The Devaluation of the artist

Die Entwertung des Künstlers

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Abstract

Much has been written about artists' precarity and dependency on institutions. Precarity is a de-economisation of freelance artists and 'asymmetry' on which cultural economy and arts policy relies. Speculation early in 2020 was that Covid-19 drew attention to the unethicality of these relationships but what has changed? Here, pre-pandemic and rapid response research on UK freelance theatre artists are brought together to suggest that the #CultureReset has been little more than a resetting of the stage with all props and players returning to previous positions.

Pre-pandemic, the separation of artists from the language, policymaking, business and decision-making of professional subsidised theatre represented an unethical rationality. Covid-19 interrupted and transformed all cultural activity with a disproportionate impact on freelance artists, particularly in performing arts. Yet during 2020 and 2021, previous value systems (the rationality of the field) were maintained. Early hopes for improved conditions diminish as institutions and governments restore previous behaviours, counter to the 'new normal' advocated. A global crisis could not change the 'value problem' of artists in the arts. Moreover, pity procured for artists during the pandemic has further infantilised and devalued them. These findings call for greater scrutiny of the ethics of arts management and policy and new more collaborative approaches to solving the value problem.

Keywords

Künstler und Künstlerinnen / artists, Kulturpolitik /cultural policy, Ethik / ethics, leadership

Introduction

This article is driven by an examination of value principally drawn from the perspectives of freelance artists and decision-makers working in professional subsidised theatre in the United Kingdom (UK). First, it examines the literature to establish and define its terms. The paper then goes on to explore the devaluation and de-economisation of the artist in UK professional theatre pre-Covid-19. It argues this forms an unethical

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rationality constructed through the norms and social contracts of artistic work, management and policy. Following this, it examines how this skew to unethicality might be disrupted and changed through a crisis such as Covid-19 as part of a systemic change of the accepted norms in arts management and policy. Finally, its findings call for more scrutiny of an ethics of arts management and arts/cultural policy, and collaborative approaches to what I identify as the 'value problem' for artists.

During two phases, the research was itself a series of disruptions and changes of direction over time. I undertook a doctoral research project on freelance theatre artists as decision-makers in UK theatre, concluding in a call for radical collaborative change in 2019 (FITZGIBBON 2019a). A new collaborative phase of this work was interrupted by Covid-19 in Spring 2020. This in turn evolved to rapid response research on the instability and disruption, caused by Covid-19, to freelance theatre artists and their improvised and collectivised actions to secure support and effect change. There is then an underpinning sense that through disruption, uncertainty and resistance to the neat linearity of time and defined roles, we can gain more insight and possibly effect greater and more fluid resolution to the problems identified (not unlike LOREY 2019 but also GRINT 2008; FITZGIBBON 2021a; KUNST 2015; WESNER 2018).

Research Question

The original research set out to understand why artists' work is still precarious if so much is already known about problems of artist precarity and connected inequalities. The intention was to investigate how artists are stakeholders in the decision-making systems which produce such insecurity, and how their perceived role is affected by other players. Its later phase then examined to what extent Covid-19 changed the situation.

Such an inquiry is important because, while significant attention has been given to defining artistic precarity and inequality, there has been less exploration of artists' own influence in the dominant decision-making systems of cultural production. Additionally, while value in relation to arts and culture has been widely examined in relation to its intrinsic and extrinsic elements and its deployment in arguments for or against cultural policy interventions, artists have not featured distinctly within this discourse. They are more often elided with arts institutions in the cultural value debate; their input denied in planning and evaluative processes. Only by interrogating how and where artists hold value in the core

management and policy of a field or art form (rather than peripheralised elements accorded to them) can we understand the links between value, precarity and possible change.

While current readings of the post-Covid cultural environment vary (if we can say we are post-Covid), many suggest a cautious optimism for change. By contrast, this research suggests artists were largely devalued and excluded from decision-making pre-Covid and the 'new normal' is a reset of these prior norms.

Theoretical framework

The initial project examined to what extent artists had salience as stakeholders, bringing together three theories within the broad field of stakeholder theory: MITCHELL, AGLE and WOOD's (1997) Principles of Stakeholder Salience (see also WOOD et al. 2018), PFEFFER and SALANCIK's (1978) Resource Dependency Theory and DONALD-SON and DUNFEE's (1994) Integrative Social Contracts Theory. The first two of these theories (MITCHELL/AGLE/WOOD 1997; PFEFFER/SALANCIK 1978) bring attention to how value and salience (the ability to draw attention to one's needs and interests) are assigned to different stakeholders in any enterprise based on the stakeholder's perceived status, interdependency and dependency. Stakeholder salience may also be used to consider how some players dominate, attract perceived value, and to what extent any business or system relies on particular definitive stakeholder groups for survival. Although under-utilised in the study of artists, these theories aid scrutiny of artists' reliance on the perception of others for their status (LENA/LINDEMANN 2014) and heighten understanding of interdependencies at play. Additionally, such theories may be used to examine how (perceived) status, value and interrelationships might be changed or suppressed by different players according to their own interests, high salience and dominance (BRIDOUX/VISHWANA-THAN 2018).

DONALDSON and DUNFEE (1994) propose that an ethical rationality is constructed through the norms of a field of business which form implicit social contracts between businesses, their management and their stakeholders (distinct from the articulation of that between a 'profession' and society as discussed in RØYSENG 2019). Norms are shaped by collective understanding and context (cultural, social, political). They form the ethics of decision-making—what a business must do, and ought to do

as obligations beyond laws and regulations. The authors also articulate that such norms of practice are governed by rules: they must be generally understood and agreed; and all the players must be free to exit.

Extending these theories, an *un*ethical rationality forms when the norms of practice are *un*ethical, *not* generally understood and *not* free to exit. The value artists hold and the degree to which they can influence their status rely on the perceptions of other players and are controlled by dominant norms. Within such a rationality, a denial or suppression of artists' (non-economic) value in cultural production systems can be understood as a devaluation. Similarly, a limitation placed on the economy of artists (their precarity, their subordinate value to other players and their denied participation in the decision-making of the wider cultural economy) can be understood as a forced de-economisation. This differs from artists' choice to refuse economy in what LOREY (2019: 164) describes as a collective act of "becoming-precarious" in the now: a deliberate embracing of risk, uncertainty, and togetherness as a resistance to the masculinist economy version of precarity as a perpetual sacrificing for an individualist future (LOREY 2019).

