



SELF HELP

A NEW DIRECTION

Open Space Conference addressing how the arts can positively address the coming funding cuts.

Artists Anonymous, the networking organisation for emerging theatre practitioners, in association with Performance Initiative Network, Finger in the Pie, Room for Pudding Theatre, RedGate Marketing and Middlesex University, organised a conference to discuss new and creative solutions to the issues facing small-scale performing arts companies in light of the recent cuts in the Arts Council's funding.

Rather than grumble about the decline in funding we felt it's time to discover a new model of organisation that does not rely on government subsidy to survive. Therefore the conference aimed to find practical approaches, methods and structures for emerging performing artists and organisations to help themselves and the wider community to become more self sufficient, with greater independence.

On behalf of Artist Anonymous and in support of the organization and conference, Performance Initiative Network facilitated the documentation of this day. Here is a record of this conference along with the issues, ideas and suggestions that were discussed and put forward.

SELF HELP: A New Direction was hosted by Middlesex University on the 7th July 2007.

This one day open space conference was attended by 78 people who together responded to the invite from Artist Anonymous to address the numerous issues that are coming up through the cuts of Arts Council funding and the implications that has for theatre artists and companies

These reports document numerous one to two hour sessions that took place on this day. These sessions were documented by the following team of researchers:

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For the purpose of a more cohesive report, their documentation has been condensed by Kerry Irvine (Director of Research and Projects for P.I Network). Great care has been taken not to edit all transcripts and documents from these researchers, however names of delegates have been excluded and some minor changes have been made to support anonymity (upon request by some of our delegates). Should anyone have any queries or questions regarding this report then please contact Kerry on kerry.irvine@brunel.ac.uk

SELF HELP: A New Direction

The following questions were raised from the first hour of gathering. Later some of the issues were dropped, replaced or coupled with other discussion topics as they were deemed the same question.

- What's so wrong with the Art council anyway?
- Can we actually get any funds?
- Can we get funds from private corporation what-s the best way to do that?
- If *apple* can do it why can't we do it
- Sustainable activities
- Is it ever ok not to pay people?
- How do you sustain yourself when people can't pay you?
- Special enterprises versus charity
- Communication, Communication, Communication
- Is there an opportunity for artist in critical conditions to show their work?
- I am looking for producers working on my collective
- What right do we have and facilities to share in economic and do we do to divert creative energy?
- What links and network can we make between theatre and education?
- What are the steps challenges and processes in becoming self supporting?
- Why we should fund theatre
- Should we create our funding body?
- Shall we pay something other then money?
- When an Emerging company stop to be an emerging company why should we consist and how should we consist
- Innovation in the theatre
- Visual Artist often share studio space why don't we? Or do we?
- Can we actually get some money?
- Any one interested in coming on board and run in our foundation Artist Anonymous
- Who should I pay first myself or the artists I hire?
- Should we A create our funds body or B protest against the current Art Council under the form of a petition with the Arts council
- Are there venues we get access to which don't require a lot of funds
- What sort of other open spaces are in London
- Are there successful framework showing work in places
- Initiative evaluation capacity buildings, funds how do we go in this direction

From this list the following issues were discussed:

1. What is the best way to attract funding from big private organisations?
2. Social Enterprise vs. Charity
3. Arts Council funding cuts: Should we create a new body, or should we protest?
4. When do emerging companies stop being emergent? What does the term emerging mean? How is it defined? Where does it come from?
5. What alternative models/thoughts are there to the current crisis?
6. Do larger theatre companies/organisations have a corporate responsibility? How do you turn them into supporters?
7. How can we link up with the education sector and its support systems?
8. Who wants to get involved with/help develop Artist Anonymous
9. Is there an alternative to paying cash?
10. Is it ever ok not to pay people?
11. Innovation in Theatre: Using Transferable Skills: If Apple can do it, why can't we?
12. Finding Empty Spaces around London.
13. How do we get money?

1. What is the best way to attract funding from big private organisations?

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations

Frustrations of gaining funding from ACE

Fitting their criteria to gain funding can be detrimental to an artist work

Time consuming –chasing funding can take time away from the creative process

Q- How do we get involved with other companies who want to attract events?

Have to offer companies a service they will pay for –not enough to offer their name on your flier. Shell, for example, has to distribute funding as part of their corporate responsibility, but they still have their own agendas

Theatre can offer skills such as movement, confidence building, speech, team building

- Artist/Companies have to think about the purpose of any workshops offered-need to put ourselves in the shoes of the company you are approaching. Private companies need publicity as well as having social corporate responsibilities. It can be good for a company's image to be associated with theatre.
- Important to not pretend we are something we are not to gain funding.
- Research a company e.g. their ethical issues before you approach them; Find a champion in the organization who believes in it.
- Human Resources is a good place to start contact
- Suggestion of workshops for children of employees
- Have a clear idea of what you're offering them and what they need before approaching anyone
- Offer publicity stunts.
- Find organisations with compatible ideals, it makes it easier to build trust and can be mutually beneficial.
- Making personal contact makes a big difference.

2. Social Enterprise vs. Charity

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations

Statement made in group: Social Enterprise may be a better option as a charity.

A few responses were:

- Charities are rooted in the attitude that as a professional actor what you do has to go back to the community-that what you do isn't legitimate enough in its own right.
- The theatre company should operate as a business in its own right, with any benefit to the community as a welcome side effect.
- Having charitable status can assist in giving access to additional support and resources, however you need to demonstrate social benefit.
- Social Enterprise model can be better as less restraint on what you can do. With a charity people assume no one gets paid. The social enterprise model encourages a more entrepreneurial approach.
- Lots of grants for entrepreneurs but difficult to convince venture capitalists that it's a good option.
- Theatre needs something other than ticket sales, but we have to ensure that extra activity is integrated-make sure your still setting up a theatre company.

Statement within group: The fundamental problem is that not enough people go to see theatre.

