Nottingham Playhouse: An Analysis of its Community Engagement

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Abstract

This thesis provides a detailed analysis of the community engagement activities of Nottingham Playhouse (NP), which has previously been unrecorded and unexplored for its implications for the theatre's current and future community work. A mixed methodological approach interweaves semi-structured oral history interviews, participant observations, and archival research with secondary reading. The thesis is organised according to two chapters. Racial and Ethnic Diversity at Nottingham Playhouse identifies historical moments of progress in addressing and developing inclusivity and makes them visible by analysing them as case studies that exemplify the extent to which NP engaged with global majority communities between 1978 and 2022. It documents and analyses the Eclipse initiative (2001), Regional Black Theatre Initiative (1993) and the Black Regional Initiative in Theatre (1999) as key projects NP staff should consider and learn from. In 2020, following the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd in the midst of the COVID-19 (C-19) pandemic, like many other arts and cultural institutions, NP launched an Anti-Racism Action Plan which is considered here for its efficacy. Harnessing Change: Investigating Dynamic Shifts in Nottingham Playhouse's Community Work, 2019-2023 underlines my assertion that theatres are, and should be, considered as socio-cultural venues and analyses NP's activities beyond its professional theatre-making and performance culture. It begins with a case study of the Coram Boy community project (2019), analysing and evidencing its relevance and impact on participants. NPs approach to the C-19 pandemic is assessed in detail through seven examples and the concepts of Hyperlocality and Mutual Aid are re-examined in the C-19 context. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the current challenges to community engagement: the UK government's "hostile environment" in the context of NP as a Theatre of Sanctuary and the cost of living crisis (2022-2023). To operationalise the thesis a set of recommendations mapped to the chapters are offered which suggest work that NP could undertake to strengthen community engagement.

Table of Contents

Introduction **1**

Introductory Recommendations **41**

Racial and Ethnic Diversity at Nottingham Playhouse **44**

The Arts Britain Ignored **49**

Nottingham Playhouse's Engagement with Global Majority Communities **57**

The Black Regional Initiative in Theatre (BRIT) 62

The Eclipse Initiative 77

Anti-Racism Activities, 2020–2022 ..... **98**

A Postscript – Aladdin **106**

Racial and Ethnic Diversity at Nottingham Playhouse Recommendations **110**

Harnessing Change: Investigating Dynamic Shifts in Nottingham Playhouse's Community Work, 2019-2023 ..... **117**

The Coram Boy Community Theatre Project (2019) **120**

Adapting Through Crisis: The COVID-19 Pandemic Response, 2020-2022 ..... **141**

Hyperlocality, Mutual Aid and Regional Theatre in Contrastive Perspective 155

Accessibility and Adaptation 162

Community Engagement (2022-2023) **171**

Harnessing Change: Investigating Dynamic Shifts in Nottingham Playhouse's Community Work, 2019-2023 Recommendations **182**

Concluding Thoughts **189**

Bibliography **197**

Appendix 1 – Nottingham Playhouse Anti-Racism Action Plan

Appendix 2 – Selected Interview Transcriptions…… 1 - 62

Introduction

Since its opening night in 1948, Nottingham Playhouse (NP) has been an integral part of Nottingham's cultural life. As a mid-scale regional theatre, NP has garnered the attention of audiences with exceptional performances of internationally acclaimed shows. For NP, however, the conception of theatre extends beyond entertaining audiences; this is a theatre with a "commitment to work that engages with and reflects the region's communities."[1] It was awarded *The Stage* Award for Regional Theatre of the Year in 2019.[2] Despite being "one of the country's leading producing theatres," an aspect of the theatre's history and currency that has remained relatively unexplored is its community engagement.[3] This thesis analyses NP's engagement with different local communities by recovering the cultural history of this work and assessing how past experiences impact present ambitions. It provides an in-depth analysis of how NP worked with communities during the COVID-19 (C-19) pandemic and what may be learned from that experience and carried forward as best practice.

Before I began this research, the primary resource available to read about the history of NP was John Bailey's *A Theatre for All Seasons,* published in 1994. A member of the "Founder Board" of NP, Bailey describes his study as a "chronicle" of the theatre's "golden decades" from 1948 to1978, and as much a "history" as a "companion to Playhouse theatre-going." Chapters are arranged chronologically and organised according to the tenure of the different Artistic Directors, which is revealing of the approach whereby a theatre's vision is understood as embodied in this role and as situated in production and performance.

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[1] NP does not have an official mission statement. For further discussion, see page 158 of the thesis. Olivia Robinson, "Nottingham Playhouse Awarded Regional Theatre of the Year 2019 by the Stage," *The Stage*, January 28, 2019, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/news/nottingham-playhouse-awarded-regional-theatre-of-the-year-2019-by-the-stage/.

[2] Robinson, "Nottingham Playhouse Awarded Regional Theatre of the Year."

[3] Nottingham Playhouse, "About Us," Nottingham Playhouse, accessed September 27, 2023, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/about-us/.

Although Bailey's account covers thirty years of production history, it was not envisaged as a document of community engagement. In fact, more has been written and published about the architectural significance of the building on Wellington Circus than the activities of the theatre.[4] The histories of community work undertaken by English regional theatres are under-recorded in general and typically overlooked in favour of more glamourous and prestigious theatre histories focused on performance. Although under-recorded in comparison to performance, there is a body of work that addresses regional producing building-based theatres and associated community engagement activities.[5] Jennifer Hughes has written extensively about the civic role of theatres, and leading the Poor Theatres research project from 2014 to 2016, which explored the relationship between theatre, poverty and economic inequality. Hughes was a co-investigator of the Civic Theatres: A Place for Towns project (2021 -2022) and the book *Theatre in Towns* (2022), written with Helen Nicholson, that derives from this project is a contemporary perspective on the role of theatres in the cultural life of English towns, particularly towns defined as "left behind." They begin from the premise that local theatre is "profoundly important to a town's cultural and social ecology" and define theatre as "a hopeful, collective, and practical form of action that generates experiences, onstage and off-stage, in ways that cannot be described neatly as optimistic or pessimistic, or aligned with politically." Their approach which centres "imagination,

[4] For sources which include extensive discussion of the architectural significance of the theatre building on Wellington Circus see, Amin Al-Habaibeh, Allan Hawas, Lama Hamadeh, Benachir Medjdoub, Julian Marsh and Arijit Sen, "Enhancing the Sustainability and Energy Conservation in Heritage Buildings: The Case of Nottingham Playhouse," *Frontiers of Architectural Research* 11, no. 1 (September 2021); 142–60; Alistair Fair, *Modern Playhouses: An Architectural History of Britain's New Theatres, 1945-1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Alistair Fair, *Peter Moro and Partners* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and Historic England, 2021); Peter Moro, "Nottingham Playhouse," in *Making Space for Theatre: British Architecture and Theatre since 1958*, eds. Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Stratford-upon-Avon: Mulryne and Shewring Ltd, 1995).

[5] There is a substantial and rich range of resources pertaining to theatre in education (TIE) that is not directly relevant to the research questions that underlie my thesis.

creativity, and pragmatism" results in a rich exploration of what theatres may mean to some of the communities they serve.[6]

Claire Cochrane – referenced across the thesis in other contexts – has been writing about such community engagement work, most particularly in relation to the Birmingham Rep, Leicester Haymarket and, indeed, Nottingham Playhouse since 2000.[7] Cochrane contributed a chapter to Kate Dorney and Ros Merkin's *The Glory of the Garden* (2010), which focuses on the relationship between English regional theatre and the Arts Council between 1984 and 2009 in the form of a case study of two comparative strategies for developing intercultural access to theatre, one at Birmingham Rep and the other at NP.[8] Cochrane has also traced the place-performance relationship of Coventry's Belgrade Theatre, a history that she argues is "curiously truncated," and sees her work as an attempt "to redress the balance of attention between the metropolitan and avant-garde and the quotidian experience of the average regional theatregoer."[9] Cochrane's article "Birmingham Rep, Youth and Community, and the Products and Possibilities of Precarity" (2017) focused on what she considers to be the increasingly central position of youth and community engagement in the function of regional theatres and suggested the beginning of a paradigm shift.[10] Claire Cochrane's contribution to theatre history is ongoing and contributes

[6] Helen Nicholson, Jenny Hughes, Gemma Edwards, and Cara Gray, *Theatre in Towns* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2022) 3. NP is refenced only in relation to its theatre in education company Roundabout (1973-2010).
[7] Claire Cochrane, "Theatre and Urban Space: The Case of Birmingham Rep," *New Theatre Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (May 2000) 137–47.
[8] Cochrane, "Opening Up the Garden" in *The Glory of the Garden: English Regional Theatre and the Arts Council, 1984-2009* eds. Kate Dorney and Ros Merkin (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 125-38. Further discussion of Cochrane's comparison of intercultural access is taken up later in this thesis, 59-62.
[9] Claire Cochrane, "Place–Performance Relationships within the English Urban Context: Coventry and the Belgrade Theatre," *Studies in Theatre & Performance* 33, no. 3 (September 1, 2013): 304. See also, Claire Cochrane, "Engaging the Audience: A Comparative Analysis of Developmental Strategies at Birmingham Rep and Leicester Haymarket Theatre since the 1990s," in *Critical Essays on British South Asian Theatre*, eds. Graham Ley and Sarah Dadswell (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2012).
[10] Claire Cochrane, "Birmingham Rep, Youth and Community, and the Products and Possibilities of Precarity," *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 22, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 36.

significantly to the under-recorded cultural histories of English regional producing building-based theatres. This thesis is intended to add to that scholarship.

By intervening in and disrupting traditional theatre histories by focusing on the "other" work taking place at NP this thesis foregrounds community work as central, focal, and future facing. In order to consider NP's community work in the present and to assess how it might work in this area in the future, though, it is also important to look back through its cultural history in this regard. Miri Rubin characterises cultural history as "an approach which considers the domain of representation and the struggle over meaning as the most fruitful areas for the pursuit of historical understanding," and my examination of NP's history is underpinned by a multivalent critical approach to ensure that NP can benefit from my work. If a cultural historian embraces "the plenitude of interlocking experiences" this approach also lends itself to inter-disciplinary and collaborative working.[11] I have adopted the belief distilled by Richard Box and Cheryl King; "that it is not possible to 'rewrite the present' without engaging in critical historical interpretation."[12] To move forward with integrity, I set about examining past initiatives to gain clear-eyed insights into what has worked and what has not because, as Sara Ahmed asserts, "We learn about institutions from trying to transform them."[13] If my analysis of community engagement is to have value and to add value to NP's current practice, it has to centre on individuals who have tried and failed to enact change and to surface ideas and opportunities for organisational transformation with a fuller understanding of how the theatre's focus on community engagement has evolved in different periods of its lifetime.

[11] Miri Rubin, "Cultural History I - Articles - Making History," Making History (The Institute of Historical Research, 2008), at https://archives.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/cultural_history.html.
[12] Richard C Box and Cheryl A King, "The 'T'Ruth Is Elsewhere: Critical History," *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 22, no. 4 (December 1, 2000): 769.
[13] Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 263.

NP is based in a large building on Wellington Circus in central Nottingham. The building houses a 750-seat main auditorium and three smaller performance and workshop spaces, Company (capacity 120), The Neville Studio (capacity 100) and the Ustinov Room (capacity 46). 120 full- or part-time employees and some 180 freelance creatives work with NP in different ways and on different ventures and initiatives.[14] The organisation's primary means of funding is via ticket sales, which account for 70% of its income; over 2021 to 2022, for example, NP sold 78,770 tickets across 262 events.[15] The remaining 30% of its income is generated from grants, sponsorships and as a result of fundraising activity, with the most significant single contributor being Arts Council England (ACE), both historically and currently. NP is an ACE National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) with annual funding of £1,379,735 slated for 2023 to 2026, more than any other arts organisation in Nottingham.[16] Between 2023-2026 The National Portfolio investment programme is to support 985 organisations who should receive £445 million in annual funding. In order to join the National Portfolio, organisations must enter into a competitive and extensive application process, so extensive that in 2022 ACE published an 80-page set of guidance notes for applicants.[17] If successful, an organisation receives an initial offer of investment and after a period of negotiation, enters into a funding agreement which forms the basis of its relationship with ACE. ACE requires that organisations adhere to extensive monitoring and reporting processes to assess the strategic contributions made to ACE, to stakeholders and the

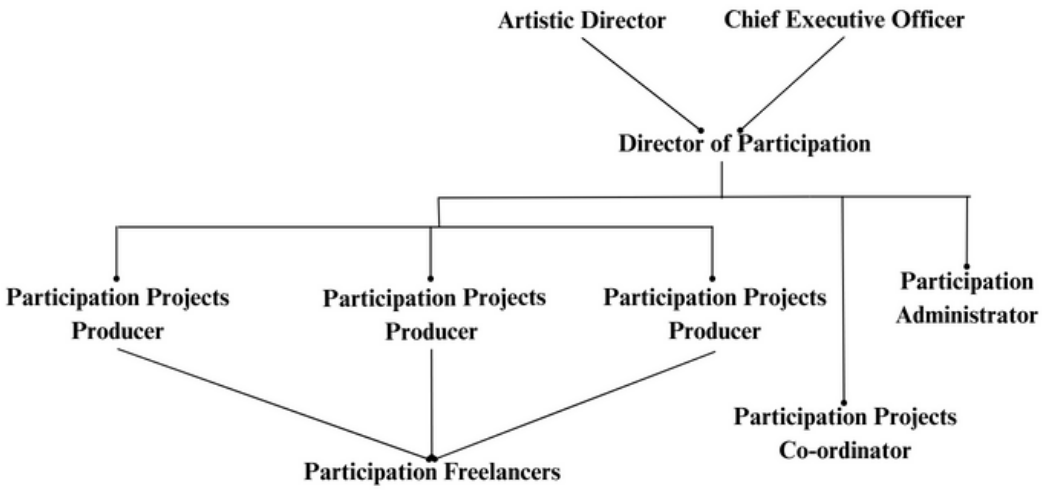
[14] Nottingham Playhouse Trust Limited, "Directors' Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 53 Weeks Ended: 3 April 2022" (Companies House, January 14, 2023), 4.
[15] Although this is a significant number of ticket sales, this period was affected adversely by C-19 restrictions and therefore, whilst being the most up-to-date information available as of November 2023, this may not be indicative of the potential or of the "usual" ticket sales generated.
[16] Arts Council England, "Investment Programme 2023-26 Data - Offered Organisations, NPO, IPSO, Transfer" (Arts Council England, March 31, 2023). Nottingham Playhouse Trust Ltd owns 100% equity of Nottingham Playhouse Trading Limited which oversees effective cooperation of the space, and Playhouse Productions Limited, a producing company for all NP in-house productions.
[17] Arts Council England, "Guidance for Applicants" (Arts Council England, January 2022), https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Guidance%20for%20Applicants%20-%20National%20Portfolio%20Organisation%202023-26._0.pdf.

wider public. Each organisation is appointed an ACE Relationship Manager who is the main point of contact and ensures that the organisation keeps to the terms of the funding agreement.[18]

NP's structure ties overall responsibility to its Chief Executive who oversees the Artistic Director and six department heads: Head of Production, Director of Participation, Director of Marketing and Communications, Head of Administration and HR, Head of Finance, and Head of Operations. The Director of Participation manages the Participation Department and was responsible for overseeing 57 projects between 2021 and 2022.[19] Over the course of my research, I have observed NP's operations more widely, but the focus of my investigation has been the Participation Department in order to produce findings and make recommendations that will serve and influence both the Department and the theatre as a whole. The Participation Department, as it existed between 2019-2023, was formed as part of a restructure that took place in 2013. Following the departure of Andrew Breakwell, Director of Roundabout & Education at NP (1999-2012), existing Education and Participation teams were merged into one new Participation Department, and a new senior management post of Associate Director was introduced to manage it. Fiona Buffini was appointed to the post in September 2013. Prior to joining NP, Buffini was an established theatre director, having directed extensively for the National Theatre as well as the Royal Shakespeare Company and West Yorkshire Playhouse. Buffini also had a breath of experience across "community settings" including Holloway Prison, Clean Break Theatre Company and Orkney Youth Theatre.[20] During her time at NP, Buffini commissioned and directed projects in which dance

[18] For the full monitoring and reporting requirements of ACE NPOs see: Arts Council England, "Investment Programme: NPO Relationship Framework 2023-25" (Arts Council England, April 2023), https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/NationalPortfolio23/key-information-2023-26-npos-and-ipsos#t-in-page-nav-2.
[19] Nottingham Playhouse Trust Limited, "Directors' Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 53 Weeks Ended: 3 April 2022" (Companies House, January 14, 2023), 4.
[20] Tyler Peterson, "Nottingham Playhouse Names Fiona Buffini New Associate Director," Broadway World, July 25, 2013, https://www.broadwayworld.com/uk-regional/article/Nottingham-Playhouse-Names-Fiona-Buffini-New-Associate-Director-20130725.

performance was featured, including *Home* (2017), a collaboration with Nottingham-based all-female company Next Door Dance for which the outcome was a "dance theatre production" which explored what the concept of home means to Nottingham's communities.[21] Her most critically acclaimed community project was Mass Bolero. Buffini also instigated In House, a theatre company for people who have or were experiencing "homelessness, substance misuse or mental health problems."[22] Alongside her responsibilities to the Participation Department, Buffini also directed a number of productions at NP including J.B. Priestley's *Time and the Conways* in 2014, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* in 2015, Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* in 2017, *Our Country's Good* in 2018 and Diane Samuel's *Kindertransport* in 2018. Following Buffini's departure in 2018, Martin Berry was appointed to a new position, Head of Participation. The new position was focused on leading and managing the Participation Department. Berry was familiar with Nottingham having spent, amongst many other freelance roles, eight years (2011-2018) as an associate director for Lakeside Arts, The University of Nottingham's public arts programme. As of October 2023, the participation department is structured as follows:



[21] Next Door Dance, "Nottingham Playhouse and Next Door Dance Present HOME," accessed October 16, 2023, https://www.nextdoordance.co.uk/home-1.
[22] Nottingham Playhouse, "In House Theatre Group," YouTube, July 3, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BYVqW4Eoho.

The Participation Projects Producers have oversight over distinct "suites of work." One producer is responsible for community work with a focus on "free to access" programmes which involve working with "vulnerable groups" and "targeted demographics." Another producer is responsible for "paid-for programmes" focused on more traditional theatregoers or "hobbyists," and another producer is responsible for working with schools with a focus on education.[23] The Participation Department is primarily funded through two streams: core funding and project funding. Core funding comes from ACE, Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council and contributes to the staffing and administration costs of the Department. Project funding is typically connected to a specific funding bid for a short-term project and comes from a variety of sources, usually trusts, foundations and charities. Any income produced by the paid-for programmes is not held by the Participation Department but returned to the wider budget. This is the funding model that is replicated across 11 of the 12 large regional producing theatres in England.[24] It may be that my research could be of use to other regional theatres, but it is produced for as well as with NP. This is the ethos behind a Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) like mine, whereby the project is co-developed and designed by a university and an external partner and intended to be mutually beneficial for both the researcher and the partner organisation, ensuring that for both parties, any outputs meet a pre-identified novel research need. This particular CDA builds on a long-standing strategic partnership between Nottingham Trent University (NTU) and NP. NTU is one of three gold-level corporate sponsors of the theatre, alongside Nottingham City Transport and Experian. NP also sponsors an annual Nottingham Playhouse Prize for students

[23] Martin Berry, interview by Laura Ewart, October 5, 2023.
[24] The 12 large regional producing theatres in England are often referred to within the theatre industry as "The Big 12." The "Big 12" is comprised of the following theatres: Bristol Old Vic, Leicester Curve, Chichester Festival Theatre, Northampton Theatres, Sheffield Crucible, Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, Nottingham Playhouse, Birmingham Rep, Northern Stage, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Plymouth Theatre Royal and Manchester Royal Exchange.

undertaking NTU's BA programme Design for Stage and Screen. The establishment of the CDA prior to the appointment of the researcher allows for a greater buy-in from the organisation as they are equally invested in the research being successful. The key research questions identified for me were:

- To what extent has community engagement, through its various forms of collaboration and participation, been employed and to what success?
- What is the impact of engaging with the NP on individuals/groups, and how might these be measured, and stories shared?
- What are barriers to participation through collaboration, and is there a history of advocates, at both NP and within local community groups?

For a CDA, the partner organisation is involved in the recruitment process and can influence the selection of a candidate who will work well with the institution as well as with academic supervisors. As I began this project, I was unsure what my relationship with the organisation would be, though I was already very familiar with NP as a theatregoer. Initially, the relationship felt tricky. I was neither an employee nor a freelance staff member, nor did I have a prior professional relationship with the organisation. It was envisaged that I would have access to a workspace at NP so that I could be quickly embedded into the organisation and visible in its quotidian life. However, it became apparent in the first months of my research that NP suffers from a chronic lack of office space, and it would not be possible for me to have a permanent desk. Therefore, I worked peripatetically, in spaces available and in more embedded ways when shadowing the work of the Participation Department. Thereafter, the issue of access was compounded due to the varying and stringent restrictions placed on in-person contact from March 2020 to March 2021 as a result of the pandemic and therefore the majority of the first two years of this project were subject to limited in-person access to

NP.[25] Despite these barriers, I have maintained regular contact primarily through monthly supervisory meetings which my external supervisor, the Director of Participation, Martin Berry, always attended, and also by immersing myself in community projects, whether in person or online. As I defined and consolidated my positionality within this research through my relationship with NP, my research questions needed to be adjusted as a result of the pandemic when NP had to respond to unprecedented challenges in delivering community engagement activities. The ability to pivot quickly as a researcher is a significant skill that I have developed. Now and with hindsight, I am convinced that tracing and analysing community engagement in the unprecedented historical context of the pandemic has benefitted the research I have produced for NP. Overall, and taking into consideration the unusual circumstances of conducting research both in situ and at a forced remove as a result of the pandemic, I feel most comfortable and confident describing myself as a critical friend. A critical friend is defined as

> a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens and offers a critique of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of the work.[26]

Researchers in the field of Education consider the critical friend's relationship to an organisation as a "longitudinal" and "changing role", with one of the most "prominent necessities" for successful critical friendships being "mutual trust."[27] This relationship is not

[25] This was further compounded by the closure of Nottingham Central Library which held the local studies library and theatre collection. I used the collection in the time I could, but it remains inaccessible until the opening of the city's New Central Library in November 2023.
[26] Arthur Costa and Bena Kallick, "Through the Lens of a Critical Friend," *Educational Leadership: Journal of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development, N.E.A* 51, no. 2 (1999), 49–50.
[27] Ann MacPhail, Deborah Tannehill, and Rebecca Ataman, "The Role of the Critical Friend in Supporting and Enhancing Professional Learning and Development," *Professional Development in Education*, January 31, 2021, 12.

necessarily a given or the norm for CDA researchers, and each will have a distinct and complex relationship with their partner organisation. In my experience, and as this PhD will evidence, working in collaboration has shaped my research and guided my approach, and NP has afforded me the freedom to explore. For example, there are ethical considerations regarding the involvement of an external organisation in research, and for the undertaking of oral history interviews with employees and multiple stakeholders as I have done. Arts organisations may not share the same expectations, or indeed be held to the same exacting standard of ethical practice that universities are expected to evidence. A data sharing agreement between NP and NTU was established in the early stages of my research, and I have been afforded access to information facilitated by NP. Most importantly, NP has not asked me to remove, change or alter any elements of this project. I have been free to pursue all avenues of research available to me and, in so doing, I hope that the outcome is a precise account of a cultural history of community engagement that is relevant to NP as well as analysis undertaken as a result of observing NP's participation Department.

This thesis comprises two extensive chapters, combining distinct methodological and critical approaches as I see fit to test my thoughts and observations. In the chapter, Racial and Ethnic Diversity at Nottingham Playhouse, I argue that to be successful in its current engagement with individuals and communities through its latest Anti-Racism activities, there should be a detailed critical reflection of the moments in the theatre's history where progress in this area was presaged and its effects sometimes made visible. There is much to be learned from the history I have uncovered. The chapter begins with reference to *The Arts Britain Ignores*, written by Naseem Kahn and published in 1976, in which she levelled a critique of how so-called "minority" arts were being side-lined and expected to operate in a cultural silo, and issued a call to action for arts organisations and funders, including at government level. Her call for all arts and funding organisations to pay attention to diversity, to how the arts of

ethnic groups were viewed and positioned, and whether and how they were supported was a significant milestone in the historiography I trace through the chapter. The cultural lives of communities, from what is now recognised as the global majority, were being stifled by an absence of engagement from funding bodies, and if the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) did not support new artistic expressions and outputs, Khan argued there could be no justification for calling Britain a multi-cultural society. By examining the national perception of 'ethnic' arts in 1976, I build a foundation from which to examine and analyse NP's involvement in national, regional and local initiatives around the imperative to enhance equitable race relations and to catalyse efforts towards overcoming under-representation, while simultaneously acknowledging mounting local pressures to evidence material change for diverse communities across Nottingham city that could benefit from stronger relationships with NP.

The chapter makes particular moments of progress visible by identifying a series of elucidatory and revealing case studies to exemplify the extent to which NP engaged with global majority communities between 1978 and 2022.[28] This chapter is also underpinned by my archival research in Nottinghamshire Archives, the Nottingham Local Studies Library, the University of Nottingham Manuscripts and Special Collections and the British Newspaper Archive. It is tested against empirical and subjective histories that I have had to source and bring forward because much of this history was undocumented and could only be captured by undertaking oral history interviews with former staff members and key stakeholders. Their experiences speak directly to the case studies I have identified and are presented

[28] Recent years have seen a problematising and move away from terms such as ethnic minority and B.A.M.E to describe non-white peoples and their communities. I have chosen to use the term global majority, a term devised by educator Rosemary Campbell-Stephens, her definition is: 'Global Majority is a collective term that first and foremost speaks to and encourages those so-called to think of themselves as belonging to the global majority. It refers to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and or have been racialised as 'ethnic minorities.' However, if an individual or group wishes to be referred to by their own distinct descriptive language, I will always use their preferred terminology.

chronologically here in order to surface the occasions on which NP took a leading role in facilitating initiatives as a founding member of the Regional Black Theatre Initiative in 1993 and the Black Regional Initiative in Theatre in 1999, its development and hosting of the Eclipse Conference in 2001, and its subsequent support of Eclipse Theatre. Examples are also drawn from relevant theatrical productions, including the 1978 production of Sandy Wilson's play *The Boy Friend* (1953), retitled *The Black and White Boyfriend* for its production at NP, and *Shebeen* (2018), produced by NP and based on experiences of the African Caribbean community in Nottingham during the 1958 race "riots."

Harnessing Change: Investigating the Dynamic Shifts in Nottingham Playhouse's Community Work (2019-2023) underlines my assertion that theatres are and should be considered— and researched— as socio-cultural venues, and that NP's activities beyond its professional theatre-making and performance culture require detailed examination. Professional activities are fundamental to its organisational identity, but so is its relationship with communities. The chapter begins with a case study of The Coram Boy project, a community project undertaken by NP from March 2019 to August 2019. Poverty, displacement, and access to arts and culture are themes that are surfaced in Jamila Gavin's novel, published in 2000, the project's source text, and its theatrical adaptation resonates in my analysis for how similar issues impact Nottingham communities. Following Coram Boy, NP planned to undertake another large-scale community project in 2021 but this did not transpire once the C-19 pandemic and government restrictions imposed between March 2020 and December 2021 dramatically impacted NP's ability to engage with the community in a similar format. During this period, my primary focus was documenting NP's efforts towards continuing community engagement in unprecedented times. Therefore, I examine seven distinct examples of community activity undertaken and analyse this difficult period through the lenses of hyperlocality and mutual aid, which were both reconceptualised during the

pandemic and hold increased relevance for the community work of regional theatres now, in my view. A critical text for this chapter, *The Club on the Edge of Town* (2022), the self-described "pandemic memoir" of Alan Lane, chief executive of Slung Low Theatre Company in Leeds is used to test a contrasting perspective on hyperlocality and mutual aid to that which NP exhibited. Issues of accessibility were brought into sharp focus by the pandemic, and I also assess the extent to which physical, financial, and digital barriers to access were lessened for a period, and suggest that while this was short-lived, it left some groups, such as those without access to technology, further marginalised. During this difficult period, the theatre sector became very introspective and then galvanised into activism, initiating conversations and campaigns which question the structure of English regional theatre. Assessing NP's approach to community engagement in the aftermath of the pandemic, then, this chapter moves into its community engagement activity over 2022 and 2023 with a focus on two major societal issues: the cost-of-living crisis and the "hostile environment" created by the UK government in a conscious exercise to limit migrants and refugees talking sanctuary here. I explore how NP is responding to these issues for communities that are impacted by them.

Analysis undertaken in both chapters gives rise to a series of recommendations designed to operationalise the content of my thesis into evidence-based, and potentially policy-focused, suggestions for increased attention to be paid to the benefits of community engagement activities at NP. As NP celebrates 75 years as a theatre in 2023, it is a signally important moment in which to reflect on how and whether community engagement has been a significant principle of the organisation and its work since its inception. For this research and its outputs to provide the most value to NP, I have chosen to focus on the areas of community engagement that I discern will be most relevant to the immediate future work with the community. Therefore, I have chosen to omit the extensive work of The Roundabout

Theatre in Education company. From 1973 to 2012, its main function was to tour schools with productions that would complement the curriculum and the history of Roundabout has been recorded and celebrated. It was the subject of an exhibition entitled "Playing Around: Taking Theatre to Communities across the East Midlands" at the University of Nottingham in 2015 and has featured in academic and professional journal articles.[29]

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When Marvin Carlson enumerates the disciplines that he believes theatre historians should consider, he highlights "cultural geography, anthropology, sociology, economics, urban studies, postcolonial studies, law, ethics, theories of memory, identity, race, ethnicity and nationhood." All of these, he asserts, potentially open up ways of thinking about "the phenomenon of performance and when, where and how it happens." Performance practice and history is typically where most academics focus but Carlson attributes "shifting epistemologies within the academy" to the expansion of the definition of theatre history, so that it now includes what he terms "theatre and its networked relationships," rather than focusing solely on recording what has occurred in "the space of performance." My project encompasses what he suggests via the metaphor of a tapestry: "Wherever one takes hold of a thread in the tapestry of theatre and performance, one is there led quickly not into a linear narrative, but into an ever-more complex inter-relationship of political and cultural activity

[29] Roundabout Theatre in Education has already been the subject of extensive scholarly work. See University of Nottingham, "Playing Around: Taking Theatre to Communities across the East Midlands - the University of Nottingham," 2015, https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/exhibitions/online/playing-around/index.aspx. For published materials relating to Roundabout see Andrew Breakwell, "Theatre Education? Swings and Roundabout," *ArtsProfessional*, October 10, 2005, https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/107/article/theatre-education-swings-and-roundabout; Jo Robinson, "Outside of Everything and Everybody': Renegotiating Place in the Classroom," *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 21, no. 2 (April 2, 2016), 214–28; Gillian Brigg, "Theatre for Audiences Labelled as Having Profound, Multiple and Complex Learning Disabilities: Assessing and Addressing Access to Performance" (PhD Thesis, University of Nottingham, 2013 under the supervision of Jo Robinson).

that can be pursued justifiably and productively in an infinite variety of directions."[30] It became clear to me early in the research that each time a thread is pulled it unravels to expose attendant concerns. Theatre historians Claire Cochrane and Jo Robinson argue for an approach to theatre history that is "founded on the notion of interweaving as a dynamic rhizomatic activity."[31] They build on Marvin Carlson's proposal to move away from what have cohered as "traditional paradigms," both in regard to expected content and "presentational mode."[32] A rhizomatic approach has become legion since Deleuze and Guattari used the botanical and arboreal metaphor of the rhizome to suggest an approach that is multi-perspectival: "A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, social sciences, and social struggles."[33] When theatre scholars adapt this approach, the focus is usually on aspects of education or performance.[34] However, Carlson, Cochrane and Robinson situate rhizomatic thinking in contrast to the "traditional historical approach," with Carlson contending that the theatre historian should make use of multiple and accessible tools (he uses the example of the internet), to weave "webs of associations and interactions."[35] The philosophy of the rhizome has been a touchstone insofar as it has allowed my thinking to be fluid when studying a changing organisation, and especially how NP has adapted to the circumstances prescribed by governmental and societal responses to the C-19 pandemic. This approach has encouraged me to move more "freely across phenomena, making connections potentially in all directions,

[30] Marvin Carlson, "Reflections on a Global Theatre History," in *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre History*, eds. Christine Dymkowski and David Wiles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 158.
[31] Claire Cochrane and Jo Robinson, *The Methuen Drama Handbook of Theatre History and Historiography* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2019) 21.
[32] Marvin Carlson, "Reflections on a Global Theatre History," 155.
[33] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 7.
[34] For examples of use of the Rhizome applied to theatre performance and education see: Mia Perry, "Devising in the Rhizome the 'Sensational' Body in Research in Applied Arts," in *Methodologies of Embodiment*, ed. Carmen Liliana Medina and Mia Perry (Routledge, 2015); Katja Frimberger, "Struggling with the Word Strange My Hands Have Been Burned Many Times': Mapping a Migratory Research Aesthetics in Arts-Based Strangeness Research," *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 38, no. 1 (December 14, 2016), 9–22.
[35] Marvin Carlson, "Reflections on a Global Theatre History," 158.

without seeking fixed structures or linear narratives," allowing for "fluid multiple connections without privileging any controlling models of either representation or interpretation."[36] Cochrane and Robinson assert that "in seeking to understand theatre's operation and relationships within these wider social contexts, theatre historians may need to mix together multiple methodological approaches."[37] No organisation is static, and during the course of my study NP has created new initiatives and joined with others, like the Nottingham City of Sanctuary network and the ChalleNGe cultural education partnership, and I attended meetings of the latter with Martin Berry.[38] I was mindful of how my focus on capturing community engagement at NP would inevitably involve "an ever-shifting web of cultural interweaving" and that its relationship to communities across the city also dovetails with the ambitions of other civic, educational and arts organisations.[39]

NP does not hold an archive of its own; there are severe limitations on space, as I have noted. Nevertheless, I hope this project will make clear that recording and promoting its history, especially online, should be considered. I undertook archival research in person at the Nottinghamshire Archives and Nottingham Local Studies Library, as well as in archives at the University of Nottingham and my digital archival research primarily focused on the reporting of the performing arts and entertainment industries in *The Stage* and the British Newspaper Archive.[40] The history of community engagement at NP had not previously been recorded in books, as I note at the beginning of this Introduction, but nor has it even been the subject of academic articles. I had to trace it via ACE's reports, features in the Nottingham *Evening Post*, and as noted or promoted in theatre programmes. Theatre programmes are

[36] Marvin Carlson, "Reflections on a Global Theatre History," 157.
[37] Claire Cochrane and Jo Robinson, *The Methuen Drama Handbook of Theatre History and Historiography*, 24.
[38] ChalleNGe Nottingham, "About Us," accessed October 3, 2023, https://challengenottingham.co.uk/about-us; Nottingham City of Sanctuary, "Nottingham City of Sanctuary," accessed October 3, 2023, https://nottingham.cityofsanctuary.org/.
[39] Marvin Carlson, 157.
[40] Unfortunately, I was only able to briefly access the Nottingham Local Studies Library Theatre Collection due to C-19 restrictions and the relocation of the collection due to building works.

among the most common archival resources through which to establish theatre histories. They are a rich source of information for specific productions, and as Lars August Fodstad suggests, hold "a privileged position" among "theatrical paratexts." Such paratexts include "press releases, flyers, web pages, posters, subscription letters, advanced publicity, reviews and interviews."[41] Programmes, however, are the only one of these texts that is not created in order to promote the theatre or as a direct marketing tool because they are bought by individuals who have already purchased a ticket and saved as memorabilia, for nostalgic purposes, while for me they have sometimes provided evidence of a community initiative, that is usually hidden in the back pages. Fodstad describes the effect of programmes as a means to "inform, guide, motivate, provoke or confuse …to contextualise or explain… to make the actors look interesting, or maybe to support or subvert certain presuppositions about a play."[42] I would argue that programmes can have the same effect on the researcher and should not be overlooked for the information they hold about other activities that theatres undertake; sometimes, my finds have been made in surprising places too. For example, I was able to establish a previously unrecorded timeline of the post-holders of the Black Arts Producer role at NP, from 1993 to 2003, from the staff lists in theatre programmes held by the University of Nottingham archive. Beginning this research in October 2019, I could not have foreseen how much of my research would rely on video conferencing software and internet-based resources. As a consequence of the pandemic, many organisations, charities and individuals began to host online events to discuss emergent issues which had yet to be captured in written works. To support my research, I attended many of these online events and initiatives. For example, in November 2020 I attended virtual sessions of "What value

[41] Lars August Fodstad, "Refurbishing the Doll's House?" *Ibsen Studies* 6, no. 2 (December 2006), 151. NP gave or loaned me ephemera which I have been grateful to receive.
[42] Lars August Fodstad, "Refurbishing the Doll's House?," 151.

culture?" an online "festival of ideas" hosted by the Centre for Cultural Value.[43] I was able to hear from and interact with practitioners, researchers and policymakers as they discussed issues at the intersection of culture and C-19.[44] I also attended international events such as the ADESTE+ online European conference "Change within Change" which took place in June, August and September 2020. I attended sessions which focused on re-examining "the role of the cultural organisation and its relationship with the public."[45] Engaging with online initiatives was highly valuable not only for my professional development but as a means of ensuring the connection and relevance of this research to the wider cultural sector, as well as maintaining my research focus though the pandemic.[46] Embracing unpredictability and being adaptable and responsive to the organisation's needs has ensured the applicability of my research findings will be a resource that benefits NP beyond this project.

My approach to a rhizomatic interweaving between methodologies, then, has built laterally toward an analysis of events and initiatives left largely in abeyance and oral history interviewing was central to that work. At its most basic that involved collecting "memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews," however as a methodology it can be problematic and I needed to be aware of its pitfalls as well as its strengths.[47] The interviewer can influence responses; the class, gender and race of the interviewer may lead to biases or assumptions that risk distorting or influencing a participant's responses. Selection of apposite informants or interviewees must also take

[43] Centre for Cultural Value, "Events Archive," accessed October 9, 2023, https://www.culturalvalue.org.uk/events-archive/.
[44] Ben Walmsley, "What Value Culture?" Centre for Cultural Value, October 1, 2020, https://www.culturalvalue.org.uk/news-what-value-culture/. For the history of the project based at the University of Leeds, see https://www.culturalvalue.org.uk/about/.
[45] ADESTE+, "Online European Conference 2020," accessed October 9, 2023, https://www.adesteplus.eu/online-european-conference/.
[46] During this time, I presented on how I succeeded in doing this with the support of my supervisory team to other Midlands4Citites (M4C) researchers and CDA supervisors. In June 2021 I presented to the M4C CDA Network. In January 2022 I presented on behalf of M4C to a meeting with representatives from the Arts and Humanities Research council. I was also the subject of an NTU research profile at https://www.ntu.ac.uk/about-us/news/news-articles/2020/10/researchers-of-ntu-laura-ewart.
[47] Donald A Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 3.

account of the reliability and fallibility of their memories, especially decades after the events I sought information about, and their bias towards nostalgia, or difficult emotions elicited when recalling a project to which they devoted themselves which may have had limited success or even less legacy. The most contested issue is the subjectivity of knowledge.[48] Memory and its interpretation may remain a contested area but as a historical source that augments other kinds of findings, fills gaps and creates bridges to other participants, the value of oral history interviewing is clear to me now; for recording the stories of individuals who otherwise have no place or representation in the historical record. It is of primary importance, and as Paul Thompson, founding editor of the journal *Oral History*, writes, "The method of oral history is also used by many scholars, especially sociologists and anthropologists, who do not think of themselves as oral historians."[49] Oral history is a complementary tool within a rhizomatic approach, not least because "[c]ompiling oral sources is an activity that points to the connectedness of all aspects of history and not to their divisions from each other."[50] It is based on the conceptualisation of research as a process and as a result of ideas raised in interviews new meanings were "generated during the research process."[51] Early in the research I identified the groups that I hoped to recruit for semi-structured interviews: NP's staff, freelance drama/participation practitioners, current community participants, and historical participants if possible. I also identified groups to contact after initial interviews: trustees, stakeholders, young participants, maybe audience members for community projects, other theatres/and organisations that have worked with NP. The approach was adapted when it became clear there was less need to distinguish between

[48] Robert Kenneth Kirby, "Phenomenology and the Problems of Oral History," *Oral History Review* 35, no. 1 (January 1, 2008), 24, 26, 27.
[49] Paul Thompson, *Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 82.
[50] George Ewart Evans, *The Days That We Have Seen* (1997; repr., London: Faber & Faber, 2008), 28; quoted in Paul Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, 83.
[51] Patricia Leavy, *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.

groups than I had assumed, especially when I was approached by people who wanted to talk, and the majority of interviews took place via online video conferencing due to several factors, primarily the C-19 pandemic and restrictions placed on meeting and travelling between March 2020 and July 2021, the period when I had hoped to conduct most of my interviews. A blog published by The Oral History Society in April 2020, and updated multiple times over the course of the pandemic, mused "It may be that we are entering a 'new normal' for oral history, where a mixed in-person and remote approach will become the norm." Certainly, this became the reality for my research. Convenience was a factor; many interviewees could only meet online due to hybrid working patterns and scheduling. However, had meeting digitally not become normalised during the pandemic it is hard to know whether as much of this component of my research would have taken place online. This involved me developing a different skill set and having to think about how to "build rapport from a distance, to be sensitive to mood changes, to provide non-verbal feedback, and to establish the relationship needed for a successful oral history interview" in this format.[52]

Alongside collecting oral histories, I observed several groups across the participation programme. Theatre practitioners would occasionally ask that I also participate in the group, so I undertook both participant and non-participant observations at the discretion of session leaders in several different settings: in-person at NP in the Neville Studio, The Café Bar, The Ustinov Rooms and the space now known as Company, in two Nottingham schools and via Zoom. I attended numerous sessions of internal and external participation groups, performances and showcases, and I attended performances because they were often examples of the culmination of a community project or group initiative. Observing in that context pointed up how comfortable regular theatregoers seem to be in the space and provoked more

[52] Charlie Morgan, Rob Perks, Mary Stewart and Camille Johnston, "Remote Oral History Interviewing," Oral History Society, February 8, 2021, https://www.ohs.org.uk/covid-19-remote-recording/.

thought about individuals and groups that enter for reasons other than watching main-stage performances and who are both less confident and, by extension, less likely to return if discomfited—and the role that the building may play into that feeling.

This CDA is underpinned by the will to ensure the democratisation of theatre culture, by focusing on inclusion and diversity. This lies at the heart of NP's mission since its Participation Department was created in 2013. Like all producing theatres, NP prioritises the making of work (and opportunities). It seeks feedback from all participants, which is fed back into programmes, but NP commissioned this research because it would appreciate an overview of its community engagement in theatre making, activities often neglected in the writing of theatre history, and an assessment of its multiple platforms for outreach in order to reflect on their wider effects for individuals and groups and in order to assess the directions future community engagement could take. I believe that some of what is recovered and analysed here may also be valuable in the writing of reports and funding bids, and, most significantly, when designing future projects and opportunities because I have identified where there are barriers to participation and engagement. To that end, this PhD is conceived as providing NP with a point of analysis and a constructive critique from which to draw.

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In 2018, Lyn Gardner of *The Stage* assessed, "If you are a regular theatregoer, you start to lay claim to ownership of theatre spaces. You know their layouts and their quirks… You see the front door of the theatre as an entrance enabling you to gain access."[53] Does a feeling of ownership of a theatre building only result from regular theatregoing? And should it? Entering a public space can be intimidating depending on familiarity with its often unspoken and unexplained etiquette, and theatres feature in a list of venues that can elicit

[53] Lyn Gardner, "Never forget that theatres can intimidate first-timers," *The Stage*, November 5, 2018, https://www.thestage.co.uk/opinion/opinion/lyn-gardner-never-forget-that-theatres-can-intimidate-first-timers.

anxiety, with galleries and museums, as well as designer clothing stores and fine-dining restaurants.[54] Elaine Heumann Gurian, in an essay on "Threshold Fear" (2005), identifies in museums what Gardner observes about theatres when she contends that, "Museums clearly have thresholds that rise to the level of impediments, real and imagined, for the sectors of our population who remain infrequent visitors."[55] Sara Ahmed digs into affect, the feelings that ensue, when what she calls "atmospheric walls" act as subtle ways of gatekeeping that make some people welcome, because such "walls" are imperceptible to them, while making others feel uncomfortable, like strangers because they perceive the space and its atmosphere to be "like a wall that is at once palpable and tangible but also hard to grasp or to reach. It is something, it is quite something, but it is difficult to put your finger on it."[56] Ahmed has been thinking and writing about accessibility for some time and in *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012) focused on institutional brick walls in the context of diversity work, whereby diversity does "not quite inhabit the norms of the institution" and demonstrates how social norms are "rather like institutional brick walls: you do not tend to notice them, unless you come up against them."[57] If theatres genuinely wish to extend community engagement, and be inclusive of all, they should work towards ensuring that access imbues a feeling of ownership for all visitors, whether long-time theatre-goers or first-time attendees. NP is, however, restricted by the building it has occupied for the last seventy-five years. Described as "one of the best theatre buildings of its date" by architectural

[54] For designer clothing stores, see Delphine Dion and Stéphane Borraz, "Managing Status: How Luxury Brands Shape Class Subjectivities in the Service Encounter," *Journal of Marketing* 81, no.5 (2017), 67-85; For fine dining and an exploration of culinary capital, see Cathy Kaufman, "Etiquette, Power, and Modernist Cuisine," Dublin Gastronomy Symposium: Food and Revolution, 2016.
[55] Elaine Heumann Gurian, *Civilizing the Museum: The Collected Writings of Elaine Heumann Gurian* (London: Routledge, 2005), 115.
[56] Sara Ahmed, "Atmospheric Walls," September 15, 2014, at https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/09/15/atmospheric-walls/; This idea is extended in the context of sanctuary cities, in Vrasti and Dayal, "Citizenship: Rightful Presence and the Urban Commons," *Citizenship Studies* 20: 8 (2016), 994-1011.
[57] Sara Ahmed, "Practical Phenomenology," June 4, 2014, at https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/06/04/practical-phenomenology/.

historian Alistair Fair, the Grade II listed building offers architectural merit but, as NP expands its community engagement activities, who gets to use its rooms and spaces has had to become a finely tuned balancing act for the organisation.[58] The theatre building is a material reality that affects ways of working and a cultural artefact that "both manifests and embodies power relations." Karl Falconer, Steve Hadley and Jon Moorhouse take this approach when arguing that "togetherness is the greatest 'sell" that the venue they study in the city of Liverpool can make to its users.[59] Only in exploring the historical context of how NP came to be in its current building can it be understood how decisions made in 1948 may still be impacting community engagement activities now— and then to discern what recommendations can be made to support the best use of this historical building.

It is often incorrectly assumed that NP began in 1963 in the building it currently occupies when, in fact, the theatre company had been active since 1948. During the Second World War, a cinema, Pringles Picture Place, was used to host the performances of a weekly repertory company in a building known as The Little Theatre. Following financial difficulties exacerbated in the post-war period, the management of The Little Theatre negotiated the tenancy of a new building to the newly formed Nottingham Theatre Trust Ltd.[60] From 1948 to 1963, then, NP was located on Goldsmith Street, around half a mile from its current building on Wellington Circus. The theatre opened under the artistic directorship of André Van Gyseghem, a well-known and distinguished actor and producer. As a lifelong communist who had great influence in the left-wing theatre groups of the 1930s, Van Gyseghem brought a very particular socialist approach to his work.[61] In 1943, he published *Theatre in Soviet Russia*, based on materials gathered over four visits to the Soviet Union between 1933 and

[58] Alistair Fair, *Modern Playhouses: An Architectural History of Britain's New Theatres, 1945-1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 81.
[59] Karl Falconer, Steve Hadley and Jon Moorhouse, "Building theatre, making policy: materiality and cultural democracy at Liverpool's PurpleDoor," *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, September 2022, 1, 3.
[60] Bailey, *A Theatre for All Seasons*, 5.
[61] Colin Chambers, *The Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre* (London: Continuum, 2002), 557.

1938, describing his role as a "workman in the theatre." Here, it is evident that beyond his role as a producer, Van Gyseghem was acutely aware of multiple pressures on English theatre:

> I live in a continually growing amazement, in view of narrow-mindedness, prejudice, and downright stupidity clogging the wheels of play production here, that so *much* really first-rate work gets to see the light of day. It is because I believe that the sickness of our social system as a whole is responsible for the above motioned narrow-mindedness, prejudice and stupidity that I have turned inquiring eyes towards the theatres of another country, with another social system.[62]

The perspective that he brought to his directorship was intrinsically linked to programming with communities in mind. He would select George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman* (1903), a satirical comedy, as the inaugural production, holding auditions in Nottingham and London.[63] Interviewed for *Plays and Players Magazine*, Van Gysegham reflected on his programming choices:

> I wanted to give Nottingham a theatre it could be proud of… But I wasn't going to play down to the public which is what the Arts Council wanted me to do. I wanted to start in the way that I wanted to go on, so we opened with Shaw and followed that with Shakespeare. And there many people said I was mad to do this, that I should go on with something simpler, nearer to the public common taste as it were and build up. I said, "You can't pull up a crowd, you can only push up a crowd if you want to keep up good quality."[64]

[62] André Van Gyseghem, *Theatre in Soviet Russia* (Faber and Faber: London, 1943), 5, 6.
[63] 'Playhouse Company Selections', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 9 October 1948, British Newspaper Archive.
[64] Frank Eggins, "That First Director, Andre Van Gyseghem Set the Pattern in the Nottingham Playhouse," in *Marielaine Church Collection* (Unpublished, 2006), 1.

He raised tensions playing out as a result of the expectations of funders, as he perceived them from the outset, but, more importantly, the Goldsmith Street building was never fit for purpose.

Local historian Emrys Bryson distilled the problem in his book *Portrait of Nottingham* (1974), when he described how the company was "battling with a vest-pocket stage, dressing-rooms foetid with boiler fumes, wings so puny that scenery had to be put out in the street, and the sort of acoustics which meant that whenever a fire engine left the station nearby, it drowned the actors' lines." Despite being in an unsuitable building, though, Bryson celebrated "that draughty little theatre in Goldsmith Street" for achieving "fortnightly miracles" and becoming one of the UK's "leading repertory theatres."[65] Audiences shared Bryson's adulation and John Harrison, appointed Artistic Director in December 1951, oversaw an average attendance of 69% for the year 1955-56. However, due to the small size of the auditorium, it was proving a challenge to recoup the cost of even well-attended productions, with shows playing to an 80% capacity still losing money.[66] In an attempt to resolve the situation, the Nottingham Theatre Trust obtained the freehold of the existing lease in 1955 and acquired an adjoining property from Nottingham Co-operative Society. When Nottingham City Council proposed a new site and the possibility of a new theatre building, it was the moment to plan a space that would be suitable for the city.[67] The ACGB annual report for 1957-58 highlighted this initiative to create a purpose-built theatre and formally announced that, "The Nottingham Playhouse must be congratulated on its achievement of establishing such a high standard and reputation during its first nine years of existence that it has been able to convince the City Council of the need for a new theatre in which the public

[65] Emrys Bryson, *Portrait of Nottingham*, (London: Robert Hale, 1974), 169.
[66] Bailey, *A Theatre for All Seasons*, 45, 47.
[67] Bailey, *A Theatre for All Seasons*, 49.

and the company can be properly provided for."[68] Despite objections from opposition Conservative council members, citing the "enormous and unjustifiable cost" and fear of "children being educated culturally on licenced premises," the Council voted to approve the new building project on 6th February 1961.[69] *The Stage* reported that an announcement of the successful vote made on the Playhouse stage that evening generated cheering from the audience.[70] This is history that should be made visible by NP on its website and celebrated.

In 1958, Nottingham City Council appointed Peter Moro as architect of the new Playhouse. Known for co-designing the Royal Festival Hall, completed in 1951, he had a grand vision of a modernist civic building that would "embody a number of notable innovations."[71] One of the proposed innovations was that the new building would include a television and sound broadcasting studio, which would be leased to BBC Nottingham; however, this never came to pass.[72] A second innovation that did not make the final design was a proposal that the new building would house flats for actors on an upper level, similar to the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, which had opened in 1958.[73] The ACGB continued to monitor progress and, in its 1959-1960 annual report, described the decision to commission the new theatre as "hailed by public and profession alike as one which would enhance the reputation of this lively city as well as provide conditions for exemplary theatre, which are notably lacking in the repertory movement."[74] By 1960, plans were finalised, and with an

[68] The Arts Council of Great Britain, *A New Pattern of Patronage: The Thirteenth Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain 1957-1958* (London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1958), 44.
[69] "Audience Cheers News of Nottingham Project-But Artists' Flats Are Cut Out," *The Stage*, February 16, 1961, British Newspaper Archive.
[70] 'Audience Cheers News of Nottingham Project,' *The Stage.*
[71] The Arts Council of Great Britain, *The Struggle for Survival: The Fourteenth Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain 1958-1959*, (London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1959), 20.
[72] "Nottingham to Build £300,000 Theatre," *The Stage*, July 30, 1959, British Newspaper Archive.
[73] I have been unable to confirm why neither of these innovations were not pursued however it could have been due to cost restraints as the project ultimately went £50,000 over budget; Alistair Fair, *Peter Moro and Partners* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and Historic England, 2021), 109.
[74] The Arts Council of Great Britain, *The Priorities of Patronage: The Fifteenth Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain 1959-1960* (London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1960), 22.

expectant tone, ACGB reported that this novel innovation was "imminent."[75] On 13th July 1963, NP held its final performance on Goldsmith Street, choosing to reproduce the play that had inaugurated its life in the building: George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*, a play that NP may usefully return to the stage if promoting this element of its cultural history. ACGB reported, "This last performance was not an occasion for regret or dismay; it was the end of nearly fifteen years of distinguished work… making this theatre one of the outstanding repertory theatres in the country."[76] Across its reports, it becomes clear that ACGB was overflowing with admiration and that it confirmed and re-confirmed NP's status as a well-established and highly successful repertory company.

NP could also celebrate its history with reference to William Shakespeare's political tragedy *Coriolanus* (1609). On 11th December 1963, NP opened to the public with *Coriolanus*. Directed by Sir Tyrone Guthrie, it was the first play performed in the new auditorium. The opening night consisted of a Gala Preview featuring scenes from *Coriolanus* and civic formalities, after which people were introduced to the building. Peter Moro's design was bold, and those features remain now: a cylindrical concrete auditorium introduced a new form of adaptable stage that can be converted from an open to a proscenium view in a venue with a capacity of 756. Open foyers are set over three floors, with access to each via open staircases exposed to the board-marked concrete of the central drum. Alistair Fair notes that the use of concrete was decided because it could "offer a neutral backdrop for the movement and colour of the gathering audience." This was a clear decision to move away from the ornate gilded spectacle typical of Victorian theatre buildings. The only relief from the exterior of the concrete drum is a large aluminium sculpture by Geoffrey Clark, which sits mounted on the right side of the drum, visible from all three levels. Fair suggests that "people

[75] The Arts Council of Great Britain, *The Priorities of Patronage*, 22.
[76] The Arts Council of Great Britain, *Ends and Means: The 18th Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain 1962/63* (London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1963), 20.

(rather than traditional ornament)" are "the source of an ever-changing theatrical festivity" in NP's building.[77] This too is something to return to in its history and to celebrate as a core value of NP's culture. Overall, the ACGB's annual report for 1963-4 was resplendent with praise of NP's first year in the new building:

> The hopes expressed by Lord Snowdon have fully materialised in the early months of this beautiful theatre; it has been crammed night after night by happy, appreciative and predominantly young audiences, and its productions have become a conversational necessity to the public in Nottingham and for miles around. Even the London critics can't keep away![78]

NP achieved an 86% capacity in its first season.[79]

Assessing the new building's success for the wider community is more complex. An article in *The Stage* reported that community members were "affronted" when the opening night was marked as "a civic occasion" and 270 seats were set aside for councillors, "many of whom had voted against the whole project originally."[80] The unjustifiable cost for some Conservative councillors seemingly became justifiable once an invitation to a Gala Night was received. The people of Nottingham were perhaps not quite so enamoured with the romantic architectural vision as Peter Moro. One report in 1964 claimed that the building was "known to locals as "The Bunker" and the reporter demurred that, in his view too, the building "looks tough, bellicose: a battleground for the skirmishing theatre of the sixties."[81] However, and despite some dissent, the building was hailed and celebrated by and for the city. It was certainly intended to look its best when in full use by the community and the positioning of

[77] Alistair Fair, *Peter Moro and Partners* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and Historic England, 2021), 113.
[78] The Arts Council of Great Britain, *State of Play: The 19th Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain 1963/64* (London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1964), 27, 28.
[79] "Nottingham Playhouse- Still More Trouble," *The Stage*, August 13, 1964, British Newspaper Archive.
[80] "Playhouse Punch-up," *The Stage*, December 19, 1963, British Newspaper Archive.
[81] John Gardner, "John Gardner visits Nottingham Playhouse," *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, January 31, 1964, British Newspaper Archive.

the entrance at the intermediate level, between the upper and lower foyers, was designed to encourage the movement of visitors further into the building.[82] NP was always conceived as welcoming, but elements of its design would work against that feeling and cause material difficulties for some patrons.

In 1995, Moro expressed his displeasure with how the building had been changed when he asserted that, "in recent years insensitive alterations have marred the integrity of the building, culminating in the installation of a lift shaft in the centre of the foyer of this Grade II listed theatre."[83] What Moro disparaged, though, was a vital project supported by the Nottingham Coalition for Disabled People. As Executive Director Ruth Mackenzie wrote then, "the best laid architectural plans for spaces for theatre cannot anticipate the audiences and artists' creativity."[84] Nor did they factor in accessibility for all. Alterations that increase accessibility may not have been the basis on which the building was conceived in an era that took less account of diversity, but they play an integral role in reducing the threshold fear that is caused by barriers to physical access. Ensuring physical access to the building is a legal requirement of the 2010 Equality Act to which, as a service provider, NP has a duty to adhere by making reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people are not excluded or disadvantaged.[85] Although complicated by the building's Grade II listed status, NP offers level access into the building via an entrance on East Circus Street, and the internal lift provides access to all floors.[86] NP's web pages also provide detailed information and advice

[82] Alistair Fair, *Modern Playhouses: An Architectural History of Britain's New Theatres, 1945-1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 82.
[83] Peter Moro, "Nottingham Playhouse," in *Making Space for Theatre: British Architecture and Theatre since 1958*, edited by Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Stratford-upon-Avon: Mulryne and Shewring Ltd, 1995), 130.
[84] Ruth Mackenzie was Executive Director of NP between 1990-1997; Ruth Mackenzie, "The Nottingham Playhouse - Space for Art or Art for Spaces," in *Making Space for Theatre*, 71.
[85] Jayne Earnscliffe and Arts Council England Capital Team, *Building Access: A good practice guide for arts and cultural organization* (Arts Council England, 2019), 6, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Building_access_guide_260319_0.pdf.
[86] Whilst this section focuses upon the accessibility of the physical budling it is noted that NP offers several accessible performance types which extend the accessibility of auditorium performances. Accessible

about support that is available once inside the building.[87] In 2019, NP won the "Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Award" from The Nottinghamshire Hospitality Stars in recognition that it "facilitates remarkable physical access despite the building's original design."[88] In 2023, more significant strides have been taken to extend physical accessibility. For example, NP has expanded access information on its website including detail about seat measurements, access to ear defenders and information about which seats are closest to toileting facilities, a fitting approach considering the original intent of the structure was to highlight its aesthetic features when at its busiest.

