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## **The 'diverse economies' of applied theatre**

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### **Abstract**

Some of the perennial tensions in applied theatre arise from the ways in which practice is funded or financed. There are the immediate material pressures and pragmatic dilemmas faced by theatre makers on the ground; the struggle to secure the resources needed to produce and sustain work or to negotiate the dynamics and demands of particular funding relationships. In the literature of applied theatre, there are many examples of groups and organizations that have compromised their political, pedagogic, artistic or ethical principles to make their work economically viable. There are also ongoing debates about the nature of the relationship between applied theatre and the local, national and global economic conditions in which it is produced. These debates examine the extent to which economic conditions shape the forms and intentions of socially committed theatre movements over time. This paper takes a practice-based approach, drawing on fieldwork conducted in 2012 with three applied theatre companies: Applied Theatre Consultants Ltd. in New Zealand, C&T in the United Kingdom, and FM Theatre Power in Hong Kong. This multi-sited organizational ethnography generated critical insights into the ways in which these companies bring social and artistic values to bear on business models and financial relationships. Analysis of the companies' practice takes seriously the aim of feminist economic theorists J. K. Gibson-Graham's (2006) diverse economies project: to imagine and create spaces of economic possibility. Organizational, management and economic processes can be insidious technologies by which capitalist/neo-liberal ideologies infiltrate socially committed theatre and performance. But, they can also be critically informed practices, involving considerable ethical consideration, creativity and care.

### **Keywords**

applied theatre

diverse economies

economics

funding

organization

Sometimes it feels like it is all about the money. Finding resources, financial and otherwise, to sustain applied theatre practice can be an ongoing challenge. In some contexts there is a historically inadequate infrastructure. In others, subsidies and supports are being eroded through the neo-liberalisation of state policy and implementation of austerity measures. Accounts of how socially committed theatre movements in different international settings have fared over the past four decades tell of the resourcefulness of individuals and organizations committed to making theatre that is socially engaged and in some cases highly critical. But, they also tell of a gradual process of adaptation to market-driven, individualised policy interests, resulting in diminished or frustrated artistic and political ideals. It is not surprising then that concerns about applied theatre's relationship with wider economic conditions and the implications of specific forms of income generation are perennial.

Michael Balfour's (2009) article *The politics of intention* sets out key concerns that arise from applied theatre's economic relationships. He suggests that typical modes of funding present the field with distinctive challenges, that funding from

... non-governmental organizations (NGOs), charitable trusts (sometimes religious, sometimes not), arts councils and government agencies ensures, at least partially, that the rationale and practice adapts to myriad social discourses. The commissioning of transformation by these donors infects the ways in which applied theatre defines and talks about itself. (Balfour 2009: 347)

He describes the 'delicate process' of translation that takes place as applied theatre makers engage with the agendas of donors and the institutional settings in which they are commissioned to work (350). Ambiguous intentions can lead to the uncritical adoption of problematic discourses and models. The terms of engagement between theatre makers and participant groups can end up being determined by application criteria, predetermined targets and reductive evaluation systems. Balfour presents problems that arise when theatre makers depend on sources of funding that demand tangible outcomes. These include the adoption of simplistic models of change, increased potential for self-censorship and diminished attention to artistry and experimentation. His analysis reflects wider concerns in the field about the extent to which the social, ethical and artistic values that inform practice are compromised or undermined by a demand to demonstrate measurable effects (Ackroyd 2007; Etherton and Prentki 2006).

So, does the perplexingly intimate relationship between the forms and intentions of applied theatre and its typical methods of income generation mean that ultimately it is 'all about the money'? In this article, I use the feminist economic theory of J. K. Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006) to pursue 'a politics of possibility' (Gibson-Graham 2006: xxxiii). I will consider whether Gibson-Graham's theory might be useful as a way of 'reframing the economy' to illuminate a diversity of economic practices in applied theatre, not all of which will be driven by an economic or neo-liberal rationale (Gibson-

Graham 2006: 144). Socially committed theatre makers take challenging creative and organizational decisions to survive in inhospitable funding contexts or as established conditions change. The approach taken by Gibson-Graham can help to identify and affirm instances in which applied theatre makers take seriously the ethical, social and artistic implications of financial and organizational decisions.

