Staging Professionalisation with the ABTT
Technical Theatre in Post-War Britain

Paul Roberts

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, January 2025

Word count: 83,391

DECLARATION

I, Paul Roberts, declare that I am the author of this work and this thesis is a presentation of original work. This work has not been presented for an award at this or any other University. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Paul Roberts

January 2025

COPYRIGHT

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author and no quotation from it or information derived from it may be published without acknowledgement and the prior written consent of the author.

Abstract

This thesis examines the professionalisation of post-war British technical theatre via the rise of the Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT) and the effect of the resulting shift in practices between 1961 and 1991 on the theatrical landscape of regional playhouse design.

In the first chapter, I discuss the emergence of the ABTT at the beginnings of the post-war civic theatre boom in order to understand the advancement of the theatre technician as expert. In chapter two, I turn to investigate the establishment of the ABTT as the principal authority on non-proscenium stage design, an important facet of Arts Council policies that shaped a changing theatrical estate and their democratising impacts. Chapter three identifies the processes of modernisation, professionalism, and standardisation that necessitated the ABTT's expansion of technical professionalisation, allowing for new styles of stage to emerge while ending the legacies and residues of pre-war technical practices. Chapter four examines the changing politics of Thatcherism and the shock of neoliberal arts policy reform on the ABTT, its self-conception, and its funding modes in a move away from its social democratic and civic origins. Chapter five concludes the thesis with a coda that shows the resilience of the ABTT and specifically its ability to adapt to the commercial, market-driven economy that has continued to dominate technical expertise in a neoliberal culture.

By telling the story of the ABTT, the thesis makes a contribution to the field by not only filling important gaps in the contextual history of post-war British theatre but by extending current debates on technical practice through the exploration of hitherto overlooked individuals, networks, processes, continuities, differences, and politics of change.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, deepest gratitude to my supervisors at Central, Professor Tony Fisher and Professor Kate Elswit, for their enthusiasm, patience, care, and commitment. This study has benefitted enormously from their intellectual prodding, their curiosity, and their ability to direct me through the many meandering paths I took. Thank you.

To my further two supervisors, Robin Townley of the ABTT and Simon Sladen of the V&A, thank you for the early direction and advice on themes to follow and ideas to explore. To the wider ABTT family – Elysia Moore and Stuart Roberts behind the scenes, Roger Fox and the Historical Research committee, Jane Thornton for the hours of time in development of the ABTT archive, and Mike Hall for continued interest, thank you for all of your patience and guidance. To the wider membership, I am grateful to each and every member for the data, the ideas, the stories, and the materials shared. This thesis would never have been completed if it was not for the complete support of all at the ABTT.

To the PhD cohort at Central, thank you for the many moments we shared and your ability to challenge with care. To Kate Pitt in Research Services, thank you for always being the helping hand I needed. Thank you also to the members and conveners of the Theatre and Performance Histories Working Group at TaPRA for the questions, criticisms, and challenging of ideas.

Finally, to H, E, and J, sorry team. I thought it would only take a couple of years to do this. Turns out I was wrong!

Table of contents

List of abbreviations 6
Key archives consulted 7
Figures 8
Introduction: Technical theatre: lexicons of stage production 9
1 Research outline: key concepts and research questions 12
2 Literature review: concepts and histories of the critical terrain 16
3 Research methodology: differing approaches and methodological tools 30
Chapter 1
A new stage: the ABTT and the emergence of the theatre technician as expert 42
1.1 A web of relations: interdependencies, affiliations, and interconnections 45
1.2 An individual response: status, motive, and social capital 60
1.3 A time for change: stage standards, design, and representation 75
Chapter 2
Material change: the ABTT and establishing principles of civic theatre design 94
2.1 The social democratic consensus: expanding the theatrical domain to the civic sphere 97
2.2 Influencing the new: the ABTT Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committee 107
2.3 Evolving theatre forms and the post-proscenium stage: building the civic playhouse 124
Chapter 3
Setting standards: the ABTT and technical professionalisation 139
3.1 Technical modernisation: experimental spaces and progressive stage technology 143
3.2 Technical professionalism: a need for skills, training, and the recruitment of labour 165
3.3 Technical standardisation: creating sector regulations and codes of best practice 187
Chapter 4
Beyond the civic: the ABTT and a new economic orthodoxy 202
4.1 Crisis management: subvention under a new regime 207
4.2 Adapting to change: how the ABTT learned to live within the free-market world 217
4.3 Selling expertise: glory, success, and partnership with the ABTT 231
Chapter 5
Conclusion: the ABTT in a post-Thatcher world 247
5.1 A Major shift: the end of Thatcherism, the road to Blair, New Labour, and thirty more years 249
5.2 Final thoughts: limitations, further research, and possible futures 261
Bibliography 268

List of abbreviations

A.B.T.T	Association of British Theatre Technicians
A.C.G.B	Arts Council of Great Britain
A.I.T.T	Association Internationale des Technicians de Theatre
A.M.C	Association of Municipal Corporations
A.T.D.C	Association of Theatrical Designers and Craftsmen
B.D.L	British Drama League
BECTU	Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications, and Theatre Union
B.T.A	British Theatre Association
C.E.M.A	Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts
C.I.E	Commission Internationale d'Eclairage
C.O.R.T	Council of Regional Theatres
G.L.C	Greater London Council
H.S.E	Health and Safety at Work Executive
I.T.I	International Theatre Institute
L.C.C	London City Council
L.G.A	Local Government Act
N.A.T.T.K.E	National Association of Television, Theatre, and Kine Employees
N.C.C.T	National Council for Civic Theatres
N.C.T.Y.P	National Council of Theatre for Young People
N.T.C	National Theatre Company
O.I.S.T.A.T	International Organisation of Scenographers, Theatre Architects, and Technicians
P.S.W.G	Professional Status Working Group (ABTT)
R.S.C	Royal Shakespeare Company
S.A.C.L.A.T	Standing Advisory Committee on Local Authorities and the Theatre
S.B.T.D.	Society of British Theatre Designers
S.B.T.L.D	Society of British Theatre Lighting Designers
S.T.C	Society of Theatre Consultants
S.T.L.D	Society of Television Lighting Designers
S.T.R	Society for Theatre Research
S.W.E.T.M	Society of West End Theatre Managers
T.A.C	Theatres Advisory Council
T.A.P	Theatre, Architecture, and Planning sub-committee (ABTT)
T.M.A	Theatrical Management Association
U.S.I.T.T	United States Institute of Theatre Technology
V & A	Victoria and Albert Museum

Key archives consulted

Arts Council
Association of British Theatre Technicians
Barbican Centre
Bolton History Centre
British Library
Coventry Archives
Coventry University Archives
Dundee City Council
John Rylands Research Institute and Library
National Archives
National Theatre Archives
Nottingham Heritage Archive – Theatre Royal and Royal Concert Hall
Performing Arts Collection (APAC)
Record Office of Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland
Royal Central School of Speech and Drama Library and Archive
Royal Shakespeare Company
Senate House Library – University of London Archive
Shakespeare Birthplace Trust
Stephen Joseph Archive (care of the ABTT)
Theatre Archives Project – De Montfort University Archives and Special Collections
Theatres Trust Library and Archive
Theatrecrafts Entertainment Technology
UK Government Archives
University of Bradford Special Collections
University of Bristol Theatre Collection
University of Edinburgh Archive and Manuscript Collection
University of Exeter Special Collections: Drama, Music, and Theatre History
University of Leeds Theatre and Performance: Special Collections
University of Leicester Archives and Special Collections
University of Manchester Library Performing Arts Collection
University of Sheffield Theatres Archive: The Special Collection
University of Warwick Modern Records Centre
V&A Theatre and Performance archive, Blythe House (Victoria and Albert Museum)

Figures

Figure 1.1	The emerging organisational networks of those most prominent in the formation of the ABTT and their associated relationships in the years leading up to 1961.	51
Figure 1.2	The Belgrade Theatre, 1958.	77
Figure 1.3	The Belgrade Theatre, lower foyer, 1958.	83
Figure 1.4	The Belgrade Theatre, auditorium, 1958.	86
Figure 1.5	The Belgrade Theatre, elevation to Belgrade Square, 1958.	91
Figure 2.1	Four main forms of modern stage.	103
Figure 2.2	Nottingham Playhouse, auditorium, 1963.	128
Figure 2.3	Nottingham Playhouse, main elevation, 1963.	130
Figure 2.4	The Bolton Octagon, 1968.	132
Figure 2.5	Bolton Octagon, Theatre-in-the-round, 1968.	134
Figure 2.6	Bolton Octagon, End-onstage, 1968.	134
Figure 2.7	Bolton Octagon, Thrust stage, 1968.	134
Figure 2.8	The Crucible Theatre, Sheffield, 1971.	136
Figure 3.1	The Sheffield Crucible lighting and sound desks, 1971.	146
Figure 3.2	The Chichester Festival Theatre, 1962.	149
Figure 3.3	National Theatre, lighting board – MK1, 1976.	154
Figure 3.4	The Royal Exchange Theatre, steel frame, under construction 1975.	159
Figure 3.5	A list of proposed international definitions for stage lighting types.	192

Introduction

Technical theatre: lexicons of stage production

This thesis examines the professionalisation of post-war British technical theatre via the rise of the Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT), and the effect of the resulting shift in practices between 1961 and 1991 on the theatrical landscape of regional playhouse design. Across five chapters, I argue the ABTT was central to the processes of modernisation, professionalism, and regularisation that allowed for new styles of theatre to emerge. My specific historical focus is on how the ABTT substantially influenced the way models of training, standards, and governance developed across the technical sector, particularly in its formative years, 1961–1985. I go on to define the Association's continuities and strategic differences in its relationship with important sector bodies such as the Arts Council of Great Britain in the development of civic theatre experimentation. In positioning the ABTT as central to the rise of technical professionalisation, my thesis offers an alternate perspective to the theatre making of post-war Britain, highlighting the multi-skilled backstage workforce that emerged, the types of specialist training they required, the sets of standards their practice determined, and the technological advances needed to make the circulation of all three possible. Through an exploration of the ABTT's importance as an advisory body, my findings contribute to the growing contemporary interest in technical theatre, pivoting away from the standard historical focus of onstage content and practices. The thesis not only provides an opportunity to fill in important gaps in the contextual history of post-war British theatre, it explores the individuals, networks, systems, and politics of professionalisation that made a significant contribution to the development of British theatre as understood today.

The first time I came across the work of the ABTT was in 2008, the year I began working in theatre, joining a local government-funded project looking to transform a rural town hall into a small civic arts centre. Built around the adaptable use of a multi-purpose stage, an ambitious programme of music, comedy, screen, and theatre was envisaged to allow growth in both the quality and accessibility of the arts to a more remote section of society. Within days, to help navigate the myriad of technical standards required by such a project, I was handed a large yellow book containing the relevant regulations and recommendations for running a theatre. *Technical Standards for Places of Entertainment*, to give the book its correct title, has been part of my theatre career ever since, helping me to understand the technical requirements of theatre management in an ever-evolving industry. Yet, it wasn't until 2016 that I began to ask questions of the book's origins, growing curious about the organisation behind the guidance and the factors that brought about its publication. First, writing a short paper on the ABTT for an MA in Theatre Consultancy, I began to discover the importance of this little discussed specialist group and the role it played in the development of technical practice in the post-war period of British civic theatre experimentation. Then, while working on the capital redevelopment of Warwick Arts Centre in 2017, a chance conversation with a theatre company manager triggered my interest further. During the ensuing debate on the merits of technical practice, I found myself defending the influence of a profession I knew little about, arguing for its relevance and significance within modern British theatre stories. When in 2018, the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama advertised an ABTT PhD studentship to research the history of the Association, I was given the opportunity to confirm my growing belief in the importance of the organisation to the current stories of post-war British theatre.

My research – and this thesis – is staked out in the space between these two anecdotes, a long-standing requirement for the specialist technical skills that have allowed for the experimentation in post-war theatre design on the one side, and technical practice being overlooked as important to the telling of British theatre history on the other. With this focus on relating the influence of the ABTT as an advisory body, I have searched for stories of the people, documents of the processes, and evidence of the various policy reforms that have not just allowed for innovation in technical practice to redefine theatre design in the modern era but also provided a stage for the professionalisation of an entire industry. My thesis aims to add technical practice to the telling of British theatre history, the stages I consider of most influence – illuminated and contextualised – focussing a light upon a growing community of experts who in coming together placed an emphasis on technical specialisms as distinct from those of playwrights, directors, and actors. In this study, I investigate how the ABTT pooled volunteer resources and knowledge of stage specialisms as a means for changing theatre practice and advocated for the professionalisation of technical theatre which became central to the evolution of theatre making in post-war Britain.

In the first section of this introduction, I describe the key research concepts and questions that have shaped my chapters, defining my terminology and delineating the scope of the research. Section two explores the critical terrain of technical theatre, the concepts, histories, and hidden legacies of the past, and its emergence as an important subject in contemporary scholarship. In section three, I discuss the shape of the thesis, as well as outline my methodology and the reasons behind my methodological choices, to articulate overall aims and objectives.

1 Research outline: key concepts and research questions

In this study, 'technical theatre' means the visual, mechanical, and auditory production aspects of theatre that co-exist alongside acting, writing, and directing. In a 1975 market review of training across the theatre industry, the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) defined technical theatre under seven headings: wardrobe/wigs, props, scenery construction, scene painting, lighting, sound, and stage management.[1] These definitions have remained stable since first being recorded in the accompanying ACGB commissioned report, delineating the developing technical specialisms encouraged by the ABTT that would be consistently recorded in the national arts polices that followed. The original ABTT Memorandum and Articles of Association, also written in 1975, described a membership made up of 'individuals with relevant experience and manifest commitment to the technical aspects of the art of the theatre'.[2] The six primary elements the ABTT used for delineation – scenery, lighting, costumes, props, stage, and sound engineering, which were broken down into membership sub-categories and committee groups – developed a taxonomy of practices within technical theatre which I will replicate at various points throughout this thesis.

I use the term 'technical specialism' as an iteration of specialist, a term localised to post-war British theatre expertise that defines a growing bifurcation of backstage responsibilities.

[1] The Arts Council of Great Britain, who commissioned the report, was established in 1946 and continued as the national arts body until a restructuring in 1994 formed Arts Council England, the Scottish Arts Council, and the Arts Council of Wales. *Technicians Training in the Theatre Industry*, Manpower Services Commission and Theatre Advisory Council from NOP Market Research Limited, Box ACGB/117/165, Blythe House Archive, Victoria and Albert Museum, p. 6.

[2] *ABTT Archive: (loose) Memorandum and Articles of Association of The Association of British Theatre Technicians, The Companies Act – incorporated 30 October 1975, England: 1231725, (London: ABTT, 1975),* p. 7.

Technical specialisation, as described by Elizabeth A. Osborne and Christine Woodworth, 'is a backstage labour of artists, craftspeople and labourers who create the illusions set before the audience, focussing on the separation of roles and processes as a formation of specialisms in a division of labour', leading to theatre departments being defined in relation to their specialisation.[3] Prior to 1945, definitions of technical practice, however, remained loose, generally encapsulated by a theatre electrician responsible for electrical work, including building maintenance and stage equipment. Then, in the aftermath of World War II, came the rise of 'civic theatre', enabled by increased public funding under the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Local Authorities between 1946 and 1986. The growth in theatre subsidy allowed for an increase in the experimentation of theatre creation, as well as the construction of new playhouses, particularly from 1958 onwards. Acting as focal points for modernising towns and cities, these new public buildings represented an alternate kind of playhouse, conceived as a public service and given a transformative social role in rejuvenating communities. The definitions in technical theatre that emerged began to create and delimit roles and departments within production cycles, with the Arts Council designating 'technical theatre' as a specific category in the policy reforms that followed civic investment. The thesis, then, while not exclusively restricted to civic theatre, places it at the centre of the project, and with it the specialisation of technical practice that arose as a consequence of civic funding.

To the terms 'technical theatre', 'technical specialism', and 'civic theatre', I add two further key terms: 'technical professionalisation' and 'technical professionalism'. Although not

[3] Elizabeth A. Osborne and Christine Woodworth, *Working in the wings: new perspectives on theatre history and labour* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015), p. 4.

mutually interchangeable, I use both to articulate the developments that took place across technical theatre between 1961 and 1986, the processes of becoming a recognised profession through the emergence of the ABTT, and the behaviours and qualities that formed as a result of subsequent sub-committee work. By 'professionalisation', I mean the attempt of a representative body to fix and ensure the technical standards, development of norms and operational protocols, and regulatory alignments, as well as the training and qualifications associated with assigning roles professional qualities. By 'professionalism', I mean the attainment of skills and competencies expected of the individual in order to perform a designated role to the requisite standard. The thesis also uses the language of 'technique and proficiency' that developed alongside the professionalisation of technical theatre and the divisions that distinguished the various forms of backstage theatre labour, with terms such as 'modern', 'standards', 'regulatory', 'expert', 'skills', and 'training' introduced to specify roles and implement industry standards for the first time.[4]

The topic of this study is located at these intersecting points of emergence that comprise technical theatre in the post-war civic period. I am interested in exposing what happens when the spotlight is turned around and shone upon the (back) stages of post-war British theatre, illuminating the instigators, innovations, and influencers, and so highlighting the importance of professionalisation to wider historical debates. The key question I ask is: how did the emergence of the Association of British Theatre Technicians influence the developing of technical practice, and to what extent is it responsible for the professionalisation of the theatre industry in the post-war years of British civic theatre? To conduct this investigation, I

[4] ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual Review 1961/62 (London: ABTT, 1962), p. 4.

wrap this key question around the following subsidiary themes. Specific emphasis is placed on defining a history of the development period of the ABTT, presenting the individuals who grew the Association and the building of networks with other specialist communities in the pursuit of civic stage innovation. The establishment of the ABTT in the 1960s formed a system that became a functioning associative body – importantly, I argue, at a point when technical specialisms were necessitated by the modernising structures of regional civic theatre design. The expansion of the ABTT within the processes of technical professionalisation (the training, standards, and modernising practices of the 1970) is demonstratable in the palpable impact the Association had on industry practice – directed from within and according to the politics of its networks. Following removal of funding under Thatcherism, a breakdown in relations with the Arts Council of Great Britain shows how the ABTT was forced to consolidate its practice in the 1980s, highlighting the consequences of a conjunctional shift in national arts funding policy that limited the expansion of both the Association and technical professionalisation in the years that followed.

The thesis, in short, is interested in the relationship between the ABTT as a membership of specialists and the post-war development of the technical theatre as an industry comprised of specialisms, and how this relationship became foundational for the professionalisation of stage production in response to civic experimentation of the social democratic period, in both technical design and practice.

2 Literature review: concepts and histories of the critical terrain

The history that this thesis seeks to trace is concerned very specifically with the emergence of technical theatre specialisms understood in relation to the ABTT as a system of professionalised affiliations, structures, practices, and networks. Although some of this history has been told before, as yet no systematic attempt has been made to fully reveal the extent of the influence of technical theatre over the development of post-war British theatre, nor the specific role played in that story by the ABTT. To be sure, elements of this story can be found in a broad range of scholarly and professional writing, including but not limited to work on technical sound, architecture, and labour, as well as industry-focussed material such as employment journals like *The Stage*, and technical publications such as *TABS*, *Cue*, and *Sightline*.[5] What the story shows is that beneath the trajectory of professionalisation, a rather more chaotic account unfolds in which we discover that a body of experts emerged out of a context that was without a plan or a rational set of choices to follow.

Filling important gaps in the contextual history of post-war British theatre, I extend current debates on technical specialisms through the exploration of hitherto overlooked ABTT individuals, networks, and technical processes, and the politics of infrastructural change. Early post-war literature has provided references, guides, and substantive critical surveys of

[5] For sound, see, Jonathan Sterne, *The audible past: cultural origins of sound reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), Ross Brown, *Sound: a reader in theatre practice* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), Lynne Kendrick, *Theatre aurality* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017); for architecture, Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses: an architectural history of Britain's new theatres 1945–1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), Christopher Baugh, *Theatre, performance, and technology: the development of scenography in the twentieth century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), and for labour, Christin Essin, An aesthetic of backstage labour, *Theatre Topics,* Volume 21, Number 1, March 2011 pp. 33-48 (p, 33), https://muse.jhu.edu/article/421027/pdf [last accessed: 2 August 2024].

the period, offering lists of professional productions, biographies, and career summaries but little on the conditions of technical production that led to the emergence of the ABTT in 1961. Issues of '*The Stage*' Year Book (1948-1969) and *The British Theatre Directory* (1972-1974), and the works of mid-century authors provide career summaries of actors, playwrights, and dramatists. Bamber Gascoigne's *Twentieth Century Drama* (1962) describes developments in theatre until the end of the 1950s.[6] Russell Taylor's *Anger and After* (1962), *The Rise and Fall of the Well-Made Play* (1967), and *The Second Wave* (1971) combine a list of major and minor staged plays from the late 1950s onwards.[7] Richard Findlater's *The Unholy Trade* (1953) and Ronald Hayman's *The Set-Up* (1973) provide accounts of different stages in the reorganisation of post-war theatre and complement the Federation of Theatre Unions report *Theatre Ownership in Britain* (1953) and the Arts Council's report *The Theatre Today* (1970).[8] Findlater's two-volume publication *The Player Kings* (1967 and 1970) and Michael Billington's *The Modern Actor* (1973) describe the conditions performers faced when working onstage by providing biographical accounts of the most prominent performers.[9] While the British Council's series of publications *Drama since 1939* (1947), *Drama in Britain 1945–50* (1951), *Drama in Britain 1951–64* (1966), and *Drama in Britain 1964–1973* (1974) provide a chronological account of stage performances from the end of World War II, it wasn't until later in the century that theatre scholars began to take a serious look at the

[6] Bamber Gascoigne, *Twentieth-century drama* (London: Hutchinson, 1962).
[7] John Russell Taylor, *Anger and after: a guide to the new British drama* (London: Methuen & Co., 1969), John Russell Taylor, *The rise and fall of the well-made play* (London: Routledge, 1967), and John Russell Taylor, *The second wave: British drama for the seventies* (London: Routledge, 1971).
[8] Richard Findlater, *The unholy trade* (London: Theatre Book Club, 1953) and Ronald Hayman, *The set-up: an anatomy of English theatre today* (London: Methuen & Co., 1973).
[9] Richard Findlater, *The player kings* (New York: Stein and Day, 1970) and Michael Billington, *The modern actor* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1973).

wider conditions of theatrical production, with most accounts tending to again eschew technical theatre in favour of wider social trends, political challenges, and economic unrest.[10]

The technical theatre that is historicised tends to be understood not in relation to the central problem of this research – the role of professionalisation in the development of the contemporary British theatre – but in relation to other questions that might be seen as more concerned with theatre aesthetics. While this thesis can be seen as complementary to such ongoing research, it is not primarily concerned with aesthetic possibilities of backstage labour. Instead, in this study, I focus upon how the ABTT became the locus of a new theatrical system, arguing that the Association was central to the professionalisation of post-war British theatre. I go on to argue that through the process of professionalisation, backstage labour came under increasing forms of regulatory governance, with the ABTT substantially influencing the ways in which models of standardisation developed across theatre construction, stage shapes, and technical design.

My thesis, therefore, acts as a corrective to such existing works in the field by amplifying their elisions, particularly around technical theatre, stage design, and regulatory professionalisation. In *Changing Stages* (2001), a history of British theatre in the twentieth century, Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright are dismissive of any role played by technical innovation in the development of British post-war theatre, arguing that progress was 'irrespective of technological advances; more an evolution of content rather than form'.[11]

[10] See, for example, theatre historians such as John Elsom, Dan Rebellato, and Dominic Shellard.
[11] The book provided the basis for a series of programmes written by Sir Richard Eyre for the BBC. Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright, *Changing stages: a view of British theatre in the twentieth century* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2001), p. 13.

More recently, historians have offered a renewed account of the shifts in perspective, drama, genre, style, and performance of post-war theatre stories through fresh archival evidence; with Dominic Shellard revisiting his original subject of British drama since 1950 with a 'new light',[12] Claire Cochrane mapping the experience of theatre through 'social and economic factors',[13] and Rebecca D'Monte examining how the emphasis upon angry, working-class, drama from the 1950s led to the neglect of much of the century's earlier stage theatre.[14] Their telling of the story of the post-war period is shaped by having to 'inevitably prioritise some topics over others', as described by Shellard, meaning that themes such as technical conditions were not considered to be of central importance.[15]

Commentators such as Lynne Kendrick and David Roesner in *Theatre Noise* (2011), take an alternate view to those such as Shellard, Eyre, and, Wright, describing advances in noise (sound) as essential to the 'embedded history and aesthetic of materiality and technology'.[16] Alongside this, Ross Brown's *Sound* (2010) argues, 'advancing digital technology whetted an appetite for the more creative use of technology in 1970s theatre'.[17] Such evolutions, across lighting, sound, and stage design, have also been explored and presented as a history of theatre innovation. We can see this in the work of scholars such as Jonathan Sterne, who in *The Audible Past* (2003) provides sonic and visual maps to 'track the connections between

[12] Dominic Shellard, *The golden generation: new light on post-war British theatre* (London: British Library, 2008), title page.
[13] Claire Cochrane, *Twentieth-century British theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 1.
[14] Rebecca D'Monte, *British theatre and performance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), back page.
[15] Dominic Shellard, *British theatre since the war* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), preface (n.p.).
[16] Lynne Kendrick and David Roesner, *Theatre noise: the sound of performance* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), p. xx.
[17] Ross Brown, *Sound: a reader in theatre practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 106.

histories of technology and the defining features of modernity'.[18] Despite doing useful work to draw attention to technological developments in theatre, much of the current academic focus remains largely located on the aesthetic effects of technology. When we begin to think of theatre technology as interconnected with the ABTT, it enhances our understanding by helping us to see the importance of innovation, expertise, and the rapid technical advancements that shaped civic stage design in a more technically informed history than scholars have previously made space for. To take an obvious example, the emergence of theatre-in-the-round as an aesthetic form could not have happened if it had not been for the innovative theatre stage design that enabled it; here, the engagement of technicians was integral to the fabric of the theatre production, and their contribution should not be reduced to providing a mere technical solution to an aesthetic problem, or, for that matter, to an afterthought or footnote in the history of such productions.

Further contemporary discourse on specialist technical disciplines (lighting, sound, and stage, for example) has begun to make stage expertise visible. As part of the theatre-making process, scholars such as George Home-Cook and Adrian Curtin research dramatic form, characterisation, staging, technology, performance style, and other forms of interaction.[19] Such scholarly work looks beyond the practicalities of production by exploring the cultural origins, semiotics, and phenomenology of technical practice. Further to this, an interest in backstage labour has begun to emerge as a topic in its own right, providing a focus on the skilled roles of theatrical production and challenging and revising the previous

[18] Jonathan Sterne, *The audible past: cultural origins of sound reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), back page.
[19] See, George Home-Cook, *Theatre and aural attention: stretching ourselves* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015) and Adrian Curtin, *Avant-garde theatre sound: staging sonic modernity*, Avant-gardes in performance (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

understandings of the history of theatre labour. As Christin Essin explains, interest in stage labour 'situates the practices of today's technicians within a genealogy of professional stagecraft practices and recognises the significance of backstage labour to an understanding of the broader theatre industry'.[20] Osborne and Woodworth talk of 'recovering the worker's visibility and identifying labour with the theatre they create; exploring how the forgotten, and in some cases, deliberately obscured histories can be returned to the scholarly conversation'.[21] Uncovering the significance of backstage labour is an interest that this thesis shares with these writers but also seeks to extend and deepen by exploring the professionalisation of technical theatre, the pressures that led to the bifurcation of specialisms, and the growing influence of the expert upon the design, policy, and funding decisions of post-war British stage design. Archival research into technical theatre, according to Essin, 'can ultimately give technicians a history they can tell about themselves (sometimes to themselves) to validate their value in an industry that routinely keeps them in the dark'.[22] The great merit of these more recent debates is that they have begun to address this long-neglected part of theatrical practice in historical research into modern theatre, with a focus on the skilled specialists of technical theatre development and what I identify as the process of professionalisation that formed as a result of new stage designs and civic theatre construction.

As I have begun to discuss, more recent research has shifted attention away from the functional accounts and fractured histories of previous writing on technical theatre towards

[20] Christin Essin, *Theatre Topics,* An aesthetic of backstage labour, Volume 21, Number 1, March 2011 pp. 33-48 (p, 34) https://muse.jhu.edu/article/421027/pdf [last accessed: 2 August 2024].
[21] Elizabeth A. Osborne and Christine Woodworth, p. 44.
[22] Christin Essin, *Theatre Topics,* p. 33.
[22] Elizabeth A. Osborne and Christine Woodworth, *Working in the wings,* p. 46.

an exploration of design, aural attention, labour, working conditions, space, place, heritage, and the cultural origins of production. Such research can, and does, provide further ways of understanding the entirety of theatre production, as well as informing wider philosophical questions across the various scholarly disciplines of architecture, politics, and sociology that technical theatre inhabits.[23] Nonetheless, despite these recent scholarly interventions, the emergence and development of technical professionalisation remains relatively underexplored, conceptually fragmented, and lacking in – at least according to Jonathan Sterne – 'an overarching, shared sensibility of what constitutes [technical] heritage'.[24] The ways in which the structures of theatrical organisations shaped meaning in theatre and the impact of the place, space, and the conditions of production, as Ric Knowles lamented in 2004, 'have remained largely absent from scholarly discourse'.[25] And yet, as he goes on to observe, 'these fundamental framing circumstances shape meaning in theatre to a degree that equals any other, including the largely indeterminable intentions of playwrights, directors, and actors that are the focus of so much journalistic and academic writing in the field'.[26]

Any analysis of the material condition of theatre – the conditions that shape what appears onstage and therefore how it is understood – must take into account the wider context of the stage: the non-textual, physical materiality and ephemerality of theatrical events, the

[23] See, Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses: an architectural history of Britain's new theatres 1945–1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Jonathan Sterne, *The audible past: cultural origins of sound reproduction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003); George Home-Cook, *Theatre and aural attention: stretching ourselves* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015); Lynne Kendrick, *Theatre aurality* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), and Ross Brown, *Sound: a reader in theatre practice* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), amongst others.
[24] Jonathan Sterne, *The audible past,* p. 5.
[25] Ric Knowles, *Reading the material theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 52.
[26] Ibid., p. 53.

entire theatre experience for spectators through performance, reception, and production. I consider this to include the training, traditions, and practices of technical theatre, as well as working conditions such as institutional and professional structures, modes of funding, and architectural design. I also include conditions of reception such as the spatial geographies of theatrical locations and the local neighbourhoods and their relation to audience amenities. Such material conditions, as discussed by Knowles, function within larger social, cultural, and historical contexts and 'are shaped by the local, regional, national and global events of the moment'.[27] The emergence of the ABTT provides an opportunity for analysis of the standardisation of theatrical production and for an investigation into the influence of professionalisation, both discursive and practical, during the theatre construction boom of the 1960s onwards. Herbert M. Prentice, producer at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in the interwar years, pre-empted such a materialist approach to encompassing the entire theatre experience when suggesting, 'the play is the thing. But what is the play? The play combines all the activities relative to the composite whole, namely the words or texts, scenery, costumes, make-up, lighting etc. [This is] the composite art of theatre'.[28] Among the material conditions shaping theatre meaning and composition, technical training and tradition are perhaps the determinants that are least apparent. Yet, Knowles argues that they provide a 'political unconscious, acting as more or less invisible to the audiences, and taken for granted by the theatre worker'.[29] Implicit in this analysis is the idea that theatre workers are themselves unaware of the material conditions that structure their own working relations and productive power.

[27] Ibid., p. 28.
[28] C. Harold Ridge and F. S. Aldred, *Stage lighting: principles and practice* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & sons, 1936), p. xi.
[29] Ric Knowles, *Reading the material theatre*, p. 24.

In the years between 1961 and 1991, power relationships flowed between the technician and the creative teams – backstage and onstage – determining what counted as onstage and what counted as backstage, and how these were reflected in the wider divisions of labour. One of my principle focusses in the thesis, then, is on those areas of literature that most explicitly demonstrate the problem of technical professionalisation, found in the policy documents and financial reports of national and local governments, industry organisations, and sector bodies. The annual reports and financial statements of the Arts Council of Great Britain provide a chronological summary of growing support for, and reliance upon, the developing specialisms of technical practice, particularly in the delivery of the Housing the Arts programme between 1965 and 1986. Providing funding for capital projects under the first minister for the arts, Jennie Lee, 'Housing the Arts was to be a means by which to build audiences as well as buildings'.[30] Applications for the fund were assessed against a range of criteria, including 'the projected type of facility, the anticipated degree of professional use, estimate of need, feasibility of the project's finance, implication of revenue subsidy, and the suitability and technical competence of the design'.[31] Reports were presented to the Housing the Arts committee, which, as explained by architectural historian Alistair Fair, comprised 'the chairs of the Arts Council's Art, Drama, Music, Regional, and Touring panels, plus representatives of the Scottish and Welsh Councils, and (from the early 1970s) independent members'.[32] Panels drew on the external expertise of ABTT specialists, with technical

[30] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: a brighter prospect. Seventeenth annual report 1961/62* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), p. 30.
[31] Box ACGB/120/1, A review of Housing the Arts in Wales [January 1975], Blythe House Archive, Victoria and Albert Museum, p. 6.
[32] Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses: an architectural history of Britain's new theatres 1945–1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 35.

assessments provided by the Association's Theatre, Architecture, and Planning sub-committee, engaging critically on all stage and building designs and placing technicians at the heart of the decision-making process of the post-war theatre construction boom.

The expansion of architectural styles and types of theatre that followed national funding and local government investment extended to the shapes and forms of theatre designs. New stage types, such as theatre-in-the-round, end-on, thrust, and open, moved production styles away from the pre-war dominance of the proscenium, driven, in part, by technological innovations in both lighting and sound. The introduction of advanced lighting desks (Old Vic, 1963; Gulbenkian Centre, 1969; Sheffield Crucible, 1971) and later sound desks (Birmingham Repertory Theatre, 1971; Aberystwyth Arts Centre, 1972; National Theatre, 1976), for example, presented new opportunities for theatre makers and placed technicians with the specialist skills to operate new technology 'at the heart of theatre production'.[33] Expansion in theatre construction and production required the training, regulation, and standardisation of technical practice. Consequently, the emergence of specialist member groups within the ABTT, such as lighting, sound, safety, and training sub-committees, began to advocate the importance of technical expertise within the expansive policy-making and regional development of 1960s and '70s British theatre. Members 'were in a position to implement ABTT standards that became generally accepted in the industry', such as specifying basic lighting and sound requirements for all new theatres being built.[34] Providing a rich archive of material, the story of technical influence sits within the minutes, meeting notes, reports, and organisational documents of the ABTT, a repository of information that is still to be fully

[33] Richard Pilbrow, *A theatre project: a backstage adventure* (New York: Plasma Media, 2011), p. 99.
[34] David Collison, *The sound of theatre: from the Ancient Greeks to the modern digital age* (Cambridge: PLASA, 2008), p. 266.

explored. Further information lies untouched in the archives of those more established organisations such as the Arts Council of Great Britain and the National Theatre, as well as smaller bodies such as the Theatres Trust, and industry organisations such as the Society for Theatre Research and the Institute of Theatre Consultants. It is by uncovering the untold stories of the ABTT that we can begin to understand the need for sector professionalisation between 1961 and 1991 and the rise in technical influence that challenged traditional hierarchies of theatre production and labour.

By traditional hierarchies of production and labour, I mean the working relations of theatre that support notions of organisational rank. Acting as ways of reproducing theatre's 'political unconsciousness', they can be found in both the training and working cultures of technical professionalisation.[35] This can be seen in the early curricula materials and training methods associated with teaching the specialist role(s) of technical labour, with many published texts in the field written as manuals, dictionaries, or technical handbooks.[36] Knowles describes how, within these texts, 'a great deal of energy is devoted to the discussion of the peculiar qualities and characteristics of particular brand names of instruments and equipment and the companies that supply them'.[37] It is the formation of hierarchies and training that have supported a shop-floor mentality towards technical workers, in which, Knowles goes on to describe, 'creative and onstage personnel [position] themselves as superior to technicians

[35] 'Political unconsciousness' was a term popularised by the American Marxist Fredric Jameson and referred to the intangible histories of how we employ concepts to represent the world to ourselves, i.e, ideology functions structurally like the unconscious. Fredric Jameson, *The political unconscious: narrative as a socially symbolic act* (New York: Routledge, 2002), introduction.
[36] Frank Napier, *Noises off: a handbook of sound effects* (London: J. Garnet Miller, 1962); Peter Bax, *Stage management* (Stratford: Ayer Company Publishing, 1977); Stanley Bell, Norman Marshall, and Richard Southern, *Essentials of stage-planning* (London: Frederick Muller, 1949); Percy Corry, Stage planning and equipment (London: Strand Electric Engineering, 1949).
[37] Ric Knowles, *Reading the material theatre*, p. 31.

and crew'.[38] Such ideological coding is apparent in the later writings of Albert F. C. Whelburg, Gosta Bergman, Neil Fraser, and David Hays, with their stories of backstage work providing proficient and accurate accounts of lighting and sound practice, and of building knowledge that 'seeks to demystify the technology'.[39] Such writing implicitly reaffirms the hierarchies of production by addressing those who, in Hays' words, 'need to make peace', or who have 'feared the dark arts, … as the insecurity of technicians can raise a wall of protective technical jargon and electrical federol'.[40] Such 'affirmative culture', as theorised by Herbert Marcuse, reproduces existing power structures and places technical theatre at the end of the creative process, 'in which lighting and sound designers [for example] are invited to serve at a point that can only be instrumentalist or decorative functions of illuminating, underscoring, texturing or decorating'.[41]

Technical practice has not always been positioned as subservient, though, with early industry commentators, innovators, and lighting pioneers such as Louis Hartmann, Frederick Bentham, and Richard Pilbrow, writing sector-specific publications on the facilitative importance of technical theatre within the production process. Bentham, when commentating on his own career as a lighting designer, 'advocated for the importance and prominence of lighting design in an attempt to convert readers to the roles of technical stage

[38] Ibid., p. 29.
[39] Michael Perryman, *Esteam: the science of theatre lighting* (n.p.: n.pub., n.d.). Albert F. C., Wehlburg, *Theatre lighting: an illustrated glossary* (London: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), Gosta Bergman, *Lighting in the theatre* (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), Neil Fraser, *Lighting and sound* (London: Phaidon, 1988), and David Hays, *Light on the subject: stage lighting – for directors, actors and the rest of us* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1989).
[40] David Hays, *Light on the subject: stage lighting – for directors, actors and the rest of us* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1989), p. 3.
[41] Quoted in Ric Knowles, *Reading the material theatre*, pp. 27 and 31.

practice'.[42] The career stories of those most influential in the development of technical theatre across Britain, predominantly stage lighting, formed within the 'fluid boundaries of amateur and professional, commercial and non-commercial, traditional, civic and experimental drama, and as stage technology moved towards a new visual language'.[43] The implications of emerging lighting specialisms from the 1940s onwards elevated the visual above the auditory, suggestive of developing hierarchical values within technical professionalisation at the time when the bifurcation of specialisms in labour materialised.[44] This set of assumptions, or a visual-over-auditory prejudice, has been challenged more recently by contemporary writers such as Farokh Soltani and Ross Brown, exploring sonic dramaturgies beyond the basics of sound effects and towards new discursive frameworks in areas such as theatre aurality, phenomenology, and literary dramaturgy.[45]

Given that auditory experience is such an important part of theatre, David Collison rightly asks, 'why has so little been written on the subject[?]' He continues, 'perhaps even more extraordinary is the lack of information on sound in most books about technical theatre published during the twentieth century'.[46] When discussing a possible history of sound we can look to Sterne again, who argues, 'we know that the parts line up some how, we know that they can connect, but we are unsure of how they actually link together'.[47] Piecing

[42] Fred Bentham, *Sixty years of light work: an autobiography* (Isleworth: Strand Lighting Limited, 1992), p. 152. Louis Hartmann, *Theatre lighting: a manual of the switchboard* (New York: DBS Publications, 1970), Richard Pilbrow, *Stage lighting* (London: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1971).
[43] Philip M. Taylor, *The project of Britain: British overseas publicity and propaganda 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 4.
[44] Paul Roberts, Case study: The Stage – the evolution of technical job advertisements, 1939–1999 (2019).
[45] Farokh Soltani, *Radio/body: phenomenology and dramaturgies of radio* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020) and Ross Brown, *Sound effect: the theatre we hear (performance and design)* (Grantham: Methuen Drama, 2020).
[46] David Collison, *The sound of theatre*, p . vii.
[47] Jonathan Sterne, *The audible past: cultural origins of sound reproduction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 5.

together a history of technical specialisms from the array of stories about equipment, architecture, design, engineering, manufacturing, techniques, and other related practices has so far not been considered through the lens of professionalisation. Achieving a fuller technical understanding needs an historical account, particularly when looking at the interconnections across specialisms, with the ABTT archive providing the material evidence required to tell the stories of training, standards, and modernisation that allowed for new forms of theatre to emerge.

This thesis adds to the field by extending long-standing and multi-disciplinary research on post-war British theatre, paying particular attention to the discourses and practices that led to professionalisation of the technical industry and to the key role played by the ABTT that has so far not been addressed in theatre scholarship. Evidence of the centrality of the ABTT to the development of post-war British theatre is present in sector-specific biographies, journals, collections, and industry material that is often overlooked. These materials can be used to tell the story of professionalisation, encouraging a fresh examination of British theatre history and beyond. The thesis, therefore, reads such primary sources to present the story of post-war British technical theatre as a history of influence, not only on material production and performance but also on the way labour, technology, and economies of theatrical practice were transformed in the post-war period. In the following section, I describe what a research project intent on bridging some of the gaps I have observed requires and the methodological approach I have chosen.

3 Research methodology: differing approaches and methodological tools

My investigation started by creating a database charting examples of innovation which in some way reflected developments in civic stage design, with a focus on the years since 1961 and the formation of the ABTT. Initially, I looked to the database as an appendix to the research, a way to prove that there was in fact wider theatre sector reliance upon technical theatre for civic experimentation, highlighting a critical movement of interventions coalescing around the work of the ABTT. This process made clear several key methodological points. Firstly, it quickly became apparent that regardless of the number of impacts across architecture, design, or policy, for example, that I uncovered, technical theatre – especially the processes of professionalisation – rarely occupied spaces within post-war histories of theatre. Secondly, where recognition was to be found, most histories revolved around the same small pool of people, the same limited case studies of theatre(s) (namely the National Theatre, London), and the same restrictive narrative – with technical innovations routinely cast in a supportive rather than lead role across theatre modernisation, and with the ABTT rarely referenced.

As noted at the outset, my objectives in the thesis include defining the study of the ABTT as critical to an understanding of the historical developments of technical theatre in Britain during the post-war period, and specifically, identifying the processes of professionalisation. I chose to do this to understand how the ABTT eventually formed into a system that became a functioning associative body, tracing the impact of that body on a developing professional technical sector. This not only demonstrates the palpable impact it had but how these impacts were directed from within, according to the politics of the ABTT in response to wider

social and political trends. The thesis tracks two such trends, the social democratic period and the advent of the neoliberal break with social democracy and its effect on the theatre industry. This is achieved through a range of methods alongside the exploration of archives and oral historiography, including a literature review, interviews, case study review, and the use of documentation that has often been overlooked, unremarked upon, or left in the background of existing theatre histories.

If the influence of technical theatre remains overlooked, we will only have a one-sided picture of the evolution in playhouse and stage designs and the theatre forms of the post-war period. Technicians were much more than unskilled labour at the end of the theatre-making process, and the emergence of the ABTT did much to address this perception, with member expertise informing the development of national policies and shaping industry change. Consequently, bringing in evidence from the ABTT archive, my corrective aim in this thesis is to amplify current understandings, building upon the important interventions of some and intervening where others have missed or overlooked technical theatre as being integral to the very conversations they have discussed.

The thesis as a whole focusses on the growing organisational influence of the ABTT upon the technical sector and – because the ABTT is not the same thing as the question of subsidy, albeit they are related – the impact of subsidy upon training ambitions, standardisation, and the value given to civic theatre amenities. In each chapter I explore how the Association communicated new ways of working with an emerging technical industry, analysing the internal and external relationships of power that formed within the organisation, and the networks and systems which shaped both the ABTT and the sector, interrogating the

Association's influence on theatre within the wider technical industry.[48] The ABTT is expansive – far more so than the thesis could be reasonably expected to cover; but fortunately, it is not necessary to be exhaustive to show how the ABTT placed itself at the centre of debates around professionalisation. These are clearly stated in periods of emergence, establishment, and expansion of the ABTT and provide the central focus of the thesis, enabling a consideration of the main theatres of the period; the civic stage shapes of in-the-round, end-on, thrust, and open that formed around them; and the training, standards, policy, and support required by technical innovation in the years between 1961 and 1991.

The ABTT is today a large organisation, made up of over two thousand members, but it started as a small group, comprised of those who were at the top end of theatre in 1961 and who already had considerable status, motive, and, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu when discussing the dynamics of power and stratification, 'social capital'.[49] As a process of strategic elaboration, the ABTT, considered as part of a *dispositif* of technical theatre, is a multiple construction of networks, relations, and systems; invariably within such a structure there are contradictions – and, as I go on to explore across the following chapters in detail, these processes create as many problems as they solve, where every limit is a possibility. The ABTT is part of the apparatus that it itself develops, and as such it cannot escape its contradictions,

[48] For example, in 1976 the ACGB funded an ABTT-coordinated training programme aimed at raising skills and standards across technical theatre. In 1986 the ABTT lost funding from the ACGB, as national theatres developed internal training and as vocational qualifications (NVQs) were introduced to be run by the Theatre Technical Training Services (TTTS). The goal of the TTTS was to provide relevant technical training to the employees of those organisations during a period when entertainment technology was advancing at a tremendous speed. The ABTT focussed on developing a training for all across backstage labour (not just the large operators), with the training portfolio still being used today.

[49] Pierre Bourdieu, The forms of capital, in *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education,* ed. by J. G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 241–58 (p. 242).

not least because it is limited by exogenous factors such as government subsidy. The administrative and institutional mechanisms of the ABTT act as a locus of power and professionalisation, behind which a larger network of backstage labour exists. This network functions and interacts through a series of mechanisms, in which hierarchical power is invoked, and seeks to impose itself on a form of social organisation (the emergence of a network that forms the Association, and paradoxically, a network that the Association then tries to control). The ABTT both promulgates the dispositif and disrupts it, concretising a wider dispersal of power within technical theatre: power relationships flow between the 'technicians' and the 'creatives', reflective of the politics of individuals and the wider function of power within an industry undergoing the process of professionalisation. The ABTT responds to internal pressures as it expands, changing and adapting itself accordingly, but also to the external pressures of the world outside the organisation. However, the Association is not divorced from that world, it is a part of it, and it is in the developing complexity of systems, networks, and politics of control in a post-Thatcher world, at the point of a new economic orthodoxy for the ABTT, where the thesis concludes.

My literature review and methodological approach show that this technical history is recognised, at best, in part, but that it has not been viewed in terms of the problem of systemisation that I identify with professionalised processes and networks. I argue that this is precisely what an analysis of the history of the ABTT is able to contribute to our understanding of the material conditions underpinning the development of post-war British theatre. While there are a number of interesting articles and books published on areas of technical practice, no synoptic history of the development of post-war British theatre has been written, and more specifically, no history on the emergence of technical theatre or the

ABTT as a way of understanding the structures and practices of power and governance between 1961 and 1991.[50] With such a history written, we will be in a better position to understand the emergence of the Association of British Theatre Technicians, its influence in the development of technical practice, and to what extent it is responsible for the professionalisation of the theatre industry in the post-war years of British civic theatre.

Further to this, the relational ontology of the ABTT as an organisation has not been explored, where every identity is limited by another identity, acting as a source of conflict within the ABTT membership and between the organisation and the industry. An emerging set of relationships existed in the Association's formative years, but it remains unclear how people related to each other prior to the imposition of organisational structure, leading to different positions (networks and individuals) and with members having different conceptions of what the ABTT was for. This produced interpersonal and professional conflict, and within this conflict changes to relationships occurred, with the network constantly changing through the pressures, contradictions, and clashes that were found within it. The ABTT is not strictly a body of governance that has authority over theatre, but it is an authority, and as such it offers guidance, not in terms of legislation but as a membership of influence, through social and symbolic capital. Power is at once a 'productive' force – and thus an inevitable and inescapable factor in the shaping of every social relation – as much as it is an occasion that 'produces' or 'incites' or 'provokes' modes of resistance and forms of agonistic struggle.[51] The formative years of the ABTT, between 1961 and 1991, moved stage practice away from

[50] With 'theatre' understood as a general dispositif comprised of systems and networks, forms of knowledge intricated in technical practices, modes of governance, and policy-making.
[51] Tony Fisher and Kelina Gotman, Introduction: theatre, performance, Foucault, in, Tony Fisher and Kelina Gotman (eds), *Foucault's theatres* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp, 1-23, (p. 9).

previous struggles and provide a means to begin mapping that wider, more systemic history of technical theatre professionalisation. The following five chapters of my thesis, therefore, tell the story of the ABTT in its formative years through the rise of the technician as expert and the changing policies, political reforms, forms of governance, and organisational structures that would ultimately lead to a neoliberal move away from social democracy and towards a new market orthodoxy.

In chapter one, I outline the webs of relations that resulted in the emergence of the ABTT and the role of the theatre technician as expert. I begin by describing the rise of specialists attempting to address a sense of indifference towards technical matters in the late 1950s, examining how the time was ripe for an association to form and advocate for the professionalisation of standards and labour amid the rise of subsidised and civic regional theatre practice. I go on to label the driving forces behind the formation of the ABTT, including personal agendas, the reputation of individuals, self-promotion, and the Association as a vehicle for producing research and development. I then explore the design limitations of the Belgrade Theatre, Britain's first post-war civic theatre, which acted as a catalyst in the development of the ABTT. What we are able to do is conditioned by the position we occupy, and all at the ABTT in its formative years, as individuals and as a membership, positioned themselves within a precarious and competitive technical field to influence and inform professionalisation. Understanding such connections of power might suggest network theories as a methodological orientation, and I use an extended approach to 'tell stories of how relationships assemble, or don't' across the professionalisation of technical theatre.[52]

[52] John Law, Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics, in *The new Blackwell companion to social theory*, edited by Bryan S. Turner (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), pp. 141-158 (p. 141).

Focussing on the institutional and organisational networks, needs, demands, and decisions of the ABTT, I adopt alternate material semiotic approaches, exploring how social networks developed across smaller groups and wider relationships within the Association, the local process and network structures linking individuals and groups to resources and beneficial outcomes, and the accumulation of those network points and their organisational meshworks.[53] The chapter uses these theories and case studies in order to develop a formative history of the ABTT as a way of understanding the origins of technical professionalisation.

Following on from discussing the emergence of the ABTT in chapter one, an analysis of broader systemic structures and systems within the establishment of the Association in the 1960s occurs in chapter two, significant to understanding the influence of technical expertise on expanding civic stage design. I use Bourdieu's notion of 'symbolic capital' to understand what group positioning did to the organisation, the social stratification of status and power found within it, and the economies of direction, influence, and network building that formed as a result of its activities.[54] This analysis is useful in understanding the roles of those most prominent in forming the networks of the ABTT and the influence thereafter of the people who led industry change. The recognition of technical expertise is a driving force in the establishment of the ABTT amid unprecedented public spending on the arts in the 1960s and '70s, as the Association sought to influence material change across the sector and, ultimately,

[53] Ric Knowles, *Reading the material theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Charles, *Understanding social networks: theories, concepts, and findings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), and Tim Ingold, *Bringing things to life: creative entanglements in a world of materials* (Aberdeen: ESRC National Centre for Research Methods, July 2010). http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/1306/1/0510_creative_entanglements.pdf [last accessed: 12 December 2019].
[54] Pierre Bourdieu and L. P. D. Wacquant, *The forms of capital: an invitation to reflexive sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 241.

become of national importance to theatre construction and design. There was a desire to influence practice and standards; to be effective in the development of a new theatre estate; and to advocate away from the traditional focus of theatre practice, instead supporting the organisation itself and the technical sector it had grown to represent.[55] I look at the politics of technical theatre and the environment within which the ABTT performed, asking what that really meant for the Association and what the most appropriate way of understanding it in the actual structure(s) of the organisation is.[56] By exploring the material change of stage shapes, I reveal how the ABTT looked to establish principles of theatre building design, considering reform across the 1960s and 1970s and the democratising impact of new policies upon a changing architectural theatre landscape. I explore the influence of the welfare state on the post-war technical industry, a sense of growing civic responsibility, and the changing cultural and social politics of both central and local government on a modernising British theatre. In a move away from proscenium dominance, the rise of alternate stage shapes, such as open-ended, thrust, and in-the-round, formed under a new generation of practitioners. Stage innovators such as Peter Moro, Richard Pilbrow, and Stephen Joseph – all founder members of the ABTT Theatre, Architecture, and Planning sub-committee – sought to break from the confines of the proscenium to engage more directly with audiences, scenery, and design by experimenting within new stage styles and types. The networks of stage specialists that formed around the regional growth in repertory work, including ABTT members Fred Bentham and Richard Southern, allowed the Association to present itself as the locus of collective exercise in technical theatre during a period when modern playhouses became civic monuments of social progress.

[55] For example, fees went back into the network in developing training, according to its own imperatives.
[56] For example, via affiliation: actors have not been welcomed by the Association historically; the politics of what the organisation has wanted to be have not change much over sixty years.

Where chapter two looks at the civic developments of theatre construction, in chapter three I discuss the setting of technical standards by the ABTT in the 1970s, explaining how the Association began to mobilise a rapidly evolving technical industry at an unprecedented pace – important in understanding the need for professionalisation at this time. This was a period of innovation in modern theatre design, with stage technology and shape encouraging, and encouraged by, experimentation in production styles and forms, acting as an incentive for the ABTT to transform the ongoing legacies of pre-war practices of technical theatre. What followed was the transformation of theatre production, allowing for new theatrical possibilities, exemplified by the array of civic stage types and technological innovations in lighting and sound techniques emerging in regional playhouse design. Technical networks evolved, with the ABTT leading an accelerated growth in the skills and training of stage labourers and the revision of modern production processes that ultimately led to what this thesis describes as the professionalisation of technical labour. I place an emphasis on the power mechanisms behind these networks and the conflicts that steered the institutional life cycle of the ABTT, using Jürgen Habermas' work to help describe its expansion in what Christopher Balme terms 'the theatrical public sphere' to reveal the necessary processes behind professionalisation.[57] The application of knowledge to change behaviour and to be more productive is explored so as to articulate the ABTT as a theory of governance of things and people. Employing Michel Foucault's concept of dispositif (or apparatus), I map the various institutional, physical, and administrative mechanisms and knowledge structures of the ABTT, which enhance and maintain the exercise of power within the social body of

[57] Christopher Balme, *The theatrical public sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 1.

technical theatre.[58] I show how industry power connects with the politics of the individuals involved, their motivations and interrelationships, and map the political stakes at play. This method is not simply Foucauldian, as I depart from a strictly structural approach, considering instead the central importance of individuals to the authority of the ABTT as a non-governing technical body.

Having discussed the professionalisation of technical theatre in chapter three, chapter four explores the transition from the idea of civic and subsidised theatre, under the post-war welfare consensus, to a model replaced by neoliberal economic policies in the 1980s. In questioning what happened to the ABTT in this transitional period, I ask how the organisation adapted to new market forces, and what impact this had on the complexity of networks, internal politics, and system controls that had emerged within the practice of technical theatre. The chapter discusses how the policies of privatisation, deregulation, and reductions in government spending – from the introduction of neoliberalised capital and Thatcherite reform of the arts – led to a questioning of the very relevance and future of the Association by those in positions of power and those who sought change. I discuss the breakdown in relations between the two key technical partners of post-war technical theatre development, outlining the impact of Arts Council policy reform upon technical professionalisation, and expose the adaptive role(s) of the ABTT in a new economic orthodoxy. By analysing the dwindling post-war settlement, I examine how subvention under a new regime forced the removal of public funding through Arts Council policy reform, exposing the crisis management of the ABTT that ensued.

[58] Clare O'Farrell, *Michel Foucault* (London: Sage, 2005), appendix ii.

The final chapter, providing a coda to the thesis, discusses the place of technical theatre in contemporary theatre practice, the everyday systems of power which re-emerged within the ABTT in a post-Thatcher world, and the wider politics of technical governance that followed. The ABTT learned to live within and adapt itself to a free-market world, primarily through a transition away from its previous dependency upon state funding towards self-reliance through commercial activity, which would change the character of the ABTT at a fundamental level. Allowing for the continuation of technical training and the standardisation of practice, albeit in a new form and beyond the theatrical sphere, the selling of expertise that followed developed commerciality through activity such as trade shows, publications, and networked events. A move towards commercial activity set the blueprint for all future practice and remains essential to the prosperity of a contemporary ABTT practice. As a consequence, the chapter ends in 1991, thirty years after the formation of the ABTT, at the beginning of a new story for the Association in a post-Thatcher world.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that technical theatre in the post-war period of Britain underwent a process of professionalisation as a sector, and within this process we discover the development of networks, standards, training systems, and forms of regulatory alignment. In an attempt to professionalise the sector, the ABTT acted as a vehicle for the nexus of practices and skills, while demonstrating the limits of what an organisation can do. It worked as a framework of governance that was not necessarily top down and did not issue orders, instead responding to things as they emerged, and so moved amorphously as and when problems arose. Technical theatre defines the norms of stage production while demonstrating the necessary porosity that will always be evident within such shifting

practices. The contradictions and tensions found in the history of technical theatre, particularly around the influence of things and people, are real but not reconcilable in the politics and actions of the ABTT, and in this thesis I do not look to solve them. I do, however, in the following five chapters, explore those contradictions to elaborate the lifeworld of the Association and the wider technical sector, which developed historically from a lack of industry governance.[59] I expose industry dispute in order to show how conflicts interrelated, particularly in the determinative years of development, shaping the agreed behaviours and values of a technical industry represented by the specialist membership of the ABTT.

[59] For 'lifeworld' see, Hugh Baxter, System and life-world in Habermas's theory of communicative action, *Theory and Society: Renewal and Critique in Social Theory*. Vol. 16. No. 1. Jan 1987, pp. 39-86.

Chapter 1

A new stage: the ABTT and the emergence of the theatre technician as expert

When it opened in London, in June 1961, the Association Internationale des Techniciens de Theatre (AITT) Adaptable Theatres colloquium was the first conference in Britain dedicated to the subject of modern theatre technology, design, and innovation. As host, the UK colloquium announced the arrival of the Association of British Theatre Technicians on both a national and international stage, showcasing the organisation as a repository for guidance on best practice and good design – independent of commercial interest. The theme of the conference was planning for new and adaptable theatres with particular reference to civic theatre projects and the design of venues seating up to one thousand people.[60] An impatience with the old naturalism of the proscenium stage, particularly amongst those advocating for new forms of theatre in Britain, and 'the need to address a perceived longstanding neglect of technical matters exacerbated by modern technology', proved to be equally compelling motives for discussion.[61] Featuring international speakers, practitioners, and specialists, including committee members of the recently formed ABTT, the presentations given were influential in shaping the design of contemporary, and often more innovative, theatres, planned for and built in the years that followed.