When the Playhouse opened its new building, there was also a change in artistic leadership. John Neville was appointed Theatre Director in 1963, and the role was shared with another director, Frank Dunlop, and the actor Peter Ustinov. A brief period in 1963 is the only occasion in the theatre's history where the role of Artistic Director has been shared. How that worked precisely in situ is difficult to discern now, or to know precisely how responsibility was shouldered, but after a successful career as an actor, taking lead roles in many productions at the Old Vic Theatre in London's West End, theatre leadership was a passionate cause for Neville. He took a strong ideological position, and, it must be assumed, the primary responsibility: "I fail to see why the theatre of all things should be in the hands of greedy merchants who would sell their own grandmother for a shilling, let alone a play." In 1964, he told the publication *Student Theatre*:

> One of the main reasons that I am here in Nottingham is because, over the years I have been in the theatre, a feeling that was perhaps latent in me before has become

performances include audio description, BSL interpretation, captioned, dementia-friendly, relaxed, and reduced capacity performances.

[87]Nottingham Playhouse, "Access - Nottingham Playhouse," accessed September 28, 2023, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/your-visit/access.

[88] Visit Nottinghamshire, "Nottinghamshire Hospitality Stars Awards," accessed October 5, 2023, https://www.visit-nottinghamshire.co.uk/nottinghamshire-hospitality-stars-awards. The Nottinghamshire Hospitality STARS Awards are an "annual celebration of tourism in Nottinghamshire" produced in affiliation between Visit Nottinghamshire and the national Visit England Awards for Excellence.

> much stronger, and that is the feeling that the theatre should be an essential, integral part of community life… [I]t's all very easy for actors to talk, particularly in pubs over a glass of comforting Guinness, it is quite another thing to do something about it. And this is, in fact, what we are trying to do here—we're trying to make the theatre an essential community service. It's what I believe in; that's why I'm here.[89]

A Provisional Survey of civic-aided theatre in the North and Midlands, undertaken by drama students between 1962-63, highlighted the efforts made by NP (as well as The Belgrade Theatre Coventry and The Playhouse Theatre Sheffield) to involve young people in its work. Initiatives highlighted in the survey include The Student Playhouse, which entitled members to concession tickets and matinees during school hours, and cooperation with the University of Nottingham's Students Union and with the City Education Committee's Service of Youth to provide ticket concessions and shows for youth clubs and school groups.[90] Although youth engagement may have been something NP was being recognised for formally, there were instances where the methods to forge such engagement were not so straightforwardly successful. In 1964, for example, the *Birmingham Daily Post* reported that "an attempt to entice young people to Nottingham's new Playhouse by installing a jukebox in the theatre's snack bar has ended in failure…" Although teenagers "poured in and the records seldom stopped spinning," the initiative led to "a flood of complaints," the removal of the jukebox, and the teenagers' disappearance.[91]

Balancing the needs of different groups is still an issue for NP. In September 2021, I observed a weekday afternoon session of the Encore Drama Group for people over the age of 55. With 11 members at this time, the group had been meeting in the Neville Studio, but the

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[89] Derek Stubbs, "Provincial Revival Talking to John Neville," *Student Theatre: A Magazine of Leeds University Students Union*, 1964, 14. Nottingham Local Studies Library, Theatre Collection.
[90] The Department of Adult Education, The University of Hull and the Yorkshire North District of the W.E.A, "A Provisional Survey of Civic Aided Theatre in the North and Midlands (1962-63) made by students of a tutorial class in drama in association with their Tutor, Muriel Crane," 1964, 32.
[91] "Juke box scheme at Theatre Fails," *Birmingham Daily Post*, August 18,1964, British Newspaper Archive.

space was being used that day for a rehearsal for a main-stage production. The group had to move to the restaurant space, where it was disrupted by a loud mechanical humming which the facilitator, a freelance theatre practitioner, was told by a member of NP staff was an air-conditioning unit that could not be turned off. Instead, upon investigation by a participant, it turned out to be a refrigerator in the corner, which NP staff then advised could not be unplugged because wine was chilling for that evening's bar. The lights were not working, the room echoed, and there was inadequate space for the activities the practitioner/facilitator had planned. The scheduling of rooms is a mindful decision. On this occasion, a choice had been made to prioritise rehearsal space for actors over a participation group, which negatively impacted the quality and experience of the participants. A less deliberate way that the building's use and priorities of use can impact adversely on groups who use it also derives from my personal experience and empirical analysis. In September 2022, I attended an evening performance of a new touring production in the Neville Studio. Written and directed by Julie McNamara and Hassan Mahamdallie, *Quiet Rebels* (2023) uses audio, visual and live performance to explore the stories of white working-class women who married Black men of the Windrush Generation.[92] It is a powerful and poignant play and one which, as one reviewer for Disability Arts Online pointed out, focused on access:

> Much of the dialogue contains elements of description held within the narrative to give clues about the various characters as they move around the stage. Much of the action is BSL interpreted through videography, projected onto the monolithic stage set. In a spirit of experimentation, creative captions are used thoughtfully, in instances where the signer is not present. There was also an audio flyer provided before the performance giving a clear overview of the action and characters.[93]

[92] *Quiet Rebels* was advertised by NP for September 21, 2022, at https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/events/quiet-rebels/.
[93] Colin Hambrook, "*Quiet Rebels*: A Necessary Play for Our Times," Disability Arts Online, September 27, 2022, at https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/quiet-rebels-a-necessary-play-for-our-times/

It was at NP for one night only. But in the main auditorium, Alan Bennett's play *The Clothes They Stood Up In*, Adrian Scarborough's adaptation of Alan Bennett's comic novella (1997), was also being performed. Around halfway through Act One of *Quiet Rebels*, interval announcements for the main auditorium boomed into the Neville Studio, disrupting the actors and the delicate, emotionally charged atmosphere crafted by the production, leaving a notably frustrated audience. These are just two telling examples that highlight tensions that can arise when different groups use the building simultaneously.

The groups most disadvantaged by NP's lack of space would seem to be community groups rather than the audience of a main-stage production, and a feeling of de-prioritisation is an inevitable result. In 1995, Artistic Director Martin Duncan's vision was "to work in an atmosphere where the art we make is a vital part of everyday life…"[94] Ruth Mackenzie supported his use of the word atmosphere then because "it is the creation of and creativity in that atmosphere that leads the work of the Playhouse, rather than the physical aspects of the building."[95] The argument that creative atmosphere is what makes NP is strong; however, the atmosphere should not privilege the experiences of individuals attending the artistic programme over those attending participation programmes. Both the physical space and the atmosphere of the organisation should foster an equal respect for both groups. Sara Ahmed's concept of "atmospheric walls," then is worth considering in detail because is revealing when applied to community engagement at NP. Ahmed describes an atmosphere as "a surrounding influence that does not quite generate its own form" but how we feel that atmosphere depends upon "the angle of arrival" and, therefore, the same atmosphere can be experienced differently insofar as we may "inhabit the same room but be in different worlds." The physical restrictions or "walls" of the building were acknowledged, and those that could be

[94]Ruth Mackenzie, *Making Space for Theatre*, 73. Martin Duncan was Artistic Director of NP between 1994-1999
[95] Ruth Mackenzie, *Making Space for Theatre*, 73.

resolved were. They do not define NP. However, “atmospheric walls” persist and do have an impact. They are more subtle but also more divisive because difficult to discern, quantify, or evidence. They are all the more important to discuss as a result, and to address, I believe, because if Ahmed is right, an atmospheric wall imbues “the effect of a habituation: someone who arrives would stand out, would not pass in or pass through, and the difference becomes uncomfortable by virtue of being a difference at all.”[96] Albeit, philosophical and intangible, being aware of difficult emotions that may be harbouring in the minds of some individuals and groups embarking on any theatre experience is a way for NP to imagine some of the barriers faced by the most tentative community participants, particularly people identified in the original outline of this research project “who have not traditionally considered the integration of theatre in their lives and who did not experience theatre and performance before relationships developed with Nottingham Playhouse.”[97] I would advise that NP undertake careful consideration of the consequences on the experience of the community groups that use the space and are welcome within it to ensure that it is always presenting its building as available and accessible to the widest community possible.

In 2021, as part of the Built Environment Trust's 90th-anniversary celebrations, the 90for90 project selected 90 leading British figures who were asked to choose their favourite buildings. Actor, director, and now writer, George Layton decided on NP “in the appropriately named Wellington Circus, ‘appropriately’ because as one passed the café, bar and restaurant alongside the imposing glass-fronted Playhouse, there was always a carnival atmosphere as actors mingled with the good folk of Nottingham.” The imagery he evoked, having worked there in 1964, rested on “the design and location of Nottingham Playhouse and the surrounding areas that engendered the carnival atmosphere.” The by-product of his

[96] Ahmed, “Atmospheric Walls,” September 15, 2014, at https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/09/15/atmospheric-walls/
[97] “M4C DTP Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) Marketing Template,” (2018).

commentary resonates with how NP was then, and less for what it has become now, and Layton acknowledged that now few theatres prioritise "this kind of accessible communal pre-show/post-show environment."[98] The post-show environment described by Layton is no longer a reality, partly due to the closure of the Playhouse Bar & Kitchen, in the space that originally housed the Limelight Bar. For decades, its popularity and outside seating ensured it was a space for the community, not solely theatregoers who were the primary patrons, but as a meeting place for all people who valued the arts. Following the closure of NP due to C-19 restrictions in 2020, Leafi Group, the catering company running the bar and kitchen could no longer fulfil its contract and control was returned to NP. Regaining control of the restaurant came at a fortuitous time, as NP secured £290,750 from the Garfield Weston Foundation's Culture Fund to help turn it into a community and gallery space. Opened in June 2022 and rebranded as Company, the multi-use space features digital screens, bi-folding doors, and improved acoustics.[99] Much-needed community space has been gained, but at the expense of having an area that remains open to the public throughout the day. There is now no café on the premises and while the bar area opens before shows, and outdoor seating area can be used if weather permits, the bar does not open post-show. The post-show environment so fondly recalled by George Layton no longer exists. So how can NP begin to ensure that inclusive social environment may be re-constituted in new ways?

Post-show mingling is valuable for debate, discussion as well as general conversation, but Caroline Heim believes post-performance discussion is still an "under-explored and under-utilised avenue for audience contribution to the theatrical event."[100] Usually, post-show

[98] "Nottingham Playhouse: George Layton," *Building Centre 1931-2021*, 2021, https://90years.buildingcentre.co.uk/building/nottingham-playhouse/.
[99] "Nottingham Playhouse, 'NEWS: In Good Company – celebrating our brand new space for everyone," Nottingham Playhouse, July 2, 2022, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/news/news-in-good-company-celebrating-our-brand-new-space-for-everyone/.
[100] Caroline Heim, "Argue with Us! Audience Co-creation Through Post-Performance Discussions," *New Theatre Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (May 2012), 198.

discussion takes place in the auditorium at the end of the performance; after a short break, an expert facilitates a public conversation with actors or director. What Heim terms "audience authorship" is encouraged in these circumstances by eliciting questions from the audience and directing back comments so that what she calls newly created "audience performers" can work collaboratively to "negotiate a common meaning for the theatrical event." Considering how to adapt this method to create new formats for post-show discussion and events could encourage community engagement in innovative ways. Heim found that audiences were "eager to contribute" and that subsequent productions saw a "rise in attendance." [101] After discussion, post-show mingling could flow freely into Company thereby fulfilling its role as a community "hub" of conversation, with further discussion facilitated more informally there. To do so would be to draw on NP's longer history, and again a way to introduce it to the community and celebrate it as central to NP's culture now. Back in 1963, encouraging theatre criticism from the community was the crescendo of the speech given by Lord Snowdon on the opening of the Wellington Circus building:

> In deciding, however narrowly, that a civilised community needs as good a living theatre as it can get, Nottingham is on the side of the future. I wish for the productions done in this theatre not only many artistic and commercial triumphs, but many fierce arguments in the foyer, in the buses and pubs and newspapers. I hope that acclamation and protest will thunder round its head.[102]

Now, we should recognise this desire as part of a wider and more complex discussion too.

When evaluating professional theatre reviews, for example, it is important to consider the source of publication. Some publications may have a "low tolerance" for "artistic risk and

[101] Heim, "Argue with Us!," 194.
[102] Lord Snowdon's speech is quoted in The Arts Council of Great Britain, *State of Play: The 19th Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain 1963/64* (London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1964), 27,28; The speech was quoted in full in: "Playhouse will be Envy of the World – Lord Snowdon," *Nottingham Evening Post*, December 19,1963, British Newspaper Archive.

cultural difference", which can restrict their reviews and reviewers. [103] Therefore, it is crucial to seek out a diverse range of opinions and perspectives when assessing the quality of theatrical performances to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the artistic merits of a production. Reviews that are celebrated on the NP website suggest that it may be important to include more community feedback there. For example, for the 2022 production of *Identical*, six reviews are from traditional media outlets, and the only independent theatre reviewer was formerly chief theatre critic at a major national newspaper.[104] For *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* in 2023, the five reviews are all professional, as are those for *The Clothes They Stood Up In* in 2022. NP has encouraged theatre criticism by young people, through the Critics' Circle group, which existed in various forms between 2009 and 2019 and was initially marketed as an opportunity for schoolchildren to get involved. It formed part of the ACE Silver Arts Award requirement.[105] In 2018, the Critics' Circle was relaunched in a video featuring Artistic Director Adam Penford. Then, members aged 14-25 would participate in a workshop before each main production, meeting director, designers and cast, and they were invited to a free performance of the play on the press night. Their reviews were published on NP's website.[106] Social media posts promoting Critics' Circle suggested that the group's age range was too limited though; "Pity you don't do one for us oldies too" and "What about us OAPs?" were comments that stand out.[107] There is clearly interest in participation from other demographics.[108] But Critics' Circle reviewed productions

[103] For example, see, Nikki Shaffeeullah, "Reimagining Theatre Criticism," *Canadian Theatre Review* 168 (2016), 34-38.
[104] *Identical* was a coproduction between NP and Kenny Wax Ltd based on the novel *The Parent Trap* (1949) by Erich Kästner.
[105] Nottingham Playhouse, *Nottingham Playhouse Autumn 2009 Brochure*, 2009, 30, https://issuu.com/nottinghamplayhouse/docs/autumn2009_brochure.
[106]*Nottingham Playhouse*, "Join Critics' Circle," Facebook Video, January 18, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/nottmplayhouse/videos/1834205763258221/.
[107]Social media comments were made on the following posts: *Nottingham Playhouse*, "Join Critics' Circle," Facebook, January 18, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/nottmplayhouse/videos/1834205763258221.
[108]Social media comments were made on the following posts: Nottingham Playhouse, "Join Critics' Circle," Facebook, January 18, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/nottmplayhouse/videos/1834205763258221; Nottingham Playhouse, "Are you a theatre critic in the making?" Facebook, December 12, 2018,

for only a year when a decision was made not to continue beyond 2019, with its members encouraged to join a new creative writing group. The largest forum for theatre criticism now is the bi-annual Season Review all-staff meeting, a forum in which to discuss the previous season's productions. Although often focused on the logistical and operational challenges, there are internal opportunities to debate artistic decisions too, because, as Caroline Heim concludes, "The audience voice is still considered of secondary importance to that voice of the arts professional."[109]

There are currently no NP-facilitated forums, though, in which a wider community in the city can get involved in theatre criticism, or debate. This is a missed opportunity, and there is a gap in provision that could be filled by targeted post-show discussion, especially when the programme points toward it. *Quiet Rebels*, for example, was commended for how it "unsettles and challenges the audience to ask important questions about the world we live in." Another reviewer pointed out how it "provokes a much-needed conversation about the political systems that impact on us and determine the values our society aligns itself with." Indeed, the real 'quiet rebels' of the play's title were women, whose love changed society in the chaotic political landscape of the 1960s. This begs the question, the reviewer for Disability Arts Online raised, "Who are the rebels for today's world?"[110] Programmes and individual plays point the way and suggest that more input from the community could be an excellent resource for NP if harnessed to showcase its relevance to the lives of people in Nottingham.

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https://www.facebook.com/nottmplayhouse/posts/pfbid0LaeBfmubUzHfDER6zusWQFJFarc3CNpwgF8eA1qYoX16C8DoDCPdihJ6MwgzTTzal.

[109] Caroline Heim, "Argue with Us!," 196.

[110] Christine Lewis, "*Quiet Rebels* is a Nightmarish Vision of the Future drawn from a racist Past," *Socialist Worker*, September 24, 2022, https://socialistworker.co.uk/reviews-and-culture/quiet-rebels-is-a-nightmarish-vision-of-the-future-drawn-from-a-racist-past/; Colin Hambrook, "*Quiet Rebels*: A Necessary Play for Our Times," Disability Arts Online, September 27, 2022, https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/quiet-rebels-a-necessary-play-for-our-times/.

The research conducted for this thesis is underpinned by NP's real and undisputed relevance to the people of Nottingham. Its role in community engagement has expanded since the Participation Department was inaugurated in 2013 when it was formalised and observing and assessing the Department's work is a key element of this research, but so is uncovering its cultural and institutional history for how that work was undertaken in previous decades. It is important to understand that NP has been at the forefront of various initiatives to diversify its staff and to ensure that it is inclusive of the city's racially and ethnically diverse population. That is the focus of the next chapter.

Introductory Recommendations

Reducing Threshold Fear

The concept of threshold fear describes the "real and imagined" barriers individuals and communities face upon approaching, entering and embodying the spaces of cultural buildings.[1] For theatres to increase community engagement and inclusivity, it is essential to prioritise the creation of an environment in which all visitors feel a sense of ownership. This approach should apply equally to all visitors, both long-time theatregoers and people and communities attending for the first time. Open Days may be opportunities to reduce threshold fear and promote future engagement. NP has a history of holding successful open days, and they were a common occurrence in the 1980s.[2]

1. NP should reinstitute regular open days designed to welcome people into the theatre without the expectation of a financial contribution.

2. The Events and Commercial Manager, appointed by NP in June 2023, should collaborate with colleagues involved in Audience Development to suggest targeted areas of development for new commercial relationships.
    a) Focused on commercial bookings, the Events and Commercial Manager should ensure that all business development aligns with NP's publicly stated commitments to community engagement through issues such as anti-racism, sustainability, and accessibility. Attracting a diverse range of groups, businesses, and event

[1] Elaine Heumann Gurian, *Civilizing the Museum: The Collected Writings of Elaine Heumann Gurian* (London: Routledge, 2005), 115.
[2] In July 1988, the promotion was as follows: "Once again, we offer you an opportunity to take a look behind the scenes and see how we work. At the same time browse around our Craft Exhibition. A day out for the whole family. Refreshments Available. Admission Free."; Theatre Programme Habeas Corpus, Alan Bennett Monil Touring Theater with Peter Wilson 17th Feburary 1988.

coordinators to book space at NP could encourage new opportunities for community engagement.

The Physical Building

Architect Peter Moro's Playhouse is celebrated for its architectural significance both nationally and for the city of Nottingham. However, the physical restrictions of the building mean that balancing the needs of different groups is still an issue for NP. The lack of space most disadvantages community groups, not the audience for productions on the main stage, risking a sense of de-prioritisation. I recommend that NP carefully consider the consequences of the use of space for its impact on the experience of the community groups to ensure they feel valued while participating.

3. NP should focus on cultivating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for the broadest community possible.

4. NP should focus on developing an interactive post-show environment which encourages audiences to stay in the building and increases catering sales. Since the Company space opened, there has been no designated area for socialising after shows. Having a space at NP where people can continue conversations would be beneficial.
    a) To encourage people to stay, NP could consider opening a bar after performances and offering post-show dynamic pricing, which has proven successful in other regional theatres; this may entice more people to remain in the building.

Encouraging Community Feedback, Debate and Discussion

In the speech given by Lord Snowdon on NP's opening night in 1963, he advocated for "arguments in the foyer" as a response to productions.[3] This aspiration to encourage community response supports a diverse range of opinions and perspectives when assessing theatrical performances. Since the Critics' Circle group disbanded in 2019, NP no longer has a dedicated means to foster and facilitate discussion or allow the wider community in the city to engage in theatre criticism or debate; this represents a missed opportunity.

5. NP should explore re-introducing and facilitating a community group focused on theatre criticism.
    a) NP could develop a book club-style post-show group to promote conversation and debate, to foster a close relationship between the theatre and the participants, which in time could elicit valuable insights which may also guide future programming.

6. NP does not routinely collect qualitative feedback from audiences or community participants, which can provide valuable endorsements and insights into why some programming is more successful than others.
    a) NP should decide when and how often to survey audiences and participants with qualitative questions post-show. This data would serve two purposes: firstly, providing community-led feedback for the programming process; secondly, this data could be shared as marketing material and used to support fundraising activities, evidencing NP's impact on community members and audience.

[3] Lord Snowdon's speech is quoted in, The Arts Council of Great Britain, *State of Play: The 19th Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain 1963/64* (London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1964), 27,28.

Racial and Ethnic Diversity at Nottingham Playhouse

In Autumn of 2020, Nottingham Playhouse (NP) initiated several anti-racism activities, starting with the creation of an Anti-Racism Action Plan, which germinated two working groups, the "Diversity in the Workforce Working Group" and the "Anti-Racism Action Group."[1] Dedicated focus on anti-racism was triggered by events that had taken place 6,309 miles away in Minneapolis, Minnesota, when, on 25th May 2020, an African American man, George Floyd, was killed by a white police officer during an arrest. What happened was captured on an iPhone by an onlooker.[2] It showed white police officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on George Floyd's neck for several minutes; Mr Floyd is heard panicking repeatedly saying, "I can't breathe."[3] This desperate call for help was to become the refrain of the summer of 2020 as the C-19 pandemic took hold globally. As anti-police brutality demonstrations in America intensified, international protests began in solidarity and as local responses to the racism endemic in other nations. The UK was no exception. A notable Black Lives Matter (BLM) protest in Bristol, England, included the toppling of a statue of slave trader Edward Colston.[4] Nottingham saw two large-scale BLM events. On 7th June, some 3,000 people gathered to protest on the Forest Recreation Ground.[5] On 15th August,

[1] "Anti-Racism Action Plan," Nottingham Playhouse, September 26, 2020.
[2] The onlooker was seventeen-year-old Darnella Frazier, who at the time of the attack was walking her nine-year-old cousin to the corner store where the arrest took place. Darnella published a statement on the one-year anniversary of the murder describing the incident as "a traumatic life-changing experience" but something of which she is also proud, because were it not for her video "the world wouldn't have known the truth." Darnella provided the evidence needed to convict Derek Chauvin for the charge of second-degree murder and a sentence of 22.5 years in prison, Darnella Frazier's Statement can be read at: https://www.facebook.com/darnellareallprettymarie/posts/1727632277437871.
[3] BBC News. "George Floyd: What happened in the final moments of his life." BBC News, May 30, 2020. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-52861726.
[4] Haroon Siddique and Clea Skopeliti, "BLM Protesters Topple Statue of Bristol Slave Trader Edward Colston," *The Guardian*, June 7, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/07/blm-protesters-topple-statue-of-bristol-slave-trader-edward-colston.
[5] Patricia Francis, "Black Lives Matter: How the UK Movement Struggled to Be Heard in the 2010s," The Conversation, June 7, 2021, https://theconversation.com/black-lives-matter-how-the-uk-movement-struggled-to-be-heard-in-the-2010s-161763.

Nottingham United Against Racism (NUAR) organised a march beginning in Old Market Square, stopping at Radford Road Police Station and His Majesty's Prison Nottingham.[6] Attention was being brought to racism in Nottingham on a scale and in a manner never seen before.

In response to the BLM movement, organisations, businesses, and charities scrambled to publish statements of support on their websites and social media accounts. Cultural organisations were prolific in their responses, from the largest and most prominent, such as the National Theatre and ACE, to mid-scale regional producing theatres, including Leeds Playhouse, Bristol Old Vic, and Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse. The content of these statements varied but it was usually separated into two sections. The first is a general statement as an expression of solidarity with Black communities, including condemnation of the murder of George Floyd, acknowledgement of systemic racism in England, and, in sum, commitments to holding an actively anti-racist standpoint. The second section, if present, consists of specific commitments or actions to be undertaken internally focused on addressing equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) within the organisation, summarised by Leeds Playhouse as people, programming and ways of working.[7] Less commonly, a third element would be introduced whereby a British theatre would acknowledge that it had contributed to racism as an institution, apologise, and commit to undertaking some form of reformist anti-racist activity.[8] NP's statement included an acknowledgement of underrepresentation and it expressed both regret and resolve: "We acknowledge that we have

[6] Revolutionary Communist Group, "Black Lives Matter - Nottingham March," Revolutionary Community Group, August 17, 2020, https://www.revolutionarycommunist.org/branches/midlands/5991-black-lives-matter-nottingham-march.
[7] Leeds Playhouse, "Black Lives Matter - Leeds Playhouse Statement," Leeds Playhouse, accessed September 23, 2022, https://leedsplayhouse.org.uk/latest_news/black-lives-matter-leeds-playhouse-statement/.
[8] National Theatre, "Twitter Post," Twitter, June 20, 2020, https://twitter.com/nationaltheatre/status/1267497737286823940; Leeds Playhouse, "Black Lives Matter - Leeds Playhouse Statement,"; Bristol Old Vic, "Black Lives Matter," Bristol Old Vic, June 3, 2020, https://bristololdvic.org.uk/press/bristol-old-vic-statement; Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse Theatres, "Standing Together," Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse Theatres, June 1, 2020, https://www.everymanplayhouse.com/standing-together.

not done everything right, despite our best intentions, and recognise that we need to improve."[9] This short statement introduces an "initial draft" of NP's Anti-Racism Action Plan. What this introduction does not draw attention to is the long history of EDI work at NP that my research has uncovered, why specific and strategic anti-racist theatre work had not continued once initiated, and, by extension, why and how any impact it may have had on the institution has since been lost.

This chapter assesses previous work in the areas of EDI because the events of 2020 did not constitute the first social trigger for NP to engage with these issues. The theatre has been here before. It also begins to unpack why, historically, the focus of NP's EDI strategies has been Black British African and Caribbean communities in Nottingham because underpinning this discussion is the awareness that NP needs to diversify its focus to build connections with other global majority communities. Nottingham is a diverse city; the 2011 Census shows 35.6% of the population as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME), an increase from 19% in 2001.[10] If NP hopes to develop a stronger relationship with the British Asian community, which comprises 13.1% of Nottingham's "BAME" community, I believe that much can be learned from its multiple and different endeavours to engage African Caribbean and African communities in Nottingham over many decades. NP has had an extended— and sometimes successful— history of participation and engagement. This work, predominantly with the city's Black communities, must be understood and analysed in detail to inform current and future anti-racism work in the hope that meaningful learning and change will occur. Through archival sources and oral history interviews, I have identified what I am calling "hinge moments" in the theatre's history where progress was envisaged and

[9] Nottingham Playhouse, "Anti-Racism Action Plan."
[10]Nicola Kirk, "2021 Census Nottingham City Ethnicity, Language, Religion and Nationality" (Nottingham City Council, 2022).

sometimes made visible.[11] Examples include NP's role as a founding member of both the Regional Black Theatre Initiative in 1993, the Black Regional Initiative in Theatre in 1999, and its involvement in developing and hosting The Eclipse Conference in 2001, and its subsequent support of Eclipse Theatre.

The history of NP's anti-racist cultural work is uneven and sporadic, often responsive to funding initiatives and always reliant on an individual member of staff, which is an issue in itself that this chapter examines. Reflection on what may have worked and why initiatives failed has not always taken place. One of the greatest barriers to reflection has been, and continues to be, the cultural policy landscape. Between 2019 and 2021, Leila Jancovich and David Stevenson undertook research designed to explore the issue of failure in cultural participation. The FailSpace project uncovered and exposed a cultural participation policy landscape, across the UK, that is not yet conducive to critical reflection. As a result, they assessed that the major consequence of fear of failure is that it "prevents learning from which the cultural sector might implement the structural changes needed to engender greater equity."[12] If there is a tendency in the cultural sector to prioritise and reproduce only narratives of success while avoiding opportunities for meaningful learning from less successful ventures and outright failures, it is a systemic problem, but not one that pertains to theatres alone because it permeates the culture of many other organisations. The FailSpace framework encompassing four stages and its toolkit are designed to be used from planning to evaluation of culture-based projects. Stage 2 and 3 for which suggest use of a "wheel of failure" tool encourages institutions to consider "five facets" of potential failure (or success):

[11] A hinge moment is a concept in physics has its application in aircraft engineering. A hinge moment is a result of the aerodynamic forces on control surfaces such as flaps and rudders when placed in a stream of air. Here it is used to describe a moment where the history of the relationship between Nottingham Playhouse and global majority individuals and groups shifted, the angle of travel was impacted, and progress was either widened or narrowed.

[12] Leila Jancovich and David Stevenson, "Failure Seems to Be the Hardest Word to Say," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 27, no. 7 (February 24, 2021): 978.

purpose, process, participation, practice and profile and participants are encouraged to complete their own wheel.[13] Embedding evidence-based tools for critical reflection into future projects and learning from failures is a practical way for all institutions, including NP, to ensure that they do not fall into a cycle of repetition and can evaluate why if they seem to do so. For various reasons discussed below, theatres have often escaped the responsibilities and attendant criticisms levelled at other kinds of institutions. If this has afforded space to experiment by introducing initiatives to augur institutional change, why, then, was organisational change not sustained, beyond making intermittent inroads into creating racial change at particular moments in NP's history? As NP reflects on its current engagement with individuals and communities through its latest Anti-Racism activities, and as culpability has become increasingly difficult to avoid due to increased scrutiny on cultural as well as all other organisations with the resurgence of the BLM movement, how can meaningful learning take place as a result of critical reflection?

[13] Leila Jancovich, David Stevenson, Lucy Wright, Malaika Cunningham, and Lizzie Ridley, "FailSpace Toolkit ," 2022, https://www.culturalvalue.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Failspace-Toolkit-2022.pdf.

The Arts Britain Ignored

In 1976, Naseem Khan published *The Arts Britain Ignores*. It is a significant milestone in the historiography that is traced through this chapter via works that focus on the failure to be inclusive of cultural diversity in arts organisations.[1] Its recommendations presaged by many decades ACE's requirement in 2006 that cultural organisations evidence that they have a diversity strategy in place in order to be eligible for its funding.[2] Khan was born in Birmingham, where her father immigrated from India; her mother was of German heritage, and had a privileged life, attending Roedean private school and completing an English degree at the University of Oxford before working as a journalist and becoming theatre editor of the London arts magazine *Time Out* in 1972.[3] In her memoir *Everywhere is Somewhere* (2017), published in the year of her death, Khan recalls a conversation with her father that took place in 1973 when she explained to him that she had met with the Arts Council, and that it had commissioned her to undertake some sort of research, because the Council had identified that it did not "know about immigrants" or "if they have culture that the Arts Council maybe should know about."[4] It was a basic and flawed beginning in the assumption that migrants to the UK could possibly be understood as a homogenous group but the research Khan began after leaving her position at *Time Out* would inform her report *The Arts Britain Ignores*. In 1999, she would be awarded an OBE for services to cultural diversity.

To understand how the arts of global majority communities in Britain could have come to be ignored, it is important to situate Khan's research in the political climate of the

[1] Naseem Khan, *The Arts Britain Ignores: The Art of Ethnic Minorities in Britain* (London: Community Relations Commission, 1976.
[2] The Change Institute, "Cultural Diversity – an ACE Journey" (The Change Institute, January 2006), 3.
[3] Dominique Gracia, "Naseem Khan: Journalist, Activist, Cultural Historian," University of Oxford, accessed August 22, 2023, https://www.english.ox.ac.uk/naseem-khan-journalist-activist-cultural-historian; Naseem Khan, *Everywhere Is Somewhere* (Hebden Bridge: Blue Moose, 2017), 116–20.
[4] Khan, *Everywhere is Somewhere*, 127

late 1960s and early 1970s. In the aftermath of Enoch Powell's infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968 and The Immigration Act of 1971, the British government was more concerned with restricting "non-white" Commonwealth migration than migration from the European Economic Community that the United Kingdom had recently joined.[5] In 1974, the Labour Party led by Harold Wilson came into power with a manifesto committed to addressing issues of sex discrimination. Within a year of being in government, the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 was successfully ratified by law and the government began to address the shortcomings of the, already outdated, and poorly worded, 1968 Race Relations Act.[6] Measures needed to be taken to strengthen the Act for how it could ensure cultural inclusion. In February 1976, the Race Relations Bill was published, and on 22nd November 1976, the Race Relations Act 1976 received Royal Assent. The new Act introduced the concept of indirect discrimination, "where everyone is treated the same, but there are conditions or requirements which put members of a particular racial group at a disadvantage compared to others."[7] Despite legal intervention, advancement in this area was not reflected or adopted in all arenas of public life. The far-right group, the National Front, particularly active in resisting the Act, found spaces in the East Midlands to disrupt the social change that was being mandated into law. Now Leicester is celebrated as one of the UK's most diverse cities, but in 1976, 14,000 people voted for the National Front in local elections securing the

[5] "Rivers of Blood" is the title of a speech given by Conservative MP Enoch Powell to the general meeting of the West Midlands Area Conservative Political Centre on 20th April 1968. See, for example, Evan Smith and Marinella Marmo, "The Myth of Sovereignty: British Immigration Control in Policy and Practice in the Nineteen-Seventies," *Historical Research* 87, no. 236 (January 17, 2014), 344–69.

[6] The 1965 Race Relations Act created two statutory bodies responsible for race relations in the UK, the Community Relations Commission and the Race Relations Board which co-ordinated 7 regional conciliation committees established to deal with complaints of discrimination. With judges exhibiting what Baroness Gaitskell describes as "verbal contortions and legal acrobatics," it was clear that the Act needed to be updated. The ambiguous wording as to what constituted a public or private space led to several legal challenges, most notably in the 1974 case Race Relations Board v Dockers' Labour Club and Institute Ltd [1974] UKHL J1016-1 at https://vlex.co.uk/vid/race-relations-board-v-792867473, RACE RELATIONS BILL [H.L.], HL Deb 3 February 1975 vol 356 cc671-8, 3.36pm.

[7] "The Race Relations Act 1976," *Race & Class* 18, no. 4 (April 1977), 405, https://doi.org/10.1177/030639687701800407.

party 18.5% of the poll.[8] In Khan's view, the focus for too long had been on the "problems" and "disadvantages" of immigrants, though, and this is where *The Arts Britain Ignores* begins its argument.

Khan establishes a tone that is informative and authoritative, part record, part recommendation. *The Arts Britain Ignores* is divided into sections that appear to have been designed to move readers past mere recognition towards creating material opportunities for inclusion, with a synopsis of recommendations for each.[9] Khan's approach was rooted in her belief that the arts had served a liberal function, and that increased inclusivity would make diverse groups visible and address the problem of "perpetuating differences." Cognisant of the socio-political environment in which her words would be weighed, Khan argues that so-called ethnic minority arts must be understood beyond a negative rhetoric typically used by the media whereby immigrants were "at best a conundrum to be valiantly solved, at worst an incursion that will hopefully be ejected." If positive changes immigrant groups brought to the UK were rarely recognised officially in the 1970s, by extension, neither were the arts of ethnic minority Britons, but Khan demonstrates that despite "neglect" and "lack of acceptance within 'the arts structure," the level of activity was high. She addresses head-on putative claims that fostering ethnic minority arts would be divisive, citing three facts. Firstly, the desire of second-generation immigrants to honour their parents' cultures. Secondly, that Britain is not and has never been homogenous and to consider it so is both erroneous and a failure to acknowledge differences in culture across the nations and regions, and thirdly that the arts have always developed through creative responses to cultural

[8] Reg Harcourt, "ATV Today: 26.05.1976: National Front in Leicester," (ATV, May 26, 1976), MACE, https://www.macearchive.org/films/atv-today-26051976-national-front-leicester; Events such as The London Spaghetti House siege, which took place between the 28th September and the 3rd October 1975, and the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival riot are examples of police attitudes when *The Arts Britain Ignores* was published.
[9] Khan's sections encompass Chinese, Cypriots, East and Central Europeans, Indians, Pakistanis, West Indians and the African Contribution.

influences, with the Notting Hill Carnival a valued example.[10] If minority arts were supported, she contends, they could animate the UK's cultural life, but an argument had to be made for what "ethnic minorities" could contribute to a country with a relatively rigid view of high culture.[11]

In 1976, Khan argued that a more inclusive arts landscape would not only add "variety and colour to the texture of life" but would enhance national "knowledge and understanding." Ethnic communities in the 1970s were playing catch up from a position of underfunding, lack of support or arts infrastructure, and an absence of attention from policymakers. An attendant concern was that a lack of sensitive support would lead to diverse British communities stagnating, turning towards preservation over development, and taking a defensive rather than a forward-looking position, and thereby "turn in on themselves through rejection." The cultural lives of communities from what is now recognised as the global majority were being stifled by the absence of engagement from funding bodies and if the ACGB did not support new artistic expressions and outputs, Khan argued there could be no justification for calling Britain a multi-cultural society. Khan closed the report by reiterating that, "The root cause of the low-level ethnic arts support is the lack of effective contact between new-British and native-British." [12] Khan's use of such colonial terms is uncomfortable for readers now; the terms native-British and non-native British that are used twenty-four times in the report endure in the literature of the British National Party (BNP).[13] However, Khan was aware of the language she needed to use to engage with civic and arts

[10] Naseem Khan, *The Arts Britain Ignores*, 5, 11, 7.
[11] The concept of high culture is contested but it corresponded in this context to the art forms prioritised by the leadership of the Arts Council of Great Britain and by the cultural establishment in the 1970s and 1980s, the anthesis of the community arts movement. Conservative Party minister Norman Tebbit was an outspoken critic on this matter and in 1985 described the organisation as elitist and politically biased.
[12] Khan, *The Arts Britain Ignores*, 7, 8, 11, 127.
[13] For example, headlines from the British National Party's website include articles entitled "Native Brits Ethnically Cleansed from Britain's Second Biggest City." The British National Party (BNP), "Native Brits Ethnically Cleansed from Britain's Second Biggest City," BNP, June 29, 2018, https://bnp.org.uk/native-brits-ethnic-cleansed-from-britains-second-biggest-city/.

leaders and the establishment at which she levelled her critique in the *Arts Britain Ignores.* Analysed with hindsight, though, she risked reinforcing a colonial sense of mission in order to integrate "new" immigrant communities and failed to be inclusive of individuals and groups born in the UK. Khan combined overarching proposals with specific recommendations for a wide range of civic groups, from government departments, including the Home Office and Department for Education Services, to the Race Relations Commission and Community Relations Councils.[14] Most significantly, a concrete outcome of Khan's report was the foundation of the Minority Arts Advisory Service (MAAS), which was founded on the shared understanding that ethnic minority arts had been virtually ignored when agreeing funding priorities and that they had suffered from "isolation, diffidence, and lack of expertise."[15] Khan was selected to direct the service.

Concurrently, a separate enquiry was undertaken by Lord Redcliffe-Maud, the Master of University College Oxford, into the structure of arts funding in England and Wales. *Support for the Arts in England and Wales* (1976) was funded, as Khan's report was, by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and initiated at the request of the Standing Conference of Regional Arts Associations and the ACGB.[16] Redcliffe-Maud's enquiry makes little reference to the arts of "ethnic minorities," though, except to refer readers to "amateur music" and, via a footnote only, to *The Arts Britain Ignores* if readers wished to "understand the position of

[14] General recommendations were made to the following groups: Home Office, Department for Education Services, Inner London Education Authority, Arts Council, British Council, Race Relations Commission, Community Relations Councils, Regional Arts Associations, Greater London Council, Schools Council, Local Authority – general, via its education, youth and community and adult education services, via it arts and leisure services or locally funded arts councils/associations, via its libraries, art galleries and civic theatres, Radio and Television Media, Poetry Secretariat, British Federation of Music Festivals, National Federation of Music Societies, Youth and Music, National Association of Youth Clubs and National Association of Boys Clubs, Crafts Advisory Committee, ethnic minority cultural groups and individual artists and Minority Arts Agency.
[15] The Change Institute, "Cultural Diversity – An ACE Journey," 3.
[16] The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation was initiated in 1956 by the last will and testament of Armenian-born Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian. The Foundation acts in four statutorily defined areas: arts, education, science and social welfare. The UK branch of the foundation has focused on issues of access to culture and has promoted this via grant-making, partnerships, and through the funding and publishing of research. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (2023), at https://gulbenkian.pt/uk-branch/about-us/the-foundation/.

Ethnic Minority Arts."[17] The "Community Arts" section of *Support for the Arts in England and Wales* merely notes the "recent development" of the Association of Community Artists and its work to establish links with the "ethnic minorities art movement." No further details are provided.[18] The report does not mention distinct or focused funding for "ethnic" theatre or arts either. The publication of two reports in the same year, with one largely excising Black, Asian and other global majority theatre groups and practitioners from the funding landscape and the other urging equitable consideration across the UK, suggests how contentious arts funding was in the decade that preceded NP's initiatives in this area—and points to how national recognition of the need to create more equitable race relations would need to drive change towards addressing under-representation, even as local pressures were increasingly apparent.

By spotlighting Naseem Khan and the pressure that MAAS began to exert on the theatre sector, some progress in ensuring diversification and representation began to trickle into the collective consciousness of people holding positions of influence, but five years after publishing her report, in 1980, Khan presented a paper entitled "The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain." Khan suggested then that the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) revisit *The Arts Britain Ignores* for how it might still facilitate the examination of arts practice and policy change if its recommendations were followed more closely. Khan drew the RSA's attention to Asian communities for whom the arts "take on a significance beyond the aesthetic. They become signals of what is seen - certainly in the Asian view - to be a saner society."[19] The idea of being seen, to be represented in UK arts and, at base, in British society speaks to the importance of visible representation, and is a cogent reminder now that to

[17] John Redcliffe-Maud, *Support for the Arts in England and Wales* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation UK and Commonwealth Branch, 1976), 131.
[18]Redcliffe-Maud, *Support for the Arts in England and Wales*,157.
[19] Naseem Khan, "The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 128, no. 5290 (1980), 677.

highlight one group, Black or African Caribbean communities in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, is also to risk invisibilising other communities that are still labelled "minority ethnic" more thoroughly. That risk still pertains and textures the analysis in this chapter.

Vacillating between where responsibility lies, whether at a national level of oversight or at local levels of community engagement continues to stymie the possibility of ensuring sustained attention to so-called minority communities in the arts landscape— and evidence of incremental change as a result. In 1995, Andrew Sinclair's social history of the ACGB looked back over the period that followed Khan's and Redcliffe-Maud's reports, in order to chart relationships between the Council, the Treasury, and politicians.[20] Now, it affords insight into how the arts of global majority communities were viewed in the 1980s before a centralised ACGB model of funding shifted towards regional and local devolution. It was felt by consensus that "ethnic minority arts" were too fragile to be devolved to local responsibility: "On the policies of social welfare for ethnic minorities and the disabled, the Arts Council could not devolve such problems of national concern." Instead, over 1988 and 1989, the ACGB agreed to make a specific additional allocation of £500,000 from its central budget to Black artists and arts organisations.[21] This financial acknowledgement demonstrated the Council's role in providing a platform for Black arts, and it invited its departments to identify priorities and development needs for Black projects. Racism awareness and cultural awareness training was given to ACGB staff and clients to this end, and Sinclair notes that it advocated the same training to other public organisations, including the BBC and the British Film Institute.[22] Over the decades, it becomes clear that strong steers

[20] Andrew Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures: The History of the 50 Years of the Arts Council of Great Britain* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), 296.
[21] Adjusted for inflation using the Bank of England's inflation calculator £500,000 in 1989 is equivalent to £1,264,197.81 in September 2023.
[22] Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures*, 296, 297.

from national-level organisations have been significant triggers for creative thinking in theatres about diversity and inclusion. What is less apparent is where theatres have driven change locally and where that has impacted thinking at the national level. Where that is evident at NP is teased out below.

Nottingham Playhouse's Engagement with Global Majority Communities

Nottingham is referenced only twice directly in *The Arts Britain Ignores*. A Polish theatre group is alluded to, and Nottingham appears in a list of cities that have held West Indian carnivals. The number of mentions is few compared to other cities in the Midlands: Leicester is referenced sixteen times to include activities such as "Asian cinema" and "Indian drama," and of fourteen mentions of Derby, most highlight "Poles, Serbs and Ukrainians," and allusions to Coventry relate to activities at Sidney Stringer Community College. It would not be reasonable to draw a conclusion solely on the basis that Nottingham figures barely in the report that there was a dearth of ethnic minority arts and culture in the city, but this does suggest that groups and initiatives may not have been visible to observers outside the city. NP had begun to facilitate engagement with Black theatre-makers and audiences in the late 1970s. The Sociable Theatre Youth Opportunity Programme, Black Theatre of Nottingham, Youth Theatre and Arrow Community Theatre are missing from national-level reports but NP was able to facilitate their coming together to perform Sandy Wilson's play *The Boy Friend* (1953) in 1978 for the Nottingham Festival, an annual two-week-long programme of arts and cultural events that had been running since 1970 and hosted by venues across the city, such as The Albert Hall, Nottingham Castle and NP.[1] The collective retitled its production *The Black and White Boyfriend* and hired NP as a rehearsal and performance space, as Alan Hescott recounts in his book about community theatre in the city, *The Feast of Fools* (1983):

> We filled the Playhouse, not an all-black audience, not an all-white audience but a black and white audience to see *The Black and White Boyfriend*. It was the real festival show for Nottingham someone said later. It was also our festival show. It

[1] The Nottingham Festival (1970-1983) is not to be confused with the Nottingham Playhouse Arts Festival, which ran annually between 1965 and 1967 and which was run solely by and for NP.

> celebrated a fraternity of black and white actors and diverse companies in Nottingham.[2]

The play was a success on three fronts: first, as the collaborative effort of four Nottingham-based theatre companies; second, for the racial composition of the audience [as noted by Hescott] which reflected that of the city so that a diverse community was reflected back on itself; and third, because this performance was the catalyst for the creation of the Pigment Multi-Racial Theatre Company. In turn, Pigment created eight jobs— six actors, a director and an administrator—and received grants from the Manpower Services Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality.

The Pigment Company toured community venues across the East and West Midlands, developing a house style of "ethnic dance, mime and mask stylisation" whilst presenting plays that it believed would be "topical and relevant" to audiences.[3] In 1983, Pigment also toured secondary schools in Leicestershire with a production of *The Nine Night* funded by a grant from the Commission for Racial Equality.[4] *The Nine Night* by Black diasporic playwright Edgar Nkosi White was first performed by the Black Theatre Co-operative at The Bush Theatre, London, in April 1983.[5] This production should be recognised as a local precursor to Leeds Playhouse and NP's co-production of Natasha Gordon's debut play *Nine Night* (2018) at NP in 2022, and presented as part of Jamaica Society Leeds' *Out of Many Festival*, which celebrated 60 years of Jamaican independence.[6] Gordon's play about a traditional Jamaican Nine Night wake is described as a "touching yet testing multi-

[2] Bob Hescott, *The Feast of Fools* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1983), 60.
[3] Hescott, *The Feast of Fools*, 61.
[4] Hescott, *The Feast of Fools*, 62.
[5] The Black Theatre Co-operative was established in 1978 by playwright Mustapha Matura and director Charlie Hanson. In 1997, NP collaborated with the co-operative to co-produce a play based on Ray Shell's novel *Iced* (1993). Following a successful run at NP, the play toured five theatres between January and March 1998. In 1999, the company was re-named Nitro, "Black Theatre Co-Operative," in *Companion to Contemporary Black British Culture*, ed. Alison Donnell (London: Taylor & Francis, 2001), 48, 49; Michael Pearce, *Black British Drama: A Transnational Story* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2017), 39.
[6] Natasha Gordon, *Nine Night* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2018).

generational gathering packed with music, food, laughter and tears."[7] Sadly, all performances of *Nine Night* were cancelled due to the sudden death of actress Josephine Melville who "passed away backstage" at NP. Chief Executive Stephanie Sirr issued a statement sharing her condolences and describing the evening as "deeply tragic and extremely difficult," commending both the Nine Night company and the NP team, who together "managed the situation with empathy and professionalism."[8] While this particular production was brought to a tragic end, it does have a historical precursor in the 1983 production, and *The Black and White Boyfriend* is a clear example of NP having facilitated productions that have been developed by artists in the city's Black communities, but there are few examples of this kind of more inclusive and diverse cultural work being produced by NP in the 1970s and 1980s. That is not to say that co-produced work is of less value; however, it does speak to where the Playhouse wished to spend its time and money in the 1970s and 80s, as one of the few remaining regional producing theatres in Britain.

Therefore, it is vital to distinguish between NP as a building, its space as a temporary space loaned so that others may create, and NP as an organisation. As I discuss in other chapters, the lines are often blurred, but how the building has been used by companies and touring productions which are an integral part of the theatre's eco-system is another element to consider for NP in working through issues of equality and diversity. There are certainly moments where the programming of touring work is a significant part of NP's broader artistic strategy; however, there are also moments where the building is just a venue. One reason why NP may have struggled to create or sustain intercultural access and space is identified by Claire Cochrane via a comparison between theatres in Nottingham and Birmingham. Cochrane's use of the word "intercultural" is purposeful and a notable departure from the

[7] Leeds Playhouse, "Nine Night," Leeds Playhouse, accessed August 22, 2023, https://leedsplayhouse.org.uk/events/nine-night/.
[8] George Torr, "Josephine Melville: Ex-EastEnders Actress Dies Backstage after Play," *BBC News*, October 22, 2022, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-63349581.

more frequently used term multiculturalism. Sociologist Riva Kastoryano posits that multiculturalism focuses on "a national level questioning the national identity," whilst interculturalism emphasises "the local because of the geographical and physical proximity among groups that facilitate dialogue and exchanges."[9] Interculturalism, defined as a facilitatory practice, could be an important practical aim for NP but historically it has been stymied by lack of space in a Grade-II listed building. As discussed in the Introduction, NP is widely regarded as "one of the best British theatre buildings of its date," but the building may still detract from otherwise realising some of NP's aims for community engagement because "architecture, theatre and cultural democracy" are "relational concepts" and the building "a cultural artefact which both manifests and embodies power relations."[10]

Cochrane wrote in 2010, that without the benefit of a designated in-house studio, NP "has never had the luxury of maintaining consistent programming policies for small-scale productions." The historical lack of designated in-house studio space has meant that NP could not always or easily afford the kind of access which Cochrane suggests has allowed London-based Black and Asian theatre companies to forge "their relationships with the mainstream."[11] Until 2013, NP could only offer the Ustinov Rooms (capacity 46) or off-site rehearsal space. Perched above the café/bar, The Neville Studio is a performance and rehearsal space that seats up to 100 people, but it is somewhat disconnected from the main building. To enter the Neville Studio, you must either walk through the first floor of the main building, outside onto the roof of the café/bar, and then into the studio, or enter via a separate side entrance around the corner from the main box office entrance at ground-level. Theatres

[9] Riva Kastoryano, "Multiculturalism and Interculturalism: Redefining Nationhood and Solidarity," *Comparative Migration Studies* 6, no. 1 (May 17, 2018).
[10] Alistair Fair, "Nottingham Playhouse," Twentieth Century Society, March 2009, https://c20society.org.uk/building-of-the-month/nottingham-playhouse.
Karl Falconer, Steven Hadley, and Jon Moorhouse, "Building Theatre, Making Policy: Materiality and Cultural Democracy at Liverpool's PurpleDoor," *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, September 17, 2022, 1.
[11] Claire Cochrane, "Opening up the Garden: A Comparison of Strategies for Developing Intercultural Access to Theatre in Birmingham and Nottingham," in *The Glory of the Garden*: *Regional Theatre and the Arts Council 1984-2009*, eds. Kate Dorney and Ros Merkin (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 130, 131.

with alternative performance spaces, like The Door at Birmingham Rep, have been better able to nurture developing work by Black and Asian companies because their space is more conducive. Reopening in 2022 after closure due to C-19, The Door continues to function as a space that Associate Director Madeleine Kludje believes can "reflec[t] stories of the city."[12] The importance of the "performative nature of the performance space" has, it is argued, "become vital in recognising and re-prioritising values designed to address the intersectional nature of power systems afflicting the cultural sector and enabling citizen usage of cultural space." Falconer, Hadley and Moorhouse argue that "removing the delineation between social and performance space" will lead to greater "democratisation" of a theatre venue and a reduced sense of "otherness" for communities.[13] With Liverpool's PurpleDoor—self-described as "the UK's first free theatre and social space"— it is an example of how intentional and thoughtful use of space by theatre companies can encourage community engagement and may be a useful comparator because although PurpleDoor is yet to open it will be a venue that prioritises community space, it has also conceptualised "the responsibilities of owning space" and, in turn, "how such opportunities can best be utilised within the changing high street, to deliver a theatre which is essential to the resident community." For NP which has occupied the same building since 1963, 60 years on, it may be time for the organisation to reflect more on the space it owns. An integral part of the responsibility that PurpleDoor's space will fulfil is to centre audiences, not artists, in order to "provide a platform for community cohesion, not just artistic reception." Its ethos of questioning the purposes of performance space may be useful as NP considers if its space can be used to reflect its commitment to community engagement and as it reassesses its institutional values through anti-racism initiatives. The physical space should be examined

[12] Birmingham Rep, "Productions Return to the DOOR," Birmingham Rep, January 14, 2022, https://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/news/productions-return-to-the-door/.
[13] Karl Falconer, Steven Hadley and Jon Moorhouse, "Building theatre, making policy: materiality and cultural democracy at Liverpool's PurpleDoor," 8.

for any ways in which it may present barriers to creating successful intercultural relationships.

The Black Regional Initiative in Theatre (BRIT)

If there are historical examples of moments when NP either facilitated or engaged directly with the Black communities of Nottingham, they need to be understood and analysed. The examples I have recovered are situated in the context of the cultural policy of a period when funders, notably the ACGB, were beginning to wake up to the need to support diverse communities and their responsibility in doing so.[14] As the 1980s gave way to the 1990s and the ACGB evolved into ACE, NP, alongside two other theatres, became involved in a radical project to embed diversity not only into its artistic programming but also its institutional structure. Between 1994 and 1999, NP was a part of the Regional Black Theatre Initiative (RBTI) and then its successor, the Black Regional Initiative in Theatre (BRIT), from 1999 to 2005. The overarching aim of both initiatives was to "create a more equitable black and Asian theatre in England."[15] This cultural work was assessed in 2006 in a report entitled "Whose Theatre?" which was the outcome of a consultation commissioned by ACE and prepared by Baroness Lola Young, a Black Professor of Cultural Studies at Middlesex University (1992-2001), Head of Culture at the Greater London Authority (2002-2004). In 2001, she received an OBE for services to Black British History. The report summarised BRIT as "an initiative designed to improve the opportunities for theatre practitioners within The Sector."[16] However, in a chapter hopefully entitled "Moving Forward," among recommendations made, Baroness Young pointed out that, it would have been helpful to have

[14] Following the publication of *The Arts Britain Ignores* (1976), the Minority Arts Advisory Service (1976-1995) was commissioned by ACGB, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and Community Relations Commission to maintain registers of artists, give advice to artists and arts organisations, and publicise activities.
[15] Helen Jeffreys, "The Black Regional Initiative in Theatre Review Report," (2004), 3.
[16] Lola Young, "Whose Theatre? Report on the Sustained Theatre Consultation" (London: Arts Council England, 2006), 6.

"a clear analysis of the successes and problems encountered" by BRIT.[17] Seventeen years after the report's publication, I revisit BRIT in this chapter to assess its work at NP, its successes and the endemic problems that made such an initiative necessary in the theatre sector more broadly, because understanding what it achieved, as well as any difficulties and failures, is of a renewed importance in the current social and political climate.

In 1994, the ACE Drama Advisory Panel comprised sixteen well-regarded British theatre makers and managers. Its role, as described by the Chair, theatre producer Thelma Holt, was to function as "[t]he umbilical cord between the artist and the decision-maker." By referring to herself and the panel as decision-makers, Holt provides some insight into the power the group held.[18] The panel identified a culture gap in the form of a dearth of opportunities for Black and Asian artists in English regional theatre, and RBTI was initiated as a result, with £180,000 allocated for its work. RBTI was imagined into being in order to improve Black arts programming in major white-led institutions by funding Black associate directors and producers in regional theatres.[19] Initially, just three regional theatres participated: NP, West Yorkshire Playhouse and Haymarket Theatre Leicester.[20] The new role ACE funded was targeted at artist-practitioners whose own, or their families' origins were specifically "African-Caribbean or Asian."[21] BRTI was designed to embed Black and Asian Britons into "key creative and managerial roles."[22] The first appointments made in 1993 were Garfield Allen as Black Arts Co-ordinator at West Yorkshire Playhouse and

[17] Young, *Whose Theatre?*, 38.
[18] David Lister, "Exit Left as Arts Council Drama Panel Resigns," *The Independent*, May 20, 1998, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/exit-left-as-arts-council-drama-panel-resigns-1158718.html?r=70527.
[19]Barnaby King, "The African-Caribbean Identity and the English Stage," *New Theatre Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (May 2000), 132.; Adjusted for inflation £180,000 in 1994 is according to the Bank of England Inflation Calculator, equivalent to £362,921.31 in September 2023.
[20] Jeffreys, *The Black Regional Initiative in Theatre Review Report*, 5.
[21] King, "The African-Caribbean Identity and the English Stage," 132.
[22] Isobel Hawson, "Changes and Challenges – What Does the Barometer Read? Strategy and Policy Challenges That the Council Has Faced in Relation to Theatre, Dance and Cultural Diversity," in *New Stages Conference at Norsk Kulturråd*, ed. Shanti Brahmachari (Norway: Norsk Kulturråd, 2001), 29, https://www.kulturradet.no/documents/10157/5766f9ec-8f5a-4ac6-.

