



## Where are the Workers?

### An investigation into the class diversity of British theatre audiences.

#### Introduction

Ask almost anybody who works in the arts whether art can be a force for social good, and the answer will almost certainly be 'yes'. Nicholas Serota, Chair of Arts Council England made this point in a recent Guardian column when he cited the 2017 Hull City of Culture as an example of how: 'Art can change how communities are perceived and how people see themselves.'<sup>1</sup> Writing to mark the launch of ACE's *Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case: A Data report 2016/17*, he acknowledged that we are living in a time of increasing social division, riven by growing disparities in: 'wealth, housing, health and education'. But, he argues: 'the arts provide a place where ideas can be debated, explored and developed and new propositions can be put forward.' Kully Thiarai, Artistic Director of the National Theatre of Wales puts this in a more personal way<sup>2</sup>: 'I grew up in a context where I didn't have many opportunities or very much access to the arts at all. So I recognize what it feels like not to have that kind of voice. And I also recognize what happens when you give a community or a bunch of artists the voice to say something. It can be hugely powerful for an audience that doesn't often see themselves reflected in that way.'

Anecdotally speaking, most people who work in the arts could probably find examples from their own experience that chime with Serota's sentiments. I could list a number of projects I have worked on that have brought together people from widely different social and cultural backgrounds to create and experience something remarkable together. Yet, we should be honest with ourselves and ask: are these projects little more than the exception to the rule that our theatres are intrinsically middle class spaces? Can any single community project or individual show make up for the fact that, when we look out on the auditoriums of most theatres, what we see is row after row of privileged faces looking back?

So my purpose with this research is to achieve three things: first, I want to discover what the demographic of theatre and arts audiences in the UK is, and, if it is the case that they are predominantly middle class, I wanted to find out why; second, I want to articulate why this might be a problem; third, I want to explore the different strategies that theatres have of tackling this problem. The majority of this document is a critical survey of some of the most effective and innovative ideas and schemes aimed at generating greater social diversity in audiences that I have come across.

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<sup>1</sup> Serota, Nicholas. 'The arts must reach more people if they are to help our divided society' *theguardian.com* 11 February 2018. Visited: 10 March 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Thiarai, Kully. Personal Interview, 6 July 2017

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## The Data

A recent poll by YouGov<sup>3</sup> revealed that 36% of the British Public think that going to the theatre is 'posh'. While it is true that considerably more people think the same of going to the opera (76%) or the ballet (72%) it is clearly still a problem that over a third of the country have this view of an art form that many of us in the industry would like to think of as fundamentally democratic. (By comparison, the same survey showed that only 2% of the UK population saw activities like stand up comedy, live music or the cinema as posh).

Depressingly, these statistics may not actually tell the full story of how socially divided and divisive the arts can be. A recent report entitled *Panic! 2018: Its an Arts Emergency*<sup>4</sup> and published jointly by the Barbican and Arts Emergency, makes sobering reading for anyone who wants the arts to play a central role in social cohesion. The kind of anecdotal evidence we usually rely on to show the positive impact of the arts exists essentially at the micro level – they are specific stories about individual people or events that we have experienced. The *Panic!* report takes a much more macro view. It is based on an extensive survey of workers in the arts carried out by the researchers themselves and combines this with data from the ONS's Labour Force Survey and from the British Social Attitudes Survey and DCMS's Taking Part Survey.

What the report shows is that: 'the cultural and creative sector is marked by significant exclusions of those from working class social origins.'<sup>5</sup> And it adds: 'In terms of social class, social mobility has been a longstanding problem for the sector, meaning the sector is currently dominated by those from affluent social origins.'<sup>6</sup> For instance, in the area of 'Music, performing and the visual arts' only 18.2% of workers could be described as having working class origins (i.e. people who would be classified as being in groups 6-8 of the National-Statistics Socio-Economic Classification system which I explain briefly below). This is against the population as a whole, which sees 34.5% of people coming from this background. By contrast, a full 49.4% of those who work in the arts have middle or upper-middle class origins (groups 1-2 of the NSSEC system), while that group makes up only 37.5% of the population as a whole. (Interestingly though, those with parents whose occupations fall in to NSSEC groups 3-5 – in the middle of the social scale – are slightly over-represented in the arts – comprising 31.6% of workers against a national population of 25.5%)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Smith, M. 'What are Seen as Britain's 'Poshest' Cultural Activities?' Yougov.com, 9 February 2018. Visited: 10 March 2018

<sup>4</sup> Brook, O., O'Brien, D. and Taylor, M. *Panic! 2018: Its an Arts Emergency*, Barbican, 2018

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p. 2

<sup>6</sup> Ibid p. 2

<sup>7</sup> Ibid p36, Table 1

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The *Panic!* report's focus is primarily on people who *work* in the arts rather than those who seek to *experience* them as audience members. But it contains important data on the social demographics of those who participate as audience members too. Unsurprisingly, for an industry whose workforce comes primarily from privileged backgrounds, consumers in this area are also far more likely to be privileged: 33.3% of those who attended a play in the last year could be considered middle class (against 37.5% of the population as a whole) whereas only 12.7% of those who could be considered most working class did so (against 34.5% of the population as a whole).<sup>8</sup>

This chimes with data that the Arts Council itself has published. In their 2016/17 report entitled *Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case*<sup>9</sup> they make it clear that 'those most actively involved [as audiences] tend to be from the most privileged groups; engagement is heavily influenced by levels of education, socio-economic background and where people live'. They use a different metric to measure socio-economic status: the National Readership Survey's (NRS) social grade system<sup>10</sup>. The report points out that those in what might be described as 'middle class' professions make up 33.1% of audiences for ticketed events over the last year, while accounting for only 25% of the population. Meanwhile those at the lower end of the scale account for only 21.9% of audiences while making up 30.6% of the population.<sup>11</sup> So working class people are considerably less likely than middle class people to participate in publicly accessible arts events.

## Why does this matter?

It might be tempting to say that none of this really matters. If working class people don't want to go to the theatre then that is their right. Isn't it an act of snobbery in itself to assume that they ought to go? Does the desire to attract a more working class audience stem from a condescending belief that the arts are in some way 'civilising'?

It is certainly true that we have to guard against these kinds of elitist ways of thinking. As Zadie Smith warns: 'middle class liberals' can be 'both politically naïve and sentimental about the working classes'<sup>12</sup>. So if people choose not to participate in certain public art forms, that is their right. Yet at the same time, we shouldn't be too distrustful of the desire to open up access. It is a very natural human impulse to want to draw others towards the things we care about. My love of theatre and my wish to share it with as many people as possible is no different from the football fan's attempts to persuade others to support their team. Building communities through shared ideals, rituals and beliefs is a very human thing to do.