[60] An adaptable theatre, as described by Richard Southern in his conference paper delivered at the 1961 colloquium, is 'a theatre whose stage is fully equipped to take changeable scenery, and yet at the same time capable of being re-arranged so as to have a stage properly planned to give shows without scenery; or even (most difficult of all) capable of both these things at once'. Richard Southern, the history of adaptable theatres, in, *Adaptable theatres,* ed. by Stephen Joseph (London: Association of British Theatre Technicians, 1962), pp. 13-16 (p. 14).

[61] Bob Millington, Tony Jackson and Athene Fielding, *Remembering Stephen Joseph: theatre visionary and pioneer* (Leeds: Book Empire, 2019), p. 81.

Founded as a response to the wider developments of British culture in the post-war years – a social democratic period of investment in civil infrastructure – the ABTT became a vehicle for the reform of the theatre industry, with a focus on the growing standardisation of technical training, skills, and labour, while also acting as a repository of guidance on best practice.[62] At its inception, the Association promised to rescue British theatre from the complacency of tradition, where the proscenium frame was dominant and the role of technician seen as subservient to that of director, playwright, and actor. A new type of specialist emerged who began to question the assumptions of pre-war theatre, particularly in technical matters, shifting individual expertise and action towards collective representation.[63] The ABTT also provided a stage for the personal agendas of its founding members, acting as a platform for advocates of new forms of theatre, technology, and building design.[64] The new social networks that emerged were both paradoxically small and vast, embedded in the local communities and memberships of the Association whilst simultaneously forming relationships and interdependencies across the wider theatrical world. Today, the ABTT is a large organisation of over two thousand members, but it started as a small group, comprised of those who were at the heart of theatre production in the West End, the regions, and touring shows across Britain in the 1950s. Those individuals who became founder members already had considerable recognition, motivation for change, and – as Pierre Bourdieu terms

[62] Technical labour is 'those who create the illusions [of stage] set before the audience'. Elizabeth A. Osborne and Christine Woodworth, *Working in the wings: new perspectives on theatre history and labour* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015), p. 4.

[63] I term an 'expert' as having extraordinary knowledge in technical theatre and being recognised as an authority in their field by peers, and a 'specialist' as a person who has devoted their work or practice to a particular aspect of the industry. An expert may have been called upon to solve a problem that others had trouble understanding.

[64] I discuss in chapters one and two the most prominent ABTT members, such as Richard Southern and Stephen Joseph who advocated for the introduction of open stage to British theatre, and Frederick Bentham and Richard Pilbrow who introduced new specialist practice to technical production.

it – 'social capital' within technical fields.[65] According to Bourdieu, what we are able to do is conditioned by the position we occupy in relation to the networks in which we are embedded, and, knowingly or not, these individuals, during the organisation's formative years, were positioning themselves within a precarious and competitive technical field to influence and inform the impending professionalisation of British theatre.

The analysis of this chapter is focussed upon the collective motivation of those who came to form the ABTT, 'to help and advise, to ensure [new theatres] were technically efficient and up-to-date', and the individual incentives and personal agendas of those who informed the very foundations of the organisation.[66] To understand further the influences behind the Association's genesis, the chapter specifically attends to the webs of relations which resulted in the emergence of the ABTT, focussing on two principal areas: the rise of specialists and experts as an attempt to address a sense of indifference towards technical matters, and the importance of the first major new regional theatre in post-war Britain, the Belgrade Theatre, to the development of civic playhouse design. In section one, I examine how the time was right for an association of technical volunteers to form in March 1961 and to advocate for a professionalisation of standards and labour. I discuss the interdependencies, affiliations, and interconnections that existed within newly formed technical networks, uncovering how a shared ambition for change resulted in the ABTT organising the first international conference on technical theatre to be held in Britain, just three months after its formation. [67] In section

[65] Pierre Bourdieu and L. P. D. Wacquant, *The forms of capital: an invitation to reflexive sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 241.
[66] Stephen Joseph Archive, Manchester University John Rylands Library: (June 1961 – JRL, ref: SJ1/38/259.
[67] The first ABTT book, *Adaptable Theatres*, was a report on the various presentations given during the 1961 conference. It was circulated widely to both the press and theatre organisations upon its publication in 1962. Free copies were also sent to borough councils and civic theatre bodies across Britain.

two, I analyse the key individuals behind the formation of the Association; their status, motives, and agendas in bringing a membership of specialists together; and the strength of a growing technical network in building collective attitudes and behaviours towards the development of technical expertise. In section three, I argue that a lack of specialist knowledge in the sector resulted in the poor stage and backstage design of the Belgrade Theatre in 1958, which acted as a catalyst for change in the future commissioning and planning of regional civic playhouses amid the emergence of the ABTT and the theatre technician as expert.

1.1 A web of relations: interdependencies, affiliations, and interconnections

In January 1961, at the London office of the newly formed lighting design and rental company Theatre Projects, Richard Pilbrow (owner of Theatre Projects) hosted a meeting of prominent theatre practitioners and experts who collectively proposed the establishment of an organisation dedicated to the enhancement of technical practice. He, along with Victoria Pilbrow (secretary), Richard Southern (theatre historian), Iris Brooke (costume designer), Eric Jordan (building safety officer), Stephen Joseph (theatre practitioner), Frederick Bentham (lighting designer), Peter Moro (architect), Sean Kenny (stage designer), Kenneth Rae (secretary of the International Theatre Institute), and Roger Furse (film and scene designer), were among the founding members of what was to become the first ABTT management committee. During the proceedings, Stephen Joseph proposed, and Sean Kenny seconded a motion confirming the name Association of British Theatre Technicians and its affiliation with the AITT. A further action was motioned for those in attendance to proceed immediately with

the organisation of an AITT congress to be held in London, in June 1961.[68] At the end of the meeting, a small committee – consisting of interim chairman Richard Southern, Stephen Joseph, Richard Pilbrow, and Victoria Pilbrow – started work on the proposed summer congress and to formally establish the Association of British Theatre Technicians. As noted in the minutes of this first meeting, the group believed it to be 'the right time for an organisation of stage specialists to come together and improve technical standards'.[69]

This 'ad-hoc group' continued to meet weekly, with their efforts culminating in a formal gathering of potential members just two months later 'to discuss the formation of a British technical association'.[70] Held at the Strand Electric Demonstration Hall, London, on 3 March 1961, the meeting was attended by over one hundred like-minded people. Leading the proceedings, recently appointed chairman Norman Marshall addressed this new community of technical specialists by firstly discussing the proposed aims of the ABTT, the nature and extent of its probable activities, and the qualifications needed for membership.[71] From the outset, entry to the organisation was a contentious topic, as prominent author on industry matters Peter Corry indicated in his report published in the widely circulated technical journal *TABS* magazine, stating 'that was the subject on which most of the subsequent speakers from the floor of the house had comment to make'.[72] Some of the more acclaimed and influential guests in attendance, such as artistic director Peter Hall, spoke for the

[68] It was agreed that those present should contribute two guineas per person to meet initial expenses, to be taken in lieu of the first annual subscription once the ABTT was instituted. First meeting to set up the ABTT, 13 January 1961, ABTT archive, Correspondence with Jane Thornton, 20 May 2019.
[69] First meeting to set up the ABTT, 13 January 1961, ABTT archive, Correspondence with Jane Thornton, 20 May 2019.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Norman Marshall, joint author of *Essential Stage Planning* with Richard Southern in 1949, was invited to be chairman by the founding (provisional) committee.
[72] Percy Corry, *Theatre technicians associate*, Tabs magazine (Volume 19: No.1, 1961), pp. 15-16. (p. 15).

inclusion of actors and for making membership as wide as possible, whilst others, including Hall's colleague at the newly established Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), technical manager John Wyckham, cautioned against including 'those who have too much spare time', that is, actors.[73]

With a desire to be governed by those directly involved in the technical aspects of the art of theatre, the individuals present agreed upon full membership to stage technicians and an associate membership to all others. A network of like-minded people came together, creating a knowledge resource accessible to all but owned by none. Many in attendance made an immediate application to join the ABTT, and a second meeting was quickly called for 23 March 'to consider recommendations for the rules of membership and for officials and committees to be formally elected'.[74] As Percy Corry noted, 'the organisation that formed emerged with no lack of expertise right from the start, representing a wide range of talents'.[75] In his closing statement on proceedings, Corry went on to state that there was 'an obvious need for the association, but like all other such organisations it will only be as strong and effective as its leadership'.[76] It is leadership that I will now focus upon, by considering the character and roles of those who comprised the volunteer groups nominated to lead the ABTT, and through exploring the dependencies which formed and the 'materiality' of the world in which they evolved.[77]

---

[73] Sir Peter Hall was a director who created the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in 1961 and became Artistic Director of the National Theatre, England, in 1973. John Wyckham was a lighting and set designer at the RSC in 1961. Percy Corry, *Theatre technicians associate,* p. 15.
[74] Ibid., p. 15.
[75] Quoted in Fred Bentham, *Sixty years of light work: an autobiography* (Isleworth: Strand Publishing, 1992), p. 228.
[76] Percy Corry, *Theatre technicians associate,* p. 15.
[77] John Law, Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics, in *The new Blackwell companion to social theory*, edited by Bryan S. Turner (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), pp. 141-158 (p. 146).

Of the original eleven founding members of the provisional ABTT committee, four – Kenneth Rae, Sean Kenny, Iris Brooke, and Victoria Pilbrow – resigned in the first month due to work commitments, with the remaining seven – Richard Southern, Frederick Bentham, Richard Pilbrow, Roger Furse, Eric Jordan, Stephen Joseph, and Peter Moro – offering themselves for election to a new executive committee. The membership of the wider ABTT was immediately increased to twelve with the inclusion of prominent stage manager Anthony Chardet, theatre managers George Devine and Robert Vaughan, artistic director Peter Hall, and theatre director Norman Marshall. The first act of the executive was to define eligibility for membership 'specifically around those who in the view of the committee assisted the actor in his performance in a technical capacity through specialist technical knowledge'.[78] Associate membership was available for any others who were interested in the technical side of theatre, although minutes from the first meeting show 'some latitude was to be used by the committee in interpreting qualifications'.[79] The ABTT structure sought to rectify hierarchies in theatre where technicians 'were often obscured from view, by providing a voice, body, and influence under a new representative volunteer membership'.[80] The recommendations to form the ABTT, presented and agreed on 23 March 1961, heralded the formal emergence of the Association as a representative body for British technical practice and simultaneously

[78] Categories for membership were acoustics, architecture, costumes, lighting, machinery, production, properties, scenery, sounds, and stage management. ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT), Association of British Theatre Technicians, Bulletin No. 1, April 1961 (London: ABTT, 1961), p. 3.
[79] Ibid., Associate members received all the same benefits with the exception of the power to vote.
[80] Elizabeth A. Osborne and Christine Woodworth, *Working in the wings: new perspectives on theatre history and labour* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015), p. 4.

provided a platform to those in attendance, the most prominent members leading proceedings with authority to represent the newly formed collective.[81]

Speaking at the 23rd of March meeting, theatre historian Richard Southern explained that the AITT, which he loosely described as a European parent body established in the 1950s, had a particular interest in holding its third biennial conference in London. Southern went on to say, 'the ABTT had received a fairly useful sum of money [from the Gulbenkian foundation] for the purpose of holding such a congress'.[82] As vice chairman of the AITT, Southern viewed this as one of the most important steps in the young association's programme, 'and coming at such an opportune moment for all'.[83] Advocating for a committee from the ABTT and one from the AITT to work together, early documents from the Association's archive show 'a group was immediately set up to plan a conference of international prominence'.[84] With two papers planned for each day, the conference was to reflect key concerns of the ABTT, with subjects ranging from the need for adaptable theatres, the impact of poor stage design, and the problems of touring shows across regions.[85] These were topics that spoke to the particular interest of the historical moment and were seen as crucial by the ABTT in understanding the trajectory taken in post-war theatre construction so far. Further, shorter papers were to be presented on topics such as lighting and sound technology, fire and safety

[81] Initial interest in the ABTT was considerable, with 110 members across Britain joining within the first month, an additional 54 by the close of the Adaptable Theatres conference in June, and a further 24 by the end of 1961. Networks within the association evolved quickly, producing interwoven relationships and multi-layered groups, which went on to shape and change the very organisation from which they emerged.
[82] ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT), ABTT, Bulletin No. 1, April 1961 (London: ABTT, 1961), p. 3.
[83] Ibid., p. 3.
[84] Ibid., p. 3.
[85] Key themes included adaptable theatres, civic and subsidised theatres and community centres, the architect in the theatre, problems of the touring theatre, and theatre outside of the European tradition. The ABTT termed 'civic theatres' as 'built and owned by a city or town'. (Ibid).

regulations, new stage materials, theatre management, and production costs, all reflective of the specialist subjects and expertise of the ABTT membership.[86]

Organised in just three months, the list of speakers presenting at the Adaptable Theatres conference featured nine members from the original ABTT committee group and fifteen members in total.[87] With twenty-three speakers addressing delegates, the remaining eight either represented the Association Internationale des Techniciens de Theatre or the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT), or were international colleagues of prominence.[88] Themes chosen emphasised the organisational interests of ABTT members, with papers discussing new forms of theatre design, technological innovations, and adaptable stage shapes, each advocating for a new cohesive approach to technical theatre and the need to involve experts in all future planning and construction. Those who represented the ABTT at the colloquium, the most eminent in their fields, took positions of rank and status in the immediate hierarchy of the organisation, placing themselves as the custodians of its aims, values, and focus.[89]

[86] Ibid., p. 8.
[87] The congress provided an opportunity for the ABTT to define its boundaries. The presenters at Adaptable Theatres were Norman Marshall, Peter Hall, Michel Saint-Denis, Richard Southern, Thomas DeGaetani, Percy Corry, Norman Branson, James Hull Miller, Peter Moro, Hans Wolfram Theil, John English, Sean Kenny, Richard Pilbrow, Frederick Bentham, Eric Jordan, Stephen Joseph, Vortrag Ernst Brundig, Derek Martinus, Disley Jones, Michal Grobbelaar, Herbert Marshall, J. L. Goodwin, K. R. Ackerman, and Ian Albery.
[88] Stephen Joseph, List of Speakers, in, *Adaptable theatres,* ed. by Stephen Joseph (London: Association of British Theatre Technicians, 1962), pp. 1-6 (p. 5).
[89] For example, Stephen Joseph was vice chair of the Executive committee, chair of the Publications sub-committee (including articles, communications, and record keeping), member of the Theatre, Architecture, and Planning sub-committee, and editor of the ABTT *Adaptable Theatres* (1962) conference report.

Figure 1.1: The emerging organisational networks of those most prominent in the formation of the ABTT and their associated relationships in the years leading up to 1961.

	ABTT Executive committee	ABTT Formation committee	ABTT Formal Executive	ABTT Stage Lighting committee	ABTT Theatre, Architecture & Planning committee	ABTT Publications committee	ABTT Materials committee	ABTT Sound committee	ABTT Fire and Safety committee	Total	Org
Stephen Joseph	X	X	X		X	X				5	
Richard Southern	X	X	X		X				X	5	
Frederick Bentham	X		X	X	X					4	
Richard Pilbrow	X	X	X	X						4	
Peter Moro	X		X		X					3	
Peter Hall			X		X				X	3	
Eric Jordan	X		X						X	3	
Roger Furse	X		X		X					3	
Elidir Davies				X	X					2	
Victoria Pilbrow	X	X								2	
Anthony Chardet			X				X			2	
John Wyckham				X	X					2	
George Devine			X		X					2	
Norman Marshall			x		X					2	
Iris Brooke	X									1	
Sean Kenny	X									1	
Kenneth Rae	X									1	
Robert Vaughan			X							1	
Joe Davis				X						1	
Ian Dow							X			1	
John Bury							X			1	
John Fernald								X		1	
David Collison								X		1	
Disley Jones									X	1	

Below is a list of additional organisations founding members were associated with during the formative years of the ABTT, 1958–1965 (identified in column 'org').

International Theatre Institute	Association of Theatrical Designers and Craftsmen	Society for Theatre Research	Association Internationales des Techniciens de Theatre	Society of Television Lighting Designers	Society of British Theatre Lighting Designers	Arts Council of Great Britain

As figure 1.1 evidences, the most influential members represented ABTT areas of expertise, framing, containing, and contributing to the individuality of the organisation and supporting the development of a multi-layered and interconnected community. Showing how the same specialists moved through different spaces, figure 1:1 further identifies where many founding members overlapped in different scenes, affiliated but also connected to each other. Richard Southern, for example, was a member of five sub-committee groups within the ABTT as well as five additional organisations with connections to the development of post-war technical theatre. Those most prominent members held multiple positions and roles within the immediate world of the ABTT and beyond, influencing change and shaping the early movements of the Association towards individual needs and wants – with a focus upon the introduction of alternate stage shapes and specialists' technical advice to post-war British theatre practice. The opportunity to host the Adaptable Theatres conference had attracted much interest within the founder group, with at least thirteen of the twenty-four of the most active members (whom I have identified in figure 1.1) either presenting or supporting activities at the colloquium, building a network of influential technical experts all jostling for positions of power within the organisation. The composite parts of this new community, its material and heterogenous relations, produced and reshuffled various kinds of networks in the months after its initial formation. The most important shift being the move to represent specialist knowledge through the introduction of organisational structures and the categorisation of expertise.

The same 23rd of March meeting that provided the impetus for the ABTT to host Adaptable Theatres also saw Frederick Bentham – lighting innovator; designer; and, for a period of time,

ghost editor of *TABS* magazine – propose the formation of a series of sub-committees within the ABTT. Returning to figure 1:1, the data shows Bentham, Joseph, Southern, and Richard Pilbrow as the most active members across all pre and early ABTT networks. As a member of the informal and formal ABTT executive committees, as well as the Lighting and Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committees, Bentham was also a key speaker at the Adaptable Theatres conference and member of both the Society of Television Lighting Designers and Society of British Theatre Lighting Designers. At the forefront of theatre lighting modernisation, Bentham advocated for the existence of an independent body like the ABTT to provide guidance on good theatre design, rather than to permit his employer, Strand Electric, or any other commercial company to undertake such a role. He considered an organisational structure of ABTT sub-committees of great importance in allowing individuals an opportunity to express their views and influence decision making. Bentham also believed it essential for (his) opinions to be shared before any ABTT publications were produced in the support of developing technical practice, and for minutes to be taken across all committee groups 'so that at future meetings reports could be received and discussed'.[90] The creation of sub-committees, formed in the first weeks and months following the Association's inception, immediately established interconnected webs within the wider organisational networks as members, such as Bentham, became active across multiple disciplines and at various levels of influence.

Writing in the summer 1961 edition of *Bulletin*, architect Peter Moro emphasised how 'sub-committees were not to take the form of watertight compartments nor to be dominated by

[90] *Bulletin* was the first attempt by the ABTT to produce a quarterly update on activity to members. ABTT, Bulletin No. 1, p. 5.

their own experts'.[91] Instead, through the direction of Moro, the ABTT looked to move away from the insular nature of post-war theatre and forge a more inclusive community of interwoven relationships. The creation of six sub-committees, focussing on lighting, design, publications, materials, sound, and fire and safety, became prominent in defining the overall purpose and character of the ABTT. The success of the colloquium and formation of committee groups allowed internal relationships to circulate to and fro as members crossed various fields of interest, meaning systems emerged, and relationships evolved in both shape and form across the organisational structures of the ABTT. By September 1961, the Association was structured around six sub-committee groups (the technical committees) who reported to the main committee members (the Executive committee); each was arranged with a framework of chairman, vice-chairman, and secretary and included a formal network of sub-committee members.[92] These networks, interconnected and hierarchical, were predominantly male in membership and London-centric, with almost all ABTT meetings regularly taking place in the capital.[93]

Defining the aims of the Association, and establishing objectives for its members, each sub-committee provided a detailed synopsis which was to be published in *Bulletin* twice a year. For example, Richard Southern, as chair of the Fire and Safety Regulations sub-committee, discussed aims to improve the standards of fire safety in theatre. The group would, he wrote, 'undertake a fairly considerable amount of research so as to provide information on which a proper judgement on existing regulations can be based, as much of this essential information

[91] Ibid., p. 3.
[92] ABTT, Bulletin No. 4, March 1962 (London: ABTT, 1961), p. 2. ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT).
[93] The archive only shows a small percentage of women recorded in the inaugural yeas of the ABTT, represented as either members, supportive spouses, or secretaries.

was not readily available'.[94] Southern's Fire and Safety Regulations sub-committee advocated for greater local government enforcement of the guidelines they produced, going on to form and present recommendations and standards to statutory bodies. Suggesting inspections of theatre spaces with local council regulators to address the dangers of smoke and fire, Southern wanted to focus on the 'high proportion of fires attributed to electrical causes, mechanical damage, or unsuspected deterioration'.[95] The latter was a great cause for concern within technical labour, as common practice 'often involved asbestos borders being hung to protect cloths from lanterns', particularly in orthodox picture frame (i.e., proscenium) theatres.[96]

The Sound sub-committee, chaired by theatre director and Principal of RADA John Fernald, 'felt it would be of great benefit to more efficient stage management if drama students had a knowledge of the equipment they are most likely to meet in theatre and how to use it'.[97] The committee prepared a recommended course outline, along with a standard cue sheet, 'to be issued to drama schools on the basic elements of sound production, practical knowledge, operations, repair, and equipment handling', as part of an initiative that Fernald hoped 'would eventually lead to the development of specialist courses across the county'.[98] Members of the sub-committee offered to give lectures and practical demonstrations to backstage labourers in an attempt to increase standards in theatre, 'because as mechanical reproduction of sound effects is being used more and more in the theatre, the job of operating tape decks or panatropes usually falls to Stage Management, often the most junior

[94] ABTT, Bulletin No. 3, October 1961 (London: ABTT, 1961), p. 5. ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT).
[95] ABTT, Bulletin No. 4, p. 9.
[96] Correspondence with Roger Fox, Historic Research committee, ABTT, March 2021.
[97] ABTT, Bulletin No. 3, p, 9.
[98] Ibid., p. 9.

member'.[99] A draft standardisation of sound equipment in theatres, particularly music, microphones, and their effects, was produced to form, in part, an ABTT theatre planning memoranda. Although bifurcation of roles was increasing in technical theatre at this time and the growing importance of sound to production was evident, the role of sound specialist had not yet emerged in the immediate months following the formation of the ABTT. I talk more about the importance of sound to theatre design in chapter three when discussing the construction of the Sheffield Crucible in 1971 and the role of ABTT member David Collison as one of the first recognised sound designers to be employed in a UK theatre. Here, it suffices to say that sound technology was developing as an innovative production tool in theatre making and was recognised as a technical specialism across the sub-committee groups of the ABTT from the very outset.

Detailing the facilities of theatres in Britain, through scrutinising ground plans, electrical installations, stage specifications, and materials within theatrical application, the Materials sub-committee aimed to consolidate an array of technical specifications into a single authoritative manual. Under the chairmanship of Ian Dow, the group focussed on contacting the manufacturers of materials used in the theatre trades to develop a system for information that Dow described as 'being presently in use in a large number of Architects' offices'.[100] A library of theatre ground plans was to be established, acting as an accessible repository of theatre designs and stage specifications for both members and non-members.[101] The Materials sub-committee, in its infancy, felt it desirable to keep member

[99] Ibid., p. 9.
[100] Ibid., p. 12.
[101] Ibid,. p. 12. The library initially made 'particularly good progress with the details of London theatres'. (Ibid).

numbers low during an 'initial stage of planning', but like the others it had a cross-committee membership.[102]

The Publications sub-committee had an initial membership of one – theatre practitioner Stephen Joseph – who acted as chairman, secretary, and sole representative until 1967. Under Joseph's direction, the committee welcomed articles of technical interest from members to be published and distributed to the wider ABTT network. Members visiting provincial theatres, and especially new theatre buildings, were 'asked to send in their views and information on the technical facilities they saw'.[103] The request for information was made primarily to gather articles for publication, but it had a dual purpose, as documents received were also to be passed on to the Materials sub-committee to support the development of the theatres reference repository, with the intention of informing a growing standardisation of design in technical practice.

The Stage Lighting sub-committee – initially chaired by lighting designer Joe Davis and then, within a year, architect Elidir Davies – was an example of the how the Association, 'in one field at least, was already very active'.[104] This group, 're-organised and enlarged to make it more inclusive', came into being at the same time as the ABTT (March 1961) and was the first to be approved by the Executive committee.[105] Immediately studying the installations planned for four large West-End theatres, the Stage Lighting committee submitted an alternate scheme, somewhat larger in scale, which was rejected by the owners as being too

[102] Ibid., p. 12.
[103] Ibid., p. 14.
[104] ABTT, Bulletin No. 1, March 1961 (London: ABTT, 1961), p. 9. ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT) .
[105] ABTT, Bulletin No. 4, p. 7.

complicated.[106] As a result, the committee began to compile and publish a pamphlet setting out the requirements for stage lighting 'in simple terms' to better support their work.[107]

The Theatre, Architecture, and Planning sub-committee (TAP) defined its main function as 'trying to help those who intended to commission theatres in how to avoid serious mistakes being made'.[108] Initially, a form of advisory service was discussed, but it was decided that such a body would be neither practical nor desirable, as 'the service would have to be free, and as members are heavily committed, it could only be of superficial nature'.[109] Instead, the committee looked to prepare a planning memoranda to help theatre design, starting with general considerations and gradually becoming more detailed. The document was intended to guide those designing new theatres in choosing the appropriate type and size of building and to make sure it 'satisfactorily fulfilled all artistic and technical requirements'.[110] It was also to include a list of accommodation appropriate to the various types and sizes of theatre, basic dimensional requirements in the form of minimum standards, and detail onstage equipment, lighting equipment, sound equipment, acoustics, and safety regulations. The first intention of the committee, however, was to publish a glossary, 'in pictorial form, giving the correct nomenclature to the various forms of staging and to outline the main groups of

[106] One of these theatres was the Royalty Theatre, London (referenced on p. 31 of the report), which became a television studio and was later taken over by the London School of Economics as a lecture theatre as a result of its poor initial design. Interestingly, the stage lighting equipment was supplied by Strand Electric but was seen as 'out of touch with trends in stage lighting'. Correspondence with Roger Fox, Historic Research committee, ABTT, March 2021.
[107] ABTT, Bulletin No. 4, p. 7.
[107] Ibid., p. 7.
[108] TAP members included, Peter Moro (chairman), Norman Marshall (ABTT chairman), Elidir Davies, George Devine, John English, Roger Furse, Peter Hall, Stephen Joseph, Sean Kenny, and R. C. E. Shields. ABTT, Bulletin No. 3, p. 3.
[109] Ibid., p. 3.
[110] Ibid., p. 4.

theatre building, educational, civic, repertory, club, commercial, etc'.[111] The committee's memoranda evolved to become a series of articles published in *Architect Journal* in 1964 and 1967, which I discuss later in this chapter and further in chapter two. The journal articles were later collated as *Theatre Planning*, an ABTT publication first edited by Roderick Ham in 1972, and again in 1986, which I discuss further in chapter three. Becoming a book of authority on theatre design practice, *Theatre Planning* was published again in 2010 with Judith Strong as editor, a prominent Arts Council officer of the 1980s who I discuss further in chapter four. The book was most recently published with Margaret Shewring – Emeritus Reader in Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Warwick – as editor in 2024.

The post-war period had accelerated changes in the aesthetic demands of British theatre, with technology advancing rapidly and the ABTT, by the end of 1961, emerging as an interconnected and multi-layered network, positioning itself to lead a reassessment of problems in planning and design before a new generation of theatre buildings arose. Arguing for greater standardisation, increased training, and design modernisation, the six sub-committee groups of the ABTT – Stage Lighting; Theatre, Architecture, and Planning; Publications; Materials; Sound; and Fire and Safety Regulations – pursued a collective ambition for change in technical practice, reflective of, and driving, the wider transformations taking place within British theatre. The ABTT membership believed 'mistakes were being made out of ignorance to the needs of the performing arts and the most important task was to examine these needs and make recommendations based upon the wide experience of members, in every branch of theatre'.[112] The ABTT, formed out of and

[111] Ibid., p. 4.
[112] Roderick Ham (ed.), *Theatre planning, Association of British Theatre Technicians* (London: The Architectural Press, 1972), p. 7.

orientated by growing networks in specialist technical labour and the success of the Adaptable Theatres conference, held a previously dispersed body of expertise together with common goals and sense of purpose, and an influential leadership. Having discussed how the time was right for an organisation of technical specialists to emerge in 1961, the formation of the ABTT, and the committee structures that evolved to support the development of the organisation, in section two, I will now look to those most prominent in the creation of the Association, and their motivations for industry change.

1.2 An individual response: status, motive, and social capital

One of the driving forces behind the emergence of the ABTT was the influence and impact of its most prominent members in the years leading up to 1961. Social networks developed across small groups and wider relationships in the early post-war period as specialists positioned themselves within a precarious and competitive technical field that lacked governance and representation to influence and inform new ways of working. In this section, I look at some of the most prominent individuals at this time, those identified in section one who had the greatest involvement in the pre and early years of the Association – Richard Southern, Stephen Joseph, Frederick Bentham, and Richard Pilbrow. Taking a chronological account of each of the four members identified, I present the network points and organisational mesh of their careers, focussing on the years leading up to the formation of technical representation through the ABTT. I use their stories to show how relationships developed, identifying the networks that formed around technical expertise and the connections of power that existed across developing stage specialisation.

When it formed in March 1961, the ABTT was one of several post-war theatre associations that many members of the Executive committee were active within. This was a period that saw complicated and interconnected networks grow to include a variety of societies and organisations – with similar aims, structures, and memberships. Both the Society for Theatre Research (STR) and the Association of Theatrical Designers and Craftsmen (ATDC) formed under the influence of Richard Southern prior to the formation of the ABTT. The ATDC, instrumental in developing a discourse on new forms of stage theatre design, was established in 1946 with the support of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) and Strand Electric. Strand Electric, a leading manufacturer of lighting and technical equipment for theatre, supported the publication of *TABS* magazine, a dominant quarterly journal on technical theatre since its first edition in October 1937. Edited between 1957 and 1974 by Frederick Bentham with long-time collaborator Percy Corry, the journal circulated articles by those who would become most associated with the ABTT, advocating for the better design of theatres and the development of standards and specialist knowledge in technical roles. Bentham, a member of the Society of Television Lighting Designers (STLD), along with Richard Pilbrow and John Wyckham, became affiliated with the Society of British Theatre Lighting Designers (SBTLD) in the 1960s as a contemporary form of stage specialism evolved. Emerging in a period of increased bifurcation and specialisation of technical expertise, Southern, Bentham, and Pilbrow went on to join further organisations, including the Society of Theatre Consultants (STC), formed by Stephen Joseph to support the design and building of new playhouses during the post-war boom. I will now explore the rise in prominence of original ABTT members Southern, Joseph, Bentham, and Pilbrow.

Appointed Theatre Planning Advisor to the newly formed Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) in 1947, theatre historian, author, and founder ABTT member Richard Southern was an early adopter and advocate for the need of better planning and design of theatre stages in Britain.[113] He worked in various capacities across stage, acting, and managing, specialising in the study of stage technique and theatre architecture. As technical lecturer at Goldsmith's College in 1932, and then London Theatre Studio in 1937, Southern began a twenty-year study of theatrical techniques, equipment, and architecture. His first book, *Stage Setting*, was published in 1937, and his second, *Proscenium and Sight-Lines*, followed in 1939. In the same year, while examining the loft of the Theatre Royal, Bristol, Southern found a portion of the original stage machinery from 1764. It was this discovery that led to his study of the development of scenery in British theatre, eventually published as *Changeable Scenery* in 1952, establishing a pattern of thinking on theatre stage design that would indirectly and directly have influence over the formation of the ABTT.

In 1946, Southern became a council member of the newly formed Association of Theatrical Designers and Craftsmen, under the chairmanship of Roger Furse.[114] The Association was

[113] Richard Southern (1903–1989) was a theatre designer, academic, researcher, and prolific collector. He was educated at St Dunstan's College and later at Goldsmith's Art School and the Royal Academy of Art, where he trained as a designer. From 1928, he worked in various capacities on the stage, acting and stage-managing in London and abroad, specialising in the study of stage technique and theatre architecture. He designed scenery for over fifty shows, including productions at the Everyman Theatre, Cambridge Festival Theatre (where he was art director), and various London theatres. In 1935 he began a twenty-year study of theatrical techniques of earlier times. During this time he made a collection of about eight thousand pictures illustrating scenery and the architecture and machinery of theatres from all over the world. In 1947, he became involved in the investigation and reconstruction of period theatres and stages, including the Georgian Theatre, Richmond. He later published (jointly with Ivor Brown) *The Georgian Theatre, Richmond, Yorkshire: the story of the theatre*. Southern was also responsible for the restoration of the first American theatre in Williamsburg, Virginia. University of Bristol, Theatre Collection, *Richard Southern Collection*. https://www.bristol.ac.uk/theatre-collection/explore/theatre/richard-southern-collection/ [last accessed: 21 December 2024].

[114] Other council members included James Lever (president), John Gower Parks (vice chairman), Beryl Anthony, Edward Delany, Peter Goffin, Anthony Holland, Tanya Moiseiwitsch, T. Osborne Robinson, and Guy Sheppard – membership included designers, painters, property makers, costumiers, and design assistants.

established to bring designers and craftsmen of the theatre together in a professional organisation, a forerunner to memberships such as the ABTT, which twenty-five years later echoed much of the ATDC's organisational aims, methods, and structures. The ATDC facilitated joint action on all matters affecting the common interests of its members, united but not as a union, and to create and maintain a high standard of stage design.[115] The manifesto for the ATDC, containing numerous references to Southern's writing, stated:

> It is evident that the profession of the theatrical designer is widening, and that it occupies a place of value in contemporary society comparable to that of the architect or the engineer (…) Certain designers have already made important contributions to other branches of the theatre – to historic research, to the problems of modern theatre planning and stage equipment, and in the sphere of education. It is the purpose and function of this association to encourage exchange of ideas between individuals and groups, and to correlate their various activities.[116]

With support from the International Theatre Institute[117] and Strand Electric,[118] the Association of Theatrical Designers and Craftsmen presented a major exhibition at the

[115] Keith Lodwick, *Association of Theatrical Designers and Craftsmen – summary of V & A archives*, August 2002 (correspondence with Peter Ruthen-Hall, January 2017), p. 2.
[116] Ibid.
[117] ITI was created on the initiative of the first UNESCO director general, Sir Julian Huxley, and the playwright and novelist J. B. Priestly in 1948, just after the Second World War and at the beginning of the Cold War, when the Iron Curtain divided the East and the West. The aim of the founders of ITI was to build an organisation that was aligned with UNESCO's goals on culture, education, and the arts, and which would focus its endeavours on improving the status of all members of the performing arts professions. They envisaged an organisation that created platforms for international exchange and for engagement in the education of the performing arts, for beginners and professionals alike, as well as using the performing arts for mutual understanding and peace. https://www.iti-worldwide.org/iti.html [last accessed: 19 February 2021].
[118] Strand Electric was founded in 1914 by theatre electricians Arthur Earnshaw and Phillip Sheridan at 19–24 Floral Street, London. Over the next fifty years, Strand became the UK's and Europe's principal manufacturers of stage lighting and theatre equipment. In 1968, Strand was purchased by Rank Film Corporation and became

Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in 1951. It also produced and published periodicals, and developed a reference collection of theatre designs and stage equipment. The ATDC formed a network of knowledgeable members, including scholars and practitioners, and aimed to become influential by approaching other organisations to work jointly with the ambition of bringing change to working standards and practice in theatre – 'no matter the distance from London'.[119] By 1950, the ATDC membership – made up of designers, painters, property makers, costumiers, and assistants – included an array of prominent theatre practitioners and was headed by future ABTT founder members Richard Southern and Roger Furse.[120] However, despite the establishment and success of its individual members, the ATDC was wound up in 1961, the year the ABTT formed, 'seemingly because of the disinterest of its membership'.[121] The reasons why the ATDC was not able to provide a home for those who founded the ABTT, why it did not provide the right vehicle for new concerns, will be explored further in chapter two. Here, I simply state that with the disbandment of the ATDC in 1961, which had acted as a precursor organisation for Southern and Furse, an opportunity opened for the ABTT to emerge and to become established as the lead technical organisation for change in the years that followed.

The launch of another organisation, the Society for Theatre Research, in 1948, built on the success of *Theatre Notebook*, a four-page publication dedicated to theatre research and written by three non-academics (at that time), Sybil Rosenfeld, Ifan Kyrle Fletcher, and

Rank Strand. https://www.skinflintdesign.com/lights/manufacturer/strand-electric [last accessed: 19 February 2021].

[119] Keith Lodwick, *Association of Theatrical Designers and Craftsmen*, p. 4.

[120] Members included, Edward Carrick, Sophie Fedorovitch, Peter Goffin, Anthony Holland, Tanya Moiseiwitsch, John Gower Parks, Paul Sheriff, Hugh Skillen, Feliks Topolski, Michael Warre, Doris Zinkeisen,

[121] Keith Lodwick, *Association of Theatrical Designers and Craftsmen*, p. 6.

Richard Southern.[122] An advert, published in *TABS* magazine, informed its readers of a public meeting to discuss the various aims and uses of the new society. In the article, the committee stated, 'one of the indispensable needs of the immediate future will be to make available to the architects and builders of our new theatres the store of information that experts possess on the subject' and 'to provide a link between the practical requirements of the modern stage and the results of historical and technical research'.[123] In proposing the society, Kyrle Fletcher stated, 'members should bring together their enthusiasms in a true community of interests, maintain a staunch loyalty to scholarship, and always use it in the best interests of the living theatre'.[124] The first ten years of the Society provided a programme of public lectures and annual publications on the history and techniques of British theatre. The STR also supported an international conference on theatre research (1955), leading to the setting up of the International Federation of Theatre Research and the first world conference on theatre research in Vienna (1957). The Society also held the first public meeting to discuss the setting up of a theatre museum (1955) and worked in conjunction with the Council for the Protection of Theatres (forerunner of the Theatres Trust) on the preservation of venues threatened with demolition.

In 1951, shortly after designing its new theatre studio, Southern was appointed as the Department of Drama's Rockerfeller Lecturer at the University of Bristol, delivering a series of talks that were later made into a book called *The Open Stage* (1953). The lectures discussed

[122] There were no university drama departments in 1945 (Bristol was the first British one, started in 1947), though there were a few scholars in English departments who were interested in theatre as opposed to drama as literature, notably Allardyce Nicoll (Birmingham) who later became the Society's President.
[123] Hugh Cotterill, A Society for Theatre Research, *TABS* (Vol. 6, Issue 1, 1948), pp, 27-28 (p. 27). I discuss further the role of the STR in developing a 'store of information' in chapter two. (Ibid).
[124] The Society for Theatre Research – History: https://www.str.org.uk/about/history/ [last accessed: 19 November 2020].

Southern's conviction that 'whenever you put on any form of theatrical show, the thing that matters most (on the material side) is not the scenery but the stage – its shape, its nature, and its relation to the audience'.[125] Surmising that the significant effect of the stage on acting and on a play is too little recognised in British theatre, Southern argued, 'that there can be any other kind of stage than that of the orthodox modern theatre, which many call a picture-frame stage, seems to have escaped most of us'.[126] This statement, an attack on the continued use of the proscenium stage to the neglect of all others within British theatre, exemplifies Southern's belief in the 'urgent need of modern drama to be served by an alternate and adequate acting-place'.[127] These public talks, a consideration of over twenty years of research and writing onstage planning and design, supported a developing narrative on the role of technical theatre in Britain, which was first advocated through the formation of both the ATDC and STR, and which later informed the emergence of the ABTT. To this end, and as a reflection of Southern's growing influence and power on technical theatre, it was he to whom the AITT turned in 1960 for support in holding their third biennale, in London, to discuss the use of new forms of theatre in stage design.

Also a champion of new forms of theatre, in particular theatre-in-the-round, founder ABTT member Stephen Joseph was influential in the design and development of post-war theatres, acting, writing, and performance. He challenged generally accepted beliefs of what theatre

[125] Richard Southern, *The open stage: and the modern theatre in research and in practice* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p. 11.
[126] Ibid., p. 10.
[127] Ibid., p. 11.

should be, questioning long held assumptions of design, look, build, and function.[128] He argued, in 1962, that:

> Not only are theatres public buildings in the sense that a live audience is part and parcel of a performance, but also (increasingly, these days) much of the money that pays for the buildings comes through the Arts Council or the local council from the ratepayer and the taxpayer.[129]

Advocating the need for experts to discuss and challenge theatre design, and with a desire to 're-educate actors, architects and the theatre-going public', Joseph exposed and explored the issues connected with building new theatres and playhouses and the development of technical specialist involvement.[130]

Attending the Central School of Speech and Drama at the age of 16, Joseph went on to be awarded a Master's degree in English Literature from the University of Cambridge before taking up a post as tutor, once again at Central. He studied for a degree in drama at the University of Iowa with a focus on playwriting. Upon returning to England from the USA, he

[128] Stephen Joseph was born in London, the child of actress Hermione Gingold and the publisher Michael Joseph. He was educated at Clayesmore School in Dorset. At the age of 16 he became a student of the Central School of Speech and Drama, where he graduated two years later. From 1941 to 1946 he served as an officer in the Royal Navy, where he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. After the war he studied English literature at Jesus College, Cambridge, leading to the award of an MA degree. While at Cambridge he joined Footlights and both wrote and directed *La Vie Cambridgienne*, a revue broadcast by the BBC in July 1948. In November 1948 he joined the Lowesoft Repertory Theatre as director, then moved on to manage the Summer Theatre season at Frinton-on-Sea. While there he saw a production by Jack Mitchley of the Christopher Fry play *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, staged in the round, which caused him to experience 'a bee beginning to buzz at the back of my mind'. He returned to the Central School of Speech and Drama as a tutor, then in 1951 was granted leave of absence to study for a degree in playwriting at the University of Iowa. Stephen Joseph, *Actor and architect* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), p. ix.

[129] Ibid., p. ix.

[130] Ibid., p. ix.

founded the Studio Theatre Company, the first professional repertory group in Britain dedicated to performing plays in the round. Beginning at Scarborough Public Library in 1955, by the following year the company was touring across England as a portable theatre-in-the-round, playing in converted halls mainly across the Midlands. In 1962, Joseph went on to be appointed the first fellow of the newly founded Department of Drama at Manchester University, echoing the achievements of Richard Southern, in Bristol, ten years earlier. This same year also saw him create a permanent base for his Studio Theatre Company, at the Victoria Theatre in Stoke-on-Trent. Indeed, it is significant that Joseph's interest in theatre-in-the-round should develop in the 1950 and '60s, in a period where we see civic and subsidised theatre begin to emerge, breaking with nineteenth-century methods still commonly used by theatre designers at that time.[131] Joseph continued to write upon the merits of theatre-in-the-round – including articles, letters, newspapers, and books, such as *Planning for New Forms of Theatre* (1962), *Theatre in the Round* (1967), and the posthumously published *New Theatre Forms* (1968) – alongside his continued involvement with the ABTT.

In 1964, Stephen Joseph led the establishment of a new organisation, the Society of Theatre Consultants, to compliment the ABTT's work onstage planning and to offer a more holistic view to theatre design. A meeting, called at the offices of the Arts Council of Great Britain, gathered theatre producers, lighting designers, historians, and architects with recent experience in theatre building design to see what might be done to improve the practicality of modern playhouses then being planned in the UK.[132] The result was the formation of the

[131] As Fair explains, 'subsidised theatre typically meant non-profit repertory playhouses with a resident company of actors presenting a wide range of productions. This sort of theatre was favoured by subsidy-givers and came to dominate the landscape of regional drama after 1950'. Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses: an architectural history of Britain's new theatres, 1945–1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 3.
[132] The meeting also included the head of the theatre section at the LCC, as he had the most recent experience as regulator of theatre buildings at that time.

STC. Its members, many of whom were also ABTT associates, formed a network of theatre consultants in response to the growing number of civic theatres that were being planned in Britain. The STC was set up to act as an accrediting body, setting fee scales and drafting codes of conduct to govern the creation of venues for performing arts through paid consultancy.[133] The emergence of the STC was in response to the ABTT, an association who had looked towards a non-unionised approach focussed on building a sense of community, advocacy, and information exchange.[134]

These early specialist theatre consultants brought expertise in production management, stage lighting, and sound techniques, and began to work with architects to improve auditoria and stage design. Joseph argued that although architects often consulted experts, theatre buildings continued to be designed poorly nonetheless because, firstly, 'the advice had often been given free of charge and had therefore been freely ignored' and, secondly, 'the expert had not been particularly qualified to give the sort of advice required'.[135] Joseph, along with many of those who were founder members of the ABTT, formed this secondary organisation to influence design at the point of construction rather than once building had already begun.

---

[133] The founding members of the STC – now known as the Institute of Theatre Consultants – were Stephen Joseph (1964–1968, theatre historian), Ian Albery (1964–2002, theatre owner and producer), Frederick Bentham (1964–1986, lighting designer), Norman Branson (1964–1967, theatre architect), Elidir Davies (1964–1984, theatre architect), Roderick Ham (1964–1971, theatre architect), Sean Kenny (1964–1973, stage designer), Herbert Marshall (1964–1968, writer and producer), Richard Pilbrow (1964–2024, Honorary Fellow of the Institute, lighting designer and producer), John Wyckham (1964–2010, production manager), Martin Carr (1964–2014, production manager), John English (1964–1991, producer and founder of the Midlands Arts Centre), Norman Marshall (1964–1980, producer), Richard Southern (1964–1989, theatre historian), Michael Warre (1964–1987, stage and lighting designer), Joe Davis (1964–1984, lighting designer), Peter Jay (1964–1983, theatre architect), Percy Corry (1964–1971, Honorary Fellow thereafter, theatre equipment and lighting designer), Eric Jordan (1971, theatre architect, Head of Historic Buildings GLC; he guided the committee in the formation of the Society and its structure but was unable to become a member until he left the GLC in 1971). *About the Institute of Theatre Consultants* https://theatreconsultants.org.uk/about [last accessed: 27.01.20]

[134] As discussed by early member Michael Holden, 'the ABTT did not want to go down a similar line, where it would be in conflict with BECTU, Equity and other unions'. (Correspondence with Michael Holden, STC Chairman 2020, July 2020).

[135] Quoted in, Fred Bentham, *Sixty years of light work: an autobiography* (Isleworth: Strand Publishing, 1992), p. 231.

With little capital available for performing arts venues, the STC believed it 'apparent that precious money was, too often, being spent on inadequate buildings'.[136] As the society grew, expertise expanded beyond technical provision – which is what the ABTT provided – to focussing on more subtle aspects of stage and auditorium design and the importance of customer and artistic provision.

Two specialists in lighting design and innovative stage technology, Frederick Bentham and Richard Pilbrow, played leading roles in the technical development of theatre, cinema, and television in post-war Britain and were fundamental in the establishment of both the ABTT and the STC. Bentham saw his participation in the ABTT as more akin to membership in the Art Workers' Guild, stating the organisation's role was 'averting the mistakes pending in the new theatre boom'.[137] A combination of artist and engineer, Bentham started his career in 1929 at General Electric as assistant to the theatre consulting engineers department, before working for Strand Electric for over forty years.[138] Leading the company's research and development department, Bentham (and Strand) became synonymous with new technology, and he was responsible for many of the advances made in the design of keyboards and

---

[136] Institute of theatre Consultants, *About the institute of theatre consultants* https://theatreconsultants.org.uk/about [last accessed: 5 March 2021].

[137] Fred Bentham, *Sixty years of light work: an autobiography* (Isleworth: Strand Publishing, 1992), p. 226. The Art Workers' Guild's stated purpose is 'to advance education in all the visual arts and crafts by means of lectures, meetings, demonstrations, discussions … and to foster and maintain high standards of design and craftsmanship in all branches of the visual arts and crafts in any way which may be beneficial to the community'. Art Workers Guild, *Constitution* https://www.artworkersguild.org/about-us/constitution/ [last accessed: 15 April 2021].

[138] Fred Bentham was born in Harlesden in north-west London on 23 October 1911. He joined the Strand Electric and Engineering Company in 1932 and quickly made his mark by overhauling the product range, publishing a new case-bound catalogue in 1936 which included a host of innovative products including mirror spots, acting area and pageant lanterns, and the light console. This revolutionary lighting control, and the ubiquitous Pattern 23 spotlight became synonymous with Fred Bentham and Strand.
Theatrecrafts, *Frederick Bentham Obituary*, https://www.theatrecrafts.com/pages/home/archive/people/frederick-bentham/#:~:text=Obituary,his%2042%20years%20with%20Strand [last accessed: 21 December 2024].

switches that played a pivotal role in the enhancement of lighting and lighting control in British theatres. Bentham also developed the use of coloured light as an art form, providing regular lectures and colour music demonstrations,[139] advocating for the growing (artistic) importance of lighting upon theatrical production.[140] As his career developed, his energies were directed towards the design of theatres, scenery, and lighting technology, with Bentham at the forefront of thyristor dimmer design, profile spotlight developments, and memory lighting systems.[141] In particular, Bentham pioneered the light console, based on a Compton organ, transforming lighting control from a large, complex onstage mechanical device to one that could be operated by a single person in control of all lighting elements and with a view of the stage. This innovation had a profound influence on all future lighting controls and stage designs in British theatres – and is still the basis of many contemporary lighting systems.

Bentham published many books and articles on technical practice, including *Stage Lighting* (1950), *The Art of Stage Lighting* (1968), and *New Theatres in Britain* (1970).[142] Importantly, in 1957, he became editor of *TABS* magazine for Strand Electric, and then later editor of *Sightline*, a journal produced by the ABTT. The in-house publication of Strand Electric since

[139] Colour music was a lighting display of the stage 'performed' by Bentham to music using an adapted organ which allowed one person to control multiple lights, a forerunner for his early lighting console designs.
[140] Bentham was made a member of the Art Workers' Guild after he presented his 1936 lecture 'Stage lighting as an art' to Guild members.
[141] A thyristor dimmer is a kind of lighting accessory used to change the luminous flux of the electric light source and adjust the illuminance. A profile spotlight is a type of stage light that produces a focussed beam of light to illuminate a specific area, such as a performer or a part of a venue. A memory lighting system, also known as a memory console, is a lighting control system that allows lighting designers to record and store lighting scenes digitally.
[142] *New Theatres in Britain* was published by Frederick Bentham, under the *Tabs* journal brand, by Strand Electric in 1970. The book covered over eighty new theatre buildings and designs reviewed in *Tabs* between 1958 and 1969 by Bentham and fellow ABTT colleagues, ranging from the Craige College, Ayr, to the Swan in Worcester.

1937, *TABS* magazine was established as an international journal, with a worldwide circulation of approximately 17,500 by 1960.[143] Initially focussing on developments in stage lighting and machinery, the journal developed into a platform for a small but regular network of contributors 'devoted to planning and the technical aspects of theatre'.[144] Many of those who went on to advocate for change in technical practice (including Richard Southern, Stephen Joseph, Richard Pilbrow, Sean Kenny, Peter Moro, Iain Mackintosh, Basil Dean, Percy Corry, John Wyckham, and Ian Albery) regularly contributed influential reviews, papers, and articles. Their prominence is particularly evident in editions from 1955 onwards as this powerful representative voice, both individually and collectively, wrote numerous articles advocating for the growing separation of specialised technical roles, the need for better designed buildings, and the importance of new stage technology.

Involvement within the Society of Television Lighting Designers and the informal creation in 1961 of the Society of British Theatre Lighting Designers brought Bentham further networks and influence.[145] An organisation created to share information and opinions on billing, fees, and contracts, the founding of the SBTLD reflected growing diversification within stage labour while recognising the importance of technical expertise in new forms of theatre and beyond. One of the 'leading proponents' of that newly categorised specialism and a founding member of the SBTLD, Richard Pilbrow, became one of several directors and specialist technicians offering consultancy and advice in the planning of new theatres in the immediate years that

[143] Fred Bentham, *Sixty years of light work: an autobiography* (Isleworth: Strand Publishing, 1992), p. 174.
[144] Tabs, *New Theatres in Britain* (London: Rank Strand Electric, 1970), p. 1.
[145] In 1975, SBTLD changed its name to the Society of British Theatre Designers (SBTD), which still exists today, and also branched as the Association of Lighting Designers (ALD) in 1981. SBTD members also had ABTT membership.

followed.[146] Beginning his career at the Central School of Speech and Drama on a stage management course he did not finish, Pilbrow soon left to become a stage manager in the West End.[147] He quickly gave this up, however, having been inspired to begin a career as a lighting designer by two American authors, Joel Rubin and Lee Watson, and their book, *Theatrical Lighting Practice* (1954). Discussing the role of the Lighting Designer in American theatre, a position that did not exist in British theatre – at least by name – they described much of the practical skills of lighting a stage that Pilbrow recognised and would go on to influence in the years that followed.

Pilbrow and Bentham first met at the second Association Internationale des Techniciens de Theatre conference, ÜBER Theaterbau (Theatre Construction: highly mechanised theatre and opera houses), held in Berlin, 21–25 November 1960. At the time, London's theatre industry, both insular and isolated, was 'a place where, as a technician or designer you seldom met your professional peers'.[148] The Berlin conference provided a unique opportunity for those in the UK, who were isolated from one another, to meet and discuss technical practice with experts from around the world. After being inspired by what they had witnessed, some of the few UK delegates present in Berlin – including Pilbrow and Bentham, as well as Sean Kenny,

[146] Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses,* p. 175.

[147] Born in Beckenham, Kent, Richard Pilbrow was the son of Marjorie (née Hayward), a music teacher, and Gordon Pilbrow, a property developer and Olympic fencer who took part in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Pilbrow believed his interest in lighting may have been engendered by growing up during the Second World War and watching the floodlights, flashes, and fires of the blitz from the fringes of south London. After attending the nearby Bickley Hall prep school, then Cranbrook school in Kent, Pilbrow did his national service in the RAF, becoming a corporal. He went to the Central School of Speech and Drama, where he met Victoria Pilbrow, and together they helped transfer the school's show in the year of their graduation, 1955, to Her Majesty's Theatre (now His Majesty's) in the West End. They married in 1958. Her Majesty's Theatre offered Pilbrow a job as an assistant stage manager on the Broadway play *The Teahouse of the August Moon*. There he was exposed to the work of Peter Larkin (who had designed the original lighting in the US) and George Schaefer (who adapted it for the West End), and started to see the possibilities of a discipline that was only in its infancy in the UK. The Guardian, *Richard Pilbrow Obituary*, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2024/jan/08/richard-pilbrow-obituary [last accessed: 21 December 2024].

[148] Richard Pilbrow, *A theatre project: a backstage adventure* (New York: Plasma Media, 2011), p. 118.

Peter Moro, and Eric Jordan, and along with Americans Thomas DeGaetani, Ben Schlanger, and Joel Rubin – 'agreed America and Britain needed some form of organisation — an association of theatre designers, architects, and technicians that could be a forum for discussion and would allow regular peer-to-peer communication'.[149] In America, the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT) was immediately established, 'to promote dialogue, research, and learning among practitioners of theatre design and technology'.[150] Upon their return to the UK, this small but knowledgeable network of male-dominated technical specialists, along with Richard Southern and Stephen Joseph, reconvened to discuss the formation of an organisation that Peter Hall wanted to 'break down the isolation felt in English theatre'.[151] The combined social, intellectual, and cultural status of these prominent individuals came together to support the networks needed, allowing organisations such as the Association of British Theatre Technicians to form and represent the technical expertise of its members. As I will now turn to in section three, this new and representative voice immediately began advocating for better standards in the design of theatre buildings, using the failings of Britain's first publicly funded post-war civic playhouse, the Belgrade Theatre, to champion for recognition in emerging stage specialisms and techniques.

[149] Richard Pilbrow, *A theatre project*, p. 85.
[150] United States Institute for Theatre Technology, *About USITT,* https://www.usitt.org/about [last accessed: 24 November 2020].
[151] Peter Hall, Introduction, in, *Adaptable theatres,* ed. by Stephen Joseph (London: Association of British Theatre Technicians, 1962), pp. 7-9 (p. 7).

1.3 A time for change: stage standards, design, and representation

The first four decades of post-war Britain represents a period where new public funding allowed regional and civic theatre to assume real prominence. A wave of newly subsidised theatres was being designed and shaped by a range of industry professionals, which, for the first time, included specialists of technical practice. Pioneers of early consultancy, ABTT members Richard Southern, Stephen Joseph, Frederick Bentham, and Richard Pilbrow were part of an emerging network of professionals whose expertise was offered to 'avoid the defects in such buildings as the Stratford-upon-Avon Theatre'.[152] The ABTT, following its formation in 1961, provided advice on plans for a working theatre and guidance on technical equipment. The Association quickly grew to work alongside two other significant committee groups, the Theatres Advisory Council and the Society of Theatre Consultants, in the two decades that followed. Each created their own network of specialists, who in turn formed interconnected webs, sharing a common purpose of remedying theatre design mistakes of the past. The ABTT, acting as a volunteer community of information exchange, advocated for the appropriate application of stage machinery and consultation in new theatre construction, in an attempt to counter the lack of specialist knowledge and standards which the membership saw as so evident in early post-war theatre designs.

In section one of this chapter, I have shown how the time was right for a membership of technical specialists to emerge amid a plexus of interconnected relations. In section two, I have discussed some of the principal people advocating for change in early post-war

[152] Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses,* p. 174.

technical practice and how the networks they built allowed for the formation of the ABTT and other industry bodies to follow. I will now turn attention towards the early period of post-war theatre construction, where traditional values in design were often relied upon in the absence of specialist stage representation, and discuss the poor backstage design of a playhouse which acted as a further catalyst in the formation of the ABTT, the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry.

In its 1959 report *Housing the Arts in Great Britain*, the Arts Council of Great Britain stated, 'for the last twenty years or more little has been done to provide adequate and appropriate buildings for the arts in Britain, and since the war only three major projects of any kind has been carried out: the Royal Festival Hall, the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, and the Mermaid Theatre at Puddle Dock'.[153] A fourth project, the Royalty Theatre, London, opened in 1960 but became 'representative of failings in design'.[154] For the Royalty, 'failure was to create a suitable auditorium, by using traditional and out-of-date principles', the result of which was the theatre becoming a cinema within a year of opening.[155] The few specialist theatre consultants advocating the need for technical advice argued that the preservation of old theatres not only commanded more support than the building of new ones but also ensured that the few new theatres which had been built replicated the failings of the old. They believed theatre designs, at that time, did not take into consideration the needs of new forms of production that audiences wanted to engage with. The proscenium frame remained dominant and, as Stephen Joseph lamented of the Belgrade Theatre, 'decorative finishes may

[153] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Housing the Arts in Great Britain part I*; *Housing the Arts in Great Britain part II, the needs of the English provinces* (London: Curwen Press, 1961), p. vii.
[154] Stephen Joseph (ed.), *Actor and architect* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), p. 8.
[155] Ibid., p. 8.

be contemporary but the stage area itself remains old-fashioned'.[156] Future members of the ABTT, advocating for a change in stage design standards, considered it essential that both those who commissioned new theatres and those who made them were aware of the problems and possibilities of design in order to avoid 'these same basic mistakes being continuously made'.[157] They did this, in part, with a modernising view of theatre as an art form, and as I discuss further in chapter two, with individual tastes of theatre, technology, and performance influencing new civic stages beyond the old nineteenth-century proscenium theatre model, thus supporting new modes of production and reception.