Andrew Caleya Chetty as Afro Caribbean Arts Producer at NP.[23] Between 1993 and 1999, the main activity of RBTI would be to fund and support this role.

Before taking on the RBTI post at NP, Andrew Caleya Chetty spent thirteen years in the arts sector in Nottingham, running his own theatre performance company and the NOW Festival, an annual festival of contemporary art and new performances.[24] Having spent two years as a trainee producer for NP's Theatre in Education company Roundabout and a period "straddling the two roles," the Afro Caribbean Arts Producer role represented a full-time commitment in an environment in which, he recalls now, "agencies, venues and organisations" were endeavouring to be "trusting and collaborative."[25] When interviewed by the Nottingham *Evening Post*, Caleya Chetty explained, "They've employed me to add a different perspective. Because I'm from the community, I know how to deal with it and how to gear the Playhouse up to the community." [26] His words suggest a realistic assessment of the role and an optimistic mindset. Caleya Chetty also touched on a pervasive issue for this chapter when he observed, "it's long been credible to send theatre into the community but not [produce it for] the main stage. House doors are often closed to innovation." He also asked a pertinent question: "Isn't there a danger that black artwork will remain a token gesture?"[27] Representation in main stage productions was considered vital to ensure that members of the Black community would see themselves reflected in the work of NP. It was, and is, but one

[23] Haymarket Theatre, Leicester appointed an Asian producer to work on what would become the NATAK Asian Theatre initiative. It is unclear why this work was initially undertaken under the umbrella of BRIT as a Black theatre initiative or how it dovetailed, but it does suggest that insufficient attention may have been paid to the diversity of global majority communities.
[24] The 2003 NOW Festival is described by BBC News as "two weeks of the buzz of urban creativity and opportunities to get creative, think different, be social and inhabit the city of Nottingham," BBC - Nottingham Culture - NOW Festival: Introduction" (BBC News, September 24, 2014), https://www.bbc.co.uk/nottingham/culture/2003/10/now_festival_introduction.shtml.
[25] Andrew Caleya Chetty, interview by Laura Ewart, August 11, 2021.
[26] "Interview with Andrew Caleya Chetty," Nottingham Evening Post, September 21, 1993, in *Playhouse Scrapbook November 1980-April 1995*, Nottingham Local Studies Library Service, Nottingham Central Library, Nottingham.
[27] "Interview with Andrew Caleya Chetty," *Nottingham Evening Post*.

factor, though, in a much larger occlusion.[28] Echoing Naseem Khan's fear that racially and ethnically diverse arts would continue to be considered only as "parlour arts," Caleya-Chetty was emphatic that if "Black artwork" were to become integrated into the ethos of NP and presented as British theatre, it had to be let in through "the house doors."[29] In the early 1990s, Caleya Chetty was acutely aware of the burden of representation he carried and that of the ethnically diverse work he programmed: "The theatre has to be geared up to the black community if they're to come in."[30] As a result of RBTI, the power of representation was a tool that Caleya Chetty could wield to create a more inclusive, welcoming environment at NP. Engagement with Black communities was at the forefront of the endeavour, and, in his own words, "we weren't bullshitting, and we followed through."[31] Caleya Chetty's approach was not to focus on main stage programming as this was "programmed miles ahead" but instead to focus on "where the flexibility came in with the touring work." Programming diverse touring dance theatre allowed to Caleya Chetty to "experiment with a more generous programme" as it was "only doing one or two nights rather than a four-week run." Alongside the dance programme Caleya Chetty was organising artist run workshops within community and cultural centres around Nottingham. Caleya Chetty is particularly proud of the collaboration between NP and Black Mime Theatre *Dirty Reality* (1993) alongside which he coordinated dance workshops for young people including a two-day workshop with director Peter Brook. Caleya Chetty recalls feeling supported in his role, in particular highlighting the

[28] See, Deirdre Osborne, "Writing Black Back: An Overview of Black Theatre and Performance in Britain," *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 26, no. 1 (January 2006), 26–29.
[29] The parlour room was commonly used for formal family events and would contain a household's finest furniture and decorations. Khan here implies that ethnically diverse arts may remain "kept for best" and not utilised and integrated into the wider artistic landscape of Britain.
Naseem Khan, "The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 128, no. 5290 (1980), 681.
[30] "Interview with Andrew Caleya Chetty," *Nottingham Evening Post*.
[31] Where possible to find, all RBTI and BRIT post-holders at NP were contacted for interview, but not all responded, and some declined. It is possible that the nature of the role and the difficulties recounted by other interviewees may not wish to be revisited by those who declined my invitation. Therefore, this chapter cannot be inclusive of all the experiences of all those involved with the BRIT programme at NP.

role leaders can play "the whole wider team were supportive at the right time… I think it comes down to the leadership. If the leadership and the vision are expressing inclusivity then that culture trickles down into all aspects of it."[32] NP should examine the moments in which EDI work began, why they began, and why they were not sustained. Doris Eikhof and Suzanne Gorman identify "the BRIGHT LIGHT moment" whereby visual representation becomes a catalyst for insight and ambition and "proof that a career in the performing arts was possible" for individuals. In their view, representation is one of the ways for an organisation to demonstrate that BAME communities matter and that "their voices are credible enough to be heard" more widely.[33] But, if this work relies on key notes and these roles are only ever reliant on funders' initiatives, they will not be sustained.

When Isobel Hawson joined ACE in 1996 as Senior Officer for Theatre, a role she would retain until 2010, she became responsible for overseeing the RBTI from its second year. She told me that her initial assessment of the initiative was that "[a] small amount of money had been put into identified projects. Basically, no companies, no strategy." Hawson evaluated that RBTI needed direction, and, with colleagues, focused on augmenting the strategy. Choosing to continue the work of the RBTI and build on it was a measured decision and not the norm in the theatre initiative space where, in her assessment, too often, the novelty and potential uniqueness of a proposed intervention were esteemed above all else. In this instance, Hawson's position at ACE afforded her oversight of the RBTI, and she could see that it had potential: "We started to look at how we could link up specific things that already existed across the country because if you look back at the time… Black theatre was finding it hugely difficult to be recognised. We decided that we had to develop what had

[32] Andrew Caleya Chetty, interview by Laura Ewart, August 11, 2021.
[33] Doris Ruth Eikhof and Suzanne Gorman, "Where Am I? BME Role Models and Leaders in the Performing Arts, Research Report for the Clore Leadership Foundation" (AHRC/ Clore, 2017), 24, https://le.ac.uk/-/media/uol/docs/research-institutes/cameo/where-am-i.pdf.

already been done, and out of that came BRIT."[34] In 1999, RBTI was restructured as The Black Regional Initiative in Theatre (BRIT) and would prove to be a key strategic initiative for ACE.[35] BRIT was much larger in scale and ambition than its predecessor. At the centre were not three organisations but eleven, which together represented some of the most well-regarded British regional theatres, including the Bristol Old Vic, the New Wolsey Theatre in Ipswich and Derby Playhouse as well as NP. Addressing the New Stages Conference in 2001, Hawson summarised:

> BRIT is an initiative that brings together a range of people: The artists and their individual needs. It looks at professional development and training, the venues connecting main-house theatre with the black arts venues in the same town. Touring has created a safe network where black and Asian artists can be secure, and where audiences, through New Audiences, can be developed. Programming the placement of key-personnel in influencing programmes connecting with Black and Asian artists and communities. And connecting funds that are available across the funding system.[36]

At NP, a change in personnel was already underway, though. Caleya Chetty had become frustrated; he spoke of an emerging shift from an "African, Caribbean or Asian" practice in his work to a "Black British voice and practice aesthetic." But this was not sufficiently understood in situ. After the successful production of *Dirty Reality* by Black Mime Theatre in 1993, a group of theatre practitioners calling themselves "The Clan" approached various organisations for funding but received rejections based on their wish to centre Black British practice.[37] One way to understand this is suggested by Stuart Hall in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990), which sets out two broad ways of thinking about Black cultural identity:

[34] Isobel Hawson, interview by Laura Ewart, June 8, 2020.
[35] Tyrone Huggins, *The Eclipse Theatre Story* (Ipswich: New Wolsey Theatre, 2006), 26.
[36] Isobel Hawson, "*Changes and Challenges,"* 28.
[37] Andrew Caleya Chetty, interview by Laura Ewart, August 11, 2021.

essentialist and *anti-essentialist* (or *pluralist*). If the former suggests that "people of the African diaspora… have a shared history, culture and identity," the latter focuses on how communities are "displaced, fragmented, hybrid and scattered," with Hall concluding that "cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as the past."[38] In the 1990s, the anti-essentialist position came to dominate Black British arts.[39] However, it was not embraced by "the old guard," or the elders, including individuals who were board members at NP. When Caleya Chetty approached the board for support, it was not forthcoming and a catalyst for his departure from the BRIT role— and from the theatre sector. He confided later, "It was a bigger fight than I had to put up with."[40] A job advertisement was placed in the Nottingham *Evening Post* on 25th May 1995: *"*Nottingham Playhouse …looking for an African Arts Producer to develop and extend their work with Nottinghamshire's African Caribbean communities."[41] The role name had changed, but if there is something to be learned from Caleya Chetty's experience, it certainly includes monitoring the role of board members and internal groups as gatekeepers against change.

In 1995, Tony Graves was appointed African (Caribbean) Arts Producer. Graves' most significant work at NP was its contribution to Africa 95, a nationwide season initiated by the RSA. The festival was an ambitious "multi-arts" and "multi-venue" celebration of the continent of Africa, spanning twenty-five cities, and was conferred patronage by Queen Elizabeth II, President Nelson Mandela of South Africa, and President Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal.[42] The programme included conferences, workshops, literature, film,

[38] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Framework* 36 (1990).
[39] Glenn Jordan, "Beyond Essentialism: On Stuart Hall and Black British Arts," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 19, no. 1 (August 24, 2015), 25.
[40] Andrew Caleya Chetty, interview by Laura Ewart, August 11, 2021.
[41]"Nottingham Playhouse Requires African Arts Producer," *Nottingham Evening Post*, May 25, 1995, British Newspaper Archive.
[42] "Black History Month 2014: Archives of Africa95," October 31, 2014, SOAS Library and Special Collections, https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/archives/2014/10/31/black-history-month-2014-archives-of-africa95/.

visual and performing arts and music.[43] The Nottingham *Evening Post* reported NP's contribution by contrasting the depiction of the African continent in *"*stark images of war, poverty, starvation, violence, social unrest and political division" with the festival's artistic offer, "encompassing visual arts, dance, theatre, cabaret, film, music, literature and storytelling with workshops and performances."[44] The most notable performance in terms of community engagement was the return of Black Mime Theatre's *Dirty Reality II*, a sequel which ran from the 13th to the 18th November 1995 as an "exploration of city life and black/white relationships."[45] It celebrated the same "Black British voice and practice aesthetic" that Caleya Chetty had been trying to gain support for with NP's board. Tony Graves also experienced difficulties, though, and struggled to balance what he felt were competing pressures in the role. Now he explains that:

> It was a very challenging role because BRIT was opening up places like Nottingham Playhouse and other theatres to Black theatre and ethnic audiences and artists… You were partly trying to be the bridge between the community and the organisation and, at the same time, trying to be— and were essentially— a member of that organisation because you were employed by it. So, you were really caught between a rock and a hard place.[46]

Sara Ahmed recognises this same tension in *On Being Included* (2012), an exploration of racism and diversity in institutional life, by drawing on the stated experience of diversity officers in academic and corporate settings. Ahmed identifies "institutional inertia" and contending with the opposing force of an institution as a common experience of diversity

[43] Nancy Van Leyden, "Africa95. A Critical Assessment of the Exhibition at the Royal Academy," *Cahiers D'études Africaines* 36, no. 141 (1996), 237.
[44] Lynne St Claire, "Africa Shows Its Heart," Nottingham *Evening Post*, September 29, 1995.
[45] St Claire, "Africa Shows its Heart."
[46] Tony Graves, interview by Laura Ewart, May 13, 2020.

practitioners.[47] In Ahmed's analysis, the appointment of a diversity officer often represents "an absence of wider support for diversity" because institutionalising diversity requires "institutional effort" that cannot reside in a representative individual alone.[48] African (Caribbean) Arts Producers were expected not only to diversify the artistic output of a theatre but, somehow, via osmosis, to deliver the diversification of the institution they were working within as evidence of institutional change. It does not seem an overstretch to conclude, as Ahmed does, that diversity work has all too often been equated to "doing within institutions what would not otherwise be done by them."[49] Tony Graves was doing cultural work that might not otherwise have gained a purchase in NP's culture but experiencing internal resistance. Hawson was similarly aware of the pressures on the role holder to work within a designated theatre structure whilst simultaneously expected to prise open its usual processes in order to encompass communities and audiences that had traditionally been overlooked. She spoke candidly about the challenges faced by the different individuals appointed to the BRIT role: "You put a Black person into a white-led organisation, and their role was really hard. You cannot change a whole organisation when the board are all white and the management is all white. You are waving your banner and your flag, but there were too many barriers."[50] The language used here is noteworthy because if the flag is seen as being waved by a Black individual, but it was not the banner of the wider organisation, it is unsurprising that an initiative like BRIT failed to be sustained by a theatre via its own financial resource once funding ends. If the Black Theatre practitioner is visible to the community as if somewhat disconnected from the organisation, though, this alienates the practitioner from the organisation too. When Sonya Dyer, in a provocation tellingly entitled "Boxed In" (2007),

[47]Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 26.
[48] Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 28.
[49] Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 25.
[50] Isobel Hawson, interview by Laura Ewart, June 8, 2020.

asks if diversity-based funding is an "anthropological exercise" in which practitioners must be seen to "demonstrate" and "perform" their ethnicity within the boundaries of "diversity schemes," she sheds light back onto initiatives that operated for a while but failed to create sustained change.[51] Both Andrew Calya-Chetty and Tony Graves allowed that the RBTI/BRIT role had been challenging but rewarding; neither had expected it to be an easy experience. The role needs to be critically reassessed now, not least because it led to some of the finest examples of community engagement with Black communities in NP's history.

Hip-hopera *Preshh* (1997) is an example of community-engaged work that was led by Tony Graves.[52] *Preshh* (Jamaican patois, or nation language for pressure), tells the story of Ezi-P, a "talented Black rapper destined for stardom," who struggles to marry his fledgling music career with what he feels and believes are his "community responsibilities."[53] The production was a collaboration between NP, Nottingham City Challenge, the Vocational Training Agency and the European Social Fund.[54] Young people aged sixteen to twenty-four described by the *Newark Advertiser* as "mostly unemployed" were invited to audition for a role in the "opera."[55] A group of fifteen core performers and a chorus of twenty-five were selected to take part, with two members of the cast, DJ Feva and Joseph Hall, gaining Equity cards.[56] "DJ Feva" is the alias of Stephen Richards, now a professional hip-hop DJ and producer, who describes *Pressh* as pivotal: "*Preshh* gave me hope, belief and opportunities to

[51] Sonya Dyer, *Boxed In* (a-n The Artists Information Company, 2007), 6, https://www.a-n.co.uk/research/boxed-in-the-scope-of-diversity-policies-from-the-radical-80s/.
[52] Frank Eggins, "Nottingham, *Preshh*," *The Stage*, 14, April 17, 1997, British Newspaper Archive.
[53] Nation language is a term originated by poet, activist and historian Edward Kamau Brathwaite. He positioned the term in contrast to dialect which centres the English language. Nation Language embraces the "contours, rhythm and timbre" of African and Caribbean heritage; Kamau Brathwaite, *Roots* (Detroit: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Jeremy Lewis, "*Preshh* Sure to Play Well," Nottingham *Evening Post*, April 4, 1997.
[54] For the details of the Nottingham City Challenge programme, see Roh N.E Blake, "Nottingham City Challenge: Policies and Programmes, 1992-1997," *Hommes et Terres du Nord* 1 (1997), 25-30. For details of the European Social Fund, see Jacky Brine, *European Social Fund and the EU: Flexibility, Growth, Stability*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).
[55] "Spotlight Is on Young Talent," 40, *Newark Advertiser*, April 4, 1997, British Newspaper Archive.
[56] Jeremy Lewis, '*Preshh* sure to play well.'

move forward into the music industry."[57] After two performances on the 4th and 5th April, Aisha Edwards wrote a glowing review in the "Letters to the Editor" section of that week's Nottingham *Evening Post*, describing it as a "joyous tale" with "ebullient high spirits erupting into unrestrained irresistible enjoyment."[58]The success of *Preshh* led to the decision to produce *Avalanche* (1998) by Beji Reid and Cheryl Martin, with a cast of forty young, unemployed local people.[59] Workshops took place at the Afro-Caribbean National Artistic Centre (ACNA), the Meadows Boys' Club and Radford Youth and Community Centre to support young people to develop skills that could help them into employment, offering "Open Credit Units" which could be used to support admission into Further Education courses. [60] It is clear that NP was committed to supporting young, unemployed people in the community in the late 1990s, and that *Preshh* was a success in this regard. The issue of youth unemployment is still relevant; in 2023, the current unemployment rate for 18–24-year-olds in Nottingham is 2.7%.[61] This may not be a high percentage, as recorded, but as the cost of living crisis ensues, it can soon increase, and there is an argument for being seen to champion young people now in precisely the way NP succeeded in doing previously. Theatre can be a powerful tool for empowering young people. Providing them opportunities to participate in theatre, could help them to develop skills that could lead to employment or to Further and Higher Education.

After Tony Graves's departure in May 1998, Brenda Edwards, who had already worked with NP as associate producer programming the autumn 1996 "Dance Week" held

[57] Stephen Fever Richards email to Laura Ewart, November 21, 2022.
[58] Frank Eggins, 'Nottingham, *Preshh*.'
[59] Sean Kirby, "Jobless Get a Start Chance," Nottingham *Evening Post*, December 29, 1997, British Newspaper Archive.
[60] *Avalanche* (1998) was produced in partnership with The Vocational Training Agency, European Social Fund, Arts Council Arts 4 Everyone Initiative and Clarendon FE College, Nottingham.
[61] Nottingham City Council and The Department for Work & Pensions, "Nottingham Youth Employment Strategy 2022-2024," 2022.

the role of African Arts Producer. [62] Prior to a career in the theatre, Edwards was the first Black female dancer employed by the English National Ballet in 1986.[63] Edwards's time in the role was short lived, though, and Paul Moore and Stuart Brown shared the role of African-Caribbean Arts Producer between 1999 and 2003. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to locate Brenda Edwards for comment, and Paul Moore passed away in 2016. Stuart Brown did not elect to be interviewed.[64] The decision to appoint to a shared role, in this case between a Black actor, writer and musician Moore, and a Brown, a white theatre producer, both Nottingham born and bred, suggests that sharing responsibility may have been judged as a possible solution to the burden of responsibility felt by a single post holder. The issues raised by BRIT postholders began to be formally recorded in 2004 in the form of "The Black Regional Initiative in Theatre Review Report," which suggests just how isolated individuals were and felt themselves to be. The report also drew attention to a structural issue that limited their remit "The post holder was situated outside of the planning and programming management structures of the theatres which were only serving to increase their sense of isolation." Referencing NP specifically, the report states that whilst BRIT was a thriving hub of activity between 1994 and 2001, since 2002, it had made little impact and was still not necessarily seen as a mainstream part of the theatre's activity by the senior leadership. The section on NP ends by explaining that "the threat exists that the work of the BRIT post holder will remain on the periphery of the organisation and its activities."[65]

It is inevitable that "reliance upon one individual to further diverse policy and

[62]"Golden Start to New Season," *Retford, Gainsborough & Worksop Times*, June 20, 1996, British Newspaper Archive.
[63] Sanide Mae Bourne, "Black British Ballet Race, Representation and Aesthetics" (PhD Thesis, 2017), 249.
[64] Sharon Monteith recalls that Stuart Brown directed Paul Moore in Barry Keefe's *SUS* in the early 1990s and that it was staged in the community. Moore would write and perform *Rock 'n' Roll Jordan* in the city too, with Brown directing, before it was filmed by Channel 4 in 1994 and screened on television. It was Moore's dramatisation of his father, a Jamaican immigrant to Nottingham in 1956, nicknamed Rock 'n' Roll Jordan because his favourite recording artist is Louis Jordan. Moore depicted the racism his father encountered in the city and his own upbringing too, playing both roles. Monteith saw the production a number of times as a close friend of Moore's and the Moore family, Sharon Monteith, interview by Laura Ewart, August 4, 2023.
[65] Helen Jeffreys, *The Black Regional Initiative in Theatre Review Report*, 15.

practice" will hamstring institutional change.[66] The toll this cultural work took upon each post-holder is evidenced in their responses to my questions about the complexity of the role and the skills and diplomacy required to carry an institution forward toward concrete racial change, not only in theatre-making but in community work with groups and individuals who may have previously had little or no inclination to engage with a theatre. Graves summarised that he felt this was complex work because he was "trying to mend bridges… and form relationships with a whole range of people," whilst maintaining his integrity in the Black community and at NP.[67] The BRIT post-holder was expected to seek out, develop and nurture relationships with communities that had had no prior involvement with NP and, as a result, may also have had no wish to become involved. The assumption that Black people in Nottingham would benefit from engaging was underpinned by the idea that the arts are instrumental to change when seen in "service of broader social agendas." But the individuals at the heart of the enterprise were expected to operate as the instruments of change— rather than the institution as a whole. With the popularisation of "the diversity agenda," a phrase used by Hammonds and Bhandal, the driving force in this historical moment, some Black artists and arts administrators felt they were instruments of an organisation and felt demoralised as a result.[68]

Tony Graves felt strongly that his position, by its very nature, was conceived to exert pressure on the theatre. Of his successors too, he assessed, "It was quite tricky in many ways to accommodate the role within the building because a lot of the people running it were always fighting against the structure of the Playhouse. The people were supportive, but the Playhouse was a big old operation."[69] The language is telling because it would seem to

[66] Jeffreys, *The Black Regional Initiative in Theatre Review Report*,15.
[67] Tony Graves, interview by Laura Ewart, May 13, 2020.
[68] Will Hammonds and Lakhbir Bhandal, "Where to next for Diversity? An Assessment of Arts Council England's Race Equality and Cultural Diversity Policies and Emerging Trends," *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* 3, no. 2 (July 2011), 194.
[69] Tony Graves, interview by Laura Ewart, May 13, 2020.

divorce "the Playhouse" as an institution from the individuals who make up the organisation. This is an issue at the heart of any anti-racist cultural work that aims to increase diversity and representation and to benefit communities as a result. Graves believed the role was inevitably divisive insofar as, "It was the intention that there should be tensions" and ACE was "trying to encourage the Playhouse to think differently. I do not mean to suggest that [the BRIT role] was not of value or that it did not achieve good things, but I think it often struggled. It depended on how good a politician the person was in the post."[70] If an organisation does not recognise "individual" accomplishments as "institutional" accomplishments and risks side-lining the success of an initiative that is only ever connected to an individual's performance in role, this kind of initiative cannot work in the future either.[71]

The experience of individuals who held the BRIT producer role contrasts with that of Eclipse Theatre producer, Steven Luckie, resident at NP in 2004. The Eclipse Theatre Initiative began in 2003 as another project designed "to address the absence of Black Theatre on the regional middle-scale touring network."[72] A report that details the struggles of the BRIT role post holder simultaneously exalts the benefits of the Eclipse producer role: "The residency of the Eclipse Theatre Producer at Nottingham Playhouse has had a positive impact on the organisation as a whole in that diversity has been integrated into the infrastructure and awareness of the company."[73] It is unclear why these two very similar roles should have been assessed so very differently or what evidence was used to draw such a conclusion. However, the expectations placed upon the permanent BRIT post-holder to enact systemic organisational change were much heavier than the expectations of a more transient residency position focussed solely on Eclipse Theatre while maintaining a well-defined, and separate,

[70]Tony Graves, interview by Laura Ewart, May 13, 2020; Isobel Hawson, interview by Laura Ewart, June 8, 2020.
[71] Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 23, 24.
[72] "History - Eclipse Theatre," Eclipse Theatre, n.d., https://eclipsetheatre.org.uk/about/history.
[73] Jeffreys, *The Black Regional Initiative in Theatre Review Report*, 24.

relationship with all theatres involved in the Eclipse consortium. With Tricycle Theatre, NP co-produced Mustapha Matura's *Playboy of the West Indies* (1988), a Caribbean-set re-working of Irish playwright J.M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and NP found an opportunity to use the programme to share a synopsis of the role of the final BRIT producer, Bea Udeh: "Here at Nottingham Playhouse, the BRIT Programme Producer's role is to engage African and Caribbean people with theatre in a holistic and creative sense. This is done in various ways such as mentoring theatre artists, exploring the possibilities for touring small-scale Black work into the city."[74] It was the final description of a role that had been sustained since 1993. BRIT funding ceased, and with no ringfenced funding for the post, it was deleted in 2005. Giles Croft, Artistic Director between August 1999 and November 2017, has since explained why he felt the organisational change brought about by this role was not sustained:

> What we lost was a coordinated approach. We'd each do our own thing, some better than others. What was really powerful about it was that five or six big theatre leaders worked on this project so that we could feed each other in some way. That is what we really lost, the connection and the impetus for change.[75]

Loss of coordination on a macro level of cooperation between regional theatres damaged the impact of the change at the micro level at NP. A review of the workforce of U.K Theatre and the performing arts sector undertaken in 2017 found "an inherent culture of "short-termism," and recognised it as "a symptom of a sector focused on delivering the next project."[76] Although the review's focus was on the workforce, the impact of short-termism is often passed on to community members who engaged with projects delivered by individuals in

[74] Nottingham Playhouse programme for *Playboy of the West Indies* written by Mustapha Matura, January 28-12, 2005, 5.
[75] Giles Croft, interview by Laura Ewart, April 27, 2021.
[76] Alistair Smith and Nordicity, "Workforce Review of the UK Offstage Theatre and Performing Arts Sector" (Nordicity, June 2017) 50.

short-term roles. When external funding ends for a position, short-termism usually means that the projects overseen by that post-holder also end. Coordination between theatres is also built on personal relationships and informal networks, and the loss of these, as demonstrated by BRIT, can have devastating consequences. What is clear is that assigning the responsibility for increasing diversity work to a single individual role within an organisation is a flawed strategy. Steven Luckie describes the end of BRIT as a time of upheaval for ACE and for the theatre sector as a whole, particularly since ACE's restructuring included the dismantling of regional arts boards, and mass redundancies were underway. Reflecting on the end of BRIT in 2006, Luckie suggested that "an element of chaos can be a significant factor in true creativity," but that would seem to put an overly positive spin on its difficulties and demise; although it could also be interpreted as a more cynical acknowledgment of the fact that progress is often difficult and halting, and that even well-intentioned initiatives can fail. The upheaval and chaos that surrounded BRIT's demise did not lead to a new and more effective approach to diversity work in the theatre sector. Instead, it set back the progress that had been made. Isobel Hawson described BRIT as being "overtaken" by another initiative: "BRIT was the beginning of change, and Eclipse took over."[77]

The Eclipse Initiative

In the late 1990s, as BRIT continued at NP, the idea for a conference was formed during a discussion about the responsibility of regional theatres to ensure cultural diversity.[78] Venu Dhupa, Executive Director at NP (1997-2001) and "the first Black person to run a regional producing theatre in Britain," was pivotal in the development of the conference.[79] Dhupa's

[77] Isobel Hawson, interview by Laura Ewart, June 8, 2020.
[78] Stuart Brown, Isobel Hawson, Tony Graves and Mukesh Barot, *Eclipse Report: Developing Strategies to Combat Racism in the Theatr*e (Arts Council England, Theatrical Management Association, Arts Council of England, East Midlands Arts Board, Theatrical Management Association and Nottingham Playhouse, 2002), 3.
[79] Marielaine Church, "Venu Dhupa Interview," in *The Nottingham Playhouse Marielaine Church Collection* (unpublished manuscript, 2006), 12.

professional background was as an actor who moved into producing, spending five years at the National Theatre as an Education Officer. Dhupa identified a problem in what she described as a mixture of a "William Morris view of culture" whereby everything equates to culture "whether you are a carpenter or an artist," and a "Matthew Arnold [or] Arts Council" view of culture, which she perceived as the drive to bring "good quality theatre to the masses in a patronising sense."[80] Under Dhupa, NP would lead from a position of "theatre practice," not ACE strategy or as focused on funding but as a way of thinking that helped to germinate Eclipse. [81] The Eclipse Conference was subtitled "developing strategies to combat racism in theatre" and that was its primary aim. It was designed as a forum through which the senior leadership of theatres across England could join together to address racism in the specific context of theatre.[82] Organised by NP, the conference was a joint initiative with ACE, East Midlands Arts Board, and the Theatrical Management Association. It was held over two consecutive days, Tuesday 12th and Wednesday 13th June, in 2001.[83] The programme comprised panel discussions, workshops, question and answer sessions, as well as keynote addresses by Police Sergeant Robyn Williams, one of the most senior female African-Caribbean officers in Britain. Dr Vayu Naidu, a British Indian storyteller, writer and performer, and NP-based actor and performer Tyrone Huggins also featured. The conference's success would be measured by its end result, if it achieved its aim to devise "strategies to combat racism in theatre and to explore ways of developing our understanding and knowledge of African Caribbean and Asian theatre."[84]

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[80] Church, "Venu Dhupa Interview," 5.; Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) was a poet and cultural critic who wished to enlighten the social consciousness. In *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) he argued that culture is "a study of perfection" and "the best which has been thought and said." Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, eds. Stefan Collini (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 37.
[81] Tyrone Huggins, *The Eclipse Theatre Story*, 26.
[82] The Theatre 2001 conference was organised by the Independent Theatre Council (ITC)/Theatrical Management Association (TMA)/Society of London Theatre (SOLT).
[83] It is unclear from the conference report what role each of the named organisations took in the funding and logistical arrangements of the conference. The Working Party responsible for the conference consisted of Stuart Brown, Isobel Hawson, Tony Graves, and Mukesh Barot.
[84] *Eclipse Report*, 4, 24-25.

After leaving the Playhouse, Tony Graves, became the lead researcher for ACE's New Audiences Programme (2000- 2003) and acted as the consultant for the Eclipse Conference.[85] He identified "the legislative context around diversity and theatre" in specific relation to the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the consequent publication of the McPherson Report as "key drivers and catalysts," because in the Report the concept of institutional racism was identified "in terms of public organisations, in terms of the police, and the whole spectre of prisons and the justice system, education and health." The fact that theatre had "never been the spotlight hitherto" was a driver for Graves.[86] Now, he believes that before the Eclipse Conference, the issue of not *if* but *how* theatre is institutionally racist had been ignored by senior leadership teams in theatres. A position statement included in the "Eclipse Report" took a gentler approach to encourage buy-in, suggesting that "most of us would like to do something about the issue" and that by having "the will or the opportunity to work together," the conference would develop "practical solutions to help shape a national strategy."[87] The idea that theatre leaders had been apathetic towards the fact of racism echoes criticism levelled at the perceived tokenism of some of ACE's interventions in the area, with Will Hammonds and Lakhbir Bhandal summarising that many Black artists considered ACE's commitment nominal in practice.[88]

Tony Graves prepared a critical analysis of the conference in the form of a personal narrative which is included as an Appendix to the Eclipse Report. He observed:

> I found that the delegates fell into two broad camps. The first …could accept the definition of racism as defined by the Macpherson Report but could not recognise it

[85] Heather Maitland and Arts Council England, *Navigating Difference: Cultural Diversity and Audience Development* (London: Arts Council England, 2006), 2–3.
[86] Tony Graves, interview by Laura Ewart, May 13, 2020.
[87] *Eclipse Report*, 26.
[88] Will Hammonds & Lakhbir Bhandal, "Where to next for diversity? An assessment of Arts Council England's race equality and cultural diversity policies and emerging trends", *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism* 32, (2011), 193.

> within the theatre, and the second …wholeheartedly embraced the definition and its application to the industry.[89]

Of 125 theatres invited, 31 were represented. On the first day of the conference 49 people attended and 48 on the second, it is unclear how many people attended both days.[90] The "vast majority" of UK theatres did not even respond to the invitation to participate. Some theatres, though, clearly did not see diversity as even an issue to be managed, let alone a problem to be solved; this would correspond to the "diversity deficit" identified in a report commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2006.[91] When Federay Holmes, a Black actor at The Globe, was asked what an anti-racist theatre could look like, he turned the question back onto the theatre industry as a material question about institutions, rather than an abstract hope. He wanted to be able to enter a building and see that as an institution it was "very confident in its role as an investigator dedicated to unearthing how racial disparity, how racism, how historical racialisation of different groups has suppressed, has blocked our expression, our own human expression, our access to each other." He focused on "the invisible spaces, behind doors" in any institution, in the belief that decolonising the theatre can only begin with its executives.[92] The role of senior leaders keeps returning in this analysis, whether in individual theatres or overarching roles and that many theatres opted out of participating in an initiative designed to address equity and diversity is telling.

In an effort to address the disappointing turnout for the Eclipse conference and to embed its recommendations, the publication of the Eclipse report was followed by a series of

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[89] *Eclipse Report,* 67.
[90] *Eclipse Report,* 5.
[91] The diversity deficit is described in the report as stemming from a discourse that is distinctly British around diversity that is apologetic, the British people were "adapting reluctantly" to something "unavoidable" diversity is something that "made life more complex and tiresome."; Phil Wood, Charles Landry, and Jued Bloomfield, *Cultural Diversity in Britain: A Toolkit for Cross-Cultural Co-Operation* (York: Commedia and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006), 5-6.
[92] Such Stuff Podcast, "How Whiteness Dominates Our Theatres," Podcast, September 2020, https://cdn.shakespearesglobe.com/uploads/2020/09/The-whiteness-of-our-stages-such-stuff-podcast-transcript.pdf.

bespoke seminars for senior staff members held in each region of England.[93] Isobel Hawson recounts how, "Every Saturday for 18 months, we went around the country to every single funded theatre building and company." Now she assesses that, "There was much resistance. The equality section was a morning session to create a greater understanding of how to begin from an equal start line. We would then talk about how to advertise, induct, interview." The effort to institute change in theatres that has been part of the cultural landscape since the summer of 2020 needs to be understood as reigniting previous iterations of effort to produce similar results. Hawson's memories of acting in this capacity more than twenty years ago are revealing: "Way before the Arts Council started an equal opportunity plan, we engaged with theatres to create their own diversity action plans."[94] Why did that commitment lapse when, as a result of the Eclipse Conference, racism in the theatre was being debated, and not only in theatres but also in The House of Lords?

On the 30th June 2002, Labour peer Baroness Ruth Rendell of Babergh rose to ask Her Majesty's Government whether it was "satisfied with the progress made in combatting racism in the theatre." What ensued was a one-hour seventeen-minute debate that comprises a snapshot of how racism in theatre was viewed twenty years ago. A novelist of renown, she summarised that:

> Unfortunately, the view of some who attended [the Eclipse conference] was that the employment of black and Asian people is a financial risk. They give as grounds that their presence on the stage or in management fails to attract potential audiences. Some active hostility was shown. The old objection to casting—for example, Afro-Caribbeans in roles originally intended for white actors—is still being put forward, despite such prejudice having been shown in the majority of cases to be unfounded.

[93] The regions identified are Yorkshire and Northern, North-West, East England, South-West regions, West Midlands and Southern South-East England.
[94] Isobel Hawson, interview by Laura Ewart, June 8, 2020.

Baroness Rendell praised initiatives like the co-sponsorship of the Theatrical Management Association and Barclays Bank of a "special award for theatres with the best anti-racism records." She cited the Lyric in Hammersmith for widening its advertising to include *The Voice* and the *Asian Times*, as well as initiating a positive action training programme. Nevertheless, Viscount Falkland countered, in a way that has historically stymied racial change in theatres, that "The Macpherson Report definition of institutional racism does not necessarily apply to the theatre." He fell back on the same excuses that Baroness Rendell attempted to remand to the past: "In the professional theatre, there is the imperative to attract and hold audiences. That must be balanced against the problems we are discussing today. Understandably, much of the ethnic theatre is didactic and political, which is not often appealing to audiences, particularly in this country, who look for amusement and distraction."[95] In a denial that institutional racism can be found in theatres and a failure to acknowledge that so-called ethnic theatre is a diverse genre, if it should be considered a genre at all, Viscount Falkland reproduced damaging stereotypes. Ethnic theatre is no more didactic and political than the Western theatrical canon. All theatre is to some extent didactic just as all theatre provides some level of amusement and distraction.

Tucked in the middle of a programme for a NP Company production in 2002, when the debate was being had in the House of Lords, is a page with the header: "NP leads way in combatting institutionalised racism."[96] The context for the assertion is an announcement that a play by Errol John written to provide opportunities for Black actors, *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* (1957), would be programmed and produced in February 2003, with NP committed to

[95] House of Lords, *Racism in The Theatre*, (Hansard HL Deb, 30th June 2002), vol.640, accessed 23rd September 2022 at https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2002-06-30/debates/dafbefcc-9c01-4688-9532-49bdb940ddf6/RacismInTheTheatre.

[96] Theatre programme for a production of Tennessee Williams' *Suddenly Last Summer* n.d., Document Reference MS 809/1/7/39, Theatre programmes and related material collected by Tony Church (c.1920-2006), theatre sound engineer and radio producer; 1970-2005, Manuscripts and Special Collections University of Nottingham Libraries, King's Meadow Campus, Nottingham.

spending "one-fifth of its production budget for the year on this project alone." One could be persuaded that by publishing such a confident statement, and acknowledging institutional racism in theatre, the leadership was genuinely committed to combatting the issue. However, whilst a public commitment to co-produce "three major pieces of Black theatre" should be commended, there are striking parallels between this statement in 2002 and NP's 2020 Anti-Racism Statement, both in content and circumstance. Three months prior to this statement in 2002, the Macpherson Report, based on the inquiry into how the Metropolitan Police managed the investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence in Eltham on 22nd April 1993, defined institutional racism as "[t]he collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin."[97] One of a number of cultural responses to the inquiry was *The Colour of Justice* (1999), Richard Norton-Taylor's dramatisation of the inquiry. From Wednesday 28th September to Saturday 2nd October 1999, West Yorkshire Playhouse's production of *The Colour of Justice* was staged at NP.[98] Reporting for the Nottingham *Evening Post,* Nic Ridley witnessed a moment of sombre reflection: "in the Playhouse, all rise to remember the murdered black teenager; to show respect for the family."[99] There are further parallels to be drawn with the 1981 Brixton Riots and the subsequent Scarman Report (1983). Stuart Hall's essay "From Scarman to Stephen Lawrence" (1999) describes a similar urge to make a difference to that witnessed in 2020, as institutions began to be perceived as beginning to act to address racism and the under-representation of "minority" groups because of a specific, tragic event.[100]

[97] William Macpherson, The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (London: Stationery Office Limited, 1999), 49.
[98] Nic Ridley, "Killing That Shook the Country," *Burton Daily Mail*, September 25, 1999, British Newspaper Archive.
[99] Jeremy Lewis, "The Colour of Justice," *Nottingham Evening Post*, September 30, 1999, British Newspaper Archive.
[100] Stuart Hall, "From Scarman to Stephen Lawrence," *History Workshop Journal* 48, no. 48 (1999), 187–97, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4289641.

Following the Scarman Report, a Black British cultural commentator, Kobena Mercer, noted that the "political expediency—the need to be seen to be doing something—was a major aspect of the benevolent gestures of many public institutions, now hurriedly redistributing funding to Black projects."[101] This could be a description of what happened in the summer of 2020. Mercer had already focused critical attention on the intricacies of this phenomenon in relation to "black-creativity": "Politically, the eruption of civil disorder expressed community protest at the structural marginalisation of lack voices and opinions within the polity, and this renewed anger encoded militant demands for black representation within public institutions as a basic right." He observed, "Culturally, this demand generated a veritable renaissance of black creativity-expressed across a variety of media in literature, music, theatre and in photography, film and video."[102] While Mercer closed this statement on a surge of Black creativity, the same commitment to support it ensues in different historical moments, notably when the ravages of racism on British society peak and general notice is taken, but also sometimes for longer periods when demands for Black representation within public institutions swell, sometimes into "civil disorder" and always in "community protest," and cultural organisations try to respond by instituting cultural change. There was little indication until RBTI and BRIT that NP felt external pressure to consider racial and ethnic diversity within the organisational structure or the workforce. An issue that keeps intervening in my mapping of this history is that theatres have often been considered, and have considered themselves, somehow exempt from criticisms levelled at other kinds of institutions. Perhaps it was convenient to situate theatre outside or outwith institutional racism that has been raised repeatedly in the hope and expectation that public institutions will listen and learn. The events of 2020, however, have shifted the discourse and switched it up

[101] Kobena Mercer, "Recording Narratives of Race and Nation in Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies," in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 77.
[102] Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 77,79,80.

because the call for anti-racist action was coming from a larger more vocal group and the consequences of denial and delay are set to be more damaging than engagement.

A powerful example of the potentially positive impact that derives from accepting that theatres are institutions, and using that as a starting point for anti-racist activities was suggested by Baroness Blackstone, Minister of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, on another occasion, in 2002 when she said, "We should ask ourselves the direct question: is the theatre racist?" In her view, racism was not deliberate, but the risk was that it may be "unthinkingly" the case.[103] Her recommendation was to "ensure that theatre, like other art forms, properly reflects the diversity of the population." She believed it was "a more helpful starting point than accusing the theatre of racism."[104] Why might accusing theatres of racism be unhelpful? "White fragility" and the uncomfortable nature of assessing one's own prejudices may mean that admitting and changing systemic institutional issues appears an overwhelming and continual task. For Robin DiAngelo, writing in 2011, white fragility is "a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves."[105] But the state is not new and is often hidden; manifestations of "racial stress" often go unreported, which is one of the reasons that lone individuals find it difficult to change institutions, and that evidence of racism is difficult to convey or "prove." One example presented itself in the form of a review in *The Stage* of NP's premiere of *Shebeen* (2018) where a white critic expressed disapproval of the behaviour of the majority Black audience. Such instances are, in my view, missed opportunities for theatres to act by challenging public statements that disparage diverse audiences that a theatre is engaging and would like to see return. NP did not publicly denounce this view when expressed about a very

[103] Baroness Blackstone's remark is taken from the same debate cited on p.79.
[104]House of Lords, *Racism in The Theatre*, (Hansard HL Deb, 30th June 2002), vol.640, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2002-06-30/debates/dafbefcc-9c01-4688-9532-49bdb940ddf6/RacismInTheTheatre
[105] Robin Diangelo, "White Fragility," *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 3, no. 3 (2011), 54, https://libjournal.uncg.edu/ijcp/article/viewFile/249/116.

popular show for the city's Black communities, but to comment would have been a small but activist step toward challenging how diverse audiences are disparaged, affirming NP's commitment to diversity and inclusion. In the future NP could publish a statement or a series of blog-style posts to share why diversity and inclusion are important to the theatre and to its audiences, host a panel discussion or workshop on diversity and inclusion in the theatre, or partner with other theatres and organisations to raise awareness of the issue and promote diversity and inclusion in the industry. By taking these or other steps, NP could show its leadership and demonstrate to a wider public that the theatre stands with its diverse audiences and that it values their voices. I think that on the basis of its institutional history and current advocacy, NP could act as a thought leader for the industry by working with partners, funders and sponsors, like ACE and NTU.

The introduction in 2022 of a racism reporting system at NP demonstrates a concrete commitment to supporting anyone who experiences racism or racial abuse related to any and all NP activities, but there were earlier moments when NP could have led the way for regional theatres in response to discussion whether in government or as recognised by funders.[106] There are lessons to be learned from what happened twenty years ago. Eclipse Theatre, a separate entity to the Eclipse Conference, crystallised after three years of discussion between Venu Dhupa and members of the board at NP, including Charles Washington, an African American who was a board member from 1992 to 2001.[107] This "major Black theatre initiative", was instituted by NP in January 2002 in association with the New Wolsey Theatre in Ipswich and Birmingham Repertory Theatre, with funding from ACE. Between 2002 and 2009, Eclipse produced five productions, the first of which opened

[106] Nottingham Playhouse, "Report a Racist Incident," Nottingham Playhouse, accessed August 23, 2023, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/report-a-racist-incident/.
[107] Tyrone Huggins, *The Eclipse Theatre Story*, 26.

at NP.[108] Errol John's *Moon on Rainbow Shawl* (1958) was one of the first plays by a Black Caribbean writer to be produced in Britain and so successful that John won the *Observer* Award for Best New Playwright. It was fitting that it became the first Eclipse production, opening on the 6th February 2003 and then touring Bristol's Old Vic, Oxford Playhouse, Ipswich's New Wolsey Theatre, and South Hill Park Arts Centre, Bracknell ending its run at the Northampton Theatre Royal.[109] The play was well received, with the *British Theatre Guide* reviewer assessing that "overall it is a slick, enjoyable production which should help Eclipse Theatre enormously in its aims of raising the profile of black theatre and encouraging youngsters, especially young black people, to see their productions."[110] It was considered a positive start for a fledgling theatre company. It is intriguing, then, that the next play chosen by Eclipse was a theatre standard, Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939). Premiering in February 2004 at NP, the play was adapted by British-Nigerian playwright Oladipo "Dipo" Agboluaje, who has said that he represents Africa on the British stage "as an 'outsider' in the mainstream of British theatricality," and directed by a Black British actress Josette Bushell-Mingo, and produced by Steven Luckie.[111] Luckie had previously worked has a producer with the National Theatre and co-ordinated ACE's Black Directors Course for the West Midlands ACE, he was appointed into the role of Eclipse Theatre Producer in 2001 a role in which he remained until 2006. [112]

Where Brecht was protesting Hitler's war preparations, Agboluaje pointed up contemporary catastrophes such as AIDS when setting the play in modern Africa. It was

[108] The five plays produced by Eclipse Theatre were *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* by Errol John, *Mother Courage and Her Children* by Bertolt Brecht, adapted by Oladipo Agboluaje, *Little Sweet Thing* by Roy Williams, *Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov, adapted by Mustapha Matura, and *Angel House* by Roy Williams.
[109] *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* won first prize in the *Observer*'s 1957 play competition.
[110] Steve Orme, "Theatre Review: Moon on a Rainbow Shawl," British Theatre Guide, 2003, https://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/rainbowshawl-rev.htm.
[111] Sola Adeyemi, "I Write as a Pan-African: A Conversation with Oladipo Agboluaje," *African Performance Review* 10, no. 1 (2018), 8.
[112] "Major Theatres Respond to Eclipse Report," ArtsProfessional, September 9, 2002, https://www-artsprofessional-co-uk.ezproxy-f.deakin.edu.au/magazine/33/article/news-major-theatres-respond-eclipse-report.

well-received with positive reviews locally and nationally.[113] The *Left Lion* in Nottingham observed, "This is an example of the Playhouse's best kind of production, relevant, accessible, thought-provoking and entertaining." Luckie observed that, "Sales for the show at NP, and on its UK tour, prove that this is the kind of culturally-diverse work audiences love to see."[114] *Mother Courage* was considered even more successful than its predecessor, with Steve Orme assessing: "Eclipse have (*sic*) done an outstanding job with *Mother Courage* which should help enormously to raise the profile of black theatre even more than *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* did."[115] CEO Giles Croft described NP's production of Brecht as "surprising" and "challenging". He was unequivocal when talking about Eclipse: "This initiative is going to have a profound influence on the future development of Black work on the middle-scale. It will provide opportunities for the development of Black practitioners alongside mainstage productions and help to grow new audiences for important work. That three such significant theatres have given this sort of commitment is a sign of real change." But his observation that that *Mother Courage* was "able to attract large audiences without compromising our ambition" is striking. [116] Behind this comment is an unspoken assumption that a case needs to be made— and still proved— for Black theatre if an institution considers it "different" and a risk, with (white) theatre audiences assumed to conform to the same ideas of what should be seen on a main stage. *Mother Courage* was

[113] Alfred Hickling, "Mother Courage and Her Children," *The Guardian*, February 12, 2004, sec. Stage, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2004/feb/12/theatre1; Steve Orme, "Theatre Review: Mother Courage and Her Children at Nottingham Playhouse and Touring," British Theatre Guide, accessed August 23, 2023, https://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/mothercourage-rev.
[114] LeftLion, "Mother Courage and Her Children" (LeftLion, February 9, 2004), https://leftlion.co.uk/legacy-content/mother-courage-and-her-children-122/#. Steven Luckie quoted in "BBC - Nottingham Stage - *Mother Courage and Her Children*," BBC Local Nottingham, accessed August 23, 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/nottingham/stage/2004/02/mother_courage_review.shtml.
[115] Steve Orme, "Mother Courage and Her Children."
[116] Croft quoted in "Major Theatres Respond to Eclipse Report," *ArtsProfessional*, September 9, 2002, at https://www-artsprofessional-co-uk.ezproxy-f.deakin.edu.au/magazine/33/article/news-major-theatres-respond-eclipse-report; Theatre programme for a production of *Mother Courage and Her Children* n.d., Document Reference MS 809/1/8/26, Theatre programmes and related material of Tony Church (c.1920-2006), theatre sound engineer and radio producer; 1970-2005, Manuscripts and Special Collections University of Nottingham Libraries, King's Meadow Campus, Nottingham.

featured in ACE's annual report in 2004, highlighting the national tour that followed the play's opening in Nottingham.[117] It was nominated for Best Play/Theatre Production for an Ethnic Multi-Cultural Media Academy (EMMA) Award.[118] It was spun out into a companion production called *3 Tales of Courage* which toured secondary schools in Nottingham. However, it was also seen as a risk that might compromise the theatre's "ambition," as if Black cultural production is "confined to a paradigm of ethnicity" that "supersedes artistic identity."[119] An Eclipse aim was to programme more Black-led work on the mid-scale touring circuit. However, it was not proscribed that the content be linked to the "ethnic identity" of actors. The unspoken assumption that programming Black-led theatre would also involve programming plays that centre issues that are particularly relevant to Black communities served to keep Eclipse plays firmly in their place. If attention to Eclipse productions was a visible step towards embedding an inclusive workforce inside a theatre's decision-making structures, was it a victim of being seen in an aesthetic silo, or set according to putative artistic boundaries? If so, to what extent were these set externally or internally, or both? These are questions that can be explored historically, and they are useful to return to now because they continue to have relevance and resonance for what NP may decide to stage today and in the future.

From 2004, Eclipse Theatre tried to create a new production year-on-year. The third was *Little Sweet Thing* (2005), a new play written by another African Caribbean playwright Roy Williams, which centres on school-girl Tash and her brother Kev, who has recently been released from prison and is struggling to stay away from crime and gang culture. Directed by Michael Buffong, who became CEO and artistic director of Talawa Theatre Company in

[117] Arts Council England, "Arts Council England Grant-In-Aid and Lottery Distribution Annual Report and Accounts 2014/15," (London: Arts Council England, July 1, 2015), https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Arts%20Council%20England%20-%20Grant-in-Aid%20and%20Lottery%20distribution%20annual%20report%20and%20accounts%202014-15.pdf.
[118] "BBC Mother Courage and Her Children," BBC Local Nottingham.
[119] Will Hammonds and Lakhbir Bhandal, "Where to next for diversity?," 193.

2011, it opened at NP in February 2005. Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* (1900), adapted by Mustapha Matura shifted the play's setting to Trinidad in the 1940s, and it opened at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds in March 2006. *Angel House* was the second original play written for Eclipse, again by Roy Williams, and, like *Three Sisters*, it was directed by Paulette Randall. It is set on fictional Angel House, a London housing estate, it follows two brothers Franklin who is facing imprisonment on drugs charges and Stephen a lawyer. *Angel House* opened at the New Wolsey Theatre Ipswich in February 2008. Eclipse was an initiative that immensely impacted the theatre professionals involved. Steven Luckie left the Eclipse Producer role in 2006 to pursue freelance directing, writing and producing. Luckie directed a 2006 production of *Booty Call* by Nigerian Mancunian Segun Lee French. Aside from *The Gift* (2000), which premiered at Birmingham Rep, Roy Williams' work had not been seen outside London until *Little Sweet Thin*g (2005) at New Wolsey, Ipswich.[120] Eclipse was fundamental in getting William's plays into production in areas that had never previously had the opportunity to see his work. Williams has continued to be a prolific writer, The Black Plays Archive attributes 29 plays to him.[121] In 2008, Williams received an OBE for services to Drama. Paulette Randall directed two Eclipse productions; it was Randall's idea that Eclipse should produce *Three Sisters.* Between 2003 and 2005, Randall was the Artistic Director of Talawa Theatre Company; a successful move into TV production followed. Randall was associate director of the 2012 London Olympics opening ceremony. In 2013, Randall became the first Black British woman to direct a dramatic play, August Wilson's *Fences* (1987), in London's West End. In 2022, continuing the working relationship developed during Eclipse, Randall directed Roy Williams' play *The Fellowship* (2022) at Hampstead Theatre.

[120] Tyrone Huggins, *The Eclipse Theatre Story* (Ipswich: New Wolsey Theatre, 2006), 56.
[121] Black Plays Archive, "Roy Williams," (National Theatre), accessed October 26, 2023.

Stephanie Sirr and Giles Croft celebrated Eclipse as "a unique collaboration of English producing theatres" which had run successfully for four years and planned to produce "quality Black productions, with high production values by Black artists," this commitment to the initiative persisted until 2009 as part of NP's Business Plan.[122] But, in 2010, Eclipse Theatre Company Ltd. was formed and it defined itself as a "new company," with a permanent home in the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield with Artistic Director Dawn Walton at the helm.[123] The transition from Eclipse as an embedded project to a theatre company produced what Croft describes as a "problematic hole" for the organisations it "left behind" he expressed that the project has not challenged NP "in terms of organisational change." [124] Ultimately due to a lack of clarity of how the joint legacy of the Eclipse project would be sustained it was lost. It will be important to ensure that co-producing partnerships are secure to be assured of sustained work in this area unless NP integrates more diverse programming into its repertoire and sustains it as a norm. As Eclipse Theatre was establishing itself independently, the legislative landscape was changing, not least with the introduction of The Equality Act of 2010, which provided a new legislative framework that would inform ACE's work in promoting equality of opportunity and reducing barriers to engagement for audiences, artists and the workforce.[125] The Equality Act brought together 116 pieces of legislation into a single Act, and identified nine characteristics protected by law from discrimination, notably in this instance, race.[126] In 2002, the Eclipse Conference report was

[122]Giles Croft and Stephanie Sirr, "Eclipse Theatre – 3-Year Business Plan" (Nottingham Playhouse, 2006).
[123] Eclipse Theatre, "History."
[124] Giles Croft, interview by Laura Ewart, April 27, 2021.
[125] Concilium Research & Consultancy, "Equality and Diversity within the Arts and Cultural Sector in England," accessed August 23, 2023, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Equality_and_diversity_within_the_arts_and_cultural_sector_in_England.pdf.
[126] The nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership (in employment only), pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and sex and sexual orientation. In the Equality Act race can include any of the following: your colour, your nationality (including your citizenship) and your ethnic or national origins, which may not be the same as your current nationality; Equality and Human Rights Commission, "Race Discrimination | Equality and Human Rights Commission," February 19, 2020.

explicit in its concern that theatres were in danger of falling foul of the law in this area, with Sergeant Robyn Williams quoted as saying, "It is only a matter of time before someone brings a case of racial discrimination against a theatre which financially could be very expensive for the theatre in question."[127] The Equality Act ensured and formalised the legal rights of people with protected characteristics to be treated without discrimination and with reasonable adjustments. In 2010, a further level of external pressure emerged from ACE in the form of a new 10-year strategic framework, "Great Arts and Culture for Everyone." ACE pledged to invest only in arts and cultural organisations that were "committed to equality and diversity" in both the application and in the production of their work. ACE also took the decision to extend the characteristics identified by the Equality Act to include "socio-economic status and education"[128]

After Eclipse Theatre left its close association with NP in 2010, eight years passed before highly visible, Black-led work was produced again. In *Shebeen* (2018), Nottingham-based playwright Mufaro Makubika, focuses on twenty-four hours in the life of a Jamaican couple, Pearl and George, in 1958. How the play came to be written is a story that sits at the intersection between community engagement and programming for Black communities. Makubika had been working at NP, initially as a bartender, and said that, "in the bar there were always meetings" and that he met "interesting people."[129] One of those people was Kate Chapman, Creative Director of the Theatre Writing Partnership, a scheme that involved Midlands theatres, based at NP.[130] Makubika asked for her feedback on the idea for his play and was provided with support and opportunities through the Writing Partnership to develop

[127] *Eclipse Report*, 2002, 5.
[128] Arts Council England, "Great Art and Culture for Everyone" (London: Arts Council England, 2010), 34, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Great_art_and_culture_for_everyone.pdf.
[129] Mufaro Makubika, In Conversation with Mufaro Makubika, interview by Angharad Jones, *Fifth Word Theatre and Nottingham City Libraries*, April 12, 2021, https://www.nottinghamcitylibraries.co.uk/in-conversation-with-mufaro.
[130] The collective of producing theatres involved in the creation of the Theatre Writing Partnership was New Perspectives, NP, Northampton's Royal and Derngate and Leicester Haymarket.

his writing.[131] Makubika would write fourteen pieces of theatre between 2010 and 2016, six of which premiered at NP.[132] In 2012, Makubika was looking for inspiration in the St Ann's area of Nottingham: "I wanted to write about the people who have called it home and still do to this day. I had never heard their story."[133] In 2011 when demonstrations around England were triggered by the death of Mark Duggan, shot and killed by police in Tottenham, London, they brought back into focus the violence of 1958 when St Ann's was at the epicentre of a race "riot."[134] Tensions within Nottingham had been building because in the proceeding 18 months there had attacks on Black people on Nottingham's streets and they were "becoming more frequent."[135] On the 23rd August 1958, an incident at a St Ann's pub involving a racially mixed couple proved to be a catalyst for violence as a crowd estimated at more than 1000 gathered and violent clashes ensued for many hours.[136] Peter Fryer was among news reporters who witnessed white people shouting "Let's get the blacks" but records that only 24 people were arrested.[137] Makubika was curious to learn more about this period, with playwriting the medium through which to share the city's stories. Nottingham Black Archive (NBA), having developed long-standing relationships in African Caribbean communities, and having already told many of the stories that Makubika wanted to hear in the form of oral histories, was asked by Makubika to facilitate his play by undertaking

[131] Mufaro Makubika, "The Revival - Episode Three: Shebeen," YouTube, July 31, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVJrQE70jW4&ab_channel=NottinghamPlayhouse.
[132] The six plays performed at NP where: *Come to Where I'm From* (NP/ Paines Plough) 2011, *Premature* (NP/ TWP) 2011 *Waiting for the Tide/Apathy* (NP) 2012, *Common Land* (TWP/NP) 2013/2014, *Good Teacher* (NP) 2013, *How to Breathe* (NP) 2015.
[133] "Q&A with Mufaro Makubika," Alfred Fagon Award, accessed August 23, 2023, https://www.alfredfagonaward.co.uk/features/qa-with-mufaro-makubika/.
[134] See, for example, Clifford Stott, John Drury, and Steve Reicher, "On the Role of a Social Identity Analysis in Articulating Structure and Collective Action: The 2011 Riots in Tottenham and Hackney," *The British Journal of Criminology* 57, no. 4 (April 8, 2016), 968.
[135] Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (1984; London: Pluto Press, third edition, 2018), 377.
[136] Emily Cousins, "Nottingham Riots (1958)," Black Past, August 30, 2010, https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/nottingham-riots-1958/.
[137] Fryer, *Staying Power*, 377. The Nottingham riot is cited as a precursor to the much larger Nottingham Hill Riots. Christopher Hilliard, "Mapping the Notting Hill Riots: Racism and the Streets of Post-War Britain," *History Workshop Journal* 93, no. 1 (April 15, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbac012. 51. See also, Kennetta Hammond Perry, *London Is the Place for Me* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

community-focused research. Founder of NBA, Panya Banjoko, put in place a roadshow of workshops visiting Black communities in the St Ann's, Lenton and Radford areas of Nottingham to that end.[138]

As Bridget Minamore, reviewing for the *Guardian*, wrote of *Shebeen*, "Sometimes theatre reveals itself to be aware of growing tensions in communities before they make the news."[139] Just two months before the opening night at NP in June 2018, the Windrush scandal began to break in the English media. The "Windrush Generation" arrived in the UK from Caribbean countries between 1948 and 1973, most often by invitation from the government to take up jobs affected by the British post-war labour shortage. Through her investigations, journalist Amelia Gentleman uncovered that hundreds of Black Britons had been wrongly detained, deported and denied their legal rights based on a lack of documentation held by the government that proved their right to residency then and British citizenship thereafter.[140] In 2009, the UK Border Agency began destroying "millions of paper documents," including landing cards and registry slips, in order to comply with the Data Protection Act, leaving many people unable to evidence that they were in England legally.[141] An independent review published in 2020 summarises that, "The 1971 Immigration Act entitled people who had arrived from Commonwealth countries before January 1973 to the "right of abode," or what was called "deemed leave" to remain in the UK, but the government issued no documents to demonstrate this status. Nor did it keep records."[142] The review identified 164 people who

[138] For more information about Nottingham Black Archive see, http://nottinghamblackarchive.org/. Panya Banjoko, interview by Laura Ewart, May 9, 2022.
[139] Bridget Minamore, "Shebeen Review – Love and Rage in Windrush Generation Drama," The Guardian, June 11, 2018, sec. Stage, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/jun/11/shebeen-review-windrush-nottingham-playhouse-mufaro-makubika.
[140] The Joint Council for The Welfare of Immigrants, "Windrush Scandal Explained," Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, 2020, https://www.jcwi.org.uk/windrush-scandal-explained.
[141] Georgina Lee, "FactCheck: Who Destroyed the Windrush Landing Cards?," Channel 4 News, April 24, 2018, https://www.channel4.com/news/factcheck/factcheck-who-destroyed-the-windrush-landing-cards.
[142] Wendy Williams, *Windrush Lessons Learned Review: Independent Review* (London: Home Office, 2020), 9, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/876336/6.5577_HO_Windrush_Lessons_Learned_Review_LoResFinal.pdf.

had been welcomed into the country before 1973 but detained or removed since 2002.[143] Many members of the Windrush Generation had made their homes in Nottingham, and this became the broader social-cultural context of the play *Shebeen* that NP produced in association with Theatre Royal Stratford East, which allowed for *Shebeen* to have both a regional and London premiere. Winning the 2017 Alfred Fagon Award, it was well-received by the majority of audiences and theatre critics.