The value (and devaluation) of artists in cultural value discourses

The subject of artists and value can be explored in a number of ways. It can focus on how artists and their artistic work are perceived and appraised in artistic markets (ANGELINI/CASTELLANI 2018; LENA/LINDEMAN 2014). Artists' value (as appraisal of their artistic quality, talent and status) is closely entwined with their economy (the economic worth of their outputs, as well as their economic participation and livelihood) and scholars argue that their artistic value relies on the denial of their own economy and institutional perceptions of their value (ABBING 2002; ANGELINI/CASTELLANI 2018; KUNST 2015; MANGSET et al. 2018). Additionally, the value and role of the artist in society has been explored extensively (as public intellectual, as activist) (BECKER 1974; BECKER 2000; MCCARTNEY 2018). Less has been examined about how artists contribute to wider collective understandings of cultural value.

Cultural value discourses in the arts have sought to define cultural value as separate from culture's economic value, recognising that art and culture perform non-economic functions of intrinsic value in human exchange. Nevertheless, forms of cultural value and their measurement have been mobilised as alleged evidence of the social value, public

value and public benefit of arts and culture; adopted by institutions and policy bodies as economising and instrumentalising arguments for their continued public/government support (BELFIORE/BENNETT 2009; ZAPATA-BARRERO 2016) with limited attention to public perception of artistic or cultural value (GILMORE/GLOW/JOHANSON 2017). Parallel discourses of cultural value exist, offering counter-narratives to increasingly neoliberal, economically driven, governmental attitudes and reductive evaluation (BONET/NÉGRIER 2018; KLEPPE 2017). Calls for a 'cultural democracy' propose recognising the value in everyday cultural practices and reshaping valuation processes (policymaking, grant-making, institutional hierarchies) (KELLY 2016; STEVENSON 2019). Despite KELLY's (2016: 151) assertion of "equality of access to the means of cultural production and distribution", artists figure little in discourses of cultural value and democracy. Their capacity to contribute to value understanding is neglected (NEWSINGER/GREEN 2016) and their role in the value practices of the arts is often elided with the "closed and ill-tempered conversation" between institutions and public bodies described by HOLDEN (2006: 10).

Inequality discourses discuss concerns of value as embedded and intersectional: artists are devalued should they be perceived as deviating from or resisting dominant artistic ideologies and norms, coming from the 'wrong' background, pursuing the 'wrong' cultures or types of practice (ERIGHA 2020; PINNOCK 2019; JOHANSON/LINDSTRÖM SOL 2021). EIKHOF (2020) rightly notes income alone will not fix precarity and inequality. However, as value and economy are intertwined, it is difficult not to see how artists' perceived value, equality and economy are connected.

The economy (and de-economisation) of artists

Artists are not exceptional in their precarity relative to the precarious existence of other workforces and people. Yet many argue that artists' economy is out of step with their relative skills, qualifications and their centrality to value creation in cultural production (NEILSON/ROSSITER 2008). Scholars differ as to both cause and solution for artistic dependency and precarity. BAUMOL/BOWEN (1966) argued that artistic precarity is inevitable due to what came to be known as "Baumol's cost disease" (BAUMOL 1996: 183) of production inefficiency in performing arts. ABBING (2002: 282) proposes donor/state subsidy in

an "exceptional economy" leads to over-supply and thus precarisation of artists, and only removal of subsidy will achieve equality. TURBIDE et al. (2008) by contrast propose arts institutions must prioritise donor accountability to balance competing demands. Yet all of these privilege economically dominant players (donors, policymakers, institutions) and all adopt a principally economic and institutionally-centred solution. None fully explain the disparity between artists and other players in the field or artists' limited participation in decision-making that affects either their value or economy.

The pursuit of career as an artist and the suppression of one's own value or economy entails individual choice (as per LOREY 2019). Different scholars (ABBING 2002; MANGSET et al. 2018) debate to what extent this is an actual choice, or one conducted within such limited options and "asymmetrical power relations" (MANGSET et al. 2018: 542) that it cannot be seen as such.

Theatre and arts policy as an ethical rationality with a 'value problem'

Professional theatre is an interesting site for this exploration as it is an art form (and industry) where artists must always be present for the art to take place. This establishes artists' salience as definitive stakeholders on whom business relies (MITCHELL/AGLE/WOOD 1997) and their centrality in theatre's value creation. Less is known about how they shape this rationality. If artists must be present for value creation but depend on others for their own valuation and economy, this poses ethical concerns for arts management and cultural policy. Additionally, it suggests there is a value problem embedded in the artistic/industry norms formed by institutions and policy bodies.

One might argue that artists are not dependent on institutions and public bodies. This may just be an unacknowledged capitulation to industrial and neoliberal systems (KUNST 2014). Many artists elect to work outside institutional and policy structures. However, the sites where theatre artists might work are predominantly controlled by institutions and circumscribed by public licensing and governance. This means artists must often be attached to an accountable corporate entity to access sites of work, generate financing and secure policy compliance. Therefore, what *might* be possible as a rejection of, or exit from institutional/policy value systems, is impossible due to the inability to work

autonomously. This places a moral obligation on institutions and their management (KUNST 2015) and prevents the separation of the artist from institutional and policy delivery.

One might also propose that artists contribute to the value problem and are part of shaping the ethical rationality of artistic/industry norms through the established dual and multi-form leadership in arts institutions (PRICE 2017; REYNOLDS/TONKS/MCNEILL 2017; CAUST 2018). Roles such as Artistic Director are intermediaries between an ambiguously defined arts/theatre sector and policy, thus they also shape public arts policy and lead change of the wider rationality. Yet, such positions are relatively small in number, and often consumed by institutional self-interest (FITZGIBBON 2021b; NISBETT/WALMSLEY 2016). Therefore, an artist's presence in institutional management is not symbolic of *all* artists' presence nor does it account for artists outside of institutions being afforded equivalent status or norm-changing powers.