Figure 1.2: The Belgrade Theatre, 1958. City Archives – Coventry CCD/1/9/4/2, The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, *Reprinted from The Architect and Building News,* 18 June, 1958, (p. 5).



[156] Ibid., p. 9.
[157] ABTT, *Theatre planning*: *the Architects' Journal information library, AJ SFB (85)* (London: ABTT, 1964), p. 104.

The Belgrade Theatre, built in Coventry in 1958, was the first new professional playhouse to be constructed in Britain for nearly two decades and the country's first all-new civic auditorium. Opening three years before the arrival of the ABTT, the theatre, shown in figure 1.2, was designed for both the practical needs of the city and as a symbolic presence that represented modernity. Limited consultation from theatre practitioners, however, culminated in a series of ill-informed design decisions leaving stage and backstage facilities inadequate and open to criticism. Developed within the city architect's office, 'the Belgrade seemingly turned to established modes of theory and practice', deciding to forego the need for specialist technical consultation – the result of which was a fan-shaped auditorium with design principles based on the traditional horseshoe shape of older theatres.[158] Financially supported by Coventry City Council, the theatre was composed of a proscenium stage with an auditorium seating capacity of 910 spectators, associated backstage facilities, 6 shops, and 21 single-room flats.[159] The theatre, whose name commemorated a major gift of timber to the City of Coventry from the authorities of former Yugoslavia, was regarded as the herald of a new age and marked the beginning of a boom in British theatre construction.[160] Built within the wider context of post-war city renewal, the theatre, 'designed to function as a civic and community focus', attracted considerable national attention.[161] Commenting on the unusual use of local council funding, the *Observer* drama critic Kenneth Tynan was particularly enthusiastic, stating, 'it is one of the great decisions in the history of local government'.[162]

[158] Alistair Fair, *A new image of the living theatre: the genesis and design of the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, 1948–58*, Architectural History, 54, 347–382. p. 348. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/architectural-history/article/abs/new-image-of-the-living-theatre-the-genesis-and-design-of-the-belgrade-theatre-coventry-194858/B9AA63B385623869904A26D62410F082 [last accessed: 4 December 2020].
[159] ABTT, *Theatre planning*: *the Architects' Journal information library, AJ SFB (85)* (London: ABTT, 1964), p. 299.
[160] Alistair Fair, *A new image of the living theatre,* p. 347.
[161] Ibid., p. 348.
[162] Ibid., p .347.

Envisioned by Coventry's first appointed city architect, a new theatre was considered as part of plans to reconstruct the city following severe bombing in 1940 and 1941, within a new centralised area dedicated to leisure and entertainment. The idea gained momentum, particularly with the possibility of theatres, traditionally commercial in operation up to this point, receiving state and local subsidies following the formation of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1946 and the Local Government Act of 1948. At a national level, as architecture historian Alasdair Fair explains, 'the Arts Council of Great Britain was initially concerned with support for the practice of the arts rather than buildings in which they were housed, but the Local Government Act gave local authorities discretionary powers to levy a rate of up to sixpence in the pound for the arts'.[163] The Belgrade was to represent a more democratic venue for 'civic repertory operations' and symbolised the renewal of the city as its most 'prominent public and institutional building'.[164] The theatre was to be presented both in physical terms, as a centralised civic space within a new cityscape, and with symbolic meaning, engendering continuing civic consciousness and a sense of local identity.

It took until 1956 for plans to be finalised, under the initial direction of Donald Gibson and later by his successor, former London City Council (LCC) Town Planner Arthur Ling. In 1955, Ling arrived having been exposed to the planning of the Royal Festival Hall, built for the Festival of Britain in 1951. According to Coventry's Policy Advisory Committee, the initial drawings of Gibson and the amendments made by Ling resulted in a final design that was intended to 'make a better contribution to civic architecture'.[165] Paradoxically, it did this in

[163] Ibid., p. 351.
[164] Ibid., p .351.
[165] Ibid., p .359.

two ways: first, materially, as a prominent civic building within a rebuilt city; second, semiotically, having a civic role to play for the city and its community.[166]

Writing shortly after the theatre opened, soon to be ABTT founder member Stephen Joseph described stage arrangements as 'rather old fashioned', with *Architects' Journal* viewing the auditorium as 'basically a Victorian or Edwardian theatre'.[167] Being commissioned by the local authority rather than a theatre company, as was typical of the time (although the Midlands Theatre Company were involved initially), consultation between architect and practitioner was limited and no discussions were made between designers and stage experts.[168] As a result of limited technical knowledge within the city architect's team, backstage facilities were challenging almost from the outset, as established theory and traditional planning practice proved restrictive within a transforming theatrical and political landscape.[169] Consequently, the final design of the Belgrade did not take into account either contemporary movements in theatre away from nineteenth-century presuppositions or the need to accommodate modern machinery and practice requirements. Built to hold repertory, fixed-term short runs, touring productions, occasional lettings to amateur societies, conferences,

[166] The Belgrade can be read as the first post-war material theatre built in Britain. An early example of a theatre space incorporating a dual civic purpose, material semiotic analysis provides an understanding of the whole Belgrade experience, from conception to reception, with the physical design shaped by civic needs and the community – productions/seasons/audience make-up and organisation – shaped and determined by the building's configuration.

[167] Stephen Joseph (ed.), *Actor and architect* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), introduction, p. 1.; Alistair Fair, *A new image of the living theatre*, p .367.

[168] As an example of a transforming theatrical and political landscape, during the pre-war and immediate post-war period it was uncommon for theatre companies to commission buildings, as the structures of finance, agency, and local governance of the arts were restrictive in doing so.

[169] 'On the 2nd April 1957, the City Council decided the Belgrade Theatre should be managed by an independent non profit making company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital, to be known as the Belgrade Theatre Trust (Coventry) Limited. The Company was incorporated on the 8th November 1957, and the theatre was officially opened by H.R.H. The Duchess of Kent on the 27th March 1958. The company had a Council of Management of 15 by 1961 (10 being members of the City Council and 5 from outside the City Council) nominated annually by the City Council. The Arts Council of Great Britain nominated their Drama Director as an assessor'. City of Coventry, *Municipal handbook* (Coventry: North View Press, 1962). p. 2.

and concerts, the Belgrade opened in March 1958 with a production of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*. The show highlighted immediate difficulties in working conditions, with 'inadequate backstage facilities' a result of designers 'preoccupied with the public face of the building and aspirational civic ideals rather than the mechanics of theatre'.[170] There was 'immediate concern to the very limited wing space and backstage accommodation' from those who worked in the theatre, and this, in part, was what prompted the ABTT to form and immediately establish the Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committee (TAP) in 1961.[171]

An ABTT TAP review of the Belgrade Theatre in 1964 stated, 'limitations imposed by the site, and by the architects, indicated that from the backstage point of view this would be a difficult theatre to work and with over 900 seats it was likely to run into economic trouble'.[172] The impact of a large auditoria resulted in an immediate change of policy for the Belgrade, with a new focus on achieving maximum attendance given higher priority than 'risky' forms of theatre.[173] Subsidised, contemporary, and experimental works, for which the theatre was originally planned, were to be avoided and replaced by box office attractions that could generate greater income through larger footfall. Within two years, in addition to short runs and tours, a large part of the theatre's programme was devoted to a modified system of repertoire, replacing much of the new and experimental plays originally planned. The TAP report stated, 'difficulties lay across all aspects of the layout, from the front of house areas, foyers and auditorium, to the backstage areas, wings and ancillary spaces', contributing to

[170] Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses,* p. 99.
[171] ABTT, *Theatre planning*: *the Architects' Journal information library, AJ SFB (85)* (London: ABTT, 1964), p. 299.
[172] Ibid., p .300.
[173] Ibid., p. 300.

recurring expenses and shaping a move away from the organisation's original ambition of engendering public and civic consciousness with a sense of local identity.[174]

Writing in *Architects' Journal* in 1964, ABTT member Douglas Cornelissen asked, 'after several years running and a change of policy, how different does the Belgrade look?'[175] The article, written just three years after the emergence of the ABTT, was part of a series of papers published by the Association under the title *Technical Study and Briefing Guide*, providing evidence of a rapid rise and growing influence, confidence, and authoritative presence in modern theatre design. In his introduction to the guide, architect and chair of the ABTT TAP committee Peter Moro stated:

> This supplement has been prepared in close collaboration with the ABTT and many of its members have given advice and help in checking the information. The results should fill the gap which exists in available information and although the supplement cannot claim to be comprehensive, it should, if studied and followed, prevent the many avoidable mistakes that are still being made in theatre design.[176]

I discuss the effect of these papers to the establishment and expansion of the ABTT in chapters two and three. For now, I focus on the ABTT's detailed use of the Belgrade Theatre as an exemplar in poor theatre stage design, observing the dual importance of this playhouse

[174] Ibid., p. 301.
[175] Ibid., p. 300.
[176] Ibid., p. 300. Topics included the auditorium and stage, performers' spaces, rehearsal areas, and public spaces and provided technical studies of modern stage designs, as well as defining existing categories of theatre: commercial and touring theatre (excluding the West End), West End (London) theatre, civic theatre, festival theatre, club theatre, teaching and studio theatre, opera house, concert hall, and multi-purpose hall.

to the Association: first, as I have just discussed, acting as a catalyst in the emergence of the ABTT; and second, as I will now go on to show, serving as a warning to the theatre sector of the need to engage technical specialist representation such as the ABTT in the design of modern civic theatre buildings in the years that followed.

Figure 1.3: The Belgrade Theatre, lower foyer, 1958. *City Archives – Coventry CCD/1/9/4/2,* The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry*, Reprinted from The Architect and Building News*, 18 June, 1958, (p. 17).



When discussing the contemporary public areas of the Belgrade, functioning as 'transitional spaces', Cornelissen observed how the theatre's foyers and auditorium tried to bring

individuals together to form 'a collective and democratic body of the audience'.[177] He went on to describe prominent staircase placement, voids, and galleries, and the development of café bars and restaurants, as the backdrop to a new form of foyer experience for British theatre. These spaces (as seen in figure 1.3), designed to move people out of the auditorium and into communal areas at an interval, were open to all, promoting 'inter-audience contact'.[178] Accessible, and with large banks of glass facing a communal city square, the foyer brought daylight to what would have been a darkened space, making the outside visible and changing the theatre's relationship with its surroundings. The value of this 'semi-transparent skin' was in making the theatre more accessible to audiences, 'who might otherwise suffer fear of the threshold', and resulted in a building that 'from the outside looked unlike a theatre'.[179] The use of light and colour in the foyer as well as the placement of mosaics and panels across the wall, depicting Coventry's rich story, were used as Alistair Fair explains, to build communal history and 'for people to gain an understanding of their surroundings with a sense of civic pride'.[180] That communal idea was designed further with the inclusion of flats for use by actors from repertory companies with consistently changing memberships who, as *The Stage* noted, 'could often face forms of discrimination from private landlords when on tour'.[181]

Foyers were constructed with entrances at either side of the building, intended for egalitarian use, regardless of ticket price or whether a visit was for social, non-performance reasons. Front of house areas were described as 'comfortable' and 'spacious', with the

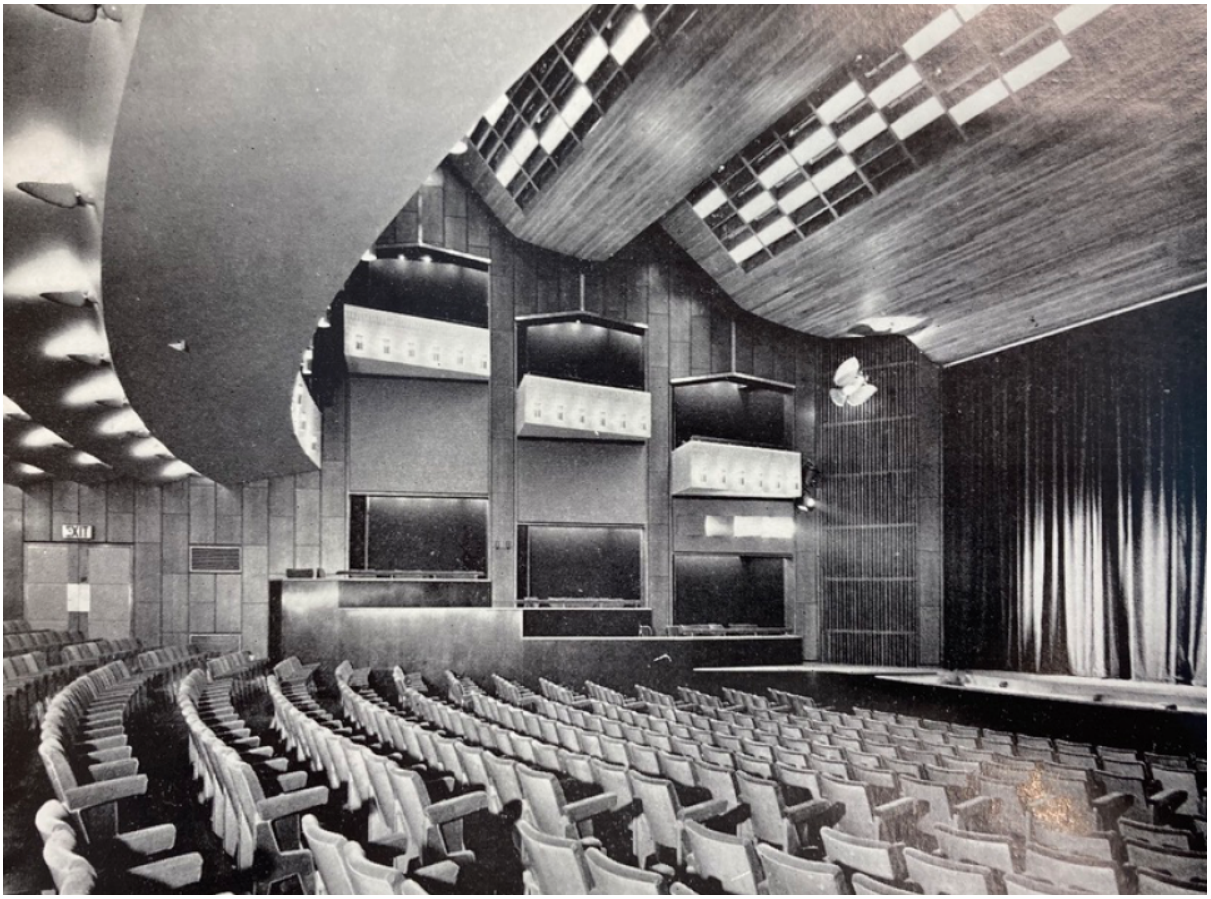
[177] Ibid., p. 300.
[178] Ibid., p. 300.
[179] Ibid., p. 300.
[180] Alistair Fair, *A new image of the living theatre,* p. 369.
[181] Quoted in, Alistair Fair, *A new image of the living theatre*, p. 370.

circulation and movement of the public 'satisfactory', but the poor location of a box office service generated 'heat loss' to the building and inconvenience for 'those who arrived by car'.[182] There was a 'well-positioned and large' cloakroom in the main foyer that 'during bad weather would be almost impossible to serve a full house properly', as storage space was 'only about twenty-five percent of what was needed'.[183] Toilets had been located separately from the cloakroom, with poor design leading to there 'being too few' of them when large audiences were in attendance, and the entrance doors were so badly positioned that 'queues formed outside which obstructed free access to the auditorium'.[184] Kitchen arrangements were not spacious enough to cope with the potential demand from the restaurant, leading to a 'loss of fifty percent in possible sales'.[185] Two bars were active during performances, one on the ground floor and one on the first floor, with only one licensed, which was 'rather small for a quick and efficient service'.[186]

Within the auditorium, cross gangways were not incorporated into the design, which 'led to difficulties for ushers' when showing patrons to seats and selling programmes.[187] With raked stalls and a balcony, the auditorium was designed with too great a divide between the two levels, which resulted in actors 'experiencing difficulty in directing their performance to the whole audience at once'.[188]

[182] ABTT, *Theatre planning*: *the Architects' Journal information library,* p. 300.
[183] Ibid., p. 300.
[184] Ibid., p. 300.
[185] Ibid., p. 301.
[186] Ibid., p. 301.
[187] Ibid., p. 301.
[188] Ibid., p. 301.

Figure 1.4: The Belgrade Theatre, auditorium, 1958. City Archives – Coventry CCD/1/9/4/2, The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, *Reprinted from The Architect and Building News,* 18 June, 1958, (p. 20).



Sightlines and acoustic mechanics were prioritised over 'atmosphere and style', apart from the casting of a dove placed on the proscenium, visible in figure 1.4.[189] With no office for the director and a lack of administrative rooms, the boardroom served a double function, but 'when meetings were convened all papers had to be cleared'.[190] The production manager's office was a converted toilet, and staff areas were overcrowded. Consequently, 'the planning of a production at which design projects, lighting, etc were discussed, had to be held almost anywhere else', as the offices were too small to take in models, plans, and staff.[191]

[189] Alistair Fair, *A new image of the living theatre,* p. 369.
[190] Association of British Theatre Technicians, *Theatre planning*: *the Architects' Journal information library, AJ SFB (85)* (London: ABTT, 1964), p. 301.
[191] Ibid., p. 301.

For backstage areas, which was the specific focus of Cornelisson's ABTT report, changes were needed almost immediately to alleviate cramped conditions and to provide a degree of flexibility. Built without a practical green room, a small canteen – 'essential where long hours are worked by a resident company' – was created by converting the original wardrobe repairs room, although the wardrobe department already lacked sufficient space to install the basic equipment needed for making and repairing costumes and for laundry and storage.[192] Dressing rooms for actors and staff were 'barely sufficient', with visiting companies pushing room capacities and larger amateur societies unable to be accommodated appropriately.[193] Ancillary stage spaces, such as electrical workshops and stores, property rooms, and the stage manager's office were 'not built adequately and companies had to cope through a series of compromises'.[194] Essential practice such as property making and the servicing of electrical equipment 'were often done in a corner of the paint shop or sometimes away from the theatre altogether'.[195] The carpentry and paint shop were designed to be enclosed within one space, which led to 'an inefficient paint frame adjoining the stage and separated from it by a roller shuttered scene dock door'.[196]

Shops were of low ceiling height, restricting large scenery being raised vertically 'without collision with the sprinkler system', which would result in flooding of the area.[197] Storage was a particular problem, with repertory performances requiring up to three complete

[192] Ibid., p. 302.
[193] Ibid., p. 302.
[194] Ibid., p. 302.
[195] Ibid., p. 302.
[196] Ibid., p. 302.
[197] Ibid., p. 302.

productions of scenery, props, and furniture being stored, while a fourth was on the stage.[198] The wing spaces, 'never adequate', forced scenery shops to be used for storage and resulted in the carpentry workshop being removed.[199] In summing up the backstage spaces, Cornelissen described a back of house area where 'the scenic artist worked in what was the carpentry (construction) area, the paint frame had been dismantled and discarded, and in the area where the painters used to work, at least two complete shows were stored'.[200] The original civic policy and financial stability of the Belgrade had placed a great reliance on backstage areas which proved to have been ill planned and unable to cope with the demands of general productions and more modern forms of theatre.[201]

Attempting to remedy design mistakes proved significant to the Belgrade, with recurring expenditure, along with the hire of external rooms and the need for transportation, adding unexpected costs to shows. The Belgrade's productions had to be designed with building

[198] Ibid., p. 302.
[199] Ibid., p. 302.
[200] Ibid., p. 302.
[201] The City of Coventry municipal handbook of 1961 stated, 'The Company [Belgrade Theatre Trust (Coventry) Limited] takes an annual tenancy of the theatre and pays the City Council a recoupment charge of approximately £16,750, the tenancy being renewable by the City Council after consideration of the Company's annual report and statement of accounts and financial estimates for the succeeding year. The City Council has undertaken to pay to the Company after the result of each year's working has been ascertained such subsidy as may be required up to a maximum of £6,500 and financial assistance to the Company from the Arts Council has been granted annually. In November 1959, the Trust accepted an offer by the Arts Council to associate with them. The City Council had issued the following general directions on policy to the Council of Management in relation to the management and development of the Belgrade Theatre for year 1961/2:

(a) It shall be regarded as an overriding consideration that the affairs of the Company are so arranged that no additional financial contribution to its funds is required from the council beyond the amount of initial grant loan on account of working capital and the product of ½ d. rate which the Council will make available to the Company in one form or another.
(b) The main purpose of the Company shall be to promote drama, singing, and music in forms appropriate to a company carrying on business as a theatrical charitable trust and, as ancillary thereto, to encourage and assist (subject to the financial considerations mentioned in paragraph a) local amateur dramatic, operatic and musical societies in the public presentation of their productions.
(c) The Company shall, in the conduct of its affairs, have regard to the desirability of assisting the Council in its capacity as the Local Education Authority in the development of an appreciation of drama in the schools of the city.'

City of Coventry, *Municipal handbook* (Coventry: North View Press, 1961), p. 3.

restrictions in mind, but for touring productions choice was restricted further, 'as site dimensions had limited the stage size and the grid height of thirty-two feet was insufficient to clear sightlines with standard scenery'.[202] There were also too few counterweight bars set in the grid. As an example of further poor design layout, Cornelissen described how the volume of essential technical maintenance and preparation had to be conducted at night, after a performance, due to the lack of backstage space.

> Full size black clothes have to be painted on the stage, suspended from the counterweight bar. This is an awkward arrangement and very slow in operation: the painter is able to reach only a few feet of cloth at a time and is hindered by folds of raw material piled beneath the work on which he is engaged. At regular intervals the cloth has to be hoisted to bring the next horizontal section into position for painting until the cloth is completed and hanging clear of the stage floor.[203]

Six years after opening, in 1964 (the year Cornelissen's article was published), the Belgrade presented plans to build an annexe, a development to relieve some pressure on the physical aspects of the theatre. The structure was designed to house the production unit, reuniting all technical departments and providing rehearsal space and offices, as well as space for meetings and conferences, which could not be accommodated within the main building.[204] The proposed scheme was presented to the ABTT Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committee in 1965, by now an authoritative voice advising the Arts Council of Great Britain

[202] Association of British Theatre Technicians, *Theatre planning*: *the Architects' Journal information library,* p. 302.
[203] Ibid., p. 302.
[204] Ibid., p. 302.

on the technical validity of proposed publicly funded theatre projects. The rise, growth, and significance of this committee I will discuss further in chapter two.

Cornelissen's article provided a detailed account of the material and semiotic use of the Belgrade Theatre, considering what the ABTT saw as flaws in design across its varied front and back of house spaces and in the civic nature of its form. Examining the article further, I view it as not only delivering a critique of early modern playhouse design but also providing an opportunity for the ABTT to affirm a position of authority as industry specialist within new hierarchies of theatrical production. Acting as an advocacy document, Cornelissen's text (compiled with TAP colleagues Southern, Joseph, Bentham, and Pilbrow, amongst others) outlines in great detail the various compromises believed to exist in both layout and use, with the focus a continued reflection of the technical concerns founder members of the ABTT had in the years leading up to 1961. Looking closely at the details within the article provides a deeper understanding of the origins of the Association and the motivations of those aiming to enact technical change through the development of standards, design, and representation. The article also shows a wider interest in theatre design beyond purely technical matters and away from the aims of the ABTT, beginning to allude to why a series of complementary organisations were set up by members of the Association in the immediate years that followed. This includes organisations such as the Society of Theatre Consultants and the Society of British Theatre Lighting Designers, identified within the growing sector networks of the ABTT and discussed further in chapters two and three. Although the material aspects of its original design were questioned by technical specialists, as a symbolic point of

reference for post-war civic progress 'the Belgrade resonated with the wish that the theatre bring together the whole of the community in a democratic venue'.[205]

Figure 1.5: The Belgrade Theatre, elevation to Belgrade Square, 1958. (City Archives – Coventry CCD/1/9/4/2, The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, *Reprinted from The Architect and Building News,* 18 June, 1958, (p. 29).



Figure 1.5 shows this dual civic purpose in design, and in particular how The Belgrade, as an early example of new regional theatres of the post-war period, was built to construct both a functional and democratic public realm. It was a theatre produced by the practical needs of the city, while simultaneously received as a symbolic presence of modernity for a community – one shaped by local, regional, national, and global events.

[205] Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses,* p. 4.

As a building of further importance, firstly, the Belgrade ushered in a new wave of publicly subsidised and civic designed theatre spaces; secondly, as I have just argued, the flaws in design proved to be a catalyst in galvanising a network of technical specialists. The Belgrade provided a new stage for British theatre, representing an alternate kind of playhouse within a modernising theatrical estate, triggering the emergence of the ABTT and the theatre technician as expert.

As I have discussed in this chapter, the web of technical relations outlined in section one, the individual motivations of a growing number of stage specialists explored in section two, and the failings in early post-war civic design presented through a case study of the Belgrade Theatre in section three acted as a catalyst for change to those looking to develop better standards in stage design. In a period of growing industry change, it is those most prominent individuals that I have identified in the years leading to the emergence of the ABTT – Southern, Joseph, Bentham, and Pilbrow, as well as Moro, Wyckham, Cornelissen, and the committee networks which emerged at the time – that went on to establish much of the developments in theatre construction that took place in the two decades that followed. Writing for the ABTT in 1963, Peter Moro observed, 'by all appearances the theatre is undergoing a revolution. Playwrights are exploring new subjects which are presented by producers in unusual ways; old plays are given new interpretations; actors, backed by new techniques in lighting, use new techniques of acting'.[206] Regional and subsidised theatre, evolving as a 'social necessity' in location and style, were being realised amid debates about the nature of performance, embodying ideas of 'cultural citizenship in a self-consciously

[206] Association of British Theatre Technicians, Bulletin No. 2, August 1961 (London: ABTT, 1961). ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT).

modern and increasingly affluent nation'.[207] Ushering in a new period of theatre design, the impending boom of post-war construction positioned new forms of theatre and advances in technology in conflict with the traditional use of the proscenium stage, challenging the settled conventions of the past. A new stage, both physical and symbolic, had given rise to the theatre technician as expert, and it is the role of the ABTT in the civic development of theatre design that I will discuss next in chapter two.

[207] Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses,* p. 2.

Chapter 2

Material change: the ABTT and establishing principles of civic theatre design

The post-war years offered signs of progress and optimism for British theatres as the state sought, through modernisation programmes, to improve the health, education, and welfare of the population amid ambitions to take culture to the people and improve the lives of the post-war generation. Through a series of reforms, successive Labour and Conservative governments aimed to better the social, economic, and cultural democracy of the nation while simultaneously grappling with the legacy of pre-war Victorian values, the transition from empire to commonwealth, and the forging of new relationships within Europe. Key policies for change – the Keynes report (1936 and 1945), the Beveridge report (1942), and the Butler Act (1944) – helped shape a programme of regeneration, which was implemented, in part, through a number of social infrastructure projects. These included government investment in the construction of motorways, new universities, civic buildings, and amenities, and in a new National Health Service.[208] For the first-time, public money was also made available for new theatre buildings, with the number of nationally subsidised civic playhouses designed, planned, and built between 1958 and 1984 at unprecedented levels.

[208] The Keynes report, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (1936), proposed that economies are made up of aggregate quantities of output resulting from aggregate streams of expenditure – unemployment is caused if people don't spend enough money. Keynes also presented a paper in 1945 on Britain's industrial prospects, drafted during the last days of the war and presented to the Cabinet in the first days of peace. The Beveridge report, *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (1942), was influential in the founding of the welfare state, calling for the abolition of want, disease, ignorance, squalor, and idleness from society and instead building a comprehensive system of social insurance and welfare. The Butler Education Act (1944) put forward plans for post-war secondary education in Britain, aimed at removing the inequalities which remained in the system. This was the remaking of the social relationship between state and citizen with the creation of a comprehensive welfare state, substantial educational reform, and the pursuit of a full employment policy to which the political parties ascribed.

Those with responsibility for informing this new use of the public purse – an evolving network of theatre designers, architects, technicians, and consultants – emerged from a period 'short of technical education and skills in the UK labour force'.[209] This provided a fertile context for the Association of British Theatre Technicians to emerge, as a growing membership remedied a lack of available technical expertise by donating an immeasurable amount of voluntary labour to support the development of a new theatre estate. The ABTT, which was quickly placed by the Arts Council of Great Britain at the heart of its decision-making process, was initially tasked with 'providing technical knowledge on whether or not plans for certain theatres made adequate provision backstage; for the comfort of the artist, the requirements of production, and the efficiency of the performance'.[210] From 1965, the ABTT Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committee (TAP) began to discuss and report on the technical considerations proposed for all new venues and existing playhouses submitted to the Arts Council for capital grants under the newly formed Housing the Arts scheme. Members of the ABTT and more specifically the TAP committee, such as Stephen Joseph, became prominent advocates for alternate types of stage construction emerging at this time, in a move away from the still dominant norm of the proscenium. Technology and design encouraged experimentation in stage forms, with innovation providing the material basis for the cultural transformation of theatre visible in the building stock of new playhouses built in the post-war boom of civic construction.

[209] Peter Hennessey, *Winds of change: Britain in the early sixties* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), p. 498. In the 1960s new technology put an emphasis on efficiency and productivity. Unions had to work hard to organise retraining for members made redundant by new methods and techniques.
[210] ABTT, Correspondence with British Actors Equity Association, 2 June 1961. ABTTEH/EarlyHistory/box1 (ABTT/EH).

The study of this chapter is framed around the democratic mission of British theatre post 1945 - 'the questioning of traditional drama which extended to challenging the architecture and shape of theatre buildings' - and the social foundations for new civic stage designs that formed.[211] To understand further the material changes in design, this chapter specifically focusses on the expansion of the theatrical domain to the civic, discussing the importance of the ABTT Theatre, Architecture, and Planning sub-committee to the building of new playhouses and the evolving theatre forms of the post-proscenium stage which followed. In section one, I examine the rise of the welfare state, the growing sense of civic responsibility, and the effects of changing cultural and social politics of central and local government on theatre. I do this by exploring some of the alternative stage shapes introduced to theatre design within the wider context of theatre modernisation that was underway in the post-war years. In section two, I discuss how new forms of civic theatre construction encouraged the formation of specialist networks by redefining architecture, stage, and design styles of post-war playhouses in the 1960s in a move away from the previous dominance of the proscenium stage. I go on to analyse the relationships that formed around a regional growth in repertory work at this time, paying particular attention to the role of the ABTT Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committee as backstage advisor to the Arts Council of Great Britain. In section three, I look at the most prominent early civic theatres of the period and the variations in design that emerged. Built with technical guidance from the ABTT TAP committee, these new playhouses challenged the conventions of Britain's aging theatre stock, establishing the new principles of civic theatre design.

[211] Andrew Davies, *Other theatres: the development of alternative and experimental theatre in Britain* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Publishing, 1987), p. 160.

2.1 The social democratic consensus: expanding the theatrical domain to the civic sphere

Before 1939, theatres had been predominantly privately funded, often operating as purely commercial ventures. This commercialism influenced stage style and shape, with the inclusion of 'prosceniums, enlarged auditoria, and minimal backstage areas dominating pre-war design'.[212] The foundation of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1946, and the provision of the Local Government Act of 1948, changed the financial models of theatre building, as new public funds allowed alternative styles of architectural design to emerge.[213] Funding also provided support for new theatrical forms, with 'serious subsidised theatre' coming to dominate the landscape of regional drama in the 1950s – at the expense of the 'hitherto dominant' commercial touring circuits and repertory companies of the pre-war years'.[214] The wave of subsidised municipal playhouses which followed were largely planned for and publicly funded from 1958, as the view of the 'social, civic, and educational necessity' of modern theatre began to take physical form.[215] This shift in practice not only played a significant role in accommodating and framing new styles and techniques of theatre design but also reflected the changing pace and place of an expanding theatrical domain within the civic sphere, which was itself emerging for the first time as part of the post-war settlement.

In 1941, John Maynard Keynes became chair of the Council (originally Committee) for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA). Initially an initiative of the Pilgrim Trust, it

[212] Ellis Hillman, *Essays in local government enterprise: volume 1 – Hugh Jenkins; towards the civic theatre* (London: Merlin Press, 1964), p. 15.
[213] Local authorities were allowed to subsidise the arts through grants and taxation.
[214] Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses: an architectural history of Britain's new theatres, 1945–1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 3.
[215] Peter Jay*, Theatres, stages, and auditorium, Architectural Review 133,* March 1963, vol. CXXXIII, No. 793, pp 75-85. (p. 175).

later became wholly supported by the government, and in 1946 – in the same year that Keynes died – emerged as the Arts Council of Great Britain. Originally intended to support amateur as well as professional practice, CEMA – and then the Arts Council – increasingly focussed upon 'the fine arts exclusively'.[216] This resulted in a growing prioritisation of professional regional playhouses and mixed programme repertory companies in the decades which followed, as subsidy for the arts began to increase under the developing influence of the Arts Council. Keynes, when establishing its charter, ensured that the Arts Council reported directly to the Treasury, rather than an arts minister or the education department as had been the case with CEMA, establishing the principle of an 'arm's length' relationship between UK arts policy and the government of the day. At first, the shift in patronage from private to public sources of funding (with the founding of the Arts Council and the 1948 Local Government Act) allowed local authorities to routinely support the performing arts by providing 'a modest amount of money to be spent on entertainment'.[217] Initially, investment in the old theatre building stock was low, but an increase in funding from the 1960s onwards, alongside developing forms of theatre production styles and techniques, enabled alternative types of stage design to emerge. Secretary general of the Arts Council, Hugh Willatt, considered the theatre of this period as being 'rehoused, […] its young directors seizing the opportunities given by new purpose-designed buildings, […] and with repertory type work very much at the centre of things'.[218] The move away from proscenium-styled theatres and

[216] Robert Hewison, *Culture and consensus: England, arts and politics since 1940* (London: Methuen Publishing, 1995), p. 29.
[217] The Local Government Act gave authorities the power to spend on the arts the product of a rate equivalent to sixpence in the pound. A slightly lower rate of 4–4/5 d. (£0.25) applied in Scotland into the 1960s. Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouse*, p. 11.
[218] Arts Council of Great Britain, *The Arts Council of Great Britain: the first twenty-five years* (report, 1972), p. 13.

towards the publicly supported alternate stage shapes of 1960s civic design, built within what Alistair Fair terms 'the modern playhouse', is what I will now go on to discuss.[219]

Between 1945 and 1960, the early years of public funding saw only tentative developments in civic playhouse design, hence the first of two Arts Council reports titled *Housing the Arts in Great Britain*, published in 1959 and focussed on London, complained of a barren post-war period of theatre building in Britain. This period saw the Royal Festival Hall, London (1951), the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry (1958), and the Mermaid Theatre, City of London (1959) being the only major projects achieved. The report, however, found 'no lack of bold and imaginative plans', with 'municipalities, voluntary bodies, and individuals diligently engaged in formulating building schemes for the arts'.[220] In its second report, *Housing the Arts in Great Britain* (1961), looking at the needs of the English provinces, the Arts Council described a haphazard pattern of old regional playhouses that had become 'inadequate, unworthy, and in need of replacement'.[221] Alongside this, a survey of backstage conditions by the Council of British Actors Equity Association warned of 'inadequate, uncomfortable, and unhygienic' playhouses.[222] Equally damning, the Labour government's white paper *A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps* (1965) wrote of theatres continuing to present work 'in old-fashioned gloom and solemnity'.[223] This series of reports is evidence of a growing political belief that the old theatre buildings of the pre-war age could no-longer support the requirements of emerging post-proscenium theatre styles and the civic demands placed on modern playhouses.

---

[219] Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses,* p. 1.
[220] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Housing the Arts in Great Britain: part* 1 (Plaistow: Curwen Press, 1959), p. 9.
[221] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Housing the Arts in Great Britain: part* 2 (Plaistow: Curwen Press, 1961), p. 3.
[222] Quoted in, Arts Council of Great Britain, *Housing the Arts in Great Britain: part* 2, p. 3.
[223] Presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister by Command of Her Majesty, *A policy for the arts: the first steps* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, February, 1965): https://collective-encounters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/A-Policy-for-the-Arts-Jennie-Lee.pdf [last accessed: 06 January 2022], p 49.

The Arts Council believed the best course of action was to replace the legacy of pre-war 'slums, which were wholly unworthy of survival', by providing the means to build modern playhouses more suited to the changing tastes, styles, and needs of contemporary British theatre.[224] A more 'coherent, generous, and imaginative approach' to the arts was also outlined by Jennie Lee in 1965. As the first Minister of State for the Arts, Lee represented a national approach that shifted away from old theatre spaces, 'which failed to move with the times and that retained a cheerless and unwelcoming air'.[225] Campaigning for greater social and cultural democracy in her report, Lee warned, 'help was urgently needed locally, regionally, and nationally to enable the arts to become more generous to all'.[226] The old pre-war building stocks were seen as 'failing to move with the times, retaining a cheerlessness that alienated all but the specialist and the dedicated'.[227] The report went on to say, 'for things to change, to develop a wider and more appreciative public for the arts, a new social [civic] as well as artistic climate was essential'.[228]

Lee outlined a vision which looked to buildings 'to succeed in providing a friendly meeting ground for artist and audience, balanced across the north and south, east and west'.[229] The policy asked for 'fine permanent buildings that house the arts to be universally available through the combined efforts of the Government, the Arts Council of Great Britain, regional committees, and national associations'.[230] This was to be achieved 'by embracing the latest

[224] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Housing the Arts in Great Britain: part* 2, p. 4.
[225] Presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister by Command of Her Majesty, p 6.
[226] Ibid., p 7.
[227] Ibid., p 6.
[228] Ibid., p. ix.
[229] Ibid., p. 5.
[230] Ibid., p. 13.

developments in building techniques, labour, and with a standardisation of backstage fitments and equipment requiring specialist knowledge'.[231] With local bodies primarily responsible for support, alongside government aid, an unprecedented increase in national funding provided a new legacy of theatre building across Britain from 1965.[232]

Public funding enabled the introduction of alternative forms of stage design which evolved away from the traditional proscenium frame, focussed on accommodating the contemporary needs of the West End, Greater London, and the provinces, as well as looking to address the challenge of 'other, experimental' types of theatre performance emerging across the regions.[233] The conventional proscenium theatre, traditionally characterised by a picture

[231] Ibid., p. 13. In the late 1960s, the government and the unions began to grow apart. Strikes increased, and in 1970 over ten million working days were lost through strike actions, including those of nurses and electricity workers. A number of these strikes were unofficial and not supported by unions. Adding to union militancy was the increasing importance of 'shop stewards', who were employees but also union officials. They were especially powerful and influential in large industries, particularly those that were nationalised. Critics of trade unions saw shop stewards as dangerous activists who were eager to make trouble. They were closely associated with the union practice known as the closed shop, which meant a worker could not be employed in a particular factory or production line unless he was a member of the relevant union. Another practice associated with shop stewards was demarcation – when one type of worker was not allowed to do the work of another.
If we look back on union history, we can see why unions acted in this way: employers had a long history of undercutting the job security of workers. At the same time, however, these restrictive practices frustrated employers.
https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/alevelstudies/1960-radicalisation.htm [last accessed 21 March 2022].

[232] Government funding in this context took the form of contributions towards capital costs of new or remodelled buildings, or towards some part of the cost of acquiring existing buildings suitable or adaptable as civic spaces. In 1965/66, allocated funds totalled £150,000; by 1975/76, £1,150,000; and by the close of the Arts Council's Housing the Arts fund in 1985/86, the amount totalled £1,400,000 per year. In 1984/85 the Arts Council's Grant-in-Aid of £101,900,000 included £1,400,000 for Housing the Arts, where £1,145,700 was accounted for in England, £145,000 in Scotland, and £109,300 in Wales. The sum of £33,400 was paid to the National Theatre Board in 1984/85, being the final instalment of the special grant of £350,000 earmarked in 1981 for the cost of completing the South Bank Theatre complex. At the end of March 1984, the Council withdrew capital funding as part of its future strategy for the arts; outstanding Housing the Arts commitments at that date totalled £1,922,200. In April 1984 the Arts Council reviewed all other capital projects in which it had expressed an interest and agreed to receive applications from a further 37 projects. The Council set a maximum limit of £3,205,000 available for application. A total of £991,300 was committed in respect of these projects during 1984/85 which left outstanding commitments totalling £1,513,500 as of 31 March 1985.
https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Arts%20Council%20-%2040th%20Annual%20Report%20and%20Accounts%201984_85.pdf [last accessed: 23 March 2022].

[233] Andrew Davies, *Other theatres,* p. xi.

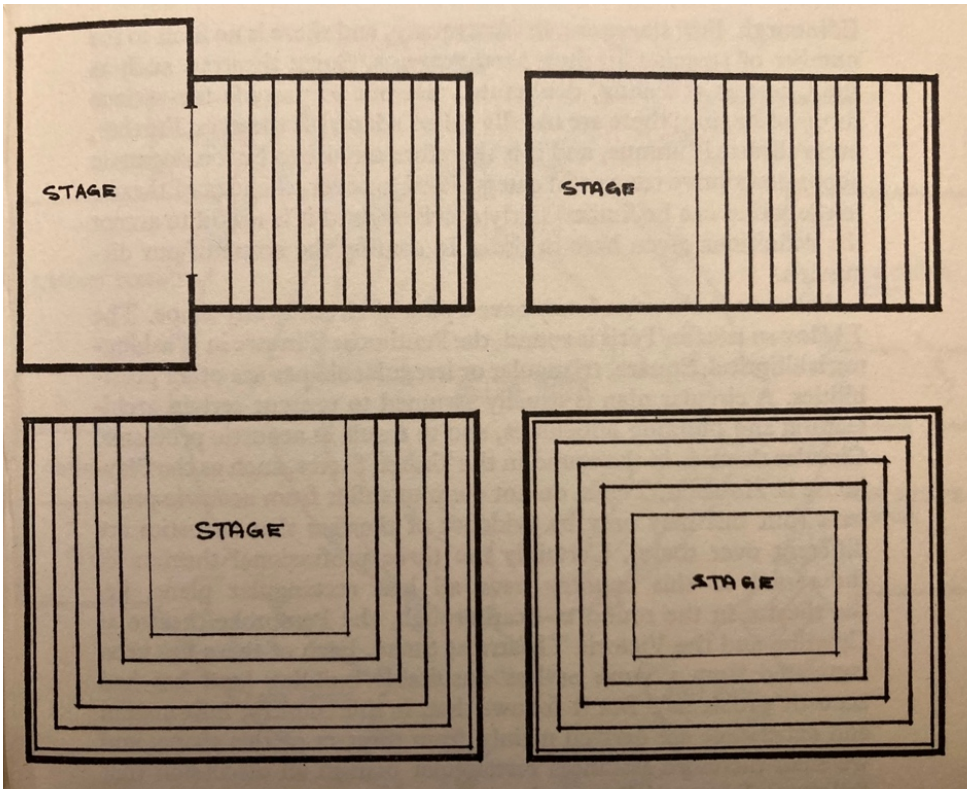
frame stage and the architectural separation of the auditorium space from the stage space, is designed as two houses divided by the proscenium wall. The stage is enclosed, framing the performance, and often built with space hidden from audience view to the sides and above. Alternate performances spaces, first termed by Richard Southern in 1953 as 'open stages', have performance areas designed within the same architectural space as the auditorium.[234] Southern, advocating for new forms of stage, 'wished to see the urgent figures of modern drama served by an adequate acting place' – figures such as T. S. Eliot, Jean Anouihl, Jean Cocteau, and Christopher Fry – as he believed, 'it is not the scenery behind the actor which most helps the player as a tool of his craft but the stage he treads upon'.[235] Created in a variety of forms across the following two decades, open stages were shaped to be more democratic, with the audience no longer placed in a hierarchical relationship to the performance space and to the social stratification built into the old proscenium theatre building.

The proscenium stage so dominant in the nineteenth century had remained so in the first half of the twentieth century, and – as I have already stated – not least because the commercial success of its design allowed strong box-office returns, especially with the rapid growth of cinemas, musicals, and big show productions. Pre-war notions of commerce perpetuated the architectural design of new proscenium theatres (such as the Belgrade Theatre discussed in chapter one), predicated on sight-lines and seats, 'with the action [onstage] increasingly retreating into the backstage area of the scenic world as stage sizes

[234] Richard Southern, *The open stage: and the modern theatre in research and in practice* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p. 9.
[235] Ibid., p. 13.

and seating capacities continued to grow [and socially divide]'.[236] The radical questioning of traditional drama in the 1950s, as descried by historian Andrew Davies, 'extended to the challenging of the architecture and shape of theatre buildings'.[237] In escaping the social inequalities and financial restrictions present in pre-war playhouses, often physical relics of class divisions, the practical, artistic, and aesthetic considerations of new stage forms went on to oppose the proscenium tradition.

Figure 2.1: Four main forms of modern stage. The enclosed stage (conventional proscenium theatre) [top left] and three open stages: end stage [top right], thrust stage [bottom left], centre stage (theatre-in-the-round). Stephen Joseph, *Theatre in the round* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1967), p. 13.



Four main forms of design dictated the playhouse stages of civic construction: post-proscenium, open-ended, thrust, and theatre-in-the-round. Two further designs later

[236] Tim Foster, Playhouses and spaces for drama: in *Modern theatres 1950–2020*, edited by David Staples (New York and London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 77-86 (p. 78).
[237] Andrew Davies, *Other theatres,* p. 161.

formed: the adaptable theatre (or studio theatre), a space built to present all four styles of modern form; and the multi-purpose hall, a performance space used part time to showcase new forms of theatre but shared with a range of other leisure and cultural activities such as dance, exhibitions, banquets, and variety shows.[238] As described by Stephen Joseph, and shown in figure 2.1, 'these various kinds of open stages can be distinguished by the extent to which the audience embraces, as it were, the acting area'.[239] In many cases, open stages allowed the audience to see itself, as well as those performing on stage, and often the technicians working around it. If, as seen in figure 2.1, the acting area is considered a square, then new forms of design such as the end stage would have the audience on one side, the thrust stage on three sides, and theatre-in-the-round on four sides. For theatre director and ABTT member John English, these three open-stage design types were concerned with bringing together 'the heart of the theatre', the auditorium and stage – or as he described them, 'the theatrical world and the real world'.[240] These were two worlds that Fred Bentham, lighting designer and ABTT founder, described as 'meeting but remaining quite separate, […] as a theatre contains both the entertainers and the entertained'.[241] Variants of open-stage design include the corner stage, with an audience on two sides; the traverse stage, a catwalk-like stage with the audience sat on either side; and courtyard and adaptable theatres, spaces designed to provide adaptable forms of staging. With few stages actually designed as square, however, Stephen Joseph advised, 'there remains no limits to the number of stage/auditorium arrangements, so it is unwise to be too dogmatic about descriptive terms and categories'.[242] Collectively, these new stage shapes made the audience aware of its own

[238] Fred Bentham, *New theatres in Britain* (London: Tabs Publication, 1970), p. 5.
[239] Stephen Joseph, *Theatre in the round* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1967), p. 13.
[240] Quoted in, Fred Bentham, *New theatres in Britain,* p. 10.
[241] Fred Bentham, *New theatres in Britain*, p. 11.
[242] Stephen Joseph, *Theatre in the round*, p. 14.

presence in the theatre in a democratising move away from proscenium hierarchies predicated on commercial gain, particularly so in the most extreme forms of open stage design.

The centre stage, or theatre-in-the-round, has the acting area in the same room as the audience and is completely surrounded by it. Often small in scale, a radically different form of theatre in terms of acting style and capacity emerged, with, as Joseph described, 'centre stage presenting the most extreme extent of audience embrace'.[243] Its design removes the possibility of any ordinary scenic background and allows the maximum number of people in attendance to be close to the performance. Such intimacy reveals the presence of other members of the audience to those watching while stripping back the need for significant stage props, scene changes, and effects. Unconventional in production approach, the use of a centre stage shows the actor's back to some of the audience while at the same time presenting their face to others in a non-linear style of performance breaking with tradition. The Library Theatre, Scarborough, opened in 1955 and was the first recognised post-war theatre-in-the-round in the UK. This was later followed by the Victoria Theatre in Soke-on-Trent in 1963, and then the Bolton Octagon in 1968. Joseph was significant in the development of all three theatres and was seen as the authority on theatre-in-the-round in Britain by the time of his death in 1967.

The thrust stage is designed to have an audience sitting around three sides of the acting area. The stage shape itself projects or 'thrusts' into the auditorium, beyond the proscenium

[243] Stephen Joseph, *New theatre forms* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1968), p. 38.

frame. Not always square in shape, the stage may be semi-circular or half a polygon, designed with any number of sides. Shaped to increase intimacy between the actor and audience, productions can be viewed from multiple vantage points, blurring lines between performer and viewer. The principal advocate of the thrust stage in Britain was Tyrone Guthrie, who was first influenced by the open stage of the short-lived Cambridge Festival Theatre of the late 1920s. After Cambridge, Guthrie moved to the Old Vic, London, where, as Alistair Fair describes it, 'he sought to abandon scenic realism while still working on a proscenium arch stage'.[244] In 1936, moving an outdoor performance of *Hamlet* to a local ballroom due to bad weather, Guthrie arranged the audience around an improvised acting area in a move away from convention. The idea developed further in his 1948 production of David Lyndsay's *Satire of the Three Estates* at a church hall in Edinburgh, 'where the Moderator's dais became a stage surrounded by the audience'.[245] The production minimised scenery, with more relevance and meaning placed upon costume and props, and with the audience distributed evenly around the stage. These principles formed the basic design of a thrust stage at a time when Guthrie considered 'most forward-looking directors trying to get away from the proscenium, [...] as by bending rows and getting the audience round an open stage you can get so many more people closer to the actors'.[246]

Returning to Southern once more, discussing the merits of both the 'illusion' of the picture-frame (proscenium) and the 'realism' of the open stage, his plea for those making civic theatres was one of understanding: 'simply never mix your drinks in theatre – do not build

[244] Alistair Fair, *Modern* playhouses, p. 180.
[245] Ibid., p. 180.
[246] Stephen Joseph (ed.), *Actor and architect* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), p 22.

one type of civic stage more suitable for presenting the work of another'.[247] Alternate stage shapes demanded new design solutions and greater technical expertise of those building modern playhouses. Design also had to be responsive to the new social and civic consensus that emerged under public funding. With people 'here and there trying to decide how to build the perfect theatre', as I have previously discussed in chapter one, a new type of expert formed – the technical specialist.[248] The role of the specialist was initially based on providing technical advice and guidance on specific stage equipment, but it soon evolved to supporting the wider architectural design of civic theatres. As a consequence, ABTT member expertise quickly translated the civic policy environment into practicable results, by growing responsive to the new social consensus that had emerged. Moving on to the next section of this chapter, I will now discuss who the main protagonists in the ABTT were – particularly in the Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committee – and how their tendencies supported the design of civic theatre building in the 1960s, exploring the relationships they helped form across the developing networks of technical theatre.

2.2 Influencing the new: the ABTT Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committee

Having established the factors behind new forms of civic theatre design emerging within the social democratic consensus of post-war Britain, I will now explain how the introduction of open stages would not have been possible (or at least would have been severely hindered) without the development of the ABTT and its sub-committee groups of experts. The Association quickly became the foremost authority on all technical matters to the Arts

[247] Richard Southern, *Unusual forms of stage*, in *Actor and architect*, ed. Stephen Joseph (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1965), pp. 48-57 (p. 56).
[248] Stephen Joseph, *Theatre in the round,* p. 1.

Council of Great Britain in the 1960s and the representative body of a growing technical sector. Becoming influential in the decision-making processes of theatre construction resulted in a growing confidence in, and the growing stature of, the ABTT at a national level. Member expertise was shared across the theatre industry through sector publications, conference activity, and by providing specialist advice to funding bodies and policy makers. It is those most prominent members of the early ABTT period – influential figures such as Stephen Joseph and Peter Moro – building the networks of stage expertise through internal committee structures that I will now go on to explore further.

With the ABTT initially formed of six sub-committees, it was the Theatre, Architecture, and Planning sub-committee (TAP), under the chairmanship of Peter Moro and later Roderick Ham, that forged the organisation's first collaborative relationships with the Arts Council of Great Britain. Reviewing more than 335 projects during its 20-year affiliated tenure, the ABTT archive shows how TAP provided comment on the appropriate size and type of all theatre designs proposed for capital funding. Ensuring each artistic and technical requirement was considered, over 179 projects were reviewed and reported upon between 1963 and the beginning of the new decade, a period of intense collaboration between the two organisations.[249] It is during this wave of heightened construction that TAP members provided the momentum that shaped and defined the reputation of the ABTT, and the open-stage forms and designs of playhouses in modern Britain for years to come.

[249] ABTT, Bulletin No. 4, March 1962 (London: ABTT, 1961), p. 4. ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT).

Chaired by Peter Moro, the TAP committee began in 1961 by advocating for a system of safety regulations and designs, 'to combine a consistency in the essential requirements [of a theatre] with a degree of flexibility adequate to permit realistic consideration of each premise on its merit'.[250] Supporting the establishment of the ABTT, TAP set about defining the remit of the Association by building a glossary of terms as a response to the 'inadequately equipped and furnished' theatres highlighted by the Arts Council in its *Housing the Arts* reports of 1959 and 1961.[251] The committee soon began offering specialist comment on the technical aspects of all theatre projects submitted for public funding and ensured plans were 'to the requisite size and capacity and with up-to-date equipment and proper amenities for players, staff, and audience'.[252] Defining an initial relationship between the two organisations, TAP soon responded to what the Arts Council referred to as 'schemes regarded as being practical propositions for housing the arts'.[253]

Discussing with fellow TAP members the influence of the committee and its burgeoning relationship with the Arts Council, Stephen Joseph considered a number of obvious difficulties he saw facing the group in the future decision-making of stage design. Joseph identified three primary concerns:

> First, the general lack of agreement among technicians on the best way of dealing with each matter; second, an unwillingness of people who build theatres, whether

[250] Ibid., p. 4.
[251] TAP did this by identifying stage layout designs, providing information on the varying size and type of theatres, and detailing forms, locations, costs, accommodation, dimensions, stage equipment, stage lighting, sound equipment, safety regulations, and acoustics.
[252] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Housing the Arts in Great Britain part II,* p. 43.
[253] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Housing the Arts in Great Britain part I*, p. 5.

> clients who pay for them or architects who design them, to seek advice; and finally, the trespass that any freely given advice from the Association may be on the grounds of the professional consultant.[254]

Joseph argued that in operating TAP, 'the ABTT had formed a serious responsibility', with a need to build relationships between architect and client that remained 'undamaged and for concepts and designs considered inadequate to be treated sympathetically'.[255] The various styles and techniques of theatre and stage were to be 'tolerated' by all members, with the ABTT remaining objective, not becoming a pressure group for any particular form of theatre stage shape or equipment.[256] The advisory service, he believed, was to be an essential part of ABTT activity, 'one that must remain free and judge every matter on its appropriateness to the particular case and overall efficiency'.[257] With a committee group made up of those most prominent and influential within the ABTT, it fell to chairman Peter Moro to maintain discipline and an objectivity in decision-making when supporting the various designs of proscenium and open-staged civic theatres presented for technical consideration.[258] Documents in the ABTT archive capture Moro's concerns on possible member prejudice

[254] ABTT Advisory Service, *Proposed scheme*, Stephen Joseph Archive: 6 SJ, 25 August 1961. Document number SJ/1/37: 16.
[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Ibid.
[258] As Alistair Fair reports in correspondence between himself and Peter Longman, 'a certain amount of alcohol was apparently consumed during meetings and coloured the assessment given to designs considered later in the agenda'. Fair goes on to reference a meeting between Geoffrey Axworthy of University College Cardiff and the TAP committee, with Axworthy leaving somewhat bruised by the committee assessment of his proposed Sherman Theatre. In discussing the meeting with David Hughes, Axworthy asked, 'I hope you have recovered from the ABTT's breathtaking session of instant criticism. A little shocking to see how these things are actually handled – in view of the importance of the issue. No one there seems to have seen a plan in advance; nor indeed, in such cramped quarters can they really take in all the plan'. Axworthy concluded, 'Moro [and the chap with the beard] were good value and one would have been happier to talk to him alone'. As I will discuss in chapter three, Peter Moro, as chair of TAP, became the most prominent member of the TAP committee, leading the group through both the 1960s and 1970s. Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses,* p. 176.

when he stated in a TAP advisory report, 'this committee is aware of the danger that its views on such things as adaptability may thwart experimentation and therefore hesitates to be too doctrinaire in its comments'.[259] Despite his own warnings to the contrary, and the concerns of Moro, Joseph was an outspoken and influential critic from the start, most notably on the potential use of any pre-war proscenium design values on civic theatre construction – a type of design he was so keen to rebuff, and a change Joseph immediately advocated for through his work with the ABTT and TAP.

A staunch advocate for the inclusion of open stages in the new wave of theatre construction, Joseph immediately began warning councils, trusts, and municipalities of the dangers of not including specialist consultation when submitting plans for Arts Council funding. Writing in his first ABTT members' newsletter, Joseph argued that without expert technical advice theatres would simply fail in their design.

> Modern theatres will be built for audiences that cannot see properly. Actors that cannot be heard but backstage lavatories that can. Scenery which cannot be got on the stage. Fly-towers which are too low. Wing spaces which are too small. Front of House lighting which lights everything but the stage. Lighting control rooms which cannot see the stage. Orchestra pits with muffled sound. Dressing rooms far away from the stage. Seating layouts which prevent escape. Proscenium openings which are too large.[260]

[259] ABTT Archive, TPC case studies, 1963-2010, no. 23-340, E1, Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committee, *Report on the proposed New Lincolnshire Theatre*, 19 November 1973, p. 3.
[260] ABTT, Newsletter Vol. 10, No. 1, 25 March 1961 (London: ABTT, 1961), p. 10. ABTT Archive/shelves/ (PBL1/BLT 0001-0010/1961-1965).