The Shebeen project was community-centred insofar as it developed via NP, but it also came together as a result of substantial input from NBA for the local and broader historical context interlaced into the play's creation because, as NBA evidenced, it was interwoven into Black experiences in Nottingham. However, there was little to be seen of the legacy of the play in the community or of the research that underpinned it. Panya Banjoko shared her personal disappointment with how the legacy of the play was managed: "There should have been some kind of continued dialogue."[144] She observed that, "*Shebeen* had a great response from the wider Nottingham community," but she received phone calls from participants in the research she had undertaken by gathering oral histories to share with the playwright. They lamented what they felt and believed was the play's inaccuracy or inauthenticity for them insofar as it did not represent the subjective history that they had shared towards its creation. While a playwright is afforded the freedom to imagine and to use poetic licence, having asked Black people in the city to share their stories, suggests a responsibility to what was contained in them. Ensuring that future community-engaged projects will have a tangible legacy for communities is something that NP can learn from *Shebeen*.

[143] Wendy Williams, *Windrush Lessons Learned Review*, 9.
[144] Panya Banjoko, interview by Laura Ewart, May 9, 2022.

Shebeen premiered in the year that marked the 40th anniversary of the publication of Naseem Khan's *The Arts Britain Ignores*. In "The Arts Britain Still Ignores?" (2018), Jerri Daboo assessed how much progress had been made in the intervening years now that institutional racism was "acknowledged." She flagged familiar concerns that persisted, enumerated as: "lack of representation and visibility on mainstream stages"; lack of funding; expensive tickets; and a perception that theatre buildings remain elitist spaces. Daboo worried that theatre programming was still "not relevant" to diverse communities and that theatre buildings were still perceived as "being for white people as well as the middle class and highly educated."[145] These are all issues that have been identified many times over many years when assessing whether Black and Asian Britons feel welcomed into cultural institutions, of which theatres are only a single example.[146] Instead of focusing solely on diversifying audiences, theatres should work towards decolonising of their structures.[147]

In 2018, NP was the venue chosen for the launch of ACE's 2016-2017 diversity report, *Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case: A Data Report.* The report contains data collected about ACE, the organisations it funds and their audiences.[148] Data and reporting focused on four of the protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act of 2010: ethnicity, disability, sex and sexual orientation. Sir Nicholas Serota, Chair of ACE, described Nottingham as "a fast-growing city with a young and diverse population of which nearly 30%

[145] Jerri Daboo, "The Arts Britain Still Ignores?," *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 38, no. 1 (April 10, 2017), 5.
[146] Daboo identifies The Warwick Commission, "Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth" (Warwick: University of Warwick, 2015); Helen Jermyn and Philly Desai, *Arts - What's in a Word?* (London: Arts Council England, 2000); "Open Conversations: Developing, Strong, Effective Connections to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities" (Voluntary Arts, 2016), https://www.creative-lives.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=03810465-0337-4f49-a1d6-5ac97b06b349.
[147] Daboo notes a kind of "postcolonial angst" which if it persists may prevent theatres from reconciling their ideas with their ideals; Daboo, "The Arts Britain Still Ignores?" 5.
[148] *Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case: A Data Report* (London: Arts Council England, 2017), 9; The report specifically analysed data on: The workforce of National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) and Major Partner Museums (MPMs) including the diversity of people in key leadership roles and at different job levels. The Creative Case for Diversity ratings of NPOs. The diversity of individuals and leadership of organisations receiving investment in the last year through our Grants for the Arts fund. The diversity of the Arts Council's workforce and leadership and audience data from the NPOs.

are aged 18-29, while nearly a third of this group are Black and minority ethnic."[149] He suggested that for both the arts and culture sector and the Arts Council itself, "success will come when change in the composition of the workforce feeds through to the leadership. We need to see talent moving up."[150] The contrast between Daboo's assessment of the sector and that of the Chair of ACE is striking. The disconnect can be viewed through the prism of *Shebeen*. On the one hand, it is an example of progress in the area of community engagement as a successful Nottingham-led project, promoted by NP and award-winning. On the other, the project received a racist review to which NP did not respond, members of the Black community were unhappy that what they shared in interviews was not visible in the final play, participants were not invited to the opening performance, and that no attention was paid by playwright or theatre to creating a legacy of community engagement.[151] These are moments that merit reflection to ensure that the synergy between NP's public commitments and the lived experiences of global majority communities can benefit both, and to consider whether and how to incorporate the perspectives and insights of diverse communities into its decision-making processes to maintain positive relationships whether in the form of direct partnerships, or community consultations.

[149]Nicholas Serota, "Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case a Data Report" (London: Arts Council England, 2017), 3.
[150] Nicholas Serota, Equality, *Diversity and the Creative Case A Data Report*, 3.
[151] *The Stage* removed the racist comment and has since uploaded an edited version of the review to which is appended the following: "*Editor's note: this review was updated on June 6 to remove references to behaviour of other audience members during this production."* I contacted *The Stage* to request a copy of the original for my research but did not receive a response and cannot reproduce it here.

Anti-Racism Activities, 2020–2022

Claire Cochrane observed in 2010 that there was still "the problem of the prevailing whiteness of employment patterns within the organisational structures of building-based theatres."[1] Since NP began to reflect more openly and critically on how it can become an anti-racist institution following the resurgence of the BLM movement in 2020, there have been a number of activist interventions in sectoral practices. Pressure has come from individuals and groups in the theatre industry, with one notable example being an open letter published by The Black Theatre Collective and addressed to "Britain's Artistic Directors/Executive Directors/Producers and Members of SOLT." The signatories called for five commitments to the sector, expressed as "Hire and Retain," "Hair and Wigs," "Makeup and Costume," "Reviews" and "Outreach". The most pertinent is the first to "[h]ire and retain diverse teams across all departments."[2] Organisations were being compelled as well as encouraged to move beyond statements condemning racism in society toward acknowledging their positionality as complicit in institutional racism. Employees publicly shamed cultural venues whose responses fell short. A notable example is the Royal Opera House, whose Technical Director Mark Dakin wrote an open letter summarising the view of many in the sector: "After all these years I have no more tears only an exhausting, burning rage and desolate sadness that still nothing has changed."[3] There was mounting pressure to respond and to respond well. Posting a black square to the theatre's Instagram page would not satisfy

[1] Claire Cochrane, "Opening up the Garden," 136.
[2]The remaining commitments specify: Ensure that wig heads of department and their deputies are trained in afro hair by summer 2021. Provide appropriate skin tone make-up, underwear and physio strapping for performers. Make space for a broader range of publications on press night to ensure works are critiqued by a diverse audience and to do outreach work with young people from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds; The Black Theatre Collective, "An Open Letter to British Theatre," July 2, 2020, https://alettertobritishtheatre.wordpress.com/.
[3]Mark Dakin, "Mark Dakin - an Open Letter," *Stage Sight*, accessed August 23, 2023, https://www.stagesight.org/mark-dakin-an-open-letter/.

Black communities that Black Lives matter in theatre.[4] NP's statement was published alongside a public facing online "Anti-Racism Action Plan" which begins: "We acknowledge that people from the Black community feel underrepresented at NP, and we are striving to address this. We acknowledge that we have not done everything right, despite our best intentions, and recognise that we need to improve."[5] This admission was not unusual when compared to other similarly sized Nottingham based cultural organisations such as Nottingham Contemporary who published an Anti-Racism statement with seven commitments to their website.[6] City Arts Nottingham similarly published to their website "Black Lives Matter: Our Commitments" which contained eight commitments for further action.[7] NP also shared an "initial draft" of an Anti-Racism Action Plan and eleven commitments.[8] NP is not the only theatre to take this approach; other notable examples include Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, which instigated an "Action Plan for Change" and National Theatre Scotland, whose "Anti-Racism Action Plan" is split into four distinct sections: people, programme and artistic development, audience and communications and creative engagement and schools.[9]

In March 2021, the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities recommended that the UK government stop using BAME, Black Asian and Minority Ethnic. The commission found the term BAME was demeaning and reductionist. The recommendation called for a

[4] #BlackoutTuesday was a viral display of allyship. The idea was initiated by two music industry professionals, Jamila Thomas and Brianna Agyemang, to take a day of reflection on 2nd June 2020.It morphed into a wider display of allyship with 28 million Instagram users posting a plain black square on their feeds.
[5] Nottingham Playhouse, "Anti-Racism Action Plan."
[6] The webpage was last updated June 13, 2022, with details of progress made towards meeting commitments made in 2020; Nottingham Contemporary, "Anti-Racism: Statement, Responses, Resources," June 13, 2022, https://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/record/anti-racism-statement-resources/.
[7] Suzannah Bedford, "Black Lives Matter: Our Commitments," City Arts Nottingham, September 10, 2020, https://city-arts.org.uk/black-lives-matter-our-commitments/.
[8] NP explicitly states that the eleven commitments will be developed and refined as more is learned,. Therefore, the wording in this text may have evolved since and may differ now from more current material relating to the Anti-Racism Action Plan in NP's literature.
[9] National Theatre of Scotland, "Anti-Racism Action Plan," accessed September 23, 2022, https://www.nationaltheatrescotland.com/ar-action-plan.

disaggregation of the term to highlight the "differences in outcomes between ethnic groups."[10] If the "need to distinguish between all White and non-White populations" arose, the report recommends the use of the terms "ethnic minority', 'ethnic group', or 'White ethnic minorities" where appropriate. Although the government has adopted these new terms, another has emerged. The term global majority challenges "whiteness as the norm", and as opposed to terms such as ethnic minority, it does not "subordinate entire communities as 'non-white."[11] The term has faced criticism for being collectivist and homogenising groups; however, originator Rosemary Campbell-Stephens clearly states that global majority is not to be used when describing the specific backgrounds of individuals or groups as one should make "every effort to describe ethnicity in the way people belonging to those groups prefer to self-identify."[12] She suggests that global majority has the "potential to connect and amplify… the majority" through disrupting "deficit narratives." NP's anti-racism activities only reference Black communities, and although it is appropriate to identify specific racial and ethnic groups when specifically targeting action towards the particular needs of that group in this instance, it is unclear why the delineation has been made. Why the commitments made in the Anti-Racism Action Plan are not beneficial for all people of global majority communities is unclear. NP would benefit from adopting consistent terminology in Anti-Racism literature to demonstrate if commitments are for all or a specific and targeted community.

The eleven points of the NP Anti-Racism Action Plan encompass several commitments to initiating anti-racist practices. Point One aims "To set up a working group to take the lead on, oversee the development of and ensure that the Anti-Racism Policy is

[10] Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, "The Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities" (Cabinet Office, March 2021), 32.
[11] Rosemary Campbell-Stephen, "Global Majority; Decolonising the Language and Reframing the Conversation about Race," 2020, 3, https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/-/media/files/schools/school-of-education/final-leeds-beckett-1102-global-majority.pdf.; A wide and varied number of organisations such as National Museums Liverpool, the Women's Equality Party, Connex, The Inner Temple, The British Antarctic Survey are now using the acronym GEM (Global Ethnic Majority).
[12] Campbell-Stephen, "Global Majority," 3.

communicated to, understood by and adhered to by all employees, freelancers, participants." This has been satisfied by the creation of the Anti-Racism Action Group (ARAG). However, how this group has communicated NP's "Anti-Racism policy" to employees, freelancers, and participants is unclear. As of October 2023, there have been nine short updates to the group's page on the NP website.[13] A short mission statement for ARAG, written by its members, was included with the October 2021 update:

> The goal of the ARAG is to ensure NP is an actively anti-racist organisation. We are doing this by auditing the Playhouse's current policies and strategies, consulting with a representative range of stakeholders, and researching and evaluating best practices both within – and external – to the theatre sector. This work feeds into our ultimate action: crafting and applying a set of new active anti-racism policies that are bespoke to the organisation's needs; the staff, freelancers, audiences the Playhouse engages with; and the wider communities the organisation seeks to serve. We believe in NP being a safe and welcoming space for all. Our progress is regularly reported on the Playhouse website.

It is unclear when anti-racism policies will be published, that is to say, the timescale that the group has agreed and whether it is on schedule, and how the policies will be disseminated when the work is complete. I recommend assigning timescales to when these polices will be in place, rather than risk returnees to the website assuming that progress is slow.

Point Two of the Anti-Racism Action Plan is an intention "to increase the diversity of our workforce." ACE's fifth annual diversity report in February 2020 published for the first-time statistics from individual organisations, specifying the gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation of the workforce in each.[14] From 1st April 2018, ACE introduced a new

[13] Nottingham Playhouse, "Anti-Racism Action Group," Nottingham Playhouse, accessed August 23, 2023, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/about-us/anti-racism-action-plan/anti-racism-action-group/.

four-point scale to evaluate success: “not met, met, strong and outstanding”. This is another reason why 2018 is an important year from which to measure NP’s progress towards EDI goals. For the period 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019, NP statistics revealed that permanent staff identified as 90% White, 2% White Other and 9% BAME, leading to a creative case rating of “met” i.e. the second-lowest rating.[15] ACE publicly shared its expectation that all NPOs in Bands 2 and 3 commit to achieving a rating of “strong” by October 2021.[16] In 2018, when NP was the venue chosen to launch the 2016-17 ACE diversity report it was in the context of the city's racial diversity but in 2020 ACE highlighted it as an example of disappointing statistics on ethnic diversity.[17] As ACE published the data for its Annual Diversity Report of 2019-2020, then, there was a marginal decrease in non-white identifying permanent employees (5% Black, Asian or Ethnically Diverse, 93% White, 1% White Other and 1% Not Known). September 2020 saw the creation of a dedicated Diversity in the Workforce working group at NP, whose purpose is:

> Assessing the impact of Positive Action. Devising a programme of change to deliver at least 15% representation in the permanent staff make-up of Nottingham Playhouse in the area of staff who are Black, Asian and ethnically diverse. Delivering the programme and evaluating it against the ultimate aim of ensuring that the workforce of Nottingham Playhouse represents the diversity of the community we serve.[18]

Although the data for 2020-2021 looked much more promising, with 12% of permanent employees identifying as “Black, Asian or Ethnically Diverse” (88% White, 1% White

[15]Arts Council England, “Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case” (London: Arts Council England, February 17, 2020), 33, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ACE_DiversityReport_Final_03032020_0.pdf.
[16] Arts Council England, “Applying to the National Portfolio FAQs,” Arts Council England, 5, accessed August 23, 2023, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Investment_process_FAQs.pdf.
[17] Georgia Snow, “Major Theatres Put on Notice by ACE over Diversity as Annual Report Reveals ‘Disappointing Picture,’” *The Stage*, February 18, 2020, https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/major-theatres-put-on-notice-by-ace-over-diversity-as-annual-report-reveals-disappointing-picture.
[18] Nottingham Playhouse, “Diversity in the Workforce,” Nottingham Playhouse, accessed August 23, 2023, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/about-us/anti-racism-action-plan/diversity-in-the-workforce/.

Other), ACE warned that due to C-19 closures and restrictions, data could not be "directly compared due to different sample sizes."[19] Therefore, the most up-to-date information regarding workforce diversity at NP can be found on the Diversity in the Workforce working group webpage: "Employee Representation has marginally improved as of 31st March 2022: employees identify as 2% Asian or British Asian, 9% Black or British Black, 5% Dual, Mixed or Multiple Heritage and 85% White."[20] The improvement is attributed to an updated recruitment policy and an influx of new staff, with 23 vacancies advertised between February and July 2022, for example. Although the 15% target has been surpassed, it is unclear if statistics refer to permanent staff or whether they include freelance practitioners.[21] I recommend NP make this data more transparent by explaining who is included in these statistics, even if that means acknowledging some of the difficulties involved in diversifying the workforce.

Points Eight and Nine reference career development opportunities for Black theatre practitioners. Point Eight commits to developing a mentoring programme for Black people wishing to develop a career in theatre, but it is not clear which "Black" identities are included in this commitment. As of October 2023, this programme has not been instituted. Point Nine commits to continuing to provide opportunities for freelance artists to engage with NP through the Artist Development Programme, Amplify. There is no mention of race or ethnicity regarding this commitment. Point Ten is the only point to reference the work of the Participation Department directly: "To ensure that the work we present on our stages and create in our participation programmes reflects the communities that we serve." This

[19] Arts Council England, "2020-21 Annual Diversity Report," (Arts Council England, June 24, 2022).
[20] Nottingham Playhouse, "Diversity in the Workforce July 2022 Update," Nottingham Playhouse, accessed August 23, 2023, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/about-us/anti-racism-action-plan/diversity-in-the-workforce/.
[21] It was confirmed to me by NP Director of Participation Martin Berry that the statistics refer to permeant employees only and are therefore comparable with ACE statistics. However, this would be unclear to a member of the public and therefore remains an issue of transparency.

commitment may have been met in many ways since the inception of the Participation Department, but it is surprising that this community-facing Department's remit does not figure more prominently. The final point, "To ensure that all marketing material is using appropriate language and images" presents no guidance as to who will be accountable, or how "appropriate" may be defined internally, whether the Marketing Department alone is responsible, or whether all departments will contribute to this assessment.

The Anti-Racism Action Plan is in many ways, a superior attempt to engage with anti-racism activities. Many other British regional theatres without any public anti-racism activities include Bristol Old Vic, Curve (Leicester) and Sheffield Theatre. However, there are no time scales specified for the operation of the Plan. Names may be attached to items internally so that individuals or Departments are responsible for specific actions are clear in their responsibilities to NP, but it is unclear how the two Action Groups are working towards implementing the points in the Plan and this would be useful for the public to see. It is evident that the work currently being undertaken at NP is designed to "effect representative change" for the Black community but, it is unclear how it will affect change for British Asian communities, the largest in the city, or non-British white communities.[22] One clear measure that has been implemented is the Racist Incident reporting system, launched in 2022 and available via the NP's website.[23] It is not mentioned in the initial Anti-Racism Action Plan, but the Anti-Racism Action Group has developed and implemented a way for anyone, internal or external to NP, to report a racist incident. The Report a Racist Incident page provides clear information on how the Racism Reporting Group will process reports and what

[22] According to the 2011 Census, the "Asian Pakistani" ethnic group, which made up 5.5% of the City's population, is the largest global majority community in Nottingham, with five other groups having populations of more than 2% of the city's total ("Asian Indian"; "Black African"; "Black Caribbean"; "Polish"; and "Asian Chinese." The "Polish" ethnic group (6,031 people; 2.0%) was a "write-in" category and by far the largest of the groups not covered in the standard detailed breakdown; NP, "Anti-Racism Action Plan."
[23] Nottingham Playhouse, "Report a Racist Incident."

kind of response can be expected.[24] A mechanism for employees to report a racist incident is not unusual; it is a legal requirement to protect employees from racial discrimination, because "race" is one of 9 "protected characteristics" covered by the Equality Act (2010). What is novel and a clear example of good practice is that the mechanism is available to the public as an outward and open indication that NP is committed to creating a safe theatre environment.

[24] As of October 2023, the Racism Reporting Group consists of: Sairah Rehman, Chair of the Anti-Racism Action Group. Natalie Gasson, NP Trustee and Chair of the Diversity in the Workforce Working Group, Neena Sharma, NP Trustee and Independent HR Consultant (Secretary of the Racism Reporting Group).

A Postscript – Aladdin

As part of my research into the influence of the NP board of trustees on community engagement, I began interviewing board members in early 2020. After establishing the board members' understanding of their role and their thoughts about the work of the Participation Department, interviews moved on to focus on the NP's response to C-19. After the publication of NP's Anti-Racism Action Plan, I asked board members for their thoughts on anti-racism activities, and how, if at all, they had engaged with the work of the two anti-racism working groups. Responses tended towards proud recognition of this cultural work but, beyond that, suggested little interaction for or from the board of trustees. Beyond quarterly updates from the Anti-Racism working groups on NP's website, there is no way for the public to know what impact the groups are having either.[1] This pattern of responses remained until one interview in which it was disclosed that the Anti-Racism Action Group had been involved in the choice to change the 2022 pantomime from *Aladdin* to *Dick Whittington*.

As is tradition, during a pantomime's run, tickets for the following year's pantomime go on sale. On 3rd December 2021, NP revealed that its 2022 pantomime would be *Aladdin*. The Middle Eastern folk tale is a stalwart in the tradition of pantomime, with its first recorded performance in 1788, and it has remained popular with UK audiences ever since.[2] This would not be the first performance of *Aladdin* at NP; there were productions in 1951, 1989, 2003, 2008, and again in 2016. It is common for theatres to cycle through pantomimes, repeating the most popular stories every few years. For 2022, *Aladdin* was to be written and directed by Adam Penford who wrote in a press release, "*Aladdin* is one of my favourite panto titles. It's

[1] Anti-Racism Action Group updates were posted to the NP website on the following dates: March 2021, May 2021, October 2021, January 2022, April 2022, July 2022, September 2022, Feburary 2023 and May 2023. Updates occurred on average every three months.
[2] VC Clinton-Baddeley, *Some Pantomime Pedigrees* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1963) quoted in Milly Taylor, *British Pantomime Performance* (Bristol: Intellect Books Ltd, 2007), 70.

a beautiful story with the perfect balance of adventure, magic and romance."[3] The stage was set, but in April 2022, a statement appeared on the website announcing, "This year's pantomime will be changed to *Dick Whittington*." *Aladdin* was to be, the statement explained, "put on hold to allow for more development time."[4] The language used would seem to conceal the reasoning behind the decision, which corresponded to concerns raised by the Anti-Racism Action Group.

Members of this group, as well as Adam Penford, raised concerns with the board of trustees, querying the choice of *Aladdin* and wanting to ensure that the adaptation was sensitive to the cultural context of the source material. A board member recounts, "there was a discussion about all the kinds of cultural issues, where it is set, and what sort of cast members they should have for *Aladdin*, all those types of things."[5] Adam Penford raised concerns, having discovered that other theatres had faced criticism for racist and insensitive adaptations of *Aladdin*. Pantomimes have recently faced criticism for being sexist, racist, ableist and for reinforcement of stereotypes through casting patterns and character dialogue, and inappropriate routines, such as "The Wall" whereby a male actor would look up the skirt of the female actor.[6] Conversely, pantomime has also been the chosen theatrical art form of the anti-woke brigade's "culture war."[7] Controversial broadcaster and provocateur Piers Morgan on the ITV morning news programme *Good Morning Britain* suggested that pantomimes "have been the last refuge of political incorrectness."[8] Articles in *The Sun*, *The*

[3] Sarah James, "Nottingham Playhouse to Stage Aladdin Panto in 2022," (*West End Theatre*, December 6, 2021), https://www.westendtheatre.com/104632/news/nottingham-playhouse-to-stage-aladdin-panto-in-2022/.
[4] Nottingham Playhouse, "Aladdin (in Person)," Nottingham Playhouse, accessed September 23, 2022, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/events/aladdin/.
[5] Nottingham Playhouse Board Member, interview by Laura Ewart, July 21, 2022.
[6] For Ablism see: Erin Pritchard, "Get down on Your Knees': Representing the Seven Dwarfs in the Pantomime," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (August 18, 2022), https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v42i1.7576. For racism see: Simon Sladen, "Pantoland: Let's Talk about Race," *British Theatre Guide*, June 12, 2020. For sexism see: Baz Bamigboye, "Panto Boss: Sexist Japes Are behind Us," *The Daily Mail*, December 8, 2017.
[7] For more, See, Bart Cammaerts, "The Abnormalisation of Social Justice: The 'Anti-Woke Culture War' Discourse in the UK," *Discourse & Society* 33, no. 6 (May 12, 2022), 730 – 743.
[8] Piers Morgan, "Should Panto Be Political? | Good Morning Britain," YouTube (Good Morning Britain, November 26, 2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDTklBSC0E0&ab_channel=GoodMorningBritain.

Express and particularly *The Daily Mail* express concerns over the inclusion of trigger and content warnings and specifically the role of the pantomime "dame." Contradictory views about pantomime suggest that it is too controversial for some and not controversial enough for others. Writing for *The Stage* in 2018, Simon Sladen, Senior Curator of Modern and Contemporary Performance at the Victoria and Albert Museum, advocated for pantomime to be updated and cited *Aladdin*, in particular. Bedworth Civic Hall, only one among many controversial productions, faced criticism after naming characters Chow Mein Slave of the Ring/Villager and PC Pong Ping.[9] In 2020, Forum Theatre in Billingham was condemned for having an all-white cast, despite the characters being described as "the Chinese Police Men" (*sic*).[10] Any adaptation of *Aladdin* would need to be aware of the cultural context of the source material and ensure that the representation of Middle Eastern and Chinese characters did not fall into racist tropes.

A board member shared that NP had chosen to conceal the reason *Aladdin* had been postponed indefinitely and expressed the wish that the theatre had engaged with ticket holders: "I think that it might have been interesting in terms of how that was perceived by audiences." The same board member shared this decision as a positive example of the work of the Anti-Racism Action Group: "I do not think that this would have been a conversation that would have been had necessarily in that way before." The board member concluded, "I do think that conversation really might have been hard without that group, but I think it was discussed fully in the group."[11] Transparent conversations are a powerful tool for encouraging accountability and trust amongst communities and inside organisations. Robert Marsden, a theatre director, is quoted in *The Stage*, for example, advocating that, "If as an

[9] Neil Johnson, "Is That Racist? Oh Yes It Is! Panto at Bedworth Civic Hall Pulls Advert for 'Chow Mein Slave,'" *The Times*, August 23, 2023, sec. news, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/is-that-racist-oh-yes-it-is-panto-at-bedworth-civic-hall-pulls-advert-for-chow-mein-slave-dndwbsn7x.
[10] Lucy Lillystone, "Aladdin Pantomime Accused of Racism: We Can Do Better," The Indiependent, September 21, 2020, https://www.indiependent.co.uk/aladdin-pantomime-accused-of-casual-racism-we-can-do-better/.
[11] Nottingham Playhouse Board Member, interview by Laura Ewart, July 21, 2022.

industry we still believe *Aladdin* is a strong story, we need to address how we tell it."[12] If NP believes it can produce a culturally sensitive production of *Aladdin*, then one reading of the failure to share its thinking with patrons is that it is incongruent with its current public commitments. To cancel quietly and without explanation suggests that the production team does not feel equipped to produce an adaptation that will not inevitably veer into racism, and this will certainly reduce the selection pool for future pantomimes. An alternative reading is that NP has made a shrewd decision allowing the production team time to study the source material and develop stronger relationships with Chinese and Middle Eastern performers in order to do a production justice—and to express its commitment to social justice. I hope NP audiences may have the opportunity to watch *Aladdin* in the future, and I think that sharing how this cultural work is changing programming is a useful way for NP to engage with the public, and perhaps to invite more expertise and debate into the discussion. The more openly NP engages this work and shares its ideas along the way, while learning from its history and celebrating its long-standing commitment to diversity, as this chapter explores, the sooner it may evidence the material change it is working to effect.

[12] Simon Sladen, "Why Pantomime Must Be Updated for the Modern Age," *The Stage*, November 22, 2018, https://www.thestage.co.uk/opinion/historian-simon-sladen-why-pantomime-must-be-updated-for-the-modern-age.

Racial and Ethnic Diversity at Nottingham Playhouse Recommendations

This chapter has provided a detailed critical reflection of the moments in the theatre's history where progress towards increased engagement with Black communities was envisaged and sometimes made visible. The recommendations are mapped alongside the eleven commitments which constitute NP's Anti-Racism Action Plan where appropriate.[1] These recommendations are grouped into eight themes: Increasing Trust and Transparency, Improving Organisational Memory, Failing Well, Accountability, Engagement with Non-Black Communities, External and Internal Communications and Physical Space.

Increasing Trust and Transparency

If NP wishes once again to enter a successful period of engagement with global majority communities, I recommend that it focuses on increasing trust and transparency with these groups. Research undertaken within a university setting has found that an organisation needs to have a culture of transparency to encourage trust in the commitment to stated diversity goals.[2] For example, the cancellation of *Aladdin* in 2022 was an opportunity for NP to raise the issue of representation in theatre in the form of a public conversation or staged debate on stage. These recommendations work towards point three of the NP Anti-Racism Action Plan.[3]

[1] "Anti-Racism Action Plan," Nottingham Playhouse, n.d. at https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/about-us/anti-racism-action-plan/; A copy of the Anti-Racism Action Plan is included as Appendix 1 of this document.
[2] Molly B. Pepper, Linda Tredennick, and Raymond F. Reyes, "Transparency and Trust as Antecedents to Perceptions of Commitment to Stated Diversity Goals," *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 3, 3 (2010), 160.
[3] Point three of the action plan is: "To make a commitment that we acknowledge past mistakes and will learn from them and make sustainable changes." Anti-Racism Action Plan," Nottingham Playhouse, n.d.

1. To build trust through community engagement, NP should seek to create a public forum for challenging discussions.
    a) NP should explore the appropriate format for supporting and encouraging discussions in response to both artistic programming and organisational decision-making. Dialogues could be achieved through pre- or post-show talks, press releases, podcasts, and social media.

2. NP should increase transparency about how and why decisions are made about artistic programming, organisational structures, and community engagement; this could lead to greater participation as well as trust from global majority communities.

3. There is currently no formal way for community members to influence decision-making at NP directly. I recommend that NP explore how to introduce a dialogue with community members.
    a) NP successfully encouraged feedback from young people via the NP Youth Board established in 2021. This model could be replicated on a wider scale with the creation of an NP Community Advisory Board. Community Boards are an established model that has been successfully applied in cultural organisations.[4]

Improving Organisational Memory

[4] For an example of a cultural organisation that has established Community Boards see: "Community Board," Tullie - Museum & Art Gallery, accessed October 12, 2023, https://tullie.org.uk/get-involved/community-board/; The Urban Institute, a US-based think tank, has produced a guidebook of tools and resources for establishing and integrating a Community Advisory Board see: Diane Arnos, Edward Kroll, Emma Jaromin, Hannah Daly, and Elsa Falkenburger, "Tools and Resources for Project- Based Community Advisory Boards." Washington DC: The Urban Institute, October 2021, https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104938/tools-and-resources-for-project-based-community-advisory-boards_0.pdf.

Interviewees identified a lack of recorded institutional memory as a factor in the loss of learning and outcomes from past projects, initiatives, and former staff members. My research has resurfaced the previously undocumented history of engagement with Black communities at NP. These recommendations address point 3 of the NP Anti-Racism Action Plan.

4. The analysis in my chapter brings NP up to the present day and will be publicly available as a resource. Throughout this research, I have amassed oral history interviews, making available some transcripts in the form of an Appendix, to afford opportunities for NP to reflect on and learn from past initiatives and to begin to provide a resource to strengthen organisational memory.

5. I recommend that all digital content concerning the Anti-Racism Action Plan, Anti-Racism Action Group and Diversity in the Workforce Working Group is archived regularly, and that some is made publicly accessible as evidence of progress.

6. To further strengthen institutional memory, I recommend that NP acknowledges any group, initiative, sessions or schemes that have ended in the last year and, if appropriate, include the reasons for ending them.
    a) I recommend that, where possible, this information be included in the annual review published on the NP website. Including this information serves as a formal acknowledgement of participants and provides transparency about why a group may have disbanded, especially when a decision is made to institute a new group.

7. The American Theatre Archive Project (ATAP) has produced an archiving manual for "the busy theatre maker" that aims to help theatre companies develop an "archival sensibility that saves time and money while preserving and making accessible records of

theatrical process and product." [5] NP should consider this resource for how it could support future research, improve organisational memory and evidence the theatre's impact on the community.

Failing Well

The current cultural policy landscape is identified in the chapter as a barrier to learning from failure. The chapter evidences historical examples of NP moving on without having the time, or having taken the time, to consider how learning from those initiatives could be taken into future work. This recommendation works towards point 4 of the NP Anti-Racism Action Plan.

8. I recommend that NP embed tools and activities developed by FailSpace, an AHRC-funded research project which aims to support the cultural sector to better learn from failure.[6]
    a) FailSpace tools and activities support cultural organisations to recognise, acknowledge and learn from failure. Workshop tools are free to access and take as little as 30 minutes to 1.5 hours to complete.

Accountability

The present format of NP's Anti-Racism Action Plan includes few opportunities for demonstrating proof of tangible progress. Of the eleven points, none includes a target completion date or a responsible staff member, and no specific outcomes are associated with

[5]Susan Brady, Ken Cerniglia, Maryann Chach, Brenna Edwards, Jessica Green, Helice Koffler, Sharon Lehner, and Tiffany Nixon, "Preserving Theatrical Legacy: An Archiving Manual for Theatre Companies" (American Theatre Archive Project, 2021), 1, https://www.americantheatrearchiveproject.org/resources/preserving-theatrical-legacy-an-archiving-manual-for-theatre-companies/.
[6] FailSpace Project, "About FailSpace," 2020.

points. The current system of six-monthly updates on the action group's web pages does not show progress towards actioning the Plan. These recommendations work towards point 7 of the Action Plan and its implementation as a whole.

9. I recommend that an expected date or timescale for completion accompanies each point. It is currently unclear how progress is being measured. Therefore, the community cannot track the progress made by NP towards satisfying the commitments publicised in the Plan.
    a) The National Theatre of Scotland provides an example of how NP may choose to approach this recommendation, by specifying an action, target/steps and a deadline via their website.[7] By sharing more detail, the wider community can see in real-time that the commitments made in the plan are being fulfilled.

10. To increase accountability to the community, and perhaps to accelerate the outcomes, I recommend that a named person is responsible for each point of the Action Plan.
    a) This recommendation is supported by guidance from the business-community outreach charity Business in the Community (BITC), which recommends within its Race at Work Charter that organisations appoint Executive Sponsors to provide 'visible leadership' on issues of race and ethnicity in the workplace.[8] The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) also recommends the appointment of a "race champion" within a leadership team to 'take responsibility for progress'.[9]

[7] "Anti-Racism Action Plan," National Theatre of Scotland, https://www.nationaltheatrescotland.com/about/who-we-are/reports-and-documents/ar-action-plan.
[8] "Race at Work Charter," Business in the Community, 2022, online at: https://www.bitc.org.uk/post_tag/race-at-work-charter/
[9] "Developing an anti-racism strategy," The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), May 24, 2021, 8.

Engagement with Non-Black Communities

NP is located in the Radford and Park ward of the city, where "All Black and Minority Ethnic Groups" comprise 48.6% of the population, with the largest group being 17.8% "Asian/Asian British" the largest individual communities being 7.9% Other White and 7.1% Pakistani. According to the 2011 Census, the "Asian Pakistani" ethnic group, which made up 5.5% of the City's population, is the largest global majority community in Nottingham, with five other groups having populations of more than 2% of the city's total ("Asian Indian," "Black African," "Black Caribbean,' "Polish" and "Asian Chinese." The "Polish" ethnic group (6,031 people; 2.0%) was a "write-in" category and by far the largest of the groups not covered in the standard detailed breakdown.[10] This recommendation addresses a potential deficit in the Anti-Racism Action Plan.

11. Where relevant and appropriate, the Anti-Racism action plan should be updated to include specific actions for Pakistani, Indian, Chinese and Polish communities.

External and Internal Communications

External marketing and communications are, for the most part, how the public sees and interacts with NP. Director of the Centre for Cultural Value, Ben Walmsley, suggests that arts marketing has become an increasingly value-based exchange relationship.[11] How NP is promoted and communicated via NP's social channels and website undeniably impacts how communities engage with the content. These recommendations work towards point 11 of the NP Anti-Racism Action Plan.

[10] Nottingham City Council, Ward headlines - Ethnicity - Nottingham City, Census 2011 – Ethnicity, n.d.
[11] Walmsley argues that the transactional model based upon four core elements (or 4Ps) of product, place, price and promotion is now outdated and proposes that a new paradigm based upon aspects of experience, exchange, environment and engagement (4Es) has emerged. Ben Walmsley, "The Death of Arts Marketing: a Paradigm Shift from Consumption to Enrichment," *Arts and the Market* 9, no.1 (2019), 18.

12. I recommend that external communications accurately reflect NP's output and the breadth and span of work undertaken by the Participation Department.

13. I recommend that internal communications keep staff updated with progress made against the Anti-Racism Action Plan.

    a) All staff should be aware of when positive progress is made and what they can expect to see change or develop because of the Anti-Racism Action Plan, Anti-Racism Action Group and the Diversity in the Workforce Working Group.

Physical Space

If NP is to reassess its institutional values through its anti-racism initiatives, the physical space should be considered for ways in which it may present barriers to creating successful intercultural relationships. Historically, NP did not have an in-house studio space, which limited access to diverse practitioners and artistic outputs not typically seen in main-stage productions.

14. I recommend that NP maintains an awareness of how the physical space of the theatre building and any spaces used by NP are best optimised for inclusion.

Harnessing Change: Investigating Dynamic Shifts in Nottingham Playhouse's Community Work, 2019-2023

On an average week at Nottingham Playhouse (NP) in 2019, you could attend one of the 19 weekly classes for people over fifty on a Monday. On Tuesday, you might have met a friend for a coffee in the café bar, and on Wednesday attended a Young Company session. You might have taken your under-five-year-old to a Story Explorers show on Thursday. On Friday, you could have been one of twenty university students undertaking a placement at NP. Many of these activities would not be defined as traditional theatregoing. The Theatres Trust Act of 1976 defined a theatre as "any building or part of a building constructed wholly or mainly for the public performance of plays."[1] Now, theatres have surpassed legal requirements as they were understood back then.[2] Individuals and communities who may still view theatres only as buildings in which they pay to watch a performance that has been developed and performed by a group of professionals from a pre-booked seat are missing out on the rich community offer occurring off stage. Theatres are multifaceted venues offering a myriad of experiences beyond the main stage. In 2019, NP also undertook its largest community engagement project to date, producing the play *Coram Boy* with a large community cast but during 2020 and 2021, NP chose to undertake its community engagement

[1] *Theatres Trust Act 1976*, 1976, Chapter 27, Adopted 21st January 1977, accessed January 16, 2023, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1976/27/introduction.

[2] The Theatres Trust Act 1976 used the same meaning of the word 'play' as its predecessor the Theatres Act 1968: (a) any dramatic piece, whether involving improvisation or not, which is given wholly or in part by one or more persons actually present and performing and in which the whole or a major proportion of what is done by the person or persons performing, whether by way of speech, singing or action, involves the playing of a role ; and (b) any ballet given wholly or in part by one or more persons actually present and performing, whether or not it falls within paragraph (a).

activity during a global pandemic, which saw government lockdown restrictions in place for fourteen months between March 2020 and July 2021.[3]

Now, the organisation confronts new challenges, including the impact of a cost of living crisis that was building then and the effects of the "hostile environment," a government policy intended to make the UK a difficult place to live for immigrants, whilst, as always, balancing the expectations of its largest funder, ACE and delivering its Let's Create strategy for 2020-2030.[4] The Let's Create strategy is focused on three outcomes: Creative People, Cultural Communities and A Creative and Cultural Country. To inform its investment decisions and organisations in receipt of funding, ACE has adopted four Investment Principles: Ambition and Quality to ensure an emphasis on improving the quality of creative work; Inclusivity and Relevance to ensure that the nation's diversity is fully reflected in organisations supported and the work produced; Dynamism which enables organisations to respond to different challenges; and Environmental Responsibility. In this chapter I bear these principles in mind as I argue for and evidence why theatres should be conceptualised as socio-cultural and community venues in the context of community engagement activities between 2019 and 2023. NP had previously undertaken large-scale, stand-alone community projects but usually in partnership with other organisations. Mass Bolero in 2014 stands out as a collaborative partnership with Dance4 and the Confetti Media Group, a group of five creative, digital and entertainment businesses, including Spool, a film production company.[5]

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[3]Institute for Government, "Timeline of UK Government Coronavirus Lockdowns and Restrictions," Institute for Government, accessed August 29, 2023, https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/data-visualisation/timeline-coronavirus-lockdowns.

[4] For further explanation of the Hostile Environment see p.172, for relevant literature see: Frances Webber, "On the Creation of the UK's 'Hostile Environment,'" *Race & Class* 60, no. 4 (2019), 76–87; Sophie J. Weller et al., "The Negative Health Effects of Hostile Environment Policies on Migrants: A Cross-Sectional Service Evaluation of Humanitarian Healthcare Provision in the UK," *Wellcome Open Research* 4, no. 109 (July 22, 2019), 109, https://doi.org/10.12688/wellcomeopenres.15358.1.; Melanie Griffiths and Colin Yeo, "The UK's Hostile Environment: Deputising Immigration Control," *Critical Social Policy* 41, no. 4 (January 11, 2021), 521–44.

[5] Dance4 was founded in 1991 and continues to lead and contribute to city projects. Founded in 1994 by Craig Chettle, the Confetti media Group exists under the aegis of Nottingham Trent University; Nottingham

The project was conceived and directed by Fiona Buffini, Associate Director of Nottingham Playhouse (2013 to 2018) as a tribute in celebration of the 30th anniversary of Jayne Torville and Christopher Dean's gold medal-winning figure skating programme at the 1984 Winter Olympics. Nottingham-born Torville and Dean trained at the city's National Ice Centre and have maintained strong connections to the city, returning often to perform and make press appearances.[6] Choreographed by Jeanefer-Jean Charles, a Black British creative and leader of multiple global projects, 46 community groups, schools, colleges, sports teams, businesses, and charities across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire participated in a version of the Bolero figure skating performance as it was adapted into a community dance performance. The film premiered at NP and launched the Nottingham European Arts & Theatre Festival (neat14) on 23rd May 2014; it also launched Notts TV.[7] In March 2020 in response to the pandemic and while moving to sharing digital content, NP publicised the video via inclusion in email newsletters and a dedicated webpage on its website.[8] Bolero was a very successful project with a tight agenda; the sophisticated film belies how much preparation took place to create it, but in 2019 I observed a looser and very different kind of community project from its inception.

Playhouse, "Mass Bolero - a Tribute to Torvill & Dean," YouTube, May 28, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WOO6qoEcgo&t=6s.

[6] For example, in 2012, Torville and Dean returned to the National Ice Centre to perform with the Olympic torch as part of the relay. In 2015 the duo filmed the documentary *Ice Rink* at the Centre. They retuned again in 2018 to promote *the Dancing on Ice* Live Tour.

[7] A project shared between Nottingham Trent University, Confetti Media and Inclusive Digital led to OFCOM awarding a licence for a new television channel in the city in 2014; Visit Nottinghamshire, "Nottingham's Neat14 Festival Is Back with a Bang This May - Visit Nottinghamshire," Visit Nottinghamshire, April 25, 2014, https://www.visit-nottinghamshire.co.uk/blog/read/2014/04/nottinghams-neat14-festival-is-back-with-a-bang-this-may-b4446.

[8] Nottingham Playhouse, "Mass Bolero – a Tribute to Torvill & Dean," Nottingham Playhouse, March 24, 2020, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/news/mass-bolero-a-tribute-to-torvill-dean/#video-modal.

The Coram Boy Community Theatre Project (2019)

As a revealing case study, the Coram Boy project speaks to several pertinent issues for NP's community engagement more broadly. Unlike previous projects, of which Mass Bolero is the most renowned, Coram Boy was the first community project undertaken solely by NP, under the leadership of Adam Penford, Artistic Director since 2017. Penford is credited as the director and he underlined in a press release that "Coram Boy is our most ambitious and exciting community project to date."[1] I followed the community cast from rehearsal to performance, paying attention to how people shared in the experience, and attuned to issues now highlighted in arts evaluation: loneliness, well-being, creativity, and positive mental health outcomes.[2]

Coram Boy (2000) is a novel by Jamila Gavin, a British children's author of Indian heritage who believes "stories are an essential part of growing up and helping us to become members of our community."[3] It won the Whitbread Prize for the Best Children's Novel. Adapted into a play by Helen Edmundson in 2005, Gavin describes its second life as a "kind of wish fulfilment."[4] Performed with both professional and community casts, the play has been consistently reproduced in the fifteen years since it premiered to favourable reviews. Its success is evidenced in the National Theatre production in 2005, its run at The Imperial Theatre on Broadway in 2005 and nomination for six Tony Awards.[5] In 2019, the novel was

[1] Nottingham Playhouse, "Coram Boy: The Story so Far," Nottingham Playhouse, accessed October 15, 2019, https://www.nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/news/coram-boy-the-story-so-far.
[2] Nottingham Playhouse, "Coram Boy: The Story So Far."
[3] Jamila Gavin, *Coram Boy* (London: Egmont Books, 2001). Jamila Gavin, "Why Children Need Books and Why I Need to Write Them," Address to The First Festival of Children's Literature 2004 Kerman, The Islamic Republic of Iran, 2004, accessed February 1, 2020, http://www.jamilagavin.co.uk/writing.html.
[4] Helen Edmundson, *Coram Boy* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2005); Jamila Gavin, "Coram Boy as Theatre," March 28, 2021, http://www.jamilagavin.co.uk/coram-boy-as-theatre.html.
[5] Performances of *Coram Boy* have been undertaken by various theatre groups, for example, the Cotswolds Theatre Group in 2019, Sharnbrook Mill Theatre Trust in 2016, Bristol Old Vic in 2011, and York Theatre Royal's Youth Theatre in 2010.
Favourable reviews of the 2005 National Theatre production can be found at: Paul Taylor, "Coram Boy, National Theatre, London ," *The Independent*, December 21, 2006, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-

introduced as a set text for GCSE English Literature in response to student and teacher feedback about the lack of diversity of the authors selected for study. The whitewashing of the UK education system despite the diversity of pupils was underlined when in 2015, Pearson highlighted the novel's inclusion for Key Stage 4, as if individual works alone could change pervasive white norms and ideology.[6] *Coram Boy* had already been expected to carry significant weight as a standard bearing text, then, before it was selected by NP. The story Gavin tells has resonated with audiences internationally, and it has been the subject of literary criticism; when arguing that *Coram Boy* may be read as "cosmopolitan gothic," Chloé Germain Buckley notes how its gothic imagery may be used to interrogate Britain's imperial and colonial history.[7] For Gavin, the story exposes a hidden history: "Children in the eighteenth century were routinely brutalised... It was often entirely a matter of luck if a child was kindly and lovingly reared, and it was to redress this that Captain Thomas Coram opened his hospital in 1741."[8] Her fiction foregrounds the role of private philanthropy in addressing issues that were largely neglected at the level of government and it introduces readers and audiences to the work of the Coram Foundation, founded by Captain Thomas Coram in 1739 in London. A potted history of the Charity was included in the programme produced by NP for its project:

> Thomas Coram, a successful sea captain, had returned to England after ten years living in America. He was shocked by the sight of destitute and dying children left

entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/coram-boy-national-theatre-london-6229494.html; Philip Fisher, "Theatre Review: Coram Boy at Royal National Theatre, Olivier Theatre," British Theatre Guide, accessed August 31, 2023, https://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/coramboy-rev; "Coram Boy Review," *The Stage*, 2005, https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/2005/coram-boy-review-at-national-theatre-olivier-london/.

[6] The educational publisher Pearson situates *Coram Boy* for, "recognising the importance of diversity within literature" see "Pearson Edexcel GCSE English Literature (9-1) from 2015," Pearson, 2019, at https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-gcses/english-literature-2015/teaching-support/new-diverse-texts.html.

[7] Chloé Germaine Buckley, "Fundamental British Values" through Children's Gothic: Imperialism, History, Pedagogy," *Children's Literature in Education* 49 (2018), 3, 5. *Coram Boy* has many gothic elements, enumerated by Buckley as "ghosts, hauntings, body horror, transgressive violence and villainous character types," 24.

[8] Gavin, *Coram Boy*, n.p.

> abandoned on London's streets… so he started a campaign for the foundation of a 'hospital for the maintenance of poor and destitute young children. For 17 years, Coram petitioned the King for a charter to create his Foundling Hospital. He was finally granted royal approval in 1739 and, two years later, the Foundling Hospital opened its doors in Bloomsbury, an area at the outskirts of London…Coram's vision was to give children a roof over their head, a healthy diet, access to healthcare, and a practical education so that they could work to support themselves as they grew up.

Today, the Coram Charity's mission is to "develop, deliver and promote best practice in the support of vulnerable children and young people." Its ethos as stated is to "champion what matters most for children, creating better chances, and a brighter, happier future."[9] Gavin's novel is grounded in this social justice programme and NP's choice to foreground it as a community project resonated, I would argue, because from the relative safety of historical distance, it commented meaningfully on the "hostile environment" faced not only by newcomers to the UK but also by established citizens like members of the Windrush generation. If such politicised commentary was oblique and may not have been a consideration at all for some audiences, it is unsurprising because in the wider context, there is considerable linguistic slippage around the government's use of the term "hostile," not least because no White Paper introduced it: "There is no central policy document, no official definition nor clear aims and objectives. The policies are spread across various Immigration Acts, rules, and regulations, affecting numerous sectors and policy arenas."[10] Theatre can and, I would assert, should intervene in such debates, and can do so sensitively but meaningfully. The emphasis on health and social care is indisputable in *Coram Boy* and, thereby, in the community project inspired by the novel.

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[9] The Coram Foundation, "About Us," n.d., https://www.coram.org.uk/about-us.
[10] Melanie Griffiths and Colin Yeo, "The UK's Hostile Environment: Deputising Immigration Control," *Critical Social Policy* 41, no. 4 (January 11, 2021), 521.

Gavin emphasised poverty and precarity. In its eighteenth-century Gloucestershire setting, the stage play opens with a man called Otis promising a destitute new mother that he will deliver her baby to the Coram Foundling Hospital.[11] It is a lie. It quickly transpires that Otis is killing and burying babies but taking money from their mothers for their upkeep. Otis's son Meshak falls for a local girl, Melissa, the daughter of the governess for the Ashbrook family, and makes a friend of Alexander Ashbrook, who is struggling with his father's decision to stop his musical education. When Melissa secretly gives birth to a son, Aaron, Meshak takes him to the real Coram Hospital without her knowledge. As Act Two begins, Aaron is 8 years old and living at the Coram Foundling Hospital with his best friend Toby, the son of an enslaved African, who is sent to work for Mr Gaddarn, who is selling children into slavery. When Toby escapes, Meshak realises that Aaron is being tutored in music by his father and takes Aaron with him to find Toby. Captured by Mr Gaddarn and taken aboard a slave ship, it is finally revealed that Gaddarn is Otis in disguise. Meshak, Aaron and Toby jump from the ship, but Meshak dies. Despite the tragic end of the character who has protected the boys throughout, the play ends with Aaron reuniting with his parents. The plot is centred on family and does not shy away from tackling hard-hitting issues, including infanticide, slavery and people trafficking. The importance of families staying together is at the heart of the play, but only private philanthropy makes this possible in Gavin's story. NP chose a project that would mirror its commitment to providing access to the arts for people without the financial means to do so via traditional routes, and by implication, issued a critique. There are barriers for young people taking up free opportunities, and the UK government should recognise the power of the arts in ways that it

[11] No reason is given as to why the mother, Miss Price, leaves her child in the care of the Coram Hospital. However, the most common phrases identified in the petitions of mothers to the Coram Hospital included "desertion by the child's father, sexual assault; rape; the social disgrace of being a single mother, and the inevitability of unemployment and homelessness that came from this social stigma."; Carol Harris, "Admissions to the Foundling Hospital," Coram Story, January 18, 2021, https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/blog/admissions-to-the-foundling-hospital/.

generally fails to do. In the meantime, NP is well-positioned to provide cultural opportunities that are accessible to everyone, regardless of their income or social status, and that are available locally.

In its iteration as a community project, *Coram Boy*'s casting process began with an open call for actors and singers to which more than 300 people responded from across Nottingham in March 2019: "Applicants ranged from ages 12 to 80, and from a diverse range of jobs, including nurses, care workers and bus drivers."[12] The successful participants, or the Community Company as they came to be known, totalled 100 people. The cast was predominantly White British (94%), though, with the only other ethnicities represented self-described as Black British (3%) and Black African (3%).[13] The company was profiled using the consumer segmentation model Mosaic which suggested that the largest group represented was "Family Basics." defined as "Families with limited resources who budget to make ends meet" and that they accounted for 15.5% of the community company.[14] According to Experian which developed the Mosaic model, Family Basics accounts for 7.91% of UK households and 9.51% of individuals.[15] As NP's Director of Participation Martin Berry recognises, "Some peoples' lives present enormous challenges and engaging in arts and culture is therefore understandably some way down their list of priorities," and as participants in parent-and-children's activities at NP admit, "lower cost of public transport would support future family trips."[16] Coram Boy saw "Family Basics" overrepresented by almost a half in the community cast in which global majority communities were underrepresented. According to the 2021 Census, 10% of Nottingham's population describe their "Ethnic Group" as

[12] Nottingham Playhouse, "Coram Boy: The Story So Far."
[13] Nottingham Playhouse, "Coram Boy basic stats evals" The sample size is 35. November 28, 2019.
[14] More information regarding Mosaic can be found at, https://www.theaudienceagency.org/insight/mosaic.
[15] Experian, "Mosaic | UK E-Handbook," 2022 at https://www.selectabase.co.uk/downloads/Mosaic7brochure.pdft.
[16] Martin Berry quoted in, ChalleNGe Nottingham, "Family Arts Explorers," ChalleNGe Nottingham, August 2022, https://challengenottingham.co.uk/family-arts-explorers.

"Black, Black British, Caribbean or African" and 42% overall as non-White-British.[17] This data would suggest that NP was successful in recruiting community members from low-income households but could usefully consider how it approaches future recruitment of community participants with a view to ensuring that casts are more reflective of Nottingham.

NP's stage adaption of a complex novel translated into twenty-four roles, sixty-five scenes, and a 2-hour 20-minute running time (including an interval). This may initially appear to make *Coram Boy* an odd choice for a community project, but Penford felt that the complexity could be advantageous for his first community project, "*Coram Boy* is a play I've wanted to direct for years… [it]is too costly to produce professionally as the cast size is so large, but that means it's perfect for a community production as all the performers get lots to do."[18] Other factors also led to *Coram Boy* being a strategic choice. A decision was made by the senior leadership team not to include elements of co-creation in this project. Co-creation has become increasingly commonplace and is understood as indicative of the "participatory turn" in the cultural sector: "The notion of participation may correspond to different features, to providing information (reciprocally), to being heard (consultation), to having decision power, or to the phenomenon of co-production (co-creation), among others."[19] Theatre scholar Ben Walmsley allows that definitions of co-creation are disparate because its theorisation is relatively new but he offers a taxonomy of the key ideas involved: collaboration, interaction, invention, experience, value and exchange. NP's senior leadership wanted to ensure that the outcomes of this project would be of the highest quality possible, but co-production is expensive, time-consuming and has the potential to produce unpredictable results. The disadvantages of co-production that Walmsley posits are typically

[17] Nicola Kirk, "2021 Census Nottingham City Ethnicity, Language, Religion and Nationality" (Nottingham City Council, 2022).
[18] Nottingham Playhouse, *Coram B*oy Programme (2019), 5.
[19] Lluis Bonet and Emmanuel Négrier, "The Participative Turn in Cultural Policy: Paradigms, Models, Contexts," *Poetics* 66 (February 2018), 65.