### **An ethnographic approach to researching the economies of applied theatre**

I originally came to this topic as a practitioner. After ten years of running participatory theatre projects in London I needed to know more about the economies of that work. What were the implications of engaging with particular sources of funding, different business models or management strategies? The research project that informs this article examined applied theatre's relationship with the economic conditions in which it is produced through a multi-sited organizational ethnography. It focused on how this relationship is experienced and managed by three theatre companies: Applied Theatre Consultants Ltd. (ATCo), C&T, and FM Theatre Power (好戲量 - FMTP).

ATCo is a small company based in Auckland, New Zealand. Co-directors Peter and Briar O'Connor create participatory theatre programmes that address significant social issues. ATCo works mainly in schools and local community settings. Its flagship programme, 'Everyday Theatre', was developed in 2003 to provide a safe space for children and young people to talk about child abuse and family violence. Everyday Theatre is presented to its young participants as a computer game. The actors are Games Masters, desperately trying to complete The Family Game by helping the characters, a family experiencing violence, abuse and neglect. The young people are invited to assist the Games Masters. In doing so, they explore the complexities of the family's situation and try to identify possibilities for change. Everyday Theatre tours the country, working closely with local services. The intention of the programme is not to transmit fixed messages, but to explore social issues in their complexity through drama. ATCo aims to work democratically with communities, involving participants in dialogues from which they are typically excluded.

C&T is based in Worcester in the United Kingdom. Paul Sutton is Artistic Director and a founder of the company. C&T works locally, nationally and internationally on projects that combine drama with digital and social media to create interactive learning experiences for young people, working in schools, colleges, universities and other organizations. C&T's hybrid projects are described as Applications (Apps). C&T has created an online network of schools and groups that collaborate on projects by uploading and sharing digital content. During my research, for example, a group of students at a secondary school in East London and a group in New York were working with the *Lip Sync* App. They live-streamed performances in which they repurposed lyrics from popular songs to comment on the ways different technologies were affecting their lives. C&T is committed to working with young people as active participants to generate and deconstruct content and meanings in popular cultural forms. Through the C&T Network, they aim to shape 'global literate citizens', connecting young people

in different parts of the world, sharing localised perspectives, and collaborating around issues of common concern.

FM Theatre Power is a collective of theatre makers and activists, founded by Banky Yeung Ping Kei. Their base is the Drama Factory, a studio theatre in Tai Kok Tsui, Hong Kong. Their work is driven by the aim to enable people to speak out through theatre. They produce plays, musicals, devised theatre, street theatre, forum theatre, Playback and Playforward theatre, education and community-based arts projects, films and books. Not all of their work immediately looks like applied theatre. During my research, they staged a Cantonese translation of Dario Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. To anyone unfamiliar with FMTP, it would seem to be a professional production staged at a central municipal venue, City Hall. The show was a pointed comment on the election taking place at the time. It depicted a dystopic future Hong Kong where the existing political system had gone unchallenged. The cast, including trained actors, students, teachers, social workers, restaurant workers and artists, devised scenes to represent their fears for Hong Kong's future. FM Theatre Power are committed to the ideal of people's theatre, 'theatre of the people, by the people, for the people' (Banky and Mo 28 September 2012). They apply these ideals to challenge established modes of cultural production and civic participation in twenty-first century Hong Kong.

I spent three months working with each company, taking on roles that contributed to the company's work. In the tradition of organizational ethnography, the research involved sustained participant observation, paying close attention to everyday organizational practices (Ybema, Kamsteeg, Yanow, and Wels 2009). A range of methods were used to attend to what Davide Nicolini (2009) describes as the relational 'texture' of practice (121), following 'trails of connections' within and beyond the immediate site of the research (121). Predominantly through observations, interviews and document analysis I followed connections with people, organizations and policies and then, with those relationships in mind, stepped back into the midst of practice. The fieldwork also involved looking with each company at an issue related to the research topic that was of immediate or ongoing concern. For example, ATCo's contract for Everyday Theatre was up for renewal and the future of the programme was uncertain. C&T had recently been made a National Portfolio Organization as part of the Arts Council England's new (at that time) funding system and were reflecting on how their new business model might affect their relationship with schools. FMTP's members were interested in the impact of a grant from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council on their way of working – organizationally, creatively and politically. During my fieldwork, these, and other emergent issues, were examined through the companies' reflective processes, through interviews and through a final arts-based session. This research produced a practice-based perspective on many of the issues raised in existing literature.