Response to this:

- Theatre isn't a failing industry, but it's not very profitable. Fringe theatre can be self-sustaining.
- It's easy to compromise the artistic merit when energies are focused on making it financially viable – all creative thinking gets focused on making money.
- No one starts a business thinking that they're not going to make money. If you just want to be an artist you can work in the industry, but by starting a theatre company you're setting up a business – and making a profit is going to be one of your concerns.

Back to original topic:

- Small companies find it hard to hold on to good staff – e.g. a good fundraiser. They leave for more money eventually. The bureaucracy is one of the major drains. Is there less of it with a charity
- A good model is to have a venue and rent it out in order to make a profit, as well as using it as a resource for producing your own work. The problem with theatre, as opposed to say painting, is that you don't really have any assets, so investors have less security. There's nothing to liquidate!
- Might get some support getting hold of the venue too; say from your local authority, or from a strategic partnership with an interest in regeneration. (Other sources of support mentioned included the local Development Agency, Heritage Lottery Fund, and New Deal for Communities).
- Having a popular bar attached to it works – it brings people in and is good marketing. It creates good networking potential too.
- The Blue Post in Soho hires out its space for rehearsal for free so long as you buy lunch.

3. Arts Council funding cuts: Should we create a new body, or should we protest? (This topic lasted for two sessions)

Statement within group: Theatre need's to find a way to build more positive interest – find a better use of funds. (Proposes a model in which, rather than qualifying for funding through filling out funding applications, ACE pays a certain amount for each ticket sold.)

Response to this:

- Not everyone would get it – there would be a sliding scale of funding, so the money goes to where it's needed most. The RSC would receive less per ticket sold than a start-up company doing challenging theatre.
- There is a need to improve the way funding is distributed, with the emphasis being less on the ability to fill out funding applications and more on the ability to bring people to your work.
- encourage people (companies) to get good at marketing – to attract audiences and make theatre more sustainable – to stop being so dependant
- Funding is not used well. People are hardly being encouraged to use their funding as effectively as possible. You're not allowed to save it. You're not rewarded for using it creatively.
- The Arts Council don't know how much is going to artists and how much is going to admin.
- There's so much monitoring before a project happens Artists are not so good at making plans and much better at having ideas

Statement within group: Should we protest

Responses to this:

- There's no point. They're committed to the Olympic now, so it won't change anything.
- Yes but you have to say you disagree. It's important to protest – and to show them what they've lost by showing the value in what we do.
- Consider a new model

- Develop the structure further – with more tiers.
- Devolve the structure further (model of GroundWork was given as an example)

Question within group-where do you find your audiences for all this new work? A lot of the issues ACE has are around trust and accountability.

Response to this

- With this model they can hand over some of the accountability.
- Problems with structure are who decides what gets support – what gets funding? Is it the amount of people who come to the show? Is it how well you can fit funding criteria? Or is it someone's personal opinion?
- It should be based on how many people come to see it – supply and demand. For a production that attracts a lower audience it just means it will have to be a lower budget.

Statement within group: At emerging level people/companies need a platform to spring from.

Responses to this:

- Exactly – somewhere to promote new performance. Funding bodies are part of the industry. It's about investment – where do we get our talent from?

Statement within group: Should we protest?

- Funding cuts are a reality. It's worth lobbying government at the next funding review for a focus on arts. We shouldn't be silent, but lobbying against the Arts Council will only be counter-productive. They play an important role but they're not the only one. Don't forget about ACE but be less dependant.
- I'm a dance artist. I learnt early on that that alone wouldn't sustain me, so I learned to teach. You have to think about how you can sell what you have.

4. When do emerging companies stop being emergent?

Questions within group: What does the term emerging mean? How is it defined? Where does it come from?

Responses to this:

- Member of group confirmed that she encounters the term very frequently, that it is used both by the companies themselves and their producers for marketing purposes. She however believes that it undervalues the work ("either you are an artist or you are not") and that it might be used as an equivalent of "unfunded". It might also reveal an issue with (self-) value and legitimating yourself: Am I legitimate (with my work)? She alternatively suggested calling a newly formed theatre company by its name: "New theatre company".

Response to last statement

- That it might be used as it has certain freshness about it. People want to see the exciting, the new.
- The term emerging is undefined and overused. A term has to be valuable for the collective of artists (that is a theatre company). It's a dangerous thought that you are only valuable as an artist once you are established, noticed or funded. It comes down to: "Am I legitimate? It goes back to value.

Question within group: Which other terms can we use?

Member of group picked up on questioning the term "emerging" and existing terminology as such. She continuously stressed that we need to find ways to step outside existing terminology to allow for truly new thoughts and ideas to break through ("thinking outside the box, thinking much bigger, going way out there first"). As existing thoughts and thought processes get passed on (see monkeys and Pleasantville-example as recorded!), we are facing powerful beliefs within the Arts community. What is needed is the belief that we can similarly „bring down the Berlin wall“ and do things differently. This kind of momentum is needed within the Arts community (for example when facing the current Arts council cuts). But we "buy into beliefs".

5. What alternative models/thoughts are there to the current crisis?

Member of group shared how she was a member of the Association of Community Theatres in the 70s (now the ITC) and was both fighting to be fringe and proud of it, as there was a strong sense of community ("before the funding came in") and force ("the Arts council was afraid of us"). She has been running a temporarily sustainable company for fifteen years before turning to the Arts council again. Also sharing her experience at an ITC meeting, being shocked by the lack of protest and initiative, the community being somehow divided. She insists that it needs the physical get-together (not only via the net), the physical protest and a 'sustainable organisation that does one thing after the other to bring about change'.