"messy, raw, contingent and context dependent," led NP to choose a play that was tried and tested and to produce it in a manner that could be very similar to that of a professional production.[20] It was also felt that participants would be more willing to engage and commit their time to a well-known play. Leila Jancovitch suggests that innovation and risk-taking may be stifled if theatres rely on what is popular with participants and select "safe work," but the Coram Boy project also maps to the model that Bonet and Négrier describe as amateur expression: "The ability of collectives of laypeople to create, interpret and jointly enjoy a community work. The empowerment of these individuals is total, because they decide on what, how and when they participate, and the border between the process of creation/interpretation and of consumption/participation is almost non-existent."[21] The democratisation of the project is clear, as is NP's focus on achieving the best commercial, artistic and community outcome. These are issues to which this chapter will return when considering future projects.

The proliferation of *Coram Boy*'s staging as a community play may in some part be due to its flexibility; it can be staged in "smaller, simpler spaces" than a professional theatre and the production notes suggest that its most challenging features are also opportunities for creative staging: "drowning, flying, babies which move on demand are an invitation for invention."[22] The Albert Hall, situated next door to NP, was chosen as the location of the performances, a venue that city schools have used as performance space for decades.[23] NP's stage would not have comfortably supported such a large cast and an organ is also integral to the production. The Edwardian Binns organ is an imposing presence in the Albert Hall. The

[20]Ben Walmsley, "Co-Creating Theatre: Authentic Engagement or Inter-Legitimation?" *Cultural Trends* 22, no. 2 (June 2013), 118.
[21] Leila Jancovich, "Great Art for Everyone? Engagement and Participation Policy in the Arts," *Cultural Trends* 20, no. 3-4 (December 2011), 276; Walmsley, "Co-creating theatre," 11; Bonet and Emmanuel Négrier, 68.
[22] Edmundson, *Coram Boy*, vi.
[23] For example, Sharon Monteith remembers her school, Mundella Grammar, staging Handel's *The Messiah* there in the early 1970s. Focal for the city since the 1870s and used for political rallies as well as performance, it is now a commercial venue. Its history is at https://www.alberthallnottingham.co.uk/History accessed July 31, 2023; Sharon Monteith, interview by Laura Ewart, August 4, 2023.

complexity of the musical elements led to John Keys, an internationally acclaimed organist, and Alex Patterson, a composer, conductor and choral animateur, being brought in as musical directors. The music was signposted in NP's programme as integral to audience understanding and suggestive of why this play was selected as a community engagement project:

> Unusually for the period, music also became part of their education, and over time, was taught more widely through the Hospital with performances given to raise money. In 1749 the famous composer Handel staged his first concert at the Foundling Hospital to raise money for the Chapel, and he continued to stage performances of Messiah every year until his death. Foundling pupils were encouraged to appreciate music, and many went on to become musicians in the most prestigious army and navy bands.[24]

The music and choir form an essential component of the play, so much so that its staging is not very different from that of a musical. Sheet music is included in Edmundson's adaptation for the stage, emphasising the importance of music in its production.[25] So significant to the history of the Foundling Hospital is George Frederic Handel that in Act Two, Scene Nine, Handel performs his seminal work, *The Messiah* (1741). The musical aspect of the play carries significance beyond its aesthetic impact insofar as a rapidly growing body of evidence suggests that music and, more specifically, singing in choirs "positively affects individuals' health and well-being."[26] This is a core aim for any community project. One study exploring women's perceptions of their performance in a choir concluded that "for the individual, it can

[24] *Coram Boy Programme*, 6.
[25] Edmundson, *Coram Boy*, 8, 120.
[26] For example, see; Betty Bailey and Jane Davidson, "Effects of Group Singing and Performance for Marginalised Middle-Class Singers,"; Stephen Clift and Ian Morrison, "Group Singing Fosters Mental Health and Wellbeing: Findings from the East Kent 'Singing for Health' Network Project," *Mental Health and Social Inclusion* 15, no. 2 (May 23, 2011), 88–97; Nick Stewart and Adam Lonsdale, "It's Better Together: The Psychological Benefits or Singing in a Choir," *Psychology of Music* 44 (2016), 1240–54.

enhance a sense of identity, promote self-esteem and confidence, and build social capital." There is pertinent evidence that it can "enhance feelings of connectedness and belonging and could potentially promote social inclusion."[27] This was an effect felt by participants in the Coram Boy choir, whose anonymous responses to my research questions included the following when enumerating their experiences:

> Met wonderful people, met people from all walks of life, made friends. On a personal level I proved to myself I could do it! Fantastic to be coached (and pushed) by Alex Patterson. Absolutely loved learning Handel.[28]

> Seeing first-hand how a professional, highly skilled team worked with a disparate group of unknowns to create a singing force to be reckoned with. This process had a marvellous effect upon our collective self-confidence and a strong sense of personal belief in our skill set.[29]

All participants referenced both the individual and a collective experience of taking part. The Coram Boy project afforded them the opportunity to work together with a creative team of professional artists, a choreographer, and a musical director, and to collaborate with two professional actors who performed alongside the amateurs.[30] Initially, Penford identified six key roles that he was concerned might be too challenging for inexperienced actors. However, during the auditioning process, it became apparent that promising community members could fill four of the six. Participants commented on the confidence building that was an overall outcome of the project in their survey responses when asked, "What impact has being involved in Coram Boy had on you so far?" Responses include: "Widened my horizons

[27] Kari Batt-Rawden and Sarah Andersen, "Singing Has Empowered, Enchanted and Enthralled Me'- Choirs for Wellbeing?," *Health Promotion International*, no. 35 (2019), 148.
[28] I conducted a survey on behalf of Nottingham Playhouse between October and December 2019 with the community cast of Coram Boy. 20 digital and physical responses were received.
[29] Survey undertaken by Nottingham Playhouse, "Coram Boy basic stats evals," 35 participants returned.
[30] Tim Samuels as Otis Gardiner and Jack Quarton as Thomas Ledbury/Associate Director.

and given me an insight into how a professional production is put together," and "It has made demands of me that require me to 'stretch' myself and I have made new friends; I have learnt some more drama techniques."[31] There is burgeoning evidence that individuals began to develop professional theatre skills and that positive experiences resulted from sustained engagement throughout the weeks and months through which this community production evolved. However, more data needs to be shared by NP for this to be further substantiated. If participant experience is shared and showcased to the city more widely, NP would be better understood and valued by its communities. Just as the production quality remained as close to a professional show as possible, so did the rest of the experience. I observed the cast being taken for individual costume fittings, excited by the attention to period and detail, for example. Nevertheless, producing a high-quality outcome with a community cast comes with a unique set of issues to address. I observed one cast member request permission to miss part of the following week's rehearsal to pick up their child from a sports club. Although the cast was incredibly dedicated, members were also bound by their quotidian routines. The impact on planning and continuity of rehearsals is unavoidable; participants had full-time jobs, were attending college, and had other caring and support responsibilities. Participants rehearsed twice weekly between May and August, and the production team had to find ways to ensure the project could fit into people's lives over four consecutive months which is not a simple process to manage.

If, as a novel, *Coram Boy* has the potential to "affirm the diversity of British identity at a time of heightened nationalism, racism and imperialist nostalgia," in play form, it has the potential to become an even more powerful tool.[32] In its successful funding application to the National Lottery Community Fund, NP identified "themes such as abandoned children,

[31] Survey I conducted on behalf of Nottingham Playhouse between October and December 2019 with the community cast of Coram Boy.
[32] Chloé Germaine Buckley, "Fundamental British Values" 3, 5, 18.

slavery, race and friendship" and highlighted that they are "unfortunately very relevant to our community today."[33] Parallels in Nottingham in 2019 were also underlined in the programme; when Penford was asked in the interview transcribed there, "Why do you think the novel and play are so popular?" he summarised succinctly, "Even though it is set over 270 years ago, it still has contemporary resonances around slavery, poverty and the rights of children."[34] Jamila Gavin emphasised poverty and precarity in the novel and in Nottingham a higher proportion of children live in poverty than the national average, which sits at 30%. Nottingham City Council has stated that according to whichever definition of poverty may be used, "Over 60% of City children live in families that receive financial support from the Government, either because nobody in the household works or those who are in work earn an income low enough to receive tax credits."[35] Access to arts education is a pertinent issue in the city. Young people's access to the arts has been eroded and cuts to education spending in schools reached a peak in 2021 when the Campaign for the Arts lobbied Education Minister Gavin Williamson to scrap his decision to cut arts in Higher Education by 50% after he made a statement that arts and creative courses were not "strategic priorities."[36] In 2018, an ACE national survey had revealed that 79% of people believed the arts to be important and an Equity campaign discerned that 63% of people in the UK wanted to see their local council spend at least 50p per person every week on the arts (to encompass theatre, museums and heritage). Equity emphasised social inclusion for the enrichment of life chances and local regeneration:

[33] Nottingham Playhouse, National Lottery Funding Application (March 3, 2019).
[34] *Coram Boy Programme*, 5.
[35]Child Poverty Action Group, "Child Poverty Facts and Figures," accessed October 20, 2023, https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures#footnote1_mtbusaq.; Policy and Research Team, "Child Poverty in Nottingham, 2017" (Nottingham City Council, 2017), 2.
[36] In 2021 the government proposed that there be a 50% reduction in funding towards to provision of music, dance, drama and performing arts; art and design; media studies; and archaeology courses describing them as "low value."; Will Hazell, "Majority of public back funding for university arts courses, as Gavin Williamson plans cut in support," *inews.co.uk*, June 11, 2021, at https://inews.co.uk/news/education/public-back-funding-university-arts-courses-ministers-plan-cut-1047684.

> Creativity and culture are not an add-on, a surplus luxury we can only afford when other needs of social life have been dealt with. We experience cultural life individually and collectively every minute of our work and leisure, whether through music, art and photography, dance, theatre, TV, film or video games. The arts run through our lives like a grain through wood characterising and strengthening us.[37]

In 2019, NP's CEO Stephanie Sirr observed the impact of austerity on young people of school age when sharing the fact that producing theatres had "never witnessed a bigger gap in the cultural opportunities open to those in private schools compared to those in state education."[38] The divide identified by Sirr parallels the experience of Alexander and Aaron in *Coram Boy*: although discouraged by his father, Alexander can pursue his musical dreams, but Aaron can only do so through a series of benefactors. In my viewing of the play, and subsequent examination of how it correlates to the widening participation activity that NP espouses, this observation mirrors the opportunity NP offered young people to engage. NP is a benefactor to those who may not be able to afford to pursue the arts otherwise. This is underlined over and again in the period I am focusing on and continues to be. For example, in July 2023 when NP faced making difficult decisions about whether or how it could support increased demand for bursary places for participation programmes. There are significant barriers for young people taking up "free opportunities" and the UK government should recognise the power of the arts in ways that it generally fails to do. In the meantime, NP is well placed to provide cultural opportunities that are accessible, economically, and social, and, most importantly, local.

[37] Equity, "Performance for All: Arts Policy 2019," 2019, 9, https://www.equity.org.uk/media/lj5odh4r/equity_arts-policy-2019_final-web.pdf.
[38] Stephanie Sirr, quoted in Adele Redmond, "Increasing Social Division' in Schools' Theatre Access," *ArtsProfessional*, August 16, 2019, https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/increasing-social-division-schools-theatre-access.

The primary outcome of the Coram Boy project was its culmination in five performances between Wednesday 7th and Saturday 10th August 2019. I found the production to be of an exceptionally high quality. The audience of a community production is typically constituted of family members, neighbours, friends and work colleagues who join with traditional theatregoers in the city who are already "devoted supporters of local theatre."[39] This squares with my observation of the audience of *Coram Boy*. However, due to a change in Customer Relationship Management software, NP has been unable to provide any data on the people who came to see the community project, and this is disappointing. My observations may comprise the only objective and sustained evaluation beyond that which is internal to NP. Where community members might have felt "othered" from and auxiliary to theatre professionals, my observations suggest that a putative insider-outsider dichotomy was broken down. To some extent, this transferred to the audience too, but this range and scope remains invisible. I think in the future it would be valuable to capture in summative form how children, partners and friends tested participants on their lines, driving them to rehearsals and, to differing extents, sharing the experience over four months. The pride in the room was palpable and such conversations were being had. I sat behind two young children who were excitedly fixed on spotting their elder sister on stage and gave her a big wave.

Reviews in the local press and by theatre critics were glowing, with the reviewer for Nottingham's independent and community-facing arts and culture magazine *Left Lion* judging, "many fellow audience members were left wiping tears away, confirming the sentiment that had been building in my mind through the production: this was one of, if not the best play[s] I had ever seen."[40] Even the rehearsal process was reviewed in *Left Lion,* and the project situated in a continuum of NP's "long-standing tradition for making ground-

[39] This is how Nadine Holdsworth, Jane Milling, and Helen Nicholson define such audiences in "Theatre, Performance, and the Amateur Turn," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 27, no. 1 (2017), 12.
[40] Sharon Stevens, "Theatre Review: Coram Boy," *Left Lion*, August 9, 2019, https://www.leftlion.co.uk/read/2019/august/coram-boy-theatre-review/#.XU1eDBS-28U.twitter.

breaking theatre with, and for, local people."[41] To some extent, *Left Lion* is fulfilling a role for NP by publicising its community ventures along with main productions, as it does for all arts venues in the city. Building on such reviews and extending them via participant responses to reviews on the NP website could better ensure the legacy of a project and promote it to other potential participants. Philip Lowe, writing on behalf of East Midlands Theatre, assessed that, "what has been achieved is an astonishing, accomplished production of a difficult and demanding story, with a hugely talented community cast and a very hard-working production team."[42] There is more to narrate about what was achieved, and if opportunities were missed, they could be picked up again in advance of the next community project in order to promote it. The professional critical response is traditionally a significant marker and arbiter of quality, but for a community project, the community is arguably just as, if not more, central in judging the venture's success. Theatre critic Lyn Gardner observed in the *Guardian* newspaper, "I can only ever review what I see. I can't review intent, and I can't review the fact that the people putting on the show will almost certainly have expended much time and effort and may even have mortgaged someone's granny's house to raise the money."[43] Her context was a community project at the National Theatre Wales in 2013, but her argument applies across the board and she acknowledged that a performance is "but the tip of the iceberg" that constitutes a much larger endeavour. That much of the success or failure of a project is withheld from external view in unseen backstage processes leaves the professional critical response somewhat diminished in the community context. Nevertheless, I am unsure that Coram Boy would have been such a definitive success for NP

[41] Ashley Carter, "Preview: Nottingham Playhouse's Coram Boy," *Left Lion*, July 17, 2019, at https://leftlion.co.uk/features/2019/07/preview-nottingham-playhouses-coram-boy/
[42]Philip Lowe, "Review: Coram Boy," *East Midlands Theatre*, August 9, 2019, https://eastmidlandstheatre.com/2019/08/09/review-coram-boy-nottingham-playhouse-community-at-albert-hall-nottingham/; *Left Lion* was initiated in 2003 by a group of 3 friends who had been to school together. Its reviewers are local people.
[43] Lyn Gardner, "Time we stopped patronising community theatre," *The Guardian*, March 13, 2013, sec. Stage, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2013/mar/13/stop-patronising-community-theatre

had the critical response not been favourable; it carries weight as a measurement of success on commercial and reputational levels. I also believe that the decision to professionalise the experience was made to ensure participants would achieve quality outcomes. Gardner concluded with her hope that "in the coming years,…theatres and companies rightly realise that they have a significant role to play in making meaningful connections with communities."[44]

When writing about community theatre, it is crucial to address the quality of the art produced. Is the work's cultural value higher if the performance quality is judged highly? Who decides what may be of cultural value to any individual participant or to a community audience? These questions are something that funding bodies and policymakers are concerned with defining and understanding in context, local as well as national.[45] Arts organisations are having to diversify their income streams because core funding is no longer sufficient to sustain an organisation. Many theatres are having to fund-raise or undertake projects which generate money to cover a basic programme and their overheads. The Participation Department at NP relies on income from community groups when participants can afford to pay for their place. For example, The Young Companies are weekly groups which run termly, most cost £80 to £90 for ten weeks in 2023 with a small number of bursaries available which are funded by NP.[46] The department also relies on a fundraiser who writes bids for external funding. Berry, Director of Participation, ensures that there are always one or two bids in process at any one time. A continual cycle of bidding for funding is precarious and problematic when it comes to ensuring the legacy of the work of the Participation Department. Short-term projects such as Coram Boy are an essential and

[44] Gardner, "Time we stopped patronising community theatre,"
[45] Toby Lowe, "Quality in Participatory Art," *Cultural Value Initiative*, February 4, 2015, http://culturalvalueinitiative.org/2015/02/04/quality-participatory-art-toby-lowe/.
[46]NP runs a number of groups under the Young Company name; Infant Young Company (ages 5-7) Junior Young Company (ages 8-11), Senior Young Company (ages 12-16), Open Stage Young Company (For learning disabled and/or autistic young people aged 10-18).

targeted response to a contemporary fundraising landscape and an example of combining funding streams insofar as it was supported by core funding, ticket sales and fundraising specific to the project.[47] NP applied for and was awarded £9,900 by the Big Lottery Fund because this project could evidence that it would:

- bring people together and build strong relationships in and across communities;
- improve the places and spaces that matter to communities;
- enable more people to fulfil their potential by working to address issues at the earliest possible stage.[48]

Funded organisations are encouraged to publicly announce their grant successes and acknowledge National Lottery players in the material around the project, but for funding under £10,000 there is no formal evaluation requirement.[49] This means that projects can evolve and to some extent depart from the remit described in the application, a necessary caveat for a community project where it is sometimes necessary to pivot to different emphases while maintaining the core functions described above.

The ACE funding (Band 3) which NP receives stipulates conditions that include the requirement to evaluate the work produced. ACE also selected Coram Boy for an Artistic and Quality Assessment (AQA) because it falls within the assessment criteria for "participatory work where the primary reason is to engage in the arts" and "engagement projects that have social and/or informal learning outcomes, and may be using the arts as a tool to engage."[50] Funders establish parameters according to which the quality of participatory arts is

[47] Most notably, Arts Council England and Nottingham City Council. A full list for can be found for 52 Weeks ending 31 March 2019 at http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/Accounts/Ends42/0001109342_AC_20190331_E_C.PDF.p25.
[48] These are criteria specified in the National Lottery Funding Application, The National Lottery Community Fund, https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/national-lottery-awards-for-all-england.
[49]The National Lottery Community Fund, "Promoting Your Project," accessed October 19, 2023, https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/managing-your-grant/promoting-your-project.
[50] Arts Council England, "Artistic and Quality Assessment," accessed October 19, 2023, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/national-portfolio-organisations/artistic-and-quality-assessment-0.

evidenced, not solely by outcomes but also by creation and development processes. Some funders require proof of impact in order to make their own case for support, but it also means that a Participation Department needs to dovetail multiple external bids to different, and continually changing, criteria, and to seek out more and more potential funding sources in order to ensure that the community is served, and that underserved communities participate in NP's programming. In future, projects such as Coram Boy could help NP to demonstrate its contribution to the Cultural Communities outcome of ACE's Let's Create strategy in which ACE aims to target investment to "bring people together" through an "outward-looking" cultural sector.[51] Maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship with ACE is currently integral to the financial success of NP as an organisation.

Examining the Coram Boy project holistically outside of the final performances that were its culmination, it is clear that multiple other aspects contributed to a high-quality overall experience for all involved. A large cache of digital content was produced during the casting process and rehearsals. There are now nine YouTube videos and an episode of the NP podcast, the Nottingham Playcast, which is entitled "Coram Boy Special Edition."[52] The podcast includes interviews with Jack and Chloe, members of the community cast, followed by a conversation between Musical Director, Alex Patterson, and Penford, during which Penford was emphatic: "I am hoping that it is going to be one of the cultural highlights of the calendar in Nottingham." Digital content should be used more consistently. It is a promotional device that inspires as well as engages potential participants for future projects and a means to evidence the success of past projects, a necessary component of future

[51] Arts Council England, "Let's Create" (London: Arts Council England, 2020), 37-38.
[52]Nottingham Playhouse, "Coram Boy Playlist," YouTube, accessed October 19, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPbOSvxFvoo&list=PL2je32IohYsRkOlaNI4FAiQgSDQkzZ1GM; Nottingham Playcast, "Coram Boy Special Edition," Podcast (Apple Podcasts, July 4, 2019), https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/episode-015-coram-boy-special-edition/id1372696051?i=1000443627510.

funding bids, and, perhaps most notably in the immediate community context, podcasts and videos constitute souvenirs for the cast of *Coram Boy* and their families.

The Coram Charity was involved in the project in several ways. Still based at the original London site of the foundling hospital but now encompassing "a group of specialist organisations," Coram's mission is "to help more than a million children, young people, professionals and families every year."[53] The Coram Charity got in touch with Penford early in the production cycle, and he visited Coram's headquarters to explore its history in its extensive archives, as valuable context for the project.[54] Coram promoted the production on its website, emphasising its "long standing history with the arts."[55] Two local representatives of the charity delivered a presentation during a rehearsal early in the schedule to provide historical context for the community cast. Coram also had a front-of-house presence at performances, harnessing the NP project to raise awareness, educate, and fundraise while highlighting its support. There was distinct media interest in the story of one community cast choir member who discovered that her great-great-grandfather had been a foundling who was taken in by the Coram hospital in 1876. That her grandmother began telling her this part of her family history as a result of NP's project was a striking effect of this initiative, and 20-year-old Kai Dennett learnt much more about the charity as a result of it, telling the Nottingham *Evening Post*, "My family [is] really excited to see me perform and proud that I'm a part of it – it feels like our history has come full circle." [56]

Some kind of partnership with the charity was presaged by the choice of play but the project was led by NP with no assumption made about co-facilitation. A visit to explain the

[53] Coram, "About Us," accessed November 15, 2019, https://www.coram.org.uk/about-us.
[54] Details of the archive can be found at: https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/08adcdf7-4568-4221-b844-dca8a480cd4e.
[55]Coram, "Coram Boy comes to the Nottingham Playhouse," accessed November 15, 2021, https://www.coram.org.uk/news/coram-boy-comes-nottingham-playhouse.
[56] Simon Wilson, "My great-great-grandfather was a Coram Boy - Nottingham Playhouse cast member digs into family history ahead of play's run," *Nottingham Evening Post*, August 1, 2019, [online version].

Thomas Coram Foundation's history is very different from sustained input over the project, co-planned sessions, or a co-decision to promote a pedagogical or social justice agenda. A relationship with the charity was forged as a result of Coram's interest and underpinned by Penford's visit. It was mutually beneficial without NP ceding responsibilities that are inherent in co-creation and co-production. NP might think about the relationship with the charity that developed for how that could provide a supporting structure for future community projects if plays are selected with a national charity in mind, or, indeed, focus more on local charities that have a connection to Nottingham communities. NP has evidenced that meaningful involvement with local charities is possible for main-stage productions, notably with the "Access Nottingham" community exhibition which accompanied the 2023 production of *The Real & Imagined History of the Elephant Man*. The exhibition displayed "stories and histories from deaf & disabled people in Nottinghamshire," including "braille technology through time, the journeys of historical organisations and schools" as well as photography.[57] The exhibition was a result of partnerships between NP and Disability Support, My Sight Notts, the National Federation of the Blind (Notts), Nottinghamshire Deaf Society, Nottinghamshire Disabled People's Movement, and Portland College. Embedding partnerships with external organisations or charities into community projects could increase impact because they provide expertise, resources, and connections to which NP may otherwise not have access.

The people involved with *Coram Boy* are referred to, in NP's promotional materials, as "community performers," "creatives," "a community choir," and "a company," but never as amateurs. The project made people feel part of a professional production, but are community theatre experiences only valid if they attempt to professionalise the community?

[57] Nottingham Playhouse, "Access Nottingham," Nottingham Playhouse, accessed October 19, 2023, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/events/access-nottingham/.

The term "amateur" suggests a complicated relationship between non-professional and professional artists but are amateur cultural practices always and expressly distinct from professional practices? It could be argued that the Coram Boy project put into tension what should be considered an "amateur" or a "community" production, and that it opened up the term "professional" by converging participation processes into a project that was perceived, at least in part, in professional terms.[58] It was a professional experience for participants and audiences if, as Stephen Pritchard suggests, the conventional narrative in participatory arts "equates 'quality' with 'good experiences" and audience members as well as participants find value in experiences where what is "good" is measured capaciously.[59] For example, cast members spoke of feeling challenged by "the opportunity to break out of my type casting and challenge my abilities" and for how the project "made demands of me that require me to 'stretch' myself..."[60] These may not have been uniformly "good experiences" in each rehearsal, but, once rising to the challenge, participants have a lasting memory of personal goals achieved— and that too may be a constituent marker of the quality of the overall experience.

There is a significant difference between going into a community that is already formed, as much as a community can ever be a stable entity, and creating a community, whether around a shared characteristic, place or event or, as in this case, a community theatre project. Coram Boy used both methods of approach insofar as participants were recruited in a somewhat targeted way from groups that NP runs, and Berry has suggested that "Playhouse Family" is a way he would describe those particular participants' relationship to NP.[61] If

[58] For an essay that pivots on some of these terms, see Nadine Holdsworth, Jane Milling, and Helen Nicholson, "Theatre, Performance and the Amateur Turn," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 27, no. 1 (2017), 8.
[59] Stephen Pritchard, "Quality in participatory arts: fit for whose purpose & in need of qualification?" Colouring in Culture accessed November 1, 2019, http://colouringinculture.org/blog/2015/02/09/quality-in-participatory-arts-fit-for-whose-purpose-in-need-of-qualification.
[60] Survey undertaken by Nottingham Playhouse "Coram Boy basic stats evals."
[61] Martin Berry, interview by Laura Ewart, February 11, 2021.

participants are seen as family, this speaks to the importance of staff welcoming them inside and suggests that, once inside, they may have a role to play that extends beyond the project's end. In Berry's team, there is an acute awareness of the challenges of outreach work and the precise nature in which relationships can be built with pre-existing communities, but creating a community may not be the express intention of all staff members at NP. It can and does come about due to the work of the Participation Department, and of its Artistic Director when he throws his expertise behind a community project, but my research and observations suggest that NP should prioritise this work and make its commitment in this area more visible on the website and in the city if it is to engage underserved communities as well as those who are already loyal to the theatre.

Members of staff have felt the impact of the Coram Boy project. A reunion event held on the 28th November 2019 underlined staff interest in the continuing development of the shared experience. I was invited to attend with some thirty members of the cast and choir and observed a wide age range. Penford gave a short speech emphasising the bond created and said he had missed working with the cast. A 5-minute video was shown, "The Coram Boy Story," celebrating the success and creating a legacy for the project. The first session of the newly formed NP Choir took place on the same night, led by Alex Patterson, musical director of Coram Boy, itself a continuation of the musical element so significant in the production of *Coram Boy*. NP announced that it hoped to produce its next large-scale community participation project in 2021, with planning beginning in early 2020. However, the events of the coming two years would not see planning for the next project begin until the middle of 2023.

Adapting Through Crisis: The COVID-19 Pandemic Response, 2020-2022

Five months after the Coram Boy reunion in November 2019, the Chief Medical Officer for England, Professor Chris Whitty, released a statement on the 5th March 2020 confirming the first English death due to C-19.[62] On the 12th March, Prime Minister Boris Johnson confirmed that C-19 was a global pandemic and the country was facing "the worst public health crisis for a generation."[63] On the same day, NP released a statement via its social media accounts:

> We are open for business and have no current plans to cancel any events. Our top priority is to ensure the health and safety of customers and staff, and we will continue to follow Government advice on Coronavirus. If the situation changes, we will notify all affected customers.[64]

By the 16th March 2020, though, the situation had already accelerated, and Johnson advised, "We need people to start working from home where they possibly can and you should avoid pubs, clubs, theatres, and other such social venues."[65] He included theatres with pubs, clubs, and other venues where people socialise. The unwieldiness of suggesting patrons not attend rather than declaring it a legal requirement that theatres close meant that UK theatres were faced with a challenging decision: close without access to standard business interruption insurance coverage, or remain open, face criticism for doing so and potentially place both employees and audiences at risk. Creative industry leaders expressed their concerns, with

[62] Department of Health and Social Care, "CMO for England Announces First Death of Patient with COVID-19," March 5, 2020, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cmo-for-england-announces-first-death-of-patient-with-covid-19.
[63] Boris Johnson, "Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19), 12 March 2020," March 16, 2020, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-coronavirus-12-march-2020.
[64]Nottingham Playhouse, "We Are Open for Business...," X (formerly Twitter), March 12, 2020, https://twitter.com/NottmPlayhouse/status/1238097431243481088; Nottingham Playhouse, "We Are Open for Business...," Facebook, March 12, 2022.
[65] Boris Johnson, "Prime Minister's Statement on Coronavirus (COVID-19), 16 March 2020," March 16, 2020, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-coronavirus-16-march-2020.

Caroline Norbury, Chief Executive of the Creative Industries Federation and Creative England, writing:

> As the social distancing measures announced this afternoon are only advisory, rather than an outright ban, we are deeply concerned that creative organisations and cultural spaces will find they are unable to claim compensation for the huge losses they will experience as a result of C-19.

Philippa Childs, head of The Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union (BECTU), contended:

> The government needs to be clearer in its guidance and its language so that theatre companies can claim insurance to ensure that staff are not left without pay for weeks on end. It is failing to provide the clarity it needs to, and this must be addressed immediately.[66]

Government advice that the general public should avoid theatres led to the Society of London Theatre (SOLT) and UK Theatre of which NP is a member, instructing member venues to close that same evening. They published a joint statement the following day:

> Following official government advice issued on Monday, 16th March, which stipulates that people should avoid public buildings, including theatres, SOLT and UK Theatre have advised member venues to close to help slow the spread of coronavirus.[67]

NP was running around fifty classes, courses, and workshops, all of which were immediately suspended. Overnight, theatres went from normalcy to complete shutdown of their physical buildings and all activities. Publicity focused on cancelling performances, but

[66] Giverny Masso, "Coronavirus: Leading Theatre Lawyer Warns Unclear Government Advice Could See Insurers Avoiding Playouts," *The Stage*, March 17, 2020, https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/coronavirus-leading-theatre-lawyer-warns-unclear-government-advice-could-see-insurers-avoiding-payouts.
[67] UK Theatre, "Theatre Closures to Slow Spread of Coronavirus," March 16, 2022, https://uktheatre.org/theatre-industry/news/theatre-industry-coronavirus-advice-16-march-2020/.

community work was impacted dramatically. On 20th March 2020, a video message from Penford, was uploaded to YouTube:

> We're really sad that we're having to postpone so many of our Spring productions and the work we do in the community. That's an awful lot of work being put on hold. The financial impact on the Playhouse and the theatre workers that we employ is going to be great. However, we're trying to focus on positives. Last week, we organised a photo shoot for our pantomime *Beauty and the Beast*. You could consider making a donation to the Playhouse, however, why not consider buying your ticket for *Beauty and the Beast* now. That's the way you can support your local theatre and at the same time have something to look forward to yourself. Pantomime is something we do really rather well, and we really value your support in these difficult times. Thank you. [68]

Penford's position as Artistic Director often sees him take the role of spokesperson for NP, embodying the public face of the organisation. However, there may be opportunities where it is appropriate to increase the visibility of the Director of Participation, especially when communications pertain to community engagement beyond the main stage. This period was one of immensely rapid change and forced adaptation to increasing safety measures that needed to be designed quickly to safeguard an anxious public, but NP also needed to balance internal and external forces in order to remain relevant, profitable, and civic-minded.

Research undertaken before the pandemic suggests that the arts are valuable coping tools during stressful situations. A systematic review conducted in 2018 analysed 37 case

[68] Nottingham Playhouse, "A Message from Adam Penford," YouTube video, March 20, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SepXfOlVyU&feature=emb_logo.

studies of creative arts intervention for stress management and its prevention. The review found that the arts positively impacted perceived stress on the part of participants and improved stress management. More than 80% of studies analysed by the report found a "significant improvement in one of their stress-related outcomes." Additionally, creative arts interventions were found to "reduce anxiety levels" and improve mood.[69] Research undertaken since evidences more strongly that the arts and creativity have healing and coping effects which were of considerable use during a worldwide pandemic, and that may now augur positive change: "experiencing adversity may promote motivation to engage in creative endeavours because individuals rely on creative engagement to overcome the constraints and disadvantages caused by adverse events."[70] With critical analysis now crystallised by hindsight, it is evident that some social barriers to accessing theatre were lessened, and that others, such as the digital participation gap, were sustained. The digital participation gap differs from the digital divide insofar as the divide refers to access whilst addressing the participation gap requires focus on cultural factors that contribute to the inequality of opportunities for participation.[71] Researchers in the Behavioural Sciences uncovered that the pandemic "created new opportunities and motivations" for people who had been "traditionally excluded" from the arts while others were supported "to maintain their usual levels of engagement." The arts play an important role in the regulation of emotions, sometimes by functioning as an "avoidance strategy" and sometimes as a form of "self-

[69] Lily Martin et al., "Creative Arts Interventions for Stress Management and Prevention—a Systematic Review," *Behavioural Sciences* 8, no. 2 (February 22, 2018), 14; Alexandra Bradbury et al., "The Role of the Arts during the COVID-19 Pandemic," Arts Council England (London: University College London, August 31, 2021), https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/UCL_Role_of_the_Arts_during_COVID_13012022_0.pdf.; Frederic Kiernan et al.,"The Role of Artistic Creative Activities in Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic in Australia," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (August 25, 2021), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.696202.

[70] Whilst this study focused on the US, China, and Germany as its case studies, some of the findings are similarly relevant to the UK; Min Tang, Sebastian Hofreiter, Xinwen Bai, and Vignesh Murugavel, "Creativity as a Means to Well-Being in Times of COVID-19 Pandemic: Results of a Cross-Cultural Study," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (March 9,2021), 11.

[71] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York, London: New York University Press, 2006), 258.

development."[72] New and different "dynamics" and "patterns" of arts engagement could lead to the expansion of the benefits with new communities.

In May 2023, Nottingham City Council published its report on the impact of C-19 on the health of the city and asserted:

> An integrated recovery will provide the most effective impact. The idea that recovery should be focussed on one sector would be short-sighted. Health and wellbeing have been impacted across all areas of society and a recovery process that is integrated is likely to have the greatest chance of success. The recovery should have the community at its heart. A personalised approach can be more successful in engaging certain population groups and areas of the city. Engaging in co-production by using local assets such as volunteers, social networks and charity, faith and community groups could play a vital role.

While the report highlighted community and "co-production," the arts were only mentioned once as "a mitigating factor" in the section on education, and then only in terms of a Council-led citywide project for children.[73] An opportunity was missed. The work that arts and cultural institutions pursued is not mentioned, but it was significant, and included Nottinghamshire Libraries commissioning poet Panya Banjoko to co-create a poem to celebrate the power of reading for individual and collective wellbeing during lockdown in October 2020.[74] NP, like other arts organisations, submitted its annual report to the City Council, enumerating its innovative online activity over 2020, but rather than highlight and

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[72] Hei Wan Mak, Meg Fluharty, and Daisy Fancourt, "Predictors and Impact of Arts Engagement During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Analyses of Data From 19,384 Adults in the COVID-19 Social Study," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021), 15.

[73] The report states, "During the 2020 school summer holiday, a city wide COVID-19 safe holiday activity programme was created which ran for five weeks Monday-Friday. A project team was set up to facilitate a programme incorporating sport, arts, and crafts, as well as mental health and wellbeing support for children."; Nottingham City Council, *The Health Impact of COVID-19 on Nottingham City*, May 2023, 22 at Impact%20of%20COVID%20JSNA%20Chapter%20FINAL%20May%202023.pdf.

[74] For the poem created out of the community's words, see: https://www.inspireculture.org.uk/whats-on/online/agm2020panyabanjoko/

explicate successes, the Council's report falls into generic statements and aims when there was much for the city to learn and share from the experience. As theatres continue to develop beyond an emphasis on aesthetics and with a greater awareness of their socio-cultural role, my research suggests that theatres have much more to learn from their responses to C-19.

One of the main ways NP could engage with communities in Nottingham was by creating and disseminating digital outputs. In a period when live in-person main-stage content could neither be created nor performed, the participation sector was the element of NP's work that was best able to pivot online. I followed events closely to investigate how in this challenging and unprecedented period the Participation Department would refocus its community engagement work. There should be full recognition of its importance as one of the few ways in which NP could stay connected with the diverse communities it hopes, and is expected, to serve. I interviewed Berry who took on the post of Director of Participation in 2019, about his experience of leading his department through the pandemic.[75] Keeping his eye on the news and after learning formally that the theatre would close via an email from the Head of Operations, Berry sensed then that this would be "a dramatic but short-lived episode." His immediate thoughts were for his team reckoning with the emotional and logistical effects of the announcement. Once it became apparent that restrictions would not be lifted soon, NP had to decide its approach to community engagement and Berry summarises, "We felt very strongly that we should do everything we could, which was ultimately quite a lot."[76] He describes two primary reasons why it was NP's duty to serve the city: NP is a publicly funded organisation, "a difference maker to people's lives," and in order to sustain staff wellbeing: "there are many people who work in the arts for whom their job is their vocation, their love, their passion, and to just stop doing that could have quite a serious

[75] Martin Berry, Interview by Laura Ewart, March 1, 2023. In 2023, Martin Berry's title changed from Head of Participation to Director of Participation.
[76] Martin Berry, Interview by Laura Ewart, March 1, 2023

effect."[77] Community engagement around the arts is vocational work. Before the pandemic, Vincent Dubois detailed how the choice to work in participation encompasses "culture" as a vocation and Steven Hadley, whose focus is audience development as the combined effort of staff and stakeholders, extends that idea further, to recognise that individuals in roles like Berry's enable "democratic forms of access to culture – such that issues of class, educational attainment, geographic location or wealth should not impede the cultural engagement (and thus betterment) of the citizenry."[78] The theatre industry does not always or uniformly view or understand community engagement work or assume that it carries the same prestige as other artistic roles, though. "Doing everything" became "a policy decision" at NP, with the Participation Department working hard "to continue absolutely everything in an adapted form." Berry recalls that the starting point of every conversation during the pandemic was, "How are we going to make it work?" And work it did. NP ran 29 participation programmes and saw almost 8,000 engagements over the course of the pandemic.[79]

When summarising how he directed the Participation Department through the pandemic, Berry assessed that, as a result of adapting quickly:

> We remained engaged with a huge percentage, not everyone, but a huge percentage of the people we were already engaged with, and we've come out the other side. We hope, although it is almost impossible to measure, that people are better off than they would have been had we not done that. We could have stopped. I do not think anyone would have blamed us if we had just shut up shop; some theatres did, you know, a 'see you when it's over' kind of thing. But that wasn't our approach.[80]

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[77] Martin Berry, Interview by Laura Ewart, March 1, 2023

[78] Vincent Dubois, *Culture as a Vocation: Sociology of Career Choices in Cultural Management* trans., Jean-Yves Bart (London: Routledge, 2016), 147. Steven Hadley, "Are We the Baddies? Audience Development, Cultural Policy and Ideological Precarity," in *Routledge Companion to Audiences and the Performing Arts*, ed. Matthew Reason et al. (Routledge, 2022), 147.

[79] Martin Berry, Interview by Laura Ewart, March 1, 2023; Nottingham Playhouse Trust Limited, "Nottingham Playhouse Trust Limited Directors' Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 52 Weeks ended: 28 March 2021," Companies House, January 7, 2022, 4-5.

[80] Martin Berry, interview by Laura Ewart, March 1, 2023.

March 2020 unfurled into a continually escalating period of change with no clear end in sight. NP responded quickly, launching its first piece of new digital theatre in May 2020, an interactive Zoom play for children aged five to nine years old called *Noah and the Peacock,* written by Jeff James. James is a theatre director, writer, and dramaturg who, at the beginning of 2020, was looking forward to what he described as "a very busy year" having booked two projects, one of which was *First Touch*, the first commission made by artistic director Penford when newly appointed in 2017 and written by Nathaniel Price. At the end of 2019, James had been invited to direct the production, which was slated to open in June 2020: "The project had lots of momentum and energy, and I was trying to get that together quickly, and then it got postponed indefinitely."[81] With his other projects stalled too, three weeks into the first lockdown, James became interested in using the video conferencing platform Zoom to create and share theatre. He wrote *Noah and the Peacock* specifically to be performed over Zoom and approached several theatres with his proposal: "One other theatre said they were interested, but Adam (Penford) just moved a bit more quickly and seemed to have more idea of how to move it forward." The speed and agility with which NP was able to move impressed James because his feeling was that "it had to happen quickly…when I first had the idea, that was the perfect moment to do it."[82] NP's risk-taking was rewarded. *Noah and the Peacock* proved to be an innovative, highly interactive production. Video shared by NP before the show featured actors from the upcoming performance asking children to dress up as one of Noah's animals and to find household items, such as an electric toothbrush or a pair of rubber gloves, to create sound effects for the show. Writing for *The Guardian* newspaper, Chris Wiegand highlighted "smart use of familiar technology" whilst commending how

[81] Adam Penford, "It was the first play I commissioned when I arrived" How First Touch came to Nottingham Playhouse," Nottingham Playhouse, April 28, 2022, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/news/the-significance-of-first-touch-premiering-at-nottingham-playhouse/; Jeff James, interview by Laura Ewart, March 6, 2023; *First Touch* was finally able to open on 21st May 2022 following a two-year delay because of the pandemic.
[82] Jeff James, interview by Laura Ewart, March 6, 2023.

James and NP succeeded in maintaining the "warmth and interaction essential to children's theatre." Howard Loxton of the *British Theatre Guide* and Nathan Blue writing for *Everything Theatre* requested more performances, with Loxton encouraging readers and viewers to "demand" that NP "put on another live run."[83] Visit Nottinghamshire shared feedback that was collated by NP from children who watched the play in a promotional video. It was uniformly positive: "Amazing. Funny and Fantastic" and "I loved it so much."[84] During C-19, agile and responsive programming would lead to positive outcomes like the success of *Noah and the Peacock*. An organisational stance and policy decision to try to "do everything," spearheaded by the Participation Department, was gaining momentum and would lead to further confidence in pursuing community engagement during the much longer period though which the pandemic and lockdowns would persist and change the ways in which we all engaged with theatre.[85]

Organisations that had already been engaging well in the digital space fared better in the circumstances created by the pandemic. In a 2016 report commissioned by ACE, UK Theatre and SOLT, the "wide range of positive effects" of "Live-to-Digital work" were assessed as having "re-energised audiences who can now access theatre content; a wider range of productions on offer; and a 'halo effect' of increased interest in their live repertoire."[86] Many of these potentially positive effects had been previously overlooked by the sector. Beginning in 2013, ACE and the National Endowment for Science, Technology, and the Arts (Nesta) reported shared concern about the levels of technology harnessed by arts

[83]Howard Loxton, "Noah and the Peacock," *British Theatre Guide*, June 19, 2020, https://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/noah-and-the-pe-19047.; Nathan Blue, "Noah and The Peacock, Online from Nottingham Playhouse – Review," *Everything Theatre*, June 22, 2020, https://everything-theatre.co.uk/2020/06/noah-and-the-peacock-online-from-nottingham-playhouse-review/.
[84] Visit Nottinghamshire, "Reviews of Noah and the Peacock Zoom Play from Nottingham Playhouse," Facebook video, August 11, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/VisitNotts/videos/283291952973692/.
[85] Martin Berry, interview by Laura Ewart, March 1, 2023.
[86] AEA Consulting for Arts Council England, UK Theatre, and Society of London Theatre, "FROM LIVE-TO-DIGITAL" October 2016, 16, https://aeaconsulting.com/uploads/200002/1476388267228/AEA_-_From_Live_to_Digital_-_complete__FINAL.pdf.

and cultural organisations, specifically theatres. The ACE and Nesta digital culture survey undertaken in 2019 found that only 54% of theatre organisations perceived digital technology to be essential/important for creation, and that only 46% perceived digital platforms to be essential/important for distribution and exhibition. The survey discerned that theatre organisations were significantly less likely than the rest of the sector to digitise live art. This needed to change, and in the forced context of the pandemic it did, with theatres adapting far more rapidly to the digital landscape.[87] NP had already been creating digital outputs and, since 2017, has employed a Digital Producer who is responsible for the planning, development, and delivery of digital projects, and who creates trailers for upcoming plays and promotional videos. Before May 2020, NP's most notable regular digital output was a podcast series, Nottingham Playcast, initiated in March 2018. As of January 2023, there have been sixty podcast episodes, often focusing on a production, but the podcast received a boost when, between April 2020 and August 2021, Craig Gilbert, Amplify Producer at NP (2019-2023), interviewed 28 artists "of national and international renown."[88] His subjects represented a panoply of professions: writers, directors, theatre makers, choreographers, and stage managers.[89] By creating new work and utilising extant digital outputs too, NP provided instant communication channels for its public and communities. The Digital Producer role— a step beyond in the sector— and the established podcast were significant factors in ensuring NP could bring theatre into people's homes during the pandemic.

Most importantly for engagement and continuity, over the course of 2020, NP explored alternative digital outputs and adapted long-standing events. For example, Family Fest usually runs over the Easter and October half-term school holidays and comprises a

[87] Nesta, "Digital Culture 2019: Theatre Fact Sheet" (Arts Council England, February 7, 2020), 2, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/DC2019-Theatre-factsheet.pdf
[88] Amplify is the name of the artist development programme at NP which focuses on the development of East-Midlands based theatre makers.
[89] Nottingham Playhouse, "Nottingham Playcast on Apple Podcasts," Apple Podcasts, accessed October 19, 2023, https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/nottingham-playcast/id1372696051.

programme of events, workshops, and performances for children, from toddlers to eleven-year-olds at the transition of leaving primary education for secondary. The Easter holiday fell between the 6th and 17th April in 2020, and due to government restrictions designed to control C-19, all plans for physical events had to be abandoned. NP announced via a video on its social media channels that Family Fest would therefore go digital: "Whilst our doors are closed, we'll be bringing all the fun of Family Fest live to your living room. Head over to our website, or keep an eye on social media, for loads of family fun and activities!"[90] Activities included Storytimes accessible via YouTube, like "Gem, the Little Worker Bee," created and performed by Narisha Lawson; a digital book "Up, Up and Away!" which followed the characters of Granny Owl and Little Owl and was accessible by PDF; and a pre-recorded film in which Circus Hub Nottingham taught participants how to make Poi socks, a form of tethered weight used as a prop for dance. NP also hosted a crafting competition online whereby children created characters in the pantomime *Beauty and the Beast* to win tickets to a performance still slated for the post-pandemic future.[91] As part of Family Fest, Baby Disco streamed via Facebook Live on the 17th April and was the most well-attended participation event ever recorded by NP, with 1075 people participating in the live stream. In excess of 3,800 parents and children accessed free Family Fest activities over the two weeks of its 2020 run.[92]

Smaller one-off projects were also instigated as novel opportunities for community engagement in a difficult period, like Playhouse Pen Pals connecting individuals isolated by C-19 which encouraged them to correspond throughout the lockdown. More than 200 people signed up for the scheme, with 170 letters exchanged.[93] NP's choir (a legacy of the Coram

[90] Nottingham Playhouse, "Family Fest Goes Digital!," YouTube video, April 6, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2ar71Iliwg&feature=emb_title.
[91]Nottingham Playhouse, "Family Fest in Your Living Room," April 10, 2020, accessed July 13, 2020, https://www.nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/participation/community/digital-playhouse/family-fest/.
[92]Nottingham Playhouse, "2019/2020 Annual Participation Report for Nottingham City Council," n.d. 14
[93] Nottingham Playhouse, "2019/2020 Annual Participation Report," n.d. 14

Boy community project of 2019) and its leader Alex Patterson, recruited "budding singers" to participate in The Big Distan-Sing, which would coalesce in a music video featuring a compilation of clips sent in by the public. It launched on 15th April 2020 with support from BBC Radio Nottingham. The song chosen by a public poll was "You Can't Stop the Beat" from the musical *Hairspray* and the video, released on 16th September 2020, showcased submissions from all 86 people who took part across the city. As of October 2023, this YouTube video had attracted 739 views which, when compared to other videos on the NP YouTube channel, is above usual viewing figures.[94] These small and short-term projects were an inventive way for NP to produce low-cost but high-visibility outputs to engage its established local audience and wider communities. It is not necessary for people to return to these videos now; they were highly successful in the moment they were needed. Nevertheless, their existence on YouTube is a legacy for participants and evidence of digital innovation in a pandemic. And there is much to be learned from that innovation at the local as well as national level.

For example, on Thursday evenings over three months, between April and July 2020, the National Theatre released a pre-recorded performance as a part of its event cinema programme. Having partnered with the National Theatre for a cinema broadcast of Alan Bennett's *The Madness of George III*, which was filmed at NP in November 2018, the production was released under the aegis of "National Theatre at Home" in June 2020. Free-to-watch plays premiered via live stream on YouTube and were available throughout the following week [95] Sixteen productions were watched more than 15 million times in 173

[94] Nottingham Playhouse, "The Big Distan-Sing - You Can't Stop Our Beat," YouTube video, September 16, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wThAL9Sgk-Q&ab_channel=NottinghamPlayhouse.
[95] The National Theatre had been successfully recording and screening plays in cinemas internationally since 2009 as part of NT Live. In April 2020 the National Theatre decided to make a recording of a play available weekly for free via YouTube the scheme ran for sixteen weeks, reached 15 million people and was known as National Theatre at Home.

countries.[96] NP was innovative in this regard as the first regional theatre to be involved in the National Theatre's scheme, with its recording of *The Madness of George III* premiering at 7pm on Thursday, 11th June. Penford celebrated the decision to share the performance more widely:

> It remains as pertinent as ever in its exploration of mental health, power and political divide. The production became the highest grossing drama in the Playhouse's seventy-year history, and I'm delighted more people will be able to experience the work of this highly talented cast and creative team.[97]

Not only did the live stream publicise the quality of productions at NP, but it also became a lucrative fundraising opportunity. Information on how to donate to the Curtain Up Appeal via text message was displayed before the screening, during the interval and after the performance on the live stream. The Curtain Up fundraising appeal was launched in April 2020 to raise funds to support NP to reopen the whole theatre, bring back postponed shows, create new productions and re-start classes, courses, youth theatres, and work in the community.[98] Between April 2020 and November 2021, more than £100,000 was donated to the appeal to support NP opening its doors as soon as possible after the pandemic.[99] NP pivoted online on its own terms and took advantage of a new external opportunity with the National Theatre, but some long-standing features in its programme were much harder to address in the context of a pandemic. Much can be learned from how NP approached an integral production of the theatre year, and a historical and financial mainstay: the pantomime.

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[96] Emma Keith, "The road to National Theatre at Home," National Theatre, accessed January 10, 2023, https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/blog/road-national-theatre-home.
[97]Nottingham Playhouse, "Nottingham Playhouse's award-winning production of The Madness of George III to be streamed online by National Theatre at Home," June 4, 2020, https://www.nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/news/nottingham-playhouses-award-winning-production-of/.
[98] Nottingham Playhouse, "Curtain Up: Our New Fundraising Appeal," April 8, 2020, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/news/curtain-up-our-new-fundraising-appeal/.
[99] Nottingham Playhouse, "Curtain Up Appeal 2021," Facebook, November 30, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/nottmplayhouse/videos/614547093078370/.

There has been a pantomime at NP since its opening season in 1948 when Bridget Boland's *Arabian Nights* achieved the highest attendance percentage of the opening season.[100] The pantomime is the highest grossing production annually. Pre-pandemic in 2018-19, it brought in a gross profit of £773,507.25, 71% higher than the next highest profit made by a production in the same year.[101] NP planned a hybrid in-person and digital run for the 2020 pantomime *Cinderella*, from 3rd December 2020 to 16th January 2021. The On-Demand pre-recorded performance had been specially adapted for online audiences to ensure that people who chose to access the pantomime that way could still enjoy a high-quality performance and experience. A digital resource accompanied the production, a "Make Your Own Theatre" activity pack, which included instructions for "Fairy Godmother's Heavenly Hot Chocolate." NP was preparing to welcome both digital and in-person audiences for the opening show. However, on the 1st December 2020, there were twenty-two confirmed cases of a new variant of C-19, Omicron which was highly infectious and had "growth advantages" over the previously dominant Delta variant.[102] As a result, on the 17th December, NP published a statement on social media channels: "Following the UK Government's announcement earlier today, we are sorry to confirm that we will be unable to open for in-person audiences before Saturday 2nd January at the earliest."[103] When the government announced further restrictions on the 30th of December, hopes for January in-person performances were no longer viable, but more than 3,500 households and students from 69 schools watched the on-demand performance of *Cinderella* which accounted for 56% of digital performance sales for the year, evidence of the popularity and importance of the

[100]W.B. Stevenson, "Arabian Nights at Playhouse," *Nottingham Journal*, December 15, 1948, British Newspaper Archive; John Bailey, *A Theatre for All Seasons: Nottingham Playhouse the First Thirty Years 1948-1978* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1994), 23.
[101] Martin Berry to Laura Ewart, "Analysis of Box Office Income and Attendance 2018/19," PDF, n.d.
[102] UK Health Security Agency, "COVID-19 variants identified in the UK – latest updates," October 1, 2021. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-variants-identified-in-the-uk-latest-update.
[103]Nottingham Playhouse, "Facebook Post," Facebook, December 17, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/nottmplayhouse/posts/pfbid0EsXUa8mNwAaRR2cdeKw3gU5LFwJ9hfmVbAQFLtF2Rph9pwiiQyxECMZJou7xw2xJl.

pantomime and of the acuity of pivoting online. Such decisions were the "big-ticket" winners, but it is, and will be, important for NP to drill behind how main-stage productions pivoted online or were reprised in the case of *The Madness of King George III*. During the pandemic, NP used various creative methods to connect with its established audiences, commissioning new plays, and taking advantage of established relationships with national partners to participate actively in initiatives like NTLive. But it has much more to learn from how its existing community engagement programmes adapted and how it could think about hyperlocality.

Hyperlocality, Mutual Aid and Regional Theatre in Contrastive Perspective

Loyal people who would have usually participated in a weekly group in the building could, at the touch of a few buttons, access similar content. As the pandemic settled, NP maintained its digital provision because theatres were forced to become hyperlocal when they could no longer rely on audiences travelling any distance to attend productions. At the same time as NP customised its digital offer, there was a surge of local grassroots organising across the UK emphasising what, in the context of the C-19 pandemic, began to be called "a hyperlocal infrastructure of care," and was being defined as "a reawakening of mutualism" at a scale "not seen for decades."[104] Hyperlocality has been emerging as a critical paradigm that may complicate the dichotomy according to which the local and regional are pitted against the global. It is used in the context of digital spaces and community news too. For Nesta in 2013, for example, the hyperlocal equated to "online news or content services pertaining to a town, village, single postcode or other small, geographically defined

[104]Anastasia Kavada, "Creating a Hyperlocal Infrastructure of Care: COVID-19 Mutual Aid Groups in the UK," in *Social Movements and Politics during COVID-19: Crisis, Solidarity and Change in a Global Pandemic*, ed. Geoffrey Pleyers and Breno Bringel (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022); Oli Mould, Jennifer Cole, Adam Badger and Philip Brown, "Solidarity, not charity: Learning the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic to reconceptualise the radicality of mutual aid," *Transactions (Institute of British Geographers)* 47, no.4 (2022), 875.

community," but researchers now are testing whether the term has shifted in meaning beyond strictly geographical ties towards inclusion of cultural capital that could forge a sense of "embeddedness" and "connectedness" within a community.[105] It has taken on new meanings as a result of the pandemic. "Mutual aid" is also being considered in ways that take into account the forms of community support that were heightened as necessary during the pandemic, especially those based upon an "equal and horizonal relationship of solidarity" and designed to have "a powerful impact on political mobilisation and social transformation."[106]

The artistic director of Slung Low theatre company in Leeds, Alan Lane wrote a "pandemic memoir," *The Club on the Edge of Town,* in 2022, which is useful for NP to consider because it suggests what a theatre company can be, and may achieve in the most exigent of circumstances, at its most audacious. Slung Low is still bound by the most significant part of its funding to ACE, as NP is. Established in 2000, it has been an ACE National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) since 2012 and remains "one of the smallest regularly funded theatre companies" within ACE's group.[107] Prior to the pandemic, this theatre company, based in Holbeck in inner-city Leeds, specialised in creating large-scale outdoor shows, often by working with community performance companies. In January 2019, it took over management of The Holbeck, the oldest working men's club still operating in Britain, founded in 1971, and managed it throughout the pandemic but returned it to its members in December 2022. In his memoir, Lane underlines the core values under which his enterprise operates, and he expresses them in terms that are simple but, he argues, indubitable: "Be

[105]Jon Kingsbury, "UK Demand for Hyperlocal Media Research Report" (Nesta and Kantar Media, 2013), 3, https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/uk_demand_for_hyperlocal_media.pdf.; Carol Arnold and Shane Blackman, "Retrieving and Repurposing: A Grounded Approach to Hyperlocal Working Practices through a Subcultural Lens," *Digital Journalism* 11, no. 6 (March 9, 2021), 1068.
[106] Anastasia Kavada, "Creating a Hyperlocal Infrastructure of Care: COVID-19 Mutual Aid Groups in the UK," 153.
[107] Alan Lane, *The Club on the Edge of Town* (Bristol: Salamander Street, 2022), 17.

useful. Be Kind. Everyone gets what they want, but no one else gets to stop others getting what they want." Such open aspirations, seemingly loosened of any bureaucratic expectations as expressed, risk seeming naïve, especially if such fiercely community-led tenets are immoveable in all instances, and Lane acknowledges the possibility of trouble because of adhering to them. However, trouble is not something I believe Lane fears. He is unequivocally democratic and passionate about the locality in which his theatre is located: "There are children in Holbeck without crayons, [l]iving in a city with an opera company. An opera company paid for with money from all of us. Until everyone has crayons, no one gets opera. That's what I believe." All tickets for Slung Low are sold on a "Pay What You Decide" basis. This was a controversial decision and Lane allows that his counterparts in the industry counselled that it was naïve and expressed concerns that "we were putting public money at risk," but, he asserts with hindsight, "we ignored them and after a while everyone agreed that we were doing it right." The other significant decision made was that every member of the company's staff would be paid the national average wage of £28,600, or £110 per day.[108]

In March 2020, as the first lockdown began, Slung Low sent a letter to each of the 200 houses immediately surrounding the Holbeck, telling neighbours, "We have cars and a van…if there is anything we can do for you in the coming weeks, please do not hesitate to ask."[109] The letter sparked what Lane describes as "moments of mutual aid."[110] A discourse of mutual aid swelled during the pandemic, with an estimated 4,300 mutual aid groups set up across the UK.[111] The infrastructure of these groups was built on pre-pandemic community organising and the spontaneous actions of people who were mobilised to act in support of

[108] Lane, *The Club on the Edge of Town*, 14, 15, 31, 207, 33.
[109] Lane, *The Club on the Edge of Town*, 14.
[110] Lane, *The Club on the Edge of Town*, 70.
[111] Anne Power and Ellie Benton, "Where next for Britain's 4,300 mutual aid groups?," *London School of Economics Covid-19 Blog*, May 6, 2021, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/covid19/2021/05/06/where-next-for-britains-4300-mutual-aid-groups/.

others as a direct result of the pandemic. Slung Low was doing both, and quickly, building upon existing relationships with partners, including Leeds City Council, and embracing new relationships with groups such as Leeds United Football Club, Mecca Bingo, The Salvation Army and Costco. In late March 2020, Leeds City Council asked Slung Low to be the lead organisation coordinating community care in the wards of Beeston and Holbeck. Over 15 months, 30 staff and volunteers provided more than 15,000 food packages to people in South Leeds. Speaking to *The Stage* in April 2020, Lane explained, "The skills we are using are absolutely the same skills we use to make our big shows…. I honestly do not see the difference between doing what we are doing now and what we usually do. Of course, I see that the mechanics are profoundly different, but the actual drive, the core spirit, is the same."[112] Slung Low's approach to community is driven by a strong moral imperative: that the values under which a theatre or theatre company acts are defined clearly and communicated to the community openly. During the pandemic, Lane asserted, "The foodbank was the only way we could justify the theatre."[113] Like the decision to have only "Pay What You Decide" tickets, this evoked concerns in the industry, "that we would ruin people in the generosity of support," and Lane reacted with the same absolutism, and suggested that later other theatres "asked if we could model our activity."[114] NP does not have a clear mission statement or set of values; the "about us" and "our story" sections of the NP website are informative but do not yet adequately communicate NP's commitment to community engagement. NP shares its values and mission most succinctly in recruitment packs which provide background information on the theatre for people wishing to apply for jobs. Under the heading of "our mission, vision and values" NP reveals a thoughtful and

[112] Fergus Morgan, "Alan Lane: 'The skills we are using are the same ones we use to make shows'," *The Stage*, April 16, 2020, https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/alan-lane-the-skills-we-are-using-are-the-same-ones-we-use-to-make-shows.
[113] Lane, *The Club on the Edge of Town*, 194.
[114] Lane, *The Club on the Edge of Town*, 208.

impactful mission statement; “The essence of who we are is to create wonder in Nottingham. We believe that, through theatre, being transported to different worlds broadens our horizons, that by being positive, relevant and devoted we provide an experience, not just a stage.”[115] NP could build on this statement, and may benefit from sharing Slung Low’s approach to openly communicating clearly defined values which could be further developed and refined in collaboration with the wider community.