### **Of mercenaries and miracles: The economics of applied theatre**

There is a strong precedent in applied theatre for critically interrogating the implications of modes of income generation and relationships with wider economic conditions. The effects of changing economic

and political conditions on socially committed theatre practices in the UK have been well examined. Baz Kershaw (1992), Toni Jackson (2013) and Jonathan Neelands (2007), for example, provide accounts of the left-wing, alternative theatre and 'Theatre in Education movements' fragmentation and political reorientation over the latter part of the twentieth century. Kershaw and Jackson highlight the ways in which changes to policy and funding conditions placed an economic imperative onto socially committed theatre movements, contributing to de-politicisation and marketization. Neelands (2007) proposes that after 1997 the political values of applied theatre were 'neutralised' as theatre companies orientated their intentions towards the New Labour government's social inclusion agenda (307). New Labour reformed and entrenched an economic rationale for arts funding that had been set in place by Conservative governments over the previous two decades (Belfiore and Bennett 2007). Jenny Hughes and Helen Nicholson (2016) point out that the move in socially committed theatre towards delivering tangible outcomes through individualised approaches to social problems is now predominantly recognised as one consequence of neo-liberalism.

Critiques of neo-liberalism are particularly prevalent in the literature of theatre for development (TfD). Tim Prentki (2015) offers a thorough analysis of the impact of neo-liberalism on TfD across multiple contexts as an agenda that 'asserts the dominance of economics and finance over every other area of human activity and requires that the myriad of ways in which humans relate to each other – the very stuff of culture – are reduced to market exchange' (57). He identifies the seemingly unresolvable contradictions faced by TfD companies, to simultaneously demonstrate economic value within the neo-liberal paradigm and social value within the international human rights framework; to deliver individualised outcomes for donor agencies using approaches based on the collectivist principles of TfD. Jamil Ahmed (2002, 2007) and Asma Mundrawala (2007, 2009) both highlight the many ways in which the economically driven development agenda of international NGO donors can affect the politicised practices of local theatre groups. Mundrawala focuses in on how the systems and technologies of donors disciplined Pakistani theatre makers into becoming compliant with externally defined development agendas. Prentki argues that TfD companies need to engage in theatrical strategies that promote conscientisation and counter neo-liberalism's hegemony. Ahmed (2002), however, depicts the failure of Bangladeshi TfD companies to enact such ideals when the need to reflect the priorities of funders underpinned decision making even in supposedly participatory processes. In pursuit of funds from global donors, he describes larger theatre companies behaving like empire builders, and smaller groups ending up as 'pseudo-mercenaries' (Ahmed 2002: 214–215). As James Thompson (2006) and Kirsten Sadeghi-Yekta (2015) highlight, defining local need or enabling local control can become almost impossible within complex networks of international donor and partner relationships.

Many of the issues raised above are specific to historical and geographic contexts, but there are common concerns about the ways in which an economic rationale can infiltrate theatre making in social settings, shaping the values, intentions and forms of practice and limiting the control theatre makers have over what they produce. Even when practitioners intend otherwise, projects can end up

contributing to, or at least becoming complicit with, the social and environmental injustices produced by capitalism, sometimes the very injustices the work seeks to address. Funding relationships can act as a nexus in a complex web of local, national and global actors. Understanding the full reach of such relationships and the implications for local practice may be beyond the critical faculties of even the most ethically rigorous practitioner (Thompson 2011). Alternatives, instances in which social and artistic aims are furthered through a particular donor relationship, for example, seem to be amongst the rarest miracles of the field (O'Connor 2009). An unintended outcome of such critical accounts, then, could be that opportunities for acting ethically within or against economic conditions appear impossible or, at best, miraculous.

### **Finding possibility in a postcapitalist perspective**

Drawing on the postcapitalist theory of Gibson-Graham,<sup>1</sup> I am interested in how research into the economies of applied theatre might proceed in a way that helps to 'widen the scope of possibility' (Gibson-Graham 2006: xxxiii). Gibson-Graham's academic activism is concerned with political and economic transformation; they seek to intervene in the way the economy is conceived and practiced. This involves reframing 'the economy' so that diverse economic practices can be imagined, recognised and supported. Operating from a performative ontology, they argue that how we talk about the economy matters. They identify a

tendency to theorize economy as a stable and self-reproducing structure impervious to the proliferative and desultory wanderings of everyday politics; the tendency to constitute 'the' economy as a singular capitalist system or space rather than as a zone of cohabitation and contestation among multiple economic forms. (Gibson-Graham 2006: xxi)

For Gibson-Graham (1996) this 'capitalocentric' tendency reinforces capitalism's hegemony as it conceals economic difference and marginalises alternative economies (260). They propose a language for talking about economy in a way that performs economic diversity by making visible multiple forms of transactions, labour and organization, finance and property (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013):

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<sup>1</sup> J. K. Gibson-Graham is the single authorial name used by two co-authors.