Response to last statement:

- Was holding against it that the Internet is the place for the young generation to take control while essentially this century is characterised by passivity. She asks: Is the artist still the innovator? Innovator enough?
- Working for a large market research group (15.20) and within product development, Paula mentioned further how a lot of progressive thinking (outside the frame of reference) happens within the corporate market and accounts for the success of companies such as Apple: "If Apple can do it, we can!" She stressed that Apple similarly started from an idea without financial support. In the arts, it often is poverty consciousness that stops such innovation.
- Members of group responded to the corporate role model Apple by stressing that art is not a product quite like an Apple Mac. However picked up on the idea of the product to move the discussion forward to thinking about the market for work of "emerging" companies.

Question within group: Where is the market for work of emerging companies?

- Suggested that companies should make more use of linking up with art-education, which companies like Forced Entertainment are very successfully doing and therefore generating a real community and audience within arts-education: "The audience for new work is in the universities". also stressed that the universities have to take more responsibility in linking up with the industry, as students are increasingly becoming consumers aware of what they are paying for and getting offered in return.

(Short excursion into the market being flooded with graduates that cannot be integrated into the industry)

- The market for new work is in the universities as they are most likely to be able to engage with it. And it is crucial for us to link up with those organisations and their funding! It goes back to creating and fostering a community by connecting with arts-education.

6. Do larger theatre companies/organisations have a corporate responsibility? How do you turn them into supporters?

Questions within group: Should established companies step back from Arts council funding and look for other sustainable options? Can established companies do more to help emerging companies?

Statement in group

It is a myth that theatre doesn't make a huge economic contribution if you take into account how much money is spent around it (such as on eating out or travel). Economic rule that 1Dollar spent, generates 20 Dollars for the economy!

Suggested a proper economic study into the influence of theatre onto the overall economy which would give us more arguments against tax-payers accusations of swallowing public money and funds as the taxpayer's money completely flows back into the economy (about 7% of all funding?) An organisation is needed to put that argument forward.

Responses to last statement

- The surrounding businesses (like restaurants) actually benefit much more in terms of profit considering their costs and turnover in contrast to the ones of a theatre production. And yet we are willing to pay much more for a meal than a theatre ticket (in general). Some of that money should be flowing back into funding the theatre, which the surrounding restaurants are benefiting from.
- It's a market, like everything else and the price that you are willing to pay is determined by it. You can try to link up with those businesses (as theatres often do, negotiating discounts, advertising, etc.) but remember they are businesses with their own interests.

Coming back to the original question:

Do larger theatre companies/organisations have a corporate responsibility? How do you turn them into supporters?

Possibilities how large companies/organisations can help:

- Sharing resources such as space, hosting emerging companies (ASK!)
- Open up spaces to showcase other work: suggestion that you approach the organisation with a very planned out proposal as they might respond to a good idea but don't help you develop it/come up with it!

7. How can we link up with the education sector and its support systems?

Questions within group: How do you conform to an academic curriculum? How do you fit your work in? Do you twist it? (Say if the syllabus requires work on Shakespeare-do I just do a bit of Shakespeare?)

Questions following:

- **How do you conform? Do you need to conform?**
- **How do you access it?**
- **What do you benefit?**

Member of group explains how her work is very contemporary in a sense that she looks at models of devising and forms of collaboration but that a good source of funding for her has always been going into schools/teaching/linking up with the education sector. She stresses how her work actually becomes relevant to the kids in terms of teaching them basic skills about negotiation, listening and letting go of an idea (through the devising process, which is not focussed on an end product). She feels that she can therefore justify her work within this context.

Member of group stresses that funding is available and that especially private schools and grammar schools can be very lucrative as parents can and are often willing to pay privately for their kids' creative work. He also mentioned how he has been getting further private tutoring out of teaching at such schools (mentoring kids wanting to go to drama school). He questions whether that is justifiable and cynical to pass on those information.

Responses to last statement:

- Think about how much money you have invested into getting your skills that you are now passing on. There shouldn't be any shame in charging for it now.

Question within group: Have you found it difficult to legitimate yourself as professional?

Responses

- One response from group states how it is difficult but how has been lucky since graduating in getting work and sometimes refers to his TV

jobs for credibility: "I was on TV last week, so I must know what I am talking about. That's all they need to hear." (Everyone laughs)

- Also, a company gives you credibility. It often is about suggesting things that they haven't thought of before such as Stage Combat: Learning how to fight without actually hurting each other and understanding that it is like a dance. It is easy to forget what skills you have actually developed (as a performer, a director) as you are always around people with similar skills but they are very special skills. You almost forget to mention and sell those skills.
- Member of group stresses that there is a real need for someone with those skills to come into the schools and enrich a very uncreative, unimaginative environment. Coming back to Stage Combat: a brilliant idea to take into schools!

**Question within group: How do you link up with the education sector?
Are there any networking events for teachers?**

Responses

- Possibly approach local authorities, the borough or a regional representative of exam boards (standardisation boards?) to make suggestions about activities that would fit into/enrich the curriculum
- Most theatres/theatre companies offer educational activities already, so possible no use in approaching them?
- Other sources of information: SCUDD-list, UK Drama Network, Artsadmin

Question within group: How do I gain credibility and access if I don't have experience already?

Responses

- Possibly offer a free taster session or workshop which schools would happily take you up on
- (Legal advice): You need to get a CRB check done!
- Apart from linking up with schools, there are funding possibilities for creative partnerships etc...

- Apart from making a living and supporting your own work with it, you are further nurturing an audience for yourself and possibly learning as well as inputting.

8. Who wants to get involved with/help develop Artist Anonymous?

Question within group: What is Artist Anonymous?

Response from Artist Anonymous:

Monthly pub-club events which is that people get together regularly, talk about their ideas and follow up on networking (for that it is crucial that people keep coming back rather than the group fluctuating from time to time). This is how things have started to happen between members and are taking off. Unfortunately there is no capacity to go beyond that at the moment

Other ideas from Artist Anonymous in respects to how to develop their organisation

- Setting up a prop-share website
- Sharing resources that way and minimising costs.
- Sharing information/databases.
- Sharing workshops and skills

Question within group: So, is there a job vacancy at the moment (e.g. an admin based role)?