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<sup>8</sup> These numbers for the population as a whole don't appear in the *Panic!* report itself, but have been confirmed for me via email by Mark Taylor, one of the report's authors.

<sup>9</sup> Arts Council England, *Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case: A Data Report 2016/17* Arts Council England, 2018

<sup>10</sup> 'Social Grade' *National Readership Survey* <http://www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-print/lifestyle-and-classification--data/social-grade/> Visited: March 10 2018

<sup>11</sup> ACE, *Equality, Diversity*, p. 40

<sup>12</sup> Smith, Z. *Feel Free: Essays*, Penguin, 2018, p. 25

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However, as we shall see, the disparity in attendance across different social classes has to do with a lot more than just personal taste. And there is a particular obligation on publicly funded arts organisations to address this. After all, if we are going to take public money to create art, we had better ensure that that work is as accessible as possible to the taxpayers who funded it. This research is motivated by my belief that theatres should aim to be as egalitarian and accessible as possible. Any venue should reflect the community it serves as closely as it can - both in terms of those who work there and those who make up the audience. Inevitably, this will mean very different things in different parts of the country - the demography of Edinburgh is markedly different to that of Bradford. It will also vary greatly depending on the theatre in question. For example, the National Theatre will define the community it serves in a very different way to a place like the Tobacco Factory in Bristol. But the underlying challenge remains the same: how can each theatre work to ensure that it resists rather than exacerbates the growing social divisions in the UK?

On top of this, just as the *Panic!* report cited above shows that employment within the arts can contribute to social division, so too is there is evidence that attendance at arts events can play a role in *reinforcing* those social divisions. The LSE's International Inequalities Institute recently published a report entitled: *Can cultural consumption increase future earnings? Exploring the economic returns to cultural capital*<sup>13</sup> It argues that 'People who consume a larger number of cultural activities are more likely to earn higher wages in the future, to be upwardly socially mobile, and to be promoted.'<sup>14</sup> At best, this might just mean that increased cultural consumption simply *correlates* with greater social privilege. However, the report suggests that it may actually have a *causal* role in reinforcing that privilege. Their research shows that: 'Cultural consumption... can function as cultural capital in some labour market settings, **potentially contributing to the reproduction of income inequality between generations.**'<sup>15</sup> (Emphasis added).

However, this report also points out that even '**after controlling for education and social origins**, income is positively associated with cultural consumption in the UK'<sup>16</sup> (emphasis added). So, if cultural capital can influence economic capital, then perhaps this means that there is at least the potential to believe that if we can widen participation in the arts to a broader range of people (in socio-economic terms), then the arts can become a driver of social mobility rather than something that reinforces social privilege.

I have another, more personal, and perhaps more selfish, reason for believing that it is important that we widen access for audiences. I strongly believe that greater diversity can make us better artists. As an artist, I am not satisfied to just talk to

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<sup>13</sup> Reeves, A. de Vries, R. *Can cultural consumption increase future earnings? Exploring the economic returns to cultural capital*, LSE International Inequalities Institute, February 2018

<sup>14</sup> Ibid p. 3

<sup>15</sup> Ibid p. 3

<sup>16</sup> Ibid p. 6

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people who look and sound like me. At both an institutional and an individual level, reaching new audiences requires that we work in new ways, explore new stories and collaborate with new people. This process inevitably means that we have to challenge our assumptions about the world and it is through this that we can be even more creative.

## What is 'class'?

As a society we have a paradoxical approach to the notion of social class. On one level, British culture is completely class-obsessed. The success of television programmes like *Downton Abbey* at one end of the scale and *Eastenders* at the other, show that we are finely attuned to the nuances of how the class system operates. Yet when it comes to public policy we have a blind spot: neither 'class' nor 'socio-economic status' figure amongst the nine protected characteristics of the *Equality Act* of 2010.<sup>17</sup> This has meant that in all of the recent debates within the arts industry around diversity and inclusion the issue of class can quickly get sidelined. Though to its credit, the Arts Council has, in recent years, started to include 'socio-economic status' alongside the other protected characteristics as something that needs to be monitored because it recognises: 'how these are highly influential factors in shaping engagement with the arts and cultural sector'.<sup>18</sup>

Part of the problem is that when we talk about 'socio-economic status' we have to acknowledge that it covers two related but ultimately separate things. 'Social class' is not necessarily the same thing as 'economic status'. While it is true that, overall, people who are working class will likely have less money than people who are middle class, there are many, many exceptions to this. A tube driver may have what would traditionally be seen as a 'working class' job, but with a starting salary of £49,673<sup>19</sup> they are earning considerably above the median gross annual wage for those who work in inner London, which, according to the ONS in 2014 was £34,473<sup>20</sup>. By contrast, those who work in the arts often earn far less than that, but will probably have high levels of formal education and as discussed above, will likely have parents who had middle or upper-middle class occupations.

So privilege can manifest itself either in terms of one's social and cultural capital, or in terms of one's financial capital (or, obviously, through a combination of these). If

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<sup>17</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission 'Protected Characteristics' *equalityhumanrights.com* 30 January 2018

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics>

Visited: March 10, 2018

<sup>18</sup> ACE, *Equality, Diversity*, p6

<sup>19</sup> 'Who What, Why? What do Tube drivers do and how much do they earn?' *BBC News* 09 July 2015. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-33459515> Visited: March 10 2018

<sup>20</sup> Ehrenberg, B. Spickernell, S. 'Where can you earn the most money in the UK? Pay in London is much higher than any other part of the country' *cityam.com*, 28 December 2014. Visited: March 10 2018

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our aim is to widen access to audiences who lack privilege then we might find that different tactics will be required to reach them depending upon how that lack of privilege manifests itself. (Not to mention those who are under-privileged from both those perspectives).