As arts policy interferes in norms, and influences institutional behaviours and the wider rationality (as per ALEXANDER 2017), one might look to policy bodies to address (or acknowledge) the value problem as part of their moral and ethical obligations to artists and the wider inequalities their precarity produces. However, arts policy has few regulatory or oversight responsibilities and public policy cannot be responsible for wider systemic flaws. There is, too, a question of how involved artists are in shaping both "artist policy" and general arts policy (HEIKKINEN 2002: 299). WODDIS (2014: 497) argues that arts practitioners (including artists) often have greatest power when they advocate "uninvited" or without permission. However, with or without invitation, artists do not always advocate for change or against institutional systems (STEVENSON 2014). More needs to be understood about how artists participate in institutional/policy decision-making systems that shape or influence their value problem.

Value disruption during Covid-19

While the outbreak of Covid-19 and worldwide lockdowns in 2020 caused widespread global disruption and change in all forms of cultural production, distribution and consumption, less is known about its effects on the value systems and rationality described above. In the UK, where this study occurs, nation-wide state emergency powers imposed restrictions and re-openings. National restrictions and bailout funds were

introduced with often contested and confusing variations at devolved (sub-national) and local government levels. Live events (including theatre) was generally the first industry to close and the last to reopen.

Emerging research on the pandemic and the arts suggests Covid-19 amplified pre-existing precarities and inequalities; the significant freelance workforce and freelance artists were more adversely affected than other groups and the already marginalised (by gender, class, race, disability) were further excluded (EIKHOF 2020; TRAVKINA/SACCO 2020). Pre-existing policy environments, particularly relating to protected incomes for artists or interventions in workforce supports (universal payments, furloughs) , determined levels of lockdown and pandemic disruption support for institutions and artists (WRIGHT 2020). Advocacy campaigns pleaded a special case for arts and cultural industries, and artists, as significantly affected and vitally necessary to post-Covid recovery planning (POLIVSTEVA 2020; MAGKOU 2021). Yet this did not always translate to increased government attention or the involvement of artists in policy.

Propositions have emerged from practice and research that the pandemic is a signal of humankind's failures to address environmental and social collapse and a moment to refuse neoliberalised consumerist behaviours. Such provocations call for the enforced interruption to be used as a catalyst for change (BANKS/O'CONNOR 2020; O'CONNOR/ BARNETT/TONKIN 2021; CULTURE RESET 2020). Far from utopian idealism, these campaigns point to de-economised practices and strategies of care that emerged during Covid-19, the certainty that more crises will come, and the urgency to emerge to a new normal. Such optimism of a great #Reset or #CultureReset may already be fading as new viral outbreaks, wars and a landgrab for oil and gas expose the fragilities of growth-hungry economies. Yet the persistence of such ideas beyond 2020 suggests this period is the time when previous systemic failures and ethical problems might be addressed, and new cultural economies of care and value redistribution might be devised.

Methodology

This inductive interpretive research draws from two distinct but connected phases of research with the first informing the second. As noted earlier, in so doing, the conclusions here confirm the potential for more improvisational, time-fluid and collaborative approaches in the field of

arts management and cultural policy research. Drawing on pre-Covid and post-Covid research to compare what happened in, and emerging from, crisis, presents a much shorter span than time-fluid studies such as WESNER (2018) but signals the opportunities for research to evolve knowledge of behaviour through, and in relation to, time. Additionally, taking in a timespan reveals deeper concerns about the ethical and structural impasse in effecting change.

Phase 1 was a completed stakeholder study of freelance theatre artists as decision-makers in UK theatre (FITZGIBBON 2019a). Conducted between 2015 and 2019 it examined the perceived relationships between artists, institutional leaders and policymakers in public bodies. It deployed a multi-method approach combining document analysis of key strategy documents for the period 2015 - 2018 of the 4 UK public arts bodies (ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND 2013; ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND 2013; ARTS COUNCIL WALES 2013, 2015; CREATIVE SCOTLAND 2014); interviews with relevant officers in these bodies, senior staff from the principal UK representative bodies for theatre, artistic/executive heads of small and large theatre institutions and freelance theatre artists. Research also included focus groups with freelance theatre artists. Participants were selected using snowball sampling and open calls. The data was analysed thematically using a reflexive and codebook approach as per KING/BROOKS (2018) and deploying BOEIJE's (2002) Constant Comparison Method between data types. The analysis enabled common and divergent perceptions and understandings to be reviewed within and between different participant groups (artists, institutional leads, policy officers). In total, 83 participants contributed to the project across the UK. As its conclusions were being disseminated the pandemic hit.

The situation of the Phase 1 research as a pan-UK study in which one state combined four nations (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) is useful in identifying if this problem is uniquely failed in one policy regime or can be interpreted more widely. UK taxation, social welfare, foreign and military policies are all controlled by a single UK parliament in London. However, other policy areas such as arts and culture are the responsibility of the devolved Assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland while the national Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) oversees policy in England. This results in divergence within these (theoretically) autonomous policies. Associated public bodies (three Arts Councils and Creative Scotland) are thus shaped by different political influences, leading to observed similarities and variations.

Phase 2 was a short-term rapid response collaborative research project initiated during 2020 in Northern Ireland and Greece. Its approach drew on conclusions from Phase 1, pursuing a collaborative and patch-work ethnography (as per (GÜNEL/VARMA/WATANABE 2020) in which four "practitioner experts" (FITZGIBBON/TSIOULAKIS 2022: 5), all artist-activists in their locales, acted as co-researchers. Only the Northern Irish data is referred to here; however, the project approach is influenced by knowledge exchange between its two researchers and four collaborators (plus forty-five freelancers in meetings). Its data combined transcripts of freelancer group meetings, notes from sectoral meetings called by institutions and government departments, and online review of statements, campaigns, policy announcements issued by groups and bodies in the UK from March to December 2020. All of this was analysed during review meetings with the practitioner experts. Notes from these meetings also form the data used in this study. An initial research plan to document the effects of the pandemic and support the co-researchers' activism was abandoned as the practitioner experts redirected the project, eschewing planned methods, introducing new participant voices, and questioning both policy and sector responses to their circumstances.