Responses from Artist Anonymous:

- The idea rather is to form a collective of companies who are taking shared ownership (much like the conference today), sharing the chairing and for example organising 3 events among 6 companies. It doesn't involve money at this stage but maybe it could eventually....
- Much like two companies who met through artist anonymous and set up between them a rehearsed reading night to which entry was free and open for feedback and discussion.
- The idea is to possibly form a committee out of 7 or 8 companies who meet regularly and discuss ideas and possibly identifying one person who might want to take the lead on one project, such as the rehearsed reading night. Artist Anonymous could then provide their mailing list, their support and resources to make it happen.

Question/statement within group regarding whether a movement such as Artist Anonymonus is suggesting which is a dream in itself, can be brought about or usually happens organically. Warns to stay away from trying to force it and mentions Shunt Vaults as a place of artistic encounter that feels vibrant and organic. Over time, people discover that this is a space that has been

opened up and is a great place to go to. It is the place where I go when I want to get something done, as I know that it just filled with people like me.

"It is an exciting idea but as soon as words like committee come into it, it doesn't feel organic enough. If it feels like its being organised it feels a bit like the Arts council."

Response from Artist Anonymous:

That's the big question: Should Artist Anonymous better stick with organising a monthly pub night, an online notice board and a once a year event like this?

Voices and Counter voices:

- Online-contact as the most important one, foster that as this is the way we communicate most and you will get people dropping out of monthly meetings?
- Physical meeting is crucial: "Now I understand what Artist Anonymous is about and I kind of ignored your emails before".

Response from Artist Anonymous:

Meeting is the wrong word as it is a totally social environment! Much more organic....

Question/statement within group: What is organic? Can mislead to the assumption that things do not need to be organised. We do need to sit down and talk.

Question within group: How do we turn such meetings into something proactive and not threatening?

Response

E.g. by discussing how to share resources, experience and information about all sort of things (for example if to work in a certain venue or not?), sharing information about facilities does not touch upon your creative integrity and independence ("your creative work is still yours and different from everybody else's) and it helps to establish a feeling of community

Suggestions:

- Regional focus is important, accessibility in sharing information! Corporate models can help when looking at building databases etc...
- As there are forums in place, it goes back to maximising how useful they are through actual human contact, having a place or a venue as the hub of it.

Question within group: What is the target group of Artist Anonymous and what is the capacity?

Question/statement within group: But is there a capacity that you don't want to exceed when thinking about target groups? At the moment it is self-selective but the more you advertise online, the more you will have to think about structuring membership etc... Quality control? Criteria for registration?

Voices in discussion:

That immediately breaks down a community while we actually want to create community (it exceeds the community level and reach and therefore breaks it down). If property and reputation gets involved, it goes beyond people helping each other. A suggestion might be a free-cycle community: for everything you ask for, you need to give something back.

Question within group: Are they useful in terms of balancing the interests of certain professions?

Responses:

From Artist Anonymous:

- Not restricting access but encouraging a balance of skills, knowledge and interests. (A producer voicing how it is not useful to her to attend meetings in which there is a predominance of actors!)
- Agreeing that there is a predominance of actors (outnumber other members 5:1) but there are enough writers, directors and producers to link up with. Offering a case study of a writer who shared his idea, got help in adapting the script, who found actors through AA meetings and further used their resources and mailing list. He is now taking the show up to Edinburgh.

Others:

- Even without restrictions, there will be a natural filtering due to commitment and interest (self-selective) and how much time people are willing to invest. There will be natural fallout of people who might come to the pub but might not come back as they don't see their interests immediately fulfilled (actors example)

Question within group: Is it going to be a word of mouth event? How did it get started?

Responses from Artist Anonymous:

No, we do advertise every month through other mailing lists and groups (as much as possible) such as the Arts council newsletter and actors/directors groups

- It has been going for a year now and we do have a lot of members but not ridiculous amounts due to the natural fall out, not due to lack of publicity
- We found out that networking events are great but that the real networking happens afterwards in the pub, much better than in the regimented space of the e.g. Old Vic (May 06) So we thought it would be great to have a room in a pub and distinct from everyone else (who did not want to be involved), where you knew to be able to meet and catch up with people on a particular day of the month. It now has the potential to become a vehicle for other community possibilities. But we don't have the manpower alone to make that happen. That's why it would be great if a few other companies came on board to make that happen.
- It's not hard, you only need a room in a pub and send something out through the Arts council and you have 60 people turning up. There is a thirst for it!
- (You can also approach universities for space and the representative of Middlesex stressed that they were very happy to be approached!)

Suggestion:

Linking up across regions-how much easier would that make a tour??

Establishing touring networks, passing on recommendations: It's not what you know but whom you know!

A closing note:

Make a list of everyone you know and share that list with someone else and you suddenly know so much more people!

9. Is there an alternative to paying cash?

Summary:

The basis of this group discussion was whether it would be possible to have some sort of bartering system, similar to Barter Card but confined to theatre, whereby people could be 'paid' by barter points where there was no monetary payment possible. The consensus seemed to be that it would be best to have a skills-swap system rather than points or vouchers, and that in many cases working like this would be more valuable than a token cash payment. The main points raised are listed below:

- No matter how you pay someone, even if it is in raisins, the taxman requires a percentage of the perceived value. Is there a way around this, some sort of legal loophole whereby vouchers or points could be given with no perceived value (like coupons, with a 0.0001 value attached) to avoid having to pay tax? Any sort of barter is still taxable, but who decides the value of a skill-swap transaction?
- How does this relate to charities? Charities pay tax in a different way, would it be possible to do the same with a skill-bartering system?
- If services were performed in exchange for barter points, who decides how much a skill or service is worth? There would need to be some sort of scale of worth. Cash is simple as everyone knows its value. If we used a barter points or vouchers system, is this not simply replacing cash, but limiting where it could be 'spent'?
- The point of the original Barter Card system was to do something in return for someone rather than using points as wages.
- Better to have a straight swap – e.g. a plumber and a gardener could use their skills to help each other – the plumber installs a sink for the gardener, who then spends an equivalent amount of time in the plumber's garden. We could create a similar system for the arts.
- You could still use a points system for this – e.g. someone spends 20 hours of time helping with rehearsals, receives a 20 hour voucher to 'spend' on a graphic designer. This would mean you wouldn't have to need something from the person you have the initial transaction with.
- It's difficult to quantify the value of skills and time. People in this industry do tend to be generous with their time, and it's hard to know initially what a time commitment will be to something like a rehearsal process. It would be nice to be able to have some sort of repayment and not be always asking for favours. Often a swap of skills would be more

useful than a small payment. Many small companies try to offer some sort of token payment, which causes tax complications and can undervalue someone's skills. A bartering system could be the way around this.

- Perhaps personal gain needs to be configured into calculating payment amount. For example if someone needs extra experience for their portfolio or CV, then the opportunity alone could be of equal value. Tangibles such as lending equipment could have a 1-to-1 value system, but skills and time could be more varied.
- What would be the cost to the employer of using a barter system, and where could they spend their points? This system could favour the lower end players, and mean venues etc are left with a lot of points as payment for tickets or rehearsal space etc, with nowhere to spend them.
- A potential problem could be attracting enough people to the system to make it valuable initially. As more people join, there will be more points around, which will attract more participants – supply and demand. Use existing networks and mailing lists to advertise and recruit people to the system.
- Also, it could mean your potential contacts are reduced to the people in the system - if you are only able to 'pay' barter points, you will have to use someone in the system, or willing to use it.
- This would only be an alternative to the current system, not a replacement. You could have a mixture of paid, volunteer, and barter point 'employees'. Could this cause resentment? Could also make budgeting much more difficult.
- The points could end up having the same value as money, but stuck in a smaller community with points going round in circles from person to person – how do more points enter the system? Do participants get a certain number of points on joining? Where can people spend their points? The initial start up would need to be well managed to recruit large theatre companies and venues as well as those starting out. Once established it would be self-sustaining – more people have points, more wanting to spend them, creates supply and demand.
- However, people also need cash to survive, especially if the system was to be kept within the theatre environment.

- This is already happening to some extent on online forums etc. There is currently a simple barter space where people offer what they have and advertise for what they need.
- Freecycle and Gumtree websites are also offering something similar on a more general scale.

Suggestions:

- Set up eBay-Style website? This would allow a wider network, and individuals could advertise themselves on an online profile, offering their particular skills. People who have used them for something could rate the transaction (much like the eBay star system) so you would know whether people are reliable. If someone organised/facilitated the website, they could sift through who needed a service and who was offering a service and facilitate more than just a one-to-one swap. E.g. Person A does something for Person B who does something for Person C who does something for Person A etc. Organiser would need to be paid, where would funding come from? Arts Council might fund this as could lessen the need for individual funding? They could therefore fund more shows and keep more money in the industry.
- It would also be necessary to look into all the legal ramifications quite carefully.

Question within group: What would be the first step in setting up something like this?

Response:

- Application to the Arts Council, or apply to existing networks (Artists Anonymous, SCUDD etc) to try and link them all, get them talking to one another. Also to create online forums for discussion to develop rather than impose a system and structure. It would be better to bring all the current networks into one, rather than start yet another network and further dilute/divide discussions and practitioners.
- There could be a registration day, advertised on all the different networks, so that everyone could meet in person initially. This would be an important element in a system that requires a certain amount of trust. Also to invite representatives from the different networks, posting websites etc to start negotiating for one central website to link them all together.

- Overall it was agreed that the technology exists for this to happen, and it would make it easier and fairer for those currently working for free.

10. Is it ever ok not to pay people?

Summary:

This discussion started out being about the above, but expanded into a general discussion about the current situation regarding funding, and whether the Arts Council is still fulfilling its initial function. The consensus leaned towards a huge shake up in the way we look at and seek funding, although no conclusions were reached as to the best way to facilitate this.

Responses:

- Are we putting enough capital into ourselves, and if there is funding available, who should we pay first – ourselves (the founder or organiser of an event), or the people we have enlisted to help? This often becomes a moral issue/question. Some theatre companies have survived by accumulating capital, but not necessarily paying the people who produce the money.
- You have to think like a business – how long would any other business last without paying people?
- It's never ok not to pay people. It's an issue of giving value to a person and to their skills and contribution. If they can, people should be paid. Can be a subjective business – how to judge the value of someone's contribution in terms of skill/time/input. Most people agree they would like to pay everyone who helps them, but where does the money come from? We can't charge enough for tickets to cover costs as then audiences wouldn't come as it would be too expensive.
- We are basically working in a fucked industry!
- It's important to allocate any funding from the start and to ensure everyone is paid fairly. Contracts should be drawn up from the start to save any arguments, particularly with profit-share arrangements.
- Depends whether you consider yourself a business or an enterprise? Are people being paid as employees, or being entrepreneurial? Or is the end product the focus and all contributors concerned with the end product?
- In theatre, we are the product. It takes a lot of people to make theatre.
- Are we setting a precedent of non-payment by accepting unpaid work for the love of it? Are we therefore creating a cycle of exploitation? Maybe it's a case of changing the way we think, and trying to see producing theatre as a business. Supply and demand – more people want to work

in the theatre than is practical, so people will work for free to get experience in the hope it will lead to paid work later.