Throughout the course of my research I have come across a number of different methods that people in the theatre industry have for measuring and describing class. One common way is to do it through 'self-definition'. Essentially this means categorising people based on their view of themselves. This is a system that both the Royal Court and the Young Vic have started using when it comes to the people they employ. They provide space on equal opportunities monitoring forms for individuals to describe how they view their own class background. One advantage of this is that it can allow for a significant degree of nuance. For instance, as Sue Emmas of the Young Vic explains, it means that one way to take account of the fact that artists are often socially privileged but poorly rewarded financially is to use the phrase 'working middle class'.<sup>21</sup>

However, self-definition is fraught with problems. Dave O'Brien, one of the authors of the *Panic!* report, points out that through his research he has discovered that, when asked to self-define, about two thirds of people will say they are working class. Yet this compares to the fact that only about one third of the population could be objectively considered to be working class by the standard of the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification system (NS-SEC).<sup>22</sup> So, while self-definition can be useful as a measure of people's subjective perceptions, it has minimal value from a statistical point of view. It is the NS-SEC classification system that the *Panic!* report is based upon. It essentially defines class entirely through the prism of an individual's occupation. If you are a CEO you will be in level 1, if you are a cleaner you will be level 7, if you're long term unemployed you will be level 8.<sup>23</sup>

Another common way of defining class comes via the Social Grade system used by the National Readership Survey. This puts people in to groups described as: A, B, C1, C2, D and E, and is used to determine which kinds of people read which newspapers and magazines. Like the NS SEC system, it is defined primarily through occupation and it groups households on the basis of the occupation of whoever is the Chief Income Earner (CIE). This system is the one used by ACE to monitor socio-economic diversity of audiences in the *Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case* report. These are both straightforward methods, but they are inevitably reductive. They fail to take into account all the other elements that might comprise one's sense of class identity: birthplace and geographical location, accent, education, social values and so on.

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<sup>21</sup> Emmas, Sue. Personal interview, 11 January 2018

<sup>22</sup> O'Brien, Dave. Personal interview, 8 February 2018

<sup>23</sup> Office for National Statistics. 'The National Statistics Socio-economic classification (NS-SEC)' [ons.gov.uk https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology](https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology) Visited: March 10 2018

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Within the theatre industry itself the most common way of understanding audience demographics is to use either the MOSAIC <sup>24</sup> or, more usually, the Audience Spectrum <sup>25</sup> segmentation system (the latter of which is used by the Audience Agency). This latter system 'segments the whole UK population by their attitudes towards culture, and by what they like to see and do.'<sup>26</sup> It divides people in to groups with names like 'Metroculturals' or 'Facebook Families'. It does this by classifying people on the basis of a wide range of things alongside their levels of cultural engagement, including: income, geographical location, age and so on. One thing these systems don't reference explicitly, however, is class. This, as Oliver Mantell of the Audience Agency explained to me, is 'partly because [class] is quite hard to define, and partly because it brings a lot of baggage with it'. He also points out that when people talk about class, they often bring up things like the NRS classification system described above. But, he says, that is 'not very accurate relative to class as it is currently lived and experienced'.<sup>27</sup>

Despite this, it is possible to make some inferences about the class backgrounds of people in different Audience Spectrum categories. For instance, with the group entitled 'Kaleidoscope Creativity' we are told that: 'A majority are council tenants, though some own their own homes in slightly more prosperous areas. Like all urban segments, they are culturally diverse, but often economically challenged, are to be found in inner city areas or the suburbs of large cities like Leeds, Birmingham, with nearly half found in London.'<sup>28</sup> It is likely that most people living on inner city council estates could be considered working class. Though again, the question of self-identification can become an issue here. As Alexander Ferris, Director of Creative Engagement at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, says: 'A lot of the young people who come to us are from traditionally white working class areas... but those young people certainly wouldn't identify as 'working class'. It's not that they're not aware of [the term], but it's not something that they would associate with themselves'.<sup>29</sup> But whether or not the term 'working class' is universally recognised, we can find a correlation between social or economic marginalisation and low cultural engagement.

There are, of course, other methods that theatres have for defining and therefore reaching communities that are socio-economically marginalised. The Donmar Warehouse, for instance, targets school in each London borough that have the

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<sup>24</sup> This system was created by Experian and more information can be found here: <http://www.experian.co.uk/marketing-services/products/mosaic-uk.html> there is also a useful summary of the different categories it uses here:

<https://www.theaudienceagency.org/insight/mosaic>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.theaudienceagency.org/audience-spectrum> Visited: 10 March 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Mantell, Oliver. Personal interview, 7 February 2018

<sup>28</sup> 'Kaleidoscope Creativity' *The Audience Agency* 2018

<https://www.theaudienceagency.org/audience-spectrum/kaleidoscope-creativity>

Visited: 10 March 2018

<sup>29</sup> Ferris, Alexander. Personal Interview, 28 February 2018.

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highest number of free school meals.<sup>30</sup> And several venues, including Hull Truck, Sherman Cymru, The New Vic in Stoke and the ARC in Stockton focus on places in their catchment areas that score highly on the Index of Multiple Deprivation - a classification system used by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government that measures things across a range of areas such as: income, employment, health, education, crime, etc.

Through this research I have become especially interested in the work of those venues that have been drawing a higher than average number of people who fit into the Audience Spectrum's Kaleidoscope Creativity category. I am also particularly interested in looking at venues that have demonstrated success in building audiences who come from areas that score highly on the Index of Multiple Deprivation. As such, the phrase 'working class' in the context of this essay refers to people who feel they are either not welcome in the theatre or who cannot afford to go.

## **What are the barriers?**

Throughout the course of my research, I found that there were many different barriers both visible and invisible that can get in the way of participation. These can vary widely by venue and geographical location. Often, there is a gap between what we, in the industry, might perceive to be a major barrier, and the things that actually are getting in the way. But as we shall see, an interrogation of how we operate as theatres must cover a wide spectrum of elements that influence whether or not someone feels able to engage: from the pre-existing perceptions that working class people with low levels of engagement might have of theatre, through to the prices we charge, the way we market shows, the physical environment of the buildings themselves and, of course, the work we programme.

## **'It's not for me'**

One of the most fundamental barriers to access occurs way before an individual has even reached the theatre foyer. For many working class people, theatres are seen as places that are inherently unwelcoming. The Sherman Theatre runs a scheme called Sherman Five that is aimed at enabling access for people from the most disadvantaged parts of Cardiff. Julia Barry, the theatre's Executive Director, says that in their initial research for this, the most fundamental and overarching reason that individuals from those communities gave for not going was: 'people like me don't go to the theatre'<sup>31</sup>. This, she says, felt like a bigger barrier even than cost of the tickets or the location of the venue. This is a sentiment echoed even more strongly in research that Hull Truck did for a similar project. Their Community Dialogues project was aimed at building long-term relationships with residents on two social housing estates in Hull. According to their final report on the project, trust was a major barrier at the outset: 'Initial contact with some of the community organisations and

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<sup>30</sup> Rourke, Josie. Personal Interview 14 December 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Barry, Julia. Personal interview, 12 February 2018.