LABOR	TRANSACTIONS	PROPERTY	ENTERPRISE	FINANCE
Wage	Market	Private	Capitalist	Mainstream Markets
ALTERNATIVE PAID Self-employed Reciprocal labor In-kind Work for welfare	ALTERNATIVE MARKET Fair trade Alternative currencies Underground market Barter	ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE State-managed assets Customary (clan) land Community land trusts Indigenous knowledge (Intellectual Property)	ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST State owned Environmentally responsible Socially responsible Non-profit	ALTERNATIVE MARKET Cooperative Banks Credit unions Community-based financial institutions Micro-finance
UNPAID Housework Volunteer Self-provisioning Slave labor	NON-MARKET Household sharing Gift giving Hunting, fishing, gathering Theft, piracy, poaching	OPEN ACCESS Atmosphere International Waters Open source IP Outer Space	NON-CAPITALIST Worker cooperatives Sole proprietorships Community enterprise Feudal Slave	NON-MARKET Sweat equity Family lending Donations Interest-free loans

Figure 1: Diverse economy framework.<sup>2</sup>

Capitalism is viewed as one set of economic relations among many. Gibson-Graham propose that all economic subjects, enterprises and sectors occupy multiple sites in this diverse economy. With this analytic framework, it becomes possible to identify and examine the different economic and organizational practices that coexist within theatre companies like ATCo, C&T and FM Theatre Power without reinforcing capitalism as an all-pervading or determining force.

The diverse economies project also involves recognising the ways in which individuals and organizations ‘cultivate’ ethical economic subjectivities and participate in ‘a global politics of local transformations’, developing everyday practices for negotiating a way through uneven power relations and historically sedimented structures (Gibson-Graham 2006: xxvi–xxvii). This approach focuses analysis on the decisions, actions and relationships of theatre companies as they generate or acquire the resources needed to produce socially committed, aesthetically rich practice. It is my argument that this theory widens the scope of possibility for applied theatre makers by casting economic activity and relationships as sites of active critical and creative negotiation.

### **Applied Theatre Consultants Ltd.: Socialising surplus**

ATCo is a limited liability company, owned and run by Company Directors Peter and Briar O’Connor. In 2012 they employed Stephen Dallow as National Programmes Manager and had a small team on contracts to run Everyday Theatre. As a for-profit, ATCo are not eligible for grants from government or most charitable trusts. The majority of their income comes from service contracts from government departments. In 2012 approximately 85% of the company’s income came from the Everyday Theatre contract with the Ministry of Social Development’s Department of Child Youth and Family (CYF).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.communityeconomies.org/home/key-ideas>



In New Zealand, reforms of the public sector since the early 1980s are recognised as an aggressive process of neo-liberalisation. Jane Kelsey (1997) details the process by which the Treasury of New Zealand's Labour government in the 1980s restructured state services to create a decentralised, competitive market of 'private voluntary contracting' (39). This context made it possible for ATCo to sustain a form of enterprise that is unusual in applied theatre. Recognising that being for-profit in the arts is seen to be at odds with genuine social commitment, the name Applied Theatre 'Consultants' was chosen with a degree of irony. Peter and Briar were aware that they would be perceived by some as 'selling out', but they wanted to challenge the view that all capitalist businesses are bad and charities inherently 'good'. The reasons for setting up ATCo as a for-profit are explained by O'Connor (2011) as he reflects on the company's response to the 2008 banking crisis. Setting up a charitable trust was costly and they decided it was better to put the money directly towards projects. They also wanted to avoid the often protracted decision-making processes involved in the running of trusts, to be able to respond to issues quickly as they arose rather than deferring to a board. O'Connor argues that this capacity, together with their ability to accumulate some financial capital, was essential to ATCo's survival in the tough political and economic climate of the late 2000s. So, setting up a limited company was about making the best use of income and keeping control of decision making. But, it was not, Peter argues, driven by a desire to profit financially from the work:

**Peter:** The key for us around the money thing is ... we're a business and so it's about making money, but it's not about making money to make us rich, it's about making money so we can do more of what we want to do ... so everything that we get goes back into the business ... (O'Connor, P. 13 March 2012 interview)

While ATCo is formally a capitalist enterprise, the economic identity of 'capitalist' does not fully encompass its diverse economic activities or provide the basis for creative and organizational decision making. There is no evidence, for example, that ATCo exploits its contract with CYF to generate profit for its own sake. On the contrary, ATCo invests income from the contract, plus any surplus income, into ensuring Everyday Theatre stays true to its core values. Peter O'Connor (2009, 2011) has published critical reflections on ATCo's contractual relationship with CYF. He highlights the power inequalities that are typical in such relationships and how contracts can be used by state agencies as methods of control. But, he argues the original contract for Everyday Theatre was a rare example of genuine partnership developed around shared social, artistic and educational principles. While New Zealand's neo-liberal reforms were extensive, they reflect Jamie Peck's (2010) description of neo-liberalisation as a contingent, uneven and often contradictory process. The Everyday Theatre contract was formed at a moment in which public sector policy was trying to redress some of the damage done over the previous decade. During my research, however, ATCo was experiencing tensions that had arisen since the

contract had been rewritten in 2008, when a change in government led to further reforms. The new contract reflected the incoming government's focus on efficiency and value for money in public services:

**Peter, ATCo Director:** Our contract at the moment is very tight in terms of where we go and all the rest of it. We're measured by outputs ... numbers of shows, numbers, numbers, numbers ... that's pretty much what they're interested in. (O'Connor, P. 13 March 2012 interview)

The contract set out quantifiable deliverables that ATCo would be accountable to over a two-year period. Everyday Theatre would tour five to 10 regions a year. Each aspect of the programme was allocated a number of days or hours. A purely profit-driven enterprise might have taken this opportunity to deliver each 'output' in the most cost efficient way, leveraging the most profit. In contrast, what became evident during my fieldwork was that the company was channelling resources into sustaining the quality of Everyday Theatre, ensuring democratic relationships with communities, and trying to steer their relationship with the state department back towards being a genuine partnership (Mullen 2013).

ATCo knows that Everyday Theatre can only create a safe forum for young people if it is embedded within local support services. Fostering supportive partnerships with local groups and agencies often required more time than was allocated in the contract:

Negotiating local politics can be demanding. Stephen needed to visit for a couple of days because hanging out, hugging, eating and drinking tea are as important to these negotiations as the formal one-hour scheduled meeting. (Research journal extract 13 January 2012)

ATCo invested more in this aspect of their practice than the contract required, creating the National Programmes Manager role to enable Stephen to sustain and develop community partnerships. The new contract also reduced some of the control ATCo had over which regions Everyday Theatre visited. They found they could not always return to areas where the programme was seen as integral to local provision. Sometimes they could work with local partners to source alternative funding. When this was not possible they used any surplus income to fund a tour. ATCo had responded to the changes to its contract with a deep sense of care for the central values of the programme and of commitment to their participants and communities. This response was not without consequences however. Complying with the contract *and* compensating for its limitations left little time, energy or money for experimenting with new areas of practice (see Mullen 2013).

In the literature discussed above, it is evident that marketised funding contexts can push companies to act as if generating income is the main imperative, even if they are formally not for profit. ATCo is an example of how decision making in a capitalist enterprise may be driven by imperatives other than profit, growth or efficiency. In Figure 1, Gibson-Graham differentiate between categories of

enterprise on the basis of how surplus (wealth or labour) is appropriated and distributed. They highlight that the ‘Difference *within* the category of capitalist enterprise is as important to recognize as the difference *between* enterprise forms’ [emphasis in original text] (Gibson-Graham 2006: 67). In a capitalist firm, there is usually a systematic effort to reduce production costs and maximise surplus wealth, which is duly appropriated by the business owner/shareholders. In ATCo, however, a commitment to creating rich, complex and affecting work, and to working in dialogue with participants and communities underpins financial decision making. ATCo continues to govern itself in a way that is consistent with a capitalist enterprise, with the company Directors controlling how income and surplus are distributed. But, from a diverse economy perspective, they provide an example of how ethical decision making goes against some of the norms of neo-liberal capitalism.