All contributions are anonymised, and a Letter/Number code used to signify the different roles of contributors/different contributions in this text (See Table 1).

Code	Participant
Phase 1	*Sept 2015–March 2019*
LM	Institutional Lead (Artistic/Executive/Both)
RB	Representative Body (trade associations/membership organisations)
PM	Public Body Officer (Arts Councils or Creative Scotland)
IP	Independent Producer, playwrights, directors, theatre-makers)
A	Artist (self-defined focused on actors
	strategic documents used as data are listed in the reference list

Code	Participant
Phase 2	*April 2020–January 2021*
GM	Group Meeting
PE	Meeting notes from reviews with Participant Experts
OM	Notes from other sector or goverment / public body meetings

Table 1: Participant Breakdown for Phase 1 and Phase 2 (source: Table 1 Participants)

Findings

The Findings first examine the devaluation processes identified as embedded in the norms and social contracts of the field pre-Covid. I then explore what happened during the period of the rapid response project in 2020 with some attention to later events in 2021. I move on to discuss how this formed an unethical rationality, and the failure of a global pandemic to disrupt this pattern of devaluation.

Pre-Covid Institutional Dominance

Analysis of the Phase 1 data reinforced other research, showing that institutions rather than artists dominate the field (of professional subsidised theatre) established here as an unethical rationality. Institutions and policymakers were the principal players in establishing norms of practice, and institutions dominated the relationships between the theatre sector and public bodies or governments. This reinforced the role of institutional leaders as extremely powerful intermediaries and interpreters of the needs of artists to public bodies. These needs and the wider sector demands are presented as not without an amount of institutional and personal self-interest (FITZGIBBON 2019b; NISBETT/WALMSLEY 2016). Institutional dominance was reinforced by public arts bodies who saw their relationship with the sector as principally institutional. As one drama officer put it, "95% of what I deal with is in a venue" (PM1). While the different arts bodies had individual artists' support schemes (and Arts Council Wales had a dedicated officer for Creative Practitioners), these were often general multi-artform programmes. Many artist research participants felt no real relationship with these public bodies,

often hearing partial or mis- information through informal channels and social media. The few artist participants who claimed any influence with public policy bodies attributed it to their previous work as institutional leaders or their non-artistic work as producers or project managers.

There are legitimate accountability arguments for this institutional focus. The bulk of public funds were distributed to institutions, therefore, this was principally a scrutiny relationship to protect public investment. Public bodies had little or no economic relationship with individual artists, therefore they lacked means to encourage or enforce their interests. This meant that public bodies' relationships were built principally on both institutional and economic dominance. In interviews, it was also apparent that this institutional focus shaped their expertise (as arms-length 'expert' bodies) in understanding art form development and needs. While public body officers often noted artists could engage with their public and sector consultations on policies and strategies, many research participants (officers, leaders and artists) distinguished between those for whom consultation attendance was paid (institutional staff) and unpaid (freelancers and artists). Opinions varied about artists' interest in policy development and whether they wanted to see themselves as "instruments of the state" (PM3) when accepting funding or subsidised work. One policy officer (PM6) said:

I don't think they [artists] have the same opportunity that maybe organisations or leaders of organisations have. And if they are given the opportunity I don't think they take it up as much. I think some people feel that they're not allowed to have, or that maybe their perspective isn't as valued or as important as organisations'.

Many artists viewed consultations as a form of inaccessible tokenism rather than genuine engagement. As one CEO (LM6) put it:

This idea that it [policy consultation] was all open and transparent, when in fact it's not, it's just a way of masking the fact that they [artists] have no part or they're not accessing the power they absolutely do have.

Artistic Directors were often noted as examples of artists shaping institutional leadership and influence. While this was certainly true, many artists in interviews and focus groups noted that the person in this role was often the only artist in regular institutional employment, creating, as a freelance director put it, "an artist-led organisation of non-artists" (A5). This and other discussions of artists being perceived as "risky" (A39) in institutional leadership suggested that artists were limited in their opportunity to be decision-makers and leaders, only legitimised when in institutional leadership/management roles. Furthermore, there

was an asymmetry of information and influence, with artists holding uneven and inconsistent access to policy and decision-making compared to other institutional players. This asymmetry amplified institutional dominance, leaving little room for non-institutional players or those in diffused models of production (cooperative and self-producing) to influence decision-making.

Separation of art-making from business of art

In Phase 1, I analysed the four strategic plans of the four public arts bodies: Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Arts Council England, Arts Council Wales and Creative Scotland (ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND 2013; ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND 2013; ARTS COUNCIL WALES 2013, 2015; CREATIVE SCOTLAND 2014). These documents varied in the period covered, but all spanned the years 2015 - 2018 and were the *de facto* policies of the four bodies. In the absence of wider cultural policies and strategies for the devolved nations or England, they also functioned as implicit national cultural policies.

The four strategies, as pan-art form plans, rarely distinguished 'theatre' or 'performing arts' therefore the terms 'arts' and 'artists' were read as constituting all artforms and artistic practices. Attention was given to the presence, stated relationships and priorities of artists. This term 'artist(s)' was not significantly present in documents although Arts Council Wales had issued a written policy on the term Creative Practitioners to mean all creative workers, including artists. More generally, concerns of workforce (training, sustainability, precarity) were not significantly prioritised except for considerations of diversity such as Arts Council England's *Creative Case*, (ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND 2015).

These strategies separated the two terms 'the arts' and 'artists', with one signifying a 'sector' and the other a grouping of people in the role of 'artist': implicitly separating the making of art from the business of the arts. Published after the 2008 recession, in a climate of government austerity, emphasis on economic sustainability was not unexpected, but dominated. Ambitions for the arts were described in business-heavy terms: the arts should be "fit for purpose" and "business-like" (ARTS COUNCIL OF WALES 2013: 12, 36) with expectations of "high levels of cultural entrepreneurship" (CREATIVE SCOTLAND 2014: 20) and "sustainable business models" (ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND 2013:18). There were general statements about the value, inspiration and

benefits of the arts (rebuilding communities, job creation). However, the attention in these documents was towards viability with an emphasis on diversifying business models and making robust business cases.