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individuals revealed a level of scepticism and mistrust about the motivations behind the Community Dialogues project and HTT.<sup>32</sup>

Gavin Porter, a working class theatre and film maker from Butetown in Cardiff, gives a good explanation for why this kind of mistrust might exist: 'Growing up... I saw theatre as part of the establishment. So I would align theatres with government, with institutions, with universities and with museums. I would see them as all part of the same infrastructure that I didn't feel any ownership of.'<sup>33</sup> He adds that his community was often the victim of prejudice from the police and that this added to his distrust of the establishment and perhaps added, subconsciously, to his hostility to anything he associated with that – including theatre.

But why might this association between the theatre and an authoritarian establishment exist? Lynette Linton, a working class theatre maker from Stratford in East London, explains that when she was young, theatre going was not something her family ever did and so she only went as part of a school trip. Before each trip teachers would say: 'you need to be absolutely quiet, don't make any noise, don't eat anything!' It was, she argues, as if they were saying: 'be the exact opposite of who you are'. And so, she says: 'of course you're going to feel uncomfortable in that place!'<sup>34</sup> So a young working class person's first experience of theatre becomes inextricably linked with the sense of being told what not to do by an authority figure.

What underlies many of these concerns is that theatre buildings and theatre going feels like a fundamentally *unfamiliar* thing to do. And as we examine the different elements of the theatre experience, we will see that the key to building audiences from working class communities is to find ways to generate a deep sense of familiarity.

## Ticket Prices

It is often assumed that expensive tickets are a major barrier to participation. But in one respect this is not true. Both Oliver Mantell of the Audience Agency and Dr Dave O'Brien told me during their interviews that there was plenty of evidence to suggest this was not a primary barrier. In situations where the work already feels familiar – because of the show's title perhaps or because it has a recognisable star – then working class audiences will be prepared to pay full price for tickets. The RSC, for instance, have said that one of the shows where they notice greatest social diversity amongst ticket buyers is their West End production of *Matilda the Musical*.<sup>35</sup> Additionally – many of the subsidised regional theatres I spoke to such as Northern

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<sup>32</sup> Candler, M. *Community Dialogues family engagement project with the residents of Thornton and Greenwood & Orchard Park Estates Evaluation Report*, Hull Truck Theatre, 2017 p. 9

<sup>33</sup> Porter, Gavin. Personal interview, 12 February 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Linton, Lynette. Personal interview, 26 February 2018.

<sup>35</sup> This information was provided by email on 18 January 2018 though they declined to cite specific figures.

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Stage in Newcastle or the Nottingham Playhouse said they felt it was very likely that their commercial counterparts in their respective areas – The Sunderland Empire or Theatre Royal in Nottingham – would have a more socially diverse audience despite the fact that tickets at those venues are generally more expensive.

Katie Walker, the marketing officer at Theatre Royal Stratford East, which sees Kaleidoscope Creatives comprise 35% of its audience (against a London average of 10%) is clear that ticket price is not a barrier on its own<sup>36</sup>. She says that they used to heavily flag that tickets started at £7 but that this led some to think that the experience itself would not be worth much. By contrast, she argues, their audience will be happy to pay top prices for tickets if they feel convinced that the show will be 'a good night out'<sup>37</sup>.

A smaller-scale example of how pricing is not always an inherent barrier can be seen with an experiment that Freedom Studios in Bradford did recently.<sup>38</sup> They mounted a show in an abandoned shop front on Bradford High Street and put all tickets on sale as 'pay what you decide' with bookers able to opt to pay either £3, £5, or £10. Seating was unreserved so a higher price did not guarantee a better view. Far and away the most popular price that people paid was £5 and interestingly, the second most popular price was £10. This is despite Bradford being one of the poorest places in the country (with 41% of its wards falling in the poorest 20% in Britain against a local authority average in GB of 15.1%).<sup>39</sup> So even though many in the audience were likely to be quite poor, they were still prepared to pay more than the minimum when they thought it would be worth it.

Ticket price does, however, become a significant barrier when it comes to asking an audience to take a risk on something that is unfamiliar – an unknown artist or a new play. It can also be a barrier to regular attendance – people might pay out a significant sum of money for a Christmas show as a once in a year treat, but they will not be able to do this more frequently than that. To address this, many theatres run schemes that involve free, discounted or optionally priced tickets.

There are two potential problems here. Firstly, as working class theatre maker Rhiannon White, founder of Common Wealth Theatre says, the way those tickets are offered can have an 'othering' effect. If cheap tickets are reserved for a specific night for instance, it makes it feel like the theatre has created a specific 'poor night'.

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<sup>36</sup> Walker, Katie. Personal interview, 8 February 2018.

<sup>37</sup> This is a phrase that came up a great deal in conversations about what would draw working class audiences in to the theatre. It is no surprise, perhaps, that this is also the title of 7:84 founder John McGrath's book about how to create theatre for a working class audience: McGrath, John. *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre - Audience, Class and Form*. Methuen, 1981.

<sup>38</sup> Chisholm, Alex, Aisha Khan. Kash Arshad at Freedom Studios. Personal interview, 5 February 2018

<sup>39</sup> 'Austerity Audit: Data Graphic' *Financial Times* 2013 <https://ig.ft.com/austerity-map/?gss=E08000032> Visited: 10 March 2018.

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Secondly, reducing ticket prices does not necessarily increase access. I spoke to one individual who worked at the National Theatre when it introduced the Travelex discounted tickets scheme. They told me that, despite the huge amount of publicity it engendered, there was little change in the kinds of people booking. Essentially they were selling tickets to the same people as before but for less money.

However, there are a number of particularly successful and rigorous ticket schemes that I have come across. The first is one that for many years I, as an emerging theatre maker, was a beneficiary of: the Young Vic's funded ticket scheme. This involves giving away significant numbers of free tickets to every show the theatre produces. As Sue Emmas explains<sup>40</sup> it is not just emerging artists who benefit. Tickets are given to a wide range of groups - from refugees to carers to sex workers. They are careful not to make judgements about what people might want to see, and they also ensure that tickets are available throughout the run and in the best seats in the house, thereby ensuring that there is minimal risk of recipients of those tickets being made to feel in anyway separate from the rest of the theatre's audience.