- In commercial theatre, money dictates what you produce. Most practitioners would prefer, wherever possible, to produce something that they want to do, rather than seeing a market and creating something for it. Also, in theatre, value isn't necessarily measured by box office takings – many people find it more important to have peer recognition and self-worth. However bills still need to be paid – does this mean that theatre creation is to be limited to those who can afford to do it?
- Should we be paid to do something we love? People all around the world slog it out in jobs they hate to pay the bills and live – why should theatre practitioners be 'allowed' to make a living from something they enjoy and have passion for? Although there are other precedents of this – footballers for example. And perhaps this overlooks the fact that some people love being accountants or teachers or scientists etc.
- Are we being blocked from advancing and achieving within theatre because of lack of funding? Artists are necessary in society, so they should be able to earn a living doing it. The government professes to want to put the arts at the centre of society, yet they are taking away a main source of funding.
- Maybe there is industry saturation? DO we have too many theatre practitioners?
- Other industries make money directly from theatre (for example restaurants, bars, taxis) – should we have access to some of this profit?
- Can we go on strike? We are currently playing by the rules and getting screwed. Would anyone notice if no one was producing theatre (back to artists being necessary in society)?
- In theatre money comes in after the product has been produced. We need to do something parallel to bring in money first to allow us to create the theatre – running club and conference facilities, nightclubs, touring shows – we need to create an economy to inject money into the micro system of a company structure. We need to have flexibility and look at utilising alternative economies. We need to change the way we think, work and see our product.
- The British Council funding system is a bit like commercial theatre, but looking at social responsibility rather than profit. Ventures are funded if they can prove their contribution to society in some way. There needs to be a balance between a social role and creative capacity. Quid pro quo.

- Option – make use of the transferable skills within a theatre company to make money to feed back into creative enterprise.

Question within group: Should we all stop doing stuff for free? Do we have artist saturation?

Responses:

- Obviously, from the discussions, there is not enough demand to pay everyone who wants to be in the industry, so either we somehow cull the amount of potential practitioners to allow fair wages for the rest (natural selection?), or everyone gets paid, but not very much.
- No company has enough money to pay all the people they need – it's not a matter of saturation, there's just not a big enough initial pool of money. This becomes self-defeating if you keep looking at it in this way.
- If the supply and demand is there, what is keeping the lid on prices? Is it just what audiences are willing/able to pay? Often families will spend maybe £500 on one trip to a West End show, rather than a little a lot (on fringe or local theatre).
- Change the language – not plays but shows; not theatre but entertainment. Know your market – take the show to the market, don't expect them to always come to you. How do we clone/archive/tour a singular work in collaborative performance when the original participants/creators of the work are replaced?
- Fringe/devised theatre companies have had commercial success and moved into the mainstream – does this mean they've compromised their vision? Again, self-defeating way to think. We need to find a way to redesign and reconstitute work to be successful in a wider context and generate money. Part of being sustainable is finding a way to pay yourself and your company without being continually hampered by funding structures.

Suggestions:

- Possibility – Arts Council could buy tickets for distribution rather than subsidise artists. This would create an economy and allow audiences to choose what they want to see, meaning funding was decided by the audiences rather than an Arts Council committee. Public funding = self censoring. Maybe some kind of "Ticket Aid" system (like charity Gift Aid schemes) where companies get a refund/bonus for ticket sales. This would add to the notion of the audience dictating the funding. Or, 'Arts Aid' – 28p per ticket goes back into art funding 'pot'.
- Perhaps there is an argument to scrap the Arts Council and start again, with a notion that the criteria for distribution of funds should be different.

If we want the change, we have to bring it about. The fact that we are being so visibly 'screwed' by the Olympics means people are starting to rebel and speak up. The Arts Council reinvented themselves as delivered of government policy in order to save themselves. Money goes to strategic policy. AC not concerned with artistic community anymore.

Question/statement within group: Has the money gone irretrievably? Do we want the money to go back into the Arts Council when we are struggling with them anyway?

We aren't being sustained by the theatres we work for, or by the Arts Council, so where do we look next? Other industries (e.g. cinemas) make money from other sources – popcorn, tee-shirts, merchandise, etc – why should theatre not have to do the same? Innovations are coming from the commercial sector – theatre needs to look outside itself. Not rely on one product, allowing ideas to branch out, not relying on one funding body.

Responses:

- Ideas – Arts branding – money per click websites, arts credit cards, generic products such as toilet paper, pens etc that could put part-profit into the arts. We need to look at new, crazy ideas that might just work.
- The arts need a radical shake up and overhaul, big new ideas. Get rid of 'funding' jargon; create a new frame of words, new ideas. Stop getting stuck in a painful and rigid cycle, and look for a whole new structure.

11. Innovation in Theatre? Using Transferable Skills? (If Apple can do it, why can't we?)

Summary:

This discussion picked up from where the previous one left off, looking at how artists can use their transferable skills to become self-funding and not rely on Arts Council or external funding bodies. It was agreed that this is possible, and is something a lot of artists are already looking at and doing, but there needs to be more.

Responses:

- Theatre companies often have a goal of creativity, but not innovation. This is something we need to get good at to survive. Find new, innovative ways of working. For example, Coca-Cola is constantly changing and creating new products within its remit, to keep the market fresh and interesting – innovating and reinventing itself. It is important to keep re-evaluating a product and adapting to changes in the market.
- Two strands – innovation in practice (creativity) and innovation in business (doing something new and different with creative ideas).
- Examples of theatre innovation:
 - Creation of a resource for fun-filled, lifelong learning through drama. Creation of a package for schools to make all learning fun using drama, not just using it for drama classes.
 - Royal Opera House has bought a DVD production company to produce their own DVDs and generate income.
 - Roger Perant at the University of Alberta, Canada, has created a play about intercultural conflict, which can be adapted to fit any specific community. This can be (and is) toured all over the world to create community-specific theatre. The resulting performance is videoed and used to create educational DVDs.
- Need to think as a business – have business plans, models of working practice – tap into what is popular to make money. Transfer business models and income generating plans to other theatre practitioners – share and expand ideas. Looking beyond tours and workshops and other traditional means of generating income. Use intellectual property to create revenue for company?
- Innovation to help generate audiences. Use internet to get performance out to more people.

Question within group: Is the theatre innovative already?