As editor of *Adaptable Theatres* (1962) – the accompanying publication to the 1961 ABTT conference – Joseph promoted the practical elements of open and adaptable stages, alongside other 'artistic and aesthetic attractions'.[261] He wrote of 'the inescapable fact that theatres are themselves an expression of their times', arguing that 'the gilt and plush of the Victorian theatre having lost their original meaning must obviously be replaced, and so, though perhaps less obviously, must their staging techniques too'.[262] With support from the Gulbenkian Foundation, through Joseph's endeavour, the ABTT provided free publications of *Adaptable Theatres* to all organisations, councils, town halls, and specialist groups who expressed interest in building a civic theatre. Over sixty-five copies of *Adaptable Theatres* were requested in its first year alone as the ABTT set about 'informing borough councils and civic theatre bodies all over the country' of what the TAP committee considered to be the pressing needs of a civic theatre – the only representative technical body who could do so at this time.[263] Joseph went on to say, 'if the enquirer wished to engage a professional consultant, they choose whoever they wish, including any member of the Theatre, Architecture and Planning committee or the wider Association'.[264] With 'much good advice

[261] Stephen Joseph, *New theatre forms*, p. 16.
[262] Stephen Joseph, *Actor and architect*, p. 10.
[263] Bob Millington,, Tony Jackson, and Athene Feilding, *Remembering Stephen Joseph: theatre visionary and pioneer* (Leeds: Book Empire, 2019), p. 80. The ABTT archive shows *Adaptable Theatres* was requested by a range of town clerks, town halls, librarians, and councils from Canterbury, Derby, Keighley, St Pancras, Manchester, Chester, Bridport, Walthamstow, Leicester, Lincoln, Wolverhampton, Southend-on-Sea, Caernarvon, Canterbury, Great Yarmouth, Eastbourne, Bury, County Durham, Cleethorpes, Barrow-in-Furness, Bolton, Liskeard (Cornwall), Mansfield, Rossendale, Uxbridge, Rochdale, Taynton, Carlisle, Portsmouth, Blackpool, Darlington, Marlborough, Sheffield, Wigan, Rotherham, Dartford, Southport, Preston, Oldham, Nottingham, Warrington, Tamworth, Lichfield, Kingston upon Hull, Southampton, Plymouth, Dudley, Basingstoke, Stratford, Reading, Llanidloes, Bradford, Lyme Regis, Northampton, Sunderland, Beckenham, Halifax, Ipswich, Guildford, Lydd, Doncaster, Burnley, Bristol, Walsall, and Thornaby-on-Tees.
[264] This final point paved the way for the Society of Theatre Consultants, formed by Stephen Joseph in 1964 and acting as a complementary organisation to that of the ABTT. ABTT Advisory Service, *Proposed scheme*, Stephen Joseph Archive: 6 SJ, 25 August 1961. Document number SJ/1/37: 16.

evidently dispensed', discussions with TAP members were initially seen as 'useful'.[265] Over time, however, experiences became 'mixed', with reports of 'scepticism, prejudice, and rivalries clouding the judgement of those involved' – particularly amongst members who advocated most for a change away from 'anti-illusionism' and the traditions of the proscenium arch stage.[266] Those such as Joseph and fellow TAP member Richard Southern, who had been calling for 'a stage in an audience rather than a stage before an audience' since 1953, remained authoritative voices. [267] Both members influenced the types of theatres being funded by the Arts Council while also imposing their will upon the decision-making of the ABTT, and more specifically TAP.

The Royalty Theatre, London (1960), and the Prince Charles theatre, London (1962), provide early examples of Joseph in particular shaping TAP even before the ABTT could influence good practice, by compelling newly formed members to take immediate action against what he considered poor theatre design. In describing the Royalty, captured in his book *New Theatre Forms* (1968), Joseph argued, 'it had an entirely inadequate lighting system, designed on traditional and out-of-date principles'.[268] The theatre, according to Joseph, was a failure in design, and it became a cinema within a year of opening. Equally scathing, a second article, this time intended for membership circulation, highlighted the limitations of the Prince Charles, which resulted in the project's lead architect, Alfred Esdaile, threatening legal action against both Joseph and the ABTT. In response to a preliminary TAP report, Esdaile replied, 'I

[265] John Brownrigg, Briefing for a new theatre, TABS, Vol. 23, No. 3 (September 1965), pp. 8-14. (p. 8).
[266] 'Anti-illusionism' was a phrase used by Richard Southern in *The Seven Ages of the Theatre* (1962). He argued that the most recent 'seventh age' comprised anti-illusionism, a reaction against composed scenes observed by the audience as detached spectators rather than participants. Richard Southern, *The seven ages of the theatre* (London, 1962), p. 268, and, quoted in, Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses*, p. 177.
[267] Richard Southern*, The open stage,* p. 268.
[268] Stephen Joseph, *New theatre forms*, p. 8.

wish you to understand clearly that your comments are hopelessly incorrect, and I hereby refuse permission for you to write an article or to get it published'.[269] By 1965, the two-and-a-half-year-old theatre, heralded in *Housing the Arts* (1959) for being the first built in the West End in the post-war period, was to close – it later also became a cinema. Both theatres, I argue, were only fit for cinema use precisely because they were built upon the premise of an old proscenium frame and not designed appropriately for the purpose of post-war civic stages, as I have described in section one. The failure in design so soon after being built – as Peter Moro described, 'the Prince Charles theatre's need for extensive exterior and interior improvements to bring facilities fully in line with modern day West End requirements' – was highlighted in the critique Joseph circulated to emerging technical industry networks and gave further impetus to the ABTT and TAP as an informed advisory body.[270] Joseph's concerns, 'based on physical examples of poor theatre design', solidified a need for the ABTT as an influencer and the reputation of Joseph as a figure of authority.[271]

The ABTT archive holds the records of early meetings of the TAP committee, with documents providing detailed discussions amongst members such as Joseph and Southern on individual theatre cases as well as wider committee reviews. These uncatalogued documents 'illustrating the work of the advisory service' also offer evidence of the various types of 'client' the TAP group fielded and the range of inquiries received from as early as 1963.[272] A

[269] ABTT Advisory Service*, Proposed scheme*, Stephen Joseph Archive: 6 SJ, 25 August 1961. Document number SJ/1/37: 31.
[270] ABTT, Newsletter Vol. 1, No. 1, 25 March 1965 (London: ABTT, 1961), p. 4. ABTT Archive/shelves/ (PBL1/BLT 0001-0010/1961-1965).
[271] Stephen Joseph, *New theatre forms*, p. 9.
[272] A 1965 review of enquiries to date listed twenty-six clients in contact with TAP: Hackney Borough Council; St John's College, Southsea; Greenwich Hippodrome; Bryanston School; Bromley Borough Council; Glyndebourne Opera House; Borough of Tunbridge Wells; Borough of Kingston upon Thames; Borough of High Wycombe; University of London Union Theatre; Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford; University of Monash, Australia; Borough of Rochdale; Borough of Hendon; Darlington Civic Theatre; Harrow Borough Council; Weston-super-

mix of 'architect, municipal authority, and individual', the committee offered recommendations on planned theatres, providing reports that were often 'unfavourable' or 'critical' of design proposals and supportive of the need for specialist technical advice.[273] A 1963 review of the proposed redevelopment of an old hippodrome in Greenwich, 'to repurpose an existing theatre due for demolition', drew much criticism from TAP committee members.[274] In discussing the relationship between actor and audience within the auditorium, members noted the architect's intention to retain gallery seating and the impact this would have on visibility of the stage. The report stated, 'TAP members stress that the problem of sightlines is of paramount importance and cannot be overruled by other factors' – in this case the need to maximise seating capacity for financial gain.[275] The committee went on to describe intentions to form an open stage under the main auditorium as lacking rudimentary requirements, 'feeling it would be a great disservice to advertise theatre-in the-round in a building so lacking in facilities'.[276] Cramped workshops, inappropriate stage height, and a lack of backstage areas were further worries. TAP concluded their report by considering the difficulty of restoring pre-war theatres, stating, 'it would probably be far cheaper in the long run to demolish old buildings and build something new'.[277] The Greenwich Theatre project, being one of the first TAP reports recorded in the ABTT archive,

Mere; City of Norwich; Edinburgh Opera House; City of Glasgow; Paignton Urban District; Chester Central Development; Christ Church College, New Zealand; Birmingham Repertory Theatre; and Newport Central Redevelopment. ABTT Archive (uncatalogued), *Technical Sub-committee ABTT Advisory Service*, TPC Case Studies 1963–2010, No. 23–340, Box E1.

[273] ABTT Archive (uncatalogued), *Technical Sub-committee ABTT Advisory Service*, TPC Case Studies 1963–2010, No. 23–340, Box E1.

[274] Between 1961 and 1965, the Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committee included Peter Moro, Stephen Joseph, Richard Southern, Frederick Bentham, Peter Hall, Norman Marshall, George Devine, John Wyckham, Roger Furse, Elidir Davies, Martin Carr, Ian Appleton, and Roderick Ham. ABTT Archive (uncatalogued), *Report on meeting between ABTT representatives and the architect for the Greenwich Theatre Project*, TPC Case Studies 1963–2010, No. 23–340, Box E1, p. 1.

[275] Ibid., p. 2.

[276] Ibid., p. 2.

[277] Ibid., p. 2.

was reflective of the initial concerns that brought together the Association as a specialist technical body to inform theatre building in the 1960s.

One year later, in 1964, the TAP committee provided recommendations on the proposed design for the New Theatre, Bromley, a civic playhouse presented by Bromley Borough Council as part of wider plans to redevelop local town provision. One of several civic proposals presented to TAP for comment in the same year, I read this report in particular as an indication of members responding to growing civic requirements for theatres with the increasing availability of public money. In the case of Bromley, TAP was concerned with the proposal of both backstage and front of house areas. In and around the auditorium, ceilings were considered 'too low', which would lead to difficulties with acoustics.[278] Sight-lines, particularly from balconies, 'needed careful checking', and the lack of provision for wardrobe or other backstage facilities 'presented many difficulties'.[279] Certain aspects of the design drew praise, with the inclusion of large sound and lighting control rooms in the auditorium seen as 'pleasing' and allowing the opportunity for scenic projection apparatus to be installed in the future. In looking beyond the auditorium, TAP also considered the design of the foyer and external spaces, as well as the role of the theatre in the civic realm. The committee presented ideas on the pedestrianisation of roads, the designs for shop frontages, and 'the need to attract the casual passer-by into an arcade shopping area'.[280] The report's conclusion captures the changing nature of early 1960s theatre construction, the adaptative role of the

[278] ABTT Archive (uncatalogued), *Report on proposed design for New Theatre, Bromley*, TPC Case Studies 1963–2010, No. 23–340, Box E1, p. 1.
[279] Ibid., p. 1.
[280] Ibid., p. 2..

TAP committee as an advisory service, and the importance of public money in developing new civic realms:

> Whilst TAP is most anxious not to hinder in any way the construction of the building, it hopes that due consideration will be given to the views expressed. Plans were thought to be highly unsatisfactory from many respects, and a possible hindrance to the development of the theatre as an important centre in the community life of Bromley.[281]

The Bromley report represents a growing interest of TAP in the wider concerns of theatre construction, with the committee acting as a self-assigned authoritative voice on the correct approach to designing all aspects of new civic playhouses and not just the stage. Reporting on over twenty-six projects in the first two years alone, 'members were confident any comments made would always provide full value', recommending specialist technical advice should always be sought.[282] By the end of 1964, the ABTT, the only representative body of technical practice at this time that could perform such an advisory role, had moved beyond an initial position of informing stage styles to include discussing and debating the wider material changes of civic theatre design.

Reflecting the growing conviction among ABTT networks of the need for technical expertise, in 1965 the TAP committee presented a series of talks on civic theatres, their housing, and their administration. Organised by the British Drama League, with support from the Theatre

[281] Ibid., p. 2.
[282] Ibid., p. 3.

Advisory Council and the Association of Municipal Corporations, the Civic Theatres conference was held on 24–25 February at County Hall, Westminster, in London. Keynote speakers on the first day included Lord Farringdon, Chairman of the Theatre Advisory Council, and Jennie Lee, Arts Minister and Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Public Building and Works.[283] Papers were given by Hugh Jenkins, MP ('What is a Civic Theatre?'), D. Colley ('The Library Theatre, Manchester'), Alderman A. J. Waugh ('The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry'), and R. Birks ('The Empire Theatre, Sunderland'). The presence of such illustrious figures alongside members of the ABTT demonstrates the growing importance given to the Association by the wider theatre sector when discussing the policies, practices, and governance of new theatre design. On the second day of the conference, a number of TAP committee members delivered papers on what the Association believed theatre planners should consider when preparing an architectural brief, with a specific focus on 'design and technical administration'.[284] I consider Civic Theatres to be a further example of how talks, conferences, and advocacy work provided one means by which the ABTT was able to exert influence upon an emerging technical industry.

Speakers in the morning session included a range of members from the TAP committee. First, Roderick Ham took to the stage, discussing the actor/audience relationship. Ham considered

[283] The Theatre Advisory Council was founded in 1962 on the initiative of, amongst others, Hugh Jenkins, being given a broad remit that included 'stopping the destruction of existing viable buildings and to encourage and advise on the construction of new ones'. V&A, THM/351/5/66, 'Theatre preservation and encouragement of new theatre building', 14 July 1961.
Other member organisations of the Theatre Advisory Council included: the Arts Council of Great Britain, London County Council, the Association of Municipal Corporations (AMC), the Society of Theatre Consultants (STC), the Council for Regional Theatres (C.O.R.T), NATTKE, Equity, Strand Electric, Association Internationale Technique des techniciens, the Fire Protection Association, the Home Office, the Standing Advisory Committee on Local Authorities and the Theatre.
[284] Association of Municipal Corporations and Theatre Advisory Council, *Conference on civic theatres: their housing and administration*, programme (24–25 February 1965 at County Hall, London, SE1). p. 1.

the new generation of 1950s playwrights, such as John Osborne, Harold Pinter, and Arnold Wesker, and the growing connections between new forms of theatre production styles and theatre building design. Douglas Cornelissen followed with a talk on the working stage, the innovations of post-war production, and the equipment needed to support alternate open-stage theatre shapes. Martin Carr considered stage lighting, more specifically the positioning of the lighting desk within the auditorium, explaining the opportunities presented by having a specialist lighting designer provide more than just decorative finishes to a performance. Ian Albery, exploring management and public areas, introduced an alternate type of front-of-house experience, presenting theatres as civic spaces being managed as a public service. John Wyckham read a paper on the repertory and repertoire theatres and the impact of funding on regional production, arguing the need for resident companies and appropriate skilled labour to be placed within civic theatres. In the afternoon session, ABTT member John Neville outlined requirements on repertory theatres for the actor/manager, which was followed by a twenty-minute lecture on 'many of the do's and don'ts of theatre building'.[285] The day's programme concluded with an open discussion on technical theatre, facilitated by ABTT chairman Norman Marshall and looking at the role of technical specialists in developing principal needs of civic theatre design.

The conference supported a growing belief among those attending in the value of developing theatre in light of the programme of civic renewal, with Marshall concluding, 'more money could and should be spent if theatre [was] to have the same cultural value as the civic art gallery or library in regional regeneration'.[286] The conference also supported the continued

[285] ABTT, Newsletter Vol. 1, p. 5.
[286] Association of Municipal Corporations and Theatre Advisory Council, *Conference on civic theatres*, p. 10.

influence of the ABTT, evidenced in the number of members speaking and the subject matters they chose to discuss. As the importance of new theatres such as the Nottingham Playhouse (1963), Cheltenham Festival Theatre (1963), and Bolton Octagon (1968) became apparent within the evolving civic planning of towns and regions in the later years of the 1960s – particularly across the large industrial centres still producing local wealth – by association so too did the advice of TAP, and, in turn, the role of the ABTT in building networks, providing advice, and establishing principles of theatre design. I will discuss these three theatres, alongside further examples of 1960s open-stage civic design, in section three. Here, it suffices to say talks, publications, and conference activities, alongside the continued work of TAP as an advisory body to the Arts Council of Great Britain, provided the ABTT with the necessary technical influence to inform and produce an impact upon the material changes taking place in civic theatre design at the end of the decade.

The influence of the ABTT can be traced further in *Preparing a Brief for a Theatre Building* (1971), a guide written at the end of the 1960s and published in 1971 by the Theatre Advisory Council and the Standing Advisory Committee on Local Authorities and the Theatre (SACLAT). In the guide, the ABTT was asked to write an outline of the main considerations when contemplating the design of a new theatre. Presented as a resource for local authorities, and commissioned as a preliminary guide of requirements for modern theatre needs, 'topics were derived from the technical experience gained by the ABTT and its members'.[287] This contribution was extended further with the Association providing advice

[287] Association of Municipal Corporations and Theatre Advisory Council, *Conference on civic theatres*, p. 3. The Standing Advisory Council members were: the Association of British Theatre Technicians, Association of Touring and Producing Managers, British Actors Equity Association, British Children's Theatre Association, British Drama League, Council of Regional Theatres, Institute of Municipal Entertainment, League of Dramatists, Musicians Union, National Association of Theatrical Television and Kine Employees, National Operatic and Drama

on a range of additional theatre factors, 'including civic and business model types and operational requirements'.[288] The booklet went on to cover a range of topics, all supported by empirical evidence gained from the recently built and, in part, publicly subsidised theatre buildings of the Housing the Arts programme.[289] The booklet further reinforced the position of the ABTT as the dominant association for advice on technical and stage requirements. In specifically presenting the concerns of the TAP membership, *Preparing a Brief for a Theatre Building* was written for those interested in building a civic theatre stage. Aimed at influencing the local councils who commissioned new civic theatres and the architects who designed them, the guide foreshadowed the impending release of the ABTT's next publication, *Theatre Planning* (1972), which originally provided a detailed glossary of the technical needs and requirements necessary for 'all successful playhouses'.[290]

Initially presented as a series of individual technical guides in the industry publication *Architects' Journal*, two thousand editions of the ABTT's *Theatre Planning* (1964) and *Theatre Planning II* (1967) were bound into paperback volumes, published, and distributed 'to those who commissioned theatres and those who built them'.[291] Following significant interest from regional councils and local trusts, the ABTT set about revising *Theatre Planning*, gathering information from within the membership from those who had experience of working within new forms of theatre production to enable a more considered publication.[292] By 1972, the

Association, Society of Theatre Research, Society of West End Theatre Managers, Stage Management Association, and the Theatrical Management Association.

[288] Ibid., p. 3.

[289] Topics included cost, type, organisational make-up, supply, demand, site, shape, stage, provision, use, and budget.

[290] ABTT, *Theatre planning*: *the Architects' Journal information library, AJ SFB (85)* (London: ABTT, 1964), p. 99.

[291] ABTT, *Theatre planning*: *the Architects' Journal information library, AJ SFB (95)* (London: ABTT, 1967), p. 103.

[292] The original *Architects' Journal* series was edited by Leslie Fairweather; the principal authors were ABTT members Peter Moro, Ian Appleton, Peter Jay, and Roderick Ham. When writing in his acknowledgements for *Theatre Planning* (1972), Ham was indebted as editor to Peter Moro and Frederick Bentham, 'for their continual

ABTT's third iteration of the book expanded upon 'the problems common to all forms of theatre design'.[293] *Theatre Planning* (1972) explored 'those spaces designed for presentation of live performances to an audience, including accommodation for the public and performers, and facilities that would have been required for performance, organisation, and production'.[294] In his introduction to the book, editor and future TAP committee chair Roderick Ham opened by describing a post-war period of accelerating change in British society, with technology advancing rapidly and where 'a reassessment of the problems of theatre planning and design was clearly necessary as a new generation of building arose'.[295]

---

advice and encouragement on matters both technical and syntactical, during the two years which the task of compiling and editing has been spread'. The chapter on acoustics was originally written by Henry Humphreys; work on safety, regulations, and legislation was largely the work of Eric Jordan, 'who also contributed to the section on comparisons of theatres and all the drawings in that chapter'. The chapter on stage scenery was adapted from the study by the ABTT Materials committee, first published in *Architects' Journal*. The members of the committee, of which the editor was the chairman, were: Ian Albery, Dorothea Alexander, Alan Cohen, Frederick Crooke, Bertram Harrison, Joseph McDougall, Harry Pegg, and Edward Tietjen.
The Materials committee, joined by Peter Angier, Ethel Langstreth, Ken Smalley, Peter White-Gaze, and Peter Woodham, assisted with the chapter onstage planning and with the glossary. Richard Brett contributed a note on powered flying. The ABTT Lighting committee drew up the original recommendations for stage lighting installations, published in the *Architects' Journal*. The members at that time were: Eric Baker, Frederick Bentham, Charles Bristow, Bill Bruce, John Bury, Martin Carr, Peter Coe, Elidir Davies, Joe Davis, David Furse, Barry Griffiths, Cyril Griffiths, Robert Hall, Margaret Harris, Edward Hitchman, Peter Jay, Brian Legge, Robert Ornbo, Richard Pilbrow, Francis Reid, Peter Rice, and John Wyckham. The document was completely revised by the committee, then joined by Brian Benn, Bill Besant, E. E. Faraday, Robert Fox, and R. G. S. Anderson, 'who contributed the section on providing for television broadcasts from theatres, and Derek Gill whose notes on memory systems was included'. Requirements for control rooms were taken from the ABTT information sheet on the subject by Martin Carr. Information on sound installation and communications was adapted from the ABTT Sound committee's studies on permanent equipment for theatres, permanent wiring for theatres, and stage management by sound control. The members of the committee were: David Ayliff (who, in conjunction with the West End Stage Managers' Association, prepared the material on prompt corners), Bernard Bibby, Sylvia Carter, David Collison, Barry Griffiths, Shirley Matthews, Peter Moore, Roger Spence, Dorothy Tenham, and Colin Wootton. The basis of the chapter on film projection was the series of articles by Leslie Knopp and Anthony Wylson which appeared in the *Architects' Journal* in March, April, and May 1967, and the section on heating and ventilation was adapted from an ABTT information sheet by Paul Hanson published in the *Architect's Journal*'s first series of design guides on theatres. Ham went on to say, 'the editor is very conscious of how much he has learned from taking part in the deliberations of the ABTT Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committee, chaired by Peter Moro, which over the last ten years has examined over one hundred schemes for new [civic] theatres or for the improvement of old ones'. The other members of the TAP committee were: Ian Albery, David Ayliff, Frederick Bentham, John Bury, Martin Carr, Douglas Cornelisson, Elidir Davies, Tony Easterbrook, John English, Michael Elliott, Eric Jordan, Iain Mackintosh, Richard Pilbrow, Ken Smalley, and John Wyckham. Roderick Ham, *Theatre planning* (London: Architect Press, 1972), p. 10.
[293] Roderick Ham, *Theatre planning* (London: Architect Press, 1972), p. 8.
[294] Ibid., p. 7.
[295] Ibid., p. 7.

Ham described the ABTT as driven by a group of enthusiasts, all professionally connected, who believed the time was right to improve technical standards across British theatre.[296]

With over seventy topics covered, across all aspects of theatre design – including auditoria, stage and ancillary spaces, fixtures, and equipment – I argue that *Theatre Planning* might be understood as an ABTT manifesto for change. The book is a declaration of ABTT aims for theatre construction, bringing together the culmination of an expansion of the theatre domain to the civic in the post-war period and a growing confidence within the ABTT of representing technical developments in stage design. Each version of the publication challenged the conventions of the proscenium picture frame, setting out the Association's principles that shaped the organisation in the 1960s and providing the practical considerations required for civic theatres to successfully house live performance.[297] Supported financially by the Arts Council and with advice from the *Architects' Journal*, *Theatre Planning* (1972) was built upon the growing professional confidence of (and in) the membership and its networks. Becoming one of several key ABTT publications, which intersected with the evolving theatre forms of the time, it is a book I will return to again in future chapters. Next, however, to further understand the impact of such material change upon theatre design, it is necessary to look more closely at some of the principal stage shapes of the period, the influence of the Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committee in building the leading playhouses of the 1960s, and the symbolic place of civic buildings within a post-war British theatrical landscape.

[296] Ibid., p. 9.
[297] Ibid., p. 7.

2.3 Evolving theatre forms and the post-proscenium stage: building the civic playhouse

As the progress, hopes, and active engagement of the ABTT broke new ground, the Association, through the work of individuals and committee groups, became reflective of wider social and cultural changes taking place in the 1960s across an innovative, industrialised, and technologically developing British theatre industry. A major thrust behind these changes was the rise of alternate, radical, and often political theatre, described by Andrew Davies as a movement that 'was against the apolitical or establishment tone of the plays presented in the West End'.[298] The drawing room settings of pre-war West End performances often excluded the working class, unless portrayed as domestic servants, with much of the talk which took place in scenes steering clear of political controversies. This was a policy induced by the Lord Chamberlain and the Examiner of Plays and, as Davies states, 'by the self-censorship of [theatre] managers who took care not to offend their clientele'.[299] The alternative theatre of early post-war Britain rebuffed the pre-war styles of Victorian proscenium production by presenting plays seen as directly relevant to larger proportions of the population, discussing topical issues that were seldom aired and usually ignored by the larger and more commercial London stages.

As I have discussed in section one of this chapter, new forms of theatre were enabled, in part, by the rise in subsidised civic playhouses and repertory companies emerging across the regions. Encouraged by the growing size and influence of the 1960s British labour movement, the 'secure cultural foundations' of alternate, radical, and politicised post-war theatre were

[298] Andrew Davies, *Other theatres*, p. 162.
[299] Ibid., p. 162.

'indicative of a mounting self-confidence'.[300] New forms of plays, and the theatre buildings they were housed in, challenged the Lord Chamberlain's authority, the pre-eminence of proscenium stage design, and the West End's centrality to British theatre. Influenced by the growth of experimental, radical, and alternative theatre being played in community centres, in student halls, and on the streets of Britain, venues such as the Traverse, Edinburgh (1963), a former brothel; the Victoria, Stoke-on-Trent (1963), a theatre-in-the-round;[301] and the Arts Lab, Drury Lane (1967), an open space, further challenged 'old West End values'.[302] A new social, as well as artistic, climate was emerging, termed as 'essential' in the Government's white paper *A Policy for the Arts* (1965) in cultivating a more decentralised Britain.[303]

New forms of public subsidy provided a safety net for alternative theatre to thrive, with regional repertory companies mixing programmes of traditional and new work best matching the requirements of policy makers, developing a desire amongst some to refurbish old buildings or commission new ones. The renewed vitality of live regional drama was, in part, also a reflection of the belief of local authorities in the place of the arts within contemporary society, as civic playhouses were built to symbolise social democratisation within reshaped communal realms with theatre being presented as a public service. New 'social' theatres

[300] At this time, the number of trade unionists rose from just over 9.5 million at the end of the 1950s to over 11 million by 1970. Andrew Davies, *Other theatres*, p. 162.

[301] One of only a small number of its type, the conversion of an old cinema in 1962 provided the country with its first theatre-in-the-round. The Victoria, Stoke-on-Trent, was a professional playhouse with resident company, designed by Stephen Joseph to popularise theatre 'not only through the performance of new work but also by stripping away the traditional trappings of theatre buildings'. For Joseph, the removal of the proscenium was designed to emphasise the live qualities of theatre 'as an alternative to the attraction of television and cinema, with the Victoria allowing for unobstructed, three-dimensional presentations'. Stephen Joseph, *Theatre in the round*, p. 18.

[302] Andrew Davies, *Other theatres,* p. 160.

[303] Presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister by Command of Her Majesty, *A policy for the arts: the first steps* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, February, 1965): https://collective-encounters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/A-Policy-for-the-Arts-Jennie-Lee.pdf [last accessed: 06 January 2022], p. 12.

presented larger foyers, shared entrance points, and refreshments that were 'available all day', acting as hubs for local communities with cafés and facilities made accessible to the public irrespective of shows.[304] The availability of subsidy also allowed smaller auditoria to be built, removing the need for large audiences to provide the theatre with financial security and 'enabling a rejection of the naturalist theatre of the West End and proscenium dominance'.[305] Some theatres were designed without a proscenium, while others retained a form of traditional yet flexible surround that 'blurred the lines between performance space and auditorium to allow various configurations of seating and stage', while also accommodating new forms of backstage design.[306]

An area of great interest to the ABTT, backstage spaces of the 1960s were often extensive in comparison to old theatre stock, with civic repertory theatres in particular designed to accommodate workshops, storage spaces, rehearsal rooms, and offices. This is one further reason why the old theatre stock was seen as inadequate by the ABTT, not just the fact buildings were locked into the dynamics of the proscenium arch but that they lacked the backstage spaces and administrative areas required by more contemporary styles of production. Not all open stages and styles required each backstage element, however, creating a cacophony of design implications, which prompted Stephen Joseph and other prominent members of the ABTT in the 1960s to vehemently argue the need for specialist technical advice. Once again, commenting in the inaugural ABTT newsletter of 1961, Joseph was an early agitator for change; he argued, 'unless the ABTT states clearly and at frequent intervals, through the media of its committees of experienced men and women, the technical

[304] Alistair Fair, *Peter Moro and partners* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), p. 106.
[305] Andrew Davies, *Other theatres,* p. 164.
[306] Alistair Fair, *Peter Moro and partners*, p. 106.

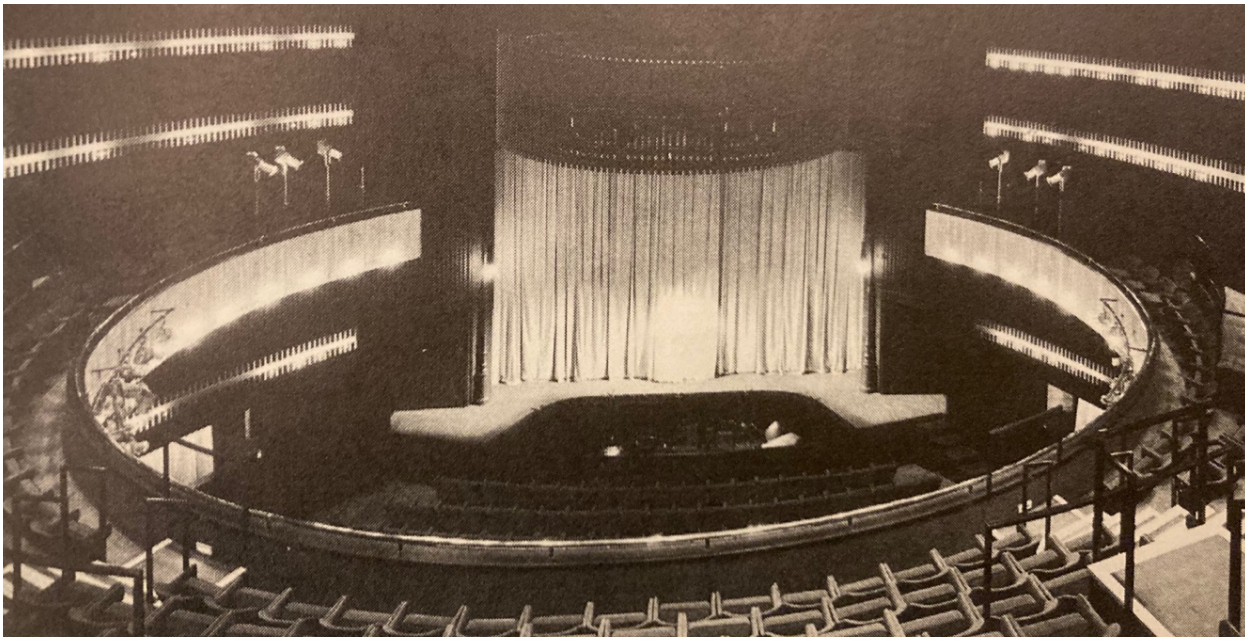
needs of all types of modern theatre, we shall find a country riddled with pre-fabricated shacks and steel and concrete barns'.[307] He went on to say:

> The ABTT is endeavouring, against very great odds, to be a watchdog for all branches of theatre, from actor to stagehand, and box office clerk to cleaner. The facts must be clearly stated so that the authorities can decide for themselves just how far they can meet the recommendations. At least we will set a standard where before none has existed.[308]

Becoming the primary organisation that routinely offered technical assessment on all projects seeking subsidy and support, members of the ABTT immediately began influencing and changing the shapes of civic stage design. Groups such as the Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committee, in particular, who I discussed in section two, were involved in the actual design of theatre buildings, exerting influence by informing decision-making processes at a national level. The following three examples show how an emergence of alternate theatre designs in the 1960s quickly followed public (and private) investment through the Arts Council's Housing the Arts scheme and local government support, all involving the expertise and technical awareness of ABTT members, highlighting the breadth of open-stage construction across the decade.

[307] ABTT, Newsletter Vol. 1, No. 1, 25 March 1961 (London: ABTT, 1961), p. 2. ABTT Archive/shelves/ (PBL1/BLT 0001-0010/1961-1965).
[308] Ibid., p. 2.

Figure 2.2: Nottingham Playhouse, auditorium, 1963. Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, Part II, Newer Spaces, in, *Making space for theatre,* ed. by Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Stratford: Mulryne & Shewring, 1995), pp. 156-180 (p. 131).



The Nottingham Playhouse, a civic theatre with proscenium stage (shown in figure 2.2), opened in 1963 under the guidance of two highly influential ABTT members, architect Peter Moro and consultant Richard Southern. The Playhouse was built for Nottingham's repertory theatre company after their existing premises, a converted cinema, proved too small for growing audience numbers and became technically inadequate for the style and type of plays being produced. Financed by local council subsidy and a substantial loan, the building of a new theatre appealed to the council's belief that 'providing for people's leisure was almost as important as jobs, housing, and education'.[309] Moro, who had gained experience of building for the arts when overseeing the design of the Royal Festival Hall (1951), brought an understanding in modern theatre design to the brief, one that was 'prepared in consultation with many theatre people'.[310] As outlined by Alistair Fair, 'it was the absence of such an

[309] Alistair Fair, *Peter Moro and partners*, p. 108.
[310] Ibid, p. 108.

informed brief and careful preliminary thought which led to the defects observed in the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry', which – as I have previously discussed in chapter one – acted as a catalyst for change and gave rise to a greater awareness of the need for technical expertise in planning and designing theatres.[311]

The foyers of Nottingham Playhouse were deliberately imitative of the Royal Festival Hall, designed as connected spaces on differing levels and 'featuring staircases and gallery-esque walkways to provide space for late night performances, talks, installations, and exhibitions'.[312] Southern and Moro combined in one building 'two seemingly incompatible forms of theatre: open and proscenium stage'.[313] They achieved this by building the auditorium in a cylindrical form, and instead of the traditional framed hole in the wall to the stage, the proscenium was no more than a gap in the surround wall. This allowed for the performance to then be transferred into the auditorium by a large mechanically raised thrust stage, with the audience seated in a drum-shaped position. Front stalls could be replaced by a substantial forestage, providing a theatre that was flexible enough to present plays of 'many periods and countries' in front of a proscenium or not, depending on the needs of the production.[314]

[311] Ibid., p. 108.
[312] Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, Part II, Newer Spaces, in, *Making space for theatre,* ed. by Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Stratford: Mulryne & Shewring, 1995), pp. 156-180 (p. 130).
[313] Ibid., p. 30.
[314] Alistair Fair, *Peter Moro and partners*, p. 114.

Figure 2.3: Nottingham Playhouse, main elevation, 1963. Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, Part II, Newer Spaces, in, *Making space for theatre,* ed. by Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Stratford: Mulryne & Shewring, 1995), pp. 156-180 (p. 131).



The layout was reflective of a greater pluralisation of forms in theatrical production and, indeed, as figure 2.3 shows, a widening of what the public would expect to see in a theatre with open foyers and communal spaces for audiences to share. The Playhouse was created as an adaptable space, with advocates arguing that this type of post-proscenium shape 'suited a range of differing kinds of play types' and was more than just a 'conservative' approach to stage design.[315] For the Nottingham Playhouse, the traditional ornaments of older theatres were removed, with foyers given neutral colours, enabling the movement of audiences and people within enlarged and democratised public realms. The auditoria, 'built to radiate a festival atmosphere', used modern lighting technology to subdue the audience so as not to

[315] Alistair Fair, *Peter Moro and partners*, p. 112.

distract it from 'the action on the stage'.[316] In contrast to the Belgrade Theatre, the Nottingham Playhouse was well received for its design and technical capacity, allowing the repertory company it was built for to create a varied programme of theatrical works while remaining embedded within its community. The success of the theatre was to be used by future theatre consultants as an exemplar for civic playhouse designs, and the Playhouse was considered by the Arts Council as 'arguably the finest building architecturally and technically with which the Arts Council has ever been associated'.[317] In its thirty-third annual report, the Arts Council went on to describe the Nottingham Playhouse as a case study of best practice, by stating, 'it serves to emphasise the benefits of engaging a good architect with relevant experience together with recognised theatre consultants and is an example to other local authorities'.[318] The Nottingham Playhouse opened with a production of *Coriolanus* on 12 December 1963, directed by Tyrone Guthrie and starring young actors Ian McKellen and Judy Dench. Guthrie, an advocate of new theatre styles, was not only an influential director; his use of the thrust stage would go on to shape many civic theatre designs in the years that followed.[319]

---

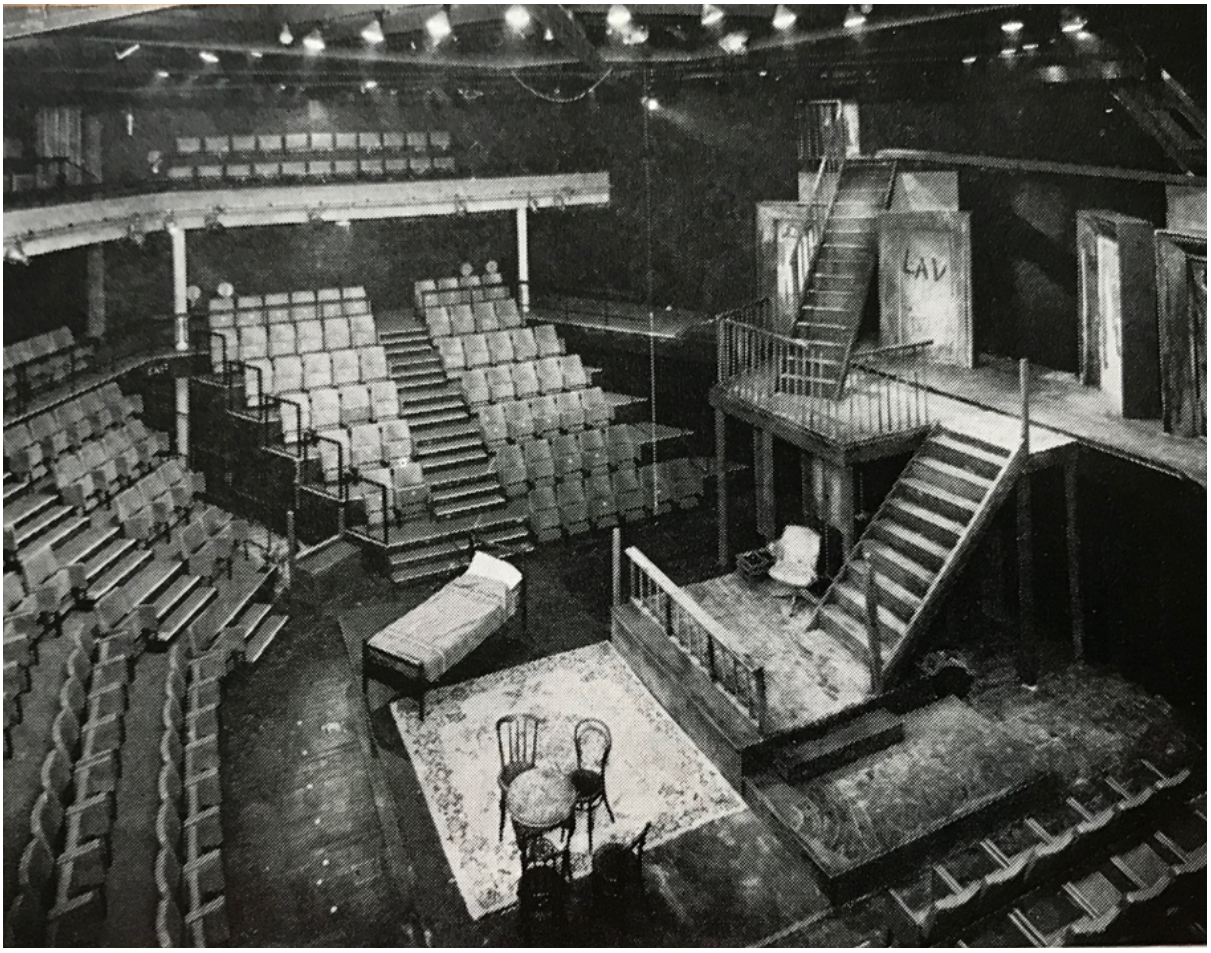
[316] Ibid., p. 114.

[317] Arts Council of Great Britain, *A year of achievement: thirty-third annual report and accounts 1977/78*, p. 36: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Arts%20Council%20of%20Great%20Britain%20-%20Thirty-third%20annual%20report%20and%20accounts%201977_78.pdf [last accessed: 9 April 2020].

[318] Ibid., p. 36

[319] The Chichester Festival Theatre (1963) was the first thrust playhouse to be built in Britain. Designed as an open-staged theatre and inspired by Tyrone Guthrie's Festival Theatre in Stratford, Ontario (1953), it was built for the Chichester Festival Theatre Trust through a combination of private and public money. Acting as a symbol of modern British theatre, the Chichester was designed for the 'promotion and advancement of aesthetic education and the cultivation and improvement of public taste' – with an opening season directed by Sir Laurence Olivier. Hexagonal in shape, the building housed both auditorium and stage, providing uninterrupted views and sight-lines for all; it was also conceived without the need for a fly tower or orchestra pit, unlike the convention of traditional proscenium design. West Sussex Record Office, Chichester, Box 60, The Chichester Festival Theatre Trust, memo 23 March 1961, quoted in Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouse*, p. 19.

Figure 2.4: The Bolton Octagon, 1968. Fred Bentham, *New theatres in Britain* (London: Tabs Publication, 1970), p. 42.



Guthrie's legacy stretched to the design of the Bolton Octagon (1967), a civic theatre built for a professional repertory company and made to be adaptable in form. Beginning as a theatre-in-the-round, the playhouse was designed by Bolton's director of architecture, Geoffrey H. Brooks, who used the success of the Nottingham Playhouse to inform initial planning decisions. As can be seen in figure 2.4, the theatre was small in scale, seating 422 in the round (figure 2.5), 356 when seating tiers were removed to form an end stage (figure 2.6), and 322 in (Guthrie) thrust stage layout (figure 2.7). The design of the theatre was strongly influenced by its director, Robin Noel Pemberton-Billing, who along with five of his theatre students from Loughborough Training College contacted Stephen Joseph and TAP for advice and support in achieving a playhouse that was able to offer a more 'thoroughgoing

modernity than many of its contemporaries'.[320] Pemberton-Billing believed open staging, rather than proscenium staging, would attract young patrons and create more of an informal atmosphere, as the Octagon's modernity was to 'extend beyond appearance and on to the actor-audience relationship'.[321]

Initial designs for the theatre were shown to the ABTT in 1966, with the TAP committee critical of stage and auditoria layouts, suggesting the octagonal shape be elongated for 'reasons of practicality and flexibility'.[322] The recommendations were acted upon, and with financial support from the local council, plans were put forward for the theatre to be part of a wider regeneration of Bolton. Councillors believed a theatre would help attract new business to a town whose primary industry, textiles, was in contraction. The theatre was to represent a sense of, 'modern vibrancy against a backdrop of intertown competition', while providing a 'leisure facility that local residents and the wider community supported'.[323]

[320] Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses,* p. 193.
[321] Robin Pemberton-Billing, *The Octagon Theatre: concept to reality* (Bolton: Octagon Theatre, 2011), p. 14.
[322] Bob Millington, Tony Jackson, and Athene Feilding, *Remembering Stephen Joseph: theatre visionary and pioneer* (Leeds: Book Empire, 2019), p. 74.
[323] Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses,* p. 102.

Figure 2.5: Bolton Octagon, Theatre-in-the-round, 1968. Fred Bentham, *New theatres in Britain* (London: Tabs, 1970), p. 42.

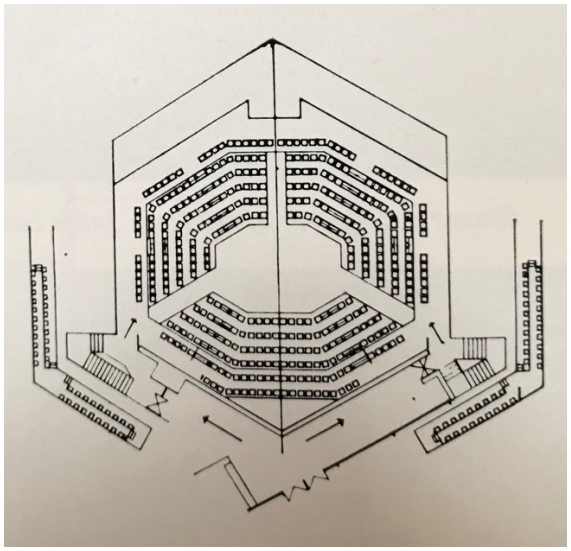


Figure 2.6: Bolton Octagon, End-on stage, 1968. Fred Bentham, *New theatres in Britain* (London: Tabs, 1970), p. 42.

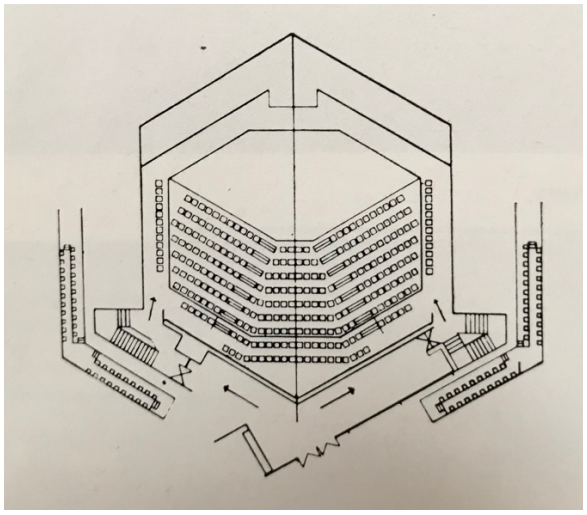
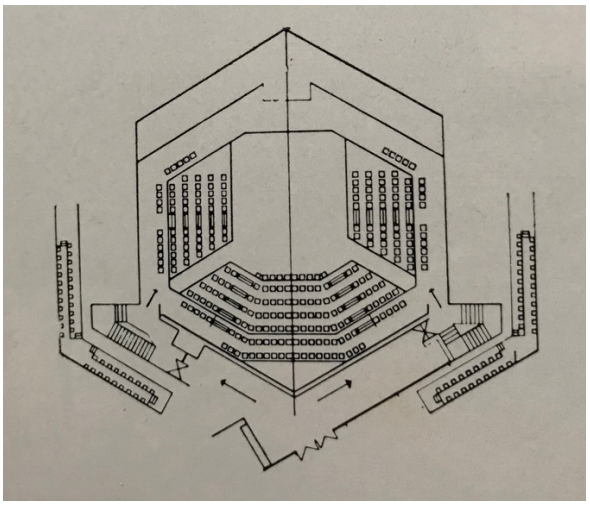


Figure 2.7: Bolton Octagon, Thrust stage, 1968. Fred Bentham, *New theatres in Britain* (London: Tabs, 1970), p. 42.



The Bolton Octagon took only seven months to build, at a cost of £70,000, compared to several years of consultation and a considerably larger sum of £330,000 to build the Nottingham Playhouse. It is an example of smaller and cheaper architectural types of playhouses beginning to emerge towards the end of the 1960s, alongside larger, more civic-statement orientated theatre building such as the next civic development I shall discuss.

The Sheffield Crucible (1971) was also built to be part of a wider local authority planning strategy to rejuvenate the civic realm. This open-stage, predominantly (Guthrie) thrust theatre was built for the Sheffield Playhouse Company, under the direction of Tanya Moiseiwitsch, and with specialist consultation on stage, lighting, and equipment by founder ABTT member Richard Pilbrow and his company, Theatre Projects.[324] The Crucible was designed to develop an intimate actor/audience relationship whilst permitting three-dimensional staging using a narrow promontory stage with step, moat, and diagonal vomitory entrances as shown in figure 2.8.[325] With an emphasis on Grecian performance and costume, rather than traditional scenery, the Crucible was architecturally designed as an enclosing octagon that developed into a scenic wall with small lights above the stage area to imitate a sense of open sky. The public areas were 'conceived as a street to bring people into the building throughout the day', leading them to the broad and spacious foyers where an interplay in levels and voids created places for people 'to see and be seen'.[326] This was a design which echoed much of Peter Moro's Nottingham Playhouse and Royal Festival Hall.

[324] Tanya Moiseiwitsch was a specialist in thrust stage design, having worked alongside the pioneer of thrust staging in Britain, Tyrone Guthrie.
[325] Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, p. 158.
[326] Ibid., p. 158.

Figure 2.8: The Crucible Theatre, Sheffield, 1971. Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, Part II, Newer Spaces, in, *Making space for theatre,* ed. by Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Stratford: Mulryne & Shewring, 1995), pp. 156-180 (p. 158).



Facing a new public square, the Crucible was designed by Renton Howard Wood Associates to be visible from afar while being embedded within its local settings. Façades allowed views into and from the building, important in developing community and a sense of civic pride in the town. Perhaps more important for this sense of modernisation and urbanity was the way in which the lower foyer was intended to form part of a longer pedestrianised walkway,

linking the railway station with the shopping district of the city.[327] The building fabric was purposefully designed to blend interior with exterior, presenting the Crucible as a contemporary playhouse, civic in presentation, location, and function, while being pioneering on stage. The opening night, a production of *Fanfare* on 6 November 1971, was a three-part programme that featured children improvising a battle between the Aztecs and the Conquistadors. The second night featured Anton Chekhov's *Swan Song*, with Ian McKellen as Vasily Vasilych Svetlovidov, and the third presented a music hall finale with a Sheffield Brass Band, highlighting the adaptable and civic purpose of the theatre and the buildings relationship with civic-minded theatre producers.[328] As I will discuss in chapter three, the Crucible is also significant for the design of its auditorium, including innovation in sound and lighting positions around the main house – what I consider to be a recognition of emerging stage bifurcation in the years that followed. One of the last civic playhouses to be built before the release of *Theatre Planning* in 1972, the Crucible also provides closure on the period of 1960s playhouse design for the ABTT, acting as the moment when the Association's manifesto for change was introduced to a new decade of practitioners continuing the post-war boom of theatre construction.

The Nottingham Playhouse, the Bolton Octagon, and the Sheffield Crucible, all monuments of civic pride, provide examples of 1960s theatre design that challenged the ideals of a traditional proscenium stage. The post-war consensus provided the means to move away

[327] This concept was also present in other designs of the period, such as the Gordan Craig Theatre, Stevenage, built in 1975 and seen by Theatres Trust 'as probably the best designed civic entertainment centre of its type in the country'. https://database.theatrestrust.org.uk/resources/theatres/show/2755-gordon-craig-theatre [last accessed: 21 March 22].

[328] Playwrights and theatre makers were in tune with differing forms of stage and their relations to the audience – that civic-minded theatres produced a certain kind of theatre maker and writer for the stage – all intricately bound together. I will discuss and exemplify this idea further in chapter three.

from the dominance of the picture frame, with alternate forms of open stage types establishing a material change in the principles of pre-war architectural design. The expertise of the ABTT that formed in 1961, particularly the members of the Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committee, came together to inform those looking to design and build the civic theatres of the post-war construction boom. It was the most prominent within the group, members such as Stephen Joseph and Peter Moro, who shaped the TAP committee, and as a consequence, the wider influence of ABTT networks of the 1960s. Technical innovation provided the material basis for the cultural transformation of theatre, and subsequently, by the end of the decade, the number of civic playhouses being proposed and built across the regions offered new challenges to the ABTT. Presenting as the expert in technical theatre, the Association not only continued to advise on designs proposed to the Housing the Arts programme across the 1970s, their manifesto for change expanded to include the equipment and training required for the successful presentation of new forms of theatrical production. As a consequence of the regional theatre building boom, a newly professionalised labour force emerged amid the development of skills and equipment and a bifurcation of traditional stage roles. It is the representative role of the ABTT and the processes of technical professionalisation in the 1970s that I will now discuss in chapter three, exploring the continual improvements and innovations of stage modernisation, the introduction of agreed values and behaviours for sector professionalism, and the required training and regulation of standards in stage labour.

Chapter 3

Setting standards: the ABTT and technical professionalisation

New major civic theatres continued to be built across the regions of Britain in the 1970s. Local government promoted and subsidised construction, alongside growing contributions made by individual benefactors, grant-giving trusts, and local fundraising efforts. The Arts Council's Housing the Arts programme, introduced in 1965, continued to part-fund and make decisions upon many projects, with its views on the most suitable theatre proposals carrying particular weight. The ABTT Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committee, who had been part of the Arts Council's decision-making processes since 1965, informed on the technical aspects of all projects submitted to the Housing the Arts programme throughout the decade. The ABTT, by now the representative body for technical theatre, supported the continual improvements and progress made in modern playhouse design. Expanding the theatrical estate across the regions, modernising factors such as open-stage technology and playhouse construction placed demands upon a technical workforce still reliant upon many pre-war values and beliefs. The work of the ABTT, particularly sub-committee groups across lighting, sound, and safety, introduced a previously unseen level of professionalism into new forms of technical practice. By identifying both the training and recruitment needs of the theatre industry, the ABTT looked to establish a series of programmes that provided a consistency in the skills and qualifications of technicians across the regions. The standardisation of technical procedures which ensued, a consequence of modernisation and professionalism, culminated in the necessary processes for what I term 'technical professionalisation'. The ABTT, acting as the representative technical body in British theatre, went on to establish the norms of best practice in the years that followed.

Even though a significant number of playhouses were planned for and built under the Housing the Arts programme in the 1970s, three in particular were unique in approach and modern in all aspects of design. The Sheffield Crucible, a theatre I discussed in chapter two for its modern style of thrust stage design, was also significant for its innovative use of stage technology, which demanded high levels of technical expertise. Introducing progressive forms of lighting and sound technology when it opened in 1971, the auditorium was built to place technical specialists within close proximity of the stage, able to see and hear productions without obstruction. The Crucible is also important for being one of the first modern playhouses to actively recruit an in-house sound engineer, an early example of sector recognition for the bifurcation of stage expertise taking place within the processes of technical professionalisation. Next, the National Theatre, London, which opened in 1976, comprised a complex of three theatres: one open stage, one adjacent proscenium stage, and – a year later – one experimental studio. Each space – the Oliver, the Lyttelton, and the Cottesloe (now Dorfman) theatres, respectively – was designed to provide facilities and a home for Britain's National Theatre Company. Built to present a mix of Shakespeare, revived classics, and new plays operating on a repertory system, the National Theatre was designed to question the relationship between actor and audience, between actor and actor, and between audience and audience. The National, a civic theatre built for the nation, was a symbol of modernising Britain that epitomised the post-war wave of subsidised playhouse construction. Finally, the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, which also opened in 1976, was unique in its design. Built as a free-standing performance structure within a Grade II listed building, the Royal Exchange presents a different kind of modern playhouse, one created with the 'close collaboration of architects, engineers, consultants, specialists, and

many members of the company'.[329] With audiences, actors, and operational teams housed within a steel and glass module, the Royal Exchange appeared as a contrast of old and new and challenged the very notion of civic needs within modern theatre design.

I have chosen to focus on the Crucible, the National, and the Royal Exchange because the ABTT directly influenced the design of each playhouse in different ways. Specific members informed the construction of stages and spaces by offering contributions to industry groups and (in the case of the National) joining specially formed discussion panels. ABTT committee groups and individual members provided expertise on the installation of sound and lighting equipment, often pushing the boundaries of early post-war design to accommodate the very latest in stage ideas and technology. Some of those most proactive within the ABTT membership went on to work behind the stages of the Crucible, the National, and the Exchange as either engineers, technicians, directors, or technical specialists, their expertise required to operate and embrace the innovative machinery that lay behind technical modernisation. Further to this, the ABTT influence is evident through the practices of technical professionalism – an increase in the level of skills, the types of training, and the ways of recruiting technical labour. The National Theatre in particular required a large number of qualified technicians, placing a demand on an already small pool of specialists and increasing the need for a greater spread of qualified stagehands across the capital and the regions. The scale of the National in particular also required a consistency in the level of skilled stage operators available, with the ABTT developing a regulatory framework of

[329] Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, *Making space for theatre* (Stratford: Mulryne & Shewring, 1995), p. 160.

qualifications, provided through a series of training initiatives and standardisation of technical practice.

Looking beyond the capital, the often-municipal spaces of modern regional theatres required specialist technical knowledge and a larger, highly skilled backstage workforce to support national expansion of the theatre estate. The speed and innovation of theatre construction, however, outpaced the slow growth of the technical labour pool, which struggled to adapt to modern forms of production, and in the process exposed an industry that lacked the training, standards, skills, and numbers of technicians required to support regional and national ambitions. Gradually, technical networks began to emerge, with the ABTT representing the accelerated growth in the skills of stage labourers across the 1970s and the revision of modern production processes that ultimately led to the professionalisation of technical labour.

Having discussed the factors behind the formation of the ABTT in chapter one and the Association becoming the representative body for technical theatre in chapter two, in this chapter I will now focus upon the three identified processes of technical professionalisation and the importance of the ABTT to continued open-stage theatre design in the post-war period. I will turn to the individual observations, experiences, and experimentations of those innovators of 1970s open stages, in which the often-hidden and complex stories of technical innovation can be found and understood, scattered across the influential networks of the ABTT.[330] Within these networks, a broad set of modern stage measures were developed that

[330] Technological innovation contributed to an expansion in job roles, requiring the recruitment and training of a growing labour force and the setting of standards across splintering technical specialists' roles.

went on to determine professionalised labour and regulatory standards more generally, and here I will examine them in order to understand the processes of professionalisation. In the first section of this chapter, I examine the role of the ABTT as an expanding association of experts, representative of the processes of technical modernisation in 1970s British theatre. I present a deeper exploration of the non-proscenium shapes and rapid technical innovations that radicalised post-war regional playhouses to understand the continual improvements and the progress of open stage design.[331] In section two, I discuss how the ABTT encouraged the formation of new technical networks, redefining recruitment and training while at the same time challenging the traditional meaning of backstage labour. In section three, I move on to analyse the wider industry networks that formed as a consequence of the regulatory standardisation of technical practice. I pay particular attention to the way that early ABTT recommendations informed later regulation of technical standards, as collaborative codes of practice went on to shape and extend safety in backstage theatre. The chapter ends at the point when the post-war settlement of civic theatre reaches its conclusion, in the changed political and economic circumstances of the early 1980s.[332]

3.1 Technical modernisation: experimental spaces and progressive stage technology

The ABTT was at the forefront of technical innovation in 1970s British theatre. This was a decade that saw an acceleration in the number of modern playhouses planned for and built

[331] By focussing on the problematisation of current historical narratives, I move beyond the prevalent focus in much scholarship on buildings and the aesthetics of new theatre forms, exposing the transformative processes and relationships of a technical industry that has so far, for the most part, remained unexamined. As explained in my introduction and in previous chapters, the ABTT archive is an unprocessed collection that is not open to the public and that theatre historians do not know of, nor look at. This chapter begins to address that omission.
[332] Thatcherism – ironically, at the very point at which the ABTT reaches its zenith.

across the regions, with the ABTT sub-committee networks of stage specialists supporting all publicly funded designs with technical solutions. A period of great innovation in lighting technology in particular, developments in operating desks and non-conventional rigs offered new ways of illuminating the stage. The 1970s also saw an acceleration in sound technology, with pioneering new equipment introduced to amplify voices and play effects on stage becoming an essential tool of performance and composition.[333] The continual improvements and progress of stage equipment became entwined with the varying models of alternate stage design, with experimentation of performance spaces requiring the inventiveness and progression of new technology, a process I term technical modernisation. Open stages required the construction of new bridges to reach across non-linear performance spaces, pioneering ways of controlling light within changing actor/audience dynamics, and revolutionary memory systems to recall complex plotting designs. The ABTT manifesto for change – *Theatre Planning* (1972), a publication I discussed in chapter two and will refer to again in section three of this chapter – considered sound installation and communications as 'complex, with technology constantly advancing'.[334] The need for a sound room with console, the introduction of speakers on and off stage, and a variety of control panels required in and around the auditorium were new considerations for theatre designers, forcing a reconsideration of traditional design techniques and requirements for modern performance spaces. As I will now go on to show, the speed of technical innovation and stage design meant that by the end of the 1970s, the very idea of what counted as a modern theatre was itself subject to change.