Yet, while it is highly likely that many beneficiaries of the Young Vic's scheme will be working class, that is not the primary thing on which they focus. However, class is at the heart of Sherman Cymru's Sherman 5 project.<sup>41</sup> Funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, this is a membership scheme aimed at people who have never been to the Sherman before and who live in specific areas of Cardiff where there are high levels of economic marginalisation. Consisting of over 3000 members, it offers heavily discounted tickets along with subsidised travel to the venue. Initially, individuals are invited to attend specific performances but once familiar with the building they can then book discounted tickets independently. According to Guy O'Donnell, the coordinator of the scheme, they now have around 700-900 independent bookers who attend regularly.

While the Sherman's scheme is well-funded and pretty labour intensive, there are other simpler ways of directly targeting cheap tickets. The Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough work with a local housing authority to offer 1000 tickets a year at £1 per ticket to residents. This has led to repeat bookings and enough demand that they are planning to increase future allocation.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, as Robin Hawkes, Executive Director of the West Yorkshire Playhouse told me<sup>43</sup> they develop relationships with 'Community Ambassadors' from targeted communities through whom they then sell tickets at £3 each to those for whom price is a significant barrier.

Perhaps the most radical approach to this issue, however, can be found at the ARC in Stockton. The ARC is a multi arts venue – it has a cinema and programmes comedy

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<sup>40</sup> Emmas, Sue. Personal Interview, 11 January 2018

<sup>41</sup> 'Sherman 5' *Sherman Theatr-Theatre*

<http://www.shermantheatre.co.uk/sherman5/> Visited: 10 March 2018

<sup>42</sup> Donoghue, Georgette and Steve Freeman at Stephen Joseph Theatre. Personal interview, 12 January 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Hawkes, Robin. Personal interview, 28 February 2018.

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alongside theatre, dance and family work. Annabel Turpin, ARC's Artistic Director, explained to me<sup>44</sup> that since January 2015 *all* tickets for their theatre and dance shows have been pay what you decide. She introduced this because she found that the theatre and dance they were programming was drawing consistently smaller audiences than the other art forms and was attracting the same old faces every time. Since introducing Pay What You Decide she has seen a significant increase in the number of people coming and also an increase in the box office income for their theatre and dance program. She makes the point that they chose the term Pay What You *Decide* rather than Pay What You *Can* so as not to make it feel pejorative. She also says that money is only collected after the show so initial booking is entirely free – removing any financial risk. Overall, across all the work they programme, 25% of ARCs audience comes from the four Audience Spectrum categories of lowest engagement. While these groups account for 49% of the venue's catchment area, she says that the largest portion of those attenders are going to the theatre and dance parts of the programme rather than elsewhere. Turpin does stress, however, that this kind of approach should very much be seen as an audience development tool rather than one for income generation. The overall amount of money it takes is still only a small proportion of the venues total box office income – the majority of which comes from their cinema and comedy program.

### **The Building and the Ritual**

If a theatre building is unfamiliar to you, then the very act of going to one and going inside can be a source of great anxiety. One working class theatre maker I spoke explains that when their mother goes to the theatre she: 'thinks she has to dress up and she puts on a posh voice and doesn't know how to act. She is scared she is going to be too loud... I've noticed that everything that I do, she leaves really quickly and I don't know why. I think she might think she is going to embarrass me'.<sup>45</sup> There are all sorts of elements of the building itself that can make someone feel uncomfortable – from the architecture to the kind of food on sale to the price of the beer.

Darren Rodwell, the head of Barking and Dagenham County Council described to me his own feeling of not belonging in one major London arts venue on his first visit. He had been given a ticket to a classical music concert and said the experience of being there: 'was all very nice, but it was very pretentious'.<sup>46</sup> This is the word that Lynette Linton has also used to describe the experience of being in some theatres. She describes this feeling as if: 'the purpose of this is for you to let me know that you are incredibly intelligent and you are making me feel stupid because I may not be as educated as you or in the same way as you and you are using your privilege to make me feel that I should not be here'.<sup>47</sup> Of course, there is a question here as to how much of this is the fault of the venue, and how much of it comes down to personal insecurity on behalf of the visitor. However, while we can't do much to change the internal

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<sup>44</sup> Turpin, Annabel. Personal interview, 31 January 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Interviewee kept anonymous

<sup>46</sup> Rodwell, Darren. Personal interview, 10 January 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Linton, Lynette. Personal interview 26 February 2018.

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feelings of each new audience member, we can work to minimise elements that may feed into someone's worries or concerns.

One of the first problems is that theatre buildings themselves can feel forbidding and unwelcoming. Even crossing the threshold can feel like an intimidating thing to do. Lucy Davies, Executive Director of the Royal Court, explained<sup>48</sup> that when she and Vicky Featherstone took over in 2013 one of the first things they did was to put the words 'Come In' in big letters on the front door. They also made the box office lighting brighter and had colourful, eye-catching posters prominently displayed. They also completely redesigned the bar to make it feel more welcoming to first time visitors. The Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough is currently in the process of a similar revamp to make it feel more open to newcomers. They are redesigning their frontage to make it much easier to see into from the outside.

Annabel Turpin of the Arc Stockton, acknowledges that the building might feel intimidating. In a town of low-key cafes and corner-shops, it stands out as a chic glass fronted structure which curves round the corner of Dovecote Street and Prince Regent Street. So she explains that they have deliberately *not* made their front door overly grand so as to avoid intimidating people who might want to come in. Following a similar line of thinking, Katie Walker from Theatre Royal Stratford East (TRSE) says that they no longer use images of the theatre space itself prominently in marketing literature. Beautiful as the venue is, the gilded edges and red velvet can be off-putting for many people. By contrast, Lynette Linton who made many of her early trips to the theatre at TRSE argues that the fact that it serves Caribbean food in the bar and plays familiar music makes the theatre feel especially welcoming to her: 'The people in there were like me I always felt. The young people's work is really accessible; you don't need to have a clue about theatre. You can walk in there listening to grime music and no one is going to tell you to turn it off.'

One of the most remarkable front-of-house experiences I have encountered comes with the recently opened Storyhouse in Chester. The building combines a cinema and theatre and has absorbed the local library that now wraps itself around all of the public spaces of the building – with books lining the walls everywhere you look. Signage everywhere is clearly and simply worded in large, bright letters. Tickets can be bought from self-service ticket machines or from the bar. All the tables in the café are long and wide with the intention that different groups of people will end up sitting together. In the centre of the foyer is a large cinema screen, which is used to show major sporting events. Simon Poole the Senior Lead in Cultural Education and Research at the venue explains<sup>49</sup> how, at different times of day in the building, you will see different 'waves of people... very often you'll have a kind of business class or entrepreneurial set of people who will sit here at lunchtime. At four o'clock there will be quite a lot of elderly folk sitting around in the café. First thing in the morning, at around 8 o'clock, the homeless are in often using the computers... and we often have an incredible amount of young parents with babies.' The building is still young and so

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<sup>48</sup> Davies, Lucy. Personal interview, 26 February 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Poole, Simon. Personal interview, 14 February 2018.