Responses:

- Examples such as forum theatre which was developed to overcome barriers – innovation comes out of necessity.
- Step One – figure out what you want to do; step two – find the way to do it. Work out the problem before trying to find solutions, and then look for alternative solutions.
- We all need to become entrepreneurs in the arts and put transferable skills into commercial gain, e.g. cabarets, night clubs, concerts etc. Means you can still enjoy your job, while funding 'real love'.
- Is there a self-defeating mentality in thinking that fringe/alternative/experimental theatre can only remain true to its ideals as long as it remains on the edge? If it becomes popular, does this mean it must have in some way become 'dumbed down' or tapped into the mainstream? The BBC used to aim for between 40-60% of audience as any less and it was too elitist, but anymore meant it must be too 'dumbed down'. However, if you become mainstream (and therefore profitable), have you necessarily sold out on your edginess? Need to be able to make a living without too much compromise. Popularity vs. finding your audience. Funding vs. earning money.

Question within group: Is the performance industry assisting companies in performance innovation? If there is no access, it doesn't matter how innovative you are?

Responses:

- Rigid structures are hindering artists – how can we innovate/loosen the whole industry? Funding and training have a huge impact on the eventual output of the industry. Structures obvious by huge rise in demand for arts administrators. If performances were better supported there wouldn't be a need for so much funding and subsidy could come later in the process.
- Time spent chasing funding, filling in forms etc, could be used to make money directly to support performances. Major expenses are hiring spaces and people. Local Authorities should support the arts by lending vacate spaces – mutual assistance as artists would keep the building

secure and help with regeneration of areas. LDA should do this but don't. It needs to be an initiative run by artists and performers.

- We are all working with ideas, but the arts are quite static.

Question within group: Why can't we be like Apple, constantly reinventing, coming up with new ideas, challenging existing viewpoints etc.

Responses:

- Perhaps a difference is that most theatre practitioners aren't in it to make money so this is not a primary goal.

Added question: How do we use our creative ideas to make money?

- We need a change of mindset towards creative enterprise and not get stuck with the idea of applying for funding. In France for example, nobody gets paid for rehearsals, but are paid quite well for performances. Actors are in a cycle of rehearsing one play whilst performing in another to support themselves – different viewpoint.
- Not having money becomes a burden – how can we look at creative ventures without making money the issue? "Getting off the whinge" and reframing our thinking. Use not having money as an inspiration.

Suggestions:

Alternatives to applying for funding:

- Hold band nights, comedy nights, organise events. As well as making money you are generating an audience for other ventures, and making industry contacts. Then you can fund your own ventures without being locked into someone else's idea of what you should be doing.
- The company Room for Pudding explain they do all of the above, and made themselves into a recognisable brand. Constantly evolving, now looking at poetry nights, script reading etc. Collective rather than solitary (as traditional funding applications are)
- Find new audiences – tour fringe to the masses. Take it out of the theatre into people-gathering venues – golf clubs, retirement homes, even private houses. Site specific pieces in empty spaces.
- Nearly all industries now require multiple skills and lifelong learning. Hardly anyone can survive by only being able to do one thing anymore. As theatre practitioners we need to network, support each other, and hold

regular events like this conference to keep generating ideas and innovations.

- Whilst exploring alternative money-making ventures, it's important to remember and be true to your initial creative goals, and not let your money-making take over all your time and energy to the detriment of your creative enterprise. Keep a balance of time spent.

12. Finding Empty Spaces around London

Summary:

It was brought up in many earlier discussions that hiring space for rehearsals and performances is a major expense. The possibility of using empty spaces around London was discussed, but this seems logistically quite difficult. There doesn't seem to be a central resource to find these spaces, and the red tape is quite difficult to navigate. One possibility discussed was forming a collective to buy a warehouse or venue as a 'timeshare' type venture. On the whole lots of people liked the idea, but it would require a lot more research into the legal and financial side of things.

Main points are:

- Barriers – Hard to find empty spaces initially, then hard to track down owners for permission to use – fees for each transaction etc. Partly to do with 'blame culture', fear of being sued for accidents, liability.
- Benefits – currently many companies and/or local authorities have to pay security guards to keep squatters out of vacant spaces. Why not let artists use the spaces – no need for security and regeneration of the area through generation of interest, and use of space.
- Possible sources – squatters' websites, creative space agency, looking for basements/cellars.
- You get what you pay for, so if you don't pay the space could be quite inadequate. No payment means no guarantees of quality, facilities, availability etc.
- Perhaps artists could set up small collectives to buy or lease an appropriate space, then others could be charged a membership fee which allowed them an allocated amount of hours in the space. Administration could be difficult, and there would be no guarantee the space would be free when you needed it. You also get the politics involved in the management – buying in and out of the scheme, mortgage and funds management etc.
- Could use the model of a co-operative? This requires a lot of organisation again, and there would be a distinct pecking order. The Actors Centre had something similar – reciprocal benefits. Community Housing as a model? Having a collective mortgage or lease would require stringent financial management – we would need to do more research into the legal ins and outs – get a friendly financial expert on side?

- Pub theatres – theatre owning the pub as well, rather than existing as 2 separate (and often clashing) entities. This would mean the pub generated income for the theatre, and create a link between the pub clientele and the theatre clientele. Website – buyapub.com – good research tool for this possibility.
- Collective could buy a large warehouse as both a rehearsal and performance space. Look into regeneration funding through local authorities rather than limiting ourselves to arts funding. Maybe make the whole venture into a reality show and get TV funding!

13. How do we get money?

Question/statement from group: We've managed to get the Arcola for a run and need to raise £12,000 - how do we do that?