[333] Amplification and sound systems were crude and of poor quality at the beginning of the post-war period.
[334] Roderick Ham, (Ed.), *Theatre planning*, Association of British Theatre Technicians (London: The Architectural Press, 1972). p. 137.

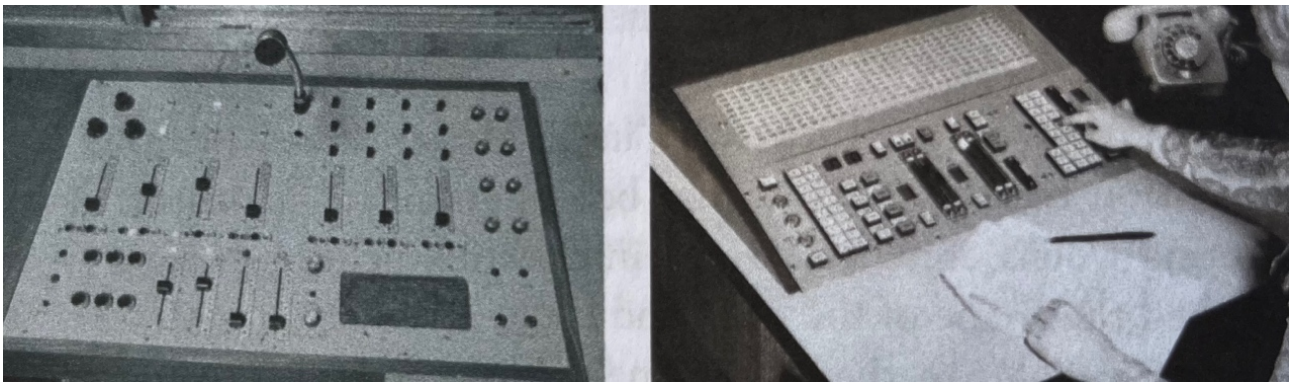
It is within the interwoven and layered stories of those whom ABTT founder member Frederick Bentham describes as 'inventing and initiating theatre equipment and pioneering ways of using it' that the processes of technical modernisation can be best traced.[335] Those at the forefront of technical development have provided 'chronologies of key events through the publication of personal accounts and shared experiences', such as ABTT members David Collison (*The Sound of Theatre*, 2008) and Richard Pilbrow (*A Theatre Project*, 2011).[336] Further, biographies such as *The Guthrie Thrust Stage* (Iain Mackintosh, 2011), *Peter Moro and Partners* (Alastair Fair, 2021), and *Stirring up Sheffield* (Colin George and Tedd George, 2021) offer an exploration of the origins of some of the most prominent regional theatres of the 1970s, including what I consider to be three of the most important: the Crucible Theatre, significant for introducing the first true Guthrie stage; the Royal Exchange Theatre, important for its pioneering in-the-round design; and the National Theatre, which was built to represent the pinnacle of British theatrical creativity. Over sixty new theatres were built across the UK, with many more modelled and planned for, in the time it took to build the National Theatre, during a period rich in technological endeavour and stage innovation. It is the evolution of theatre and stage design that culminated in the building of the National Theatre that I will use to highlight the interconnectivity of the period, by focussing on the knitted relationships of early post-war stage shapes, technologies, and expertise that informed the eventual opening of the country's most prominent modern theatre building.[337] To do this, however, I first need to start with the history of the Sheffield Crucible – the introduction of the first true

[335] Fred Bentham, *Sixty years of light work* (Isleworth: Strand Lighting Limited, 1992), back page.
[336] David Collison, *The sound of theatre: from the Ancient Greeks to the digital age* (Cambridge: Plasa, 2008), back page.
[337] By using the term 'interconnectivity', I reference the heterogenous factors that link post-war playhouse development in this period, including the stage design, technology, labour, specialisms, specialists, and aesthetics of technical modernisation.

Guthrie thrust stage in British theatre – and the impact of the ABTT upon pioneering stage technology and technical expertise.

As discussed in the biography of the theatre's designer, Colin George, with his son, Tedd George, 'the Sheffield Crucible was built in 1971 with a revolutionary thrust stage through profound design and technical innovation', and it is one of the most significant stories of any theatre from the period.[338] Challenging proscenium conventions of production through a telling of his father's experience in 'bringing the Crucible to life', Tedd George explains how the use of a thrust 'presented radically different challenges for lighting and sound techniques' and, as figure 3.1 shows, 'required pioneering stage technology'.[339]

Figure 3.1: The Sheffield Crucible lighting and sound desks, 1971. On the left, a sound control desk, and on the right, a Q-file lighting control desk – both designed specifically for the Sheffield Crucible by Richard Pilbrow and his Theatre Projects team in 1971. Colin George and Tedd George, *Stirring up Sheffield* (London: Wordville, 2021), p. 150.



Despite electrical engineers having already been appointed at the beginning of the project, Tedd George explains, 'to exploit the full potential of the [Crucible] stage, expert technical advice on lighting was also needed'.[340] Richard Pilbrow, by now a highly successful consultant

[338] Colin George and Tedd George, *Stirring up Sheffield* (London: Wordville, 2021), back page.
[339] Ibid., back page.
[340] Ibid), back page.

and experienced ABTT member, provided 'the innovative designs needed for lighting bridges with three-dimensional lighting techniques, and the development of an inverted egg crate lighting and suspension rig design'.[341] Pilbrow worked with Colin George to provide a thrust stage, which the latter considered 'provided a personal contact between actor and audience'.[342] During initial discussions with Colin George, Pilbrow described 'the idea of a three-dimensional open stage as opposed to a proscenium presentation where the action and the actor are viewed against a scenic background'.[343] Pilbrow argued that a reliance upon lighting was a necessity to provide mood and atmosphere, thus demanding a greater amount of stage lamps in comparison with a proscenium stage of equivalent size.[344] Pilbrow, along with members of the ABTT (some of whom were also employees of his Theatre Projects company), created a new lighting system that magnetically recorded lantern settings (up to 200) and had capacity for up to 250 cues. Colin George recalls this as being 'a very practicable solution to a very complex question of lighting'.[345] Through the use of stage lighting, Pilbrow presented the proximity of the spectator to the performer as one of the virtues of the open stage. As Colin recalled to Tedd George, 'the better and more imaginatively lit the actor, the

[341] Ibid., p. 149. Pilbrow worked on many stage designs of the period, including Michael Elliott's at Manchester 69, Sir Laurence Olivier's at the Chichester Festival Theatre, and Tanya Moiseiwitsch's at the Old Vic, and was lighting consultant on the National Theatre. His lighting of the Crucible stage would come from four intersecting lighting bridges which followed the shape of the stage and could be directed at 45, 135, 225, and 315 degrees to the centre line of the stage.

[342] Quoted in, Iain Mackintosh, *Theatre spaces 1920–2020: finding the fun in functionalism* (London, New York, and Dublin: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2023), p. 49.

[343] Colin George and Tedd George, *Stirring up Sheffield*, p. 128.

[344] The Crucible was built as an open stage theatre, replacing the company's earlier proscenium playhouse for its own productions and (eventually) an annual snooker tournament. The audience is evenly arranged on three sides of a thrust stage, a design in direct succession to other theatres conceived by Tyrone Guthrie and Tanya Moiseiwitsch.

[345] Colin George and Tedd George, *Stirring up Sheffield,* p. 128. The opening night of the Crucible Theatre, a Fanfare Evening that showcased the versatility of the thrust stage, consisted of three performances that included a piece of devised children's theatre, Ian McKellan in a performance of *Swan Song*, and a Music Hall finale.

more effective the performance – and the more this form of theatre is exploited'.[346] As I will discuss later in this chapter, Richard Pilbrow, along with many of his ABTT colleagues, would go on to have a significant and long-lasting influence upon the design of modern theatres and stage technology in the years that followed.

Prior to the Crucible, it was theatre director Tyrone Guthrie who first presented the thrust stage as a new form of post-war performance space in 1948.[347] Originally improvised as an open stage with the audience on three sides, Guthrie's first theatre, in Stratford, Ontario, was built under a tent, 'with a permanent structure only being made once it had proved itself in design and economics'.[348] Replicated with an improved shape in Minneapolis, it was later copied, 'poorly', at Chichester, before Britain's first pure Guthrie thrust stage, The Crucible, opened in Sheffield in 1971.[349] Enjoying direct involvement with the architects, both Guthrie and his long-time collaborator Tanya Moiseiwitsch are credited with the theatre's successful design.[350] For the Chichester Festival Theatre, built almost a decade earlier, a lack of direct involvement with either Guthrie or Moiseiwitsch had resulted in a stage deemed too wide

[346] Colin George and Tedd George, *Stirring up Sheffield*, p. 128. Pilbrow went on to describe further the importance of lighting to new dramatic forms. 'On the open stage where an actor is visible to the audience from three sides, he has to be lit with a minimum of the three lanterns. The actor must stand in a circle of light, in order to be isolated on the open stage which is one of the principal ways of achieving variety and dramatic effect in such a theatre. The smaller the circle of light in which the actor stands, the greater the isolation. The greater the number of lanterns that cover the stage, the smaller the circle of light thrown and the greater the dramatic effect'. (Ibid.)

[347] A stage design raised and with steps leading down to a moat area. 'The stage at the Crucible was modelled on early Guthrie stages in Edinburgh, with wider steps and shallower risers, and from the experience of exits and entrances, as many ways on and off as possible, to allow speedy clearance after a crowd scene, and no piling-up and slowing down of traffic to interfere with the next and probably overlapping scene'. Iain Mackintosh, *The Guthrie thrust stage: a living legacy* (London: ABTT, 2011), p. 11.

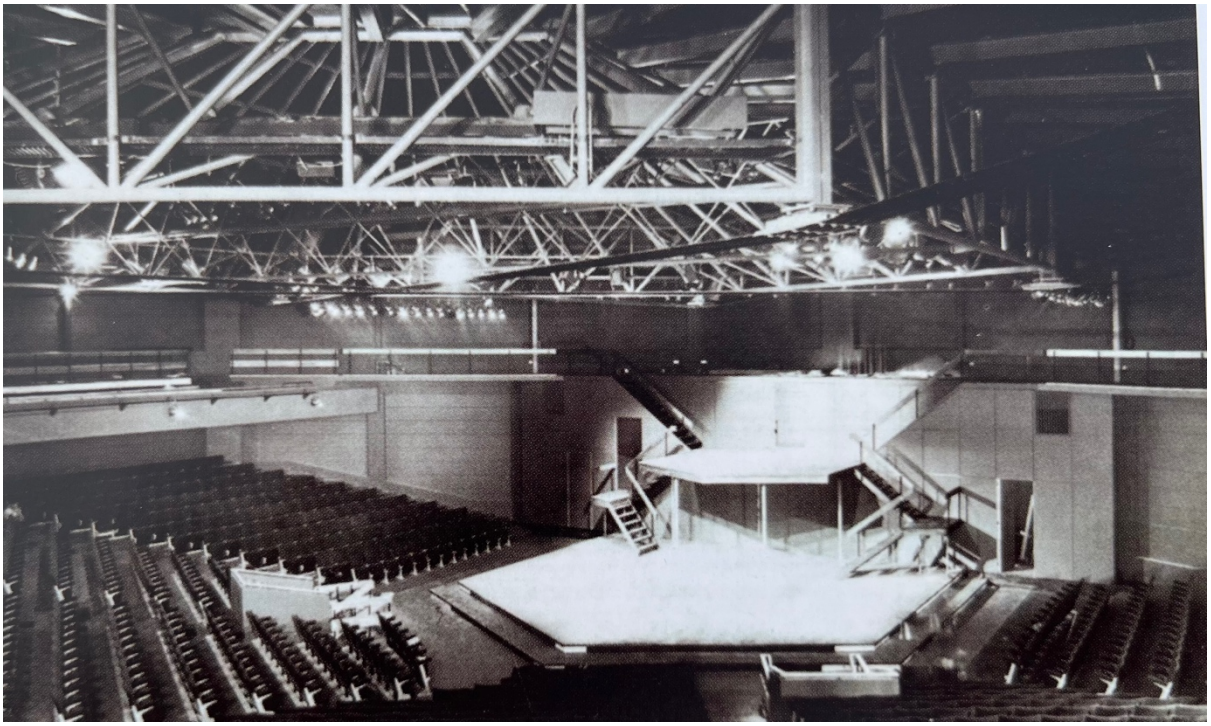
[348] Michael Elliott, *On not building for posterity*, Tabs Magazine (Vol 31, Issue 2, 1973), pp. 41–44, p. 41.

[349] The Young Vic, London, opened in 1970, was also a homage to the designs of Tyrone Guthrie but not a pure thrust stage. Iain Mackintosh, *The Guthrie thrust stage*, p. 12.

[350] 'A stage recognised as in direct line of evolution of the Guthrie Thrust'; Michael Elliott, while contemplating what type of theatre to build for his own company in Manchester, as well continuing to 'analyse objectively the purpose of a National Theatre for the next century and design an appropriate house for it', was said to be 'deeply influenced by Guthrie'. Iain Mackintosh, *The Guthrie thrust stage*, p. 15.

and an audience seated too shallow for successful thrust productions (see figure 3.2).[351] Notwithstanding the limitations of the stage, it was at this time that Chichester provided Britain with a new National Theatre Company (NTC), emerging under the direction of Sir Laurence Oliver.

Figure 3.2: The Chichester Festival Theatre, 1962. Iain Mackintosh, *The Guthrie thrust stage: a living legacy* (London: ABTT, 2011), p. 13.



Taking the job 'not because he liked the thrust stage but in anticipation of becoming the first director of the National Theatre', Olivier used Chichester as a proving-ground for new practice, working with technical specialists such as Pilbrow in experimenting with the idea of

[351] 'The simplistic but inexpensive hexagonal geometry of the whole building forced too much of the audience to the front of an overwide stage and seated them on too shallow a rake, only 13 to 19 degrees as opposed 21 to 28 degrees of the true Guthrie stages of the time'. Iain Mackintosh, *The Guthrie thrust stage: a living legacy* (London: ABTT, 2011), p. 12. The Chichester Festival Theatre was designed as a summer theatre inspired by Tyrone Guthrie's Festival Theatre, Ontario. The audience are positioned on three sides of a hexagonal stage in an auditorium that holds up to 1374 people.

new stage types and technologies.[352] Following a run of successful seasons under Olivier's stewardship as artistic director between 1962 and 1965, the NTC relocated away from the Festival theatre, eventually moving to the more traditional proscenium setting of the Old Vic in 1973 (through a desire to move to London), before making a permanent home at architect Denys Lasdun's National Theatre three years later.

New to theatre building, Lasdun was advised on the design for the National Theatre by a distinguished committee that included Olivier, ABTT associate and theatre director Michael Elliott, ABTT collaborator George Devine, early ABTT member Peter Hall, and the ABTT chairman, Norman Marshall.[353] Preceded by over two decades of political wrangling, the National Theatre opened to much fanfare in 1976. Built with three performance spaces, each with a different stage shape, its biggest auditorium, the Olivier, opened on 16 September with a performance of *Tamburlaine the Great* under the direction of Peter Hall.[354] Designed as an open stage – adaptable in approach – the auditorium was built with a ninety-degree arch on three levels, comprising of centre seats, raised side seats, and an unbroken circle. A large thrust stage, 17.7 metres wide, extended into the audience on three sides, and it contained a complex and revolutionary drum revolve and lift mechanism designed by Richard Pilbrow. Moving further beyond the traditions of proscenium convention, the theatre was built without an orchestra pit, further challenging the physical relationship between actor

[352] Iain Mackintosh, *The Guthrie thrust stage: a living legacy* (London: ABTT, 2011), p. 17.
[353] Those present at the architectural interviews to build the National included Sir Robert Matthew (chairman), R. A. Lynex (secretary), Hubert Bennett, John Piper, Norman Tucker, Stephen Arlen, T. Sommerville, William Gaskell, Michael Elliott, Peter Brook, George Devine, Sir Laurence Olivier, Norman Marshall, and Sir William Holford. Architectural History of the National Theatre – part two, Seating plan for the NT/Opera House architect interviews, October 1963, https://artsandculture.google.com/story/architectural-history-of-the-national-theatre-part-two-national-theatre/VwWhA0PNKAUA8A?hl=en-GB [last accessed 15 December 2022].
[354] The National Theatre, built at an initial cost of £20m (central government funding, apart from a contribution by the Greater London Council of £5.7m).

and audience within the auditorium. When it first opened, the Olivier had seats for 1160 people and was described by its artistic director, Peter Hall, as being unrivalled, 'like most modern things'.[355] Hall described how the Olivier, as a design, looked forwards to a contemporary view of society, and was an epic theatre in scale, which he considered good for Shakespeare, Shaw, Brecht, or the works of David Hare. Of the Olivier, Hall went on to say, 'the relationship between actor and audience is not confrontational – as in the conventional proscenium stage; it is rather participation – where the spectator is made to consider and evaluate the arguments of the actor'.[356]

The Olivier's move away from proscenium convention and the scale of its stage made director Richard Eyre consider the value of such a modernistic approach. Eyre argued it was a hard stage to draw attention on, hard to design for, and hard to animate. Detailed in theatre historians Mulryne and Shewring's *Making Space for Theatre*, Eyre lamented, 'it's monumental scale militates against intimacy, its architectural features intrude on the province of the director and designer, and its enormous volume gives rise to lamentably capricious acoustics'.[357] The perpetuation of modern open-stage construction in the 1970s, the volume and permanence of theatre construction under the Housing the Arts scheme, was beginning to be questioned by those at the very centre of change. Criticism originally came from ABTT members such as Stephen Joseph, before his death in 1967, and then from commentators such as Michael Elliott in the 1970s and later Richard Eyre. Elliott, as part of the advisory committee to the National Theatre, was outspoken on the permanence of

[355] Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, Part I, Mainstream Theatres, in *Making space for theatre,* ed. by Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Stratford: Mulryne & Shewring, 1995), pp. 118-152 (p. 120).
[356] Ibid., p. 120.
[357] Ibid., p. 120.

modern playhouse styles, rejecting the inflexibility of design, and is someone I will return to again later in this section.

The second auditorium of the National Theatre, the Lyttelton, was conventional in shape and built with a seating capacity of 890 across stalls and circle. The proscenium stage was designed to be adjustable, enabling the creation of an open stage, a forestage, or an orchestra pit. With Richard Pilbrow and his team once again providing the stage technology, the Lyttelton was designed with straight seating rows, bare concrete side walls, and a single balcony. Creating an auditorium that Pilbrow considered 'flawed in design', he later described the Lyttelton as being 'a cold, cinema style space […] but with stage planning and equipment that was perhaps a decade in front of its time'.[358] Although functionally the theatre worked, the gap between stage and seating and its linear approach struggled to bring together the audience and the actor, drawing further criticism from Elliott and emerging playwrights of the time such as David Edgar and Alan Ayckbourn – the latter a keen advocate of the thrust stage at the Sheffield Crucible.

The third space at the National Theatre, the Cottesloe (now Dorfman), was an auditorium and stage built as a flexible space. Its adaptable layout allowed for a capacity of between 200 and 400 people dependent on the type of stage form presented, which could include end stage, with or without proscenium; in-the-round; traverse stage, on a long or short axis; and promenade across a flat-floor. ABTT member and theatre consultant Iain Mackintosh described the Cottesloe as a 'courtyard theatre', with an audience on fixed galleries around a

[358] Richard Pilbrow, *A theatre project* (New York: Plasma Media, 2011), p. 244.

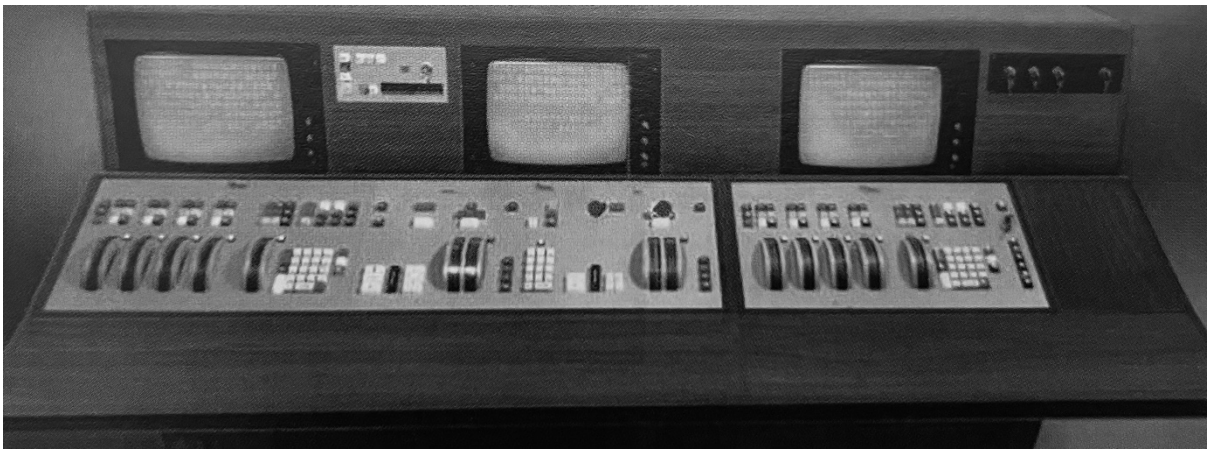
flexible central space, modelled on seventeenth and eighteenth-century theatres used for 'balls, pony races, and circus events, as well as plays'.[359] The audience entered on the middle level, above an already built foyer, with their seating based upon the director's stage choice, allowing for a variation of the actor/audience arrangement. Proving to be what Pilbrow described as a 'pivotal moment' for him and his Theatre Projects company, the courtyard style of the Cottesloe provided a blueprint for future performance spaces based upon a similar design.[360]

The overall construction of the National Theatre was heralded by the ABTT 'as a collaboration between designer and architect that allowed for a new, flexible, and more intimate theatre space'.[361] In its first season, under the direction Peter Hall, most of the innovative stage equipment remained missing. Richard Pilbrow, retained as technical consultant, was told to prioritise the readiness of the stages 'so that some performances could at least take place – meaning floors to stand on, and lighting and sound for audiences to see and hear'.[362] Complicated by 'stage equipment being installed too late and contracts given to the lowest bids', much of the ground-breaking machinery and systems designed by Pilbrow and his Theatre Projects team 'were decades ahead of its time but months away from

[359] Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, Part II, Newer Spaces, in, *Making space for theatre,* ed. by Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Stratford: Mulryne & Shewring, 1995), pp. 156-180 (p. 166).
[360] The Tricycle Theatre, bult by ABTT member Tim Foster, was a conversion of a 1920s dance hall and based upon a mixed programme of its own productions and touring shows. Built from a scaffolding structure with two central stalls and two circling tiers, the auditorium had a seating capacity of 225. Theatre Projects provided advice on all technical matters.
[361] *The National Theatre: a place for plays*, a symposium presented by the Association of British Theatre Technicians in association with the Royal National Theatre, 30 October 2016 (Cambridge: Entertainment Technology Press, 2016), p. 10.
[362] *The National Theatre: a place for plays*, p. 9. The season opened with a production of *Tamburlaine the Great*, with Albert Finney in the lead role, under the direction of Peter Hall. Stage design was by ABTT member John Bury and lighting under the direction of Richard Pilbrow.

completion'.[363] This culminated in, 'the building opening with much of the sophisticated electronic equipment, stage lighting controls [as seen in figure 3.3], dimmers, sound racks, and mixing desks still to be installed'.[364]

Figure 3.3: National Theatre, lighting board – MK1, 1976. Richard Pilbrow, *A theatre project* (New York: Plasma Media, 2011), p. 177.



Both organisationally and physically, the National Theatre personified the concerns of advisors such as Michael Elliot in building 'huge, inflexible, hard-to-demolish buildings, alongside huge, inflexible, hard-to-demolish institutions'.[365] The National Theatre also characterised the working structures and architectural shapes of 1970s open stages and became representative of the changing styles of modern theatrical establishments. I argue the National Theatre's three stages were also emblematic of technical modernisation, 'being progressive in design, technology, and innovation, while [housed in a] brutalist shell'.[366] The

[363] Particularly the use of a drum revolve and a power spot flying system in the 'vast, encircling, and open stage' of the Olivier theatre. Richard Pilbrow, *A theatre project*, p. 245.
[364] Richard Pilbrow, *A theatre project,* p. 244. Pilbrow later said, 'the truth is that I feel guilty. I was so bloody young at that moment when our national theatre was first designed. I simply did not understand the essentials of theatre design … and, truthfully, neither did our blue-ribbon building committee' (ibid.).
[365] Michael Elliott, *On not building for posterity*, TABS (Vol. 31, Issue 2, 1973), pp. 41–44 (p. 41).
[366] Richard Pilbrow, *A theatre project*, p. 244.

opening of the National Theatre illustrates the links between technology and stage design in the 1970s that forged the processes of technical modernisation I have discussed so far.[367]

With connections that stretched from Sheffield to Chichester, from the NCT to the ABTT, and from the Old Vic to the South Bank, the building of the National Theatre exemplified the interconnectivity of design, personnel, and technology at that time. Embodying the transformative potential within technical theatre, the National Theatre was symbolic of the innovative and specialist knowledge actively promoted by the ABTT, and the permanence of construction provided by modern playhouses.[368] Yet, the National Theatre remains just one story out of many of the theatres built in this period, which allow one to trace and to understand the interconnections between the advent of progressive technology and technical practice that allowed for new theatrical forms and aesthetics to emerge. As I will now go on to discuss, the National Theatre also provides the antithesis to another groundbreaking theatre that opened in 1976. The Royal Exchange Theatre was designed like no other theatre. It was informed by the ideas of Michael Elliott and long-time collaborator Richard Negri, and by the technical prowess of Richard Pilbrow and David Collison, and it was endorsed by those more prominent within British theatre, including Laurence Olivier. Shifting focus away from the capital and towards a postmodern free-standing structure within the

[367] Once completed, the Olivier, an encircling open stage, the Lyttelton, a modern proscenium stage, and the Cottesloe (later the Dorfman), a courtyard studio, were built 'to lead us into the next century'. ABTT, *The National Theatre: a place for plays*, a symposium presented by the Association of British Theatre Technicians in association with the Royal National Theatre, 30 October 2016 (Cambridge: Entertainment Technology Press, 2016), p. 9.

[368] Reflecting upon the impact of the National and its design, and that of post-war British playhouses in general, Richard Pilbrow later mused, 'much of the theatre architecture and stage shapes we have built are now locked in concrete perpetuity, however, design, skills, and technology will always be changing'. Richard Pilbrow, *A theatre project*, p. 245.

heart of old Manchester, the Royal Exchange epitomised Elliott's ideas of flexibility in both theatre construction and theatre creation.

Having previously written in the 1973 edition of the influential technical journal *TABS* magazine, Elliott had already been considering the need for more flexibility in construction within British theatre, which, he stated, 'like all the other arts, was in a state of change so rapid and chaotic that it had no tradition for the individual to lean on'.[369] Invited by ABTT founder member and long-time innovator of stage lighting Frederick Bentham, Elliott contributed an article on the fascination of building modern playhouses that were both permanent in physical construction and inflexible in creative approach. Elliot's article, published while still serving on the building committee for the National Theatre, was in reaction to 'the hyper-sophisticated and very expensive architectural, mechanical, and electronic monuments of regional modern theatres'.[370] Arguing that nearly all of the new playhouses that had 'gone up' in the post-war period belonged to a style never seen in Britain until fifteen years prior, Elliott believed the large publicly subsidised modern theatres 'served a new public with a new fare'.[371] However, designed with no experience and little knowledge of what 'the beast was like, its greatest dangers, and its richest advantages', Elliott was adamant that all available experience should be collected and made available 'as we near the end of the major theatre building boom'.[372] As I have just explored, this was a boom that saw

[369] Michael Elliott, *On not building for posterity*, p. 41.
[370] Ibid., p. 42.
[371] Ibid., p. 43.
[372] Ibid., p. 41 In the article, Elliott argued, 'don't we need something different, something less expensive, less daunting, less expressive of civic or national pride, more reflective of changing tastes – something perhaps less permanent. In future, shouldn't we try to retain a certain lightness and sense of improvisation, and sometimes build in materials that do not require a bomb to move them? In short, shouldn't we stop building for prosperity?' (Ibid).

theatre construction evolve to represent the rapid advancements made in design and technology, insofar as the changing tastes of post-war theatre allowed, 'through evolution by experimenting with alternate stage layouts and shapes'.[373] It was also a time that saw theatre technicians become essential to the growing connections of expertise and specialisms informing modern playhouse design.

Forewarning the need of adaptive and flexible theatres for the future, Elliott believed regional modern playhouses had emerged to play a much larger (and more important) part than ever before in 'the chaotic national scene'.[374] As Elliott explained:

> So used are we now to this state of flux, with a National Theatre, a London branch of the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Court, and no less significantly, a Nottingham, a Birmingham, and a Sheffield appearing overnight, that we assume it is a normal situation. It is not. The great danger of subsidised theatre is institutionalisation, which can lead directly to fossilisation. The new National Theatre, for instance, will run three auditoria, pull a government grant in the same category as Covent Garden, and pay enough employees to make the Festival Hall look like a flea pit. Reminds one organisationally more of a battleship than a theatre.[375]

Incorporating the need to 'compensate for the more heavy and permanent theatre companies made', Elliott argued for equal importance to be given to flexibility, 'both in bricks

[373] Ibid., p. 44.
[374] A move away from entirely commercial theatre towards a split European tradition of the serious subsidised theatre and the boulevard commercial.
[375] Michael Elliott, *On not building for posterity*, p. 43.

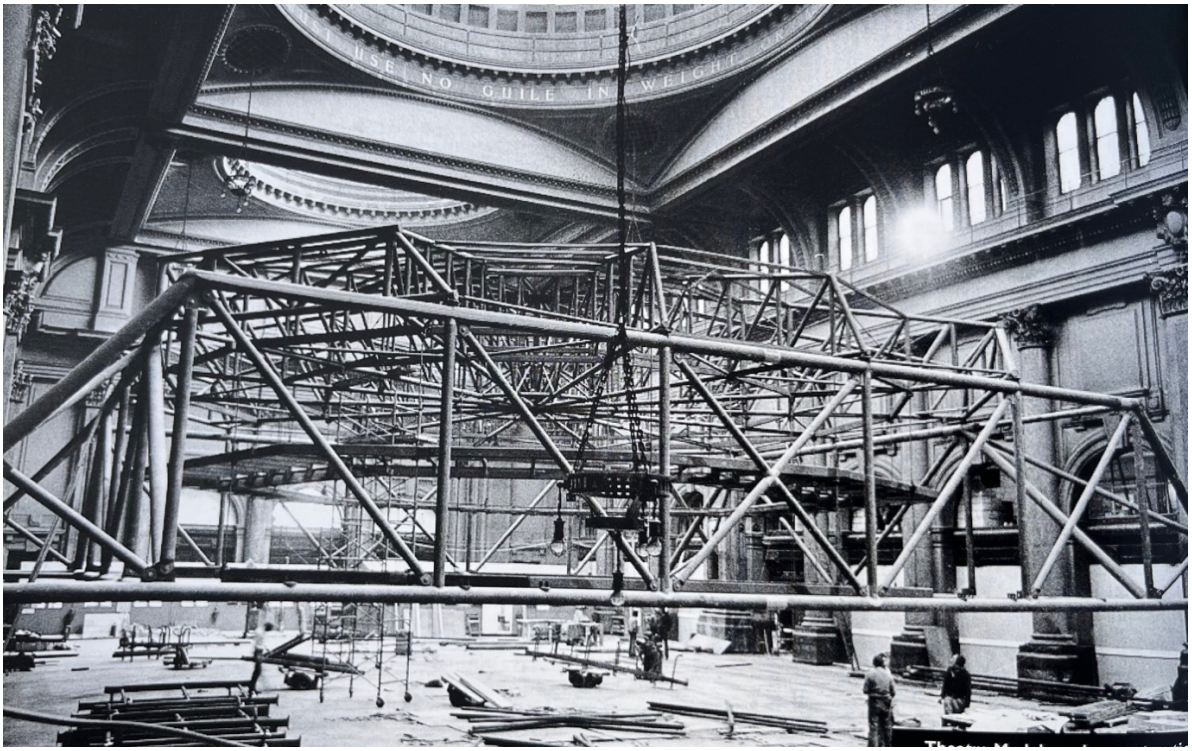
and mortar and in the people running theatres'.[376] He championed the need for urgency 'in providing the vivid memories and vital experience of theatre, on both sides of the vanishing curtain, for new audiences, new professionals, and new trainees'.[377] Elliott also warned against the transformative potential of theatre being stifled by institutionalism, removing the ability to innovate and challenge conventions, epitomised by his unease with the final design of the National Theatre and 'the austere and non-scenic approach of stage adaptions'.[378] To counter his concerns, Elliott created of one of the most innovative and modern playhouses ever built in Britain.

The Royal Exchange Theatre (the Exchange) in Manchester was opened by Sir Laurence Olivier a month prior to the opening of the National. Conceived by Elliott, along with Richard Negri, Richard Pilbrow, David Collinson, and fellow ABTT member Eric Jordan, the Exchange was seen as 'one of the most exciting theatres of modern times'.[379] Its design challenged the very limits of technical innovation through continual improvement and progress, while remaining entwined within the same processes of technical modernisation that had informed the building of the National Theatre and the many other theatres of the 1970s that came before it.[380]

---

[376] Ibid., p. 44.
[377] Ibid., p. 44.
[378] Elliott, quoted in, Iain Mackintosh, *The Guthrie thrust stage: a living legacy* (London: ABTT, 2011), p. 48.
[379] David Fraser, *The Royal Exchange Theatre Company: an illustrated record* (Manchester: Royal Exchange Theatre Company, 1988), p. 18.
[380] Receiving 'immediate critical acclaim', the theatre was awarded the 1976 Manchester Society of Architects president's award, the British Tourist Authority Come to Britain award, and the Royal Institute of British Architects gold medal. The British press described the Royal Exchange Theatre as 'a poem of steel and glass', 'a hovering counterpoint of stress and balance gripped in, launched from, the towering marble of another age' (*Sunday Times*), and 'an ingenious structure spread like an inverted cat's cradle of steel under the great central dome … here is the tour-de-force of theatrical engineering and architectural inspiration' (*Financial Times*). Quoted in, Richard Pilbrow, *A theatre project,* p. 249.

Figure 3.4: The Royal Exchange Theatre, steel frame – under construction, 1975. The Royal Exchange Theatre Company, *Words and pictures 1976–1998* (Manchester: The Royal Exchange Theatre Company, 1998), p. 16.



Constructed using alternate materials to almost all other theatres at that time, and with a radical design, the Royal Exchange was built as a transparent theatre-in-the-round, based on a seven-sided figure. The space had raked seating for up to 100 people at ground level and two galleries above, each seating 150 people in rows two deep.[381] The galleries were suspended by 25mm diameter rods, shown in figure 3.4, that were hung from fourteen roof trusses, bearing on four tubular steel frames that were anchored to pillars that supported the Victorian hall and provided the structural framework for the theatre.

[381] The Royal Exchange Theatre press release of 1972 describes the design team's ambition for 'a multi-coloured steel framed and highly intimate auditorium that will sit clear of the walls, contrasting with their ancient weight by the modern open-work light-weight design of the structure. The audience will be accommodated on different levels, with every seat having a perfect view of the stage. The farthest member of the audience from the acting area will be closer than in any other theatre of this size in the world'. V&A, ACGB/84/182, Press Release (November 1972).

Holding up to 740 people in total, one bank of seats was made removable, enabling a thrust-effect stage. Seventy toughened glass panels (totalling 400 square meters) formed a continuous steel band around the structure, creating a distinctive design that architectural historian Alistair Fair suggests, 'rejected the kind of modern theatre architecture developed during the previous two decades'.[382] I read the Exchange Theatre as the most modern of playhouses built under the modernisation agenda of rehousing the arts. Under Elliott and Negri, the Royal Exchange seemed to reject the very form of modern theatre it came to represent, transforming what people conceived the modern as being. Challenging assumptions around the permanence of materials, the need to build from new, and the relationship between actor and audience, this most modern of playhouses was built with the technical expertise of Richard Pilbrow and fellow members of the ABTT. The theatre was envisioned so that no seat was further than 9 meters from the performance edge – 'eight entrances lead to a stage area almost 11 meters high' and to a floor made of solid wood parquet.[383] When reporting to his Housing the Arts colleagues in 1976, Arts Council officer Peter Longman told of 'the Exchange Theatre resembling one of those American moon landing craft, probably just about as technically sophisticated, and nearly as expensive'.[384]

---

[382] Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses: an architectural history of Britain's new theatres, 1945–1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 238.

[383] David Fraser, *The Royal Exchange Theatre Company: an illustrated record* (Manchester: Royal Exchange Theatre Company, 1988), p. 18.

[384] Technically challenging, the Exchange used a Rank Strand Galaxy lighting board, with 100 x 10-amp circuits and 20 x 20-amp circuits over 3 phases. It provided a 60-amp over 3 phases power supply for temporary lighting boards and had a basic rig housing 100 spots and 80 Fresnel lights – all Rank Strand. The sound desk was a Neve 24/8/2, situated on the second gallery alongside the lighting and stage management controls, designed to be acoustically open. The sound system comprised desk, racks housing jackfield and power amplifiers, and speaker lines and microphone tie lines around the theatre, as well as moveable amp racks. The acoustics, with a 7–8 second reverberation time, were variable via 3 tiers of louvres near the roof and 15 double doors. The prompt corner was positioned in the second gallery, 'next to lighting and effects', built with a 15-way cue lights system, show relay, and tannoy to back-of-house. Beyond the module there were 4 single dressing rooms, 2 foursomes, 1 sixsome, and 1 sevensome, plus 2 rehearsal rooms, all accessible from a double dock door which was 27 steps below floor level. Also, clustered around the great hall's parquet floor were tables, kiosks, and 'life – all the essential attributes of a theatre conceived as a social centre'. Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouse,* p. 238.

Described in transformative terms, as 'revolutionary and radical', the Exchange Theatre was suggestive of theatrical progression in architecture, technology, and style.[385] By 'daring to go all the way beyond the traditions of a proscenium stage', it was a 'space of uncompromising modern design'.[386] It pressed the very limits of the modern, or what had hitherto been imagined as possible under the processes of modernisation. The Exchange, acting as 'a Chinese lantern lighting up an old dark place', was conceived and constructed despite the reticence of a local council who needed to be led by those individuals who believed in its cause.[387] As I have already begun to describe, the relevance of the Exchange Theatre is not that it was simply another modern theatre building of the period, but that its modernity seemed to contradict that very mission. It challenged the civic space of the new theatre forms I described in chapter two, emerging as something exotic, wild, and ambitious, pushing the relationship between civic and modern to the very limit.[388] The Royal Exchange asked questions of what modernisation really meant for theatre in the 1970s and how compatible it was with the continued civic mission of the post-war consensus. Michael Elliott, Richard Negri, and architects Levitt Bernstein Associates, alongside ABTT members Richard Pilbrow and David Collison, created a (postmodern) playhouse described by Pilbrow as 'the most exciting of his career'.[389] Believing it to be 'more transitory in operations and less permanent in building', those behind the Exchange Theatre designed it as a reaction to constantly

[385] The Royal Exchange Theatre Company, *Words and pictures 1976–1998* (Manchester: The Royal Exchange Theatre Company, 1998), p. 11.
[386] Ibid., p. 11.
[387] Alistair Fair, *Modern playhouses,* p. 236.
[388] The theatre's first production, *The Rivals*, played in repertoire with *The Prince of Homburg*, directed by Eric Thompson, was presented in-the-round and with experimental lighting design to challenge the actor/audience relationship.
[389] Richard Pilbrow, *A theatre project*, p. 250.

changing theatrical conditions and requirements that had informed previous modern theatre designs.[390]

Up until this moment technical modernisation was conceived in terms of permanent structures, not impermanent or ephemeral ones. The Royal Exchange challenged that perception, built as the apotheosis of the boom in new theatre building to be the best, the last, and the most challenging. Its contemporary modern nature saw a move away from the concrete permanence, institutionalisation, and theatrical rigidity of which Elliott had forewarned, allowing the interconnectivity of technical modernisation to shape the radicalisation of an alternate theatre playhouse design.[391] Such a need for flexibility was outlined by both Elliott and Negri when discussing their vision for the Exchange within an article written for *The Stage* in 1976:

> Why are we in the round? Because we believe that there is a happening and that what happens among people has more effect than what happens the other side of the peep-hole. Why are we in Manchester? Because we want the theatre to be rooted in the community and serve it, not open the doors to the endless anonymous mass that is London. We are an arts centre. Apart from the main play repertoire we already have classical pop, jazz and folk concerts, poetry recitals, one-man shows, children's shows, and lectures. Architecture is only expressed with purpose in real estate. Our purpose has long been growing. The building is one expression of it. What

[390] Michael Elliott, *On not building for posterity*, p. 44.
[391] Exemplified by the influential careers of Richard Pilbrow and Michael Elliott, following the connections of technical modernisation allows us to begin understanding the importance of stage shape, design, and technology to the processes of theatrical practice in the post-war period.

> comes to occupy the building over the years, allowed, encouraged and insisted upon by the architecture itself will reveal to us, as much as to others, what its real depth and nature is.[392]

In the above quotation, Elliott emphasises the modernity of modular forms. Highly adaptable to different kinds of performance and audiences, the Exchange Theatre is in contrast to the scale and institutional might of the National Theatre. There are, however, also parallels between the vision for these two modern projects: both were (partially) publicly funded through the Arts Council's Housing the Arts scheme, each was heavily supported by the specialist knowledge of ABTT members, both were guided by over twenty years of shared industry knowledge gathered by those most innovative within technical theatre, and the processes of technical modernisation allowed for experimentation in stage design to inform new and radical approaches in the designs of both.

As Negri concluded, 'our achievement in getting the theatre built was largely due to the sensitivity, skill, and determination with which all the people who have had to create the concrete result have worked towards, in an age where the relationship to function is paramount in the design of everything'.[393] The objectives for the National Theatre and the Exchange Theatre may have been different, but 'the overall aim to provide facilities for technicians up to 21st Century standards' proved paramount to both.[394] Indeed, all of the modern theatre builds of the post-war period elevated the importance of technical expertise

[392] The Royal Exchange Theatre Company, *Words and pictures 1976–1998*, p. 12.
[393] Ibid., p. 12.

within theatre building design to unprecedented levels, promoting those most active in stage innovation to become involved in numerous and multiple construction projects. This placed many ABTT members within the heart of the post-war theatre boom, with those most active simultaneously working across numerous design projects, often within the parameters of the Arts Council's Housing the Arts funding scheme.[395]

From this brief investigation into the factors leading up to the building of the National Theatre and the Royal Exchange Theatre, I have exposed the accounts of those responsible for stage innovation and the intricate connections and often-complex relationships formed between design and technology, industry and individual, networks and experts. The Royal Exchange, I have argued, challenged the very idea of what counted as modern (which was itself subject to change), reliant upon the processes of technical modernisation. Discovering the interwoven links of technical practice allows for a greater understanding of how new stage forms arose in the 1970s and the importance of technical modernisation to the wider processes of professionalisation. So far, however, the significance of technical modernisation to post-war British theatre, as well as the connections of those most prominent in the stage innovations of multiple playhouse designs, remain rarely discussed in theatre histories. This is also true of the role played by a wider technical workforce often hidden in the shadows of the stage, both metaphorically and literally.[396] As I will discuss in the next section of this chapter, the consequence of modernisation for technical theatre – the constant

[395] I talk more of the Arts Council Housing the Arts scheme in chapter two and four.
[396] What limited academic focus there is on the development of technical theatre predominantly looks at the backstage workings of American theatre, particularly in New York, often referencing the networks built around the influential United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT) amid a more historically unionised labour force. The USITT emerged at the same time as the ABTT, following the 1960 ITI conference in Berlin, and is recognised as a comparative organisation to the ABTT. This is discussed further in chapter one.

improvements and innovations of stage design and technology I have just discussed – was a need for greater skills, training, and recruitment of labour. Next, to understand the practices of technical professionalism, formed as part of a wider industry professionalisation commensurate to the changing demands placed upon the workforce by the processes of modernisation, it is necessary to understand the adaptive behaviours and attitudes of a growing pool of sector specialists and the role played within these processes by the ABTT in the 1970s.

3.2 Technical professionalism: a need for skills, training, and the recruitment of labour

Up until now in this chapter, I have shown how technical modernisation in the 1970s brought about an increase in the technological innovations, specialist connections, and varied styles of regional playhouse stage designs. In this section, I move on to discuss the practices of technical professionalism which underpinned modernisation, by which I mean the development of trained experts, the changing behaviours and attitudes of an evolving workforce, and the bifurcation of specialist stage labour – represented by the ABTT as part of wider technical professionalisation. A key consideration here is how the practices of professionalism formed and how they addressed a shortfall in the number of specialist technicians required to operate modern stage technology. The pre-war legacy of historically localised training had left a technical workforce that was both geographically splintered and bereft of the qualities required by innovative theatrical practices and forms. The same factors also left a labour pool short of the quantities of skilled technicians required to work the new stage shapes and innovations emerging across regional theatres. A move towards professionalism saw the ABTT grow to collaborate with government departments, industry

specialists, and educational institutions, and as I will go on to explore, to develop national programmes aimed at raising the competency and recruitment levels of an entire technical industry. As I will now illustrate, the job pages of sector specialist journal *The Stage* provide insight into the challenging and changing processes of this period, capturing the development of role requirements that became emblematic of the shifts taking place across labour needs, skills, and the specialist categorisation of stage practice.[397]

Traditionally, stagehands trained as junior members of a department, often serving informal apprenticeships within a single playhouse. This type of training was typically carried out in-house in a large number of theatres across the country, many of which were linked by common ownership and formed part of a touring circuit. Although informal, the training provided was efficient, achieving a consistent standard of technical competence across regional receiving theatres and requiring little in the way of formal recruitment processes. Equally, a strong pool of independent subcontractors formed alongside in-house theatrical labourers. Hired to provide the skills for making sets and costumes, these specialist practitioners often trained their own staff on a similar informal apprenticeship basis. Evident in early advertisements within *The Stage*, opportunities for theatre labourers were presented infrequently and with minimum detail, with adverts made up of no more than a brief job title, location, and contact name. There was minimal division in stage labour present at this time, with only scenic roles categorised under a singular heading, whereas all other stage positions

[397] Launched in 1880, *The Stage* has covered the major events in British twentieth-century theatre ever since. http://www.thestage.co.uk.

were posted without requirement for training or specialisation and grouped under generic titles, for example, 'Wanted: Managers, Agents, staff'.[398]

This pattern remained more or less unchanged until a marginal development in the listing system emerged in the late 1950s. Opportunities were placed under a regrouping of stage labour, bringing all positions within a singular heading, 'Staff Wanted', and requiring 'experience, competence, and knowledge'.[399] It is at this point that we can begin to discern evidence of the new industry practices that were forming – and that recruitment processes were now responding to the growing demand for skilled technicians (specifically to address a shortfall in suitable candidates), effectively beginning the processes of technical professionalism which appear in recruitment listings for the first time. The impending boom in regional playhouse construction that followed would further challenge the volume and competency of a workforce already severely tested by new ways of working and by the plethora of opportunities that emerged from the expansion in the post-war years of the entertainment industries. By 1959, *The Stage* had adapted its name to *The Stage and Television Today*, and the influence of new technologies was becoming ever more apparent within its pages, destabilising recruitment opportunities beyond the theatre, with radio, cinema, and more importantly television diversifying career opportunities for developing stage specialists.[400] It is in this context of change that the ABTT attempted to bring order to

[398] Proquest, Entertainment Industry Magazine Archive, The British Library, *The Stage*, Advertisement, 21 September 1939, p. 11. *The Stage*, in 1939, advertised a density of job listings but with very few roles advertised for technical positions, the few that are shown being generically categorised, requiring no training or specialist knowledge.

[399] Proquest, Entertainment Industry Magazine Archive, The British Library, *The Stage*, Advertisement, 17 September 1959, p. 9.

[400] By 1959, pages in *The Stage* presented job advertisements for technical roles partially categorised within a busy page format that does not identify a technical section within theatre recruitment but does begin to capture a need for experience, competence, and knowledge from potential candidates.

the chaos of a technical industry in need of developing the skills, training, and recruitment of labour required amid the rapid rise of regional playhouse construction at the beginning of the 1960s. The volume of measures required led to a realisation by the ABTT that this would be one of its predominant roles in the changing theatrical landscape of post-war Britain.

As early as 1964, the Association began to discuss the development of technical training with the Arts Council of Great Britain while working alongside organisations such as the Council of Regional Theatres (CORT) in what was described in a letter between the two organisations as, 'participating in any workable scheme for the training of staff in repertory movement'.[401] Initially focussing on the diversifying roles of stagehands and electricians, training activities and short courses soon expanded. The innovations in stage technology and the adaptivity of new stage shapes I discussed in section one of this chapter began to form a splintering in stage labour, leading to a bifurcation of specialisms, which in turn drove the demand for new skills and training requirements. Sporadic collaboration across technical networks ensued, with the ABTT working alongside a variety of organisations, including the Ministry of Education, the British Drama League , and the National Amateur Drama Association, acting as a source of advice, a body of experts, and an authority on technical innovation.[402] At the request of the Council of Regional Theatres, in a letter to the Association asking for advice and support, the then ABTT Training Working Party 'produced a pilot scheme for the training of electricians in London theatres'.[403] Submitted to the Arts Council for financial support, the application was initially rejected, turned down by the Arts Council with a belief that

[401] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1964–1970 B1, 1964.
[402] The ABTT worked with the Ministry of Education in support of a two-day stage training course at Questors Theatre in 1965, provided panellists for the British Drama League training conference in 1966, and advised the National Amateur Drama Association on how to support best methods for drama in schools in 1967.
[403] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1964–1970 B1, 1964.

'apprenticeships already covered the subject at technical colleges'.[404] As minuted documents from further ABTT committee meetings outline, despite early rejection, a forging of relationships with the Arts Council nonetheless ensued, 'providing the required momentum to foster the beginnings of a concerted effort to raise technical standards', as the ABTT set about changing the activities and attitudes of the theatre industry towards the practices of technical professionalism.[405]

With a variety of small training schemes launched and partnerships with local colleges developed in the late 1960s, the Association became the 'central co-ordinating body for technical training'.[406] Firstly prioritising the Capital – where the ABTT was based and where the greatest concentration of technicians could be found – the ABTT went on to look towards training for the regions in an attempt to extend the national pool of skilled stage technicians. In 1967, the ABTT Training committee was formalised, a reaction to growing requests for advice and guidance on course content and accreditation from colleges and universities across Britain.[407] Unearthed from the ABTT archive, in a document presented to the Arts Council for further funding consideration, what becomes visible are the four conditions the Training Committee saw as the most pressing concerns for the Association in developing technical skills:

[404] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1964–1970 B1, 1964.
[405] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2, Ken Smalley, The theatre technicians' training in Britain, 9 December 1975.
[406] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2, 1972 papers.
[407] Under the chairmanship of theatre designer and consultant Martin Carr.

1. That electricians should be prioritised, aiming to produce skilled men of technical assistant standard, competent to maintain and operate modern equipment.
2. That the need for skilled stagehands should not be overlooked.
3. That any new schemes were to cooperate closely with the CORT project.
4. To consider the importance of differential pay structures for trained men.[408]

The Training Committee's first act was to collaborate with the Council of Regional Theatres, setting up a joint working party at the request of the Arts Council 'to produce schemes for the training of theatre technicians with particular emphasis on the requirements of civic and repertory theatre'.[409] In 1968, fresh plans were submitted to the Arts Council for a two-year training course, including a syllabus for the training of fully qualified theatre electricians, based on a full-time course lasting eight weeks.[410] CORT, anxious that only theatres with 'proper facilities and staff should be allowed to take trainees', asked the ABTT to provide 'two inspectors to select suitable theatres and one inspector to ensure training was being properly carried out'.[411] Such disparity between ambition and funding, time and labour, for an Association still reliant upon a volunteering membership, was to become a constant concern across future ABTT training endeavours. The needs of the sector were always to prove greater than any ability the ABTT had to support it.

[408] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1964–1970 B1, 25 October 1968. This gendering of skilled roles was at a moment when women's participation in the workforce was rapidly increasing (and the increase was visible).
[409] ABTT Archive / Annual Reports – 1967/68, p. 5.
[410] The course was presented by members Anthony Easterbrook, Brian Benn, and Dorothy Alexander. A grant of £2,000 was received from the Arts Council, although £5,600 was requested, limiting the number of trainees from ten to under half that. ABTT Archive / Annual Reports – 1967/68; ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1964–1970 B1, 1968.
[411] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1964–1970 B1, 29 March 1968.

It was not until 1970, when the ABTT finally succeeded in gaining consistent funding support via a grant from the Arts Council to develop training schemes, that we can see a more coordinated approach to technical training begin to form. An increase in resources allowed the ABTT to trial training programmes, at first in London and later across regional theatres, to see how best to develop the skills of the technicians required for modern stages.[412] Following extensive negotiations with theatre management organisations and unions, day release programmes commenced at technical colleges for those already employed in the theatre. Further actions took the form of financial incentives, from the ABTT via grants to theatres and employees, in an attempt to sustain a form of traditional apprenticeship. Several types of technical pre-entry courses also became available at this time, through drama schools, university drama departments, design schools, and teacher training colleges.[413] Although not specifically designed for the training of technicians, the ABTT considered that 'these courses, in mounting productions, gave attention to the technical and craft aspect of theatre work which could be used to the advantage of any would-be theatre technician'.[414] Also, electrician examination papers, prepared by the ABTT, were approved and adopted by the National Technical Examinations Institution as an emergence of specialist skills across lighting and sound gave new meaning to the role of stage electrician. Regardless of industry best efforts, as highlighted by the Association's Executive committee minutes, 'the labour pool remained small and theatres still had problems in finding suitable personnel to fill posts'.[415]

[412] By September 1970, there were nineteen electricians and eleven stage staff ABTT trainees, all employed in West End theatres. ABTT Archive / Annual Reports 1970.
[413] Including the Royal Academy of the Dramatic Arts, the Central School of Speech and Drama, Manchester University, the University of Bristol, and Paddington College.
[414] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2, Ken Smalley, The theatre technicians' training in Britain, 9 December 1975.
[415] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2, 1971 papers.

Asked by the Arts Council to undertake research into the 'training requirements of the regions', by the early 1970s the ABTT was fast becoming the recognised authority on technical training requirements for a sector undergoing a process of professionalism as part of wider professionalisation.[416] The ABTT report of findings which followed, written by a hastily formed Technical working group, described an industry built on 'getting by'.[417] Up until this point, the pre-war traditions of labourers working the theatre stages of Britain had been reliant upon 'flexibility and ingenuity'.[418] The ABTT believed such technical behaviours to be one of theatre's most valuable assets, but it also constituted a serious drawback in the identifying of training needs for technicians. The agreed practices and attitudes the ABTT was attempting to implement, under the remit of technical professionalism, looked to address a previous lack of consistency in the skills required of a fractured labour force. Professionalism introduced training requirements and supported an increase in the range of people who could attend courses. The ABTT aimed to develop a consistency in the level of skilled technicians across the regions, presenting greater employment opportunities for an industry having to adapt to new ways of working. As I will go on to discuss further in section three of this chapter, the practices of professionalism, entwined within the modernisation of the open stage, then allowed for a standardisation of industry practice and basic expectations of anyone who worked in technical theatre. Represented by the ABTT, the combination of all

[416] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2, 1971 papers.
[417] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2, Minutes, 30 October 1970, p. 1. The ABTT described, 'in the West End, the requirement was essentially for an operator who was part of the production and who could control the sound with a subtlety and accuracy of timing that could only be possible for someone who had worked throughout rehearsals. In professional repertory, the resident staff achieve this liaison with the production much more easily'. The Training committee, stating the difference in production types, 'emphasised that these views in a way contradicted the need for more specialist training in sound equipment and maintenance at a more technical level for theatre electricians'. (Ibid).
[418] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2, Report on regional training survey, January 1972, p. 2.

three processes, modernisation, professionalism, and standardisation, culminated in what I term the professionalisation of technical theatre. For present purposes, though, it suffices to say professionalism did not happen without difficulty, as the ABTT Technical working group report went on to outline.

Finding the number of those employed 'small by almost any industry standards', the report presented a lack of trainee attendance as representative of a sector not taking training needs seriously.[419] The report went on to suggest funding 'sometimes prevented the possibility of taking on younger staff for training within departments'; it also proposed a need for greater 'flexibility in areas of responsibility to help one department make up for a lack of numbers and deficiencies in skills of another department'.[420] Insularity within the industry, restrictive in the sharing of skills and expertise across theatres, was described as prohibitive in passing information from one playhouse to another. The report also highlighted the impact of a comparatively short length of service from senior technicians, 'adversely affecting the training of new technicians across the regions'.[421] Professionalism required opening up channels of communication so information could be better distributed – a service provided by the ABTT. With few managers promoted from the ranks of theatre technicians, the report concluded that many heads of department found it difficult to be specific when identifying training needs, 'resulting in financial incentives being the most likely to broaden theatre management current views on the need for training'.[422]

[419] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2, Report on regional training survey, January 1972, p. 2.
[420] Ibid., p. 4..
[421] Ibid., p. 4..
[422] Ibid., p. 4.

Offering a range of further conclusions, the report presented a need to identify and separate the various skills required of theatre technicians 'to counter the confusion arising from courses meaning different things to different establishments'.[423] It warned that an increase in training would present a considerable drain on the number of already limited technicians available to the industry, as roles within educational settings would present 'more attractive pay and conditions for those whose career structures and possibilities were haphazard and lacking in year-round employment'.[424] Describing short courses as the most practicable, a syllabus of basic knowledge was proposed, to be embedded in a form of examination for those attending technical colleges. Believing it to be 'inevitable that on the job training was to play a large part in the upskilling of technicians', the provision of information sheets and training guides was proposed to benefit all organisations.[425] Aware that by formalising training, publishing recommendations, and standards of production practices, 'the report accepted there would need to be agreement by the industry through consultation with theatre unions and management'.[426] It was here that the ABTT began to express concern for 'any form of authoritative approach that may be of benefit for the individual but not the collective', as we can see from the following report extract.[427]

> To give an organisation the responsibility for training has certain dangers. The process starts with an attempt to establish a formula for improvement, but the training

[423] Ibid., p. 4.. The skills were separated under four headings: basic trade and theoretical knowledge, theatre experience and its application, manual skills, and organisation and communication knowledge and skills.
[424] Ibid., p. 5.
[425] Ibid., p. 5.
[426] Ibid., p. 5.
[427] Ibid., p. 5.