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it is hard to know yet what the long-term impact of it will be. However one early positive sign is the fact that membership to the library jumped by 300% in the first few months – across all demographics.

Yet the problem of access does not just lie in a building's bricks and mortar. The whole question of how to behave in a theatre can be a huge barrier for those not in the know. Georgette Donoghue, Marketing and Sales Director at the Stephen Joseph Theatre explained to me they train their front of house to spot newcomers to the building. If, for instance, someone doesn't know where the toilets are then the chances are they have not been in before. It sounds simple but it enables FOH staff to target their welcome and help to those who are likely to need it most. To tackle anxieties about how to behave, Sherman Cymru have made videos in which they ask audience members about how they should or shouldn't behave – with the aim being that a shared understanding amongst theatre goers themselves can be developed without the venue itself seeming high-handed.

But perhaps one of the most effective methods of enabling new visitors to feel welcome at a theatre is to ensure that the venue is actively open to children. Oliver Mantell of the audience agency says that whenever venues allow children in, then you will see a wider overall social demographic in the audience. This, he says, is because children simply do not see different places as being intimidating in the same way that adults do. By going into a space they can then make their parents feel as if they too have permission to go in – as Annabel Turpin explains, children are a 'massive passport into the building... people won't come into the building to see a piece of theatre, because they are scared they won't know what theatre is and they won't understand it. But if their child is performing in something then they will feel really comfortable with that. Once they've been in the space and they've discovered that actually you can buy drinks at the bar and they're not expensive... then we've made them feel welcome.' This is a tactic that Hull Truck have started using too and they now have a specific play area for children in their foyer with toys, games and so on.

We should be careful, however, to not always assume that buildings are inherently problematic. They can also be liberating and inspiring. Rhiannon White, a working class theatre maker from Cardiff and co-Artistic Director of Common Wealth makes this point when she talks about a show she created called *Class: The Elephant in the Room* at Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff. One of the performers in this show was a friend of hers from St Mellons – the estate she grew up on. He had never been to Chapter before and she asked him how he felt being there, assuming that he might not feel like he fit in. His answer was quite the opposite – as she explains he said: 'I like it here. I like it here a lot, because it feels like in this place, you can be yourself. It's different from a lot of places that I go to. I feel like I want to learn more about this place, and I'm happy to be here.' By contrast, she argues, the estate that they both grew up on was quite 'isolated' and she adds: 'You have to be in a uniform, you have to talk a certain way, it's very limited, and you don't get to meet other people... Everyone sounds the same, looks the same, thinks the same, and you can't go out of that box.' So Chapter was a release from that.

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She goes on to make the point that the ideal solution would be for amazing arts centres to be built in places like St Mellons: 'what I would love to do is build a theatre here in St. Mellons, I'd love it. I'd love to build a theatre and get people to come here... for a good reason. To look and see what is possible here, and what people can make. I'd want that to be a grand building. I wouldn't want it to be a shed, people deserve more than a fucking shit building.'

## Beyond the Building

Inevitably, one of the most direct and effective ways of engaging with working class communities is to build relationships by working with people in the places they live. Lucy Davies of the Royal Court explains that this thinking lies at the heart of all the work they do through their Beyond The Court program. The aim here is to work with local communities to empower and enable them to create their own work. Alongside this, people are then offered free tickets to see shows at the theatre itself. In this way, she says: 'artist development and audience development become one and the same thing'. The RSC's recent production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* achieved a similar thing. It toured nationally and in each venue featured a different community cast playing the mechanicals and some of the fairies. It was another show that the RSC's marketing department told me had seen a wider audience demographic. As Erica Whyman, Deputy AD of the RSC and the show's director, said to me about the audience: 'My experience was that people who thought they wouldn't enjoy it, or wouldn't have access to it, or would be excluded from it, came because their friends and most critically their children were in it.'<sup>50</sup>

The Leeds based company, Red Ladder, puts the idea of touring to communities with low engagement at the heart of everything it does. As producer Chris Lloyd <sup>51</sup> explained to me, it may open a show at an established theatre, like the West Yorkshire Playhouse, but it will then tour it to working men's clubs throughout their region. The aim is to develop an audience for theatre in venues where the kind of entertainment on offer is often quite different. Often, tickets for these shows will be sold through a 'hub' website – such as the Playhouse itself. In doing so, those venues are able to begin collecting data on audiences that they may not have had access to before and they can then use that to initiate a direct relationship themselves. Though, as Robin Hawkes at the West Yorkshire Playhouse told me, the numbers of people booking in this way are still quite small so the capacity for data capture is limited.

Sometimes, though, in order to reach as deeply as possible in to the local community, one needs to go beyond theatre buildings entirely. The New Vic in Stoke is based in a ward that ranks 13<sup>th</sup> highest in the country on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. Of the many different projects they run in their local community, one of the most eye catching is called *Appetite* and it brings outdoor and circus events to Stoke on Trent in free 'stumble across' programmes. As Theresa Heskins, the New Vic's Artistic

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<sup>50</sup> Whyman, Erica. Personal Interview, 14 June 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Lloyd, Chris. Personal interview, 5 February 2018.

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Director, explained to me<sup>52</sup> this has proved hugely successful. In the first two years of the program they had 314,000 attendances against a population of 250,000 – implying a significant number of repeat visits as well as people coming from outside of the area. As her colleague Emily Clarke, Head of Marketing and Communications, says: 'The idea behind *Appetite* is that it is for those people who do not see themselves as arts attenders and might never consider coming in to this building or who don't even know we exist.'<sup>53</sup> Heskins adds that 'We called it *Appetite* because it didn't have the word art or theatre in it.' And as a result they also keep the theatre's branding fairly discrete on banners at these events so as not to put people off. By encouraging repeat visits over a number of years, Clarke explains, the aim is 'to encourage people in to a rhythm of engaging with the arts.' And she adds that once they have achieved this: 'there is a programme where we want to encourage those audiences to visit us' in the building itself.