### **C&T: Thoughtful transactions**

C&T is a non-profit-making company and registered charity. It generates income in a variety of ways. In 2012, less than half of its overall income came from grants. Regular funding from the Arts Council England was used for researching and developing new technologies, creative processes and project models; activities harder to fund from other sources. Grants from private charitable trusts, the Big Lottery Fund and local government were usually project-based, tightly ring-fenced to specific budget areas. The majority of C&T’s income was earned through schools paying a fixed cost to participate in the C&T Network, to have an animateur employed on a part-time basis to run projects using C&T Apps and develop locally responsive initiatives within and beyond the school (Sutton 2012). Income from school contracts funded salaries and the company’s other core running costs. Paul proposes that this model gave C&T freedom to pursue its artistic vision and to negotiate the purposes of projects directly with partner schools – rather than having them set by a donor.

All of C&T’s sources of income were impacted by the effects of the 2008 banking crisis. Cuts to public spending under the Conservative coalition government included a reduced budget for the Arts Council England and local authorities. The government cut capital and programme funds for schools, including the specialist school programme. Many of the schools in C&T’s Network had used the ring-fenced income that came with specialist status to pay for their membership. By 2012, the number of schools in the C&T Network had dropped significantly. The model that was based on schools committing to long term (3-year) membership, paying a large annual sum, needed to be reconsidered. During my fieldwork, the company was in the midst of what Paul described as ‘an exercise in fine tuning of what C&T does and how we engage with schools in these new circumstances’ (Sutton, P. 12 August 2012 interview). C&T decided to create a more flexible way for schools to participate in the network. The C&T Business Plan 2012–2015 set out a new model of organizational and creative practice and explained the rationale behind it. The concept was to sell individual licences to C&T’s Apps to schools and other users. The company were already selling 2nd Folio online, a card game linked to a website that

involves interpreting and performing Shakespeare quotations. Paul was trying to work out exactly how the other Apps could be packaged, promoted and sold to schools:

they have realised that the value of the work is ‘embodied’ in the Applications as IP and that few schools can now afford to buy into their Network at the set rate ... But the idea of selling licences to the individual Apps seems bemusing. There is no precedence for how to price them... (Research journal extract 9 May 2012)

C&T spent considerable time developing iterations of the new model and considering their implications. This process involved two external consultants, discussions with staff and debate at C&T board meetings. To begin with, working with one of the consultants, C&T engaged in what appeared to be a price-setting process. Gibson-Graham et al. (2013) define a market transaction as a relationship that is ‘mediated’ by price (85). In an ideal market, price is set according to the levels of supply and demand. C&T researched comparable educational products, trying to work out what schools actually wanted to pay for, and how much. The first iteration of the new model looked like a mobile phone plan. Schools would purchase access to the App with online resources and tutorials. More expensive plans would give access to the C&T Network, the ability to collaborate nationally and internationally. Schools could pay extra for days with an animateur. Paul immediately reflected on the extent to which this would transform the nature of C&T’s established transactional relationship with schools, limiting the degree to which it could be a genuine partnership. By the time he met with the next consultant, then, Paul was thinking again:

**Paul:** We’re trying to pretend our projects are science resources and it’s not strictly true. I understand the logic of the tick box model, it just doesn’t feel right ... The model is too complicated, too fragmented and too commercial. It forces the company to narrow down and commodify... (Sutton, P. 19 June 2012 interview)

C&T uses a funding ethics document, a framework that prompts each financial relationship to be evaluated against the company’s core values, one of which is collaboration. For C&T, collaboration involves a relationship in which there are ‘shared aspirations and outcomes that benefit all parties’ (C&T 2011: 2). The C&T Network is most successful in schools where a strong collaborative partnership is formed. Considerable time and care is spent on negotiating a shared purpose with each partner school. C&T recognised that if schools bought licences for Apps with no involvement from the company there would be no collaboration. Further, for C&T, the focus of any collaboration should always be the interests of students/participants, even when these interests conflict with the agendas of schools:

Educational institutions are often our partners but in terms of funding are most readily characterised as C&T’s paying customers ... However it should be remembered that

schools are often driven by the government or local authority priorities, which C&T might not always perceive as being in the best interests of our children and young people. (C&T Funding Ethics Document 2011, p. 3)

Reducing their relationship with schools to a purely market transaction had implications for the pedagogic and social value of C&T's practice. Apps are designed to activate learning that is embodied, affective, collaborative and efficacious (Shaughnessy, 2012). They are informed by theories of knowledge and power that position the individual not as alienated consumers of culture and technology but as authors 'encoding their values and cultures into the fabric of the drama' (Sutton 2012: 609). C&T believes Apps should be activated differently according to the context; they want teachers and schools to use them independently. But, it was important to them that control of the creative process was shared between teacher and students, that the process was of value to the students on their own terms, not just those decided by the school. C&T pragmatically needed a model that responded to conditions in which school resources were limited. But a model that reduced the collaborative nature of the relationships between the school and C&T, teacher and student; or between participants in the C&T Network did not reflect the company's core values.