> creates its own terms of reference and the end can become obscured by the means.[428]

With the final conclusions of the report advising that an independent body be responsible for the coordination of all training matters, the ABTT working group put forward the Association 'to be the independent body that could be separated from the other organisations involved'.[429] Importantly, here we see members of the ABTT being concerned with the practices of technical professionalism while also being mindful of the Association's position of influence within the developing networks of a rapidly expanding industry.

Further exposing the importance of technical professionalism to and the influence of the ABTT on new theatre forms, in a series of recommendations presented to the Arts Council, CORT, the National Association of Television, Theatre, and Kine Employees (NATTKE), and the Theatre Management Association (TMA) in 1972, the ABTT asked for 'every effort to be made to get the role of training acknowledged and accepted within the industry'.[430] Repeating the need for an organisation to be the focal point for all training matters, the ABTT reaffirmed its belief in itself 'as being probably the best to perform this function'.[431] The Association went on to present a series of initiatives aimed at addressing the continued shortfall of skilled technicians across the regions. At first this was to be done by continuing the original London electricians scheme formed with CORT, then by beginning a similar programme in Manchester with Openshaw Technical College, before pursuing the possibility of further

[428] Ibid., p. 6.
[429] Ibid., p. 6.
[430] Ibid., p. 6.
[431] Ibid., p. 6.

training in Bristol and Birmingham.[432] Recommendations were also made for new stage manager courses, technical lectures for production managers and stagehands, and for information to be provided on all available training syllabi and examination papers. Requiring financial support, the final recommendation was for further funding to provide incentives for collaboration and attendance. An initial grant application for £13,700 was submitted to the Arts Council for technical training during the financial year 1972/73, with the money to be spent on 'subsidising the trainees and compensating the managers in the hope of encouraging greater support'.[433] Over the course of the next ten years, funding from the Arts Council to the ABTT would increase significantly, with training becoming central to the Association's expansion across British technical theatre in the 1970s. I discuss further the funding support of the Arts Council to technical training through the ABTT and the issues that it eventually raised for their relationship in chapter four.

Short courses on flying, wig maintenance, millinery, fabric dyeing, and lighting productions were also proposed, as well as the continued financial support to those technicians attending technical colleges outside of London. Expanding its networks, the ABTT worked alongside the National Council for Drama Training, formalising a set of criteria for the accreditation of stage management courses, and the BBC Training Centre, developing a range of technical courses for entry into the industry.[434] Also, the ABTT collaborated with the Department of Employment, securing a dispensation grant that 'allowed trainees to remain on attachment

[432] As discussed earlier in this section, at the request of CORT the then ABTT Training working party originally produced a pilot scheme for the training of electricians in London theatres as early as 1965.
[433] Ibid., p. 7.
[434] *Training for the Theatre* (1980) and *So You Want to Work in Theatre* (1982). ABTT Archive / Annual Reports 1981/82.

to courses without jeopardizing unemployment benefits'.[435] The ABTT was expanding to assume wider sector responsibility, developing a more formalised approach to training and qualifications through the representation of an industry still struggling nationally to recruit the necessary quality and quantity of technicians required for new production techniques.

Although developing skills through training was deemed essential for the ABTT, there was an acceptance amongst some of those within the membership that certain processes of professionalism were beginning to work counter to what the Association aimed to achieve. Such difficulties were exemplified by the increasing tendencies of regional theatres to appoint lighting designers (and a growing number of sound engineers) in newly formed roles, 'resulting in more traditional positions such as the Chief Electrician becoming downgraded and less interesting'.[436] As I have already discussed in chapter two, the Sheffield Crucible, for example, proved radical in its recruitment practices, appointing a sound technician who was 'trained professionally and not, as was so often the case, an Assistant Stage Manager operating a tape recorder backstage'.[437] Designed to incorporate a large sound control room with windows that opened completely 'so the operator would be able to hear what was happening in the auditorium', the layout of the Crucible rebuffed standard design practice of the time.[438] Such innovation 'required a new breed of theatre professional' – the sound designer – with the Crucible going on to employ David Collison as the very first person to use such a title in the UK.[439] Collison, an active ABTT member and consultant for Theatre Projects,

[435] ABTT Archive / Annual Reports 1982/83.
[436] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2, 29 September 1972.
[437] Colin George and Tedd George, *Stirring up Sheffield*, p. 149. This process of recruitment has now become standard practice for lighting thrust stages.
[438] Ibid., p. 149.
[439] Ibid., p. 149.

was one of a growing breed of emerging stage specialists who would go on to revolutionise the use of sound in theatre practice.

The emergence of skilled technical labour remained sporadic, chaotic, and unregulated for long periods, but ultimately, the mid-1970s saw a slow move away from the old generalist idea of stage labourers towards an array of technical experts spread across differentiated disciplines. What formed was first a splintering of traditional roles, and then second a move towards a complex diversification of specialisation. Returning to the recruitment pages of *The Stage*, the number of technical roles advertised in its recruitment pages increased significantly, from 117 to 678 opportunities in the period between 1958 and the beginning of the 1980s. Interestingly, there is a lack of correlation between the increase in job opportunities identified in the journal and the lack of suitable terminology used to represent bifurcation as identified through the ABTT archive, with most advertisements falling under the heading of generic stage and technical terms rather than later specialised categories such as lighting and sound. By taking these recruitment listings as an index for understanding the diversification of skills required by new theatre practices, we can begin to understand something of the nature of the phenomenon of technical professionalism at this time. [440] In a period of heightened activity, such chaotic expansion is reflective of the rapid need for specific labour expertise as recruitment processes were adapted to developing technical requirements. Those applying for technical roles now needed to prove their specialist skills and industry knowledge; provide information on their character, competence, and experience through references; and show their ability to perform as part of a team within

[440] The numbers of listed technical roles: 1959–68 = 117; 1969–1978 = 241; 1979–1988 = 320. Sample data taken from September 1959 until 1989, from Proquest, Entertainment Industry Magazine Archive, The British Library, *The Stage,* Advertisement, The Stage. Author's own data.

more hierarchical organisational structures, often under new management controls. A time of greater diversification across technical theatre, innovation in design and technology continued to challenge the ability and availability of skilled technicians, which, despite the best efforts of the ABTT, created a complicated scattering of jobs within a continually disorganised and unregulated industry.

Such bifurcation of labour, presenting multiple problems for a limited technical workforce, resulted in the ABTT adapting to build relationships with those institutions offering the widest possible support in the training and upskilling of a fractured industry. The Arts Council, NATTKE, CORT, and educational institutions such as Paddington Training College became important partners, with the latter being one of the first to be asked by the ABTT to run a full-time theatre electrics City & Guilds course. This relationship continued further, with the ABTT working with Paddington College to design a full-time one-year course in theatre sound. Run by film, sound, and broadcast engineer and ABTT member John Mizzi, with support from Eric Pressley (head of sound at the Royal Opera House) and Rob Barnard (head of sound at the National Theatre), the course provided students with the practical skills, theory, and work experience necessary to become stage sound specialists. Paddington Training College grew to open as a new school for sound and lighting only a few years later under the new name City of Westminster College, and John Mizzi became the first head of department, overseeing an expansion of accredited courses that catered for an emerging sound industry reflective of wider sector changes and in need of skilled practitioners.[441]

[441] The change in name from Paddington College to City of Westminster College is a reflection of the increase in courses offered. Course accreditation included City & Guilds, BTEC National Diploma, National Certificate, and Higher National Certificate and Higher National Diploma levels. https://www.cwc.ac.uk/about-us/college-information/history [last accessed: 27 January 2023].

Particularly true across the regions, recruitment shortages remained a great concern for the ABTT in 1974, with (by now) chairman Frederick Bentham writing to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation for funding support 'to infuse an extra 26 technicians into regional theatres'.[442] Bentham, outlining the severity of the situation, stated, 'this seemingly drastic course of action, initiated by the ABTT Training committee, was a device to anticipate the replacement of some of the 150 technicians to be recruited by the National Theatre'.[443] As I have already discussed, the design of the National Theatre was representative of the technical modernisation of British theatre at the time, and here I argue this is also true of the practices of professionalism, with the stages of the Olivier, the Lyttelton, and the Cottesloe requiring a substantial amount of fully skilled, trained, and qualified technical experts. Stated in the ABTT's Gulbenkian application, 'the requirements of the National Theatre would have to encourage regional playhouses to employ staff in addition to their normal compliment and the ABTT looked to support the provision of a pool of regional technical labour to replace those attracted by the capital and the National, as such a resource was virtually non-existent'.[444] At a time when regional playhouses continued to be built, the pool of labour in the provinces remained small, as noted by the ABTT Executive committee minutes of 1975, 'meaning theatres continued to have problems in finding suitable personnel to fill posts'.[445] Similarly, the 1975 Gulbenkian Foundation report on British professional theatre training told of 'a serious situation clearly existing [in technical theatre]', surmising that 'an acute shortage

[442] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2, 1974 papers.
[443] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2, 1974 papers, Draft of application to the Gulbenkian Foundation, p. 1.
[444] Ibid.,, p. 1.
[445] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2, 1975 papers.

of skilled technicians was apparent'.[446] Highlighting a workforce lacking in formal training, experience, teaching, and facilities, combined with a steady flow of labour movement towards television and light entertainment, the Gulbenkian report expressed concerns for 'the shortage of experienced technicians being exacerbated by the demands made by large institutional organisations such as the National Theatre'.[447] From the outcome of these two documents we can see how the need for skilled technicians continued to outpace any ability by the technical sector to create a significant labour pool for the regions, despite the best efforts of the ABTT and wider training networks.

Up until now, I have shown how a shortage in suitably skilled technical labour, particularly across the regions, had been exacerbated by innovations in technology, stage design, and the even greater lure of the Capital. What can also be understood from looking at the archives of the ABTT in particular, is how such limitations were also born from a number of historical factors. Outlined in Bentham's Gulbenkian application for funding, these circumstances included the breakdown of apprenticeship-based training following the closure of many theatres during the interwar years, with the remaining playhouses staffed wholly by senior technicians which eliminated any new intake; the rising career expectations of technicians, which had made the working patterns of theatres compare even less favourably to other entertainment industries (such as the emergent TV industry); entry into theatre becoming more difficult, with restrictions imposed on the responsibilities, requirements, and opportunities for stage management staff when previously for most technicians their first positions were as assistant stage managers; the salary in theatres, always low compared to

[446] Ruari McLean Associates, *Going on the stage; a report to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation on professional training for drama* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1975), p. 63.
[447] Ibid., p. 64.

other industries, which failed to maintain a favourable position relative to other sectors that offered better working conditions and career advancement prospects; and finally, staff turnover, which was steadily increasing, so an even greater rate of intake was required to maintain the status quo.[448] The Arts Council, looking to address such historical factors as well as the more contemporary requirements of professionalism highlighted in the Gulbenkian report, necessitated the industry support and knowledge of the ABTT to deliver change.

By 1976, the ABTT – now incorporated as a not-for-profit distributing company – was in receipt of regular and significant funding from the Arts Council to deliver a range of skills programmes.[449] Activity for the Association continued to increase with the establishment of training schemes, including the continuation of a full-time theatre training course for electricians, a two-year day release course for theatre electricians, a stage course, City & Guild examinations, and multiple short courses across various regional theatres. In trying to promote training to an initially reluctant industry, the ABTT sought representation at a national level while forming wider affiliations with emerging organisations such as the Drama and Theatre Education Council.[450] The Association also formed ad-hoc partnerships with representatives of theatre unions and management, as we can see in the ABTT annual report of 1978, 'discussing regional theatre requirements, staff shortages, union membership for pre-entry trainees, and the need for courses on specialised techniques'.[451] To encourage participation in ABTT activities, training initiatives were advertised nationally, alongside the

[448] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2, 1974 papers, Draft of application to the Gulbenkian Foundation, p. 1.
[449] In the UK, a not-for-profit organisation is a broad term for all independent organisations whose purpose is something other than to make private profit for directors, members, or shareholders.
[450] Formed in 1979.
[451] ABTT Archive / Annual Reports 1978/79, p. 4.

recruitment listings of *The Stage*. The journal had by now reverted back to its original title, dropping '*and Television Today*' in response to the diversifying roles and growing importance of technical professionalism within the wider theatre industry. The ABTT, addressing the rather ad-hoc behaviours and attitudes of technical labour to this point, kept up the pressure to professionalise on a reluctant industry with the continued expansion of training networks and development of specialist committee groups.

The ABTT's willingness to adapt to the evolving circumstances of the late 1970s is evidenced in the formation of a further committee in 1978, the Professional Status working group (PSWG). Charged with categorising new technical stage roles 'to recognise those of being theatre technicians in a professional theatre', this was first and foremost an exercise in renewing the criteria for membership.[452] More than that, I argue the list is representative of a growing diversification in the labour skills required by modern playhouses, as new forms of stage innovation and financial support from the Arts Council compelled the technical professionalism and categorisation of the entire stage workforce. Representative of over twenty skilled roles, the PSWG list provided an alphabetical appraisal of the changing demands of stage production and offers one of the first examples of the ABTT referring to technical roles as 'professionalised practice'.[453]

The working group, chaired by lighting designer Bob Anderson, proposed membership acceptance for two types of technician, 'those working IN theatre, in a production, or in a

[452] Associate membership could also be granted if a role was seen as complementary to technical practice but not within the ABTT listings, however, no voting rights were offered. ABTT Professional Status Working Group, *Listed jobs – jobs recognised as those of theatre technicians (professional theatre)*, Executive committee note (March 1980). ABTTComEX/1975-1981/includingfinanceandgeneralplanning14.3.75/B2.
[453] Ibid.

trade easily recognised by the committee as being both theatre and technical (such as a lighting designer), and for those working FOR theatre in a technical capacity (such as an architect)'.[454] The group advised that those who worked for the theatre needed more careful scrutiny 'to avoid extending the definition of theatre technician too widely'.[455] In fact, minutes of the committee reveal how members insisted 'applicants show how their work had benefited theatre, had been of a technical nature, and had achieved a high standard in stage practice before any acceptance'.[456] The ABTT, who had represented technical theatre in Britain since 1961, 'now defined, categorised, and supported a professionalism in practice through the proven experience, status, and competence of a rapidly diverging membership'.[457]

Reflective of the continued complexity and ad-hoc nature of professionalised development, the PSWG was soon disbanded, replaced by a more formalised ABTT (Membership) committee, which implemented much of what the group had originally proposed. Offering student, affiliate, fellow, and member status, by the end of the 1970s acceptance into the ABTT had almost become a prerequisite for employment in the theatre industry. ABTT membership, in short, became the precondition for any technician who wanted to work

[454] Ibid. A list of those working **in** the theatre: armourer, box office, costume (designer, maker), carpenter (scenic, stage), designer (scenic, lighting, sound, costume), electrician, engineer (electrical, stage, house, maintenance), manager, machinist, makeup artist, operator (lighting, sound, lines), properties (master, maker), production manager, painter (scenic), stage management (SM, DSM, ASM), stagehand, technician (theatre, sound, lighting), wardrobe, wigmaker, flyman.
[455] Ibid.
[456] A list of those working **for** theatre: acoustician, architect, academic, consultant, director, safety officer, surveyor, supplier, manufacturer, teacher, fight director, choreographer, production secretary. ABTT Professional Status Working Group, *Listed jobs – jobs recognised as those of theatre technicians (professional theatre)*, Executive committee note (March 1980). ABTTComEX/1975-1981/includingfinanceandgeneralplanning14.3.75/B2.
[457] ABTT Professional Status Working Group, *Listed jobs – jobs that may be recognised as qualifying for full membership in special cases (professional theatre)*, Executive committee note (February 1980). ABTTComEX/1975-1981/includingfinanceandgeneralplanning14.3.75/B2.

professionally in technical theatre, requiring a suitable job title, previous experience in one of the ABTT's listed stage roles, and a position of professional responsibility that had been held in a theatre for at least two years.[458] Applicants were asked to provide two named sponsors and a statement of achievement, 'emphasising experience, interest, and responsibility in a theatre and technical setting for at least five years'.[459] This expansion of professional categories aligned with the language of membership criteria was intended as a means of 'demonstrating to the satisfaction of the council a standard of competence in a branch of theatre technology appropriate to professional status'; it stands in stark contrast to the formative years of the Association that I discussed in chapter one, and the chaotic rise of post-war technical stage development in which the ABTT emerged.[460] Becoming recognisable as a new professional taxonomy for the industry, the ABTT listings of specialist roles in theatre provided the terminology for identifying theatre's new-found technical professionalism, allowing for the categorisation of labour and skills, which in turn supported a structured move away from the chaotic practices of the pre- and early post-war years.

When analysing the professionalising developments of this period, what we can see is the changing behaviours and attitudes of post-war technical labour, arising as a consequence of the technological innovations of regional stage design which embodied the processes of modernisation.[461] Reflected in the recruitment pages of *The Stage*, a more cohesive and structured approach to identifying and separating the various recruitment practices required of technical labour had emerged by the end of the 1970s. Also, through training and skills

[458] Ibid.
[459] Ibid. The application was then examined by the Members committee for acceptance or rejection.
[460] Ibid.
[461] The process of modernisation and the practices of professionalism were different from one another but, at the same time, also integral to one another.

development, the specialist knowledge of innovative equipment and stage designs had become standard requirements across a diversified technical workforce. What this shows, I argue, is the beginnings of a rubric of professionalism that began to shape the previously localised and disordered nature of theatre recruitment practices, expanding roles through improved skills and placing an increased emphasis on accredited training. The result of this was a complex diversification of labour – a division of labour previously unseen in the theatre – which transformed from a range of generalist stagehands to a professional nexus of key specialists working across all aspects of theatre production. This tendency towards professional expansion, driven by forces and pressures of innovation, had no singular cause but derived from a multiplicity of factors. Nor do I mean to suggest that the process was indicative of a clear and conscious paradigm shift taking place in practices. Instead, through the advances of stage design, technology, and technical expertise, the recruitment and training of specialised labour arose from a series of contingent events that nonetheless culminated in the process of professionalism that sought to impose at least a semblance of order on an otherwise ungoverned categorisation of an industry. This is visible in the complex diversification and classification of labour represented in recruitment listings, with roles evolving from traditionalist to specialist, to all-encompassing terms that capture an array of distinct positions within the emergence of a new economic logic of theatrical production. I consider the ABTT Professional Status working group document, *Listed Jobs – draft of revised membership application form*, to be the first attempt to categorise new forms of stage labour. The listings provide further evidence of an adaptive advisory association adjusting to support the nexus of training and skills required within the shifting practices of technical professionalism.

As I have discussed, the divisions of labour that evolved and the requirements for governance that materialised through the practices of professionalism, overseen by a representative (if not statutory) body such as the ABTT, converged to create the context for something new to emerge.[462] With the development of training and recruitment came a need for standardisation, amid what the Theatre Advisory Council described in their survey of the theatre industry at the beginning of the 1980s as 'the growing mismatch between required standards and available skills of a professionalising industry'.[463] It is by continuing to interpret the contingencies of new theatrical forms, through technical modernisation, professionalism, and as I will move on to discuss next, the processes of standardisation, that allows for an understanding of the importance of technical theatre – and the specific role played by the ABTT – to post-war developments. How exactly the ABTT became necessary to the implementation of new sector standards, with early recommendations to codify the unwritten customs and conventions of stage labour informing the future regulations of technical standardisation, is what I will now turn to explore in the final section of this chapter.

3.3 Technical standardisation: creating sector regulations and codes of best practice

So far, I have shown how the processes of technical modernisation, the stage shapes, designs, and technological innovations of post-war modern playhouses, led to a period of technical professionalism, the development of skills, training, and new practices in the

[462] Exemplified by the formation and establishment of the ABTT.
[463] Theatre Advisory Council, Technicians training in the theatre industry: a joint survey commissioned by the Manpower Services Commission and the Theatre Advisory Council from NOP Market Research Limited. TAC Working Party Report, 1984, p. 1.

recruitment of stage labour across 1970s British theatre. In this section, I move on to discuss the processes of technical standardisation – by which I mean the regularisation of stage design, equipment and machinery, technical practice, production techniques, and aesthetic styles – across regional theatres that formed alongside the development of labour and as a consequence of technological innovation. A central concern here is how the ABTT became the primary advisory body for the industry, 'to be consulted with from the outset of any theatre building project', becoming pivotal to a network of post-war technical groups that converged in support of the standardisation and development of industry measures across, amongst others, civic and touring theatres.[464] I will go on to illustrate how the ABTT's revision of production practices in modern playhouses – the Association's attempts to create the regulations, rules, and norms that governed technical practice – allowed for the processes of standardisation to form. A consequence of the organisational alliances that emerged across technical theatre, I explore how standardisation involved the bringing together of the production practices and values of a formal and informal network of British theatre bodies, led by the knowledge and expertise of the ABTT. I then conclude by considering how acceptance of early ABTT recommendations later informed sector-wide regularisation, with the Association becoming synonymous with writing technical codes of best practice, many of which remain relevant to contemporary theatre production.

At a meeting held in Sunderland, on 31 October 1963, 'representatives from local authorities, the theatrical profession, and other bodies interested in the provision, conventions, and development of civic theatres' came together to discuss the need for a National Council for

[464] National Council for Civic Theatres, *Survey 1964–65* (Sunderland: Thomas Reed and Company, 1964), p. 14.

Civic Theatres (NCCT).[465] What quickly followed was the formation of committees and a first meeting, held at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, in January 1964, where agreement coalesced around the pursuit of two principal aims: to conduct a survey of theatre facilities throughout Great Britain, and to encourage the promotion and expansion of civic theatres within a touring circuit.[466] The resulting survey, published one year later, told of a country bereft of suitable theatre buildings, 'formed from a post-war slump in live entertainment that created a gap between intellectual type of theatre on the one side and bingo on the other'.[467] The development of civic theatres was seen as key to encouraging greater diversity in leisure and entertainment, 'with much of the current theatre becoming foreign to young people and left to the tender mercies of commercial exploitation'.[468] Such ambition for change was made clear in the NCCT survey and manifesto of 1964, with the following extract calling for public money to be invested in transforming the role of theatre in society, and quickly.

> The Government, in partnership with local authorities, could embark upon a programme of civic theatre development, which would transform the social life of the people in this country, and with the weeds growing as quickly as they are on this fertile land of ours, it is no longer a luxury BUT A NECESSITY.[469]

[465] National Council for Civic Theatres, *Survey 1964–65*, p. 7.
[466] Symbolic, with the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, being the first publicly funded post-war civic theatre built in Britain.
[467] Councillor Len Harper, Chairman of the NCCT. National Council for Civic Theatres, *Survey 1964–65*,, p. 5.
[468] National Council for Civic Theatres, *Survey 1964–65*), p. 5.
[469] Ibid., p. 5.

In the report, the NCCT warned against 'building general-purpose halls', championing the need for a range of well-designed and planned-for theatres across the regions with a variety of stages, large and small, to enable all types of theatre entertainment to be presented.[470] Through the advice of the ABTT, the NCCT believed, 'some standardisation of stage dimensions, facilities, and equipment would be of great advantage to the development of a civic touring circuit.[471] Standardisation, they believed, 'would cut down costs of set-up and changeover of shows across the regions, addressing the needs of touring companies forced to travel with additional apparatus'.[472]

Having recently published *Theatre Planning* (1964), 'an admirable book giving comprehensive details of all theatre requirements', the ABTT had already provided an outline for the basic technical needs of modern playhouses 'at a time when much of the stage accommodation and equipment of many provincial theatres was antiquated and sadly inadequate'.[473] Along with *Planning for New Forms of Theatre* (1962), a booklet addressing growing interest in the planning of theatres other than the proscenium picture frame type, and *Stage Planning* (1963), providing advice on the traditional presentation and new approaches to proscenium staging, the ABTT had begun to 'stress the importance of suitable design and proper installation of stage equipment'.[474] Here, the use of the word 'proper' is indicative of a desire

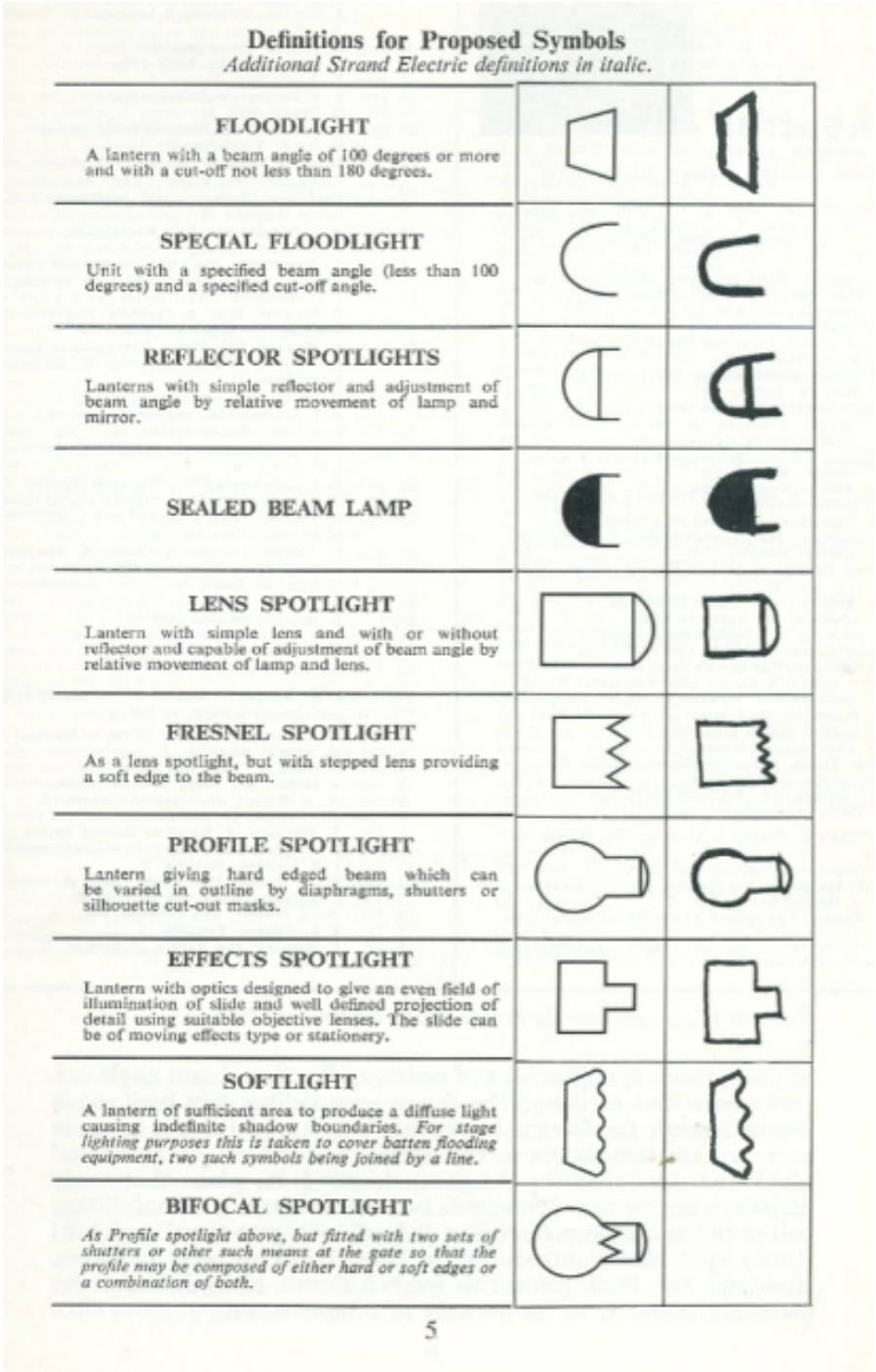
[470] Ibid., p. 14. Small theatres with a seating capacity of under nine hundred and large theatres with a seating capacity of over a thousand.
[471] Ibid., p. 7.
[472] Ibid., p. 15.
[473] Ibid., p. 14. *Theatre Planning* (1964) covered a range of theatre design topics, with the NCCT survey focussing upon proscenium, stage, grid height, electrical equipment, sound and amplification, property room, dock doors, orchestra pit, cyclorama and blacks, dressing rooms, wardrobe, laundry room, band room and staff room, rehearsal room, carpenters' and electrical store, scenery store and workshop, green room, and smaller spaces. The publications *Theatre Planning* (1964), *Theatre Planning II* (1967), and a revised edition in 1972 are also discussed in chapter two.
[474] ABTT Archive / CommExec, The Association of British Theatre Technicians, Constitution, 1962.

to establish the norms and principles of civic stages, informing much of the early work of the ABTT in building the industry relationships required for regularisation, underpinning an emergence of the technical networks that would soon follow.

Initially presenting demonstrations on new technology under the recently formed ABTT Safety committee, chaired by founder member Richard Southern, the Association began to inform theatre practitioners on the most suitable materials and techniques for stage innovation. Exemplified in figure 3.5, the Safety Committee initiated a consideration of required regulations for safe practice within all aspects of modern theatre production, by working with a range of industry specialist groups that included governmental and international committees.[475]

[475] Previously the Fire and Safety Regulations committee. The work fell under three headings: 'Study of examples of fires, panics, and other hazards', 'Consideration of the various measures which have been used to limit these dangers', and 'Examination of the effects of regulations in force, and consideration of implications of possible future changes'. ABTT Archive / CommExec, The Association of British Theatre Technicians, Constitution, 1962.

Figure 3.5: A list of proposed international definitions for stage lighting types. Anon. *International Agreement in Prague*, *TABS*, Vol. 23, issue 3, 1965, pp. 4-8 (p. 5). Definitions were proposed by the ABTT for universal lighting symbols and submitted to the Commission Internationale d'Eclairage (CIE) for international acceptance. The symbols and their translations were described as a 'good beginning, with the same task needed in respect of dimmers and control systems' as the ABTT looked to adopt and advocate for the standardisation of stage equipment and relevant terminology.



Definitions for Proposed Symbols

Additional Strand Electric definitions in italic.

FLOODLIGHT

A lantern with a beam angle of 100 degrees or more and with a cut-off not less than 180 degrees.

SPECIAL FLOODLIGHT

Unit with a specified beam angle (less than 100 degrees) and a specified cut-off angle.

REFLECTOR SPOTLIGHTS

Lanterns with simple reflector and adjustment of beam angle by relative movement of lamp and mirror.

SEALED BEAM LAMP

LENS SPOTLIGHT

Lantern with simple lens and with or without reflector and capable of adjustment of beam angle by relative movement of lamp and lens.

FRESNEL SPOTLIGHT

As a lens spotlight, but with stepped lens providing a soft edge to the beam.

PROFILE SPOTLIGHT

Lantern giving hard edged beam which can be varied in outline by diaphragms, shutters or silhouette cut-out masks.

EFFECTS SPOTLIGHT

Lantern with optics designed to give an even field of illumination of slide and well defined projection of detail using suitable objective lenses. The slide can be of moving effects type or stationery.

SOFTLIGHT

A lantern of sufficient area to produce a diffuse light causing indefinite shadow boundaries. *For stage lighting purposes this is taken to cover batten flooding equipment, two such symbols being joined by a line.*

BIFOCAL SPOTLIGHT

As Profile spotlight above, but fitted with two sets of shutters or other such means at the gate so that the profile may be composed of either hard or soft edges or a combination of both.

5

When, in 1965, the Society of West End Theatre Managers (SWETM) expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of standardised equipment and facilities in West End theatres, the ABTT supported the development of a series of structures to enable consistency in technical abilities across all of London's commercial playhouses.[476] The SWETM understood there to be 'a complete lack of information available to producing managers', and they hoped collaboration with the ABTT might result in 'a list of recommendations on the minimum requirements in the way of equipment and facilities'.[477] Recorded in the Association's annual report of 1965 as 'the first time London's commercial theatre industry had recognised us as a body of national significance', this can not only be read as a request for support in the building of regulations required by new stage practices but also in the need for an organisation such as the ABTT to lead industry change.[478] Believing 'it to be a good moment to get safety regulations standardised', the ABTT became a member of the newly formed Theatres Advisory Council (TAC) and sought 'to ensure theatres were treated as a special case and not under the general heading of assembly places amid the implementation of new government health and safety policies'.[479] The TAC was a complex membership consisting of over fifteen organisations and affiliates. Working with the Association of Municipal Corporations, in 1966 the TAC committee went on to establish the Standing Advisory Committee on Local Authorities and the Theatre (SACLAT), placing the ABTT within a

[476] The domains for standardisation, at this time, included equipment, facilities, buildings, skills, training, labour, machinery, networks, and resources.
[477] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1964–1970 B1, 12 March 1965, p. 2.
[478] ABTT Archive / Annual Reports 1978/78, p. 4.
[479] Such as the Fire Prevention Bill (1968) and the advent of the metric system. ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1964–1970 B1, 3 June 1966, p. 1.

chaotic network of growing theatrical organisations looking for industry change and regulation.[480]

An organisation of volunteers, the range of responsibilities held by the ABTT increased with the approach of a new decade, with advice, information, publications, and guidance shaping much of the Association's activity. Two particular topics, a proposed Arts Council Touring Theatre Committee and an impending Fire Precautions Bill, attracted much attention within the ABTT. On the first, a 1971 report to the Arts Council written by a group consisting primarily of representatives of the major touring companies and members of the ABTT Theatre, Architecture, and Planning committee, echoed much of the previous NCCT report of 1965, outlining the technical deficiencies of fifteen theatres of a total of thirty-one on the touring circuit. Recommendations were made to raise the standards of facilities and to advise where money should be spent on suitably consistent equipment. Regarding the second, an impending government bill to provide further provision in the protection from fire of places of work had raised concerns within the ABTT as regulation looked to make sweeping industry changes. A series of comments and observations were presented by the Safety committee chairs, Eric Jordan and Ronald MacDonald, to a TAC meeting held in 1970, with the intention of wider consultation with the Secretary of State, Hugh Jenkins MP. Highlighting contradictions and anomalies in the bill specific to the theatre industry, the ABTT addressed member concerns and aimed to inform policy change. The Safety committee concluded with

[480] The member organisations of SACLAT were the Association of British Theatre Technicians, Association of Touring and Producing Managers, British Drama League, British Actors' Equity Association, Council of Regional Theatres, Council of Theatre Preservation, Institute of Municipal Entertainment, League of Dramatists, Musicians' Union, National Association of Drama Advisors, National Association of Television, Theatrical, and Kine Employees, National Operatic and Dramatic Association, Society for Theatre Research, Society of West End Managers, Theatrical Managers Association, and Variety Artistes' Federation. Associated organisations included the Arts Council of Great Britain and British Centre of the International Theatre Institute.

two main factors that emerged from their findings: first, 'the need for professionally and technically qualified people to regulate by means of setting up a consultative advisory body to mediate and interpret standards'; and second, 'the use of existing technical groups in the development of those new standards'.[481] What we can understand from this is that the ABTT, promoting the expertise of its membership and specialisms of its committee groups, positioning the organisation as the authoritative body on technical standardisation.

With two further publications, a revised edition of *Theatre Planning* (1972) and *Preparing a Brief for a Theatre Building* (1972), the ABTT continued to influence the changing standards of technical theatre in the immediate years that followed the Association's 1971 report – although, as I will consider, this was at a pace more suited to the volunteer nature of the Association rather than the needs of the theatre sector.[482] As was made clear in the Association's annual report of 1978, the ABTT dismissed any possible industry concerns of lethargy, inactivity, or reactionary considerations that may have been growing within the organisation, citing the strength of membership expertise which allowed for a longer term, proactive, and more considered approach to sectoral change:

> If the wheels of The Association may appear to grind somewhat slowly, this is largely because our work is based upon the voluntary efforts of many people. But the strength of the ABTT lies in the considerable experience of its members pertaining to the theatre, and to dispense with the benefits of this experience would be to deny the very principles upon which the ABTT was founded. Our aim is therefore one of

[481] ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2, Comments and observations on the Fire Precaution Bill, 29 January 1971.
[482] I discuss both these publications in chapter two.

> steady expansion and development, rather than a flashy and perhaps short-lived brilliance, and we look forward to a continuance of this policy.[483]

Developing its expansion was not without difficulty, however, as standardisation – the ABTT's attempts to impose minimum professional standards on practices across all theatre production – brought the Association into conflict with the very networks it had helped form. This was felt both within the organisation and beyond, as finding a common approach towards technical safety and regulation provided multiple challenges. I discuss further the politics that shaped the regularisation of technical theatre, and the expansion of the ABTT in the years that followed, in chapter four; for now, the key issue is simply to note that the time it often took for the ABTT to have an impact upon the fast-paced changes required by technical theatre became frustrating for some networks and also alienated others.

Recognising safety as 'a growth industry', the ABTT conducted 'active investigations into the revision of safety manuals and regulations, stage standards, and other detailed aspects of safety in theatre'.[484] The ABTT Safety committee published checklists for theatre management and information sheets on best practice, going on to represent the technical theatre industry on the British Standards Institution Committee, for example, looking into stage lighting and exit signs in public buildings.[485] Committees across the Association came

[483] ABTT Archive / Annual Reports 1978/79, p. 5.
[484] Ibid., p. 4.
[485] Earlier examples include Information Sheet 2: SSC1: recommendations and proposed standards for wiring requirements in a new theatre, SSC2: stage management by sound control, SSC3: permanent equipment for new theatres (1969); and Information Sheet 3: recommendations for a lighting control room (1969). Later examples of the period can be found within the Association's annual reports, submitted between 1976 and 1985, 'including the first part of a new code of practice for the theatre, a pamphlet on electrical safety for stage (1977) and a data sheet on the Health and Safety at Work Act (1977)'. ABTT Archive / Annual Reports 1978/79, p. 4.

together, working on joint schemes to regulate layouts for stage ground plans and the use of plastics, and on new codes of practice for means of escape in case of a fire. Seminars were held at the Fire Service Technical College in Moreton-on-Marsh for senior fire prevention officers on the problems in theatre with scenery and properties. The annual reports of 1973 and 1974 show how the safety responsibilities of the ABTT continued to increase, with information and advice on best practice given to theatres and local councils across Britain on a wide range of technical topics.[486]

By 1975, the ABTT had consulted on the revision of building regulations with the Department of the Environment, 'meeting frequently in order to maintain these and other contacts held with various governmental and local authorities in representing the interest of theatre technicians'.[487] The ABTT annual report of 1978 tells of an organisation growing in confidence, with the networks of regularisation forming in and around the expertise of its membership. For example, its authors state, 'the increase of enquiries and requests for advice from outside of the organisation is indicative of the position the Association holds in the theatre world and the results of past efforts are now being realised in the growth of new theatrical practice'.[488] At this time of heightened activity, the Association began to consider preparations for a comprehensive code of practice on theatre safety, to be submitted to the Health and Safety at Work Executive (HSE) once completed. Eventually providing a series of recommendations for technical standardisation, this work of the ABTT would go on to define

[486] Topics included the technical responsibilities of regional playhouses under the Theatres Act of 1968, application advice for Arts Council capital grants on lighting and sound equipment, and the safe design of backstage areas in theatres with the GLC. ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2, p. 2.
[487] ABTT Archive / Annual Reports 1975/76, p.4.
[488] Ibid., p. 5.

future standards in technical theatre, as well as the role of the Association within the industry.[489]

Under financial assistance from the Arts Council and at the request of the Theatre Advisory Council, towards the end of the decade the ABTT was tasked with preparing 'standards to meet the growing requirements of the theatre industry'.[490] Guided by ABTT technical editor Ronald MacDonald, much of the preliminary work resulted in a number of revisions to pre-existing statutory requirements, 'representing a unique instance of a theatre users' body being able to influence decisions that affected those working in the theatre at all levels'.[491] Here, we see the first formalisation of safety practice in technical theatre being prepared for and implemented by the industry, on behalf of the industry, as the expansion of ABTT activity determined best practice.[492] Such self-regulation was considered essential, with the ABTT Safety committee intent on becoming representative of the expertise required for setting future standards, as seen in the Association's annual report of 1978, 'otherwise codes would be imposed by powerful civil service departments that could be totally unsatisfactory for the running of a theatre'.[493] However, with 'often limited success amid growing regulatory

[489] *Technical Standards for Places of Entertainment*, or the Big Yellow Book, was first published in 2001. It was developed, and is revised each year, by a Standing committee comprised of the ABTT, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, the District Surveyors Association, and the Institute of Licensing, together with representatives from other organisations who deal with matters of interpretation, subjects for inclusion, and modifications in view of technical innovation. The book is discussed further in chapter five. *Technical standards for places of entertainment* (London: Entertainment Technology Press, 2013), preface.
[490] ABTT Archive / Annual Reports 1978/79, p. 5.
[491] Ibid., p. 5.
[492] Exemplified by *Safe Sound* (1978), a pamphlet of advice on electrical safety, with particular reference to musical instruments, the ABTT initiated a proactive response to a perceived increase in the number of fatal incidents involving modern equipment and those working on the stage. From this, the Association went on to produce a survey of accidents in theatres for the Health and Safety Executive. The work of the Safety committee resulted in important modifications and revisions to certain statutory and licensing requirements, as well as informing best practice in new stage technology, as members achieved nationally agreed standards across modern theatre production.
[493] ABTT Archive / Annual Reports 1978/79, letter to Peter Longman, 26 January 1977.

concerns', a lack of volunteers willing to devote their time to the increased responsibilities of the Safety committee, and the retirement of long-serving members with connections to local authorities and government departments, significant challenges were soon presented to the ABTT in the turbulent years that followed.[494] This proved to be a period of profound change for the ABTT and for the processes that had helped shape the professionalisation of the technical theatre industry so far; as I will go on to discuss in the next chapter, a new political landscape brought much uncertainty for all.

Over the course of this chapter, I have focussed upon the three processes of technical professionalisation – modernisation, professionalism, and standardisation – and the role of the ABTT as representative industry body. Technical modernisation encouraged the non-proscenium shapes and rapid technical innovations of 1970s theatre construction, presenting alternate forms of stage design and progressive stage machinery. In a period that saw some of the most prominent theatres built across Britain in the post-war years, including the long-awaited National Theatre, by the end of the decade even the very notion of what counted as modern was itself subject to change. Technical professionalism, the development of expertise commensurate with the new demands placed on the backstage workforce by modernising processes, redefined recruitment and training needs at this time, challenging the traditional meaning of backstage labour through a recategorisation of roles. As a consequence of both modernisation and professionalism, technical standardisation provided the collaborative codes and regulations of best practice that went on to shape and extend safety in backstage theatre, creating the regulations, rules, and norms that governed new

[494] ABTT Archive / Annual Reports 1980/81, ABTT services, p. 2.

forms of technical practice.[495] Central to all three processes, the ABTT provided the body of expertise required to advise on new styles of stage design. The Association also provided the training needs of a diversifying technical industry and developed the sector standards and networks required to make the implementation of all three possible. Acting as industry specialist, the 1970s saw the ABTT become the recognised representative body for industry change, ready to lead the professionalisation of technical theatre into a new decade.

As I will next explore in chapter four, the 1980s brought an abrupt end to many of the critical developments that had taken place across 1970s British theatre, with an immediate change to Arts Council policy threatening the continuation of technical funding and indeed the very existence of the ABTT. A new decade saw the breaking up of the post-war settlement, in a move away from the civic, community, and cultural renaissance of post-war Britain in which a new theatre had flourished. The changing ideologies of society and the political will of a new government effectively returned dramatic form back towards the fourth wall of commercial theatre: with this transformation, the slow destruction of early post-war networks began to accelerate, and the very meaning of technical professionalisation was threatened by a culture that prioritised deregulation over the processes of modernisation, professionalism, and

[495] The ABTT, in writing a code of practice for the theatre industry, developed a series of standards that went on to define health and safety in the theatre. Codes were written in line with the Factories Act of 1961, the Fire Precautions Act of 1971, and the Health and Safety Act of 1974, advising on best practice under the Enforcement Act of 1976 – under which the Health and Safety Executive was solely responsible for enforcement of health and safety at work. Under law, at the end of the 1970s, a factory was any premises or place where persons were employed in manual labour in any process listed in section 175 of the Factories Act, 1961. For theatres, this meant any premises in which the making, adaption, or repair of dresses, scenery, or proprieties was carried out, incidental to the production of theatrical performances – not being a stage or dressing room of a theatre, in which only occasional adaptations or repairs were carried out. The following notes summarise the main points of the Factories Act 1961 and other regulations the ABTT considered to be connected to the Act that also affected theatres: Abrasive Wheels Regulations, 1970; Electricity Regulations, 1908; Electricity (Factories Act) Special Regulations, 1944; Highly Flammable Liquids and Liquefied Petroleum Gases Regulations, 1972; Horizontal Milling Machines Regulations, 1928; Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act, 1920; Protection of Eyes Regulation, 1974; Safety Signs Regulation, 1980; Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations, 1981; Construction (Working Place) Regulations, 1966; Woodworking Machines Regulations, 1974.

standardisation. It is within this new political and economic context that funders began to cast doubts over 'the sustainability and common approach towards safety, training, and labour' which the ABTT provided.[496] The fundamental shifts in the cultural landscape, altering the coordinates for the ABTT and the modern theatre more generally, was something the technical industry was ill-prepared for and struggled to react to. Therefore, I will now explore the consequences of the 1980s for the ABTT and the wider technical industry, paying particular attention to this period in the history of the Association for its significance to the story of modern British theatre, both then and now – and not least because, as I will go on to argue, where we are today is entirely determined by the challenges of the period.

[496] ABTT Archive / Annual Reports 1984/85, ABTT correspondence to the Arts Council, 10 October, 1984, p. 1. The launch of the Arts Council's ten-year strategy for the arts in England, *The Glory of the Garden, in 1984,* implemented much sector change.

Chapter 4

Beyond the civic: the ABTT and a new economic orthodoxy

In this chapter I examine the changing politics of 1980s British theatre, exploring the impact of Arts Council policy reform on technical professionalisation, exposing the way organisations such as the Association of British Theatre Technicians adapted themselves to the new economic orthodoxy of neoliberalism. As discussed in chapter three, modern playhouses – built with support from public funding under the Arts Council's Housing the Arts scheme since 1965 – required the technical training of regional labour and the standardisation of stage practice for new forms of civic theatre to succeed. As a result, early Arts Council policies supported the emergence of technical professionalisation, encouraging an expansion of the ABTT to deliver the growing requirements of training and technical expertise for an evolving backstage industry. The rise to power of Margaret Thatcher, in 1979, brought about significant changes in the political and economic landscape of British theatre, and culture more generally, culminating in new imperatives that shifted arts policy towards private investment and the law of the free market.[497] As a result, the ABTT reorientated operations away from ambitions rooted within the civic mission, eventually becoming market facing by developing ways of selling knowledge and expertise back to the technical sector. It is by analysing the effects of the attack upon subvention under a new political regime that I now consider the challenges faced by the ABTT at this time, exploring organisational pressures and exposing the impact of decision-making upon technical professionalisation across the theatre industry.

[497] Defunding under the Conservatives resulted in the termination of post-war theatre building programmes, training schemes, and regional stage design innovation, as the government looked to influence a raft of technical theatre industry changes.

The Conservative Party came to power in 1979 with a mandate to reform the economy, under what historian David Harvey describes as 'a fierce determination to have done with the institutions and political ways of the social democratic state consolidated in Britain after 1945'.[498] As a result, Thatcherism during the 1980s led to a transformation in the fiscal and social policies of organisations such as the Arts Council, first under the stoical chairmanship of Kenneth Robinson, and later under the more sympathetic political leadership of William Rees-Mogg and Peter Palumbo.[499] Industry publications such as *The Glory of the Garden*, the Arts Council's ten-year strategy for the arts, issued in 1984, epitomised a growing fiscal move away from state-supported theatre building, stage experimentation, and technical training.[500] Further Arts Council publications reinforced a policy move towards market-orientated industry practice, supported by a range of sector reforms, and I will discuss these later in the chapter. What followed, in the second half of the decade, would go on to establish a more commercialised approach to British theatre, in what Jen Harvie suggests was 'an age when capitalism and consumerism were becoming increasingly entrenched'.[501] Subsidies under Thatcherism eventually evaporated, bringing about an abrupt end to the expansive design experimentation of regional civic playhouses and the supportive networks of stage expertise – a process compounded by what the Arts Council described as 'a continued thinning of

[498] Most notably seen in the early impact of 'quango decisions on the role of subsidy' and later by the campaigning of MPs such as Norman Tebbit on the restructuring of Arts Council funding systems. David Harvey, *A brief history of neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 23.
[499] Presenting his 1979 secretary-general report, under the title *Patronage and Responsibility*, Roy Shaw described the Arts Council as a 'quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation', going on to defend 'the recent proliferation of quangos and the undue political bias in their composition being open to abuse as a source of jobs for favoured boys'. Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: patronage and responsibility. Thirty-fourth annual report, 1978/79* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979), p. 5.
[500] Most noticeably the closure of the Housing the Arts fund that previously supported theatre building across Britain for over twenty years and stimulated the need for stage specialists' consultation, technical training, and sector standards in stage production.
[501] Jen Harvie, *Theatre and the city* (London: Red Globe Press, 2009), p. 6.

budgets'.[502] For the technical theatre industry, Britain's 'emphatic turn towards neoliberalism in political-economic practices' resulted in deregulation, privatisation, and the withdrawal of state support from all training and development programmes by the end of 1986.[503] As a result, the Arts Council no longer supported the work of organisations such as the ABTT and instead turned towards the 'new arts industry', promoting the consultancy services of companies such as Theatre Projects in providing specialist advice on theatre sound, lighting, and stage expertise.[504]

While there have been a number of histories on the impact of Thatcherism on British theatre funding to date, including works by Olivia Turnbull, Anthony P. Pennino, and Phoebe Patey-Ferguson, none discuss the plight of technical theatre under Thatcher's rule and the impact that funding reform had upon industry professionalisation.[505] In contrast to such an approach, I turn in this chapter to technical theatre specifically, discussing the broader relationships between public subsidy and the future of the ABTT that unfolded under Thatcherism, as well as the commercialisation of stage specialisation, training, and standardised practice that followed. In order to understand the challenges this new environment set for the ABTT, as the leading protagonist for industry change, it is important

[502] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: critical judgements. Thirty-sixth annual report, 1980/81* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979), p. 4.
[503] David Harvey, *A brief history of neoliberalism*, p. 2.
[504] Arts Council of Great Britain, *A great British success story: an invitation to the nation to invest in the arts* (University of Warwick library photocopy of original – NX750G707, no publication details given), p. 3. Previously from the Arts Council of Great Britain Library, 400Art. 1985. I have discussed Theatre Projects in previous chapters. Originally set up in 1957 by ABTT founder Richard Pilbrow, the company has become one of the leading theatre consultants in the world.
[505] Olivia Turnbull, *Bringing down the house: the crisis in Britain's regional theatres* (Bristol: Intellect Publishing, 2008), Anthony P. Pennino, *Staging the past in the age of Thatcher* (Hoboken: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), and, Phoebe Patey-Ferguson, LIFT and the GLC versus Thatcher: London's cultural battleground in 1981*, New Theatre Quarterly,* Vol. 36, Issue 1, February, 2020, pp. 4-16. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/new-theatre-quarterly/article/abs/lift-and-the-glc-versus-thatcher-londons-cultural-battleground-in-1981/623080E3F90124933760E772A407821B [last accessed: 31 January 2025].

to first recognise how the withdrawal of funding in the 1980s slowed the processes of technical professionalisation initiated in the previous decade.

In response to the removal of funding and the inevitable increase in financial pressures that arrived in 1984, the ABTT initially requested the re-establishment of grant support, petitioning the Arts Council, members of Parliament, and sector bodies in an attempt to have funding reinstated.[506] Provided with only a short extension to training budgets, the scale of the financial problem soon became apparent, triggering a period of crisis management within the Association. With the removal of all supporting bursaries and project grants, the ABTT was forced to react, to move beyond its historical reliance upon Arts Council subsidy and plural funding.[507] As a result, member expertise transitioned away from the regional stages of the civic period, towards the metropolis and commercialised theatre.[508] In turn, the communal ties built through the post-war consensus that gave rise to the need for ABTT expertise became irrevocably broken amid the fracturing of industry relationships. This new political moment – what sociologist Stuart Hall would describe as a 'conjunctional shift' in The Great Moving Right Show (1979) – is representative of the wider structural readjustment

[506] Arts Council Accounts for the financial year 1983/84 show the ABTT received an £8,000 bursary and £77,000 training grant. This was increased to £10,000 and £84,000 in 1984/85. A single subsidy of £32,000 was provided in 1985/86, after which all other bursaries and grants stopped. During this time there was a threefold increase in ABTT membership to over one thousand stage specialists by 1986. Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: patronage and responsibility. Thirty-fourth annual report, 1978/79* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979), p. 5.

[507] Introduced in the 1950s, plural funding provided new sources of money from other public bodies, namely the regional arts associations and local authorities, alongside the Arts Council support. See Olivia Turnball, *Bringing down the house: the crisis in Britain's regional theatres* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2008), p. 12.

[508] Driven partly by the continued advances in stage technology and design, with the origins of these advocated by the ABTT and its members in the years prior to Thatcherism, adaption was further encouraged by the governance of those in a position of influence. This is most evident in the career of Richard Pilbrow, moving from founder of the ABTT to technical consultant for the construction of the National Theatre while becoming a world-renowned designer, director, and advisor to the West End and Broadway through his company Theatre Projects.

taking place across British technical theatre at this time.[509] The pivoting away from social democracy towards privatisation can be traced in the actions of the Arts Council, the reactions of the ABTT, and in the repercussions for the technical industry, many of which remain evident in contemporary theatre practice.

In order to begin recognising the impact of 1980s policy change, I begin in the first section of this chapter with an exploration of the dwindling post-war settlement at the end of the 1970s, examining how subvention under a new regime forced the removal of government funding through renewed Arts Council agendas and the crisis management that ensued across technical theatre. This discussion is important for understanding the complex and broad changes that occurred due to the advent of Thatcherism and the challenges it set for the theatre sector – the cultural, economic, and political context under radically changing conditions following the 1979 general election and the impact of legacy funding against profound economic changes. In the second section of the chapter, I explore how the ABTT learned to live within and adapt to a free-market world. I pay particular attention to the way the Association transitioned from a reliance upon state funding towards self-reliance, the challenges directly posed given its previous model, and the incorporated struggles with the Arts Council. From there, in the third section, I consider the selling of expertise, that is, how the ABTT developed commercially through trade shows and selling the technical standards for places of entertainment through publications, networking events, and forms of knowledge exchange. I conclude the chapter by reviewing the consequences of decision-making in the 1980s, posing the question of sustainability for technical professionalisation

[509] Sally Davison, David Featherstone, and Bill Schwartz Davison, Introduction, in, *Stuart Hall: selected political writings*, ed. by Sally Davison, David Featherstone, Michael Rustin and Bill Schwartz (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2017). pp. 1-16 (p. 2).

under the aggressive political conditions of Thatcherism, and the reaction to existential threats that faced the ABTT.

4.1 Crisis management: subvention under a new regime

Before understanding the gravity of Thatcherism upon technical theatre, I first consider the years leading up to Arts Council policy change, from the mid-1970s to the beginning of the 1980s.[510] I do this to understand the continued support, encouragement, and advice provided by arms-length state funding to organisations like the ABTT, and, indeed, the growing over-reliance of the sector upon public finance that ensued – albeit in a new form and that reached beyond the theatrical sphere. The importance of state funding to technical theatre can be traced through the often mutually beneficial and reciprocal processes captured in the minutes of meetings, policy documents, and national records of the Arts Council, as well as the uncatalogued documents of the ABTT and associated networks. This rich material provides insight into the mechanisms that brought about change and the resulting conflicts that repeatedly arose as a consequence.

[510] In describing the composition of the Arts Council and arms-length approach to policy-making at this time, Kenneth Robinson provided a detailed overview of the body's composition. 'The members of the Arts Council are appointed by the Secretary of State following consultation with the Minister for the Arts and the Chairman. The objective of all three is to have a Council which is broadly based in more than one sense. There should be members who have understanding of and a love of the arts in general; there should be some who have perhaps a deeper knowledge of one particular art form. The members should come from different parts of the United Kingdom and from a variety of educational, cultural, and social backgrounds. The academic, the practitioner, and the consumer should figure in the membership. There needs to be enthusiasts for both the traditional and the avant-garde. And not least, a sizable proportion should have had experience of the process of collective decision-making through committee or other groupings, and each should be ready to support a majority view whatever his own. Such a group of individuals should be more able than most to recognise what is best in the qualitative sense of the arts; they will equally, one hopes, have sympathy with the more popular manifestations of the arts. Their minds need to be open to new ideas, and alert at all times. They should have differing views and approaches, and yet be able to function as an entity, without necessarily always reaching a consensus.' Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: value for money. Thirty-second annual report, 1976/77* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1977), p. 5.

For the ABTT, the early 1980s saw significant increase in the levels of grant and bursary support from the Arts Council, as well as smaller contributions from local authorities, in return for the delivery of training schemes, the creation of better working conditions for stage technicians, and the implementation of greater efficiency in standards across the industry – what I have termed a process of technical professionalisation. Arts Council support led to a rise in public profile for the ABTT, with those in a position of authority within the association becoming leading advocates for industry development, acting as sector representatives in a variety of roles across national panels and industry committees.[511] It is in the annual reports and policy documents of the Arts Council, from the late 1970s onwards, that I now begin tracking the connections between these two pivotal organisations which underpinned the drive towards technical professionalisation. I will do this by exploring the conflict over civic and social funding they both represented and the breakdown in alliance that followed under Thatcher's rule.

Writing in the 1976/77 Arts Council annual report *Value for Money*, incoming Arts Council chairman Kenneth Robinson began by thanking his predecessor, Lord Gibson, 'for showing wise leadership, vision, and understanding' throughout his five-year term in office.[512] Going on to explain how 'none of them were easy years, with the last one or two in particular bringing money problems perhaps more intractable than predecessors have had to face', Robinson raised funding concerns for the Arts Council that would become all too familiar in

[511] The ABTT represented technical matters across various organisations, including the Health and Safety Executive, the British Standards Institute, the Theatre Advisory Panel, and the Standing Advisory Council on Local Authorities and Theatre.
[512] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: value for money,* p. 5.

the years that followed.[513] Elected to the role through ministerial appointment in March 1977, under the Labour government of James Callaghan, his tenure began during a period when arts policy remained substantially bipartisan, 'with both main political parties accepting the need (embodied in the Arts Council's charter) to make art accessible to a larger proportion of the population through continued funding and support'.[514] Under Robinson, and retiring Arts Council director of drama N. V. Linklater, the Arts Council believed in the importance of stage expertise to regional theatre and, as the following extract shows, of the rewards that were available from relatively little investment.