Venues don't always get it right though. Darren Rodwell tells me of one unfortunate encounter he had with a major London arts organisation. He was seeking partners for the Barking Folk Festival and was told by this institution that they thought the idea was 'racist' because they thought it would be 'only for the white community.' They made this assumption, he says, 'because their class tells them that. As far as they're concerned, a folk festival is a white thing. Actually, there's a 137 different cultures in this borough, 130 different folk histories in this borough. If we took a piece of dance, a piece of music, a piece of poetry and a piece of writing from each one those cultures, what have you got? You've got [a] world folk festival.'

## Marketing

Unsurprisingly, much theatre marketing is focussed on those who already have a record of engagement. And, of course, there are methods of communication that can work both for regular theatregoers and those for whom it is a new experience. The Hull Truck Report makes the point that: Many residents of Orchard Park and Thornton Estate mentioned that they never know what's on at the Theatre. And it adds that, along with word of mouth, Facebook is one of the 'two most popular methods of informing these audiences about the programme of events'<sup>54</sup>.

However, in order to reach under-engaged working-class communities, many other assumptions need to be interrogated. This is a point made clearly by Annabel Turpin from ARC Stockton: 'a few years ago, myself and the Marketing Manager did a bit of an exercise where we went out and looked at... how other things were being sold to people in Stockton. We looked at notice boards. We looked at posters in takeaway shops, and community centres. And we looked at all this information about yoga classes and coffee mornings, and we looked at our information, and oh my God did

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<sup>52</sup> Heskins, Theresa. Personal interview, 25 January 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Clarke, Emily. Personal interview, 25 January 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Candler, M. *Community Dialogues family engagement project with the residents of Thornton and Greenwood & Orchard Park Estates Evaluation Report*, Hull Truck Theatre, 2017 p. 14.

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we look expensive!' She adds that essentially, she realised that they were using Waitrose marketing materials but for an audience who were more likely to shop in Lidl. So again, if the aim is to generate a sense of familiarity with a new audience, then it is vital that flyers and print – often the first experience an individual might have with a venue – don't feel inherently alienating.

She also makes the point that all of their marketing materials focus overwhelmingly on the content of a piece rather than on the artists who created it or the form it takes. This is especially interesting given that the ARC has a particular reputation in the industry for supporting young artists whose work is often quite formally radical. So while experimentation might lie at the heart of the ARC's artistic mission, it is not the basis upon which that work is sold to the venue's local audience. (Whereas, when those artists perform at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, as they often do, that same radicalism might be exactly what draws in an audience). As she says, her local audience will care little for whether an artist has won an award they have never heard of or are reinventing a form that is unfamiliar to them in the first place. It is the subject matter that people connect with. She talks of the success they had with Chris Thorpe and Hannah Walker's show *The Oh Fuck Moment* and says that when people asked how she managed to sell such an unusual show in Stockton: 'One of my answers was 'Well, go and stand in the High Street and look at the people around you, and imagine trying to sell *Anthony and Cleopatra* to them, or imagine trying to sell them a show about making mistakes.' Which do you think would be easiest to sell?' And she adds: 'It's obvious that people are going to connect with that more than they're going to connect with a piece of Shakespeare that in their head is probably tied up with horrendous experiences at school.'

Another thing that came up repeatedly in conversation was the necessity of direct, highly personal approaches as a way of building relationships with new audiences. Katie Walker at TRSE often employs a team to hand out flyers in the local area and makes the point that this is pointless unless a real connection is made. She says that she always tells her team that it is: 'better to spend 30 minutes talking to one person than to hand out 30 flyers.' Similarly, Sue Emmas explained to me that some years ago at the Young Vic, they employed a woman whose previous job had been generating audiences for Gloria Hunniford's TV show. When she joined the Young Vic, she would set up a counter on the street outside the theatre and speak directly to local people as they passed by. Her experience made her highly adept at connecting with new people who might never otherwise think that a theatre was a place for them. By engaging in such a direct and highly personal way she was able to persuade them to come inside.

### **The Programme**

Programming a theatre involves an on-going tension between an audience-led and an artist-led approach. Do we prioritise the things that we know people already want – big titles that will be relatively safe bets; or do we go for shows and artists that are trying something new and exciting but are much less known and which come with far greater risk? And when it comes to audiences, how do we balance the demands of

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those for whom a trip to the theatre is an occasional treat with our desire to encourage people to make attendance a habit so we can engage in a deeper dialogue?

When it comes to drawing a working class audience for whom theatre going is an occasional treat, it is unsurprising that the most familiar show are the best bets. Most of the theatres I spoke to said their Christmas shows drew some of the most socially diverse audiences. Indeed, Pantomime has one of the most equally balanced audience demographics of all. As the *Panic!* research detailed: last year 13.9% of those in NSSEC categories 1-2 went to a panto, as did 12.7 of those in categories 3-5 alongside 10.7% in categories 6-8. So Panto draws its audience roughly equally from all strata of society. And, of course, big titles or shows with a big name attached and strong local relevance inevitably draw a more diverse crowd. When the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough staged *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* – the film of which was shot in the town in 1995 - they found this to be the case. Equally, Northern Stage are finding increased booking from first time bookers in postcodes with low attendance for *The Last Ship* – a musical they are developing with the Newcastle born musician Sting.

But we should be careful not to assume that there won't be an audience for new work. The success that the ARC in Stockton has had in developing a socially diverse audience for the experimental theatre it programs and produces demonstrates that it is entirely possible to draw people in if the financial risk for the audience is removed. Sherman Cymru have had this experience too – the new writing that the theatre programs has proven especially popular with their Sherman 5 audiences. This is particularly the case when those plays tell local stories that resonate directly with people. Lynette Linton saw this too with her play *#Hashtag Lightie*. The story of a mixed race, working class family in East London it was a huge hit when it opened at the Arcola Theatre. As she says: 'A lot of people still feel alienated because of the way they speak... because no one sounds like them on stage. That is why *#Hashtag Lightie* is doing so well. Because all the feedback we've been getting is from people saying 'you are telling our story... in our language'.'

The key thing to acknowledge here, is that familiarity, for an audience that rarely ever goes to the theatre, does not just have to be about recognisable titles. The underlying theme of a show can be familiar and able to make a connection. We have already seen, above, that Annabel Turpin has found that theme and content matter far more than form or who the artist is. And Theresa Heskins of the New Vic makes a similar point: 'What I think preoccupies our audience is not so much the life of the mind, [but] the life of the body. It's the plays about where the next meal is coming from or what one's pay packet is - much more fundamental things that are about subsistence.'