In contrast, when artists were discussed in these documents, there was almost no mention of viability or sustainability. Terms deployed were environmental and associated with nature with artists rendered as both passive recipients of care and/or abstracted forces of inspiration. The public bodies described trying to "nurture" or "foster" conditions in which artists can "flourish"(ARTS COUNCIL OF WALES 2015: 5; 2013: 27), showing a "full flowering" (ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND 2013: 5), where creativity was "free to roam" (ARTS COUN-CIL ENGLAND 2013: 7, 24-26), implicitly building dependency on institutions and agencies to create a nurturing environment as a protective space for artists. As one document noted, "Fish are only as healthy as the water they swim in" (Arts Council of Wales 2013: 11).

Artists were also described as something spontaneous that could "spring forth" and "illuminate", "lighting the spark" (ARTS COUNCIL OF WALES 2013: 21-25); the "cradle of our creativity" and "the key that unlocks the door" (ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND 2013: 9), discussing them as if they were in a detached space in which they inspired, but their needs were unexamined. While recognising these documents were written for multiple audiences including governmental and other public figures, the passive detachment of artists in content and language from discussion of economy or the business of how artforms develop suggested an implicit policy separation. It was also possible to speculate that this seemingly other-worldly detachment contributed to what research participants described as the political view of artists as "some sort of dangerous, bohemian, tree-hugging activists" (LM4); and "arty-farty" (A2). Moreover, the infantilised version of artists, articulated here, implied institutional and policy dependencies.

Implicit policy of devaluation/de-economisation

Across all Phase 1, participants acknowledged that artist precarity was a significant concern both for present and future theatre (and the arts). In interviews, drama officers of all four bodies stated a commitment to un-ion minimum payment terms (most often referring to those terms bargained by the theatre practitioners' trade union, Equity). But they, and other research participant groups, acknowledged these rates were an

insufficient livelihood, while also noting the diminished power of trade unions; one drama officer stated, "Equity minimum is a joke" (PM4). Austerity budgets and policy changes in all four nations covered by this study, had led to a rise in project-driven funding (with smaller institutions often moved out of core funding systems), and in turn, a growth in volume of micro-contracts: artists working multiple projects each for shorter periods, often for sub-union rates. Policy officers and institutional leads observed the disparity between perceived success and actual career viability. One officer described mentally calculating the total fees in project budgets across a year for one artist considered successful as not much more than £10,000 in total. Sighing, the officer said, "It's not a career is it?" (PM2). At the same time, many policy officers and other participants noted that the proliferation of multiple micro-subsidised companies, projects and scratch works (semi-staged unfinished works), gave the impression to government of value for money of the existing budgets of public bodies (and institutions); at the same time giving a false picture of the arts and artists as flourishing in all places.

Despite the awareness of precarity, artists' ability to negotiate their own budgets and participate in economic or business decision-making was suppressed by, and within institutions. At institutional levels, Artistic Directors complained that artists wanted to talk about money too early in relationships, damaging evolving creative exchange. Concerns of budget, contracts and policies were often deflected as aspects of work that institutional leads said artists did not understand or were not interested in. While acknowledging the inadequacy of union minimum terms, most institutional leaders interviewed had no formal policies to redress this, arguing lack of subsidy as the main reason. Artists. by contrast. levelled complaints that their relationships with Artistic Directors were too transactional/budget-driven while artists were often excluded from discussions about the planning of their own work (or at macro-level institutional planning). These differing views of the experience meant relationships were formed under financial tension but always with freelance artists at a disadvantage, reliant on Artistic/Executive Directors controlling both the terms and the discussion.

In exchanges with public bodies, artists' economy (as previously defined to be both earning power and participation in economic decision-making) was also suppressed. Artists could bypass institutional patronage (to varying degrees in each nation) by applying for individual artist or project funding to public bodies. However, grants were capped at levels sufficient for "one person and his dog to do some stuff" (PM1),

preventing anything of scale or duration. Caps on the number of applications, evidence of a track record of institutional patronage and requirements to have institutions as proxy producers were all discussed. One grant scheme included a requirement to do a separate element of work for community benefit without payment. In addition, officers of public bodies described reviewing applications to ensure artists were not "too strategic"(PM1) in trying to seek funding, described as "doing it for the wrong reasons" (PM2). Officers and institutional management acknowledged the necessity of artists pursuing multiple or hybrid roles (self-titled 'slash artists' or 'hyphenates') while criticising this practice as hard to appraise, promote or support. These limitations or criticisms caused artists to suppress their economic needs and also suppress their working identities depending on their working contexts, as this artist/producer (A24) described:

> I do define myself as an artist … and yet, I'm also a producer and a manager …I do think it would be a lot healthier if there was more of that perspective because they do feel like quite different camps sometimes and the language is very different. So, despite being maybe bilingual, I still feel like a little bit of an alien in one or the other.

As others have found (ABBING 2002; MANGSET et al. 2018), these findings demonstrate how artists were implicitly forced to suppress their economy and full working selves to be seen as artists in their transactions with institutions and public bodies. Additionally, it showed the limits placed on their potential economy with widely-known norms of forced precarity (inadequate union minimums, over-reliance on micro contracting, grant limits and forced dependency). These, in turn, reinforced the perception of artists as non-economic and unable to work at scale without institutions, in effect de-economising their role. This affected their economic livelihoods and limited their participation in economic decision-making at industry and policy levels. Artist participants in interviews and focus groups saw these limitations as a lack of trust in their expertise, denying their professional knowledge—a knowledge derived from their artistic and hybrid portfolio work in and with multiple institutions.

Visible & invisible subjectivities/dependencies

Freelance artists were often described as independent artists. This betrayed a confusion of terms and dependencies at play within professional theatre and reflected in policy. Although the term used was 'inde-

pendent', freelance artists' dependency and suppressed economy were entirely normalised in sector, institutional and policy practices. Institutional management, public officers, independent producers and artists all described artists requiring a network of institutional and public body support to not only work, but to be seen as artists, and to achieve any success or status. A freelance theatre maker (A2) described it like this:

> If there's a kind of, constellation of people you can get involved in the work. So you can present the package rather than me. I can't, I have no, my name doesn't have any currency here but were I to have people I could interest, maybe, I could change stuff.