> Even the small amounts [of money] given to help some of the organisations that support the theatre – the Association of British Theatre Technicians for example – have enabled them to continue giving a service over the years, which had it ceased, would have reduced the efficiency of the whole industry.[515]

By the end of Linklater's term in March 1982, British theatre had changed irrevocably, with the industry having to adjust to 'earn their keep' under a new Conservative administration looking for a return on investment.[516] Government policies began to directly and indirectly reduce state funding of the arts, forcing British theatre, and in particular subsidised technical networks, 'to operate in the real world where they were made subject to market forces'.[517]

---

[513] Ibid., p. 5.
[514] Ibid., p. 18. 'The Arts Council was established by Royal Charter to develop and improve the knowledge, understanding, and practice of the arts; increase the accessibility of the arts to the public throughout Great Britain; and co-operate with government departments, local authorities and other bodies to achieve these objectives'.
[515] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: value for money*, p. 21.
[516] Olivia Turnball, *Bringing down the house*, p. 10.
[517] Olivia Turnball, *Bringing down the house,* p. 10.

For the ABTT, having initially received small subsidies in Robinson's time, which eventually grew into substantial pots of public money, the removal of all Arts Council funding by 1986 resulted in a drastic scaling back of operations, putting a stop to the training programmes and sector standards that had driven technical professionalisation.[518] In practice, this meant the termination of all day, short, and full-time courses, as well as the variety of sound, scenic, and costume training schemes that had propelled new standards in technical theatre over the preceding decade.

If we dig a little deeper, into the development of state funding that allowed for the expansion of technical theatre (and the role of the ABTT in technical professionalisation), we can see how a growing reliance upon sector funding enabled a deepening industry dependency on the public purse. Greater analysis exposes the inherent problem with funding reliance for the ABTT and the impact of developing political involvement upon technical professionalisation towards the end of the 1970s. At the same time, the increasingly assertive views of the New Right concerning arts subsidy, some of which were to find their way into Thatcherite policy, were being aired openly even before the election which took the Conservatives to power in 1979. Publications such as *A Policy for the Arts: Just Cut Taxes* (1978), 'prefigured the bluntness that was to characterise the utterances of Thatcherite ministers towards the arts'.[519] Writing in *Right Turn* (1978), author and playwright Kingsley Amis, one of a group of

[518] The ABTT, along with industry networks such as the Council of Regional Theatre (CORT), Theatres Advisory Council (TAC), British Theatre Association (BTA), British Theatre Institute (BTI), and the National Council of Theatre for Young People (NCTYP), was described by the Arts Council as having grown to become 'part of a working party that supported the theatre to provide a better service for everybody despite facing and suffering the same economic difficulties of the theatre industry itself'. Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report. Forty-second annual report, 1986/87* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1987), p. 2.

[519] D. Keith Peacock, *Thatcher's theatre: British theatre and drama in the eighties* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 34. Such publications suggested that a simple solution to arts funding was a general lowering of taxes, which would lead to more disposable income. It was considered that this would result in greater patronage of the arts by middle-income groups and would thereby obviate the need for public subsidy.

labour supporters and MPs who transferred their allegiance to the Conservatives during this period, argued for the removal of state funding from the arts, suggesting, 'if all stage companies had to cover their costs, those concerned would be far less self-indulgent'.[520] In *An Arts policy?* (1979), Amis went on to suggest, 'the one way of allowing [quality of the arts] to improve was to withdraw public money'.[521] Being no more enthusiastic about the Conservative arts policy of 1978, Amis and colleagues, in *The Arts: The Way Forward* (1978), derided the government's pre-election agenda for 'following a path similar to that of Labour in reiterating the post-war consensus of Government actively supporting the arts'.[522] As the following extract shows, the Arts Council, under secretary-general Roy Shaw and fearing the coming change of policy, felt concerned enough to warn against the reorganising of funding systems through government will alone. Writing a cautionary note in *A Year of Achievement*, the Arts Council's annual report for 1977/78 stated, 'It would be disastrous if arts policy, which has hitherto been almost fully bi-partisan, ever became a political football to be kicked right or left with every change of government'.[523]

Similar concerns were raised by the Arts Council just one year later, with both Shaw and Robinson using the organisation's 1978/79 annual report, *Patronage and Responsibility*, to remind the new Conservative government of the 'value' of the arts and of political pledges made to 'protecting funding'.[524] More pertinent still was Robinson recounting the words of

[520] Kinglsey Amis, Speaking up for excellence, in, *Right Turn: eight men who changed their* minds, ed. by Patrick Cormack (Lincoln: Cooper, 1978), pp. 47-66 (p. 56).
[521] Kingsley Amis, *An arts policy?* (London: Centre for Policy Studies, 1979), p. 6. Amis wrote a series of edited articles, published by the Centre for Policy Studies, where he associated state funding with that of 'Russian Totalitarianism'.
[522] Kingsley Amis, *An arts policy?,* p. 10.
[523] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: a year of achievement*, p. 7.
[524] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: patronage and responsibility. Thirty-fourth annual report, 1978/79* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979), p. 4.

new minister for the arts Norman St John-Stevas, who when in opposition said, '[he] advocated significantly increasing spending on the arts'.[525] Clearly aware of the growing political pressure upon the Arts Council, Shaw pointed out once more, 'how the arts policy was, and has remained, until perhaps the last two years, almost wholly bi-partisan … thus assuring the arts freedom from political control'.[526] His interventions highlighted a perceptiveness to future threats and a growing vulnerability to political pressure felt by the Arts Council, but also exposed the growing 'problem' of funding faced by the arts at the end of the 1970s amid the imminent collapse of 'bi-partisan policies'.[527]

Despite electioneering to the contrary, once in power, Margaret Thatcher quickly expressed views akin to those of Kingsley Amis, believing 'artists should feel the full blast of market forces'.[528] Further to this, new cabinet ministers such as Nicholas Ridley pushed for greater policy reform, arguing 'no artist had a right to a living from his work'.[529] As a consequence, the Conservatives, under Thatcher, began presenting state support as 'regimental and stifling to artistic activity'; particularly in the frame was arts bureaucracy, with the prime minister going on to suggest, 'the State had come to mean the vested interested of the arts lobby'.[530] In the government's view, public funding was to be replaced by 'the private sector raising more money and bringing business acumen and efficiency to bear on the administration of cultural initiations'.[531] The changes in policy reform that followed challenged Arts Council

[525] Ibid., p. 4.
[526] Ibid., p. 6. This raises the question of whether two parties agreeing to back an agenda can be apolitical?
[527] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: progress and renewal. Thirty-fifth annual report, 1979/80* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1980), p. 5.
[528] Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street years* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 633.
[529] D. Keith Peacock, *Thatcher's theatre: British theatre and drama in the eighties*, p. 36.
[530] Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street years*, p. 633.
[531] Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street years,* p. 634.

organisational structures and the use of specialist committee members, those who Amis argued sat within a system that 'exalted the experts and institutionalised them – the panels and study groups and regional boards they sit on, officialise and bureaucratise, and politicise'.[532] Such committee groups included the specialist members of the ABTT and the wider networks of technical expertise that had grown to inform sector professionalisation.[533]

Just three months on from the Conservatives coming to power, St John-Stevas presented the State's altogether new political attitude towards arts funding. Writing in *The Observer*, he stated, 'the arts world must come to terms with the fact that Government policy in general has decisively tilted away from the expansion of the public to the private sector'.[534] Stevas continued, 'the Government fully intends to honour its pledge to maintain support of the arts as a major feature of policy, but we look to the private sphere to meet any shortfall and to provide immediate means of increase'.[535] For the Arts Council in 1981, a standstill in funding in the face of inflation resulted in making cuts for the first time in its thirty-five-year history. As historian D. K. Peacock asserts in *Thatcher's Theatre*, 'business sponsorship represented under two percent of arts subsidy in Britain [at the turn of the decade], and, therefore, could not be relied upon in the short-term to make up the shortfall'.[536]

[532] Kingsley Amis, *An arts policy?,* p. 10.
[533] Embattled by a year he described as a 'watershed for the Arts Council', Robinson rallied support for the need of continued state funding against a raft of spending cuts and committee revocation. In summarising the year, he defended 'the actions taken by the Arts Council as an exercise in streamlining to meet the challenges of the 1980s – of which, immediately there had been significant cuts to funding and a raising of taxes … in a period where contributions from business were marginal'. Shaw recalled how, 'the new government fairy soon cut £1.1 million from the grant already voted to the Arts Council from the outgoing Labour Government. The arts world was shocked, and no less shocked by the increase in V.A.T.' (Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: patronage and responsibility. Thirty-fourth annual report, 1978/79*, pp. 4, 5, and 7. His pleas for continued state funding amid mass cuts to arts organisations were to prove ineffective.
[534] Quoted in, D. Keith Peacock, *Thatcher's theatre*, p. 36.
[535] Ibid., p. 36.
[536] D. Keith Peacock, *Thatcher's theatre*, p. 37.

Writing in *Critical Judgements* (1980/81), his final annual report as chairman of the Arts Council, Robinson alluded to decisions being made 'between quality and the needs of the regions' – between civic and social ambition (that drove ABTT growth) – 'and choosing which was the main responsibility for the Arts Council to follow'.[537] Questions of the right to public money of the arts were once again being raised as, politically, sectors such as subsidised technical theatre moved from being seen as akin to a public service towards a more commercialised business enterprise.[538] I argue this as a pivotal moment for technical practice, signalling a sea change in industry support, as the sector had no choice but to conform with government policy changes by looking towards a more commercialised and self-reliant approach to professionalisation. For the ABTT, with funding commitments for technical training secured with the Arts Council for four more years, the immediate threat of policy change was not so apparent. The removal of bursaries and guarantees secured against losses that soon followed, however, was a warning of things to come.

In 1982, William Rees-Mogg, incoming chairman of the Arts Council (1982–1987) and keen advocate of Thatcherite values, began a tenure that would go on to oversee multiple policy reviews and bring about an altogether alternate discourse in Arts Council funding.

---

[537] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: critical judgements. Thirty-sixth annual report, 1980/81* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1981), p. 6.

[538] A problem explored by both a parliamentary select committee and the Gulbenkian Foundation in 1982. The Parliamentary Select committee brief was to report on the public and private funding of the arts. During the committee's investigations, the Gulbenkian Foundation posed a number of questions concerning public funding as the basis for discussion. 'Further considerations, the foundation suggested, should be given in light of 40 years' experience, to the principles of public subsidy and the social planning which should go with it. What is public subsidy about? The pursuit of excellence or the right to fail? The extension of accessibility or the increase of availability? Support of the individual or the creation of arts structures?' Eighth report from the Education, Science, and Arts committee, Session 1981–82. *Public and Private Funding of the Arts*, Volume 1 (London: HMSO, 18 October 1982), p. vi.

Introducing terms such as 'cost-effectiveness and deselection', Rees-Mogg promoted a new narrative in describing the government's arts strategy as the Arts Council looked to apply free-market philosophy to policy developments.[539] Initially advocating 'the need to make better use of limited resources to continue effective expansion of the quality and availability of the arts in Britain', Rees-Mogg began by presiding over immediate alterations to the workings of the Arts Council, exemplified in changes made to the *Thirty-Seventh Annual Reports and Accounts* (1981/82).[540] These can be seen in the removal of titles and front cover images, with further changes including a reduction in the number of pages dedicated to the secretary-general and more space provided to data-driven analysis and marketing imagery. This trend was to continue, in a move designed to solicit private investment from businesses through forms of marketing that employed prospectus-styled publications and results-driven dossiers in support of Thatcherite moves towards a new market orthodoxy.

The political 'swing to the right', a term used by sociologist Stuart Hall in *The Great Moving Right Show*, was representative of an historical conjuncture ('Thatcherism') that Rees-Mogg's actions would go on to epitomise.[541] Under his chairmanship, the Arts Council quickly moved away from 'the state instrument for aiding the living arts' he had once promised, instead, lurching towards a Thatcherite agenda of commercialised practice.[542]

[539] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report. Thirty-seventh annual report, 1981/82* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1982), p. 5.
[540] Ibid., p. 6.
[541] Stuart Hall, The Great Moving Right Show, in, *Stuart Hall: selected political writings*, ed. by Sally Davison, David Featherstone, Michael Rustin and Bill Schwartz (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2017). pp. 172-186 (p. 172).
[542] Geoff Mulgan and Ken Worpole, *Saturday night or Sunday morning? From arts to industry – new forms of cultural policy* (London: Commedia, 1988), p. 24.

Starting with 'a strategy for a decade' – *The Glory of the Garden*, published in 1984 – the Arts Council began to appropriate growing business practice in presenting policy reform through a series of illustrated documents.[543] Further publications were later released, aimed at conveying a more commercialised approach to the arts, with the use of corporate language, data, and highly visualised imagery to 'market the sector'.[544] I argue that the Arts Council used policy reform as an opportunity to readdress the perception of a government that saw the arts as a black hole where public money simply disappeared. Using a new and stylised prospectus design, the Arts Council portrayed an organisation at the forefront of commercialisation and arts-business acumen, where government investment would provide swift returns in the form of tax receipts on profits, increased employment, and a more profitable entertainment industry, no longer reliant on government funding alone.

As I will go on to show, the effects of this changed financial landscape upon technical theatre – and specifically on organisations such as the ABTT, who had become reliant upon Arts Council funding during the post-war consensus of British politics – was industry and organisational reform. The internal review of the ABTT that followed eventual and inevitable Arts Council funding withdrawal brought about a series of recommendations, resulting in actions leading to the commercialisation of member knowledge and a new emphasis placed

[543] Arts Council of Great Britain, *The glory of the garden: the development of the arts in England* (London: Williams Lee, 1984), p. 1. The Arts Council intended the introduction of imagery within policy documents to present the organisation as adaptive to new market needs and styles. In discussing the activities of a developing arts industry, the Arts Council incorporated multiple images to support discussions on sales records and prospects, growing customer numbers, and supplying increased leisure time.

[544] Arts Council Bulletin, no. 74, June/July 1985, supplement, n.p. Having been presented with a series of reports recommending significant changes to its structure and reach (the Parliamentary Select committee report, 1982; the Clive Priestley report, 1983; the Gulbenkian report, 1984; and eventually the Cork Report, 1986), a weakened and vulnerable Arts Council was presenting itself to the government as an organisation now willing to join the new market economy, to move away from the idealistic arts lobbying of previous administrations, in an attempt to assert itself 'as the financial engine for the new arts industry'. (Ibid).

on the profitability of sector skills. In the next section I turn to examine the consequence of ABTT policy review, the importance of developing two subsidiary companies to make the Association profitable, and the effect of market changes upon the mechanisms that had brought about technical professionalisation to this point.

4.2 Adapting to change: how the ABTT learned to live within the free-market world

When Housing the Arts officer Peter Longman wrote an open letter telling the history of the Housing the Arts fund in 1975, he noted 'how the Arts Council relied increasingly upon special ad-hoc committees of independent experts to examine all aspects of major applications of funds'.[545] For civic theatres 'in need of an understanding of the technical competence of those facilities proposed', Longman argued that 'advice should be sought from the Association of British Theatre Technicians, more specifically the ABTT Theatre Planning Committee (TPC) and that of Theatre Consultants'.[546] Fostering a relationship between the Arts Council and the ABTT that first began in 1961, Longman was responding to the growing importance of the Association as the primary advisor to the Arts Council on all technical matters relating to civic playhouse design. This was a reliance that would extend to training, standardisation, and the working conditions of technicians in the years that followed. Having reaffirmed a relationship that continued to expand technical professionalisation for a further ten years, ultimately, in 1984, the connections that had built

[545] ABTT Archive/Open Box 1. Peter Longman, *The Arts Council and the Housing the Arts Fund*, The Arts Council of Great Britain. Open Letter. 16 May 1975, p. 1. The Arts Council of Great Britain's Housing the Arts scheme was set up in 1965 following the publication of the Arts Council's reports on Housing the Arts in 1959 and 1961 and the 1965 white paper *A Policy for the Arts.* I talk more about these policy documents in chapter two. ABTT Archive / Open Box 1, Peter Longman, *The Arts Council and the Housing the Arts fund*,

[546] ABTT Archive / Open Box 1, Peter Longman, *The Arts Council and the Housing the Arts fund*, The Arts Council of Great Britain, open letter, 16 May 1975, p. 1.

Britain's new wave of post-war theatres came crashing down amid the crumbling of ABTT networks and the redesign of policy under government reform. I will now discuss the factors that led to a breakdown in relations between the Arts Council and the ABTT, the removal of plural funding, and the impact of policy reform upon technical professionalisation.

In its first year of funding (1965/66), the Housing the Arts scheme made commitments totalling £250,000, signalling a new wave of post-war theatre construction that went on to support over sixty major theatres built in just a twenty-year period.[547] Regional in location and civic in style, as discussed in previous chapters, many of these modern playhouses challenged the traditions of stage design and the role of theatre in society.[548] By 1976, chairman of the Theatre, Architecture, and Planning Committee Peter Moro wrote to ABTT members to report that a drop in the number of schemes submitted for consideration had begun, which was 'no doubt a reflection of the effect which the economic climate has had on theatre building projects'.[549] A decrease in submissions coincided with an increase in tensions between the ABTT and the Arts Council. This was illustrated in 1976 when the ABTT Theatre, Architecture, and Planning Committee influenced the decision-making policy of the Arts

[547] The annual commitment ration was increased to £500,000 in 1966/67, leading to a greater volume of applications, and remained so until 1974/75, when it was increased to £750,000. Also in 1975, the Arts Council was given increased flexibility in the way it could make commitments for future years and a special 'once-and-for-all allocation of £675,000 to aid projects in the Government assisted areas'. In 1975/76 the ration was increased again to £1,250,000. ABTT Archive / Open Box 1, Peter Longman, *The Arts Council and the Housing the Arts fund*, The Arts Council of Great Britain, open letter, 16 May 1975, p. 2.

[548] Over the ten years up to March 1975 a total of £6,731,800 had been paid or promised to 241 projects across England, Scotland, and Wales. The estimated total cost of all projects was £36.75m, towards which the Arts Council's overall contribution averaged 18.3%. For the ABTT, commenting on the technical competence of theatre facilities, grants were often secured against TAP committee approval. Ranging 'from whether the stage was suitable for dance, the provision of an orchestra pit, or that attention was paid to the acoustic quality of an auditorium', for example, the responsibility of the ABTT grew further with an adaption of new policy conditions in 1975 that resulted in fixed-term equipment such as lighting boards being included in proposed schemes, requiring further ABTT expertise. ABTT Archive / Open Box 1, Peter Longman, *The Arts Council and the Housing the Arts fund*, The Arts Council of Great Britain, open letter, 16 May 1975, p. 1.

[549] A reduction from eighteen in 1974/75 to seven in 1975/76, and six in the year under review. Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1976/77, p. 5.

Council, submitting a raft of questions to Lord Redcliffe-Maud in readiness for a round table discussion on Housing the Arts he was to hold as part of a wider review of *Support for the Arts in England and Wales* (1976).[550] Exemplifying the beginnings of a more fractious relationship, the Arts Council's response was to dismiss the value of ABTT expertise, using internal memos to describe stage specialist concerns as 'hoary old chestnuts'.[551] Signalling a growing fatigue around continued playhouse construction, further internal correspondence shows how the Arts Council 'hoped all civic prides had now been built'.[552] That hope slowly came to fruition with only seven new theatre building schemes proposed in 1978, followed by eight more across 1979 and 1980, as almost all new theatre construction ceased at the commencement of the new decade.[553]

[550] The ABTT-suggested topics were based on seven questions to be posed at Lord Redcliffe-Maud's review:

1. 'Who are the clients going to be? How can their briefs be made clearer? How can a system of vetting (architectural and practical) be established?
2. Where does the money come from for these buildings? Can the Housing the Arts fund continue to serve as an attractive carrot in the face of rapidly escalating costs?
3. Should there be an established Housing the Museum fund? And should this fund and the Housing the Cinema fund be coordinated with the Housing the Arts fund to bring some coherence to overlapping projects?
4. Do we build too permanently and too expensively? Will we still need the Crucible Theatre in fifty years-time? If not, should it not have been constructed less massively and less expensively? Is enough research being done into new building techniques? Who should be doing the research? Are fields to be examined possibly of those of short-life buildings, lighter-weight structures and mobile structures?
5. Many conversions turn out to be better buildings for the arts in practice than new buildings. Indeed there is the obvious advantage of being able to knock a building about without feeling one is destroying a piece of civic pride. Apart from the question of cost (conversions are usually cheaper than new buildings) this also raises the question of philosophy: are we constructing too many new buildings and not making sufficient use of what we already have on our doorstep?
6. Should the Arts Council take greater initiative for Housing the Arts matters or should it continue to rely on its traditional response to other initiatives?
7. What is the role of the local authority?'

Lord Redcliffe-Maud, *Support for the arts in England and Wales: a report to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1976), p. 169.

[551] Arts Council internal memo: Association of British Theatre Technicians. V&A folder/ACGB/120/133.

[552] Ibid.

[553] ABTT, Annual review 1977/78 (London: ABTT, 1978), p. 5. Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1978/79 (London: ABTT, 1979), p. 5. Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1979/80 (London: ABTT, 1980), p. 6.

By the start of 1981, although seventeen different projects had been discussed in total, Moro described, 'as a sign of the current economic climate that virtually all those projects were on a modest scale'.[554] Commenting further on a lack of theatre building in Britain, the TAP review of the year told of a series of theatre building projects that 'mainly involved the conversion of buildings from another use to some kind of performance space or improvements to existing theatre buildings'.[555] Only one project proposed an entirely new theatre, as the appetite for contemporary – and more specifically, regional – civic playhouses withered, with questions being asked by policy makers on the long-term value they represented. Following a similar pattern, 1982 saw fewer than ten theatre building proposals discussed, as TAP questioned its own role and relevance within the increasingly changing political world of Thatcherism. More significantly, having served as chairman for twenty years since its formation in 1962 and responsible for writing almost all of the 277 reports in that time, Peter Moro resigned as chair of TAP and from the ABTT. As a founder member, and designer of the Royal Albert Hall, Nottingham Playhouse, Plymouth Theatre Royal, and the renovated Bristol Old Vic, to name just a few, Moro was a significant loss to the collective expertise of the ABTT and its wider industry networks. Moro was not the only loss to the ABTT at this time, as the government's change in policy under the Conservatives placed immense pressure on the Association to move away from the publicly funded professionalised work of its committee groups towards a more commercialised approach to technical theatre.[556]

[554] ABTT, Annual review 1980/81 (London: ABTT, 1981), p. 6.
[555] Ibid., p. 6.
[556] I talk more about technical professionalisation, ABTT training schemes, safety standards, and working conditions, in chapter three.

We can begin to trace the effect of this move towards a more market-orientated economy by following correspondence between the two organisations, starting with the Arts Council writing to then ABTT chairman Anthony Easterbrook in 1982, requesting financial details for the following year. The letter warned of the extent to which the quality and effectiveness of the arts being maintained would depend upon 'the success of the bodies concerned in containing their costs and in securing funds for new developments from other sources such as private sponsorship'.[557] Having been encouraged by the Arts Council to 'take up a large lease' on new premises just three years earlier, while receiving incremental training grants that would culminated in £84,000 per year, this was a time when the ABTT found itself heavily reliant on public subsidy.[558] Against a backdrop of reduced state and local government funding, and with criteria for grant aid becoming more selective within a competitive market, the ABTT began to look towards alternative avenues for securing financial stability.[559]

[557] A letter from the Arts Council to the ABTT, 23 June 1983, *Financial planning 1984/85*, ABTT Archive/comms/1982-85.

[558] ABTT, Annual review 1981/82 (London: ABTT, 1982), p. 3.

[559] The Arts Council's criteria for grant aid:

1. 'Quality of artistic product, including, as appropriate, standards of presentation, performance, design, and direction and their relationships to the conception of the company's overall programme.
2. Actual and potential creative strength in relation to both new and established work.
3. The extent to which stated aims and objectives are realised.
4. The fullest practicable use of facilities and the widest provision of arts to the community.
5. Education policy in relation to the artistic programme.
6. The employment and other opportunities extended to members of ethnic minority groups.
7. Overall value for money, including any success in extending audiences through media.
8. Box office and attendance returns.
9. The company's success in raising local authority support and other income.
10. The efficiency shown in using available resources and the accuracy and control of budgeting.
11. The urgency and nature of any financial problems.
12. The adequacy and security of tenure of premise.
13. The balance of provision between London and other regions.
14. The Council's existing declared policies, particularly the emphasis which it places on full-time professional work.'

ABTT Archive/comms/1982-85, A letter from the Arts Council to the ABTT, 23 June 1983, *Financial planning 1984/85*,.

The 1981 ABTT Trade Show, an example of alternate commercial opportunities, was held at the Roundhouse Theatre in London, attracting over fifteen hundred people and forty-five exhibitors in three days. An exhibition of theatre equipment, the show was described by organiser and ABTT member Roger Fox 'as a bringing together of those in the technical industry who built, manufactured, and used stage technology'.[560] The show generated much-needed revenue for the ABTT, through stand fees, ticketing, and ancillary sales. The Roundhouse was again the venue for the ABTT Trade Show in 1982, with over eighteen hundred people visiting fifty industry exhibitors, with the ABTT showing its members the event could 'make a small profit'.[561] The 1982 trade show was also successful in launching two ABTT sector awards – the technical product of the year and technician of the year – while also hosting seminars and presenting demonstrations on new practice. This format, combining training and selling, proved 'successful' and would eventually go on to set the blueprint for future trade shows – a format that has changed little over the subsequent years.[562] If we delve a little deeper into the administration of Trade Show '82, beyond the high number of audience, exhibitor, and revenue totals, we can find traces of the financial, political, and relational pressures building within the ABTT and its networks – a series of stressors that were about to challenge the continuing viability of the Association, despite the trade show's success, in the immediate years that followed.

Scheduled across six days of activity (from get-in to get-out), the 1982 trade show provided exhibition space for a host of sector specialists and manufacturers. Aligning the ABTT with the growing commerciality of technical theatre, the trade networks that formed developed

[560] ABTT, Annual review 1981/82. (London: ABTT, 1982), p. 4.
[561] ABTT, Annual review 1982/83. (London: ABTT, 1983), p. 4.
[562] Ibid., p. 4.

new revenue streams within a more business-orientated environment, in a further development of professionalisation.[563] Under an agreed deal with the Roundhouse Theatre, the ABTT paid a commercial rate for use of the foyer spaces, gallery area, and two studio venues. Money received from stall holders was used to cover ABTT costs, placing an imperative upon the trade show to be self-sustaining and to return a profit. Reflective of wider societal changes, I contend this slow rise in ABTT commercial activity was a reaction to the growing impact of Thatcherism upon British theatre, under what Stuart Hall called 'the active destruction of consensus politics'.[564] Further exemplified by the financial plight of the Roundhouse Theatre, whose director, Thelma Holt, pleaded with the ABTT for early rent payment 'in the face of the most enormous cash flow problem', new market imperatives were beginning to affect all areas of British theatre under Arts Council and political reform.[565] For the Roundhouse, as Holt explained, 'financial struggles made staying open an increasingly horrible problem', resulting in its closure just one year later, despite being supported by new revenue streams through the growing commercialisation of the sector.[566] Such financial worries were to soon spread further afield and would eventually reach the door of the ABTT.

[563] Exhibitors at ABTT Trade Show 1982 were: Colortron, Roscolab, TBA Lighting, Electrosonic, CCT Theatre Lighting, Rank Strand, Theatre Projects Services, Cerebrum Lighting (sales and hire), Rank Strand Sound, Lightning (tower hire), White Light, Cosby EuroLight, French's Theatre Bookshop, Rank Strand Demonstration Area, Elliott Brothers (audio systems), ABTT Theatre Training, Stage Management Association, RAT (manufacturing), Packman Research, DHA Lighting, N&I Costello, Neville's Textiles, Action Lighting, Theatre Dispatch, Ancient Lights/Eltec/Suffolk Scenery, Giltspur Bullens Transport Services, Cambrian-Stuart, Concept Engineering, Programmed Presentations (hardware), Paul Fowler, Flint Hire and Supply, Jane Rumble, Donmar Productions, Canford Audio, PB Theatre Systems, Valiant Electrical Wholesale, Peter Evans Studio, Soundcraft Electronics, Zero 88 Lights, Shuttlesound, MAC Soundhire, Spectrum Audio, Lee Filters, Great West Lighting, Specialist Lamp Distribution, Pancan, AJS Theatre Lighting and Stage Supplies, Theatre Flooring, and DEW Electrical Lighting.

[564] Stuart Hall, The Great Moving Right Show, in, *Stuart Hall: selected political writings*, ed. by Sally Davison, David Featherstone, Michael Rustin and Bill Schwartz (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2017). pp. 172-186 (p. 176).

[565] A letter between Ethel Langstreth and Thelma Holt, 9th September 1982. V&A archive/THM/2712/1/233 ABTT 1981-83, p. 1..

[566] Ibid., p. 2.

The Arts Council gave no indication of the fact that continued radical funding reform was soon to affect the ABTT when writing in June 1983, requesting financial planning details for the following year. The Arts Council did, however, comment on a continued lack of sufficient resources, 'urging the government to reverse the trend of widening shortfall of the funds required to support the arts', in a veiled attempt to address growing gaps between state support and sector need.[567] It wasn't until secretary-general of the Arts Council Luke Rittner wrote to the ABTT 'and all other annual clients in England on a development strategy designed to inform the next five years and beyond' that the extent of change about to happen became clear.[568] In his letter, Rittner first explained that the Arts Council remained 'conscious of the needs of the artist as well as the wider public whose money it distributes'.[569] He went on to state the limitations of funding, 'being locked into an increasingly restrictive framework which inhibits the Arts Council's ability to serve either of these two constitutional interests', and 'that the arts cannot flourish nor can the Council adequately fulfil its chartered obligations unless this situation is changed'.[570] With Rittner providing a context for Arts Council concerns towards bipartisan funding models and a justification for the need to 'establish a more flexible mode of operation better suited to the demands of the 1980s and beyond', the ABTT was invited by Housing the Arts officer Judith Strong to contribute to a review of all Arts Council responsibilities and to provide a brief statement on the following two questions:

[567] A letter to the ABTT from the Arts Council of Great Britain, Financial planning 1984/85, 23 June 1983. ABTT Archive/CommsExec/82-85.
[568] A letter to the ABTT from the Arts Council of Great Britain, Arts development strategy, 11 November 1983. ABTTArchive/ABTTCouncil/C3/CouncilMinutes (1984-89), p. 1.
[569] Ibid., p. 2.
[570] Ibid., p. 3.

1. How would your organisation respond, both artistically and structurally, to a substantial real-terms increase (say, twenty-five per cent) in your total level of public funding?
2. What changes would the organisation be forced to make in the event of a substantial real-terms reduction (again, say, twenty-five per cent) in total public spending?[571]

For the Association, this letter in fact marked the start of 'the dismantling of the subsidy structure', with the prospect of dwindling state support putting at risk the training programmes and related sector standards of technical professionalisation.[572] In a warning to the sector, Rittner said that by April 1984 the Arts Council was to decide on whether clients were to have grants increased, reduced, or terminated altogether. Rittner concluded his letter with a final cautionary comment:

> In any case where the Council decides in a total withdrawal of grant, it will therefore be in a position to give twelve months' notice, from 1st April 1984, to give time for alternate methods of operation or sources of funding to be explored. For the year from the 1st April 1984 itself, you should assume that the Council will be unable to offer substantial increases in grants to any of its clients.[573]

Despite the warnings, and having submitted a request to the Arts Council for a supplementary grant to support future work, outgoing ABTT chairman Anthony Easterbrook remained 'surprised' when told by letter, in February 1984, 'there were no more bursary

[571] Ibid., p. 3.
[572] D. Keith Peacock, *Thatcher's theatre:* p. 47.
[573] Ibid., p. 3.

funds available to support the ABTT beyond current funding agreements'.[574] The eroding of relationships between the two organisations that had been building since the end of the last decade is particularly evident when we read the internal memos of the Arts Council, which highlight 'reservations apparent about the success of (ABTT) work'.[575] Concerns were raised by Arts Council training officer Loretta Howells, and her finance colleagues Paul Collins and James Anderson, about the limited success of ABTT training programmes and their lack of impact in creating jobs for the sector. For the ABTT, such reservations marked the beginning of a wider crisis that would soon manifest in the decision by the Arts Council to remove all funding from the Association. This was presented as part of a new arts development strategy when the Arts Council published *The Glory of the Garden* just one month later.

I turn to *The Glory of the Garden* in order to expand further on the new market-oriented orthodoxy and its impact on the ABTT – in so far as the Arts Council looked towards 'the flexibility of its response to constantly changing training needs inhibited by fixed commitments to organisations such as the ABTT'.[576] *The Glory of the Garden* was introduced to the Association for the first time on 29 March 1984, when Luke Rittner wrote to highlight the fact the ABTT would have its training grant contributions reduced significantly. As shown in appendix vi of the policy, *The Glory of the Garden* confirmed the removal of £84,000 for ABTT training initiatives by 1986/87, coupled with the immediate removal of £10,000 per year guarantees against losses, placing the immediate future of the Association in doubt.

[574] In a second letter, Easterbrook learned a subsidy of £84,000 had been set aside by the Arts Council for technical training schemes in the following year, providing the ABTT with a misplaced confidence of continued support. A letter to the ABTT from the Arts Council of Great Britain, ABTT, 3 February 1984. ABTT Archive/CommsExec/82-85.
[575] Arts Council internal memo, 21 March 1984. Association of British Theatre Technicians. V&A archive/chapter3/data2.
[576] Arts Council of Great Britain, *The glory of the garden*, p. 31.

These cuts were a consequence of a real-terms reduction to Arts Council funding as a result of Thatcher's new market-orientated ideology. William Rees-Mogg, in his introduction to the strategy, 'underlined the Council's belief that the positive aspects of the document substantially outweighed the negative', while conceding, 'it would be little consolation to organisations such as the ABTT'.[577] Going on to suggest that the training of technicians could continue, Ritter outlined how '£42,000 by way of bursaries might well be used but not guaranteed' within a more open funding environment.[578] The emerging effects of a competitive training market, under a more commercialised technical sector, saw the Arts Council describe 'a need to retain flexibility in using some of the remaining funds in relation to courses provided by other organisations'.[579] The ABTT was no longer to be the only possible beneficiary of Arts Council funding in the training of theatre technicians, with colleges, theatres, and training groups encouraged to express an interest in provision, thus competing with the ABTT in a more open market.[580]

The changing dynamics of policy reform can be further seen in Arts Council considerations for a post-funding role for housing the arts. Following the decision to withdraw capital funding, the Arts Council looked at ways to continue an interest in 'the provision of arts facilities'.[581] Writing to the ABTT, Judith Strong outlined a proposal for the Arts Council to act as 'co-

[577] Ibid., p. 30. Section vi of *The Glory of the Garden* provides detail on ABTT funding withdrawal. A letter to the ABTT from the Arts Council of Great Britain, Arts development strategy, 29 March 1984. ABTT Archive/ExecComm/1982-85, p. 30.
[578] Ibid., p. 30.
[579] Ibid., p. 31.
[580] *The Glory of the Garden* stated, 'in the future, the Council's training policy will rely on a small allocation from which it will be able to provide bursaries for performers, designers, technicians, directors, exhibition organisers, and administrators attending short courses and in-service training schemes where they require training in specific skills'. Arts Council of Great Britain, *The glory of the garden*, p. 31.
[581] A letter to the ABTT from the Arts Council of Great Britain, A post-funding role for housing the arts, 17 August 1984. ABTT Archive/CommsExec/82-85, p. 1.

ordinator for a group of people who would be willing to give advice on the design of buildings and related issues'.[582] Not wishing 'to 'duplicate the proficiency of the work carried out by TAP and the ABTT', Strong stressed an awareness 'of the problems faced by training money being withdrawn from the Association and the rather sensitive issue of the future position of the Theatre Advisory Panel'.[583] Publishing a series of factsheets, providing grant aid towards feasibility studies, and convening an advisory panel for specific design problems, the policy proposal was based 'on the services currently offered by the ABTT for theatre design but extended to cover all areas of the arts and entertainment'.[584] Having met with Strong almost immediately, Easterbrook, in his final act as ABTT chairman, wrote to his council stating, '[Strong] no-longer believed the Arts Council should require organisations to send their plans to the ABTT for discussion'.[585] In the space of just six months, an erosion of funding saw the ABTT lose its annual guarantee, its substantial training budget, and now its position as industry advocator and expert advisor to the Arts Council, resulting in a period of crisis management for the Association.[586]

In response to the multiple challenges he faced, incoming ABTT chairman Richard York wrote to the Arts Council, specifically Luke Rittner, in an attempt to reposition the Association as a

[582] Ibid., p. 1.
[583] Ibid., p. 2.
[584] The four main areas identified were:
1. 'theatres and spaces for the performing arts
2. arts centres and multi-purpose buildings
3. galleries, exhibition areas, workshops, and studios
4. facilities for music'

A letter to the ABTT from the Arts Council of Great Britain, A post-funding role for housing arts, 17 August 1984. ABTT Archive/CommsExec/82-85, p. 2.
[585] A letter to the ABTT from the Arts Council of Great Britain, Meeting with Judith Strong at the Arts Council, 24 August 1984. ABTT Archive/CommsExec/82-89.
[586] Confirmation of all funding withdrawal swiftly followed, with a subsidy of £84,000 agreed for the financial year 1985/86 and a maximum of £32,000 for 1986/87 being the final allocation guaranteed.

membership of experts beyond just theatre alone. In his letter York stated, 'for many years the Association has provided an unrivalled service, not only to its subscribing members, but also to the entertainment industry at large'.[587] More than just semantics, the use of the term 'entertainment' is significant, aiming to place the Association as an expert body in the wider context of the arts and its buildings – extended to include television and film studios, for example, and not just theatre alone. In an attempt to show the possible breadth of member expertise and industry involvement, York stated further, 'the ABTT is willing and able to provide the full range of services outlined in Judith Strong's letter, to continue a dialogue with Loretta Howells on providing training facilities to the theatre industry, and with Dickon Reed, to find the most appropriate way of detaching the Association from Arts Council funding'.[588] To this end, York wrote to Reed requesting a final part-year subsidy to meet accumulated deficits he believed had been encouraged by the Arts Council. Interestingly, in providing a four-point review of the advantages in offering a supplementary grant, York wrote of an 'intention to expand the commercial measures of the ABTT beyond its current activities'.[589] Although the request for support was rejected by Reed, this is evidence of the ABTT adapting to change to meet the challenges of living within a free-market world.

[587] A letter to the Arts Council of Great Britain from the ABTT, Association of British Theatre Technicians, 10 October 1984. ABTT Archive/CommsExec/82-89.
[588] Ibid.
[589] York proposed four advantages to this:

1. 'It will leave the ABTT in good heart to tackle the financial year in which it becomes independent of Arts Council subsidy of its non-training activities.
2. It will secure the immediate future, thus enabling the ABTT to discharge its responsibilities with regard to the administration of training funds.
3. It will enable the ABTT to implement a series of commercial measures to secure its future and the continuation of the many services it provides, not only to its subscribing members but to the theatre industry at large.
4. It will give the Arts Council an opportunity to discharge its responsibilities with generosity and in full measure.'

A letter to the Arts Council of Great Britain from the ABTT, Association of British Theatre Technicians, 10 October 1984. ABTT Archive/CommsExec/82-89, p. 3.

This adaption is further evidenced in the ABTT archive by a series of letters from York arguing for the value (intellectual and economic) of the Association to the Arts Council. Aiming to position the Association as Britain's recognised national and international authority on planning theatres and performance spaces, York argued the Association had already given the Arts Council satisfaction in vetting schemes of capital funding, 'and [he] had no doubt that the professional expertise of members could continue to be brought to bear on the areas of policy the Arts Council outlined'.[590] Stating further an ability within the organisation to adapt to changing sector needs, York expressed confidence in the ABTT to be more responsive to new sector demands in-line with developing Arts Council strategies. York told Strong:

> I believe that the reappraisal of your Council's attitude toward the ABTT, arising from The Glory of the Garden, places an obligation on the Association to review its own policies and attitudes, and I have no doubt that it will be in a strong position to meet the objectives laid out in your draft paper.[591]

[590] A letter to Judith Strong, the Arts Council of Great Britain, from the ABTT, A post-funding role for housing the arts, 10 October 1984. ABTT Archive/CommsExec/82-89.

[591] The three areas of activities York responded to are outlined as to how:

1. 'We [the ABTT] are uniquely placed as a voluntary organisation to prepare objective advice on the planning of all kinds of performance space, since our membership comprises not only those who design and build such spaces, but those who manage them. In addition to the provision of fact sheets giving general information and guidelines, I believe there is work to be done on continuing the Theatrefacts survey, and on the new edition of Theatre Planning' (a second edition of the book that Roderick Ham would once again go on to edit). The third edition, published in 2010, was edited by Judith Strong).
2. Whilst I would not envisage the ABTT providing direct consultancy services since that requires a full-time commitment beyond a voluntary organisation, I nevertheless, from my own immediate past experience, see a need for a source of objective advice to those requiring such services. I have in mind a small panel of experts preparing briefs for feasibility studies and advising on a list of those who undertake such work professionally. This service would clarify the objectives of those who need studies and would be extended to an examination of the studies when complete. I believe the ABTT could apply to this, not only those who are accustomed to the planning of buildings, but also those who operate them, and believe this would be of considerable benefit, particularly with regard to the

The extent to which attitudes within the ABTT adapted to align with Arts Council policies following funding withdrawal, and the continuation of technical professionalisation as an industry imperative without state support, provide indicators of the changing market forces that shaped a more commercialised theatre industry. In the final section of this chapter, I explore further the remodelling of the Association, focussing on the expansion of commercial activities within an evolving entertainment industry and the meaningfulness of introducing two subsidiary companies, Technicians Training Ltd and Theatrical Trading Ltd, amid continued arts policy reform under the final years of Thatcherism in the late 1980s.

4.3 Selling expertise: glory, success, and partnership with the ABTT

The ABTT first discussed the creation of two separate subsidiary companies in September 1984 as part of a wider internal report looking into the future work of the Association. Initially proposed as part of a series of recommendations made by the Executive committee to its membership, the setting up of a training company was one of four actions that hoped to secure the financial viability of the Association in the wake of public subsidy withdrawal.[592]

maximisation of income and the minimisation of operating costs, matters that are doubtless central to your Council's current philosophy.

3. I have no doubt that the ABTT's current expertise could be expanded since its active membership includes, in addition to theatre experts who have met in the past on Housing the Arts projects, also those who are involved in every aspect of concert halls, cinemas, art galleries, multi-purpose auditoria, and even conference and exhibition facilities.'

A letter to Judith Strong, the Arts Council of Great Britain, from the ABTT, A post-funding for housing the arts, 10 October 1984. ABTT Archive/CommsExec/82-89, p. 2.

[592] The four actions were the setting up of two subsidiary ABTT companies – Technicians Training Limited, to handle training activities, and Theatre Training Limited, to handle commercial work. The former was created to develop profit-related activities and the latter bespoke training programmes for a more privatised technical industry. There was also to be a programme of continued safety publications and a review of membership subscriptions.

Within six months, Technicians Training Ltd had been formed, aimed at securing the continuation of a training programme that sought to embed technical professionalisation in theatre stage practices. A second company soon followed, Theatrical Trading Ltd, formed to exploit the growing success of commercial ABTT activities such as trade shows, industry publications, and member network events. With a covenant that ensured all pre-tax profits went to the Association, the ABTT envisaged both companies as a means of replacing a loss of funding from the imminent withdrawal of public subsidy first identified in *The Glory of the Garden* (1984), thus representing a decisive move away from an historical reliance upon the Arts Council and local government support. The need for financial self-reliance became even more evident to the ABTT with the quick release of two further Arts Council publications – *A Great British Success Story: An Invitation to the Nation to Invest in the Arts* (1985) and *Partnership: Making Arts Money Work Harder* (1986) – amid the continued reprioritisation of national arts funding and the government's dissolution of the Greater London Authority and other local governments across the regions in the mid-1980s.[593]

The need to restructure the ABTT emerged as a consequence of this new economic reality, a result of lost funding to the technical sector, resulting in cascading changes in how the Association was run. Tasked with reviewing the organisation's structure in 1984, Lawrence Blackmore, member of the ABTT Council, Executive committee, and Management committee, described a culture of 'misunderstanding and disagreement as to the exact

[593] Alongside the GLC, the six metropolitan counties of England were a subdivision, originally created in 1974, to govern large urban areas. These areas were Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands, and West Yorkshire. The Greater London Council, in particular, supported the ABTT in developing and delivering standards across technical practice through funding, advocacy, and expertise.

relationship of the various inter-relating bodies of the Association'.[594] Blackmore saw the growing structural complexity of the ABTT as limiting its function, effectiveness, clarity, and known areas of responsibility – internally and externally – 'during a time of rapidly changing circumstances'.[595] Indeed, this was a period described as 'a watershed moment' by the ABTT, in council minutes of May 1984, amid the continued policy changes of the technical sector at a local and national level.[596] Recommendations were made to consider organisational reform 'within the existing constitutional framework to re-establish policy priorities and to ensure sufficient funds as a matter of survival'.[597] The use of the word 'survival' was not hyperbolic. In a sub-committee paper circulated to the wider membership, the Association looked at financial options in an attempt to address a 'worsening fiscal situation despite some commercial success'.[598] In order to establish a degree of stability going forwards, the paper proposed 'a strategy that will achieve financial independence'.[599] The alternative to this was

[594] ABTTArchive/ABTTCouncil/C3/CouncilMinutes (1984-89). Internal report: The organisational structure of the Association of British Theatre Technicians, paper for discussion, 22 March 1984 (ABTT Council Meeting, 30 March 1984), p. 1.
[595] Ibid., p. 4.
[596] ABTTArchive/ABTTCouncil/C3/CouncilMinutes (1984-89). Internal report: The organisational structure of the Association of British Theatre Technicians and recommendations of the sub-committee by the Council of the Association at its meeting held on 30th March 1984 (17 May 1984: R. G. S. Anderson, L. E. Blackmore, R. York), p. 1.
[597] Ibid., p. 1. Recommendations included: 'The Council should seek to achieve, as quickly as possible, a balance of its membership that will more effectively fulfil its role. All energy and thoughts should be directed upon the broad policy and future of the Association.
Specific responsibility of Officers.

- Chairman: Policy Initiation and implementation
  Public relation
  Funding bodies
- Vice Chairman (1): Co-ordination of all technical committees
- Vice Chairman (2): Training
- Hon. Secretary: Administration: legal: secretarial
- Hon. Treasurer: Financial control: fund raising'

[598] ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1984/85 (London: ABTT, 1985), p. 5.
[599] ABTTArchive/ABTTCouncil/C3/CouncilMinutes (1984-89). Internal report: The organisational structure of the Association of British Theatre Technicians and recommendations of the sub-committee by the Council of the Association at its meeting held on 30th March 1984 (17 May 1984: R.G. S. Anderson, L. E. Blackmore, R. York), p. 2.

viewed as contraction, stagnation, or insufficient growth potential of the ABTT, 'resulting in the need for either a different policy for continued survival or the winding up of the Association'.[600]

In response to questions raised by ABTT members on the decision to remove funding, Luke Rittner (Arts Council secretary-general) defended the actions of the Arts Council, outlining wider objectives that looked towards the financial self-reliance of technical theatre in supporting future sector training. Rittner stated, 'after many years of Arts Council funding to establish training programmes in a variety of fields, it is hoped that, where the industry considers them valuable, it will begin to assume responsibility for their support itself'.[601] This need for financial independence was reiterated further by Dickon Reed (Arts Council drama director) in a letter to the ABTT in which he stated, 'historically, the Council only granted limited sums to such organisations on the justifiable grounds that their income should predominantly be found from their constituent members in recognition of the services and facilities which were thereby provided'.[602] This was especially true at a time when the Arts Council continued to question the value of long-term training courses provided by the ABTT.[603] The loss of subsidy, alongside a structural reappraisal of the organisation, brought

[600] Ibid., p. 3.
[601] V&A folder/ACGB/117/20-27, Arts Council letter to Norman Buchan MP. *ABTT ADS withdrawal*, 23 October 1984.
[602] V&A folder/ACGB/117/20-27, Arts Council letter to ABTT chairman Anthony Easterbrook (date obscured), 1984. Reed, along with Rittner and William Rees-Mogg (chairman), were presiding over a new period of public spending that prioritised subsidy for the performing arts over money allocated to technical organisations.
[603] In an internal Arts Council memo from Loretta Howells to Michael Haynes and James Anderson, the perceived failure in the number, quality, and spread of trained technicians is made clear in their analysis of the 1984 ABTT course report.

1. '31 students: 20 found employment. None of them in subsidised/producing theatres. Only a handful of them outside London. *One of them a student who failed the course.
2. Two of the youngest members were asked to leave because of bad attendance (we always warned at interviews that 16/17 was too young to be turned loosed in London if boys had not been away from home before).
3. 3 didn't complete the course.

into focus the wider activities of the Association and the need to generate income. Forced to operate in a more market-orientated world, with the success of recent trade shows and publications providing much needed income, it was these areas in particular that the ABTT developed under a new organisational model that focussed on maximising revenue from commercial activity.

Outlined in the ABTT annual report for 1985/86, 'the Council and the Executive committee had given considerable thought to the future of the Association after the withdrawal of Arts Council funding'.[604] From a series of recommendations that followed, Technicians Training Ltd and Theatrical Trading Ltd were first incorporated (in 1985), then quickly formed into subsidiary companies of the ABTT (in 1986). Technicians Training Ltd became a not-for-profit distributing company, with a quasi-charitable memorandum and articles, limited by the guarantee of its members. Its primary objective was to 'undertake training directly or indirectly', with activity governed by a board of directors and members of the company.[605] The second company, Theatrical Trading Ltd, was formed to run 'as a conventional and commercial enterprise', a limited liability company controlled by its shareholders with all pre-tax profits returned to the ABTT.[606] With a confidence built upon the recent success of its trade shows and a desire to recommence short-term training programmes for the sector, the ABTT had taken a decisive step towards a commercial operating model.

4. The only subsidised/producing house used for attachments are London or the Home Counties, and the same little group of them each time'.

V&A folder/ACGB/117/20-27, Arts Council internal memo, Loretta Howells to Michael Haynes and James Anderson, 5 November 1984, p. 2.

[604] ABTT Archive (loose) – ABTT, Annual review 1985/86 (London: ABTT, 1986), p. 2.

[605] The first cohort of directors were David Adams, Lawrence Blackmore, Bruce Elliott, Roger Fox, Brian Legge, Phil Robbins, John Toogood, and Richard York. ABTTArchive/ABTTCouncil/C3/CouncilMinutes (1984-49), Technicians Training Limited.

[606] ABTTArchive/ABTTCouncil/C3/CouncilMinutes (1984-49), Theatrical Trading Limited.

For example, the 1985 ABTT Trade Show – held at the Riverside Studios, in Hammersmith, London, from 28 to 30 March – was the largest and most profitable yet. The event had sixty exhibitors and over eighteen hundred visitors, showcasing training activities and a programme of craft demonstrations that included make-up artists and wig, costume, prop, puppet, and accessory makers. With costs of £24,131 and receipts of £32,808, the show made the ABTT a profit of £8,677, helping to offset the growing demands of running the Association without public funding.[607] The following year, the first ABTT Trade Show to be held outside of London took place at the Corn Exchange, Manchester, from 10 to 12 October. Intended primarily as a showcase for northern suppliers of technical equipment, the event attracted thirty-seven exhibitors and over seven hundred visitors. A programme of seminars was also arranged, with sessions on computing, light, sound, architecture, and theatre archaeology (historic stage technology) presented by member specialists established through previous ABTT publications and events.[608] That same year, the London trade show was the first to be presented on behalf of the ABTT by its new subsidiary company Technical Trading Ltd. The event was held between 20 and 22 March 1986, once again at the Riverside Studios, with over fifty manufacturers and suppliers exhibiting and in excess of sixteen hundred visitors. This was the silver jubilee year of the ABTT, an event that was marked with a conference – also in Hammersmith – held in conjunction with the trade show. Chaired by the pioneer of British stage lighting and ABTT co-founder Richard Pilbrow, the conference held

[607] ABTT Archive (loose) – ABTT, Annual review 1984/85 (London: ABTT, 1985), p. 4iii.
[608] The seminars included Computers for Managers, by David Brierley; Light: Past, Present, and Future, by Francis Reid; Sound Operator and Sound Equipment, by Phillip Clifford; Manchester: Britain's Reborn Provincial Capital, by Robert Scott; Theatre Architecture, by Roderick Ham; and Theatre Archaeology, by Brian Legge. ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1984/85 (London: ABTT, 1985), p. 4.

sessions on eight different sector topics that focussed on the future of technical theatre.[609] Importantly, in its 1985/86 annual report the ABTT recorded its gratitude to a variety of firms who had supported and sponsored the trade show, reflective of a move towards a more commercialised relationship with the technical theatre sector and continuing the ABTT's transition from a civic to market-orientated organisation.[610] Using trade shows as an opportunity to develop interest in short courses specifically, the ABTT also aimed to generate further income through the developing commercialisation of the technical market, building industry relationships across the sector while offering training programmes to theatre organisations without Arts Council support.

For its part during this period, the Arts Council continued to look beyond the civic model of arts funding, producing a prospectus of images and data to encourage more public and private investment into the arts. Using monetised terminology missing in previous publications, *A Great British Success Story* (1985) introduced a new narrative to the technical sector 'that focussed on delivering a thriving and successful arts and entertainment industry of high quality for the good of the British economy'.[611] The need to demonstrate a profitable return on investment was not just measured in monetary terms. In fact, *A Great British*

[609] The six sessions held were Designing for Performance, by Ralph Koltai; Lighting the Show, by David Hearsey; Production Engineering, by Peter Kemp; Industrial Presentation, by Sony Communications; Sound Developments, by Peter Mapp; Safety and Constraint, by Nigel Jarvis; and Building for the Future, by Nicholas Thompson. ABTT Archive (loose) – ABTT, Annual review 1985/86 (London: ABTT, 1986), p. 5.
[610] The full list of support includes The Stage and Television Today, A. S. Green & Co. Ltd, Ancient Lights, MAC Sound Hire, Mike Sweetland Lighting, the Showstrand group of companies, Hall Stage Products Ltd, Le Maitre Lighting and Effects Ltd, Peak Marwick Mitchell & Co., Roscolab Ltd, and Strand Lighting. ABTT Archive (loose) – ABTT, Annual review 1984/85 (London: ABTT, 1985), p. 5.
[611] Arts Council of Great Britain, *A great British success story: an invitation to the nation to invest in the arts* (University of Warwick library photocopy of original – NX750G707, no publication details given), p. 1. Previously from the Arts Council of Great Britain Library, 400Art. 1985. Terminology included that of sales records, dividends, business cases, and product requirements, 'to inform greater returns on investment for the future'. (Ibid.).

Success Story presented a new way of showcasing the arts, '(through) facts and figures as well as sales records, in support of better operating units [buildings], attendance figures [ticket yield], funding [public], and employees [training schemes for performers, directors, designers, and managers].[612]

The omission of technicians from this list of training schemes was, in part, due to a lack of confidence held by the Arts Council in the ability of the ABTT as a training provider. Arts Council officer Lorretta Howells, in reply to a letter sent by Michael Haynes (MP) on the reasons behind ABTT funding removal, describes these concerns in detail:

> Considering the number trained over the past ten years by the ABTT, we are worried about the continuing difficulty in filling technical vacancies – we have also been concerned about the drop-out rate from the courses and the low numbers going into jobs in the provincial producing theatres. Our training funds are, in all other areas, routed to people already committed to the arts; and we hope to establish this as a criteria for technicians as well – which should produce more suitable applicants for existing vacancies.[613]

[612] Ibid., p. 7. Attendance figures, ticket yield, box-office receipts, and employee figures became commonplace within Arts Council policy documents, used to present a successful sector worth investing in. The changing relationship of the ABTT with the Arts Council was reflected in the absence of technical theatre in the list of prioritised sector training roles.
[613] V&A folder/ABTT/1984-85. Arts Council letter from Loretta Howells to Michael Haynes, *Reply to MP re ABTT funding*, 22 January 1985.

As previously noted, a perceived lack of 'productivity and efficiency' in the ABTT by the Arts Council drove the removal of funding, impeding professionalisation and cementing a skills gap that still remains in British theatre.[614]

Having all ties with funding cut, in the annual report of 1986/87 ABTT chairman Richard York opened his introductory statement by saying, without irony, '1986 has been the year when change began, […] when the Arts Council finally gave us our independence'.[615] The ABTT, initially turned to its membership for financial support, raising funds by ensuring yearly subscriptions were collected, 'against a backdrop of historic institutional lethargy that had resulted in a loss of numbers but not as palpable as [the Council] first feared'.[616] The second attempt to put the ABTT on a profitable footing was a 1986 review of internal policies, scrutinising profit and loss, staffing, publications, training, membership, services, committee activity, and governance structures cited in the annual reports for that year. The third attempt was to maximise the commercial opportunities of existing relationships, particularly within the technical industry, as differing strategies for fundraising confirmed the ABTT's shift towards a market-based model. This period of intense self-reflection and adaption coincided with the Association completing its funding obligation to the Arts Council, with all remaining training programmes concluded across the technical sector.[617] York looked for positives, at 'how ABTT training had begun to show signs of revival', citing as evidence the organisation of a weekend training course in Glasgow and an increase in visits to new and refurbished

[614] Arts Council of Great Britain, *A great British success story,* p. 11. .
[615] ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1986/87 (London: ABTT, 1987), p. 1.
[616] Ibid., p. 1.
[617] I have talked further about the variety of training programmes delivered by the ABTT in chapter three.

theatre sites.[618] He concluded with an outline proposal for the future of the ABTT, which aimed 'to make the organisation more fleet of foot' and thus consolidate the financial recovery he saw as 'under way'.[619]

Part of this initial recovery was down to the continued success and expansion of ABTT trade shows. Following Manchester in early 1986 the ABTT presented its first trade show in Belfast, at the Cambridge Ballroom in the Park Avenue Hotel, 22–23 October 1986. Over two hundred visitors saw a variety of stage equipment shown by eight exhibiters. Later in the financial year, the 1987 London trade show was once again presented on behalf of the ABTT by its subsidiary company Theatrical Trading Ltd. Held at Riverside Studios, Hammersmith, from 5 to 7 March, the show's success continued to grow, with an increase in demand for exhibition space. Attendance increased by twenty-five per cent, with over two thousand visitors seeing sixty-four manufacturers and supplier exhibits. Working in partnership with *The Stage*, a 'glossy catalogue' was produced and given to all visitors, alongside a supplement piece on the show.[620] The success of trade shows was evident in the financial accounts for the year, bringing a net surplus of £17,850 to the ABTT, alongside income of £24,222 from trade-fair activity.[621] Contextualising this data further, prior to the removal of funding, annual costs for the ABTT averaged £82,186.20 between 1982 and 1986, with trade-fair and other commercial activity raising an average of £31,295. In 1987, income received from commercial activity alone had risen to £46,153, providing much-needed revenue to cover continued costs approaching £42,000 per year.[622] As a result of further commercial gain – through

[618] ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1986/87, p. 1.
[619] Ibid., p. 1.
[620] Ibid., p. 3.
[621] Ibid., p. 3.
[622] Ibid., p. 11.

subscriptions and rent accrual, for example – the ABTT managed to 'extinguish its carried forward deficit, of 1986, meaning the immediate future of the Association had been assured'.[623] Built upon the success of existing networks and by creating partnership across new markets, the ABTT began navigating the path towards an alternate future within British technical theatre, one to be termed as an 'associated industry' under the Arts Council's new sector vernacular. The recovery of the ABTT in economic terms, even if only limited, came at the cost of institutional personality, however. Amid organisational change, the ABTT became peripheral to the new polices of the Arts Council, characterised as extraneous to wider needs across the arts.