Another subject that can generate an immediate sense of familiarity is sport. It is striking how many theatres and companies I spoke to who'd had success with work on this subject. When Northern Stage produced a play called *The Season Ticket* in 2016 it brought in, according to Amy Fawdington, Director of Communications and Sales: 'a whole swag of new bookers that we just haven't seen before from post codes

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that we don't normally get people to book for.<sup>55</sup> Common Wealth had a major hit with their boxing show *No Guts No Heart No Glory* and Red Ladder have also had sport at the heart of two of their most recent shows: *The Damned United* about football and *Playing The Joker* about Rugby League. The latter of these stars Rugby League play turned actor Jamie Jones-Buchanan whose standing in the local community enabled the show a significantly greater reach than might otherwise have been expected.

Despite all of this, it is important to remember that there is no single factor that might solve the complex question of what, exactly, will most appeal to a socially diverse audience. Audiences, like the individuals they are comprised of, are contradictory creatures. Mark Calvert, Associate Director of Northern Stage makes this point clearly.<sup>56</sup> He argues that local Newcastle stories (which he terms 'Geordierama') certainly can pull in a more socially diverse audience precisely because they offer something familiar. But he adds that they also find a more socially diverse audience when the RSC tours to the venue. This, he says, is precisely because the RSC brings a certain social status with it that can appeal to an audience that has particular class aspirations.

## Conclusion

For many years, in Camberwell, where I live, there was a greasy spoon called The Jungle Bar and Grill. Go in there on any given day and you would most likely find one of the most genuinely diverse clienteles of any place in London. On one table would be a group of manual workers in high viz jackets; opposite them would be a young black family; next to them would be an elderly white couple sipping tea; in the corner you'd find some students from the local art college; and then there would be people like me – who have social privilege and are as generically middle class as they come. It was a space that felt genuinely egalitarian, democratic and welcoming. I have always felt that this should be a model for how a theatre should feel. A theatre building should be demographically representative of the area in which it is located – in terms of its staff, its artists and its audiences. It should be a focal point where people can come together to share an experience on an equal footing.

The data from the *Panic!* study and the LSE report cited at the beginning of this essay demonstrate how far we have to go to achieve this. While all of the tactics I have described above can have their uses when it comes to trying to radically reshape our audiences, we should be careful not to overstate the effect that any single scheme or idea can have. Only a concerted effort by theatres – both individually and collectively – addressing challenges across all of the areas laid out above will enable us to start this process of making theatre in this country fundamentally more open and less 'posh'. To this end, I have laid out some recommended actions that theatres can take to begin to tackle this.

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<sup>55</sup> Fawdington, Amy. Personal Interview, 22 January 2018.

<sup>56</sup> Calvert, Mark. Personal Interview, 22 January 2018.

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Yet a true and lasting solution will involve even more radical steps. Entrenched in the thinking of so much of the discussion around class and theatre is an 'us and them' mentality – hardly a surprise given the evidence of how deeply middle class most of those who work in the theatre are. If venues are to be truly democratic then they must interrogate and open up their own management and employment structures – from the boards that govern to the artists who are commissioned. No single group of people – however they are defined – should be able to exert excessive control over publicly funded culture. A truly democratic creative space has to be heterogeneous. Yet, as austerity continues to bite and divisions over Brexit, (which fall predominantly along class lines) become ever more entrenched, achieving this won't be easy. But if theatres don't make a concerted effort to reshape themselves as more inclusive spaces, then they run the risk of exacerbating these divisions further. So while the idea of creating a truly diverse and egalitarian shared space might feel increasingly impossible, so too, is its need becoming ever more urgent.

## Recommendations

- Reaching communities with low engagement takes time and involves building trust. Recruiting individuals from those communities can help facilitate this.
- Don't assume that simply reducing ticket prices will have an impact. People are often prepared to pay if they feel confident that it will be worth it and give them a good night out. However, reducing prices can help encourage people to take greater risks with what they see, but only if other factors that might prevent attendance are addressed.
- Affordable ticket schemes can have a positive effect. But make sure they don't just end up subsidising people who might book anyway – relationships with social housing trusts or community ambassadors can ensure that these tickets are made directly available to those who will benefit from them most.
- Ensure that those affordable tickets don't accidentally reinforce social divisions within the theatre by being for the less good seats in the house. A greater sense of belonging can be fostered if people feel they are on an equal footing with other audience members.
- Don't make assumptions about what people will or will not know about what is expected of them when they enter a theatre building. Providing easily accessible information both online and at the venue explaining that there is no need to dress up, where the toilets are, how to buy tickets etc. can reduce the fear of those who are unfamiliar with the rituals of theatre going.
- Make sure the front door to the venue feels actively welcoming rather than intimidating. This can be done by ensuring that everyone can see inside the venue, that it is well lit, and that the signage which makes it clear that people are welcome to enter.
- Interrogate the subtle signals that the venue is sending out. What does the cost of a drink or the kind of food available on the menu say about the expected clientele? Might it be off putting to some people?
- Think about what might be done front of house to encourage people inside. Music nights, or the screening of sports events could encourage people into the building who might not otherwise want to come in.

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- Ensure that staff are well trained to spot newcomers and make them feel actively welcome.
- Making a building welcoming to children can have an enormous impact when it comes to empowering their parents to enter the space. Children can be great 'passports' in this regard.
- Audience development can often go hand in hand with artist development. Creative partnerships with community groups, schools or amateur dramatics clubs can help forge closer relationships with marginalised communities and encourage people into the building.
- Producing work outside of the main venue can be vital when it comes to reaching a new audience. This can mean touring work to local working men's clubs or village halls but it can also mean staging free-to-view outdoor work.
- Think carefully about marketing materials. A glossy brochure might look great but it might also be sending out the signal that the venue is too expensive or too posh for some.
- The personal touch is vital when it comes to marketing. Find ways of getting to know new communities and individuals personally before inviting them to see a show.
- A focus on the content and theme of a show can have more impact than on the artists who have made it (unless they are a star with a public profile in their own right) or the form of the show – however artistically exciting and provocative it might be.
- Big titles can draw a more socially diverse audience, but so can stories with clear local resonance or about a subject, like sport, that has mass appeal.
- Ensure that the staff working in the building and the artists employed and commissioned are truly reflective of the diversity of the community the venue serves. Ultimately, this is the only way to erase the boundaries that can be drawn as a result of an 'us and them' mentality.

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