Correspondingly, the absence of networked support (institutional, public and also to some extent media) further compounded inequalities of access. To be of value, artists had to be seen and collectively endorsed as valuable, as this theatre maker from a remote region described:

> So if I was playing Hamlet here and nobody from those awards [names a national theatre awards selected by an industry jury] saw me ... If I don't receive that nomination, the perception by [national newspapers] or people that could raise me from the roodstone is that I'm not very good (A21).

This normalisation of artists' dependency on networks of support was acknowledged in the strategy documents and reframed as institutional responsibility for artists (framed as "nurturing"), as seen here:

> If an artist is to make a career based in Wales, it will be because producers, galleries and venues will themselves have a stake in nurturing Wales' creative talent (ARTS COUNCIL OF WALES 2013:29).

While contradictory to the dismissal of artists' portfolio working, public bodies established through these documents that to be an artist (or the "right" kind of artist) was to be infinitely adaptive to and dependent on the needs of institutions and agencies, as illustrated here:

> the right artist will be as comfortable working on an urban planning team as they would in a community setting or on a theatre stage (ARTS COUNCIL OF WALES 2013:11).

Less openly acknowledged was the shared dependency of both institutions and public bodies on artists' precarity and adaptiveness, as they moved between multiple institutions. As one representative body interviewee noted, professional theatre relied on a norm of "necessary wastefulness" (RB3); that at any given time, enough artists must be out of work for there to be a readily available massed artistic workforce as on-demand "guns for hire" (RB3). Without this, the theatre business model quickly collapsed. While CREATIVE SCOTLAND (2014: 41) stat-

ed that, "[artists] underpin our shared creative system at every level", this did not do justice to the systemic reliance on artists' precarity to balance public and institutional budgets. Additionally, while there was an acceptance of shared responsibility for artists in such nurturing, caring statements, they did not articulate the inter-institutional dependencies: small, micro-funded or unfunded projects and companies acting as test beds and sites of artistic "self-precarisation" (LOREY 2019: 160), limiting the risk and budget claims for larger institutions while enhancing the perceived public value of limited public funds. Such micro projects also represented artists' attempts to work outside formal institutional networks, which they felt had little care or attention to artists' needs except when mobilised by the institutions' self-interest. These different subjectivities demonstrated an asymmetry of value within an unethical rationality in which the artist was devalued and de-economised, and this was relied upon by both institutions and policies.

Expressions of value and ethicality during Covid-19

Data from Phase 2 of this research showed that artists (and creative freelancers) were more significantly affected by Covid-19 and the associated restrictions than many other occupations (GM; PE). In the UK, where neoliberal policies had encouraged income diversification over many years, performing arts institutions mostly closed before official lockdown (23 March 2020) due to government discouragement of attendance at live events. Most performing arts institutions were in dire financial circumstances by September 2020. The UK government was slow to introduce support for freelancers across all industries. Freelance artists, with mixed economies of work, fell through the gaps. While many reported 100% income loss (some up to 18 months of lost contracts) by April 2020, the majority were unable to access adequate cost-of-living support from government schemes for self-employed workers (TSIOU-LAKIS/FITZGIBBON 2020). This can be viewed as a governmental decision based on perceived value and salience.

Despite their evident dependencies (previously discussed), many were left unsupported in the early months of the pandemic. Throughout 2020 into 2021, freelancers' continued labour was expected but largely invisible. Images and campaigns around the cultural shutdown often portrayed empty seats and closed venue doors while the few remaining employees and institutional leads laboured within (OM). While there

were parallels to these different invisible labours (inside and outside institutions), the mismatch of dependencies identified in Phase 1 and the implicit institutional, and thus economic, dominance was sustained. Artists were among a sizeable freelance workforce largely overlooked in national provisions, left out of official statements, and required to undertake additional work to qualify for grant aid. The issuing of government support funds and arts-specific support schemes privileged institutions and employers, with an expectation of trickle-down to artistic workforces. Northern Ireland was unusual among UK nations as the first to dispense emergency arts grants to creative freelancers (not specifically artists); nevertheless, these awards came with an expectation of delivery and were out of proportion with the scale of losses artists had experienced. Later arts-specific Covid support programmes in Northern Ireland lagged behind other UK nations as national Cultural Recovery Funding (CRF) was renegotiated through layers of devolved governmental processes.

Policy and institutional behaviours were reactive and improvisational at an accelerated scale during the global crisis. Many institutional leads and public officials spoke of "unprecedented" (OM) speed in decision-making to address the challenges: advocating for support, rewriting grant schemes, rearranging season programmes and working models. Closer scrutiny suggests, by necessity, these rapid response programmes and changes were built on existing relationships and protocols and thus implicitly replicated previous value systems. Likewise, the previous unethical rationality and norms were replicated. Institutions continued to dominate relationships with policymakers and were the principal representatives of "sectoral need" (OM) invited to emergency online meetings with departments and public bodies. Institutions (often in acts of survival) continued to operate with degrees of self-interest and artists continued to be infantilised in a system that required their presence and value creation but did not acknowledge the interdependencies at play. In group meetings, artists described an array of invisible labour, spanning voluntary efforts in and for their local communities; auto-creating and self-producing as well as "unproducing" a constantly changing timetable of projects and micro-contracts (GM); upskilling (learning new creative and technology skills); and negotiating a confusing array of grant applications (many for the first time). The collaborative nature of the Phase 2 research also exposed a labour of radical care (CHATZIDAKIS et al. 2020). As has been observed by me and other scholars (DE PEUTER et al. 2022; FITZGIBBON/TSIOULAKIS 2022; SERAFINI/