If Lane’s avowed concern was to ensure that the actions of Slung Low during the pandemic were right and good first and commercially and artistically successful second, others took a different approach, even in a context where distributed use and function was being disrupted by the pandemic. One of the more extreme examples of this was the use of theatres as Nightingale Courts. During the pandemic, the requirement for social distancing caused many existing court buildings to be deemed unsafe to hold jury trials. The lack of space within existing courts caused a backlog within the Crown Court system. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) set about identifying venues that had the capacity to host trials. In September 2020, two theatres in The Lowry Arts Centre, Salford, were converted into courtrooms hosting “non-custodial criminal cases plus civil, family and tribunal hearings.”[116] Julia Fawcett, chief executive of The Lowry, told *BBC News* that entering into a “partnership with the courts” was “absolutely key to us being able to begin the engagement with our audiences.”[117] Birmingham Repertory Theatre entered into a six-month-long arrangement with the MoJ to hire out two of its theatre spaces and meeting rooms.[118] In the summer of

[115] Nottingham Playhouse, “Recruitment Pack Marketing Officer,” September 2023, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Recruitment-Pack-Marketing-Officer-AD-Sept-2023.pdf.
[116] Ian Youngs, “Salford's Lowry theatre to stage real-life legal dramas as makeshift court,” *BBC*, September 21, 2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-54236769.
[117] Aamna Mohdin, “Black Company Pulls out of Birmingham Theatre over Nightingale Court,” The Guardian, December 24, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/dec/24/black-theatre-company-talawa-pulls-birmingham-rep-season-over-nightingale-court.
[118] The partnership also included the leasing of the Library of Birmingham as both Birmingham Repertory Theatre and the library share a building.

2020, aligning with the criminal justice system was a controversial choice as a result of the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement because the conversation around the disproportional impact of the criminal justice system on Black people was finally being taken seriously in many areas of society—with support for demonstrations being announced on C-19 WhatsApp groups.[119] Talawa, a Black British theatre company, which had announced plans to co-produce a season of Black-led work with Birmingham Rep, dissolved the partnership, frustrated that its hosting of the courts would "threaten the integrity of the Black Joy Season."[120] Talawa was not the only opposing voice; statements and articles were published by individuals and groups, all condemning the decision.[121] Birmingham Rep defended its position on the grounds that it was in a precarious financial position — it had lost 80% of the income made from ticket sales and, by July 2020, was considering making 40% of its staff redundant — stating that its future could not be guaranteed without the income provided by this contract.[122]

The experience of Birmingham Rep casts revealing light onto tensions that exist at the boundary that putatively separates a theatre from its building. The use of the building as a court could not, for some, be divorced from the building's primary use as a theatre and the attendant expectation that theatres should be spaces where local communities of diverse heritages and backgrounds feel safe and welcome. NP's physical hyper-locality is The Park, a private estate and one of the most affluent areas in Nottingham. The average price of a

[119] Kavada, "Creating a Hyperlocal Infrastructure of Care," 153.
[120]Talawa Theatre Company, "Black Joy Update," December 22, 2020, https://www.talawa.com/articles/black-joy-update.
[121] A selection of some of the statements critical of Birmingham Reps' decision to host a nightingale court include: Amahra Spence, Founder of Maia creative agency at https://www.thestage.co.uk/opinion/birmingham-rep-let-down-its-community-we-need-to-rebuild-trust; Comedian Joe Lycett at https://twitter.com/joelycett/status/1339526783461449728; The Regional Theatre Young Director Scheme https://www.rtyds.co.uk/general/rtyds-18-month-residency-update/.
[122] Chris Wiegand, "Birmingham Rep may make 40% of roles redundant amid Covid-19 crisis," *The Guardian*, July 10, 2020, sec. Stage, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/jul/10/birmingham-rep-may-make-40-percent-roles-redundant-covid-19-crisis.

property in The Park is £377,034 some 32% higher than the city average.[123] NP is located on Wellington Circus, a circular road with a small private park at the centre, but it is only accessible via padlock to residents of The Park Estate, not to NP, which also needs to negotiate with residents when events take place immediately outside the theatre. NP could benefit from nurturing a stronger relationship with Park Estate residents, albeit a demographic that contrasts markedly with Slung Low's hyperlocality of working-class Holbeck. The Nottingham Park Residents Association is a highly active community group hosting a series of talks, social groups, various workshops and an annual garden trail.[124] Although the needs the of The Park Estate community may be different, they should not be disregarded for how NP may support the engagement of its hyperlocal community, especially when NP's community-facing achievements during the pandemic were built upon a foundation of trust and respect in the community.

Slung Low is an example of the very real-world response an arts organisation can make through choosing to embrace their physical hyperlocal space during the pandemic. Food banks, medicine delivery services and other supplies rapidly became one of the few ways the resources of an arts organisation could be pivoted in order to provide the most acute support. The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement published a blog post entitled "Hyperlocal engagement during the time of lockdown," highlighting examples of community-level participatory public engagement taking place in small geographic communities.[125] Examples include, online community forums, virtual social events, mutual aid groups and creative projects. The blog concludes with the argument that hyperlocal

[123] RightMove, Information produced by the HM Land Registry, "House Prices in The Park," December 15, 2022, https://www.rightmove.co.uk/house-prices/the-park.html.
[124] The Nottingham Park Residents Association, "Parknews – the Website of the Nottingham Park Residents Association," The Nottingham Park Residents Association, September 10, 2023, https://parknews.co.uk/.
[125] David Owen, "Hyperlocal engagement during the time of lockdown," *National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement*, May 15, 2020, https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/whats-new/blog/hyperlocal-engagement-during-time-lockdown.

engagement is not just a temporary measure for the pandemic, but that it also has the potential to revolutionise the way that public engagement is done in the future.[126] If it is initially unclear how NP's focus on digital enjoyment fits into the hyperlocal paradigm, issues identified by the blog post include our tendency to live and work with people who are "just like us," and the risk that activities take on a life of their own, with participants overstepping social distancing rules and putting lives at risk. The risk to life was certainly a factor in why NP had chosen only to reinstate activities within its premises in order to control the health and safety impactions of compliance with social distancing. For NP and, more specifically, community engagement, hyperlocality was not as relevant when it pertained solely to physical and geographical community engagement; the hyperlocal areas surrounding NP are not communities which NP struggles to engage. As the concept developed with the pandemic, the digital hyperlocal became relevant and the capacity to create a hyperlocality based upon its atmosphere/organisational identity visible when not necessarily fixed to the theatre building. Birmingham Rep's commercially driven decision prioritised a national systemic response to the pandemic in comparison to Slung Low's hyperlocal expression of mutual aid. Historically and throughout the pandemic, then, NP has carefully balanced commercially lucrative activities and the need to facilitate opportunities with community impact. There were theatres that did more for their communities but there were theatres that did much, much less.

Accessibility and Adaptation

According to the Office for National Statistics, the "negative health impacts of COVID-19 (in terms of rates of death and vaccine uptake) disproportionally impacted the most deprived

[126] David Owen, "Hyperlocal engagement during the time of lockdown."

people and households, some ethnic minorities, and people with self-reported disabilities."[127] While that barely addresses the disproportional impact on Black and Asian Britons, specific issues of accessibility for people with disabilities were identified by The Global Health Council as barriers to information, testing, and treatment services.[128] Campaigns were instigated by The International Disability Alliance and International Disability and Development Consortium to ensure that the WHO and United Nations daily briefings, and supporting documents on C-19, were fully accessible to persons with disabilities.[129] Those groups most impacted by C-19 were often also the ones struggling with accessibility to vital services. However, one unintended and perhaps unforeseen consequence of the pandemic was how it impacted access to the arts for the better and for the worse.

There has been increased accessibility for groups who have historically been unable to attend performances in situ. For example, tickets to the original theatrical production of *The Madness of King George III* cost between £8.50 and £37.50, but when it was live streamed on YouTube, financial as well as physical barriers to access were removed. A regional example that resonates in this context for its success in producing "mediatised theatre and digital liveness" is the digital theatre season from February to May 2021 which brought together 60 participating companies in the Marche region of Italy: Marche Palcoscenico Aperto. Researchers found that issuing online questionnaires did not elicit more than superficial information from audiences and set about using the initiative in the Marche to assess "which entry barriers to the artistic field have been strengthened or weakened by implementing theatre initiatives for online audiences and how these initiatives have affected

[127] Emily Glastonbury, "Leaving No One behind – a Review of Who Has Been Most Affected by the Coronavirus Pandemic in the UK - Office for National Statistics" (Office for National Statistics, December 3, 2021), https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/leavingnoonebehindareviewofwhohasbeenmostaffectedbythecoronaviruspandemicintheuk/december2021.

[128] Alexa Wilder and Eliana Monteforte, "The Pandemic of Accessibility," (Global Health Council, October 25, 2021), https://globalhealth.org/the-pandemic-of-accessibility/.

[129] The International Disability Alliance, "Accessibility Campaign – COVID19," May 18, 2020, https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/acessibility-campaign.

the regional performing arts scene," and thereby to identify whether entry barriers had been "reinforced or levelled when implementing theatre initiatives for online audiences." They identified constraints felt by audiences and artists: "socio-technical constraints" which consisted of technological barriers, attitudes of the users towards digital affordances and lack of digital skills. They also analysed "organisational constraints" and challenges posed by digital platforms to the production and distribution of performances.[130] The digital switch did not wholly eradicate barriers to accessibility if it created new and unforeseen constraints. However, lessening existing accessibility issues was profound. A report published in the UK in 2022 by the Digital Access to Arts and Culture project found that, "The increased availability of online arts and culture during the pandemic led to accessibility benefits for many people – in particular d/Deaf and disabled, clinically vulnerable, geographically remote, and older participants." However, factors including "low revenue, limited funding, a public funding structure that favours one-off projects… and uncertainty about what content works best" meant that some performing arts organisations equivocated and subsequently moved away from offering regular digital funding.[131] There were growing concerns that theatres would return to only in-person productions as soon as restrictions were lifted, thereby excluding the same individuals and groups. Jamie Hale, a disabled theatre director and playwright, told BBC Radio 4's *Front Row* programme, "I feel very concerned that as the auditoriums fill up, theatres will decrease the amount they offer for live streams, and it will become less possible for people living in rural areas, people with caring and parenting responsibilities, not just disabled people like me, to access the theatre we want to."[132] One

[130]Stefano Brilli, Laura Gemini, and Francesca Giluani, "Theatre Without Theatres: Investigating Access Barriers to Mediatised Theatre and Digital Liveness during the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Poetics* 101750 (2022), 8, 3.
[131] Richard Misek, Adrian Leguina, and Kadja Manninen, "Digital Access to Arts and Culture," (Arts and Humanities Research Council, June 2022), 9, https://digiaccessarts.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Digital-Access-Report.pdf.
[132] Jamie Hale, "Front Row" (BBC Radio 4, October 5, 2021), https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m00107wb.

solution, perhaps inevitable or simply inescapable now, is identified by the Digital Access to Arts and Culture project as "hybrid programming" on the basis that "the more routes that exist for engaging with arts and culture, the easier it is to engage with, and the more inclusive it can become." Maintaining and embedding a hybrid approach is one way that NP could ensure that accessibility gained during the pandemic is embedded in the culture of the theatre. Another report on the role of the arts that was conducted by academics discerned that during the pandemic the arts facilitated "relaxation, escapism, mood, confidence, positivity and a sense of connection," and that participation in the arts could "reduce loneliness, worries and negative emotions."[133] If theatres can support wellbeing in this way, they owe all patrons the opportunity to access the benefits they provide.

The value of the arts regarding health and well-being was well documented before the pandemic. A 2019 World Health Organisation report determined that the arts play "a critical role in health promotion" by "helping to prevent the onset of mental illness and age-related physical decline; supporting the treatment or management of mental illness, noncommunicable diseases and neurological disorders; and assisting in acute and end-of-life care."[134] With such a substantial list of benefits, it is unsurprising that the arts supported so many people through the pandemic. Researchers now describe the pandemic as having a "colossal negative mental health impact" with "already vulnerable and underserved populations at disproportionate risk" of experiencing negative mental health outcomes.[135] Research published in 2021 underlines that the arts are "valuable coping tools" during stressful situations and demonstrates how "arts activities were used during lockdown to help

[133] Alexandra Bradbury, Katey Warran, Hei Wan Mak, and Daisy Fancourt, "The Role of the Arts during the COVID-19 Pandemic," University College London, August 31, 2021, 2.
[134] Daisy Fancourt and Saoirse Finn, "What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review," World Health Organisation Regional office for Europe, 2019, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK553775/.
[135] Matt Boden et al., "Addressing the Mental Health Impact of COVID-19 through Population Health," *Clinical Psychology Review* 85 (March 5, 2021),1, 9.

individuals manage their emotions."[136] There are suggestions from academics in the field of psychiatry that "arts-based interventions could possibly become part of the long-term strategy for supporting people with the mental health consequences of the C-19 lockdown." Establishing that the benefits of engaging with the arts provides a solid basis from which NP could promote participation. Social isolation, particularly for vulnerable groups, could be lessened by "boosting positive coping and resilience through community-based activities."[137] Accessibility must be at the forefront of future programming decisions at NP, as should adaptation, which is dependent on a number of material and ethical factors. The financial impact of C-19 restrictions was substantial because in 2019 NP relied on ticket sales for 70% of its income. NP received £690,325 under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and £1,108,249 across two government-run Cultural Recovery Fund awards. [138] What is harder to quantify is how adaptation was felt on a structural and cultural level. In an unprecedented situation where the need to make changes was paramount, was there time to cogitate on the freedom to innovate? How can regional theatre and the funders work together to learn from this forced period of innovation?

In "ideas for a new art world" a 2020 essay, Zarina Muhammad, co-founder of the online art criticism platform The White Pube, makes the following argument:

> The art world is close to the brink of collapse. We have got to radically restructure the way we do things; no one wants to return to normal, because normal was bad. We have got the capacity to make a mad little industry that's sustainable, accessible, genuinely diverse, fundamentally joyful, and I think we should do that. Right now.[139]

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[136] Hei Wan Mak, Meg Fluharty, and Daisy Fancourt, "Predictors and Impact of Arts Engagement During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Analyses of Data From 19,384 Adults in the COVID-19 Social Study," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (April 26,2021), 15.
[137] Emily A. Holmes et al., "Multidisciplinary Research Priorities for the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Call for Action for Mental Health Science," *Lancet Psychiatry* 7, no. 6 (2020), 550.
[138] Nottingham Playhouse Trust Limited, "Nottingham Playhouse Trust Limited Directors' Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 52 Weeks ended: 28 March 2021," Companies House, January 7, 2022, 17.
[139] Zarina Muhammad, "ideas for a new art world," The White Pube, April 3, 2020, https://thewhitepube.co.uk/art-thoughts/ideasforanewartworld/.

The essay was part of a larger project that saw Muhammad and co-founder Gabrielle de la Puente install billboards across the UK between January and March 2021. Each billboard displayed one of six "one-liners" described in the accompanying pamphlet published in 2021 as "initial ideas for a new art world."[140] The project focus was primarily on the practices of art galleries and museums; however, it should not be overlooked for its wider provocations which are applicable to theatre. During the very first months of the pandemic, Zarina Muhammad was unequivocal, stating that "it's not enough to just stop contributing to social inequalities" because that is "a fundamentally liberal position that the arts already occupy." The White Pube pushes for an optimistic vision of how disruption as a result of the pandemic could spark a transformative moment. Of the six provocations expanded upon in the pamphlet, the two which are relevant to NP are: "Curators should ask the public what they want to see and what galleries and museums should be used for" and "The art world should not replicate the capitalist structures of other industries and instead should set a better example with a horizontal approach to decision making and pay." Both advocate for arts institutions taking more account of audience interests and needs. The ultimate responsibility for the artistic vision of NP, in its current model, rests with the artistic director.[141] This is a role that is coming under increasing pressure in a precarious funding environment, with the ongoing impact of the cost of living crisis, leading theatre critic and editor of *The Stage* Lyn Gardner to pose a question, "Perhaps the artistic director is a dying species?"[142] This may

[140] The six statements are: 001: if I were the Tate, I would simply remove my racist paintings x, 002: Universal Basic Income and affordable housing so that everyone, including artists, can make a living, 003: Curators should ask the public what they want to see and what they think galleries and museums should be used for, 004: people across the creative industries need to declare if they have rich parents who helped them get where they are today, 005: The art world should not replicate the capitalist structures of other industries and instead should set a better example with a horizontal approach to decision-making and pay, 006: dear museums, give back all stolen objects. The billboards were a collaboration between The White Pube, Jack Arts and BUILDHOLLYWOOD as part of the Your Space or Mine project, an ongoing initiative that gives artists and creatives street space to create accessible art for everyone; The White Pube, *ideas for a new art world* (London: Rough Trade Books, 2021).

[141] The White Pube, *ideas for a new art world.*

[142] Neil Puffett, "Exodus of Artistic Directors 'Symptom of Sector Neglect,'" *ArtsProfessional*, August 17, 2023, https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/exodus-artistic-directors-symptom-sector-neglect; Lyn Gardner,

border on the sensationalist but theatres including Watford Palace Theatre, the New Wolsey in Ipswich, and the Theatre Royal Plymouth are all experimenting with new models of shared creative leadership.[143] Regional British theatres are beginning to examine their culture and structure, and some began to do that during the pandemic. In July 2020, *The Guardian* newspaper reported that to prevent closure due to financial hardship, the Theatre Royal Plymouth was pivoting its business model to shift from a producing theatre into a commercial receiving house.[144] A second proposal was made that the theatre undertake a "wholesale restructure" of its artistic teams. Upon his appointment to the role of Chief Executive Officer and Executive Producer in 2021, James Mackenzie-Blackman commissioned six colleagues to undertake an independent review of the theatre's creative leadership.[145] This is a moment in which new leadership roles are emerging and reframing the traditional role of artistic director role into a more hybrid creative position with an outreach focus. If, as Zarina Muhammad and Gabrielle de la Puente argue, "a singular curatorial vision cannot fulfil all the answers," NP should examine how peers in regional theatre are beginning to change and subvert traditional management structures and explore how to balance the curatorial role of the artistic director with centring communities, what communities want to see and what they think the theatre should be used for, which means making the Participation Department more visible on its website, and in public making statements about the work and culture of NP.

"Lyn Gardner: Can the Artistic Director Role Survive Theatres' Cash Worries?," *The Stage*, April 24, 2023, https://www.thestage.co.uk/opinion/can-the-artistic-director-role-survive-theatres-cash-worries.

[143] For Watford Palace Theatre see; Lyn Gardner, "Watford Palace Theatre's Brigid Larmour: 'Our Industry Is at Breaking Point,'" *The Stage* (The Stage, January 26, 2023), https://www.thestage.co.uk/big-interviews/big-interviews/watford-palace-theatres-brigid-larmour-our-industry-is-at-breaking-point.; For New Wolsey See; Matthew Hemley, "Douglas Rintoul Appointed to Run New Wolsey in Ipswich," *The Stage* (The Stage, January 28, 2022), https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/appointments/douglas-rintoul-appointed-to-run-new-wolsey-in-ipswich.; For Theatre Royal Plymouth see; "New Creative Leadership Team at Theatre Royal Plymouth," *ArtsProfessional*, June 20, 2023, https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/faces/new-creative-leadership-team-theatre-royal-plymouth.

[144] Lanre Bakare, "Theatre Royal Plymouth proposes cutting entire creative team," *The Guardian*, July 23, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/jul/23/theatre-royal-plymouth-to-cut-100-jobs.

[145] James Mackenzie-Blackman, "James' Letter."

Among calls for the theatre industry to take time to reflect on some of the industry's systemic issues, Kate McMillan also posed a key question while discussing how experiences during the pandemic suggested ways to think about creative and structural change: "How can we harness the newly found potential for change and responsiveness into ongoing issues of diversity, inequality and climate change?"[146] This is a huge question and undoubtedly something that NP and other theatres had to begin considering. However, as NP contended with the loss of 70% of its income, "most staff" were furloughed and the feeling was that "effective long-term planning" in the moment of the pandemic was "impossible."[147] If calls for adaptation in the moment were somewhat idealistic and often felt unfeasible given the material conditions of emergency planning and ever-changing restrictions, innovation was achieved via artistic outputs. Now, there exists an opportunity to evaluate and embrace the knowledge gained from an unprecedented moment of enforced change, and to contemplate optimal approaches to forging NP's culture in the future. UK theatres did not immediately instigate any large-scale organisational changes in the way Muhammad advocated for galleries and museums, but there were moments. NP took part in campaigns and protests. It joined more than 50 theatre organisations across the UK to become part of the Freelance Task Force, following the release of an open letter on 21st May 2020 in which freelancers in the cultural sector stated, "We want to facilitate the establishment of a national task force of self-employed theatre and performance makers."[148] The contradiction between increased demand and appreciation for arts content and the precarity of the arts sector was impossible to ignore in the moment, particularly in the persons of freelance theatre practitioners who rely on

[146] Kate McMillan, "Coronavirus and Culture: Challenges, Changes and Creative Responses," KCL Alumni, YouTube video, 58:54, June 4, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvQ_1L4pICM&ab_channel=KCLAlumni.
[147] Nottingham Playhouse Trust Limited, "Nottingham Playhouse Trust Limited Directors' Report and Consolidated Financial Statements 52 Weeks ended: 29 March 2020," (Companies House, January 7, 2022), 3.
[148]Alex Wood, "Open Letter Released Calling for Freelancer Support to Be Extended in Line with Job Retention Scheme," *What's On Stage*, May 21, 2020, https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/news/open-letter-freelance support_51638.html/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=21May2020.

project-based work. NP should be more confident in the positive impact of its participation and community engagement activities now, though, and as a result of the pandemic. What became apparent then is that there is the potential for community engagement work to increase and for NP to harness an increasingly large body of research to support applications for further resources internally and via external funding. Although restrictions have long been lifted, and NP is facing new and distinctly different challenges, now is precisely the right time for a conversation about whether and how a restructuring of NP and a rededication of its focus would benefit the institution and its many and diverse communities.

Community Engagement (2022-2023)

Recovery from the C-19 pandemic was not going to be a linear process; the phrase "unprecedented times" may have fallen into everyday use, but it was one of the few ways to express just how challenging a period it was.[1] Post-pandemic, there is a burgeoning body of research which begins to quantify the impact of C-19. The real-world ramifications of the pandemic are vast; as of June 2023, 228,634 people in the UK have died with C-19 specified on the death certificate.[2] The Office for National Statics has reported that long-Covid symptoms, including fatigue, shortness of breath and aching muscles, have "adversely affected the day-to-day activities of 1.5 million people."[3] The mental health charity Mind had already determined that "around a third of adults and young people" shared the feeling that their mental health worsened since March 2020 and the first lockdown.[4] The labour market was shaken; the number of people in work between March and May 2020 fell by 825,000 and claims for unemployment benefits doubled.[5] Between March 2020 and April 2021, "most pupils" missed more than half of the days they would have spent in classrooms causing deep concern about attainment and "life outcomes," especially for children from what the Centre for Economic Performance defines as "poorer backgrounds."[6] The cultural sector had to develop a responsive and reflexive attitude and reflecting on the pandemic in 2023, Martin Berry is proud of the work the Participation Department achieved in such challenging

[1] The last peak usage of the term "unprecedented times" was in 1945, "marking the end of WWI" and the "founding of the United Nations."; Clair Major, "Unprecedented Times and Innovation," *Innovative Higher Education* no. 45 (2020), 1.
[2]UK Health Security Agency, "Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK," July 2023, https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/deaths.
[3] Office for National Statistics, "Prevalence of ongoing symptoms following coronavirus (COVID-19) infection in the UK: 2 February 2023," March 30, 2023, at https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/prevalenceofongoingsymptomsfollowingcoronaviruscovid19infectionintheuk/30march2023.
[4] Mind, "Coronavirus: the consequences for mental health," July 2021, at https://www.mind.org.uk/media/8962/the-consequences-of-coronavirus-for-mental-health-final-report.pdf, 8.
[5] The number of people in work fell by 825,000 people between January-March 2020 and October-December 2020; Andrew Powell, Brigid Francis-Devine, and Harriet Clark, "Coronavirus: Impact on the Labour Market," House of Commons Library, August 9, 2022, 4.
[6] Lee Elliot Major, Andrew Eyles, and Stephen Machin, "Learning Loss since Lockdown: Variation across the Home Nations," Centre for Economic Performance, July 2021, 1, 8.

conditions by strategising and planning for the department's future: "We were always looking ahead, to what we will do when it's over." Describing the period as "two years of difference," Berry reframes it not as time lost but as period of flux with opportunity for adaptation and now for "considered expansion."[7] In 2023, the Participation Department is running 60 programmes, classes, courses, and workshops, at NP and throughout Nottingham, for children and young people, careers and training, adults and community, older people (55+), schools, colleges, and universities. The location of external groups for children and young people in areas of the city and county, that score highly on the English Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), compiled by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in 2019, seems signally important. Nottingham overall ranks as the 11th most deprived district out of the 317 districts, and a Shine group is located in each of the five Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) wards that top the city's list.[8] Shine is described by NP as "free drama provision" for "local schools and groups within the Nottingham Community," and in 2023, there are 13 Shine groups.[9]

A vital element of considered expansion should involve initiatives that currently lie outside of the existing participation programme. Berry cites Joan Littlewood's activism as inspirational for his approach to community engagement. She was one of the leading theatre directors and practitioners of her generation, and Nadine Holdsworth describes Littlewood as "having no time for polite, genteel theatre" targeted at a "predominately middle-class."[10] Littlewood worked closely with collaborator Ewan MacColl (born James Henry Miller in 1915) who left school at 14 and in 1934 joined the Workers Theatre Movement and the

[7] Martin Berry, interview by Laura Ewart, March 1, 2023.
[8] The five areas identified as LSOAs are: Bulwell Centre, Billborough East, Radford Flats, Broxtowe East and St Anns Plantagenet Street; Nottingham City Council, "Indices of Deprivation (2019) - Nottingham Insight," Nottingham Insight, accessed August 31, 2023, https://www.nottinghaminsight.org.uk/themes/deprivation-and-poverty/indices-of-deprivation-2019/#:~:text=Nottingham%20City%20IMD%202019%20results.
[9] Nottingham Playhouse, "Shine," Nottingham Playhouse, accessed October 19, 2023, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/project/shine/.
[10] Nadine Holdsworth, *Joan Littlewood* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 46.

Young Communist League. After a period of "temporary jobs, self-education, socialist politics, agit-prop theatre and rambling," he met Joan Littlewood. They married in 1936, the same year they formed the Theatre Union, committed to producing "socially relevant and theatrically engaging material"[11] Following the disbandment of the Theatre Union at the end of the Second World War, Littlewood and her co-operative ensemble re-formed as Theatre Workshop whose Manifesto is as relevant today as it was when written in 1945:

> The greatest theatres of all time have been popular theatres, theatres which reflected the dreams and struggles of the people of their time… The great events of our time, wars, social upheavals, the frustrations of man's social desires, and the attempts to build a new civilisation find little expression in the contemporary theatre.[12]

It seems no accident that Berry draws on a visionary practitioner who paid attention to social upheavals and contemporary challenges. Littlewood was passionate about working with working-class communities, and between 1963 and 1975 developed the Fun Palace, a "multi-use space" with activities "dedicated to pleasure, entertainment, communication and learning" in an attempt to "democratise the arts" and to "animate community-based activity."[13] Peter Rankin, a long-time colleague and biographer of Littlewood, shares her response to a publisher who was frustrated at an initial draft of her autobiography: "Theatre Workshop was not just about doing plays. It was a design for living."[14] One of the ways in which NP could develop and build "a design for living" in its contemporary context is by coordinating a series of workshops that focus on how post-pandemic theatres can respond to the challenges faced by the communities they serve, such as issues of equality, diversity and inclusion, and how to respond to "the hostile environment" and the cost of living crisis. By

[11]Working Class Movement Library, "Ewan MacColl Timeline," accessed October 19, 2023, https://www.wcml.org.uk/maccoll/maccoll/biography/timeline/.; Holdsworth, *Joan Littlewood*, 8.
[12] Theatre Workshop manifesto (c. 1930s), MS 89164/4/26, Joan Littlewood Archive, British Library.
[13] Holdsworth, *Joan Littlewood*, 33.
[14] Peter Rankin, "Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop: A Design for Living," *The Guardian*, November 11, 2014.

reflecting on historical approaches such as those of Theatre Workshop at Theatre Royal Stratford East, a theatre with which NP has collaborated already on *Shebeen* (2018) and *The Village Idiot* (2023) and with which it produced the 2020 digital documentary series "The Revival," a new joined-up vision for how regional theatres can better serve diverse communities, many of which are struggling, may emerge. As the cost of living crisis escalates and the welfare state is eroded, there is an "underclass of the insecure" that is "pushed or left outside representation." [15] A productive partnership with Stratford East could harness Littlewood's manifesto and update and extend it for these post-pandemic times.

Belonging and unbelonging and displacement and refuge were cautiously explored as themes during the Coram Boy community project. Since then, NP has become increasingly involved with the migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers in Nottingham, by working with the Nottingham Refugee Forum. Current levels of displacement are described by Oxfam as an unprecedented global crisis of 26 million refugees. The UK Government's approach to managing migration was the introduction of policies described as "the hostile environment."[16] The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants defines the hostile environment as a host of policies which "make life difficult for migrants living in the UK" by treating them strategically and definitively as "less deserving of dignity and humanity than British citizens."[17] After a set of new immigration policies was introduced to this end by Conservative Home Secretary Theresa May in 2012, more restrictive measures were brought in under the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts, which required professionals such as doctors, landlords, police officers and teachers to be responsible for immigration checks. The creation

[15] For example, these terms are used by Etienne Balibar in "The `impossible' community of the citizens: past and present problems" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 30 (2012), 441.
[16] Oxfam, "Refugee and Migrant Crisis," accessed October 19, 2023, https://www.oxfam.org/en/what-we-do/issues/refugee-and-migrant-crisis. Those who support the government's policies around immigration use the term 'the compliant environment' to describe them.
[17] The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, "The Hostile Environment Explained," https://www.jcwi.org.uk/the-hostile-environment-explained

of everyday borders and quotidian checks and measures is leading refugees to experience loss of accommodation, barriers to marriage, denial of access to healthcare and a "generalised feeling of instability and anxiety."[18] The impact of the policy is being felt in Nottingham. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) undertaken for Nottingham City Council in 2019 estimated that then there were some "500 destitute asylum seekers and around 7,000 refugees living in the city."[19] NP's response was clear and directed. It applied for Theatre of Sanctuary status.

Founded in 2005, City of Sanctuary UK is a social movement umbrella organisation which "coordinates, supports and grows…networks of welcome."[20] While as Wanda Vrasti and Smaran Dayal allow, in the UK sanctuary manifestos "function more as pledges of support for a culture of hospitality than actual guidelines for municipal policies," cultural organisations have been at the forefront of efforts to express hospitality, in the knowledge that access alone is inadequate as a goal, especially if "the subject positions of 'host' and 'guest' and the power relation connecting them" are left unaddressed.[21] The Sanctuary Award programme accepts applications from institutions, universities, schools, local authorities, and libraries, as well as arts organisations.[22] Applications must evidence that the institution has learnt what it means to be seeking sanctuary, embedded the values of welcome and inclusion into the culture of its organisation, and taken "positive action" to include sanctuary seekers in activities. The final requirement for the award is that the organisation share its vision of inclusion and evidence of progress by promoting "the positive contribution of people seeking

[18] Melanie Griffiths and Colin Yeo, "The UK's Hostile Environment: Deputising Immigration Control," *Critical Social Policy* 41, no. 4 (2021), 531.
[19] Nottingham City Council, "Evidence Summary Nottingham City's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment," March 2019.
[20] City of Sanctuary UK, "About | City of Sanctuary UK," January 5, 2017, https://cityofsanctuary.org/about/.
[21] Wanda Vrasti and Smaran Dayal, "Citizenship: Rightful Presence and the Urban Commons," *Citizenship Studies* 20: 8 (2016), 997, 998.
[22] City of Sanctuary UK, "Sanctuary Awards," accessed October 19, 2023, https://cityofsanctuary.org/awards/.

sanctuary" and the wider benefits of "a welcoming culture."[23] Following an appraisal by a panel including at least one member with "lived experience of seeking sanctuary" and an "expert in the field," awards are made. In 2014, West Yorkshire Playhouse became the first Theatre of Sanctuary. On 2nd August 2021, NP was awarded Theatre of Sanctuary status by Nottingham City of Sanctuary.[24] It was an early respondent in the flurry of applications that responded to the sharp increase in migrants arriving in the UK in 2021, insofar as, by 2023, there would be 14 more Theatres of Sanctuary, and a further 9 Theatre Companies of Sanctuary.[25]

The commitment to learn, embed and share has been made manifest at NP in the form of activities instigated as a direct result of the award. Isabelle Abdul-Rahim was integral to the completion of NP's application to become a Theatre of Sanctuary. She began working with NP in 2021 as a placement student in the Participation Department and during her induction Isabelle told me that a conversation led to her sharing information with Berry about her involvement with Student Action for Refugees.[26] Berry explained the Sanctuary scheme and asked if she would be interested in "picking up the application" which was already underway. Isabelle described that process as both "interesting and inspiring." Following her initial placement and the awarding of Sanctuary status, Isabelle secured a Creative Pathways Graduate internship at NP, keen to "build some momentum," but she expressed frustration over 2021: "as much as we have things that would work for sanctuary seekers— we have bursary places, we can make the theatre economically accessible and very welcoming— there was just still no connection."[27] The primary issue Isabelle identified was a lack of easily

[23] For more details of the Sanctuary award process see: City of Sanctuary, "Awards," City of Sanctuary, 2023, https://cityofsanctuary.org/awards/.
[24] Nottingham City of Sanctuary, "Nottingham Playhouse Achieves Theatre of Sanctuary Award," August 2, 2021, https://nottingham.cityofsanctuary.org/2021/08/02/nottingham-playhouse-achieves-theatre-of-sanctuary-award.
[25] Statistica, "Migration Figures in the United Kingdom from 4th Quarter 1991 to 4th Quarter 2022," Statista, May 2023, https://www.statista.com/statistics/283599/immigration-to-the-united-kingdom-y-on-y/.
[26] Isabelle Abdul-Rahim, interview by Laura Ewart, September 16, 2022.
[27] Isabelle Abdul-Rahim, interview by Laura Ewart, September 16, 2022.

available information: “There was no way for sanctuary seekers to see our events or to know what would be made accessible to them.” As a result, NP co-created a webpage, ASKLiON, an online directory for information and services created by Nottingham City Council.[28] ASKLiON is now an accessible online repository where a directory of accessible events in the city is curated and where NP signposts resources. Isabelle was recruited into the permanent post of Audience Development Officer in 2022 where she has continued to advocate for the inclusion of sanctuary seekers and to focus on how NP can ensure refugees are aware of the safe and welcoming space it offers.

One initiative that has seen proven success is a model that was established by Leeds Playhouse; NP followed suit and launched a Conversation Café in September 2022, a weekly session held on Mondays from 4 to 5 pm, for people with “lived experience of the asylum system” in which creative topics for discussion and games that encourage English language skills and conversation support refugees. Tickets are free with a hot drink included, booked via NP’s website or in person at the box office. NP runs a weekly Shine group with Nottingham Education Sanctuary Team who provide full-time education for sanctuary seekers of school age.[29] As a Theatre of Sanctuary, bursary places are advertised for all participation programmes, there are also pay-what-you-can performances, backstage tours, and free tickets through the 50:50 campaign, which supports charities and community groups with 500 tickets donated to refugees and people seeking asylum. Members of the Participation Department, as well as the Marketing Department, sit on the City of Sanctuary Steering group and all-group meetings are often hosted by NP. In order to effectively support the integration of sanctuary seekers into the existing participation program, NP must simultaneously prioritise the creation of specialised activities which could be developed in

[28]For the ASKLiON and Nottingham Playhouse page see: https://www.asklion.co.uk/kb5/nottingham/directory/site.page?id=He4Y6_fQj3w.
[29] Nottingham Playhouse, “Shine,” Nottingham Playhouse, accessed October 19, 2023, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/project/shine/.

partnerships with local charities or schools. Balancing specialised provision and integration will ensure that sanctuary seekers are able to access the entirety of the NP Participation Programme. City of Sanctuary requires organisations to be assessed every three years for reaccreditation; therefore, in 2023, NP is closely approaching reaccreditation. "Sanctuary in the Arts" a resource pack produced to support and promote the use of arts "in nurturing a culture and practice of welcome" states that "access depends on work being relevant, appropriate and ethical."[30] The pack also provides examples of activities that arts organisations can undertake to develop themselves to learn, share and embed. NP should consider these examples for which would best strengthen organisational knowledge, decision making and the experience of sanctuary seekers.[31] As one of the fourteen Theatres of Sanctuary, NP should take advantage of this expanding national network to learn and to influence how theatres deliver their commitments to sanctuary seekers.

NP seeks to represent the stories and voices of sanctuary seekers through its artistic programming and in February 2023 co-produced a theatrical adaptation of *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*. Based upon the award-winning fiction book that Christy Lefteri published in 2020, the play follows married couple Nuri and Afra, as they are forced by the outbreak of war in 2015 to flee the Syrian city of Aleppo and to make the journey towards Britain to seek asylum.[32] A pre-show event was held on 6th February 2023, "Adaptation and Authorship – exploring the creation and adaptation of *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*."[33] It is, of course, imperative that any theatrical representation of refugees and asylum seekers is approached with care and consideration for the potential perpetuation of problematic or exploitative

[30] Abigail Grace, City of Sanctuary, Counterpoints Arts, "Sanctuary in the Arts Resource Pack," October 2019, 26.
[31] See the following pages for the example lists: Learn p.11, Share p.18, Embed p.14; Abigail Grace, City of Sanctuary, Counterpoints Arts, "Sanctuary in the Arts Resource Pack," October 2019.
[32] *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* won the 2020 Aspen Literary Prize, it was 2020 Fiction runner-up for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize and also won the 2020 Prix de l'Union Interalliee for Best Foreign novel.
[33] Nottingham Playhouse, "Adaptation and Authorship - Exploring the Creation and Adaptation of the Beekeeper of Aleppo," Nottingham Playhouse, accessed October 2, 2023, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/events/adaptation-and-authorship/.

narratives. Anna Street highlights three "primary dilemmas" around theatrical representations of "the plight of the paperless."[34] Firstly, the issue of "speaking on behalf of" because refugees face a choice "to stay hidden or to speak at considerable risk… [and]have precious little space in which to portray themselves in their own manner." There is an expectation that what they may say will evidence their "assimilation" and reproduce narratives of a "victimized past and supposedly promising future." Secondly, the aestheticization of trauma is an issue. Street argues that the theatre often adopts the same criteria as "the legal procedure for gaining asylum" which "requires evidence of trauma…frequently only be produced via performance." The performance of "victimhood" is required for survival in the legal system and a supposedly "authentic" identity as a refugee is often made inextricable from "the aestheticization of violence." This situation creates something of a dilemma if it leads to theatre practitioners selecting how refugees may be represented if based on a system that they may believe they oppose.[35] Thirdly dramatisations have the potential to reinforce oppositions unless audiences are challenged also to reflect on their own complicity in "geopolitical power structures" or "consumerist cycles of exploitation." Street also notes that "even the most participatory performances" may result in privileged members of the audience simply "cling[ing] all the tighter" to innate privileges.[36] These dilemmas should be acknowledged, addressed, and could be discussed with refugee community participants at NP. Theatre of Sanctuary Status is a whole organisation commitment and therefore not the sole responsibility of the Participation Department. Programming can play a vital role in ensuring NP provides representation on the main stage.

[34] Anna Street, "Refugee Theater and Its Transgressions: Acts of Suspension in Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson's *The Jungle*," *Sillages Critiques*, no. 31 (December 29, 2021), 1, 3, 5, 6.
[35] Alison Jeffers, *Refugees, Theatre and Crisis Performing Global Identities (*2012) quoted in Anna Street, "Refugee Theater and Its Transgressions: Acts of Suspension in Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson's *The Jungle*," *Sillages Critiques*, no. 31 (December 29, 2021) https://journals.openedition.org/sillagescritiques/12495?lang=en
[36] Anna Street, "Refugee Theater and Its Transgressions."

How will NP address the cost of living crisis escalating since late 2021? When the annual rate of inflation reached 11.1% in October 2022, it was a 41-year high, and increasing energy and fuel stress, food insecurity, and a hike in the cost of rent and mortgage costs are all having a profound effect.[37] The Trussell Trust, a charity that supports 1,200 food banks in the UK, reported that the number of food parcels provided between April 2022 and March 2023 was "more than double the amount in the same period five years ago."[38] Theatre going may be seen as a luxury for many; for example, attending the cheapest advertised seats for the 2023 pantomime *Cinderella* would cost £74 for a family of four (two adults, two children), and many families are larger. Involvement in NP's participation programmes is only possible if it remains financially accessible. NP is already achieving this through several schemes. Bursary places are available for all paid-for participation programmes upon the completion of a short online form which is reviewed by NP's Participation Department. Being in receipt of free school meals, an independent household income of under £12,500 or being in receipt of Personal Independence Payment are recognised as valid criteria.[39] There are also several groups that are free to attend for all participants. Shine groups provide free weekly drama workshops to schools and groups. NP-led participation groups that are free to attend include In House Theatre Company, Rootz, and Little People, Big Adventures. There are also several free groups which are advertised and hosted by NP but are facilitated by external groups such as Streetwise Opera, Nottingham Queer Arts Collective, and The Phoenix Theatre Company. There are schemes which reduce the cost of tickets for NP productions. The 50:50 and Hothouse schemes offer discounted tickets for charities and not-for-profit organisations to distribute to their service users. Reduced prices are available for

[37]Daniel Harari, Brigid Francis-Devine, Paul Bolton, and Matthew Keep, "Rising Cost of Living in the UK," House of Commons Library, July 21, 2023, 59-61.
[38] "Record number of emergency food parcels provided to people facing hardship by Trussell Trust food banks in past 12 months," Trussell Trust, April 26, 2023, https://www.trusselltrust.org/2023/04/26/record-number-of-emergency-food-parcels-provided-to-people-facing-hardship-by-trussell-trust-food-banks-in-past-12-months/

those under 16, under 26, and universal credit and benefits recipients; however, these most often only reduce the cost of the most expensive ticket bands, A and B. A scheme introduced in February 2023, The Youth Pass, enables young people aged 15 – 25 to claim £5 tickets for Nottingham Playhouse Theatre Company productions and selected visiting performances. NP is ensuring through these schemes that free and subsidised access to the arts and culture is maintained during the cost of living crisis. However, NP should not become complacent with the offer and look to expand these schemes where possible and remain responsive to feedback in this area. As the cost of living crisis continues to impact living standards negatively, the positive impact of engagement with the arts, as evidenced during the pandemic, should not be disregarded.

This chapter has examined what can and has been achieved in a time of crisis, but precisely what should be sustained from this period is something with which NP must wrestle to sustain accessibility and to be in a strong position to confront new challenges, like the rising number of refugees seeking sanctuary and the impact on all of us from a cost of living crisis. Reconceptualising theatres as socio-cultural and community spaces could lead to further innovation in the digital arena, increased resilience in the sector and a greater appreciation by the public of what theatre offers individuals and society beyond the main-stage productions that are the mainstay of the organisation. With increased focus on and knowledge about the positive impact of the arts on mental and physical well-being and access to resources created and collected to inspire how the arts and cultural sector can adapt to a post-C-19 world, there are many ways in which the legacy of C-19 can be positive and what was achieved in adversity made sustainable now and into the future. The Participation Department will be central to that work.

Harnessing Change: Investigating Dynamic Shifts in Nottingham Playhouse's Community Work, 2019-2023 Recommendations

In Harnessing Change: Investigating Dynamic Shifts in Nottingham Playhouse's Community Work, 2019-2023, I have recorded and analysed a selection of community engagement activities undertaken by NP between 2019-2023. Over four years, NP has experienced significant milestones and challenges. Notably, NP undertook its largest community production to date, the Coram Boy Project (2019). The C-19 Pandemic (2020 – 2022) saw a complete reimagining of community engagement at NP. Issues of Current Community Engagement (2022-2023) see NP facing the cost of living crisis and supporting refugees in a hostile environment. Recommendations are grouped into six themes: Risk-Taking, Providing Access to the Arts, Continued and Sustained Use of Digital Technology, Increasing the visibility and status of the Participation Programme, Improving the prominence of the participation programme, and Responding to Current Challenges.

Risk-Taking

Amidst the C-19 pandemic, quickly adapting and responding through programming resulted in favourable outcomes, notably, the triumphs of digital and hybrid initiatives like *Noah and the Peacock* and *Still Life*.

1. NP should take confidence from successful risk-taking with recent projects and pursue innovative projects in the future.

2. NP should consider how taking a co-creation approach to future large-scale community projects which could bring even more benefit and community engagement than achieved with *Coram Boy*.

Access to the Arts

It is vital that all people who wish to can access and benefit from the arts. However, this research has identified two barriers to access that need to be addressed to increase community engagement and inclusivity.

3. NP is decidedly committed to access for children and young people. Currently, NP runs 13 Shine groups across Nottingham, which provide free drama provision to school-age children. NP should continue to prioritise access to the arts for children and young people, especially young people who have fewer opportunities to experience an arts education because of funding cuts and curriculum changes. NP should explore how it can expand access to drama and other arts activities to school children who have reduced opportunities to study or experience the arts in school.

4. NP should continue to explore the emerging area of social prescribing and how it can promote the well-being benefits of engagement with its participation programme and provide opportunities identified by social prescribing link workers.

5. As of October 2023, NP is one of few theatres that continue to provide reduced-capacity performances at which audience members are seated in socially distanced intervals. NP should promote these performances in order to raise awareness that it continues to provide this high level of accessibility.

Hyperlocality and Mutual Aid

As a result of the pandemic, the concept of Hyperlocality has been expanded from having a purely geographical meaning to encompassing digital and virtual connectivity via the

expansion of online access. NP could benefit from nurturing a strong relationship with the residents and community groups of its physical hyperlocality, the Park Estate.

6. NP should foster relationships with The Nottingham Park Residents Association, a local community group, to strengthen its relationship with its physical hyperlocality.
    a) NP could offer to host community meetings in the Company space or facilitate talks and workshops with the group.

Continued and Sustained Use of Digital Technology

Maintaining and embedding a hybrid approach to both artistic and participation programming is one way that NP can ensure that accessibility gained during C-19 is embedded in the culture of the theatre.

7. NP should embed a hybrid approach, using digital and live experiences, to increase accessibility to its programming.
    a) Into 2023, NP is providing an on-demand version of the pantomime. However, no other digital or on-demand performances are being advertised. NP should consider producing new on-demand content and re-releasing content that was produced during the C-19 pandemic.

8. A screen placed in the foyer could display what is happening in each room of the theatre so that visitors are aware of the range of activity within the building.
    a) A screen that publicises each day's events would not only increase awareness of the whole range of NP's offer but also allow visitors who do not use technology to see

that courses/groups /sessions are taking place and thereby perhaps lead to greater participation.

Increasing the Visibility and Status of the Participation Programme

Historically, the work of community engagement at NP has been under-publicised and under-promoted in comparison to the artistic programmes. The Artistic Director frequently acts as the public face or representative for NP. However, it may be beneficial for the Director of Participation to take on this role in certain instances, particularly when communicating with diverse communities in the city.

9. NP should consider increasing the influence and visibility of the Director of Participation role.
    a) Giving the role a voice at the senior leadership level will ensure that the main stage programming and the participation programme are seen and understood to inform each other in a mutually beneficial way.

    b) Authentic involvement with communities requires the Participation Department being involved with programming from day one of a project.

10. Improving the prominence of the participation programme.
    a) Elevating the prominence of the participation programme on NP's website and in promotional materials will enhance its status and credibility both internally and externally.

11. NP should share the impact of its community engagement work in ways that the city can see. More data needs to be shared by NP and showcased to the city to the benefit of how NP is viewed and understood by its communities.

Responding to Current Challenges

NP's response to C-19 demonstrated an organisational aptitude for working effectively in unprecedented times. NP has chosen to respond directly to two challenges facing the UK: The Hostile Environment and The Cost of Living Crisis.

12. By reflecting on historical approaches, including the Theatre Workshop at Theatre Royal Stratford East, NP could pioneer a new joined-up vision for how regional English theatres can better serve diverse communities, many of which are struggling.
    a) To build on the idea of Joan Littlewood's approach to theatre as "a design for living" in a contemporary context, NP should coordinate a series of workshops that focus on how theatres can respond to the challenges faced by the communities they serve: equality of provision, diversity and inclusion, how it is addressing "the hostile environment" for sanctuary seekers and the cost of living crisis.

The Hostile Environment

Theatre of Sanctuary Status is a whole organisation commitment and, therefore, not the sole responsibility of the Participation Department.

13. As one of fourteen Theatres of Sanctuary, NP should take advantage of this expanding national network for opportunities to learn about how other theatres deliver their commitments to sanctuary seekers and to be influential in this space.

14. Programming is vital in ensuring NP provides representation on the main stage. The dilemmas of representing refugee and asylum-seeking communities should be acknowledged and addressed for any future theatrical representations of, or in co-creations with, refugees and asylum-seekers.

The Cost of Living Crisis

NP has various schemes, initiatives and programmes in place which are intended to ease or remove entirely the financial burden of access. However, the cost of living crisis has continued to worsen throughout 2023, and the necessity of financial support will increase. NP may consider how it can better support people through the re-application of its resources beyond the traditional functions of a theatre.

15. NP should look to continue to expand its schemes where possible.

16. NP should actively seek out and remain responsive to feedback on how they could best reduce or remove financial barriers to access and community engagement.

17. 47% of adults in Great Britain are using less fuel because of the rising cost of living, and many people face the decision to heat or to eat. Warm spaces are heated, free-to-use spaces where anyone who needs warmth can come and spend time without the expectation of spending money.[1]

[1] CILIP, the library and information association has published a comprehensive set of guidelines to support those wanting to set up a Warm Space, see: Marsha Lowe, Oxygen Arts, Ayub Khan, and Warwickshire County Council. "A Warm Welcome: Setting up a Warm Space in Your Community." Edited by CILIP. CILIP, 2022.https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.cilip.org.uk/resource/resmgr/cilip/information_professional_and_news/press_releases/2022_10/a_warm_welcome_2022.pdf.

a) NP could consider becoming a warm space providing access to the building for people who would benefit from a warm and welcoming space.[2]

[2] Office for National Statistics, "Cost of Living Insights," October 5, 2023, https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/costoflivinginsights/energy.

Concluding Thoughts

Operationalising the thesis in the form of the Nottingham Playhouse Community Engagement Recommendation Report, ensures that I have produced recommendations that turn discursive and analytical prose into practical and relevant suggestions for future best practice. I am optimistic that these recommendations will be well received by NP and, where appropriate, implemented. In that sense, the reflective and evidenced recommendations conclude this work. However, in another sense, something remains to be said and reflected upon here: how a rhizomatic methodological approach affords space to interweave the critical historiography of racial and ethnic diversity with NP's current community engagement while taking account of the complex organisational life of a regional producing theatre. In the busy context of quotidian concerns, there is not time for NP's senior leadership team to reflect on its history, specifically the hinge moments of its historical engagement with Nottingham's Black communities over many decades, or to perceive where and how "atmospheric walls" may have been erected for visitors. In highlighting where NP risks repeating past failures and evidencing where and how, in the past and present, progress has been made in addressing issues that concern NP, this thesis can stand as a valuable reserve of organisational memory. The pandemic provoked many questions about the roles that theatres play in contemporary society, barriers to community engagement, and how regional theatres should be recognised as socio-cultural venues for the ways in which they can, and do, function beyond their traditional remit and far beyond what was envisaged at NP's inception.

Six months into this research project, in March 2020, the world irrevocably changed. The week of my first mid-year review meeting, lockdown measures came into force and would remain in place for a further 16 months. I have tried to limit the impact of the pandemic on this research; however, unavoidably, initial research plans had to change. As part of the Being Human Festival in 2020, for example, I launched the *Nottingham Playhouse*

Community Café online webpage, having secured funding from Being Human and Midlands4Cities to organise an in-person event that would initiate this component of the project. With in-person events no longer possible, promoting such an event to targeted individuals who attend NP groups was difficult. Despite promotion of the page, it did not receive significant traffic, and submissions were slow. To begin with, I was promoting the initiative alone; it did not appear in the e-newsletters sent to interested parties by NP. Ultimately, NP and I agreed to suspend the project. I did elicit interviews and the donation of NP ephemera, which helped texture the C-19 case study, but this effort to engage more individuals beyond the groups I had already identified for interviews was affected by the pandemic.

My creation of a previously undocumented history was not affected, and I succeeded in following the work of the Participation Department, which in 2023 has been in place for 10 years. It is an opportune moment to reflect on its work. This thesis has, at times, focused on the organisational structure of NP, because staffing and structure are relevant for understanding the internal impetus behind fostering community engagement and for the extent to which it is supported. In one of the interviews selected for an Appendix to the thesis, Tony Graves captures an important distinction: "Engagement can be really fantastic and really good for that moment in time, but it has to be supported by the organising structure, has to be more than that moment in time otherwise, you can just literally be back in the same position."[1] I have situated NP as an institution, in order not to fall into the lenient approach often afforded cultural organisations when other similarly sized publicly-funded institutions face scrutiny over how inclusive they are and how diverse they could become. NP is addressing this issue, and the research undertaken here contributes to that work.

[1] Tony Graves, interview by Laura Ewart, May 13, 2020.

Now, this research is also relevant to two upcoming projects. Beginning in February 2024 and slated for completion in August, NP will undertake its second "community co-production." *The Trials* by Dawn King is a play about the climate crisis in which adults are put on trial and a jury of 12 young people decide their fates. It was first staged in the UK at the Donmar Warehouse in August 2022, having been devised by its Director of Participation for the main stage. The editors of *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Young People* (2022) highlight the Donmar production as the optimal example of how to include some 200 young people in a project, as apprentices to production staff as well as actors, and with the youth actors paid as professionals:

> This is not paying lip service to community involvement… This is the thoughtful integration of young people into a main stage production, which is being meticulously planned, so that each young person has moments to perform, learn and feel part of a process in which they participate in meaningful theatre making, whether they attend just the taster workshop, the intensives, or are taken on by the project as professionals.

"This is," the *Companion*'s editors assess, an example of "community theatre at its best."[2] NP may glean much from a discussion with the Participation Department at the Donmar as it plans its next project. In 2024, *The Trials* will be co-produced by NP with Mansfield Palace Theatre, featuring a cast of 12 young people and 3 professional adult actors, as per the published play.[3] The community cast will be recruited through two workshops, which will involve a tour of youth groups, schools, colleges and youth theatres in Mansfield. In some ways, therefore, this project mirrors the format of the Coram Boy project with a community cast supported by professional actors, and much can be learned by considering the earlier production, in the way that I have analysed it here.

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[2] Selina Busby, Kelly Freebody and Charlene Rajendran eds., "Introduction," *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Young People* (London: Routledge, 2022), 3,
[3] Dawn King, *The Trials.* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2022).