Responses

I'm not British and have no idea how to raise funds

Added question: What about money for research, development etc

Responses:

- I've tried to get Research and Development funding and money for a big production but have given up on Arts Council funding. Our advice from an Arts Council representative was that they will never fund a full production. They will give you money to get you going with the hope that other people will then take over.
- But isn't that Research and Development?
- No, that's the thing, I've applied for R+D money but if you are just starting out then nobody trusts that you are going to spend the money well. We've got cheap space at the Jerwood but..
- You can get a lot of stuff for free; we managed not to pay for paper, printing, and a lot of bringing in favors. We did workshops and fed the actors because we couldn't pay them, we went to Borough market and blagged food.

Added Question: What about putting on a play?

Responses:

Yes, I've done it but with private funding from family and y paying the actor's expenses. You have to go back to the things you get for free, support in kind and then you can say how much you have in kind and other people can match it.

Added question: What about using the press to say you need money?

Responses:

There are legal issues with that if you are inviting investment. We put an advert in the Ham and High saying, do you want to be a producer? - you can get in trouble for soliciting investors. If it's less than £10,000 then it's not so bad but more than that is more problematic.

Added question: Have you got any money from a big company like HSBC, Vodafone?

Responses

- A few years ago it was a lot easier. We have been offered funding from an investment bank but we need to have charitable status. You need to think about their interests. Smaller companies will do it if it's something getting audiences. Bigger companies want to see their logo and are interested if you are approaching a new market for them.
- If you've got charitable status then you can become a part of a company's charity work.

Added question: What's hard about getting charitable status?

Responses

- It's a long process
- You need to have a board so effectively you stop owning your company. You have to be limited by guarantee first and you then have to be employed separately.
- We're about to be set up by as limited by guarantee, you have to be a director on the board and then you have to go to the charities board - it's a headache.
- We've been applying for a long time, it's very bureaucratic and most people are arts practitioners, nobody is a lawyer! It's worth getting a lawyer on board. Once you're with the charities board they really clamp down, they look at all your accounts etc, it's not worth it unless it's a big or ongoing project.
- We called the charities commission and got no support.

Question from group: Can we find a way of theatre companies who are a bit further along the line to give peer support.

Responses

- The ITC gives a lot of support. Membership for an individual is £150 and for a company is £450.
- I think it depends on the company

Added question: Is it useful?

Responses:

- I'm just in the process of finding my way with all of this. I was advised by my tutor at University to get involved with ITC
- One of our tutors said that when she started a company she got set up through them and they do a lot of work for you. You can get completely lost in paper, phone no.s etc

Added question: Can you explain how you got money from Lemann brothers.

Response:

You go through the Hollis directory which basically tells you the money given by anyone to everyone. You can look to see who as given money to theatre or not or look for some kind of tie in. We trawled through, had a look at Lemann Brothers' website and found that they tend to support companies that are their staff recommends. We found people who we had been at University with and now worked for them. Contacted them and got them enfranchised with the company so that they could recommend us. We took them to workshops and schmoozed them a bit.

Added question: Did you ask them for sponsorship or was it as an investment.

Response:

Just asking for donations, not an investment. This only gets tricky over £50,000. The first show was ok but now they want more, logos, free tickets etc... We had a recruitment company and told them that we had a mailing list of 50,000 people in London, graduates working in the arts. Access to that is interesting for them. High profile events, logos, a lot of companies are interested in business to business so if there is a party or a chance to network then they love it. Education staff can also offer workshops to businesses.

Added question: Can I ask - with donations do you have to pay tax?

Response:

We don't have to until May 2008 - have to keep track of everything

Added question: What if you have charitable status?

Responses

- You can track back but you need an accountant.
- I heard about a change in the law where they have charitable status rather than being a registered charity.
- When you're a registered charity can you give a tax receipt so people can claim back?
- Yes, and you can do gift aid - 28% back - an extra third on all gifts makes a big difference and you can backtrack for 5 years. It is only for UK taxpayers though.
- If you're a limited company are you then discouraged from getting charitable status?
- You have to be a limited company to then be a charity
- You have to be incorporated
- I'm a partnership so can't become a charity you can have two companies under one umbrella - for example the Old Vic trust and the producing company.

Added question: Is it a conflict of interests if the directors of the company are then trustees of the charity?

Responses:

- You have to declare conflicts of interest - look at your 5 year plan etc
- We were lucky; we got in at the right time with a good venue.

Dialogue question: Are you full time or part time?

We are all part time - not getting paid yet.

Dialogue question: How long have you been doing it for?

6 years, profit-share to start but now working on bigger projects. It takes a lot of time; you can get caught in a quagmire when there is a lot of times between projects as you have to keep your enthusiasm.

Added question: You said you don't feel worthy of getting money - when does that time come, where is that line?

Responses:

- I guess it's to do with communication - we don't spend enough time talking to other people. Can feel very insular about how we are being perceived. I don't know when the outside world sees you as a viable option.
- The point is that when you have an idea you can say we are doing this.
- You really have to be shameless, but you have to learn to do it. I got a job doing charity fundraising and it helped me become less ashamed about asking for money

Added question: Are you all Creatives?

Responses:

- I am a founder, performer and director of the company but I still have a 9-5 job.
- When do you feel like you are feeding the monster? You spend all your time trying to get money and can forget why you are doing it
- I run Icarus collective - have been for 3 years. We spent our first year in hibernation and now doing a tour of 'The Lesson', there are 8 in the collective and it has taken so much energy that you think no matter how good this is has it been worth the effort. If that question had stayed in my conscious then I would have had to stop.
- I started off as artistic director, now I call myself creative producer, not a proper title but I prefer it. I take a big part in the creative decisions etc. I've been doing it for a long time and last year went freelance to do it. I am also associate producer at a couple of other companies. It definitely feels worth it, the life less ordinary, which is great. But I would like to buy new shoes and pay the rent. You have to make a living or it is not sustainable.

Conclusion

In an environment where funding is going to be stagnant or indeed decreasing for the foreseeable future it is essential for theatre creators to find creative alternatives to funding dependency.

It is up to organisations such as Artists Anonymous to help promote discussion into alternative structures and support the emergence of a new funding paradigm.