NOVOSEL 2020), in the absence and failure of official networks and government supports, these communities of artists formed their own alternative ecologies of care (GM). Many were engaged in community activism (such as delivering meals, making scrubs). They also practised mutual care for other artists and creative freelancers: setting up Facebook groups, fundraising for hardship funds, coordinating letters to government ministers, providing mutual aid, often between strangers (sharing equipment, knowledge and emotional support). In Northern Ireland, groups of artists set up a crowdsourced hardship fund, the NI Bread and Butter Fund; the Facebook group NI Freelancers Surviving Corona and the advocacy website ArtistsNI (see <https://www.artistsni.com/>), all by May 2020 (PE). In contrast to pre-Covid experiences, artists were more vocal in their complaints as forms of radical care, not just in Northern Ireland but across the UK (GM). A selection of campaigns (see <https://freelancersmaketheatrework.com/advocacy/>) advocating widespread radical change and pushback against exploitation and exclusion ensued and formal policy recommendations were issued at national and devolved levels. Co-researcher practitioner experts in Phase 2 embodied this radical mutual care in recruiting research participants from underrepresented constituencies - artists in rural communities; d/Deaf and minority ethnic artists; artists with caring responsibilities (older/disabled relatives, children) and non-artist freelancers. These actions of inclusion and protest were a direct counter to their exclusion and invisibility in institutional and policy decision-making and valorised these voices. In addition, they once again created an alternate, more inclusive cultural ecology with a more equitable value system and model of exchange outside formal subsidised and institutional systems. This was positively rather than negatively de-economised.

Devaluation in a new normal

For most of the artists involved in Phase 2, the full extent of their own devaluation was revealed to themselves by Covid-19. Nationally and at a devolved level, different pressure groups had been established to demand the #Reset described with no return to a previous status quo of precarity and exploitation. Yet by late 2020 and in 2021, many participants in this research had fading optimism. This was in marked contrast to repeated assertions in sector and government rhetoric that arts and culture was of intrinsic value in supporting a society in lockdown and

recovery. As cultural recovery was discussed, and different parts of society and the economy re-opened (and closed and re-opened) key concerns were revealed that suggested the new normal is yet some way off.

By autumn 2020, artists openly articulated the denial of their value as both artists and workers (GM). Many had experienced greater levels of support and financial security during the crisis through their non-arts and non-artist roles (which had provided employee furlough, access to counselling, Covid- sickness payments and technology support to work from home) than through their work as artists. This was even the case when their non-artist roles were in arts and theatre institutions. The gap between employee and self-employed support schemes as well as poorly-considered UK government campaigns about "reskilling" (JORDAN 2020) had provoked feelings of carelessness amplified by the intensity of their own care ecologies (similar to those explored by CHATZIDAKIS et al. 2020). In this consideration, they had found broader common cause with other creative freelancers, non-creative freelancers and precarious low-income workers. This meant, as a group, they resisted the privileging of artist status (rejecting some calls for an artists' Universal Basic Income) and instead deployed arguments for equality as freelancers, as workers and citizens (GM, PE). This aligned in Northern Ireland to political preferences of the then Minister responsible for Culture and, no doubt, was useful traction in negotiating for support. However, it also represented a further suppression of their identity as artists in order to attract salience and gain perceived value.

The dissonance between artists' essentiality in value creation and their lack of presence in decision-making was amplified during Covid-19, but largely ignored. In early 2020, many theatre artists had seen institutions free-streaming archival recordings of their work, often without prior knowledge, permission and without payment. They had worked in isolation, responding to multiple lockdown micro-commissions and rapid response project calls from institutions. Yet as reopening began, many institutions reverted to previous production approaches without any real dialogue. In meetings during summer 2020, government officials had acknowledged their lack of awareness of the scale of pre-Covid precarity among artists and creative freelancers (OM). Additionally, a number of consultation reports and surveys had, by then, signalled the potential for a mass exit and skills drain from the creative workforce that would significantly hinder recovery. This led to efforts by policymakers in Northern Ireland to divert national CRF (earmarked for institutions) to directly support creative freelancers in late 2020. However, as recovery

planning began in earnest in 2021 with the formation of an Arts, Culture and Heritage Taskforce for Northern Ireland, artists were largely excluded from its membership with its announcement listing only an anonymous "Freelancer - AN Other" (DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES 2021). These actions reinforced the pre-Covid circumstance of "necessary wastefulness" (RB3): expected presence but also unacknowledged interdependency, exclusion from decision-making and infantilisation.

The early phases of lockdowns saw a number of campaigns emerge (in theatre and the arts) driven by unions, representative bodies and voluntary networks. These articulated the extreme livelihood collapse experienced by artists at all career stages. Campaigns proliferated to ensure that "The Show Must Go On" (slogan deployed in campaign by the Theatre Support Fund, see <https://theatresupportfund.co.uk/>), raising money for both individuals and institutions and advocating for safe reopening and recovery support. Images and language of these campaigns often deployed artists as the source of intangible, inspirational public benefit (echoing the 'creative spark' abstraction of earlier public policies). Alongside these campaigns, artists were absorbed into sector-wide and freelancer campaigns, presented as destitute, images of their faces with their occupations written on cards or personal stories of hardship. While no doubt mobilised to show their lived realities and equal humanity with other citizens/workers, it is hard not to see this as further devaluation and de-economisation. Once again, artists were detached from any agency, infantilised, presented as dependent charity cases and incapable of controlling their circumstances. Again, their presence and identity were mobilised to support institutional and sectoral needs alongside their own.

Discussion: the unethical rationality and the 'value problem'

Drawing the findings of Phase 1 and Phase 2 together shows that pre-Covid-19, professional subsidised theatre and its policies in the UK existed in an unethical rationality with a value problem in relation to artists. While the social contract relies on mutually agreed norms, there are asymmetries in artists' potential to influence or change their positions or the wider rules of operation relative to institutional and policy players, reflecting the asymmetries explored by both HOLDEN (2006) and MANGSET et al. (2018). Similar to the old joke of no-one acknowledging the elephant in the room, artists are perpetually present

and precarised in theatre, but their circumstances, and the wider inter-dependencies, went unacknowledged. Artists must always be present for value to be created but must always be devalued and de-economised for the policy and business models to operate. This extends to a sector and policy reliance on a growing informal economy of micro- and self-subsidised cultural production. Institutional dominance has been elided with the economic concerns of a neoliberalised cultural policy while artists' expertise and economy are devalued, and their work is not perceived as real work.