This example shows how the infiltration of an economic rationale into applied theatre is neither inevitable nor beyond negotiation. C&T treats financial decision making as closely interrelated with the form and value of its creative practice. For Gibson-Graham, a community economy involves 'making explicit the sociality that is always present, and thus constituting the various forms and practices of interdependence as matters for reflection, discussion, negotiation, and action' (Gibson-Graham 2006: 88). Participants in a community economy re-socialise economic relationships by attending to the political and ethical implications within wider networks of interdependency. C&T continued to pursue the idea of generating income by licencing its DPs to schools, viewing this as a pragmatic response to the economic conditions of the time. As my fieldwork concluded, C&T was focused on ensuring that its relationships with schools did not become reduced to the purchase of an 'off the shelf' product, but could still be collaborative, focused primarily on ensuring students benefitted artistically, educationally and socially.

### **FM Theatre Power: Performing multiple economic identities**

Drawing on the ideal of people's theatre, 'theatre of the people, by the people, for the people' (Banky Yeung Ping Kei and Mo Lai Yan Chi 28 September 2012 interview), FM Theatre Power has created its own economy within what is currently the freest economy in the world, Hong Kong. FMTP began as a non-capitalist enterprise, an informal collective of students and artists. For nearly 10 years they sustained a prolific creative practice with minimal financial income. This was possible because company members agreed to work without pay (unless they could pay all members the same). Inspired by established people's theatre companies like the San Francisco Mime Troupe, FMTP aims to operate as a collective.

They try to resist structural hierarchy within the organization and believe that members should work with them primarily because they are passionate about doing so, rather than for any financial reward:

**Mo:** So we don't want to value your efforts, or ... your concentration by the amount of money, but it's just by your attitude maybe? So concentration is also relating to your attitude and also relating to your passion. (Mo Lai Yan Chi 4 October 2012 interview)

Formally, anyone can join. FM Theatre Power offers opportunities to those with no prior theatre experience or training, and those who might be excluded from more selective settings. Expectations for participation are demanding in terms of time and energy. People get little sleep during productions, but also work through the night on administrative tasks. The ideal of shared ownership is balanced with a day to day reality of different members participating in different ways, based largely on their availability to work around other commitments. A core group of long-standing members tend to carry responsibility for ensuring essential work gets done. The level of experience and status of these core members (who are in many cases now established artists) also means that they are viewed as the leaders of the company. Such pragmatic limitations and group dynamics are addressed through ongoing efforts to ensure that all members have opportunities to contribute to organizational and creative decision making.

FM Theatre Power aims to be an independent theatre company, not dependent on any source of income. But, using Gibson-Graham's theory, independence does not mean operating outside 'the economy', but sustaining themselves through economic activities and relationships within multiple sites of the diverse economy. Some of these activities are non-capitalist, but not all. Members are expected to draw on non-financial resources where possible. Everything used in any production will be donated, borrowed, reused or recycled, but they take aesthetic decisions seriously and their stage shows often have ambitious staging concepts. While they keep production costs low, they still need to raise money to cover venue hire and publicity through ticket sales. When the company decided to turn a rented industrial space into a studio for rehearsals and performance, the need to generate income increased significantly. They have explored many ways to do this, including setting up a separate commercial t-shirt company, 2 Goods, developing paid-for theatre-education work and small project contracts within social service and youth work organizations. So, it might be assumed that FM Theatre Power are able to make theatre that is socially critical and often politically oppositional because they are less bound by economic demands or dependency. Gibson-Graham, however, do not propose that alternative or non-capitalist economic activity is inherently 'good'. They suggest that all economic activities involve different kinds of economic relations with different realms of economic freedom as well as opportunities for exploitation and oppression. I am not suggesting that FM Theatre Power are engaged in exploitation, but they are aware that this is a possibility when working with unpaid labour in particular. What I want to draw attention to is that even within an organization that minimalises financial relationships and activity, there are multiple economies in operation. Apparent independence or autonomy actually

involves multiple forms of interdependency, all of which are subject to critical attention and, in the case of FM Theatre Power, become sites of performative intervention. 2 Goods, for example, could not be reduced to a purely commercial function. The shop was a base for FMTP's street theatre, a venue for Forum Theatre and Playback events, and sold t-shirts bearing politicised messages designed by members. FMTP wanted to occupy the commercial space, but to playfully disrupt expectations for how such spaces should be used. The production of *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, mentioned above, is another example of a performative intervention into economic processes and subjectivities.