King's is a One-Act play, not only shorter but also less complex to mount than *Coram Boy* since the staging is a basic courtroom. The young people at its heart may have fewer responsibilities to balance with rehearsal time than the wider age range participating in the Coram Boy project. Like *Coram Boy*, it focuses on social justice. King believes "the play is activism" and says that she wrote it "to change things." The script was written during the first C-19 lockdowns in 2020, and in the Donmar's run post-performance discussion was crucial, echoing a suggestion I have made in the thesis that could be reinstated in different forms to the benefit of NP's communities. Dawn King stated then, "the second half is the conversation that you have with whoever you came to see the show with. How does it change the way you think? What do you want to change in your own life?"[4] *What's On Stage* described *The Trials* as "[b]old, uncomfortable, urgent viewing... King cleverly nails not just the dystopian vision, but the evasions and lack of commitment to green living that have caused it."[5] A short run of four performances of *The Trials* will be held at NP in August 2024, with one further performance at Mansfield Palace Theatre. The decision to hold a short run was made after taking into consideration the ticket sales for Coram Boy in 2019, evidencing that NP views the projects as comparable for audiences. The play and associated community engagement activities will not be directed by Artistic Director Penford but by NP Associate Artist Hannah Stone and a second "East Midlands or Midlands-based director."[6] Although the project is advertised as a "community co-production," the co-production element is the shared responsibility of professionals at NP and Mansfield Palace who chose the play. NP may wish to reflect on the account and analysis of the Coram Boy project contained in this thesis for

[4] Dawn King quoted in Andrew Dickson, "Twelve Angry Children: Young Jurors Call Adults to Account for Climate Crisis in *The Trials*," *The Guardian*, August 4, 2022, at https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2022/aug/04/climate-crisis-the-trials-dawn-king-play,
[5] The comment in *What's on Stage* is included among blurbs collated by Dawn King's publisher at https://www.nickhernbooks.co.uk/the-trials.
[6] Nottingham Playhouse, "Call out Co-Director of Summer 2024 Community Production: *The Trials* by Dawn King," accessed October 16, 2023, https://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/THE-TRIALS-Co-Director-Advert-Information-Sheet-2023.pdf.

how it can build upon that work in the upcoming project to ensure that *The Trials* contributes positively to a now-established history of its community engagement with young people.

A second project will see the reinstitution of a position at NP that will be recruited specially from the global majority. NP has secured ACE funding to ensure "the development of a future executive leader" who is a "person of colour" and will be in place for three years, from 2023 through 2026. This initiative is supported by NP's inclusion in the "Transform" project, a collective of 6 Nottingham-based NPOs aiming "to build a generation of Global Majority leaders within Nottingham's cultural landscape."[7] The funding model for this post is familiar in that it mirrors somewhat that of BRIT post holders; there is no visible commitment to continue the post when external funding ceases. In light of my research, NP may consider how to best support this individual within the organisation reflecting on the challenging experiences that BRIT postholders shared so honestly and thoughtfully in interviews that I conducted.

If NP examines the interviews I have included in the Appendix, it will be clear that the Transform project replicates many of the aims of earlier initiatives, and the challenges faced then are ones that NP could usefully reflect on when instituting and supporting this role. There is much to be learned from how the Arts Council, a former Artistic Director, and especially former postholders speak about BRIT and Eclipse now. The same initiatives come around again, maybe in different forms and certainly with different names, but the fact that they are comparable is a sad reflection on some of the issues this study addresses; Transform echoes BRIT in the 1990s so many years later. If regional theatres risk being stuck in a

[7] The five organisations are New Art Exchange, Backlit, Dance4, Nottingham Contemporary, Primary and Nottingham Playhouse, "Nottingham Playhouse NPO Bid 23," October 2023, 26, 27. New Art Exchange has been at the forefront of such initiatives to date See, for example, the Let's Talk conference in April 2023 at https://www.nae.org.uk/lets-talk-conference-20-22-april-2023-speakers-and-contributors-biographies/, NAE defines "the Global Ethnic Majority as a collective term that refers to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual heritage, indigenous to the global south, and or have been racialised as ethnic minorities" at https://www.nae.org.uk/current-opportunities/

seemingly endless cycle of repetitive initiatives in areas of EDI, how can change be ensured now, when it is clear that in the past white liberals in senior posts supported initiatives but that they did not secure material or lasting change. Sara Ahmed issues a warning that is worth noting when she worries that, "Antiracism becomes just another white attribute or even a quality of whiteness… antiracism becomes a discourse of white pride."[8] Might this description of certain individuals be applied to institutions too? Andrew Caleya Chetty summarised his concerns around institutional anti-racism initiatives: "It [the establishment] is very good at absorbing things that might be seen as a threat, and once that's been done, you can move on."[9] Embracing anti-racism as the primary aim could be the first step towards absorption and neutralisation—or if regional theatre learns from the past, it could signal a real commitment to change this time. When reflecting back on the late 1990s, Isobel Hawson expressed a certain hope, "I think that you have to see that there has been change. I think what is difficult is the time…"[10] The assumption that change will always take more time than the window represented by external funding cannot be a crutch for inaction any longer. 47 years after the publication of Naseem Khan's *The Arts Britain Ignores,* 22 years since The Eclipse Conference and 13 years since Claire Cochrane's statement about "the prevailing whiteness of employment patterns" in the "organisational structures" of English regional theatres, more must be done to diversify institutions and community engagement programmes.[11]

There is more change in train too. In November 2023, Director of Participation Martin Berry will leave NP to take up the new role of Creative Director and Joint Chief Executive of Exeter's Northcott Theatre. Berry's new position results from a senior leadership

[8] Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (London: Duke University Press, 2012), 170.
[9] Andrew Caleya-Chetty, interview by Laura Ewart, August 11, 2021.
[10] Isobel Hawson, interview by Laura Ewart, June 8, 2020.
[11] Claire Cochrane, "Opening up the Garden," 136.

restructuring at Exeter, whereby three senior managers will share the role of Creative Director and Joint Chief Executive.[12] There is a sense now, particularly post-pandemic, that Participation Departments should see an increase in status within English regional theatre. The positive health and well-being impacts of engaging with the arts are recognised in both research and policy. Giles Croft echoed in this point in his interview: "I think that sense of having a connection with communities regionally, in the regional voice, and giving opportunity, all those sorts of things which people were working so hard to kill are coming back." He was referring to the negative impact on the regions of conceiving London as "the aspiration for everything," an agenda he attributes to ACE and central government, but at the same time, he welcomes a return in valuing community engagement, more highly. ACE's most recent strategy Let's Create, identifies cultural communities among three outcomes it is seeking from arts institutions in order to develop "a collaborative approach to culture." Since 2020, there has been an unequivocal advocation— and mandate— from ACE that its funded organisations pursue community engagement: "when the cultural sector works closely with community partners, the activity itself is richer and more relevant, resources go further, and greater civic and social benefits are delivered."[13] Berry's new role may be early evidence that Directors of Participation are being sought as senior managers. NP has committed to sharing this thesis and recommendations with the new Director of Participation, who is expected to be in post by January 2023.

For theatre innovators, who are many and whose words are threaded through this thesis, notably Joan Littlewood, and Alan Lane, and for creative industry thought-provokers and influencers, like Naseem Khan, the theatre has always had a social responsibility, as central to its vision rather than as a tedious corruption of artistic space, or as at odds with the

[12] Gemma Nettle, "Martin Berry Named Creative Director of Exeter's Northcott Theatre," *The Stage*, September 6, 2023, https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/appointments/martin-berry-named-creative-director-of-exeters-northcott-theatre.
[13] Arts Council England, "Let's Create" (London: Arts Council England, 2020) 28, 37.

building, as when diversifying NP's community work clashed with architect Moro's original conception of the building. In this thesis, I have always assumed that increasing community engagement is a positive aim, and that for NP, it is undoubtedly something for which to strive because it matters even though community engagement often comes with little financial gain and some financial risk, and theatres are businesses, and profit drives decision-making. Community engagement is not without risk, then, but the risk of not engaging more with the city's diverse communities is to risk losing what makes theatre genuinely impactful. I present this research in the hope that it provides value and usefulness because it recovers aspects of the organisation's history and it demonstrates that institutional memory is not only important to create but also to reflect on, for existing and future practitioners, staff, researchers and the communities that NP serves.

Bibliography

NB. A Bibliography would not usually be organised chapter-by-chapter, but I believe that this is the optimal way to make by secondary research visible for NP and for the senior management to access the reports, texts and articles that I have used, alongside archives and my creation of oral histories, some of which are included in an Appendix.

Archives Consulted:

Nottinghamshire Archives, Castle Meadow Road, Nottingham, run by Nottinghamshire County Council for the Nottingham Playhouse Collection, and Administrative Records.

Nottingham Local Studies Library

Before its closure in March 2020, the Theatre Collection was held at Nottingham Central Library, Angel Row, run by Nottingham City Council. Nottingham City Libraries describe the Theatre Collection as "an index of performances at Nottingham City's major theatrical venues from the early 1900s to date." Due to the nature of this collection, materials were often archived without reference details. Examples of materials viewed include two unattributed scrapbooks: "Theatre Scrapbook" with contents from 1940-1960 and "Playhouse Scrapbook" with contents ranging from November 1980 to April 1994.

The Media Archive for Central England (MACE), Digital Archive, for public film relating to the East Midlands and Nottingham Playhouse.

The British Newspaper Archive, Digital Archive, for articles from the following newspapers: *The Stage* (1880-2007)**,** *Nottingham Evening Post* (1878-1999), *Retford, Gainsborough & Worksop Times* (1877-1999) and the *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald* (1866-1999).

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Appendix 1 – Nottingham Playhouse Anti-Racism Action Plan

1) To set up a working group to take the lead on, oversee the development of and ensure that the Anti-Racism Policy is communicated to, understood by and adhered to by all employees, freelancers, participants.

2) To increase the diversity of our workforce.

3) To make a commitment that we acknowledge past mistakes and will learn from them and make sustainable changes.

4) To make a commitment to never stop listening and to engage in meaningful debate in order to make real and lasting changes to NP.

5) To work across all areas of NP to promote appropriate behaviours.

6) To develop an effective representation training programme (including Unconscious Bias and anti-racism) for all employees, freelancers and Board members.

7) To ensure that all employees, freelancers, Board members and participants are empowered to challenge and call out racist behaviours, including a robust reporting system.

8) To develop mentoring programmes in all areas of our work for Black people wishing to develop a career in theatre, both backstage and front of stage.

9) To continue to create opportunities for freelance artists to engage with NP through our Artist Development Programme, Amplify.

10) To ensure that the work we present on our stages and create in our participation programmes reflects the communities that we serve.

11) To ensure that all marketing material is using appropriate language and images.

Appendix 2 – Selected Interview Transcriptions

Robert Alan (Bob) Hescott Interview - 01/02/2022

Speaker	
L.E.	Your book, *The Feast of Fools*, is such a valuable resource for what was going on with community theatre in Nottingham during the 1970s. I would like to ask you more about that time and your involvement. How did you first become involved with Nottingham Playhouse?
A.H.	I auditioned as an actor in the Nottingham Playhouse Schools Touring Company, and while I was with them, it became Roundabout Theatre Company. From there I moved to the main house and had a couple of years as an actor in the main theatre, but I had a background in London at Inter-Action and working in the community and I was missing that. I never particularly enjoyed doing schools. I felt it was halfway to the community, but not quite there. In London, I'd done shows in adventure playgrounds and places like that and it was much freer, more challenging but more exciting. In school, you rely on the discipline of the institution. Children sit in neat rows with their legs folded, and they enjoy the show because it's not maths, and they have some time off from lessons, but it's not quite the same as having them free. I became aware that on Saturday mornings a group of local teachers used to do a workshop in the front-of-house area of Nottingham Playhouse. I became friends with them and eventually married one of them. I thought it would be good to set up a small company to do work that I could take the work to where people were. That could be anywhere from libraries to old folks' homes. We even did a tour. Well, the women did a tour, of hostels for Women's Aid. We tried to get out into the wider community and away from institutions, local authority institutions. That is how it started from the Saturday morning workshops at the Nottingham Playhouse.
L.E.	In *The Feast of Fools*, I remember you say that the children who attended those Saturday morning workshops were "what you would expect at the Playhouse." Could you comment on that?
A.H.	Very nice kids but not unlike my own when they got to that age. Middle-class parents are very good at finding creative opportunities for their children. I just wanted—coming from a sort of very working-class background myself—to reach those sorts of children and their parents. We got a grant from the Gulbenkian Foundation, and set about some

	small-scale touring, and a lot of workshops in children's homes. And we took it from there really.
L.E.	Did you ever think about approaching the Playhouse to ask if that would be something it would be interested in supporting?
A.H.	I think that if we had a freedom of where we worked. I am sure, given that we were funded, the Playhouse would have been quite happy for us to do it under their umbrella, but then we would be inviting their board to be our board. I know, later, when I did run the Roundabout company, you really have to be aware of the money that's been allocated to you and not to the main house. You know, it's a difficult one. Their priority, and quite rightly, is putting on the best plays that they can with the best cast and the best directors in the theatre; that's their job. They did a good job of looking after the Roundabout company. But the further you get away from that main stage, the more of a distraction you are. It's much easier to go to someone who makes costumes and pay them to make costumes, than to go to the wardrobe department in a large institution, where you're a bit of a nuisance. You know, they've got a big show to put on and you've come to them, and you've got two people doing a tour of children's libraries and you want two costumes, and the answer is, “we haven't got time to do that now.” You know, it wouldn't have really worked had we gone into the Playhouse. I worked there for a number of years, and I eventually went back there, but Sociable Theater was just something different, freer, and sort of less tied to some centre of excellence. I think that if you work on someone else's brand, you have to respect that they have to protect that brand, and, you know, possibly a show we would want to do, they will not want us to do because it might upset the local council, the people who fund them.
L.E.	Was the local council very involved?
A.H.	I think back then they used to match the Arts Council grant, pound for pound. 50% of the support for the Playhouse came from the local authority. Now, if we wanted to do a show— I've been asked perhaps by a community worker on a council estate, where people were unhappy with some aspect of their relationship with a local authority— we could go and do it. But if we were at the Nottingham Playhouse, that might be trickier.
L.E.	So, you were released from the obligations and expectation that come with working with or for a larger organisation?
A.H.	Yes. I mentioned community workers. We worked with a lot of community workers who were very good—once they became aware of our existence—at coming to us and asking

	if we would get involved in some project or campaign. For example, a worker at a hostel for women recently paroled from prison asked us to go and do something. The women expressed a desire to do some acting. We were asked to do an acting class. Well, we did something better than that, but it was just that we could respond. You wouldn't have to say, well, we'll be free in 18 months' time. We could say, we could come next Tuesday. I think in that sort of world, people want some help immediately, not some grant project in the future.
L.E.	So, the less bureaucracy there is, the easier it is when working with groups asking for that immediate intervention. You spoke about how you were an actor among teachers. What skills did you admire in the way that they worked? And vice versa?
A.H.	I think first of all, I was impressed with the sort of teachers they were compared to the sort of teachers that I had had. That had been a process I had noted for a couple of years, actually, from leaving drama school and doing a schools' tour, going into schools where you sort of realised that the teachers are there by vocation. I am old enough to have caught the last generation of teachers who became teachers when their would-be partners died in the First World War. I think a third of the women under 30 were without partners, and they needed to be self-supporting. I think teaching was a profession that they were moved into, at the expense of married women, many of them did it because they had to, but they had no vocation in my view. Suddenly, going into schools was quite exciting, compared to when I'd gone to school as a schoolboy, where it was just very strict, and rather dull. When I met these teachers' doing drama, I was just sort of fascinated. I was experiencing for the first-time theatre-in-education in the schools' touring company: fundamental teaching skills and the ability to talk to children, as opposed to perform for them, asking them questions, and then to responding to them. "What should we do next?" "Okay, this is what we'll do, then." There is a lot of imagination in asking a question and then acting upon it. Sometimes, I must admit, I wasn't the world's greatest actor. I found gigs boring because it was the same thing every night. At nine o'clock, I'd be saying these words that I'd be saying for the next six weeks. In a teaching situation, nothing is the same two days

	running. These teachers who gave up their Saturday morning for no reward whatsoever. They weren't paid. They did it voluntarily. I just liked them; they were a nice bunch of people. I think I brought the skills of, perhaps, a director more than an actor to the group. I felt that they wanted to move on from doing workshops every week to projects that lasted longer and resulted in something at the end. That process started on Saturday morning, and then went outside of the Playhouse and became the Nottingham Youth Theatre.
L.E.	I was really struck by the story in *The Feast of Fools* of you using the caves as a rehearsal space.
A.H.	The danger I think with the arts, and with drama is that we quickly make things a ritual, without even thinking about it. If you're going to do some drama, the first thing you've got to do is find a cheap place to do it, a church hall, or find someone who can let you have a large room. It sort of happens in dusty spaces, where the surroundings are dull. Sometimes it's just nice to go out and do drama in an exciting environment, like the caves, or, you know, on Nottingham Forest. To just take it out of the dusty halls and use the environment as an extra character. The caves in Nottingham were great.
L.E.	It sounds like it was quite the adventure from what I read.
A.H.	I remember losing a group of kids down there, the sods wandered off. I was terrified, and then they reappeared, quite happily unaware that they'd caused a nervous breakdown
L.E.	I was really struck by a sentence in your book that says, "It isn't about accessibility. It's about relevancy when working with communities." I wondered if you could unpack that a bit for me.
A.H.	I think post-War II people took, in the arts, the Soviet model of "let's take the Bolshoi Ballet to factory canteens" and they took high art to people it had no relevance for; maybe one or two, it would touch. Anyone who's gone to drama school must have had that experience. Yes, I did fall in love with Shakespeare. I would have to say that in the household, I was the only one who would. Had my family found themselves in a hall, in the factory canteen where the Royal Shakespeare Company was performing, they would have been bored, they would have wanted to get out of there. It really wasn't enough just

	to say “Look, we've bought these very talented people into your world.” We needed to take the world of these people into the art and make it relevant. I think that is the difficulty sometimes in the regional theatres. They do plays to a high standard, and they are very good. But there used to be a section in *The Stage* newspaper of “what's on around the reps,” and it would show you all the different theatres and most of them were doing the same play. I just think why do the same work in Guilford and in Glasgow? Yes, it's a great play, but I think they do more these days; they encourage local writers. But it’s a difficult one, you can go too far the other way. I do remember we, and the Nottingham Playhouse, were doing a tour of Miners Welfares, and they said “please, no more plays about miners,” because they'd had so many plays coming to them about a world that they knew. That was a little too relevant. It's a difficult one. I do not think you have to reach the standards of the Royal Shakespeare Company or the Bolshoi Ballet, but it has to be something that has some sort of impact on the lives of the people who are coming to watch. I think that what theatres were trying to do then was, quite rightly, in many respects, trying to create regional as opposed to repertory theatre. Rep is cheap, commercial, provincial theatre, “who-done-its,” thrillers and shaky sets. What that movement did, after the war with the new regional theatres that were built, bit by bit, was to create a theatre system, where they did the classics, and modern new plays to a very high standard with a decent rehearsal period. So no more weekly rep, but a decent rehearsal period where the actors could actually study the parts, and I’m all for that. But part of that process, once you’ve established that is to take a look at the community that you’re in. That can be difficult because most theatre workers are sort of transitory and they come for a year or two—at the very most, five years—and that's a lifetime in directing in a theatre. But there are people who have lived in that town for three generations, or there are people who have arrived from another part of the world only a short time before and don't think that theatre is one of those places that cater for them. Certainly, in the 1970s, Nottingham was a very diverse city, but not the Playhouse.
L.E.	There is a chapter in *The Feast of Fools*, where you detail that you were working with incredibly diverse groups of people. There's the Chilean theatre group, the Black theatre

	group, a West Indian group. There was lots of diversity and you were working alongside. I just I wonder if you could tell me a bit more about that period.
A.H.	There was a place—I don't know if it's still there—on Mansfield Road called the International Community Centre and lots of different groups of people with different heritages would go there. We used to rehearse there and so became aware of these groups and occasionally they would be interested in what we were doing and would ask if we could help. It was often technical help, which we could offer, and wasn't really that interesting, but we could help them with their sound. That was an open door with them, often they were crippling themselves in an amateur dramatic way. I remember, there was a quite a good improvisation that they brought up to almost professional performance standards. This was the Black Theatre of Nottingham. It started with someone leaving their house, walking on the spot, till they arrive somewhere else knocking on the door, someone opening it, letting them in, them hanging their coat up, and then the scene started. I was able to help them artistically and just say, you don't need all that stuff at the beginning, just start at that moment in the middle of that conversation. They were a really, really, very good group of performers. The Chilean group had really top actors who were refugees from Chile and who would be working at the equivalent of the National Theatre. Now that they were refugees it was just good to be able to work with them, to do something, to help them introduce themselves to Nottingham to say, “we're here,” I enjoyed all that very much. I think that the Playhouse would have wanted to have a more diverse range of work in terms of writers and actors. It takes a generation for people to work through the system, to go to a school where they're introduced to something that they really enjoy, such as drama, to find out there are such places as drama schools, to audition for those drama schools, to spend three years at them, and then to come out at a suitable standard where somewhere like the Playhouse could use them. The Playhouse couldn't turn around in an instant and find diverse actors of that standard at that time. There were some very good people out there, but they were always working, and it wasn't always attractive to them to leave London to go and work in a regional theatre. Until you had diverse plays written and acted, you wouldn't get a diverse

	audience. It is a long-term sort of thing, a long process. I have East Asian friends who are very busy at the moment, very active and changing things for East Asian performance in this country. Only a couple of years ago I was in Manchester, and I saw a Chinese play performed entirely by English people and didn't think anything of it. The play was a folktale. They didn't put on accents, but it wasn't at the end of the day a Chinese play. It was a well-funded project, and it could have provided work for East Asian actors, you know, born in this country, who didn't have much work. Now, they'd never get away with it—the place would be picketed, and quite rightly so. Things have moved on. I've got two sons, both in television, and all the time they are asking, "How diverse is our casting?" And not just the casting, "How diverse is our crew? How many female directors do we have?" People are very aware of it now and work very hard not to put on an all-white show with an all-white crew from an all-white company.
L.E.	You wrote in the book about struggling with your own positionality as a liberal white man, especially when working with groups who by your presence, were potentially prevented from expressing themselves fully…
A.H.	In terms of the people I was working with, I was quite privileged. I hadn't had a struggle. I might have thought I had. It was difficult to come from a working-class home in London, and not have a grant to go to drama school and have to pay the fees and keep myself, and then all the hard touring I did after that without any resources, when it was so much easier for some of the actors I worked with, someone whose father was a lawyer, for example, and was actually paying their rent. So, I could become quite sort of chippy about it. Really, compared to the lives of some of the people I was working with, it was nothing, but at the same time, just being liberal and sympathetic, I was aware that just being in that room, might be limiting what they wanted to say because they were being polite. I think that's it, it's an ambassador's job, really. You give what skills that you can, and then you get out of the way, you don't create an empire. The last going out of the home job I had was directing at a drama school, where I had lots of students from other countries. I just loved their energy and commitment, their aggression, passion to get heard and seen, and to tell their stories. It made some of the people I went to drama school with seem reasonably trivial.

L.E.	You wrote a lot about your successful work with diverse groups, but you also described the struggle with local white working-class groups that had never seen themselves engaging with theatre. How did you find approaching those groups?
A.H.	In some respects, I always thought that television was their community theatre. After that period, about 10 years, I just remember *EastEnders* doing the first gay story, I thought it was tremendous. *Grange Hill*, in its heyday would do some great stories. I felt that television was a theatre of the working classes. There were places and there were times when people wanted something for themselves; an extra voice where we could make ourselves available. Things like people with a district heating system that they were very unhappy with, and no one was listening to them. We could work with a community group, from their council houses, and put together a show that they could put on. We could invite the press and local councillors and it would have an effect. I wouldn't say that the people who were involved then decided they would like to become actors or decided to get a season ticket for the Nottingham Playhouse. But, it touched their lives for a bit.
L.E.	Do you think that theatre and activism have a relationship, because you get quite political towards the end of your book about the political climate in the 1980s, and the austerity and the lack of arts spending?
A.H.	Yes, and I feel even more so now. It seems like the sort of life of my grandfather lived is being recreated: the gig economy. He was a road sweeper, who would be made redundant for two weeks every year, so that he didn't become staff and become eligible for holiday pay and retirement. We're back there now with people with no rights. The title of that book *A Feast of Fools*, was chosen I think because we were having the time of our life during a very good time of art being pretty well funded. There was money leftover where we could go off and do projects with quite small community groups. At the same time, there was Roundabout going to schools, there was EMMA, the East Midlands Arts touring theatre company going to all the villages and the rural areas. There were a number of theatres in the East Midlands— Leicester, Nottingham, Derby— doing first class theatre. It seemed as if the arts were really making a difference. But now, I think things have gone a long way back to the bad old days. I think we were very

	lucky to be young when we were. I think young people have a much more difficult struggle getting into the arts these days.
L.E.	The Playhouse has a Youth Board now. They're a group of young people that mirror the Board of Trustees. What would be your advice to them about the state of theatre today?
A.H.	I think first of all, I would ask their advice. They probably know better than I do. I think if someone listened to my advice, they probably shouldn't. There would be an arrogance to an artist if they're going to do that. If someone well-meaning says "it's very difficult you might not make a living" and they listen to that, well, you know, they are never meant to be. I mean, I always admired anyone at drama school because they had started that process of turning their dreams into reality; they've taken practical steps. I don't think I've ever met anyone who regretted going to drama school, even though only a minority of the people who go ever make a living for their whole working lives. They all, I think, get something from it. They get some courage. In terms of a youth board, which I think sounds fabulous idea, I think I'd ask them; is it advisable to go into the arts?
L.E.	You can now do complete courses in community theatre, and there are Master's degrees dedicated to how to work with communities. Do you think that is valuable?
A.H.	Yes, yes, I do. I think that the danger is that the experience of doing something, mistakes as well as the good things, are lost when that comes to an end. I never went to university; I went when I was 50 and did postgraduate studies in conflict at King's College London. I was interested in all the talk about, you know, non-government organisations. I think an awful lot of experimental work in the arts and community theatre gets lost, as soon as the people doing it move on to something else and by having it as sort of part of drama schools, it gives it a legitimacy, and also, education is a damn good thing.
L.E.	How did you end up going back to the Playhouse? You mentioned that you ran Roundabout for a time.
A.H.	Yes, for a year. I stress, sort of. I had a family, and the funding came to an end, and I needed a job. I remember, I was walking past the Playhouse, and then artistic director Richard Digby Day yelled down at me from an open window. He spotted me and said "Oh, you will be good in Old King Cole." I mean, I enjoyed being part of the Playhouse. It was a village, you know, there were props makers, and scene painters and carpenters, and girls who worked in wardrobe and the front-of-house and the actors and, you know, two separate companies and it was good to be there. I was asked after a couple of years

	to direct the Roundabout company. I must admit, I didn't enjoy that year at all. I just think I probably did it for the wrong reason. It was a year of security and my wife, at that time, was looking after the children, so there was just one income coming in and we lived pretty much hand to mouth. It was 12-month contract, but I think it had moved on from community theatre as I understood it. I wanted to do straight acting on a stage. I didn't enjoy that year. I realized that actually, it wasn't for me anymore.
L.E.	So where did you go after you left Roundabout?
A.H.	I think that was probably the time, I started to get work in television, writing things. Then I became very much a freelance actor, but for television, because the contracts were shorter, and I could mostly live at home. I used to get all-right money writing for television, which I did for the following 20 years.
L.E.	Thank you for agreeing to speak with me again. It's been so lovely and interesting to hear about your experiences and the work you undertook and the stories from that time.
A.H.	Thank you for listening.

Isobel Hawson Interview - 08/06/20

Speaker	
L.E.	Can I start by asking how you came to work for Arts Council England?
I.H.	That was a bit of a surprise really. I have always worked in theatre since the early 1970s. I started at the old Leeds Playhouse when it was on the university campus, and then I worked in theatre-in-education. I worked in television for a bit. I worked at Nottingham Playhouse for quite some time when Richard Eyre was there. I worked for various political companies and then lived in Australia for a long time because Rog [Rodger], my husband, was asked to set up a whole load of stuff in theatre there. The kids were born out there, and then, when we came back in 1988, for work reasons, I ended up running Theatre Centre, a young people's theatre company. After a period of about five years, our Arts Council officer, at that time, who did a lot of work around community theatre, asked me if I would go into the Arts Council for 6 months, to cover for someone who was ill, which I did. I ended up being there for 15 years. I was absolutely privileged to be there at that time; it was a very different organisation to what it is now, and it was a very good time to be there.
L.E.	What did you see the role of Arts Council England being whilst you were there?
I.H.	Obviously, a funding authority first and foremost. I think what happened while I was there was that it evolved and was not just a funding authority. We were there to work, and I felt it very strongly, with clients across the country. My responsibility was around cultural diversity in theatre but later on it also became about children and young people, about participation at a time when theatre was leading the way, particularly around developing policy. We became the first department to have a policy which had certain priorities and certain very clear aims, one of which was around cultural diversity. I was there during a period of change when the Arts Council changed in terms of becoming a single national Arts Council, so rather than having ten regional offices we became one Arts Council with a national office, but everybody was equal across the organisation.
L.E.	Do you feel that the political climate influenced what the Arts Council was able to do during that period or do you feel it was the people within the Arts Council?
I.H.	I think the leadership within the Arts Council changed and the structure changed, and then policies came in. Slightly after the Theatre Policy the Arts Council printed its first ten-year strategy which was very clear. It was a combination of people and leadership.

L.E.	Can I ask about the relationship between BRIT and Eclipse because I have been trying to understand the separation?
I.H.	When I joined the Arts Council there was an initiative. At that point, there were certain funds identified for priorities. There was a small amount of money put into the Regional Black Theatre Initiative, the RBTI, that came under my responsibility. A small amount of money had been put into identified projects basically—no companies, no strategy—it was just money for certain projects. When I started to understand what had been going on, we had a group meeting and decided that we had to develop what had already been done and out of that came BRIT— the Black Regional Initiative in Theatre— and behind that was a strategy. We started to look at how we could link up specific things that already existed across the country. If you look back at the time there was identified funding for small scale touring, but Black theatre— and I say that with Black and Asian under a generic term of Black Theatre— was finding it hugely difficult to be recognised. If you look back at that period, you only had to walk into a regional producing theatre— which were absolutely across the country and receiving the majority of funds—to see they were absolutely all white-led. The boards, the senior management, they were absolutely white. When you walked in, I always remember this as a sort of signal to me, you would have all the production photos and you would never, ever, see a Black face in those photos in the front-of-house. So, theatres never represented the communities with whom they were trying to engage or serve.
I.H.	BRIT was a much wider remit. There was the Green Room, Bristol Old Vic, South Hill Park, New Wolsey, West Yorkshire Playhouse and Birmingham Rep. These were always linking into, where possible, partnerships with regional theatres. Funded by BRIT, there was an individual in place whose role was challenging because expected to make change internally, but also to develop audience development strategies with the local community, plus look at touring work which was project funded. There wasn't Grants for the Arts at that point, it was project funded. In what was then the Drama Department, there were three cycles of project funding a year that went into small scale projects. Out of that, where there were various initiatives, audience development, touring, change etc. it became Eclipse and that happened at the Eclipse Conference. There was the first combined TMA [Theatrical *Management Association]* and ITC [The *Independent Theatre Council]* annual conference where small scale, mid-scale, and larger scale-verging on commercial-joined together for

	the first annual conference. On the Saturday morning, there was a challenge from the stage that theatre in general was institutionally racist at which point I picked up on that as a challenge to start to look at what it was like across the country. The start of that was the Eclipse Conference.
L.E.	How did Nottingham Playhouse become involved as the venue of the Eclipse Conference and seemingly take a lead in representing regional theatre?
I.H.	We looked at partnerships that involved small scale organisations and certainly where there was representation from BAME communities. The aim of BRIT was to create a more equitable theatre, and Nottingham seemed a viable place, due to the community within Nottingham.
L.E.	Could you tell me about the outcome of Eclipse and what happened following the conference?
I.H.	Well, you'll have read the Eclipse Report, and there were a lot of recommendations, many recommendations. Following that, the first thing that we did was to set up a series of seminars that were for senior managers and members of the board; it wasn't for general staff, it was purely for senior managers. There was a group of us. There was an equality organisation, and then we had a variety of artists: sometimes there would be Tyrone Huggins, sometimes Felix Cross, or John McGrath. It was a day's seminar, and the main objective was to create greater understanding around equality. It took place every Saturday for 18 months. We went around the country and every single funded theatre building and company, including the London theatres, took part in a seminar. It was a one-to-one seminar, so we'd do York, Leeds, Birmingham, Manchester etc. They were very hard and there was a lot of resistance. The equality section that John led, was a morning session to create greater understanding about creating an equal starting line for people. He would talk about how to advertise, induction, bringing people up to speed for interviews, creating a level playing field. Way before the Arts Council itself started an equal opportunities plan, we engaged with theatres to create their own diversity action plans.
L.E.	So that every funded organisation would have had a diversity action plan?
I.H.	Every theatre organisation, yes.

	What we tried within the Arts Council was that this would be part of the funding agreement. But, the Arts Council itself was changing; Tony Panayiotou came into what was then the Diversity Department. In many ways, Tony picked up on what had been going on in theatre. He proposed to Council that across all funded organisations—that were then still called Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs)— diversity action plans would be brought in across the board and it became part of every funding agreement. I was very involved in taking the principles and rolling them out across all the organisations. The Cultural Diversity Action Plan for ACE was published in 1998 and part of that was the seminars across each region. Because there was a Diversity Department within the Council, there were a lot of other initiatives going on, including the Roots initiative which I think Nottingham was involved with around audience development. I was working very closely with the Audience Development department.
L.E.	Eclipse wasn't about community engagement; it was about internal culture of the theatre but where did you see community engagement fitting with the Eclipse initiative? Was it positioned as audience development?
I.H.	Certainly, the Black Regional Initiative in Theatre at Nottingham, Bristol and the West Yorkshire Playhouse. Very often in the early days, the people who were employed as BRIT producers, mainly by the regional producing theatres, were given responsibility for Black History Month, or a photographic exhibition or occasionally there would be community shows they would do. I can remember Garfield at Leeds being very frustrated because it wasn't making any difference, really he felt it was fulfilling Leeds' role in Black History Month. There was a lot, a lot, of debate. You put a Black person into a white-led organisation and actually their role was really, really hard, because you can't change a whole organisation when the board is all white, and the management is all white. You're waving your banner and your flag but there were too many barriers. A lot of the early work was around audience engagement, particularly in Bristol. Andy Hay was there and there was a lot of fantastic work done in Bristol around audience development, particularly around the Asian community. With the statue being pulled down yesterday [the statue of slave trader Edward Colston was pulled down on June 7th, 2020, during a Black Lives Matter protest], I was reminded. I used to go down there a lot and have conversations within the St Pauls' community. The St Pauls' community had never been into Bristol Old Vic. I mean never. They had no interest and Bristol Old Vic had never

	engaged with them, and their limited number of attempts to bring audiences in just never worked. Through BRIT, there was an absolute engagement and work would happen within the St Pauls area. In Nottingham, I know Bea [Udeh] was there and I know that she struggled. You would have to talk to her about the background of it all, but it was very, very difficult to place a single Black person within a white-led organisation and say, "OK, well your brief is to change it all." That's a slight exaggeration but
L.E.	Thank you. In the BRIT review report that you shared with me, it talks about Nottingham Playhouse having difficulty with it. It says: "Within the last two years BRIT has made little impact and has not necessarily been seen as a mainstream activity." Do you feel there was a particular struggle at Nottingham Playhouse?
I.H.	Yes, at certain times. One of the things when Eclipse happened was the recommendation for Eclipse Theatre.
LE	How did Eclipse transition into what it is today?
I.H.	Well, the main thing about Eclipse was taking forward the recommendations. There were the seminars around equality across the country. I will probably have to refer to some documents about what else happened… there was a lot of debate and conversations, research into drama schools, BAME attendance at drama schools. I think the percentage of attendance, apart from at Rose Bruford, was pretty low in terms of the BAME community, but that is gradually changing. It's changing a bit. I know this because I do some work at Central and it's very different to what it used to be. We had various strands. If you look at the BRIT strategy chart, there was touring and distribution, training and professional development. We had conversations with BECTU, Equity, TMA, ITC, the industry lead bodies, because there were very few opportunities for the BAME community, let alone, within drama school and the technical side of theatre. Some of my statements are fairly sweeping but, by and large, you would find that the in-residence technical members were BECTU members who had been within a theatre for a very long time. It was very male dominated, very white. Openings for females or Black people to start a career within the technical side were challenging and so we certainly had conversations with BECTU, Equity, etc.

	We had the network of touring companies, and, at the same time, we had new work coming up. That happened particularly through what then became known as the Theatre Review and more money was invested into theatre. I'm not saying a high percentage, but a certain percentage went into new Black companies coming through. At that time there was, Talawa, Nitro, Charlie [Hanson], Vayu Naidu. A whole load of companies came up, some disappeared along the way and some still exist. There were about ten or twelve of them that came through. We also worked a lot on new writing, we worked with the BBC developing opportunities for writers through radio. We did something which was quite important called Live and Direct with Manchester Contact. This was the development of emerging BAME directors, a two-week annual event, and out of that a number of people who went through it began to run their own companies. An example of that would be Keith [Saha] at Twenty Stories High. We had new writers emerging and we had directors; some of whom were forming their own companies, but also there was a legacy to that where Black directors had placements within regional producing theatres. What we were trying to do was to create opportunities for development, professional development, but also to increase knowledge of what was happening within theatre, so somebody would have opportunities to direct plays within regional producing theatres. A lot of them have gone on the develop their own careers; there's no doubt at all about that. In London we had the South Asian Theatre Consortium, which was a group of touring theatres, which took work that was funded by the Arts Council. There were all sorts of targeted audience development initiatives which included the Audience Development initiative at the Arts Council and Roots who were out in the community. A lot of people were doing BRIT work in the sector.
L.E.	Did BRIT have a formal end? Or did BRIT continue via other routes?
I.H.	BRIT was the beginning of change and out of that Eclipse took over. BRIT was still running and then there was the Eclipse Conference with its recommendations, and BRIT work continued. Out of Eclipse emerged the key aims around governance, research, employment opportunities, so that overtook BRIT, and out of that came Eclipse Theatre.

L.E.	I am trying to understand and map a timeline of the initiatives at Nottingham Playhouse because there appears to have been surge of activity surrounding diversity, and initiatives like BRIT. Would it be right to say that it is complex with lots of overlaps?
I.H.	Yes, even when Eclipse Theatre started Bea [Udeh] was still at Nottingham, so she continued in her role and then Eclipse Theatre came in, and the seminars came in, all the work around Eclipse was carrying on but Bea was still there.
L.E.	So Bea was funded through Eclipse?
I.H.	Yes, and the money that funded the individuals, that was through the Theatre Review that was put into the RFOs, so it was subsumed.
L.E.	I also want to understand why Nottingham had African Caribbean Arts Producers, but Leicester had Asian Arts Producers. Where did the separation come from?
I.H.	It was to do with community because Leicester is majority Asian. There were long… long, conversations, with the old Leicester Haymarket [Theatre]. The starting point of the conversation was about their own communities. Certainly, there was a lot of community work in Leicester, loads of it.
L.E.	In 2020, do you feel that the issues highlighted by BRIT and Eclipse are still relevant?
I.H.	Yes. I think… because sometimes I look back and there was change, there is no doubt about it, there was change. I can remember, for example, at the New Wolsey theatre, that a lot of the wok of the BRIT producer there was around audience engagement and bringing in the Black community, and young people from the area. With Eclipse Theatre there was the consortium of regional producing theatres; so, there was Birmingham, Leeds, Nottingham, New Wolsey. It started off with Paulette [Randall] directing *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*, and then there was *Mother Courage* and there was Roy's [Williams] *Little Sweet Thing*. That opened at New Wolsey, and I remember going there with Tyrone, and it was a new play written by a Black writer, with an all-Black cast directed by a Black artist. There were people hanging from the roof. You would never have seen that three years earlier. There were changes and there were a lot of very positive changes, it was certainly helped by the Arts Council. It was helped first of all by Theatre Policy and cultural diversity being placed centrally. It was then helped by the Arts Council creating its own ten-year strategy where diversity was central. You can genuinely see some very positive changes; but when you look at the demonstrations that have been happening in America and in England and

	here in Paris where I am, or Toulouse, about race equality, one realises the changes, that happened in theatre, have been positive but there is a very, very long way to go. So, when you look at the theatre across the country now, in England, you will see that there was Madani [Younis] in Bradford who went to run the Bush [Theatre], then went to the Southbank [Centre]—whatever happened at the Southbank is another story— there's [Theatre Royal] Stratford East; but you can name on two hands the number of Black artists running organisations. The question that always remains in theatre is about the work that is created. I know that theatre is in a very difficult situation at the moment— I don't know anyone who knows what's going to happen—but inevitably if you have white management, and a white artistic director who has been educated in a traditional European way, the work will tend to be more [white] European or [white] British based rather than recognising that it has to acknowledge all communities. It has changed, you can almost see the change; it's changed in Nottingham, it changed in Birmingham, it has changed. There is still a long way to go. Part of this response has been redacted.
L.E.	At the Playhouse, it seems, when Venu [Dhupa] was chief executive this activity became more apparent. There is an interview with Giles Croft that I have listened to, and he says that it was Venu who instigated his realisation around diversity at NP. Giles also comments that he felt regret that the Playhouse had let Eclipse fade away.
I.H.	I think that is absolutely right. I mean the first producer with Eclipse was Steven Luckie, and he doesn't work in theatre any longer, but the challenges that he faced were very hard… Part of this response has been redacted
L.E.	Did the Haymarket choose to bring in a Co-Artistic Director?
I.H.	Yes, that happened. Before the Haymarket closed, Paul Kerryson was the Artistic Director there and I introduced him to Kulli [Thiarai], who was at Red Ladder. Paul genuinely wanted to make a change and there was a gap. What we were talking about was not having a separate wing called BRIT at Leicester … not having a separate strand of work but that it should become absolutely integrated into senior management. I introduced him to Kulli and

	after a period of time they agreed they would form a co-artistic directorship, so that was a change that happened that was positive. Then Kully and Paul took the Haymarket into the new Curve theatre.
L.E.	It is interesting that lots of the issues that you speak about are still relevant in some form...
I.H.	I agree, but to think in positive terms… I think that you have to see that there has been change. I think what is difficult is the time, when you see people on the streets of London, it's the time that it takes to change. It's basically the same people who are running the country now. A pretty white Conservative government I'd say, pretty blokesy. When you looked across the country 20 years ago you wouldn't have many Black people on boards; it has changed a little bit.
L.E.	My final question, then, if someone gave you funding to do a community engagement activity in Nottingham, what would you instigate?
I.H.	I would bring in a whole new team of people to create something with the community. I wouldn't ask any of the funded organisations in Nottingham to do it. I would ask them to support it, to put their resources into it. I could almost tell you who I would work with, and they would almost certainly not be white, because that way you would get something that would be developed by listening to the community, and it would be for the community, and it would involve the community.
L.E.	Could you tell me who those people would be?
I.H.	Well, there are a number of people that I would work with. I find that their collaborative process and their involvement in their communities creates much more interesting work that engages communities. Several projects that I am working on at the minute involve people who listen to their own communities. I am doing a project with Mohammed Ali, who used to be at the Arts Council with me. He's a writer, journalist, political activist and published author. I worked with him on his first play which was the first Somali play to tour. We are doing a new work about the white working-class women who married into the Windrush generation. It's a collaboration with Julie McNamara from Vital Exposure. You've just got these amazing stories from women who, against the will of their parents, married for love into a generation of Black people who had come over after the Second World War. There are people like Tyrone [Huggins] - if you want to read a good book, he wrote the Eclipse book, *The Eclipse Theatre Story*. That's a very simple book that talks very much about racism, it talks about the company being in Nottingham, and

	accommodation, and digs where people were saying, “Black people can’t stay here.” This was in the 1980s and the 1990s. He talks about change. I’ve done a lot of work with Tyrone. There are artists I would work with and bring into Nottingham and create work in a completely different way than repertory theatre. It wouldn’t go on at Nottingham Playhouse, it would be in the community, and it would be of amazingly high quality. It would be different that’s all. I think one of the things I want to say, going back to Eclipse Theatre, which came out of the Eclipse Conference, is that the main aim of Eclipse was to create middle-scale work to tour on the middle scale. Year One was a very well-known play, Year Two was the Chekhov and then Year Three a new play. There was no Black work on the middle scale. This was creating employment; it was creating work of quality. Eclipse Theatre then broke off to become a separate funded entity. People who were involved at that time, including me, think it was a pity that it wasn’t held to account to continue its role to create mid-scale work, because there is now plenty of small-scale diverse work. It’s not just about being Black or Asian, there’s disability to consider too. That world has changed, still has to change but it’s changed and changing. I think it’s a pity that there’s not more integrated casting, but I think that we have lost seeing a piece of work that has been created by Black people for all audiences, of a scale where you think “Wow this is something different”.

Giles Croft Interview- 27/04/21

Speaker	
L.E	I would like to start by asking how you came in to post at the Playhouse; what was your journey to getting the job?
G.C.	I took up my post in the autumn of 1999. Prior to that I'd been the Artistic Director at the Palace Theatre in Watford, and I'd been there for, say, five years for the sake of argument. Before that, I'd worked at the National Theatre, and I was the Literary Manager there and I met and worked with Venu Dhupa. Venu had in the late 1990s come to Nottingham Playhouse as, what was then called, the Executive Director, and my predecessor did a sort of short period with her and then left. She was looking for somebody to take over. I actually wasn't really thinking of leaving London at the time, but she came down to see me and asked if I'd consider applying. I mean, I had to apply, and I had to go through the interview process, but I was prompted by Venu making me consider the option, really. I'd been to Nottingham on a number of occasions to see plays. I'd been to the city a few times, but I didn't know it well. I'd always liked the theatre, and I had a lot of conversations about it because the person I worked with at the National Theatre, the artistic director there at the time that I was there, was Richard Eyre, had been the Artistic Director of Nottingham Playhouse, and he had a lot of thoughts about who was in the building and the policies, et cetera. I had some sense of the history by the time I arrived. So that was it, a combination of a series of accidents and encouragements.
L.E.	Can you tell me a bit more about your impression of the Playhouse before you began working there? When people would talk about the Playhouse, what were the kinds of things that came up most often?
G.C.	Two or three things come to mind. The first thing is the history of the Playhouse. In fact, I think it is still the case that there's something about the past in Nottingham, particularly the era that relates to John Neville, in the opening of the new building, all that carries some sort of memory. Eventually, it'll die out, but certainly when I arrived, over 20 years ago, there was still quite a strong sense that somehow it had its heyday many years before. Not that it hadn't had good periods; there'd been periods of success. Really the glory days were the John Neville era and somehow nobody had ever lived up to that. So that was one sense of it. The other major feeling I had, and this was from my visits to the Playhouse during

	my time at the National Theatre and whilst I was at Watford, was that it had a really ambitious programme, artistically, but that it seemed to have its eyes set on London or Europe and not on the city of Nottingham. I felt that quite strongly. When I applied for the job, my pitch was to recalibrate the Playhouse, not to lose all the international aspirations, but to recalibrate it in a way that connected it much more directly to the city of which it was a vital part. My third thing wasn't so much about the Playhouse, but it connects to what I've just said, which is, I'm not from London I'm from the West Country. My feeling was that I'd spent a lot of time working in London and I wanted, just on a personal note, to reconnect with my sense of regional identity. Not that Nottingham was my region, but there's something about celebrating the regional identity that I felt I had to offer because I carried that with me in some way. It felt like a good opportunity on a personal level to do that.
L.E.	When you first joined the Playhouse, you inherited a staff team and the structure that was already there. Can you recall what the community engagement and staffing structure was like?
G.C.	In terms of staffing structure, it was all Roundabout really. As the Artistic Director, I had a responsibility to make connections across the city, of course, as did Stephanie [Sirr]. There would be conversations with other departments and other organisations, of course, but fundamentally, what wasn't really considered community, but education, was driven by Roundabout. It has its own glorious history that it carried with it, which was also a bit of a millstone in some ways. And of course, Richard [Eyre] and his wife Sue Birtwistle had started it. That history was carried forward in some way. By the time I arrived, Andrew Breakwell was already in post as Roundabout's director.
L.E.	How was the relationship between you, as Artistic Director, and Roundabout? Did you have any artistic input or was Roundabout doing its own programming?
G.C.	Whilst I was there, Roundabout went through quite a lot of changes, and it was very different then from what it is now. It wasn't autonomous by any stretch of the imagination, but, it had its own director. It was in a different building, over the road from us so it could operate secretly. The director of Roundabout was a member of the senior management team of the Playhouse. Quite a lot of the work was focused around supporting the main programme of the Playhouse, in some way or other, whether that was through education packs or whatever it might be: workshops, projects. That was a key part of it, but it was

	also an independent producing company, really, making its own work. It had its own production team. It had its own stage manager, its own administrator and its own name, Roundabout. Most people, I think, didn't even know it was the Playhouse. My memory is that—I could be 100 percent wrong about this, but my memory is—the education connection between Nottingham and Nottingham Playhouse was enhanced during those early years. I am absolutely sure there was a lot of conversation about how on earth we get people to acknowledge that the work of Roundabout is actually generated by Nottingham Playhouse. It had been independent and then was embraced by Nottingham Playhouse… or throttled, some might say. To answer your question, there were a lot of conversations and Andrew [Breakwell] and I worked well together; there were agreements and disagreements. A number of people who went through Roundabout worked in the Playhouse. We tried to make connections, probably not always as successfully as we would have liked, but my feeling was, and I think Andrew's was too that, we needed to demonstrate a cohabiting relationship. More and more people started to work across the platforms. The other thing that happened was that money began to become a problem, for all sorts of reasons. It was partly to do with the historical cockup, and partly to do with changing the policy, and partly to do with the Arts Council and local authority funding diminishing. The structure behind Roundabout began to be dismantled. Within a few years of my arriving, the company had lost its stage manager, though it kept a reception administrator. The workshop leaders employed by Roundabout began to be whittled down and employed on a more freelance basis. Andrew had to deal with all of that, it wasn't easy, it wasn't comfortable. The number of productions started to diminish, and the remit began to change. There was a really strong feeling that the sort of work that Roundabout was doing, which largely was taking work out into schools, the old T.I.E [Theatre-in-Education] model, was out of date. Andrew, I think, had a much stronger sense of the value of that work than other people did. He fought really hard to keep those principles and, at the same time, he was encouraged to look at a broader remit for Roundabout. It was much more about connecting with the community, a little less to do with education in schools but using it to bring people into the Playhouse as well as going out to communities. Part of that was a journey towards making the Neville studio because there was no studio in those

	days. Anything that happened off the main stage had to happen in a meeting room, which we would turn into a performance space. It was part of a whole process of trying to refocus the work as a way of supporting the main house and less s taking it out into schools, though the community part of it increased, if that makes any sense at all. It wasn't always done as willingly as we might like. Overall, I think it was pretty successful. Money began to go, quite large amounts of money were taken away. Centrally, the Playhouse had to support that work, which created some tensions because how much additional money did we have to do the extra work? Not as much as we would have liked. It was a really tricky time; more people lost jobs. Andrew [Breakwell] fought hard, did a really good job. Out of that came some ambitious programming that was focused on access and disability, you know, the work that happened for small groups in the pod. Andrew led on this. We started to make work in a specially built space. The space could only take a few people, but it was performance space for people with disabilities, some very profound multiple learning disabilities. There are about four or five of these projects that were made, and they were really terrific; they'd be set up and then they could go out into other spaces. It was a really exciting time. There was a group of people who worked really closely on developing that work. Some of the performers had disabilities; it was about performing for that audience in a safe space, and it was quite pioneering. That is something of which I'm immensely proud. The work that then carried on and became mainstage work, was built from that.
L.E.	From my understanding of what you said, the decline of Roundabout, although incredibly unfortunate, difficult and resulting from external pressures, ultimately led to a diversification of the type of work the Playhouse was doing. Is that correct?
G.C.	No question about that. No question about that. Andrew fought really hard and pretty successfully to keep taking work into schools as well. A lot of this pioneering work then also went out into schools. The Pod would be taken out and go into special schools. It was all terrific, really all terrific. Yes, your summation of it is pretty accurate.
L.E.	The next topic I'd like to cover is around the Black Regional Initiative in Theatre and the subsequent Eclipse Conference. How did the Playhouse become involved?
G.C.	The first thing to say about Tyrone's [Huggins] book *The Eclipse Theatre Story* is that the narrative is slightly off, but it will give you a pretty good background.

	This goes back to Venu [Dhupa]. BRIT was already going on and in place by the time I arrived at the Playhouse, and it was funded in a number of different theatres. Each of the theatres had a different focus, so the staff who were doing it over at Leicester were focussing on Asian representation; Nottingham was focussing largely on African Caribbean, and you would find similar variations in the other theatres that you went to. It was quite tricky, in many ways, to accommodate within the building because a lot of the people running it were good—some better than others, of course—but somehow it was always fighting against the structure of the Playhouse. What I mean by that is that people were supportive of it, but the Playhouse was a big old operation with a huge number of things running. The BRIT scheme had some money to do stuff, some support, but often tensions existed, and it was the intention that there should be tensions. They were trying to encourage the Playhouse to think differently about what it might do. My saying that doesn't mean to suggest that it wasn't of value or that that it didn't achieve good things, but I think it struggled quite often. It depended on how good a politician the person was in the post, or the people were in the post. BRIT did some good, interesting and worthwhile work. No question about that. What happened was that Venu [Dhupa] encouraged, I think, by some other people, and this may well be in the book, decided that what they wanted to do was explore the idea of something a little more focused on main stage work. Quite soon after I arrived, there was a meeting set up in Nottingham with a bunch of like-minded people. Sadly, I can't remember exactly who, but I wasn't invited. I was excluded from the meeting for whatever reason. I think the reason was, they wanted to keep it with a group of people who felt very strongly. I have to say, I didn't feel upset about that, it felt like the right choice, if they wanted to be able to speak openly about what was going on. What came out of it was the idea for what became Eclipse. It seemed to me to be a really sensible idea, and the theory was that it was about embedding Black artists in the middle scale and not just about producing Black work. It was about encouraging Black directors and writers. I started to phone people up, as did Venu, at other theatres and ask did they want to come on board with this? We got four or five other cities, which included Bristol to begin with. I know the exact list is easy enough to find, and I'm sure it'll be in the book.