In policy and management, artists are rendered as incapable, infantilised by a system while repeatedly de-economised, unable to push against their own devaluation without suppressing their own status as artists and their own potential for complaint. Despite the potential for public policy to influence sector norms and behaviours, public arts policy, instead, reinforces these ethical faultlines. Exit options (a requirement for ethical norms by DONALDSON/DUNFEE 1994) for artists other than leaving the sector were to become non-artists or to detach from all relationships with subsidy, yet all of these options resulted in further devaluation due to the networked and inter-institutional dependencies of the field of theatre. This only became a serious concern for other players (institutional leaders and policymakers) during Covid-19 when the mass exit threatened business survival.

Covid-19 exposed and deepened pre-existing value problems of precarity, inequality, unacknowledged dependencies and an asymmetry of information and influence. Despite assertions of the value of arts and culture and the expertise of artists during Covid-19, the de-economisation and devaluation of artists continued as they were excluded from government supports or expected to do more than other workers for lower levels of support through multiple schemes. Within arts and cultural Covid- support interventions, institutional dominance was reinforced. While artists responded with invisible labour and formed inclusive ecologies of radical care, these actions were depended upon but were also largely unacknowledged.

The evidence of growing solidarity with other precarious workers initially asserted artists as both artist and worker, demanding equal treatment by the state and as citizens. However, this evolved to statements of artist as worker, an implicit self-suppression of their status of artist as something distinct or a different kind of work. Whether this is a negative form of self-devaluation that magnifies the problem or a realignment of

artists to the implied citizenship afforded to status as worker requires further investigation.

A 'reset' in theatre describes the moment in rehearsals when, having played out a scene, all the actors, props and cues are returned to their former positions in order to play out the scene again. While the #Reset/#CultureReset is imagined as a software reboot to erase earlier programming errors, the evidence of my research is that before the effects of Covid-19 are even played out, the new normal has already returned all the players to their places in earlier value systems. While clearly this research focus has been on artists, and the #Reset/#CultureReset proposes a much broader pan-cultural view, it seems reasonable to suggest the potential for change will be inhibited by ingrained norms at both institutional and policy levels that continue to deny the value of artists.

This inhibition of change then poses a challenge for arts management and both arts and cultural policy. The underlying dependency and reliance of artists on other players, despite their centrality to the field of artistic work, is distinct, exceptional and symbolic of an asymmetry of value, information and influence. If artists are not free to exit such systems, do not agree with the norms, and lack any influence to change those norms, it is reasonable to ask who is responsible for changing the rationality.

BAUMOL's (1996) cost disease may suggest this crisis is yet another in a succession of crises for theatre. Yet BAUMOL's proposition (BAUMOL/BOWEN 1966; BAUMOL 1996) does not adequately answer the internal disparity between institutional players and artists or the attendant policy failures. ABBING's (2002) proposition that subsidy is the problem cannot adequately explain artistic precarity when such inequalities are less evident in other non-profit fields. Similarly, it cannot be expected as TURBIDE et al. (2008) propose that attention to policymakers will address wider systemic and institutional failings given that the interdependencies are too great, and over-attention to a dominant stakeholder leads to a suppression of other stakeholder interests (BRIDOUX/VISHWANATHAN 2018). Equally, wider ethical concerns of inequality and exploitation are often suppressed or dismissed in pursuit of other policy and institutional priorities (BELFIORE 2021; JENNINGS/BEIRNE/KNIGHT et al. 2016; JOHANSON/LINDSTRÖM SOL 2021).

While many scholars have proposed artists can, and do, bring value to policy and institutional development, equally much has been written about the implicit and structural barriers that exclude artists from influencing such decisions (LAPADULA/MILES/ENRICO 2020; NEWSINGER/GREEN 2016, WODDIS 2014). Such barriers can also

include self-exclusion from state apparatus and politicality, as KUNST (2015) notes.

Despite much declaration of a new normal and an inclusive recovery, it would appear that a global pandemic and worldwide crisis could not disrupt the previous value systems and unethical rationality within the arts field. let alone within wider governmental policies. Further, this research suggests that artists were deployed as figures of pity in such a way that their position has been further weakened. Unless greater attention is brought to the ethics of institutional management and public policy in arts and culture, no amount of resetting will reverse the devaluation processes described here.

Conclusion

This research has proposed a value problem that lies at the heart of an unethical rationality in theatre in the UK. A global crisis has not been able to disrupt or change the implicit social contracts or the acknowledged and unacknowledged interdepencies at play within the field. The deployment of different dimensions of stakeholder theory – integrated social contracts, resource dependency and stakeholder salience – gives a rich and complex picture of the different ways value, economy and dependency are assigned within relationships, amplified by research over time. This has helped to highlight the centrality of artists to continued practice and policy while showing the stark contrast of their devalued and de-economised position.

Solutions proposed by other scholars continue to privilege institutional and policy responses while artists remain infantilised. However, while it is clear these players retain greatest power and capacity to assign value and to control the cultural economy, they cannot, and should not, be the sole authorities or solutions.

This research shows that the devaluation and de-economisation of artists is systemic. Artists have little capacity to change their circumstances due to their devaluation. This raises questions about whether propositions of #Reset and major change are achievable. While this may appear a highly negative conclusion it also invites greater scrutiny of the barriers to change in post-Covid recovery, not least the need to redistribute value and share decision-making.

In acknowledgment of the significant power institutional leaders and policymakers have in shaping the value of artists, greater reflexivity in

cultural leadership, management and policy practice is needed. In addition, the evolution of an adequately formulated ethics of arts management and cultural policy is needed, particularly scrutinising norms of the field and their disruption, and considering how these norms shape our understanding of artists and creative workforces as citizens. As other scholars have noted, the alternative invisible ecologies of radical care and mutual support fostered by artists and creative freelancers and amplified by Covid-19 should be examined as sites of new policy development and working models within a more ethical redistribution of value and shared decision-making.

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