*Accidental Death of an Anarchist* certainly had an economic imperative. Based on the success of an earlier run it was hoped that some income would be generated from ticket sales at a larger venue, City Hall. As outlined above, it also had political intentions, deliberately programmed in the lead up to the Legislative Council elections. City Halls normally house a city's government. Hong Kong's City Hall never served this purpose, being built as a venue for community services, museums and libraries. It was also the venue where the British Governor was sworn in. Through the play and post-show discussions, FM Theatre Power transformed the City Hall into a site for political dissent and debate. The overtly critical production was also considered as a test of FMTP's relatively new funding relationship with the Hong Kong Arts Development Council: FMTP were alert to the possibility of political censorship that came with engaging with an agency associated with the Hong Kong Government:

**Mo:** ...we have to fight against ADC to show that: 'OK, we're using your money but we're still working our own way'. We are still doing the *Anarchist* show of course ... which is totally against the government... (Banky and Mo 28 September 2012 interview)

The play itself commented reflexively on the economics that sustained it. In the second act when the journalist describes the trajectory of the anarchist's fall from the window, the policeman removes his hat and starts to draw on a framed canvas. The drawing is different each night; an improvised response to the same scripted speech. The drawing is then auctioned live to the audience. Banky explains:

**Banky:** White paper can be changed to anything. It represents possibility. Anybody can become an artist, even a policeman. We sell it because it is the only thing that is unique, not repeated, in each show. We sell the painting not for fundraising; we also want people to think about the 'value' of life and art. (Banky 9 April 2013 online interview)

Banky likens the blank page to the modernist empty space, a pure space of possibility. Importantly for FMTP, this space is filled by an ordinary person, not a 'professional' artist. But, ironically this creation is then sold to the highest bidder. This gesture is intended 'not only' to raise funds but to raise questions about the ways in which economic value is placed on life and art.

Rather than trying to define FM Theatre Power as one thing or the other, capitalist or non-capitalist, it is perhaps more revealing to explore the ways in which FM Theatre Power struggle to cultivate ethical economic subjectivities within multiple sites in a diverse economy.

### **Rethinking the economies of applied theatre**

The challenge of finding and sustaining the resources, financial and otherwise, is an ongoing and time consuming one for the three companies involved in this research. Sometimes the possibility of doing so in a way that reflects their social and artistic aims can seem remote. From a research perspective, it could seem especially remote in light of the many concerns raised in the literature of applied theatre about the problematic and intimate relationship between the forms and intentions of practice and its sources of funding. The tensions depicted in this literature are familiar for the three theatre companies involved in my research. I am not suggesting, then, that they should be of less concern, or that they are easily mitigated. My intention is to highlight the ways in which each theatre company has worked creatively and critically amidst such tensions, enacting what Gibson-Graham (2006) call ‘an everyday practice of freedom’ (xxvi). In the day-to-day life of each company, it is rarely *all* about the money.

None of the theatre companies are being held up as an ideal in terms of their economic or organizational models and processes. Seeking such an ideal would not, I think, reflect the purpose of Gibson-Graham’s diverse economies perspective. They are offered as a source of possibilities. The three examples illuminate multiple possible economic identities and activities and different approaches to re-socialising economic relationships. These are sometimes mundane and ordinary processes, like C&T’s use of a funding ethics document, but all involve negotiating financial relationships and making financial decisions with critical attention to wider social and artistic implications. Central to Gibson-Graham’s (2006) conception of a politics of possibility is ‘the everyday temporality of change and the vision of transformation as a continual struggle to change subjects, places, and conditions of life under inherited circumstances of difficulty and uncertainty’ (xxvii). My research with these three companies suggests that rather than the economies of applied theatre being outside of its struggle for change, as a constraining or contaminating influence on collaborative creative processes, a politics of possibility can be enacted within financial and organizational activities.

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