	I was ringing round, as was Venu, finding people who were willing to come on board with this project, to come up with a name for it, which became Eclipse. We had to talk to the Arts Council about whether they would find money and what came out of that was the idea of a conference, which effectively was the launch of the Eclipse project. So, the Eclipse project was devised over a quite short period of time, really, and the idea was that the Eclipse Conference was the announcing of it. The conference was part of the way in which we were going to promote this whole thing, and the idea was that every year one of the theatres would take on the lead in the project, so it would be handed over. We appointed Steven Luckie at Nottingham Playhouse, and I think he stayed with us in the offices for a couple of years and then he moved on and that was it. Off we went and we commissioned some writers, we got a bunch of directors, we did some work. We'd been doing work of that sort a little bit at the Playhouse, but not that much. It was very successful, not always easy, but a very successful scheme. The underlying intention that wasn't always necessarily clearly articulated was that in four, five, or ten years' time that the look of—I mean quite literally the look of—people in those senior decision-making positions would change. That was the idea. The way to work that through was by embedding it within these organisations, which were largely white, middle-class-run regional theatres. The problem came when, quite understandably, some people felt they wanted to take complete control of the decision-making process. Though Steven [Luckie] was a very important part of it, fundamentally, it was still the Artistic Director and Chief Executives of the theatres. who were people like me or Stephanie, l making the decisions. That was completely understandable. What was born out of that agitation was Eclipse Theatre company…but it was removed from the partnership and became an independent organisation. My issue with that, and I did have an issue with it, was not the existence of Eclipse, but that the pressure on the producing theatres would diminish. We could revert to our old ways, thinking "oh, there we go, there goes Eclipse we'll just get on doing what we wanted to do." The battle then, for all of those theatres, became how do we continue the legacy of Eclipse within our organisations? I don't think it was ever really happily resolved. I think the transition from Eclipse as a project to Eclipse as a theatre company left quite a problematic hole for the organisations that it was leaving behind. I'm not arguing it shouldn't have happened— that company makes complete

	sense— but what we didn't do was work out how we were going to continue the project without the specific money available for Eclipse. Some people have been better at it than others. Ramps on the Moon, which we were again first with, been doing a lot of that work, as I've already said, with Andrew; it was a similar sort of model. Many of the same partners were trying to make work and embed it within the organisation and change attitudes. The interesting thing about Ramps on the Moon is that because it had Graeae [Theatre Company], as a partner right from the outset it's been able, and will probably be able, to keep pressure on and create work within the organisations in a way that Eclipse never did. We never had that, we had relationships with other companies, but we never had a producing company, a Black producing company as part of the team, and that might have been the weakness. I suppose what I think is that if Eclipse had also embraced, let's say, Talawa [Theatre Company] for the sake of argument, I think that we would have had a voice within the group that would have articulated how we could change our processes rather than just making work. What we set up effectively was just a production company without its own Artistic Director. What we needed was something that was more challenging in terms of organisational change. When Eclipse went, we didn't have the energy behind us to maintain it, so each theatre then went on its own journey, some of them more successful than others, at trying to keep those principles alive.
L.E.	Are there any theatres that, you feel, were successful in making that organisational change? Are there any examples you could give?
G.C.	I don't think we [Nottingham Playhouse] were too bad at it. We weren't too bad because we were commissioning people. I think also New Wolsey [Theatre] has been pretty good at it. You know, there are people who have been better than others. Birmingham [Rep] had quite a strong energy behind it. I think that, you know, we look at Bristol [Old Vic], pretty pathetic actually, and various others. I think as much as anything else, what we lost was a coordinated approach, you know: we'd each do our own thing, and some of us were better than others. Actually, what was really powerful about Eclipse was that five or six big theatres were working on this project, so that we could feed each other in some way. What we really lost, was the connection and the impetus for change. If you're just operating on

	your own all the other pressures begin to become so great that you forget that you have these other things you're meant to be doing. I would imagine that in the next few years, there will be so much pressure for change, that it will become possible. I have a bugbear, which in a way I haven't really articulated, which is that I think that one of the real problems that happened was the focussing of money, central money, onto bigger organisations and encouraging them to see London as the aspiration for everything. That took place over many years, and I think the Arts Council, and government, take a lot of responsibility for messing up, actually, because I think they didn't foresee what was going to happen to local authorities and when it did happen, they didn't plan for supporting organisations in the right way. I am sure the government promoted the idea that somehow we ought to centralise. I think things like Roundabout, education, community engagement and all these other aspects of the work began to suffer as a result. It has only been the last four or five years that people have begun to see that actually maybe it's not the way to go. Regionalisation is much more important— and community engagement. My expectations are that will increase, somehow the regional value will be recognised more and more and consequently, what's happening at the Playhouse, which is really good, will be increasingly important in the coming years.
L.E.	I want to ask how did the Arts Council support BRIT and Eclipse beyond financial support?
G.C.	I should say that although I have issues with the Arts Council, it was really good about Eclipse. They supported it and went with it. They saw the value of Eclipse, no question. I think the weakness is that the Council hasn't had as much of a long-term strategic view, they've been reactive— and quite generous—but what they haven't put in place necessarily are things to ensure that it has a broader impact. They were quite pleased that everybody came up with this idea because it meant that they could—and I don't want this to sound as ungenerous as I will probably make it sound—but they saw this as fantastic thing for them to promote their ideals and policies. It needed the Arts Council to come back and say "what we need to do is see how this will feed into the national network and how can we create and support legacy." I think the legacy question is something that Arts Council has been pretty weak on because all of this was happening alongside the closing down of organisations, the shutting of companies, the closing of buildings, all that was going on. It's all well and good investing large amounts of money in big organisations because it's good

	for PR; but if there's nothing then to benefit from it that's a bit of an issue. Not enough jobs for people to have once you're doing all this work, nowhere for it to be performed. Not enough money for people to be paid decently, fewer jobs available. You know, too many productions because the more co-production you have, the fewer original productions you have, so fewer jobs, et cetera, et cetera. There's a diminishing of opportunity alongside the encouragement of change, and they're incompatible and it seems to me that was the Arts Council's issue; it didn't see the big picture, in my view. The thing about the BRIT officers was that—obviously it was all wound down eventually and shut—but I think the difficulty… the criteria for the BRIT officer was in a way highlighted after Eclipse moved on because there was an expectation, I think, that the organisations should continue to do the work. It was disappointing because we couldn't quite fulfil that. Towards the end of Andrew's time, there was a feeling that the old approach to theatre-in-education and the coming style of community engagement, needed even more of a change than there had already been. Andrew was, already, getting to a point where he was feeling it was time to be moving on and so it was felt that maybe the way for the future was to have someone come in as an Associate Director, which is what Fiona [Buffini] became, to try and integrate the community work more into the core of the Playhouse, to try and engage with communities in a different way, not always successfully again, but in a slightly different way. There was less and less money for work, and school projects, so it was a way of enhancing the connection with the organisation. Taking the work in-house, taking more of it in the Neville studio, giving the person who's responsible for programming it a more senior position within Nottingham Playhouse, not separately named. It was a philosophical but also a PR shift. It was a way of changing the way we articulated what the work was. Fiona didn't have a history of that kind of work at all; she arrived with her own views and her own approaches to it. In a way, the history stopped at that point. It was a way of saying "we're starting afresh with how we look at all this work," which is not to say there weren't inherited elements, of course they were, but the intention was different. I think making it different was a struggle for us, and had been a struggle for some years: all the pressures

	from outside and some of the ones inside were to do that. I think the Arts Council was becoming really fed up with this notion that there was something called Roundabout. Pretty much all the local authority money for it had gone by then because it used to get a lot for its own operations. Bringing community engagement in-house in that way was very important. The person who's really benefited from this is Martin [Berry]. Fiona did a lot of the heavy lifting to get the Participation Department to a place where Martin could do what he's done with it. If Martin had taken over from Andrew, he wouldn't have been able to do what he's doing now, in my view, because it needed that transition that Fiona brought.
L.E.	How was your working relationship with Fiona [Buffini], you as the Artistic Director and her as Associate Director with responsibility for participation and education?
G.C.	Good. I liked working with Fiona very much, and I thought she was very talented and a good director. I think that she's done a lot of good and interesting work. I'm sure she would say that she didn't have a huge interest necessarily in community and education, *per se*. I think she and I saw that there was interesting stuff to do but I think what she really wanted to be was director of plays and make programming decisions. Her way of doing that was to take on this role. I think it was beneficial because, as I say, it forced change. I think that the role itself is probably better held by somebody who's got more of an enthusiasm for community engagement and the sort of educational community benefits, which is, again, what Martin [Berry] has. Personally, having somebody who was an Associate Director in that post was really good for me. I had a good relationship with Andrew and liked Andrew's work and admired his intentions, but I think I was more connected with Fiona artistically. I would say we had good conversations about the work of the Playhouse generally.
L.E.	Was that a difficult period when Roundabout ended?
G.C.	I don't think so, because it was still going into schools and was still doing some good work, but not in the same way. I think the process of change had been quite a slow one. I'm sure there were some people who felt there was a bit of a loss. I think the other thing that happened, funnily enough, is— there's something ironic about this, actually – that energy went into trying to focus the Playhouse on community and education work. That was more about bringing people into the organisation, going out less unless it was focussed somehow on encouraging people into the Playhouse. I think that as an idea has also had its time, I think people are now trying to get out to go into communities more, engage more directly. Funnily enough, the old principles, though they're being delivered in a different way, I

	think have made a return. I would argue that the work that's happening now is probably closer to, the sort of political, philosophical ideas that Andrew has. Funnily enough, I think Fiona coming in and challenging was what possible, created a sufficient break for what comes out of the Participation Department now to feel like it is its own thing. I think the philosophy is closer to what Andrew would have believed in. It goes back to what I was saying earlier, I think that sense of having a connection with communities regionally, in the regional voice, and giving opportunity, all those sorts of things which people were working so hard to kill are coming back. It's absolutely essential the days when everybody was being encouraged to focus all their work on a bunch of regional hubs, like Nottingham Playhouse, the legacy of that will stick with us. What I hope will happen is that more money will go into creating organisations and work that's separate from a space like the Playhouse.
L.E.	I'd like to ask you a bit about how your relationship with the board was when you were Artistic Director. Did it function well? Was it a hindrance or some help?
G.C.	When I first arrived, the board was a bit of an issue, not for me particularly, but just the way it was structured. There was a huge number of people on it, there was a lot of local authority representation, both city and county, and it was quite hard to get decisions made that weren't being manoeuvred by the political appointees. The Chair had to be pretty smart and clever to work their way through it. I remember the Chair when I arrived was a local authority representative. There was quite a long process of change towards reducing the size of the board and reducing the level of local authority representation. One of the advantages of losing money from the local authorities was that they had less reason to be part of the board. Once that started to happen, we could go, "why have you still got four people on the board when you're only giving us 20 quid?" The result of that process of change—it was a number of years— was that the board became more streamlined. The representation of the board was more focused on supporting the work of the Artistic Director and Chief Executive. I never had problems with them, really. I mean, some people I got on with better than others. I always thought that the core of the board were good, they continued to be, and they were very supportive. Not that they didn't ask questions or challenge ideas, they absolutely did, and you often had to spend far too much time trying to explain something for the twentieth time. I always thought they were pretty good. The

	Chair is a hugely important person, of course, and the better your Chair, the better the board.
L.E.	I've recently spoken to a few members who sit on the Risk Group of the current board. Was that something that was in place when you were at the Playhouse? And if so what was the impact of risk and the board's advice around it?
G.C.	I would argue, certainly when I was there, that wasn't exactly the way to articulate what the function was. The opportunity is given to argue why a risk is necessary. If you argue effectively for why the risk is necessary, then that puts in process a way of accommodating the risk. It's not strictly about "is the risk too great? If it is, we don't do it." It was more about asking "Is the risk necessary?" Then, if it was necessary, of finding a way of making it happen by making adjustments elsewhere. It's a way of everybody understanding why that risk is essential or not essential. If one would like to take the risks, what things were put in place to mitigate the risk rather than "that's too risky, you can't do it." That might sometimes be the result, but its intention is a more positive one. It's ensuring that one can continue to operate in an ambitious manner without jeopardising the organisation. It forces people to argue for certain things, to have a really clear idea of why they want to take the risk, rather than just deciding and then going, "oh, that's embarrassing." I think that was certainly how I used to see it but again, I don't know about now. I always thought the board was pretty good. I think the weakness in the board actually, funnily enough, and it wasn't always the case, but sometimes, was there wasn't quite enough other artistic representation on it. You sometimes needed somebody—and we worked quite hard to get two or three voices on the board that weren't either solicitors or accountants or educationalists—to articulate the artistic value. I think sometimes that was a bit of a struggle, but on the whole, really good.
L.E.	The Playhouse has just set up a Youth Board….
G.C.	That's a really good idea. Really good idea. Going back to earlier in our conversation. I think that one of the things I wanted to do, and I think it happened, was work with people regionally. That sense of having regionally based actors, regionally based directors, regionally based writers, technicians, lighting designers, people who come from within the community, the wider community, is a very important part. I think that the role of a regional theatre is to engage with the artistic

	community, as well as the other communities that we tend to talk about, and create a healthy, creative environment outside of the organisation to help support it and value it. I think that's something that Playhouse has been pretty good at. My understanding is that is something that continues and that's a really good thing. I think the other legacy is that in 20, 30 or 40 years' time, there should be people who are making work independent of the Playhouse who have been influenced and encouraged by the Playhouse and that's really important, whoever they may be.
L.E.	Can you give me some examples of the things that the Playhouse did to encourage that during your time?
G.C.	We commissioned a lot of writers if nothing else. We produced their work on the main stage, and we employed a lot of regionally based actors and other creatives. I think that it is really important to hear the regional voice, to tell stories that have some connection with the community. If people can come to the Playhouse, or see the Playhouse's work outside of the Playhouse, and know that it's made by people from within their community, I think that's hugely important. Hugely important. That's something that differentiates the Playhouse from other regional theatres. I would get very agitated in meetings because I used to get angry that other theatres didn't do it; they were all producing Shakespeare or employing famous actors. My argument was always, that's not what we're here to do. We don't need another production of *Hamlet*; we don't need a famous actor coming here to sell tickets. What we need to be doing is making work which speaks to our community. The other side of it was that we maintained an international ambition. For many years we were part of the European Theatre Convention, and we took a lot of work to Europe, and we brought a lot of European companies to the Playhouse. That was always, as it seemed to me, not about aspiring to be somewhere else, it was about introducing our wider community to more voices. We did some festivals, international festivals, and we took a lot of that work into community centres and community spaces and out into other parts of the city, because my feeling was that we needed to expand people's horizons. What that doesn't mean is that it has to be elitist; it can be ambitious, engaging and surprising; It doesn't have to be some huge company coming in with an incredibly famous international director. It can be a small company from abroad making work for a community. We made partnerships with

	Norwegian companies; we made partnerships with whoever we could. We made work for young people as well with international partners, and that was very exciting. The money for that—well, these days it's probably virtually impossible to do— but we spent a lot of time doing that kind of work, I saw that, absolutely, as community engagement. One of the most exciting projects was with Michael Pinchbeck. We co-created a piece of work that connected Torvill and Dean, the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, which sparked the First World War, and [Maurice] Ravel, who wrote Boléro. We made it with a company of artists, some of whom were from Nottingham, some of whom were from Sarajevo [Bosnia and Herzegovina], Pristina [Kosovo] and from Germany. We performed it at Nottingham as part of NEAT. It was fantastic. It was the only UK performance invited to the event that took place in Sarajevo to commemorate the start of the First World War. There was a piece of work from Nottingham Playhouse, as a part of this huge international festival, and it was a small piece of work, really terrific piece of work, but rooted absolutely in the community in all sorts of ways. It was using something at the heart of the Nottingham's sense of self, but putting it into an international context and saying, “here we are.” This was a piece of work that [communicates] the context of a world that the city inhabits, not just a couple of routines down at the Ice Centre. It's an international story with resonance for all sorts of reasons. The space that they performed in became a mortuary during the Bosnian war. As I say, broaden people's horizons, [so that they] see themselves not just as a small space, but as [part of] a big world. Very important.
L.E.	Thank you very much. Thank you so much for your time.

Tony Graves Interview - 13/05/20

Speaker	
L.E.	If I can begin by asking how long you worked with the Nottingham Playhouse and in what capacity you were involved?
T.G.	It was quite a while back. I was at Nottingham Playhouse for a couple of years between 1996 and 1998 going into 1999.
T.G.	I was brought in with the interesting title of African Arts Producer at Nottingham Playhouse. I think, in all honesty, that, initially it was under the umbrella of a regional initiative in theatre, the BRIT initiative. That was a generic title. As you probably know already, there were potentially three theatres that were part of this initiative that was started by Arts Council England. It consisted of the Nottingham Playhouse, Haymarket Theatre in Leicester, so there was an equivalent me if you like at the Haymarket, and West Yorkshire Playhouse. I wasn't the first holder of that position at Nottingham Playhouse. There was someone before me and I took over. It was a regional initiative with ACE funding but then Nottingham Playhouse did commit to this and talked about it in terms of the African Arts Producer role, so that is what I held for about two and a half years.
L.E.	I want to ask you about the context of Eclipse and how it came about. I've had access to the wonderful report that was published at the end of it. I wonder if you could help me to fill in the environment at the time that Eclipse was being conceived.
T.G.	Very much around the political context, I think; that is really important. I'd left by the time the Eclipse Conference actually happened but I was certainly involved in consulting on that. I was working at The Drum in Birmingham at the time. It was a background of understanding the legislative context around diversity and theatre in particular. One of the key drivers and catalysts was the McPherson Enquiry, the report which arose after the murder of Stephen Lawrence. The McPherson Enquiry identified a seminal understanding of the concept of institutional racism which hitherto had been identified in terms of public organisations, in terms of the police, the whole spectre, in terms of prisons and the justice system, but also in term of education and health. It had never been focused on theatre. So, you had these initiatives like BRIT. Someone called Isobel Hawson who worked for the Arts Council lead on BRIT and drove forward with the Eclipse initiative which really was to say that we, the theatre world, had to do better, to

	put it mildly. We looked at it in the context of how, if it didn't address itself and get itself in order, there's a real possibility of a charge being brought in terms of institutional racism and falling foul of that understanding of legislation, in terms of equal opportunities and race relations. That drove that conversation into quite challenging areas because, hitherto, BRIT had talked essentially about giving Black theatre access to the mainstream. In Leicester, it was posed around South Asian theatre; in Nottingham it was mainly African, and African Caribbean. West Yorkshire Playhouse focused on similar audience development. But it was also about looking at management and board practices. Eclipse then drove that conversation much further in terms of between, for example, the Chief Executives and particularly the Artistic Directors of theatres and regional theatres like the Nottingham Playhouse, and the degree to which they saw their roles as reinforcing the division and the exclusion without them being conscious of that being the case. If you've seen the Eclipse Report, there was quite a strong focus on the role of the Artistic Director and on the conventional practice of [appointing] people, perhaps of a certain demographic. At Nottingham Playhouse the Artistic Director acknowledged himself, at that time, that he was just tending to cast people who he knew, the "old boys' network." These were really important discussions around practices and the need for change in the management and governance in the theatre. There were guest speakers, there was a high-ranking Black police officer who came and addressed the conference, and that was quite an unusual thing. It gave a real sense that it is not just [a problem in] the other sectors, because we always think of the arts as being very liberal, very diverse, and so on, when actually [arts institutions] needed to look at themselves in a much more critical way
L.E.	Thank you for that, that provides some good context for the report. If I could ask you to reflect upon your time at the Playhouse now? What did you see as community engagement when you were working around the Playhouse? In the city?

	Were you personally involved in any participation projects during your time at the Playhouse and could you tell me a bit about what that experience was like? What were the challenges? What were the outcomes?
T.G.	It was a very challenging role because, on the one hand, the Black Regional Initiative was to do with opening up places like Nottingham Playhouse and other theatres to Black theatre and ethnic audiences and artists. But also, it was about trying to develop the careers of BAME directors and particularly producers, so in a way you were partly trying to be the bridge between the community and the organisation and, at the same time, trying to be, and were essentially, of that organisation because you were employed by it. So, you were really caught between a rock and a hard place because then, of course, to do that job as I understood it, and I think other people within that similar role after I'd left understood it, and at the Haymarket or the West Yorkshire Playhouse… I don't want to be too dramatic… but as "double agents." You were trying to represent and, of course, you couldn't do the role unless you had the trust of the communities because that was missing — and by that I mean people who don't normally identify with the theatre or with the overall organisation. [They] didn't feel that it represented them, had anything for them, wasn't talking to them, except when perhaps occasionally there was a Black show that they wanted bums on seats. That was the environment in which you were working in that job. You were trying to mend bridges, you were trying to keep your integrity and form relationships with a whole range of people. In Nottingham, for example, we had the Nottingham Black Archive that was based there, that was a really important organisation. The New Art Exchange at that time wasn't in the building it is now but it certainly was in existence. There were social groups, community groups, African Caribbean societies that were out over in Hyson Green and Lenton, that were on the periphery, you know, clubs. There were recording studios all of whom had creativity, young people, elders, whoever, that we were trying to engage with. It was very much about talking to key people who were community leaders if you like, self-appointed in certain cases, working with them to try and make this initiative work. On the other hand, you were then trying to represent and interpret the policies of the organisation employing you, namely the Nottingham Playhouse, and, as we know, there

	are policies there in terms of artistic policies. That led to a lot of potential clashes because the aesthetic sensibilities of Nottingham Playhouse weren't necessarily the same, as you could imagine, as the sensibilities and needs of the communities that we would want to engage with. So, on the one hand, it was fine to take initiatives out to those communities, for example, workshops, plays and performances and talent shows. You can have quite a strong Black history season and comedy shows and an animation programme in the foyer. All those things were fine but what became a critical pivotal point was access to the main stage because that's where you came up against established ideas of what goes on the main stage, in terms of artistic creative sensibilities and in terms of management, the financial aspect. When there was subsidy and when there were funds, like the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, to be able to bring things on the main stage was okay. But if you were then saying "let's take the main stage budget to put a show on or to bring a theatre production in," that's where it got interesting. It really was trying to play both ends.
L.E.	I think you've touched on the next question which I am going to ask you which you can answer from either a historical perspective or in terms of now. Do you think that the performances and the projects that Nottingham Playhouse produced, or produces now, reflect the diversity of the local community?
T.G.	What I suppose what must be done is to go back and look at the programmes and look at what was put on, and what proportion one could say did reflect those needs and those audiences. There were very specific initiatives like Black History season, but they would tend to be more in terms of animation programmes. The foyer did tend to be a comedy show that was definitely going to be a banker because that's a popular art form and medium, and not a financial risk for the Playhouse. But if it came to main stage productions, I would say there was still a long way to go. I don't know how it is now.
L.E.	Were there any particular communities or groups that were really difficult to engage with, or hard to reach?
T.G.	I guess the challenging audience was really young Black people who were not at school, not in employment, not in training, but who were just out there, almost isolated out in the community. That was a very difficult audience, but that was a very important demographic to reach. That was the most challenging and that was done through networking [with] people who had the ear of those young people. Sometimes it meant

	using means that may not be conventional, if you're talking purely in marketing terms, like going to pirate radio stations and working with them to get messages out about initiatives, methods that [could have been considered by some as on] the borderline of legality. There was one project that was really successful that was a community-based project aimed exactly at that group of young teenagers, not necessarily Black but predominately, where we put on a production which benefited from money from the Employment Agency. We were trying to reach young people who were unemployed, so quite a large budget was found to audition and produce a show featuring twenty of those young people. They came to the Playhouse to rehearse. I found rehearsal room there to stage a production which ran for three or four nights with those young people. They then had the discipline over the eight to ten weeks of rehearsal, with the director coming each day, to learn the lines and perform. As we know, it was culture as instrument: even if they then didn't go into theatre or into the arts, they discovered something of themselves to move further, maybe back into education or to get jobs. Actually, it could be so interesting to come back to them, how many years later? Twenty-five years later to see what they are doing. I know just from my work at the university a couple of them have come through, and one of them has an MA now. One or two have gone into theatre and performance, and so on and music and so on. I'm not saying it was only because of that initiative but, it did seem to have some interesting outcomes.
L.E.	Do you think that regional theatre in general, and Nottingham Playhouse specifically, has a civic responsibility to the city and the communities?
T.G.	Absolutely, absolutely. I think civically that people who are on the boards of organisations often talk about it from a financial perspective, and that the audiences of the future are BAME audiences in terms of demographic, that there is an income that is missing if we are not addressing, that. But that's from a purely business perspective. I think fundamentally if you are employed by and working in a regional theatre that is funded by public money and by those people in that city, and if a majority of those people who fund you are not represented with it and cannot see themselves in your venue or don't feel like they are welcome, they are then giving away the money without you

	affecting their needs. Something is wrong there. I think absolutely there is a responsibility for theatres in general and those that are publicly funded.
L.E.	Do you feel like that responsibility has shifted over time? Do you think the relationship between theatres and their communities has improved or degraded?
T.G.	It's a question I think about. It's very patchy, because how do you measure that? Is it in terms of visible BAME people within those organisations themselves? That's where you look at who are the chief executives? Who are the directors? I'm not saying that having a Black person there necessarily means that you're going to get particular audiences or particular work in; if those decisionmakers don't identify or can't reflect and understand the needs of other audiences and communities and art forms then you're always going to be up against a barrier. We've got to look at the governance, you've got to look at the board composition. You've got to look at the directors and who is being employed. We could take the Haymarket Theatre. It was interesting how Kully Thiarai was one of the first, if not the first, South Asian director of a major regional theatre around the same time as Eclipse, and the Decibel Initiative. Venu Dhupa then became Chief Executive of Nottingham Playhouse. There have been those steps forward in terms of leadership. Haymarket, what we now know as Curve, is committed. They acknowledge that they should be doing better and want to do better. Certainly, there is an integrated programme, I would suggest, with their approach to casting and to a certain degree in programming. But again, senior management doesn't necessarily reflect the diversity of the population here in Leicester. It's almost as if, the cynic in me thinks, the establishment, or you might say the mainstream, absorbs; it is very good at absorbing movements. It is very good at absorbing things that might be seen as a threat, and once that's been done, you can move on. That's how it feels to me at the moment. I'm not sure of the degree to which the community itself, and by that I mean Black artists, actors, directors and theatre makers, believe to the same degree that there is going to be fundamental significant change, I'm not sure if that energy continued—and maybe that's me being slightly removed now in academia—or if they believe that their work is going to get recognition and, indeed, much work is being produced. Where are the companies that were there? They don't seem to have that same profile at the moment. I'm not sure how vibrant and how inclusive theatre is, regional theatre in particular.

L.E.	I was reading over your final statement at the end of the Eclipse report and it's interesting how much rings true 10 years on, unfortunately.
T.G.	I think, the problem for me has always been the separation between work that is done for the community and the artistic work. I think that, until we can get over that and we do see a continuation of that work… Perhaps that's what the Arts Council's latest report is trying to suggest: that's it's about the involvement of people in the arts. I think you will always have that sense of "are we doing this because its community work and that's a separate thing?" rather than "we are doing that because of the quality, the excellence that it can bring, a range of different forms for different audiences." I think that is something that we have to get around, otherwise you are still going to have resistance, potential artistic policy differences that have been difficult to overcome. In ten year's-time…I would like to think that Participation Departments are valued by the theatres themselves, first and foremost, so if there are cuts to be made, they are not the first area to be cut; they are not the area that is seen as an add-on to main stage work. That is the first thing: that they have a real seat at the table, that they have the ear of the directors, particularly the Artistic Director who understands the importance of that work. I think that's as much an issue of recognition and empowerment as what they're actually doing. I think that's important. Then I would like to think that those participation initiatives and participatory organisations aren't on a freelance basis, but they are full commitments within budgets, so that it is not dependent on getting extra funding, [and] that they are full-time, not peripatetic. I would like to think that they are representative; and that there is a wider picture of who is coming in and what training and opportunities are being given. BAME artists, and art practitioners, and managers, and producers are parts of that whole participatory programme, so that it's not something that is being done *to* communities but a natural reflection and natural relationship with those communities.
L.E.	Finally, if money were no object, what community project do you think Nottingham Playhouse could initiate that would benefit the city?
T.G.	There is an incredible amount of talent, and that talent often doesn't, for whatever reason, get acknowledged. We have seen something like *Hamilton* which has been such a great success. I'm not just saying that musicals are the only way forward, but I would like to see some investment in a production that is really committed to bringing talent on stage

	and developing that talent; putting all the production values, high production values, behind it to give it a chance to be a product that could then run in other spaces and tour. I'd also wonder how much regional theatre, and the Playhouse in particular, is still going out into those communities. So, I might be saying take some of that money away from that. It's a contradiction to what I've been saying about the main stage, but let's become more "inside out." Let's go back to getting out there a lot, much more, and having the resources to make things happen outside of our theatres, actually within the communities themselves.

Andrew Caleya Chetty Interview - 11/08/21

Speaker	
L.E.	Can I start by asking you a little bit about yourself and how you came to be in Nottingham during the early 1990s?
A.C.C.	I went to university in Nottingham, studied Theatre Design, and stayed. I spent 13 years working, maybe a bit less, in Nottingham. I started in my own company, a theatre performance company. I then went to work for the Playhouse, and then I ran a contemporary art festival called the NOW Festival.
L.E.	How would you describe the theatre scene in Nottingham during that period?
A.C.C.	Really, really good. I would describe it as trusting and collaborative. Everybody spent each other's money and, on the whole, was happy with it. Of course, we didn't spend anybody's money, but there was a lot of collaboration with various agencies. We could be reliant on other appropriate agencies, venues or organisations getting involved. There were a lot of excellent people, who came primarily, but not exclusively, through the traineeship. Which is what I did as well, a traineeship through the Playhouse. So, this was Nelson Fernandez, who went on to the British Council, heading up a department. Tony Graves, who's now in Leicester as a Senior Lecturer, Brenda Edwards, who was a dancer. The woman who is now the deputy mayor in London. Venu Dhupa, who went on to head up NESTA. There was a bunch. It was all Ruth McKenzie's "fault" and the guy who headed up Roundabout [Andrew Breakwell], which is the education company. Those two people created an environment that was about collaboration, that was about doing. [It was] not necessarily focused on the main stage— there was a huge mainstage element— but actually working with and for communities to fill the auditorium. To include a caveat, I no longer work in the arts and left the arts a long time ago. This is what I feel about the arts: they use communities for their own agenda, which is a funding agenda. But it never felt like that [then], it felt like it was a conversation; it wasn't perfect, but a conversation that was a two-way street.
L.E.	So within that environment, was that fostered by the leadership at the Playhouse during that period? Or did that come from a different place?

A.C.C.	Ruth Mackenzie came in as director when the Playhouse went into bankruptcy. She was the new regime that came in with Stuart [Rogers], who was another amazing person. Stuart was the admin director who went on to run Birmingham Rep and Pip [Broughton] was the creative. So that leadership led by example. I think also in Nottingham itself; the Angel Row Gallery was headed up by some interesting, really interesting people. The County Council and the City Council were both doing really good programmes, headed by really good people. Dance4 were again collaborative people, so that's why we all collaborated with each other and each other's programmes.
L.E.	It sounds like an interesting time and something the Playhouse would be trying to work towards again now. Do you recall how you came into the role? Was there an interview process?
A.C.C.	No, Ruth Mackenzie, as she does, came in to see us at college because we were a dedicated theatre course, so why wouldn't she? I shouted at her. If you ever speak to her she would say this, I shouted at her; I said that she was talking nonsense, no cultural work, which is not true because she was brand new. She basically then employed me and then I went and interviewed her and again shouted at her lots of times and she offered me a traineeship off the back of that.
L.E.	Is that then when you became Afro-Caribbean Arts Producer?
A.C.C.	That was a bit later. I spent a couple of years primarily working as a trainee producer at Roundabout and the Playhouse but straddling the two. Kind of off the back of some funding that turned into a non-trainee role.
L.E.	How would you say community engagement and participation work was valued at the Playhouse during that period?
A.C.C.	I would say it was very valued. It was very valued, and it was for a number of reasons. They had Roundabout, so that was already going and engaging with schools, so it was already doing something. It was starting from rock bottom and rock bottom w that they didn't have an audience and it was taken down by *42nd Street* - a banker, you would have thought - but it took it down into bankruptcy. Why bother trying to just replicate "bankers," why not just look at the programme and do some really interesting programming, both on the main stage but also with, and for, communities, either on the main stage or elsewhere. When I say elsewhere, that could be cultural venues spaced along the community... This was offered quite a bit, there were a lot cheaper tickets for specific communities being worked with to say, "as part of this work, you get the kind of

	cheap ticket in to see this stuff." That was all funded, it was underwritten. However, it was financed; they were investing in the creative work with the view that they were going to become the audiences of the future. Even if only a percentage will become the audience's future, [some] may also become practitioners. That was practitioners in the wider sense, and that was particularly for the work that I was doing. That was one of the big factors that I invested a huge amount of time in, trying to foster at all levels from general engagement and continuing engagement to moving people into a more professional space, giving them professional experiences that would stand up.
L.E.	So, you moved from working with Roundabout and in that role into the Afro-Caribbean producer role? What was your day-to-day role?
A.C.C.	We knew what the main stage was; the main stage was programmed miles ahead, so we knew that. Where the flexibility came in was the touring work. The touring work was either international touring companies or dance. There was very little performance that would come in, so dance theatre stuff. That's where you could be a lot more flexible, and experiment with a more generous programme when it's only one or two nights, rather than a four-week run. I would work in collaboration, and that's what I was doing programming shows on the main stage or working with the dance programmer or somebody else, whose money was being spent in the Playhouse. That was that one element. Then, concurrently, there was a programme of work happening within the community. Right from the work at Roundabout what I was spending a lot of time doing was putting artist-run workshops within community centres. I did exhibitions within community centres or cultural centres throughout Nottingham. That was probably two years, and, on one hand, you could see it as youth provision, that's one way of looking at it. On the other hand, there was no artistic provision going into those places. It was as much about the visibility of art forms and people to slowly foster appetite and interest within practice as well as the organisations. The words “The Playhouse” began with evoking a response of, "What? Who? No idea." But, it suddenly became, "Oh, yeah, those annoying folk” and it changed to "Yeah, yeah, that was fun." It changed and progressed. We created a lot of families of artists so that there were a lot of returning artists [who] could do the workshops within the community. They got to know

	Nottingham, they got to know individuals. It's about building a critical mass of activity, doing different things at different points.
L.E.	I wonder how you found the tension between what was going on the main stage, the main programme and the things that you were programming?
A.C.C.	I never felt it like that. The dance programme is two nights. What we can run has different financial imperatives. I think even if you look at the programme, if you compare it to Derby, Leicester, Sheffield, even to Birmingham, the programme was "alternative," to use a very nineties word, alternative, in comparison to the others. It might not seem as diverse and international. I think in its own right it stood up to its peers. I want to be really clear I left the arts a while back and I lost my religion, in leaving the arts. So, I am deeply critical, and cynical about it. I would question whether actually anything has changed. I don't know whether anything has changed.
L.E.	I did want to ask about this. The parallels between the work you were undertaking back in the early 1990s and the work that the Playhouse is trying to pursue now.
A.C.C.	I can't really answer that because I don't know. I really don't know what they are doing, and I don't go to the theatre, and I don't really engage with the arts anymore. My wife goes to the theatre and picks up on it a bit, and I guess I think it doesn't feel like it. And really, what do I know? It doesn't feel as culturally diverse, and I think this is something that could be argued and poo-pooed by more clever people than me. In the 1990s when we were doing the work, there was a bunch of young people coming up around my age who were wanting to forge their own language that wasn't based on historical stuff. What I mean by that is stuff that is common, that is very much about first migrant or first-generation people. These are people usually first, maybe the second generation, who have grown up, gone through the education system, and have all the complexities of what happens at home. You would call it code flipping these days. We were wanting to create our own Black British voice and Black British practice and aesthetic. That was one of the main things that I really enjoyed during my time at the Playhouse and that manifested with the work that we did with the dance programme. We did a big collaboration with Black Mime Theatre called *Dirty Reality* and *Dirty Reality Two*, which were, I think, significant pieces of work.

	As far as the deep work that was done, I created, because of the dance programme, a dance group made up of young people. I can't even remember what it's called anymore. This came out of the workshops we had been doing in and across Nottingham. We gathered interested people and then all the choreographers of all complexions and cultural backgrounds came in and did a workshop with the young people, they then all choreographed a piece. Then we [had] workshops before the event and we would have "the young people perform on the main stage as "a support act." This was 10 or 20 minutes choreographed by the choreographer, and then their show would happen. So, I'm jumping around here, the engagement, in its many forms, that's a really interesting way of both creating craft, creating awareness, putting bums on seats, but, for the better side of things, giving a better understanding of what your organisation is trying to do, so it doesn't seem tokenistic. The kind of thing that was coming out of it was very much informed by the political agenda at the time and very much informed by the strength of hip hop: being able to see a practice that was as deep as hip hop was in the 1990s— and it is deeper now. It has its complexities, it has its problems, it has amazing stuff, it has excelled, but you can use that as a signifier to say if this has been created, that it reflects people, culture. Why can't we do that? Why can't we do that with theatre? I think that did happen then. Carl, who was based in Leicester, came through the *Dirty Reality* crew. He went on to become a choreographer and a performer. Benji [Reid], o was also called "the-Black-mime-Benji." I think all of them really created a practice that was British rather than African, Caribbean, or Asian. There was something in having gone through the school system, having got work or not got work; it was about engaging, we are part of this place at this moment, and we can create our own language. One of the reasons why I started to get frustrated, was that the old guard really, really didn't like what we were doing. We tried to get funding, national funding, that Ruth heavily supported, that came off the Black Mime, Dirty Reality. So *Dirty Reality* happened, that was a massive training process. We pulled 100 people down to a core team of 20, Black Mime Theatre, we staged it. It was out in Nottingham for two weeks, then went on a tour to similar types of venues

	and there was a lot of energy. There was Arts Council funding that was headed up by all the owners of those big companies at the time, and Charles Washington— who was a board member at Nottingham Playhouse—and a bunch of other people. We called ourselves 'the clan', we wanted to create this thing, Black British identity.. We just got rejected hands down. It was a bigger fight that I had to put up with. Everybody went on and dispersed and went out and did their own things. I think that it was a typical kind of old guard versus new guard kind of problem.
L.E.	Thank you for sharing your experience, I'm interested to know how the senior leadership of the Playhouse supported you through this, you mentioned Charles Washington. Did the board get involved?
A.C.C.	No, not the board, not our peer groups, but the elders. So, this was Yvonne Brewster, and it was the director of Talawa Theatre Company, Jatinder Verma who was at Tara Arts, and there were others. It was, “I am not fighting you; I literally I'm not fighting you.” I went off and got out of being culturally specific. I started running contemporary art, but part of that contemporary art was quite diverse, for me, it was reflected by what I saw around me.
L.E.	Can you tell me a bit more about the programmes and events that you are proud of and felt were really successful?
A.C.C.	*Dirty Reality*, I was very proud of that. It was very hard work. It did a lot of good work; it created a proper buzz. The dance troupe was horrifically difficult, but at its strength, there were about 30, 99% girls who were all teenagers. They did workshops with really significant choreographers. A bunch of them that did a workshop with Peter Brook. He came and did *The Man Who* and he did two days’ worth of workshops with artists, and I got a bunch of them to be part of those two days. Now they just thought he was a bloody posh old man but, one, they enjoyed it and, two, if you reflect on it, I thought that was really successful. One of the girls, she left on my desk a post-it note saying “thank you and I really enjoyed it" when we were doing a performance. She didn't say it, she just gave me grief every time I saw her. There was that post-it note and that kept me warm for a long time, and she went on and became a female MC out of Nottingham. She won sort of like the rap game back in the very first editions of the rap game. I feel that we had a hand in [that], or some kind of influence. There's another guy called Lee Ramsey, who is another MC from Nottingham. I don't know what he's doing now but I've got all their released records. It's just nice to see. I think we and the programme had a hand.

L.E.	It really sounds like you were able to make an impact. You mentioned that you went out into the community and also brought people into the Playhouse building. How did those two experiences differ? Was it difficult to get people to come over to the Playhouse?
A.C.C.	Yes, it's always difficult to get people just to walk across a threshold they're not familiar with. Getting people in and the experience that they had, I think was good because either they were watching friends or family or/and they were watching some Nigerian company come and do stuff that they had never seen. So, it was kind of like "I might have hated it, but I've never seen anything like that." That is part of the job of art, which is to expose different people, whether it's to practice, something that's very tangible or something very intangible. Engagement, the intellectual engagement I think people are getting [from theatre].
L.E.	You mentioned in our email correspondence that you did a lot of media interviews with the *Nottingham Post*. Were you having to market yourself or was that facilitated by the Playhouse?
A.C.C.	That was the Playhouse marketing the programme and the activities.
L.E.	Did you feel supported in terms of the Playhouse marketing your work?
A.C.C.	Very. Actually, I'm sure I felt victimised, but my recollection is that the whole team, the wider team were supportive at the right time. Clearly, the technical manager wouldn't have anything to do with us until we needed technical support. There was no "oh no it's those lot coming." I felt that we would dress like any anybody else. I think to be clear, everybody bought into the vision of the management: the leadership and the vision. It helped when our vision seemed successful because audiences were coming in. People I was meeting were talking about it positively, the press was positive about it, the national press was positive about it. Clearly, it could be better, but it always could be better.
L.E.	I asked you this because down the line, kind of into the early 2000s when the Black Regional Initiative in Theater was funding a role similar to yours at the Playhouse, there are some quite upsetting reports where people reported feeling quite isolated in their role and feeling a real burden of representation, being the only Black staff member. I just wondered if you'd felt that and what your experiences had been?
A.C.C.	Clearly, like in most places, there was only two of us. No that's not true, there was Jo, who I'm still friends with, who was the company stage manager and then with us, the trainees that came through, there was Nelson from Cuba, Brenda [Edwards] was the UK's first professional Black ballerina that moved into programming, Venu [Dhupa] was doing her

	stuff. There was a bunch of people coming through. There was probably, at any given point, three of us. I bet that would be better than any other theatre or at least the same as any other theatre. I think it comes down to the leadership. If the leadership and the vision are expressing inclusivity then that culture also then trickles down into all aspects of it; it doesn't stop people can still feel isolated, but my experience wasn't so isolated. I had trainees come through when I was in that role. Some of them were from the region, some of them from Nottingham, and some of them came and went. There always were people, there were always actors, that was quite diverse. There was a bit of diversity in the casting on the main stage. There was a lot of diversity when Roundabout was operating. There was a lot of diversity within Roundabout in that kind of white liberal way. Who was there in the 2000s?
L.E.	I have a list of the people that held the named African Arts Producer role. It has changed its name various times, I imagine, to suit the post holder. To my understanding, you were the first person in the specific role, and then Tony Graves, Brenda Edwards, Stuart Brown, and Paul Moore. Steven Luckie becomes Eclipse producer and then Bea Udeh becomes BRIT officer. A specific role ceased in 2005.
A.C.C.	Yeah. All those last ones. Paul was one of the people that I grew up with and he was part of *Dirty Reality*, so I worked a lot with Paul.
L.E.	It does seem that there was, like you say, a brilliant period where the work flourished and it seemed to be going in the right direction, and then...
A.C.C.	Things change.
L.E.	Now the Playhouse is doing thorough anti-racism work in terms of both the organisational structuring and the programming. I suppose that's why I come to you in that there is a history of this work going well, and people were trying.
A.C.C.	I don't think people were trying I think people were doing. We were doing it. I wasn't from Nottingham. I was from Newcastle. I had a bit of a stronger accent at that point. I was very much an outsider, but we did good work, we weren't bullshitting, and we followed through. I go back to where you started, which is that but let’s become more “inside out.” Let’s go back to getting out there a lot, much more, and having the resources to make things happen outside of our theatres, actually within the communities themselves.

	All communities lose trust and lose a willingness to engage or to look at the building. It's clear they'll look at it; it's not about the act of looking. It's the act of engaging, looking at something and rolling their eyes. I think all of that is hard and it has to be genuine. It goes back a long time: the arts just take. Arts organisations take from organisations. I can get very animated when I say this, which is they have an agenda, because their financial model says somewhere that they have said they will engage with X number of communities. That is the target, we have to do it; we don't care how we do it, but we will have to hit that target and then we'll get our funding, or we'll be able to get our next tranche of funding. That is not how to engage with anyone; that's not actually being part of a community, that is how to get funding. I think because the arts, in general, are controlled by white liberals, they have the ability to do piecemeal engagement, where you do stroking and a little bit of love, but you don't hand over any power, you don't give anything back, you're literally just doing it for your business case. Of course, this rankles those types of people because this is their criticism when they stand on their platforms and talk about politics, that they talk about [how] they do it themselves. I've seen it so many times. I can say this with some authority because, for the last 10 years, I've been working with the technology. I was one of the direct partners of a technology company that was about creating engagement with citizens to develop new systems, to look at new democracies, and in the long run to create new bits of technology, to build the kind of new technologies that would be adopted and used by the communities. Some of it has been very, very successful around the world. It has been built on a lot of the experiences and processes that I first experienced at the Playhouse and the work that we did there. How to engage, how to build trust? What is the business model? I think that's the key. What's the business model? What's the governance model? Who owns that and who maintains it? The problem is that it's usually a hit and run action; they rarely stick around other than… "we come, you get involved, you have a great time and then we're off," off to the new thing, it's just like a hit and run. Subsequently, those [people] that take part are either a certain type of person, usually understanding that type of paradigm or are left feeling slightly hard done by.

L.E.	I have spoken to people who have been disappointed by hit and run behaviour.
A.C.C.	Yep, it's all about the organisation and it's not about the communities. It's not unique to the Playhouse, but I think that's what we were trying to do at the time. I'm sure we didn't do it right. My recollection is that because there was funding, or we committed ourselves and then went looking for funding to support those programmes but recognising that everything's driven by money. You've got to be able to pay somebody, but at the same time you've got to be able to engage. You've got to have joint ownership over the problem, otherwise, you won't make a change. Engagement can be really fantastic and really good for that moment in time, but it has to be supported by the organising structure, has to be more than that moment in time otherwise, you can just literally be back in the same position.
L.E.	I really do appreciate you speaking to me and sharing your thoughts about the period that you were involved in the Playhouse.
A.C.C.	If I had two words, it was collaborative and trusting. Maybe that's in hindsight, in retrospect, all that kind of stuff, but those are the two words that I would probably [use to] describe that period.

Martin Berry Interview - 01/03/23

Speaker	Audio
L.E.	If we can start right at the beginning of it all. It's the 16th of March 2020...How did you find out that the theatre was closing?
M.B.	What I remember very clearly [is that] there were obviously lots of rumours in the media, and then more than rumours in the media, and what nobody knew is who in which sectors were going to be asked to shut. I remember very simply that an email went around from our Artistic Director, which was quickly followed up by an email from the Head of Operations, saying, "It looks like we're going to be asked to close, so just be prepared," and there was a bit of advice around security and taking laptops with you because we didn't know when we would be back. I can't remember the exact timescale here, but we're talking hours rather than days. On that same day, from what I recall, there was a follow-up email that basically said, "it's been confirmed, and we are out of here." We closed our laptops, followed the advice, and exited the building. It was quite dramatic. I'm not sure—maybe this is just me—if even at that point, people realised quite how serious it was ultimately going to be or how long it would be before we would be back and the impact the pandemic would have. Even when you're being asked to close, clearly, things have taken a significant turn at that point. The sense of it was that it would be a dramatic but short-lived episode, I'm speaking for myself, I can't speak for others. That's my memory of it.
L.E.	What were your immediate concerns for your department?
M.B.	I immediately thought about my team, so myself and those in the office with me, and partly emotionally because it's quite a lot, but also just very boring logistically, again, around computers and laptops, and how would we work tomorrow. If I'm honest, the stuff around the work and participants and all of that, my recollection is that, came later, not much later. There's a moment where you go, okay, this is for a while now. Ultimately, the public is also very aware that this is going on. If you're sending out comms saying, "we've been asked to close," that's backed up by what's going on in the national media so everyone goes, yeah, sure. I think there was a step after that where you

	have a more serious think about what you're going to do, because this is going to go on for a while. We're a public body, publicly funded, and certainly, we felt very strongly that we should still be outputting, doing stuff.
L.E.	What was your approach to continuing the work?
M.B.	We felt very strongly that we should do everything we could really, which was ultimately, quite a lot. Probably the two immediate reasons for that, were that we felt it was our duty to do so—we're a publicly funded organization— and related to that, particularly about my department and actually it goes for the theatre making as well, because we're a difference maker to people's lives If we stop everything, then you've got a lot of people staying indoors with nothing to do— or one very big thing that they can't do any more i.e. the engagement that they have with us. I also think not secondarily but differently, there's something important around staff and staff well-being.. There's a lot of people who work in the arts [for whom] their job is their vocation, it's their love, their passion, and to just stop doing that could have quite a serious effect on people. Keeping going felt like the right thing for the way we are as an organization, and as people as well. I'm sort of reflecting on that as I'm speaking. I think that was certainly a thing as well. I'll speak from the participation point of view that led to—not policy as it was never written down— but I'll use that word: a policy decision to continue absolutely everything in an adapted form, usually moving online, unless it was literally impossible. We had a lot of meetings and conversations every day, our starting point we're not going to *not* do this programme whether a Youth Theatre, or Shine, or the Family Fest at half term. That's our starting point, we're going to do it, but how? How are we going to make it work? Will people come out, you know, and, in loads of instances, that was about using Zoom and Teams but there were some other bits we did as well that weren't just similar, but, on the screen.
L.E.	So, the approach was look at everything that you are doing as a Department, programme by programme. You went through how that could be adapted? Were there any instances where your approach to adapting didn't quite work?
M.B.	There was one. I think it was only one that we ultimately did decide just didn't work for early years. There were a couple of sessions… it was sort of it was comical, to be honest, asking a two-year-old, three-year-old to engage with something on a screen. You can

	imagine. That ended up being paused, and then we came up with a way of doing a little film. But to answer your question about whether things didn't work, I don't have recollection of anything that was moved to digital or moved to an alternative and we went "ugh, unmitigated disaster!" It was more about thinking of how to do a sort of basic deliverable version of that's COVID-friendly, COVID-secure and then we learned as we went and evolved those things to be as good as they could be. The most obvious [example], is Youth Theatre. We moved online and to begin with, it was basically similar things to what you might do in a live in-person session, but on screen. Clearly, what you're going to find is for every 10 games/activities or exercises you try, some of them—probably about half—work really well online, and make you think "oh great" then others you think "we won't do that one again" because the online format just makes it rubbish. Excitingly, then, in phase two, you start inventing and speaking to others who've come up with things that work because they're online. An obvious example would be a very famous game called Go Fetch. It's a party game where you've got youngsters, seven or eight years old, and you have a list of things that they must "go fetch" and the first one who comes back with that thing is the winner. For example, things beginning with F. You've got 15 youngsters on these little boxes on a screen in their houses and you say ", go and get something beginning with f." It's hilarious you just watch them all leg it off, out of the lounge and into the kitchen and come back with these items. That wouldn't really work in a studio, but in 15 different houses around Nottinghamshire, it was brilliant! It was really fun! There were lots of things that worked because they were online. That was the stuff that was quite exciting.
L.E.	Were the digital sessions delivered mostly by freelance staff?
M.B.	That balance is about the same as it always has been. In other words, we do have an in-house team of seven including me, that kept delivering, but also, just as outside of the pandemic, we had a significant number of freelancers who were also delivering, and what was interesting [was that] some of them really enjoyed [it] and adapted well to the online format. I don't think anyone said "Oh, I hate this so much I don't want the work," but there was certainly some who were chomping at the bit to get back to in-person. They

	clearly were not lovers of online. I'd include myself in that. We made it work, but it's not... not the same.
L.E.	Was there any formal knowledge sharing between individuals about what was working well?
M.B.	There was; although I would never use the word formal, but in so much as I was, and we as a Department, were facilitating that happening, absolutely. The reason I say it wasn't necessarily formal is because it was phone calls and "oh I've just been in a session with X person, and they did this brilliant thing! Have a chat with them and they can tell you how it worked." We do that anyway but there was definitely more of that, and I don't think that's because it was online-specifically. I think that's because it was new, it was a new format. Everyone was scrambling for the next new idea. That information and knowledge and creativity sharing that we try to do as much as possible, in normal times, was d faster, and more needed, particularly in the early days of, of COVID.
L.E.	Do you think the pandemic changed the type of community members who participated?
M.B.	I think certainly the bulk of people are the same people or type of people. I think there was certainly an access benefit for people who lived quite far away, some older people who struggled to get out [but] who engaged online. People who were engaging in person, but [who] had always found it a struggle, said to us "actually, this is better," and some of those, particularly in the reading groups, still engage online. There's an access issue around disability as well. We had more members than we'd previously had for our Playhouse Platform group, which is for adults with learning difficulties, and people with particularly physical disabilities were able to engage because of the online element. Then there's geography of course—this was more of a case for shows—but, for participation we did have some people zooming in from Wales. There was someone from Plymouth, I think someone was from America, but they were a regular member over there for some kind of work that they were allowed to do despite the pandemic. They said, "I still want to come to the session" and we were "well... you can! It's on Zoom, see you there." That was quite a cool thing. I think that was a quirk that, ultimately, unless you're really committing to online long term was fun... but, will we continue to measure international access to participation projects? I'm not sure. Unless there is a specific reason for that.

L.E.	Do you feel the way that your Department was, or is, perceived or valued changed during the pandemic?
M.B.	I have a really annoying answer to this question. I've been asked this a few times and the answer is I don't think so. It's annoying because it comes from a positive place. The reason I say that is because I think it was really valued beforehand. I talk to colleagues in other theatres, and I think there has been, nationwide, a sense of valuing what we do in terms of outreach in a new way, in a new light... and in a conscious way. I think also, being absolutely frank, part of that was around "Thank God, we can do some of that, because that's the only thing we can do." That allowed [theatres] to make the case for remaining open, for getting Culture Recovery Funding and we'll come on to post pandemic, I'm sure. Post pandemic, inevitably—and I remember thinking this would probably happen and speaking to others about it—there are now some grumblings, similar to the pot banging from the NHS, and now they're not paying them well enough. There's definitely some grumbling in the world of outreach and theatre education around "well you wanted us when we were useful to you in the pandemic to stay open and make the case and now we're back to same old, same old." I don't feel that here. That's honest. I've definitely heard that from others.
L.E.	Between 2020 and 2022, theatres faced pressure to address racist practices, the pandemic occurred and then Let's Create was published, and the participation and community engagement arms of theatres were expected to respond to all these challenges. Did you feel that at all?
M.B.	It's a really interesting question... yes, but in a really positive way. I think that—maybe, I'm being overly glass half full here – outreach, participation, the community impact and importance of the community of theatre… the consciousness of that is growing really quite rapidly. Let's Create is a big part of that. I guess COVID did play into that. The rules, the social movements and change around protected characteristics and Black Lives Matter, in particular all overlap. I think in all those cases, if the ultimate objective is to do more of what we're doing, and to have it taken seriously by as many people as possible... then that's good. Maybe there's a permanent shift—I think there is—a permanent shift towards what Let's Create is asking for. I think the most obvious

	example would have happened anyway with leadership roles that are coming up and being advertised in some major theatres; not many now are asking for an out and out Artistic Director. Most of them are reframing that as a Creative Director, or it's basically a hybrid of various things, one of which is outreach. That's not been the case before. That was a big, I think, brilliant, positive change. So, it will be interesting to see how it shakes down. Did COVID accelerate that? Maybe but it is hard to know.
L.E.	How has the pandemic affected the theatre's financial situation?
M.B.	We're very fortunate in some ways, compared to others… However, there's no denying the fact that it was an absolute kick in the guts? CRF was fantastic and lots of theatres would be closed without it; it's as simple as that. It's impossible to know whether that goes for us as well, but we'd certainly be in a significantly worse situation than we are. I think that it obviously hit audiences at the time, but ours have recovered relatively well, and relatively quickly. We are back to the responses to titles that one recognizes from pre COVID. In other words, you can guess, relatively confidently, your likely numbers based on factors like the title, rather than COVID, rather than remaining nervousness around COVID. We still do some distanced shows, socially distanced shows—I don't know how long we'll continue that— but we still are doing that which I think helps confidence for those people who are still nervous. Participation wise, we've never been so busy. We've never been so full. I think there's been a bounce from all the things you've just said but certainly from COVID and people going "God I really missed that" or even just the opportunity to do stuff that I never really did, and I'm going to. There has definitely been some of that anecdotally. We were growing anyway, so it's hard to know how much of that is COVID and how much of that is what we already had planned, but definitely some of it is COVID because you talk to people and they say so. It feels like we have come out the other side but there is lingering impact and, financially, that impact will take years, not months, of getting back to where we were before because, in the end, [COVID] wipes out reserves and that takes time to build back up. Where you will see that impact more than anywhere else is on programming across the country.

	We're reviving a big show. We may have done that anyway, who knows, but it becomes something you're definitely going to do when you need a secure year of shows where risk taking just cannot be quite as sharp as you might like. So, a difficult balance... ask me again in a year but we're okay, we're okay.
L.E.	While I was sat down in the box office, one of the assistants called somebody to tell them they had been successful in securing a bursary place.
M.B.	With our summer season, which is loads of programmes, that isa big job for the box office team, and at the same time people can apply for bursaries. They are all flooding in... Applications for bursaries have gone up since the pandemic. Again, it is hard to know if that's something about COVID and cost of living? I'm sure it is, but also e we're busier anyway and the percentage of bursaries is just as likely to go up with the number of bookings. It has jumped quite a bit, the [number] of people who are inquiring about free places.
L.E.	What is the theatre's plan for handling potential future crises? How does that plan impact future productions and events?
M.B.	It's a really good question. There's certainly not a plan that's written down. I think there will be. I think there needs to be, but it's not quite the right moment. If this has taught us all, as a country, one thing, it is that we need to be better prepared. I have no doubt we will put in place a plan; we're already looking at that, from a financial perspective. I'm sure that plan will broaden out into the nuts and bolts, frankly, of what will we do if and when it happens again... It's only really just ended. Some people say it still hasn't. The short answer is there isn't a drawn-up plan but I'm certain there will be pretty soon.
L.E.	Are there any creative solutions or innovations that you developed as a response to the pandemic that you plan to continue using or to develop further?
M.B.	I don't think any of them are ground-breaking or wild in their innovativeness but there are things that we didn't do and then we did for COVID that we will stick with. For example, on-demand versions of our shows. We're quite committed to continuing with that and are doing so in various formats. There's live streaming where you watch as it's happening, which we don't do much of but are looking to continue, and then there's the on-demand where you pay for a filmed version of the show for five days access. Schools are particularly up for that, which is interesting. There's some really low-level stuff that's actually been really great around process within the building. Reducing paperwork that needed to be handed to people that we couldn't do during the pandemic but still needed to

	have new contracts and freelancers invoicing. We're [better] now with our digital processes, which we would have probably eventually have been. COVID just accelerated all that and put a fire under it because there's a digital solution. Theatre is traditionally a bit behind, generally, with digital HR and digital paperwork. We're much more up to speed now and things like Basecamp software for project management which we would be tickling around the edges of before COVID, we're really on now. A few participation sessions have retained a Zoom element and we bought a big screen for that, which has proved incredibly useful. Meetings over Zoom of people in different locations is saving a fortune and saving the planet. There was a really lovely thing we did with one of our groups, one of our groups for children with learning difficulties, during the pandemic, where we would post out to their houses tasks which they'd be very excited to unwrap and do. Then they'd film themselves doing the tasks, and send us the films and then we edited those films together into a bigger fabulous thing. That was so much fun, irrespective of whether it was necessitated by lock down, that we're going to do that again and similar things in other groups. There was something cool around the use of film, the use of the post and the magic of something arriving in the mail, that's going to carry on as another creative way [of engaging].
L.E.	What role do you or did you see the theatre playing in helping the community recover from the pandemic?
M.B.	I'd guess it is the role we play in people's lives generally. I can't remember the exact quote but we were at war and someone said to cut the arts and culture budget, because we needed to buy weapons and Churchill said, "if we cut arts and culture, what are we fighting the war for." It's what makes life more than just existing. That's the case day to day, but if you're recovering, anxious, or you just haven't been out and about, you haven't seen people, you haven't been socially active, you're not confident. All the things that the Arts do so brilliantly we need so much more of post-pandemic. I think it's the same as I'd say if your question was "Why do you think the Arts matter?" I'd say all the things I just said. This isn't quite what you're asking but... there's been a real energy suddenly behind social prescribing, which I think is really interesting. That might be because there was such a

	strain on the NHS, because so much thinking has gone into health, wellbeing and medicine, in the [wider] general sense. Social prescribing is suddenly having a bit of money put into it; there are people being employed to link GP surgeries with arts spaces and I've had quite a few meetings about it. I have a feeling that that was quite specific to COVID. However, it's a minefield of logistics and trust, for who makes the judgment call, and how success is measured… and who is paying for it? Of course, that never has a good answer. Fascinating area because it's so health focused, and feels new and different in some ways. Coming out of COVID has played a part in that, I'm sure. It wasn't straightforward to go through. We looked at everything we were doing. We adapted everything we possibly could. We're very proud of how much we managed to achieve. We remained engaged with a huge percentage—not everyone but a huge percentage— of the people we were already engaged with and added new people. We've come out the other side, we hope, we think—it's almost impossible to measure—better off than we would have been had we not done that. We could have stopped. I don't think anyone would have blamed us if we just shut up shop, some theatres did, you know, "see you when it's over" kind of thing, but that wasn't our approach. I think one of the reasons that we've come out of it quite strong, and there's been quite a bounce and our audiences have been back as quickly as they felt they could and have remained loyal is because we stuck at it, kept spending their money ultimately, as best we could. I think, broadly, the plans that we had, the ambitions we had before COVID was even a word we'd ever heard of, are still the same as they are now. The differences are that we probably lost two years of doing it and moving things forward and growing it. But then, I don't think it is quite as simple as that, because I wasn't furloughed at all though most of my team were at various times. We were still doing a lot of the planning, the strategy because we were always looking to what we will do when it's over. I think there were two years of difference, while we were in the background, cunningly strategizing and planning and, having Zooms with potential new freelancers, with a view to be in a place when the pandemic is done, and hit the ground running. So, I don't think it was an entirely lost time. But without a doubt, it slowed us.
L.E.	Do you feel like the pandemic gave you opportunities for reflection that you maybe don't have usually?

M.B.	I think it did. I also think... and this sort of feels controversial—that breathing room can be overrated, but that's just my opinion. I think learning by doing is very powerful and learning by stopping or thinking about it is also powerful, but I love conversation. The truth is for me, COVID was about using that time not doing frontline delivery to do other stuff rather than to sit and reflect and think. Different people's approach to their work through COVID is interesting; mine was just to keep going. It's different, but it's no less busy and important to crack on. Other people thought "I'm going to have some space, I need this." That's fine. I had all respect for that. As a leader of a team, you really do have to think hard and pay real attention to what different people need in that new scenario and since, because they've tasted working from home, they've tasted breathing space. Some of them really want to keep that, which is fair enough. I don't, but that's just me; I would get bored. For me, the biggest learning curve was probably around leadership and trying to do my best by others. You know, that's not meant to sound like some big magnanimous thing. That's literally what I'm paid to do. It's important to try and get it right. All of that shifted beyond all recognition. Trying to manage people over a screen is hard. We do a lot more work from home now, and now I trust it in a way that I didn't.