Presented as part of a 'vigorous new sector of the economy', the Arts Council's *Partnership: Making Arts Money Work Harder* (1985) tells of an emerging theatre market built upon 'the previous success of a wide range of organisations led by local and national government'.[624] The document talks of a need for increased support from business and commerce, development corporations and enterprise boards, and trusts and foundations towards the arts, 'to directly benefit the creation of new jobs and the recycling of tax for revenue'.[625] It exemplifies the success of previous partnerships in action, citing the Housing the Arts scheme I discussed in chapter two as an example of private and public money coming together in the pursuit of providing improved facilities across theatre. It fails to reference the voluntary advisory role of the ABTT as part of capital funding requirements or the importance of member expertise in the successful developments of technical stage design. Instead,

[623] Ibid., p. 3.
[624] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Partnership: making arts money work harder* (University of Warwick library photocopy of original – NX750G707, no publication details given), p. 2. Previously from the Arts Council of Great Britain Library, 400Art. 1986.
[625] Ibid., p. 2.

referencing the need for new collaborative opportunities, the Arts Council positioned itself as paramount to the growing success of combined public and private investment in the arts under Thatcherism, stating 'partnerships would not flourish without our pledges'.[626] The document presents marketing, planning, and investment advice, 'focussing on the necessity for stronger financial partnerships for the future' in a move away from the networks of post-war consensus, those interwoven links that included organisations such as the ABTT.[627]

When Chris Butler, special advisor to the minister of the arts, questioned the removal of funding for technical training in November 1986, Luke Rittner captured the Arts Council's tepid relationship with the ABTT. Rittner replied, 'it was always a [funding] anomaly when compared with the rest of our training provision, designed as an in-service for existing professionals in the arts'.[628] As a counter-narrative to the ABTT's growing financial recovery through trade-show activity, regional technical training stagnated under the competitive market forces of Thatcherism while national debates eroded amid continued policy reform and dwindling industry possibilities.[629] This led to a hiatus in ABTT training activities and the

[626] Ibid., p. 5. *Partnership* introduced new terms to Art Council policies – 'marketing aids', 'efficient management', and 'maximising earnings' for example – and set up a Marketing and Resource department to develop projects, systems, and networks. By prioritising the investment of partnerships, the Arts Council continued to promote quality and quantity of arts activities and audiences, but a shift in strategic planning and development (through a new department) moved encouragement in training programmes away from technical practice and a reliance upon the ABTT.

[627] Ibid., p. 11. In *Partnership*, the Arts Council writes of helping creative partnerships to flourish by contributing to the health and growth in three main areas – marketing, planning, and investment. 'Placed in a unique position to work effectively, to explore new ideas and new avenues, to test new techniques in their marketing and promotion, and to provide for the arts nationwide. It will continue to push for high quality work, efficient management and to maximising the earning potential of activities in which it invests public funds'. (Ibid).

[628] V&A folder/ACGB/117/20-27, Arts Council letter to ABTT Chris Butler (19 November), 1986.

[629] Ibid., pp. 16-17. The need for central funding to the Arts Council to encourage investment was a key message. Without public investment, the Arts Council argued both the quality and number of arts activities would reduce, limiting box-office returns and sponsorship opportunities, and leaving idle assets and surplus capacity amongst the civic theatres of British regions. There was little concern for the technical requirements or stage expertise required in making partnership work successful or the investment needed for 'full value in the arts being obtained' through work with the ABTT and other industry networks. (Ibid).

loss of much-anticipated income. The above quote from Rittner is indicative of the continued breakdown in relations between the two organisations in the mid-1980s under the pressure of a funding crisis, cementing the ABTT's position at the fringes of Arts Council interest.

Part of this interruption to training programmes resulted in the ABTT suspending Technicians Training Ltd in 1987 as a consequence of limited activity, 'with few courses and little drive to keep it going', although there was just enough interest for the ABTT to maintain the company in a dormant condition.[630] For example, a short course on Management for Technicians, held in Glasgow from 24 to 26 April 1987, was repeated at the Barbican Centre, London, from 9 to 11 October. In all, fifty-eight people attended the courses, with the first held in co-operation with Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Civic Entertainment Association. Financial assistance was provided by both the Arts Council and the Scottish Arts Council, as well as by companies such as Strand Lighting Ltd, Black Light Ltd, Triple E Ltd, and Hall Stage Productions Ltd. This was a partnership between industry specialists and funding bodies, 'between private and public money', reflective of the Arts Council's new national arts policy objectives.[631] Significantly, the ABTT also organised a four-week study tour for eleven technicians and managers from the Seoul Arts Centre, 'for staff to familiarise themselves with the technical organisation of large facilities'.[632] Although influence was limited in Britain, international interest in technical expertise remained, with ABTT members continually invited to participate with technical networks from around the world.[633]

[630] ABTTArchive/ABTTCouncil/C3/CouncilMinutes (1984-49), Future of Technicians Training Limited (no date), p. 2.
[631] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Partnership: making arts money work harder*, p. 1.
[632] ABTT Archive (loose) – ABTT, Annual review 1987/88 (London: ABTT, 1988), p. 4.
[633] Further international work, through collaboration, included supporting the Society of British Theatre Designers at the 1987 Prague Quadrennial, providing an exhibition, seminar on computers in theatre, and a report for both *The Stage* and *Sightline* on the conference. The ABTT was also represented by Roderick Ham at

1987 also saw the second ABTT North Trade Show take place, in Oldham from 29 to 31 October. Again, presented on behalf of the ABTT by Theatrical Trading Ltd, there were twenty-eight exhibitors and a programme of member-led seminars.[634] Supported by Grange Arts Centre, Oldham Technical College, *The Stage*, A. S. Green & Co. (Lancashire) Ltd, MAC Sound Hire, Futurist Theatre Hire Ltd, Philip L. Edwards (Theatre Lighting), and Mike Sweetland Theatre Lighting, the ABTT continued to bring together public and private money to deliver sector events. 1988 saw the eleventh London ABTT Trade Show, held once again at Riverside Studios, and also the third North of England ABTT Trade Show. With sixty-three exhibitors in London and thirty-three in Oldham, both shows continued to attract industry representatives, visitors, and sponsorship. That year's finances, however, show the ABTT made a net deficit, 'with indications about future levels of covenant income [resulting from Theatrical Trading Ltd] giving cause for concern'.[635] Such concerns were realised at the twelfth London trade show, in 1989, with a reduction in the number of exhibitors compared to previous years (forty-three) and a fall in visitor numbers to just over a thousand people. For the ABTT, the substantial surplus made in previous trade shows was not to be repeated in the immediate years that followed, leading to Theatrical Trading Ltd making a loss and

---

the International Ideas Competition to design a playhouse in Amsterdam, attracting more than twenty-two entries from the United Kingdom and organising prizes that included a theatre study tour of the UK. The congress in Amsterdam also included a symposium on the future of lighting techniques, hosted by Richard Pilbrow, and held an Executive committee meeting of the International Organisation of Scenographers, Theatre Architects, and Technicians (OISTAT), with John Bury attending on behalf of the ABTT. Further afield, ABTT members Ken Smalley and Roderick Ham presented seminars in Poland and the USA, as the ABTT looked to continue relationships with international partners across networks first built in the 1960s. I talked more about these networks in chapter one.

[634] Seminars included Lighting: Can the Arts Survive the Technology?, by Francis Reid; Theatre Sound and the Audience, by Philip Clifford; Pyrotechnics in the Pantry, by Malcolm Armstrong; and The Victorian Wooden Stage, by David Wilmore. ABTT Archive (loose) – ABTT, Annual review 1987/88 (London: ABTT, 1988), p. 3.

[635] ABTT Archive (loose) – ABTT, Annual review 1988/89 (London: ABTT, 1989), p. 2.

'raising fears for the future of the Association under the shadow of recession'.[636] This market failure was a consequence of the growing recession that formed under Thatcherism, as the initial growth of a new market economy became unsustainable and the cycle of boom and bust took hold by the end of the decade.

The year that Margaret Thatcher resigned as Prime Minister, 1990, saw the ABTT once again 'looking to survive tough financial problems'.[637] This meant, just as it did in 1984, that the end of the decade saw the Association 'seeking financial support from those it was in partnership with for the expertise and independence it provided'.[638] This time, though, rather than relying upon the public purse of the Arts Council, the ABTT turned to the finances of industry for support, demonstrating that Thatcherism had completed its transformation of the sector's financial dependency in the 'utilitarianism of the free market'.[639] For the ABTT, the removal of Arts Council funding (via policy change) had replaced civic ambition with market desire and training development with private partnership, forcing the Association to navigate a conjunctural shift in the technical landscape. By mapping the economic history of the ABTT (following the complex and broad adjustments of political and policy reform, the effects of change, and the responses that followed), in this chapter I have shown how Thatcherism changed the Association and its role in the professionalisation of technical theatre. The ABTT remained standing, but as a result of adaption to a new economic orthodoxy public-funding patterns no longer aligned with the character of the Association, nor did its civic ideals align with the larger story of Thatcherism in the 1980s. When the

[636] ABTT Archive (loose) – ABTT, Annual review 1990 (London: ABTT, 1990), p. 1.
[637] Ibid., p. 1.
[638] Ibid., p. 1.
[639] Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street years*, p. 634.

influence of political change inevitably did arrive, the existential questions that arose within the ABTT led to the socially rooted sentiments of the early post-war period being replaced by a new commercial industry, irrevocably changing the professionalisation of technical practice and the role of the Association within British theatre.

Eventually, some of the civic principles that had first established the ABTT re-emerged. Lost within the conjunctional shift of professionalisation, the considerable challenges of the 1980s focussed ABTT attention on adaption and survival. The shifts that took place under Thatcherism framed future ABTT activity, consolidated within a new market orthodoxy, away from a return to the post-war consensus of civic politics. Under John Major and the National Lottery, and despite Tony Blair, New Labour, and the commercial optimism of a flush economy concentrated on the capital and a handful of regions, the ABTT was eventually able to reconnect with some of its original mission. Underpinning this, rediscovering continuities with the post-war years meant the ABTT never fully lost sight of its civic goals. These reappeared in differing ways, committing the organisation to certain training and advisory activities, reconnecting industry networks and structures, and developing new engagements and funding opportunities. The ABTT remained committed to professionalisation, to the processes that defined the Association in the early post-war years and that continued to shape it in response to the differing economic circumstances of the post-Thatcher period. It is the ABTT beyond Thatcherism that I will now discuss in my final chapter, which offers something of a conclusion to this story of post-war technical professionalisation and provides a coda to the thesis overall.

Chapter 5
Conclusion: the ABTT in a post-Thatcher world

In positioning the ABTT as central to the rise of technical professionalisation, my thesis offers an alternate perspective to the standard historical accounts of the theatre making of post-war Britain. Specifically, I have highlighted the emergence of a multi-skilled backstage workforce, the types of specialist training they required, the sets of standards their practice determined, and the technological advances needed to make the circulation of all three possible. Certainly, in part, theatre scholarship has acknowledged the importance of technology to developing styles of theatre. This is particularly so in the post-war years when new technologies emerged to influence alternate forms of stage, performance, and playhouse design as surveyed in chapters two and three. Yet, while most historical narratives discuss the chronologies of technology as a process of change, in the wider context of stage, sound, or lighting evolution, for example, few have considered the extent to which technological transformation encouraged the technical professionalisation of labour practices and cultures. By looking at the role of the ABTT in the processes of technical professionalisation, this research changes the traditional focus of British theatre history, particularly the history of backstage innovation, providing a spotlight on the new types of labour, training, and standards essential to the innovative stage and theatre designs of the post-war period. Through an exploration of the ABTT's importance as an advisory body, this thesis contributes to the growing contemporary interest in technical theatre and labour professionalisation; not only does it provide an opportunity to fill in important gaps in the contextual history of post-war British theatre, it has extended current debates by exploring the individuals, networks, systems, and politics of professionalisation, through telling a

history of the evolution of the ABTT and examining the place of technical theatre within contemporary theatre studies.

Across each chapter, my thesis has responded to a lack of current understanding within theatre scholarship around the central importance of technical professionalisation to post-war British stage and playhouse design and, by extension, to what could be staged within the new theatres of the era. Through a telling of the transformative history of the ABTT and the impact of stage specialisation upon new theatre shapes, I have shown how technical expertise became essential to the policy and funding requirements of the Arts Council in the 1960s and 1970s. The technical skills required by a modernising theatre practice went on to inform the development of training programmes and industry standards in shaping the processes of professionalisation that overhauled industry practices, and, eventually, helped commercialise and thereby sustain the technical theatre industry in a post-Thatcher world. Further to this, by exploring a previously overlooked archive, I have identified the role of the ABTT in the development of civic playhouse design from the beginning of the 1960s until the end of the Housing the Arts programme in 1986. This twenty-five-year period provided a stage in which the political, financial, and creative motivation required for industry change enabled a range of experimental theatre designs to be conceived, debated, and realised. The reciprocal support of the Arts Council and the ABTT during this period grew the networks required for technical professionalisation, enabling technological advances in stage production through regulation, training, and standardisation.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the removal of funding under Thatcherism in the 1980s brought about immediate changes to British theatre, although not necessarily to the

ABTT, as the public funding of technical professionalisation continued up until the middle of the decade. When the withdrawal of Arts Council subsidy and the end of the Housing the Arts programme finally arrived, the consequences for the ABTT were acute, propelling it into a fight for survival. Relying on commercial activity to remain viable, the plight of the ABTT reflected wider economic and political changes taking place across British theatre at this time, as a revision in Arts Council policies and wider government reform ushered in a new economic orthodoxy of private investment and neoliberal free markets. Thatcherism signalled a conjunctural transformation in the relationship between economics and society, politics and culture, and within that shift the cultural sector, and with it the ABTT, was swept along in the vectors of neoliberal orthodoxies. It is the economic vector of neoliberalism that confirmed the end of the post-war consensus and with it the civic conception of theatre that had propelled the ABTT to technical and industry-wide prominence. As a consequence, my thesis and the telling of this story ends in 1991, thirty years after the formation of the ABTT, at the beginning of a new story for the Association in a post-Thatcher world.

As the next section elaborates, what followed 1991 was the consolidation of the ABTT under factors initiated by Thatcherism that remained in place under New Labour, and which therefore continue to shape the professionalisation of technical theatre in Britain to this day.

5.1 A Major shift: the end of Thatcherism, the road to Blair, New Labour, and thirty more years

As I considered in chapter four, under the Conservative administration of Margaret Thatcher, an insistence that the theatre industry should operate like any other commercial business

and become subjected to market forces created a financial crisis within technical theatre, and more specifically, within the ABTT. Despite the introduction of National Lottery funding to the arts in 1994, little had changed by the time Thatcher's successor, John Major, left Downing Street in 1997. The election of New Labour that followed brought little immediate relief to a technical theatre industry in need of financial and political support, 'despite the [Labour} party's recognition that the arts were an influential tool in compassionate conservatism' and in their aim of creating a caring and economically successful society.[640] Subsidy, under Tony Blair, remained antithetical to the aims originally forged between the Arts Council and the ABTT during the rise of technical professionalisation amid the bipartisan politics of 1970s Britain, leaving an industry struggling with the after-effects of Thatcherism well into the new millennium.

More specifically, for the professionalisation of technical theatre and the role of the ABTT, the introduction of National Lottery funding under John Major appeared to present an opportune way of providing some much-needed relief to the culture sector, hard hit after a decade of reductions in public expenditure. Initially limited to capital funding only, lottery money allowed for the planning of new civic theatres for the first time since the Arts Council's Housing the Arts scheme was abandoned under Thatcherism in the mid-1980s. Reminiscent of conditions that brought about the formation of the ABTT in 1961, a sustained lack of investment since the late 1970s had left much of Britain's theatre stock 'in need of refurbishment', with specialist stage knowledge a requirement for future playhouse design.[641] As I have discussed in chapter two, many theatres, such as the Belgrade in

[640] Olivia Turnbull, *Bringing down the house: the crisis in Britain's regional theatres* (Bristol: Intellect Publishing, 2008), p. 106.
[641] Craig Devlin and Sue Hoyle, *Committing to culture* (London: Franco-British Council, 2000), p. 51.

Coventry, commissioned during a period of urban renewal and civic pride in the 1950s and 1960s, had in fact been considered outmoded by technical specialists even by the time they had been built. As theatre historian Olivia Turnbull explains, 'without the necessary renovations to allow them to adapt to changing audience requirements, by the 1990s the civic theatre buildings of the post-war construction boom were in need of renovation, lacking essential features, often the wrong size, and in the wrong place'.[642] For the ABTT, who had quickly grown to be the principal authority on theatre and stage design in the civic period, the advent of the National Lottery offered them a chance to reaffirm their position as leading industry experts amid a plethora of stage-specialist consultants that had emerged within the competitive market economy of (post-)Thatcherism.[643]

The Arts Council, while it had been given responsibility for administering arts revenue generated through the National Lottery, no longer relied upon the ABTT for technical expertise; instead, it encouraged a wider sector use of professional theatre consultants in the planning and building of new playhouses. The primary focus of the ABTT during the mid-1990s, although continuing to offer advice and guidance on stage and theatre design in a non-commercial capacity, was the development of technical benchmarks, safety standards within modernised theatre practice, and specialist technical training, albeit within a more commercialised sector. The period also, however, permitted the organisation to reconnect with elements of its original mission, and having never fully lost sight of its civic goals. The ABTT was compelled to reshape itself in response to the differing economic circumstances of

[642] Olivia Turnbull, *Bringing down the house*, p. 106.
[643] Many had been members of the ABTT and the Society of Theatre Consultants, setting up their own practices or working for consultant groups such as Theatreplan (https://theatreplan.com/about/john-whitaker [last accessed: 16 July 2024]), theatreresearch (https://www.theatresearch.co.uk/about-us/ [last accessed: 16 July 2024]), and later Charcoalblue (https://www.charcoalblue.com/about-us [last accessed: 16 July 2024]).

the New Labour period, with its amalgamation of market-orientated decision-making rooted in a mission to uphold civic virtues. By growing and monetising sector networks through the continuation of trade shows, the selling of publications, and the provision of chargeable training opportunities on stage, lighting, and sound for the theatre sector and beyond, the ABTT re-engaged with the fundamental processes of technical professionalisation that had been lost within the crisis management of the period that characterised Thatcher's rule. Nevertheless, despite the end of Thatcher's premiership and control over cultural policy, the financial situation of the theatre sector, and of the ABTT, improved little under John Major, who offered more or less a continuance of the Thatcher years – albeit perhaps a little softer and less abrasive in character. Turnbull goes on to say, 'by 1997, sector feelings of demoralisation at the caustic attitude and the individualist ideology that had characterised the Conservative approach to the arts was widespread'.[644] This was a feeling which, at the same time, helped end Labour's eighteen years in the political wilderness, and which spread a renewed sense of optimism throughout the sector that under new prime minister Tony Blair 'a change for the better would soon be on the cards'.[645]

Despite the optimism, a new government made little difference to the financial plight of the ABTT during the first years of New Labour. The need to accept the deeply ingrained changes made under Thatcherism restricted national policy alterations, with any shifts in theatre funding being neither radical enough nor substantial enough to overcome eighteen years of Thatcher's sustained assault on the technical industry. New Labour accepted many of the Thatcherite policies the party inherited and placed a particular emphasis on the market,

[644] Olivia Turnbull, *Bringing down the house*, p. 106.
[645] Ibid, p. 107.

privatisation, low taxation, and trade union reform – although it also sought to balance market forces with a strong belief in ethical socialism and protecting the fundamental cornerstones of the welfare state, such as the NHS. Blair's social democracy, 'a combination of economic efficiency and social justice', placed education at the heart of the government's mission to reform the culture sector as central to its party policy.[646] Uniquely positioned to 'deliver an enterprise culture' within technical theatre, the historic ambitions of the ABTT (membership, debate, and influence) appeared consistent with New Labour objectives 'of forging community identity, drawing people together, and overcoming rejection'.[647] Despite a continued lack of funding, and under greater political scrutiny following the formation of the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) alongside the Arts Council in 1998, [648] 'the ABTT looked to continue representing the technical interest of theatre through information, advice, education, and discourse'.[649] As a result, the historical work of the ABTT that had supported experimental stage design and the processes that had propelled discussions around technical professionalisation, modernising techniques, training, and standards began to re-establish itself under the educational policies of New Labour at the beginning of a new century.[650]

As I established in chapter one, the ABTT had proposed the standardisation of technical theatre as early as 1961, conceived as a code of practice for an evolving industry to be built

[646] Ibid., p. 200.
[647] Ibid., p. 200.
[648] Under the leadership of Labour's first culture secretary, Chris Smith, the Department of Heritage was allocated more power and wider responsibilities, and, in line with New Labour's concerns for national renewal, a new title: the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport.
[649] The Association of British Theatre Technicians, The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, The District Surveyors Association, and The Institute of Licensing, *Technical Standards for Places of Entertainment* (London: Entertainment Technology Press, April 2001), p. 2.
[650] This was against a backdrop of reduced annual grant aid to the theatre sector and only the fourth actual cut in government support to the arts in the history of public subsidy.

upon the expertise of its members. Initially receiving small amounts of Arts Council funding, the ABTT began to develop a series of data and information sheets in its early years, written by committee specialists and focussed on practical guidelines for changing production needs. With a rise in the number of civic playhouses built between 1960 and 1980, the ABTT provided further information on a variety of technical subjects, informing safe practice on the new stage forms and technological innovations of the post-war period. Although one key result of Thatcherism was the reprioritisation of financial objectives, for the ABTT the removal of state support did not stop its determination to provide guidance on best practice, nor its continuing mission to bring together industry networks to build a definitive series of safety measures in the post-Thatcher period. Finally, in 2001, as the transforming circumstances of lottery money encouraged the building of new playhouses once again and renewed experimentation in design, the ABTT, reflecting continuities with its past, produced a catalogue of standards that would become the benchmark for technical practice across all of British theatre: *Technical Standards for Places of Entertainment* – the book through which I first encountered the ABTT.

Technical Standards ushered in a new period of influence for the ABTT. Working with partner organisations the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, the District Surveyors Association, and the Institute of Licensing, the ABTT formed 'an entertainment industry Standing Committee', which was recognised by the Health and Safety Executive as the responsible body on technical matters.[651] First published in April 2001, *Technical Standards* was quickly – and frequently – reprinted, as technological innovations in stage design and the

[651] ABTT, The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, The District Surveyors Association, and The Institute of Licensing, *Technical Standards for Places of Entertainment* (London: Entertainment Technology Press, April 2001), p. 1.

pace of new practices required regularly updated safety standards.[652] Made up of those who 'dealt with matters of interpretation, modification, and technical innovation', the Standing Committee consisted of members from the industry and responsible authorities, including representation from the Fire Brigade, London Council, English National Opera, and members of the ABTT Safety Committee.[653] Reflective of Arts Council policy reforms of the 1980s, *Technical Standards* was an example of the ABTT 'harnessing the ideas and talents of its people' while acting as a catalyst to bring together partnerships rooted in the market economy – unlocking investment and resources through public and private support.[654] The Blair years witnessed the ABTT returning to some of its historical ambitions while recognising the new market-orientated context for theatre. The publication can be seen both as an example of the ABTT reaffirming its original mission, by raising technical standards for the good of the sector and by becoming the industry point of reference for anyone interested in the safe production of theatre, and as it recognises the transformed circumstances of a new commercial (rather than civic) theatre industry. Providing a glossary of conditions, definitions and explanations, references, publications, tables, and figures, *Technical Standards* was the culmination of over forty years' work. It incorporated the knowledge and expertise of members, the collaboration and support of its networks, embodying the civic desires that continued to animate its mission – and thus its own changing political needs. The evolving iterations of *Technical Standards* offer a further insight into the changing status of the ABTT

[652] Between 2001 and 2016, *Technical Standards* was published on ten separate occasions: April 2001, July 2001 (revisions), January 2002, January 2005, June 2008 (new edition), November 2009 (revisions), June 2013 (new edition), October 2013 (revisions), March 2014, June 2015 (new edition), p. iv..
[653] ABTT, The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, The District Surveyors Association, and The Institute of Licensing, *Technical Standards for Places of Entertainment* (London: Entertainment Technology Press, April 2001), p. 3.
[654] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Partnership: making arts money work harder*, p. 1.

in the post-Thatcher period, the continuities that remained under Major and Blair, and the adaptations that were necessary for the processes of technical professionalisation to be realised within modern theatre practices.

Further ABTT adaptations included the reintroduction of training courses, the republication of sector specialist books, and the expansion of trade shows, each designed to support the professional needs of the sector and the financial ambitions of the Association. The hiatus in training programmes that occurred under Thatcherism had slowly eased in the Major years, with the ABTT re-establishing short introductory courses in the first instance, before building the relationships required with sector specialist and educational partners to create industry specific programmes in the Blair years that followed.[655] Despite New Labour's mantra of 'education, education, education', there remained little direct funding for the ABTT from the government or its arms-length bodies under Blair, with financial self-reliance and partnership work essential to the success of any training development. As a consequence, interest in training was presented against a backdrop of continued sector instability – what ABTT member Peter Longman described as 'ironic, given the fact that after several years into the life of a new [Labour] government, and in spite of lottery money, [technical] theatre faced a greater crisis in confidence than at any time since the war'.[656] With major new cultural buildings planned and built, such as the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead, and the Curve in Leicester, a lack of skilled technicians remained an industry concern amid the ambitions of innovative stage design – echoing the technical labour demands of the post-

[655] These included the Central School of Speech and Drama; the University of Warwick; the Backstage Centre, Purfleet; West End Technical Managers; Nimax; RUG; and ATG, and led to a series of sector recognised qualifications across ABTT Bronze, Silver, and Gold Awards. ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 2008 (London: ABTT, 2008), p. 14.
[656] Olivia Turnbull, *Bringing down the house*, p. 200.

war theatre boom. Regardless, 'the ABTT could see little in the way of policy support for training needs', with continued reliance upon private partnerships, educational networks, and commercial relations to develop training needs.[657]

As evidenced in chapters two and three, the ABTT, in reaction to the theatre construction boom of the 1960s and 1970s, turned to the specialised knowledge of its membership to meet sector needs, producing a range of training guides, articles, and specialist publications in support of new theatre design. Under the lottery funding of the new millennium, the ABTT reacted to the growth in 'constructing highly complex theatre buildings' by publishing a third iteration of its original design guides to housing the performing arts, *Theatre Planning* (1972) and *Theatres* (1986).[658] This time the publication was entitled, *Theatre Buildings: A Design Guide* (2010), and it was edited by former Arts Council Housing the Arts officer Judith Strong. As Strong was to observe in her preface, '[the book] represented the cumulative knowledge and experience of a large group of experts who either worked in theatre or were actively involved in the design, building, and refurbishment of theatres for many years'.[659] Including twenty-eight case studies from around the world, *Theatre Buildings* 'took into account the economic and social pressures which required every part of the theatre to be as productive as possible' and, as Strong explains, 'to remind those embarking upon a theatre project of the need for expert help'.[660] Strong saw her version, 'not as a book providing examples of

[657] ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 2005 (London: ABTT, 2005), p. 16.
[658] Judith Strong, *Theatre buildings: a design guide*, foreword.
[659] Ibid., preface. Contributors included A. K. Bennett-Hunter, David Blyth, Tim Foster, Andy Hayles, Peter Longman, Julian Middleton, Anne Minors, Barry Pritchard, David Staples, Judith Strong, and Mark White.
[660] Ibid., preface. *Theatre Buildings* offered information on topics such as preliminary planning needs, broad principles, front of house, auditorium design, stage machinery, lighting, sound, video, backstage provision, and additional spaces. Under Strong's editorial guidance, focus was on new buildings as well as the modernisation, refurbishment, and improvement of existing facilities. Eighteen examples were from the UK.

modern equipment, rather offering a more holistic guide to the complexities of theatre needs in a new millennium'.[661] Focussing on the importance of catering, conferencing, and cafés, for example, *Theatre Buildings* was reflective of the changing pressures upon theatres and their budgets that Thatcherite policy reform had brought about – not least a diversified portfolio, with public amenities, conference income, and revenue opportunities central to change. Strong also saw the book as a promotional tool for 'paid [and unpaid] consultancy and administrative acumen within theatre's modern interconnectivity of cost and profit'.[662] As a result, the changing facets of technical theatre were captured by the market-orientated focus of the book, the need to design spaces that maximised profit, and the conflicting concerns of the ABTT in balancing post-war values against the commercial forces of Thatcherite policy – showing how little had changed under Major and Blair in the intervening years.

What had changed was the scale of commercial activity by the ABTT, which is best evidenced in the annual trade shows of the post-Thatcher period. As I established in chapter four, the initial success of the London trade show became paramount to the survival of the ABTT during 1980s Thatcherism, and later under John Major. Eventually, under Tony Blair, the growing success of this annual event accelerated, providing the ABTT with a platform to offer wider industry support while growing commercial confidence across the Association and the sector. As expressed by Roger Fox, ABTT member and trade show director of over forty years, 'there was no direct long-term effect upon the fortunes [of the trade show] other than the spin-off of political changes to funding of the arts in general'.[663] Confidence equated to

[661] Ibid., back cover.
[662] Mark White, ABTT Chairman in 2012, quoted in, Judith Strong, *Theatre buildings*, preface.
[663] Email correspondence with author, *The story of the ABTT 1990–onwards*, 28 May 2024.

success, with the size and importance of the trade show growing 'to accommodate an exhibition where the broadest collection of specialist suppliers supporting live performance technology, production and, education gathered to connect with others in the world of theatre, performance, events, festivals, music and more'.[664] Evolving to incorporate the inclusion of colleges, conservatoires, and universities alongside sector training specialists, the trade show built upon historic networks and new partnerships to promote the values of ABTT activity, technical professionalisation, and the selling of industry knowledge, combining the binaries of civic and commercial goals through training, safety, and standards. During a thirty-year period, between 1990 and 2020, accounts show that commercial revenue for the trade show grew year-on-year, helping the ABTT to survive the austere years that followed Tony Blair, under the premiership of Gordon Brown and later the Conservative governments of David Cameron, Theresa May, and Boris Johnson.

The rise of the Covid pandemic in 2020, however, had a greater impact on the ABTT than all of these political changes taken together. Speaking as chairman of the ABTT Historic Research Committee, Roger Fox described the pandemic as 'having a devastating effect, limiting contact between members, terminating activity, and highlighting a reticence towards web communications for an aging cohort'.[665] The annual report of 2020 highlights further the growing pressures upon the Association, being forced to postpone the trade show for that

[664] https://www.abtt.org.uk/abtt-theatre-show/ [last accessed: 6 April 2024]. Drawing exhibitors and visitors from all over the world, the Mermaid Theatre hosted the first post-Thatcher trade show in 1991. The show then relocated in 1992, moving to the Royal Horticultural Halls, where it remained in situ on an annual basis until 2011. Following a rebrand, and continued growth in scale, the show moved again, this time to the Old Truman Brewery in Shoreditch, staying there until 2015. It finally settled at Alexandra Palace, in 2016.
[665] Email correspondence with author, *The story of the ABTT 1990–onwards*, 28 May 2024.

year, 'meaning a significant reduction in net income culminating in losses of £20,586'.[666] Immediate and acute, the financial crisis the ABTT first faced was eventually, if only somewhat, off-set 'upon receiving the Government's retention scheme in the months that followed that aligned expenditure with reduced income and industry activity to alleviate some pressure'.[667] The ABTT was also successful in applying to the Arts Council England's Cultural Recovery Fund, gaining financial support to aid sector recovery, allowing reduced activity to commence across safety, standards, training, and other activities – albeit remotely – through a series of online seminars and events. Created to continue engagement with members and the wider industry, the seminars addressed issues including diversity, mental health, the reopening (of the technical sector), training, sustainability, and more, 'supporting a fragile recovery amid an uncertain outlook'.[668] The 'resilience and adaptability of the creative industries', advocated by Nicholas Serota in his Arts Council chair's annual statement of 2020, is evident in the response of the ABTT 'in supporting the sector through this crisis and beyond'.[669] Although, undoubtably, detrimental to technical theatre and the ABTT, the pandemic allowed the Association to build upon approaches established over many years, falling upon member expertise, networks, and influence to support the theatre industry at a point of real and imminent crisis. Combining traditional values that had shaped the Association since its inception – the civic modernisation, professionalism, and standardisation of technical practice – the ABTT established a series of actions to traverse the challenges of the pandemic. Emerging from lockdown in March 2021, and celebrating sixty years as an

[666] ABTT, Annual review 2024 (London: ABTT, 2024). ABTT-2020-Annual-Report-and-Audited-Accounts-Signed.pdf [last accessed: 4 June 2024].
[667] Ibid.
[668] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report. Grant-in-aid and National Lottery distribution, 2019/20* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 2020), p. 3. ACE%20Annual%20Report%202019%202020.pdf [last accessed: 4 June 2024].
[669] Ibid., p. 3.

Association, the continued mission of the ABTT appeared to be once again on the verge of a new shift – 'one that continues to use expertise, networks, and influence in support of industry and technical professionalisation to address the important issues of the day'.[670] The turbulence of the last thirty years, particularly during and following the pandemic, has continued to pose questions of the adaptability of the ABTT. Against a backdrop of variables, its mission has remained relevant to technical theatre practice, reaffirming a commitment to the values of professionalisation that continue to shape a response to varying economic circumstances, social change, political will, and the continued reach of Thatcherism.

5.2 Final thoughts: limitations, further research, and possible futures

This thesis draws together a range of primary and secondary sources from across theatre studies, as well as interdisciplinary evidence from other fields of interest, including architecture, design, technology, policy-making, and stage specialisation. Further to this, the lack of a centralised archive on technical theatre practice has encouraged a wider search of the research topic, encompassing the unrecorded documents of the ABTT and affiliated bodies, sector publications, personal archives, industry platforms, and uncatalogued or seldom accessed repositories. Given technical practice typically sits within the shadows of theatre history, both physically and metaphorically, accessing the breadth of private archive material required has not always been possible. Nonetheless, where this has been achieved, the research has benefitted from access to a rich array of accounts, evidence, and supporting

[670] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report. Grant-in-aid and National Lottery distribution, 2020/21* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 2021), p. 2. ABTT-2021-Accounts-Annual-Report%20(3).pdf [last accessed: 4 June 2024].

documentation, helping to shape an understanding of technical professionalisation and the role of the ABTT in post-war British theatre.

Looking towards further research opportunities, there is potential to investigate the relationship of technical professionalisation with other aspects of post-war British entertainment industries that lie outside of this thesis' scope, as well as the invention of new stage equipment and technology. For example, there is room to further consider technical professionalisation in conjunction with the development of television, film, digital, and video during the post-war period. There are significant differences between each practice, including specialisms, technologies, and networks, that exploration of their intersections could bridge industry understanding and expose historical connections. Such a study between expertise and industry would no doubt also give rise to further arguments for technical theatre's position within a wider historical ecology of post-war pedagogy and the development of theatre and performance as an academic discipline. This can offer new ways of thinking about the influence of technical professionalisation and the importance of the ABTT to the post-war period of British theatre.

Considering technical professionalisation's relationship across wider industry networks – such as the Society of Theatre Consultants, Society of British Theatre Designers, Association of Lighting Designers, and Association of Sound Engineers – would also open up further directions for research. This could extend to exploring the pioneers of stage technology, some of whom I have acknowledged in this thesis as the founder members of the ABTT. Technical specialists include those who designed the non-proscenium shapes that were essential to civic theatre experimentation, and the policy makers from both inside and

outside the political sphere, whose work extended beyond that of the ABTT. Further research can place an apparent exclusion of women from technical theatre, from the ABTT, and from the archive, where only a small number of female technicians have been recorded – which is not the same thing as saying women were not present. Such a lens would benefit wider research across alternate fields, such as that of Mar Hicks in rethinking the place of women's work in relation to histories of computation, by asking what technological stories of the ABTT might emerge if we also tended to the women of these spaces. The histories of post-war stage, sound, and lighting expertise all have the potential for further investigation, exploring the processes of theatre technology and their place within professionalisation, as well as critically considering the innovations of change and the innovators of practice.

As previously stated, in this study I have focussed solely on the technical professionalisation of post-war Britain up until 1991 since that period, as I have shown, incorporated both the conditions necessary to support the experimentation of civic theatre design that required a change in labour practices and the time when the fundamental transformation of the ABTT occurred. The sudden move towards a new cultural and economic outlook represented a central shift in the way the ABTT conceived itself, despite the continuities that can be traced between the two periods, and which remain within the post-Thatcher world – because, essentially, Thatcherism, or at least what her policies embodied in the form of neoliberal orthodoxies, is still to be surpassed. Wider sector change was not just limited to this civic period, though, nor was professionalisation only a process of British theatre. Indeed, within the ABTT, many of the specialist member practitioners that supported civic experimentation went on to build successful careers as designers, consultants, and practitioners across the commercial theatre world. Theatre Projects, for example, the company started by Richard

Pilbrow in 1957, would go on to design some of the best-known performance centres across North America, Asia, and Europe, and could be a research topic in itself – as too could Pilbrow, the man who led the way in modern lighting design techniques. Equally, understanding the impact of policy reform and Thatcherism upon technical theatre and the professionalisation of stage specialisation has only just begun. Further research has the potential to look deeper into the consequences of funding withdrawal upon a shortage of industry expertise that continues to this day. Finally, looking beyond the context of Britain, the ABTT can be viewed as an international body of significance in the practices of technical theatre that have standardised stage labour across the world. Understanding the role of the ABTT alongside international bodies such as OISTAT (International Organisation of Scenographers, Theatre Architects, and Technicians) and USITT (United States Institute for Theatre Technology) in the development of world standards, for example, is an additional research pathway that can support the main themes of this thesis within a more global context.

My findings show how the ABTT grew under the expertise of its membership and the expansive specialisms of the internal committee groups that emerged as British theatre underwent a vast transformation and expansion in the decades that followed the Second World War. By resisting a critical tendency to focus on plays alone, this research is reflective of more contemporary interest in the wider historical, political, and social context of the period, and in conditions that not only allowed theatre to expand but, crucially, shaped it. Despite an increase in contemporary academic interest beyond the common themes of British theatre history, there remains a lack of understanding around the role of technical professionalisation in the post-war period. The good work of current theatre researchers

such as Jen Harvie and Dan Rebellato, for example, 'expands our understanding [of British theatre] by illuminating contexts such as funding, unionisation, devolution, immigration, and changes to legislation', in support of shifting attitudes towards theatre-making processes.[671] These important new ways of conceptualising post-war British theatre's history, practices, and potential futures allow for the further exploration of technical professionalisation and the importance of stage expertise upon the period. Within public archives, however, access to material has proven limited, particularly when two primary sources – the V&A at Blythe House, and the ABTT's own archive – closed to the public for relocation during 2020 and 2024. The impact of the Covid pandemic further limited access to a range of material while also restricting the ability to capture oral histories and curtailing the interviewing of several key personnel who have now sadly passed away.[672] Focussing on the minutes, documents, and articles of the early ABTT period, often found across private collections and personal accounts, has provided the foundation for my research, which can be further used to build a greater understanding of the professionalisation of technical theatre beyond the scope of this thesis.

Other possibilities for expanding this research include a deeper dive into the publications, promoters, processes, and provision of technical developments from the mid-1960s until the end of the 1970s. Though, historically, wider critical discourse has not afforded this period any particular significance to technical theatre, it is nonetheless a key turning point for the innovation in stage production. Prior to this period, backstage work was mainly achieved

[671] Jen Harvie and Dan Rebellato (eds), *The Cambridge companion to British theatre since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), p. 1.
[672] Often, digital poverty and a lack of skills of those I looked to interview restricted the use of tools such as Zoom or Teams, while phone calls were limited by the ageing health of some and the poor mental wellbeing of others during the Covid pandemic.

mechanically, with the movement of scenery carried out by the manual efforts of a disciplined team of workers, sound played by tapes or created live, and with projection through physical slides. The professionalisation of technical theatre allowed for the introduction of innovative new processes in technology, the use of digital memory and Q-file in particular, which remain relevant to how we discuss and create performance today. Previous academic ambivalence to technical theatre and its development means such innovations remain peripheral in current theatre discourse. In discussing the deskilling of technical practice through innovations of digital memory, for example, historian Martin Young asks, 'why, especially when an alternate paradigm for understanding performance that has labour processes and the demands for capitalist industry at its heart is well overdue'.[673] A wider, more systemic focus that supports affiliations and highlights differences within this research would allow for further knowledge on the education, reification, innovation, and commerciality of technical theatre. It would also inform on the impact of selling training, codes of practice, and standards that continue to shape the theatre industry today and that have perpetuated a skills gap across many of the specialist stage roles that emerged as a result of political change.

Exploring the professionalisation of technical theatre is an area of research that is versatile and iterative with potential to contribute further to both an understanding of the backstage industry and to wider scholarship in the fields of theatre, architecture, technology, education, and cultural politics. Further, it is clear through this research that technical theatre has had a nuanced relationship with organisations such as the ABTT and the Arts Council of Great

[673] Young, Martin, *In memory of the Q-file: spontaneity, digital automation, and deskilling in theatre lighting*, TDR 68, Issue 1, (March, 2024), pp 143-156 (p, 144) http://doi.org/10.1017/S1054204323000564 [last accessed: 23 January 2024].

Britain, as well as government policy and reform, allowing for the rise of technical expertise in the experimentation of civic stage design and its fall under political funding review. The resulting networks that formed amid technical professionalisation rendered the role of specialist stage expert distinct, alongside that of director, playwright, and designer – at least for a while. Crucially, it made the invisible visible, providing a glimpse into the influence of backstage labour specialisation. By researching the staging of professionalisation, this thesis makes a contribution to the field not only by filling important gaps in the contextual history of post-war British theatre but by extending current debates on technical theatre through the exploration of hitherto overlooked individuals, networks, and technical processes, and the politics of change, through a telling of the story of the ABTT.

Bibliography

Archival material

ABTT Archive/ABTTCouncil/C3/CouncilMinutes (1984–89). Future of Technicians Training Limited (no date).

ABTT Archive/ABTTCouncil/C3/CouncilMinutes (1984–89). Internal report: The organisational structure of The Association of British Theatre Technicians – paper for discussion – 22 March 1984 (ABTT Council Meeting, 30 March 84).

ABTT Archive/ABTTCouncil/C3/CouncilMinutes (1984–89). Internal report: The organisational structure of The Association of British Theatre Technicians and recommendations of the sub-committee by the Council of The Association at its meeting held on 30th March 1984 (17 May 1984: R. G. S. Anderson, L. E. Blackmore, R. York).

ABTT Archive/ABTTCouncil/C3/CouncilMinutes (1984–89). A letter to the ABTT from the Arts Council of Great Britain, Arts development strategy, 11 November 1983.

ABTT Archive/ABTTCouncil/C3/CouncilMinutes (1984–89). Technicians Training Limited.

ABTT Archive/ABTTCouncil/C3/CouncilMinutes (1984–89). Theatrical Trading Limited.

ABTT Archive/Advisory Service, *Proposed scheme*, Stephen Joseph Archive: 6 SJ 25 August 1961. Document number SJ/1/37.

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1976/77 (London: ABTT, 1977).

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1977/78 (London: ABTT, 1978).

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1978/79 (London: ABTT, 1979).

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1979/80 (London: ABTT, 1980).

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1980/81 (London: ABTT, 1981).

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1981/82 (London: ABTT, 1982).

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1982/83 (London: ABTT, 1983).

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1983/84 (London: ABTT, 1984).

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1984/85 (London: ABTT, 1985).

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1985/86 (London: ABTT, 1986).

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1986/87 (London: ABTT, 1987).

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1987/88 (London: ABTT, 1988).

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1988/89 (London: ABTT, 1989).

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1990 (London: ABTT, 1990).

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1998 (London: ABTT, 1998).

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 2003 (London: ABTT, 2003).

ABTT Archive – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 2024 (London: ABTT, 2024).

ABTT-2020-Annual-Report-and-Audited-Accounts-Signed.pdf [last accessed: 4 June 2024].

ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1964–1970 B1.

ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2.

ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2. Ken Smalley. The Theatre Technicians' Training in Britain. 9 December 1975.

ABTT Archive / ComExec, 1971–1985 (including finance and general planning 143/75) B2. Report on regional training survey, January 1972.

ABTT Archive / CommExec, The Association of British Theatre Technicians, Constitution, 1962.

ABTT Archive/CommsExec/1982-85. A letter from the Arts Council to the ABTT, 23 June 1983, *Financial planning* 1984/85.

ABTT Archive/CommsExec/1982-85. A letter from Lord Jenkins of Putney, *Theatre Advisory Council*, 8 January 1982.

ABTT Archive/CommsExec/1982-85. A letter to Judith Strong, the Arts Council of Great Britain, from the ABTT, A post-funding role for Housing the Arts, 10 October 1984.

ABTT Archive/CommsExec/1982-85. A letter to the ABTT from the Arts Council of Great Britain, Arts development strategy, 29 March 1984.

ABTT Archive/CommsExec/1982-85. A letter to the ABTT from the Arts Council of Great Britain, A post-funding role for Housing the Arts, 17 August 1984.

ABTT Archive/CommsExec/1982-85. A letter to the Arts Council of Great Britain from the ABTT, Association of British Theatre Technicians, 10 October 1984.

ABTT Archive/CommsExec/1982-85. A letter to the ABTT from the Arts Council of Great Britain, Financial planning 1984/85, 23 June 1983.

ABTT Archive/CommsExec/1982-85. A letter to the ABTT from the Arts Council of Great Britain, Association of British Theatre Technicians, 3 February 1984.

ABTT Archive/CommsExec/1982-85. A letter to the ABTT from the Arts Council of Great Britain. Meeting with Judith Strong at the Arts Council, 24 August 1984.

ABTT Archive/CommsExec/1982-85. A letter to the ABTT from the Arts Council of Great Britain. Association of British Theatre Technicians, 10 February 1984.

ABTT Archive (loose) – Association of British Theatre Technicians, Annual review 1961/62 (London: ABTT, 1962).

ABTT Archive (loose), First meeting to set up the ABTT, 13 January 1961. Correspondence with Jane Thornton, 20 May 2019.

ABTT Archive: (loose) *Memorandum and Articles of Association of The Association of British Theatre Technicians*, The Companies Act – incorporated 30 October 1975, England: 1231725, (London: ABTT, 1975).

ABTT Archive/Open Box 1. Peter Longman, *The Arts Council and the Housing the Arts Fund*, The Arts Council of Great Britain. Open Letter. 16 May 1975.

ABTT Archive, (Uncatalogued) *Report on a meeting between ABTT representatives and the architect for the Greenwich Theatre project.* TPC Case Studies 1963–2010, No. 23–340. Box E1.

ABTT Archive, (Uncatalogued) *Report on proposed design for New Theatre, Bromley.* TPC Case Studies 1963–2010, No. 23–340. Box E1.

ABTT Archive, (Uncatalogued) *Technical sub-committee ABTT Advisory Service*. TPC Case Studies 1963–2010, No. 23–340. Box E1.

ABTT, *Bulletin No. 1*. April 1961. (London: ABTT, 1961). ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT).

ABTT, *Bulletin No. 2*. August 1961. (London: ABTT, 1961). ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT).

ABTT, *Bulletin No. 3*. October 1961. (London: ABTT, 1961). ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT).

ABTT, *Bulletin No. 4*. March 1962. (London: ABTT, 1961). ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT).

ABTT, *Bulletin No. 5*. September 1962. (London: ABTT, 1961). ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT).

ABTT, *Bulletin No. 6*. February 1963. (London: ABTT, 1961). ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT).

ABTT, *Bulletin No. 7*. June 1963. (London: ABTT, 1961). ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT).

ABTT, *Bulletin No. 8*. January 1964. (London: ABTT, 1961). ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT).

ABTT, *Bulletin No. 9*. June 1964. (London: ABTT, 1961). ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT).

ABTT, *Bulletin No. 10*. January 1965. (London: ABTT, 1961). ABTT Archive/shelves/boxP1 (PBL/BLT).

ABTT, Correspondence with British Actors Equity Association, 2 June 1961. ABTTEH/EarlyHistory/box1 (ABTT/EH).

ABTT, Correspondence with National Theatre Building Committee, 14 February 1963. ABTTEH/EarlyHistory/box1 (ABTT/EH).

ABTT, *Chief Executive officer appointment brief,* January 2024.

ABTT, *Health and safety in the theatre factory* (London: ABTT, 1989).

ABTT, Information sheet 2: Stage, sound, committee, 1, 2, &3, *Section 1 (SSC 1) Recommendations and proposed standards for wiring requirements in a new theatre; Section 2 (SS 2) Stage management by sound control; Section 3 (SSC 3) Permanent equipment for new theatres* (ABTT: London, April 1969).

ABTT News, *Training syllabus*, Bulletin Vol. 1. No. 2. September 1965. ABTT archive, PBL/Bulletin/00010010/1961-1965/PBL:1.

ABTT, Newsletter Vol. 1. No. 1. 25 March 1965. (London: ABTT, 1961). ABTT Archive/shelves/ (PBL1/BLT 0001-0010/1961-1965).

ABTT, *Planning for multi-purpose halls, a Theatres Advisory Council publication prepared by the ABTT* (London: Theatres Advisory Council, 1966).

ABTT Professional Status Working Group, *Listed jobs – draft of revised membership application form (professional theatre)*, Executive committee notes (February 1980). ABTTComEX/1975-1981/includingfinanceandgeneralplanning14.3.75/B2.

ABTT Professional Status Working Group, *Listed jobs – draft resolution to be adopted by council (professional theatre)*, Executive committee note (February 1980). ABTTComEX/1975-1981/includingfinanceandgeneralplanning14.3.75/B2.

ABTT Professional Status Working Group, *Listed jobs – jobs that may be recognised as qualifying for full membership in special cases (professional theatre)*, Executive committee note (February 1980).

ABTT, *Recommendations for lighting a control room* (London: ABTT, 1969).

ABTT, The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, The District Surveyors Association, and The Institute of Licensing, *Technical standards for places of entertainment* (London: Entertainment Technology Press, April 2001).

Arts Council of Great Britain, Correspondence to the ABTT. 27 May 1982. PGC/JAC/JS ABTT Archive.

British Library, *Theatre archive project: Francis Reid*, 19 May 2009, interviewer: Raymond Aherne, http://sounds.bl.uk [last accessed: 4 February 2019].

City Archives – Coventry CCD/1/9/4/2, The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Reprinted from The Architect and Building News, 18 June, 1958.

Greater London Council, Internal memo: The Roundhouse, ABTT exhibition. 8 December 1982. V&A Archive/THM/27?2/1/233/ABTT/1981-83.

John Rylands Library, Box SJ/1/39, Letter to E. P. Lambert, Association of British Theatre Technicians, April 1962.

Minutes of the Executive committee of the ABTT. 28 January 1972. V&A archive: ACGB/120/33.

Richard Southern Collection, RS Papers, ABTT minutes, 3 March 1961, University of Bristol Theatre Collections.

Stephen Joseph Archive, Manchester University John Rylands Library [June 1961] – JRL, ref: SJ1/38/259.

Technicians training in the theatre industry, Manpower Services Commission and Theatres Advisory Council from NOP Market Research Limited. Box ACGB/117/165, Blythe House Archive, Victoria and Albert Museum.

University of Bradford Archive, J. B. Priestley Collection. Theatrical Accounts File 11/2/1 – Johnson over Jordan.

University of Bristol, Richard Southern Collection, https://www.bristol.ac.uk/theatre-collection/explore/theatre/richard-southern-collection/ [last accessed: 21 December 2024].

University of Manchester Library Archive, Hugh Hunt Papers, GB 133 Hunt: https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/87a9aa19-85c4-3025-91df-fbc2b6f3e610 Administrative / Biographic History [last accessed: 4 February 2019].

V&A ACGB/120/1, A review of Housing the Arts in Wales [January 1975].

V&A archive/THM/271/2/1/233/ABTT/1981-83. A Letter between Ethel Langstreth and Thelma Holt, 9 September 1982.

V&A archive/THM/271/2/1/233/ABTT/1981-83. A letter between Geoff Hatton, Greater London Council, and Thelma Holt, 11 May 1983.

V&A folder/ABTT/1984-85. Arts Council letter from Loretta Howells to Michael Haynes, *Reply to MP re ABTT funding*, 22 January 1985.

V&A folder/ACGB/117/20-27. Arts Council internal memo. Loretta Howells to Michael Haynes and James Anderson. 5 November 1984.

V&A folder/ACGB/117/20-27. Arts Council letter to ABTT chairman Anthony Easterbrook (date obscured). 1984.

V&A folder/ACGB/117/20-27. Arts Council letter to ABTT Chris Butler. 19 November 1986.

V&A folder/ACGB/117/20-27. Arts Council letter to Norman Buchan MP. *ABTT ADS withdrawal*. 23 October 1984.

V&A folder/ACGB/120/133. Arts Council internal memo: Association of British Theatre Technicians.

West Sussex Record Office, Chichester, Box 60, The Chichester Festival Theatre Trust, memo 23 March 1961.

Articles, books, and journals

ABTT, *Technical Standards for Places of Entertainment* (London: Entertainment Technology Press, 2013).

ABTT, *Theatre planning*: *the Architects' Journal information library, AJ SFB (85)* (London: 1964).

Amis, Kinglsey, *An arts policy?* (London: Centre for Policy Studies, 1979).

Amis, Kinglsey, Speaking up for excellence, in, *Right Turn: eight men who changed their* minds, ed. by Patrick Cormack (Lincoln: Cooper, 1978), pp. 47-66.

Architectural history of the National Theatre – part two, October 1963. https://artsandculture.google.com/story/architectural-history-of-the-national-theatre-part-two-national-theatre/VwWhA0PNKAUA8A?hl=en-GB [last accessed 15 December 2022].

Arts Council Bulletin. no. 74. June/July 1985 supplement, n.p.

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: a brighter prospect. Seventeenth annual report, 1961/62* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1962).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual Report: Key Year, 1965-66:* https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/21st%20Annual%20Report%201965-66.pdf [last accessed: 23 March 2022].

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: The arts in hard times. Thirty-first annual report* 1975/76 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: Value for money. Thirty-second annual report* 1976/77 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1977).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual Report: a year of achievement: thirty-third annual report and accounts* 1977/78, (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978).

https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-

file/Arts%20Council%20of%20Great%20Britain%20-%20Thirty-third%20annual%20report%20and%20accounts%201977_78.pdf [last accessed: 9 April 2020].

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: Patronage and responsibility. Thirty-fourth annual report* 1978/79 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: Progress and renewal. Thirty-fifth annual report* 1979/80 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1980).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: Critical judgements. Thirty-sixth annual report* 1980/81 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1981).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report. Thirty-seventh annual report* 1981/82 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1982).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report. Thirty-eighth annual report* 1982/83 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1983).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report. Thirty-ninth annual report* 1983/84 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1984).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report. Fortieth annual report* 1984/85 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1985).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report. Forty-first annual report* 1985/86 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1986).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report. Forty-second annual report* 1986/87 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1987).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Annual report: Grant-in-aid and National Lottery distribution* 2019/20 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 2020).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *The Arts Council of Great Britain: the first twenty-five years* (report 1972).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *The glory of the garden: the development of the arts in England. A strategy for a decade* (London: Williams Lea, 1984).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *A Great British success story: an invitation to the nation to invest in the arts* (University of Warwick library photocopy of original – NX750G707). No publication details given. Previously from the Arts Council of Great Britain Library; 400Art. 1985.

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Housing the Arts in Great Britain part I: London, Scotland, and Wales* (London: Curwen Press, 1959).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Housing the Arts in Great Britain part II: the needs of the English provinces* (London: Curwen Press, 1961).

Arts Council of Great Britain, *Partnership: making arts money work harder* (University of Warwick library photocopy of original – NX750G707). No publication details given. Previously from the Arts Council of Great Britain Library; 400Art. 1986.

Art Workers Guild, *Constitution* https://www.artworkersguild.org/about-us/constitution/ [last accessed: 15 April 2021].

Association of Metropolitan Authorities, *Arts and cultural policy: a discussion document* (London: AMA, 1990).

Association of Municipal Corporations and Theatre Advisory Council, programme, *Conference on civic theatres: their housing and administration* (24–25 February 1965 at County Hall, London, SE1 (36 Old Queen Street, London, SW1 and 9/10 Fitzroy Square, London, W1)).

Balme, Christopher, *The theatrical public sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Balme, Christopher, and Tony Fisher, *Theatre institutions in crisis: European perspectives* (Oxon: Routledge, 2021).

Barker, Clive and Maggie B. Gale, *British theatre between the wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Barnes, Philip, *A companion to post-war British theatre* (New Jersey: Barnes and Nobel Books, 1986).

Baugh, Christopher, *Theatre, performance, and technology: the development of scenography in the twentieth century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Bax, Peter, *Stage management* (Stratford: Ayer Company Publishing, 1977).

Baxter, Hugh, *System and life-world in Habermas's theory of communicative action*, Theory and Society: Renewal and Critique in Social Theory. Vol. 16. No. 1. Jan 1987. pp. 39–86.

Bell, Stanley, Norman Marshall and Richard Southern, *Essentials of stage-planning* (London: Frederick Muller, 1949).

Bentham, Fred, *The art of stage lighting* (London: Taplinger Publishing, 1969).

Bentham, Fred, *New theatres in Britain* (London: TABS Publication, 1970).

Bentham, Fred, *Sixty years of light work: an autobiography* (Isleworth: Strand Lighting Limited, 1992).

Bergman, Gosta, *Lighting in the theatre* (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975).

Billingham, Peter, *Theatres of conscience 1939–53: a study of four touring British community theatres* (London and New York: Taylor and Francis, 2002).

Billington, Michael, *The modern actor* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1973).

Bisaha, David, *American scenic design and freelance professionalism* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2023).

Bourdieu, Pierre, The forms of capital, in *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education,* ed. by J. G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 241–58

Bourdieu, Pierre and L. P. D Wacquant, *An invitation to reflexive sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

Bratton, Jacky, *New readings in theatre history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Brown, Ross, *Sound: a reader in theatre practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Brown, Ross, *Sound effect: the theatre we hear (performance and design)* (Grantham: Methuen Drama, 2020).

Brown, Shirley, *Bristol Old Vic Theatre School: the first fifty years 1946–1996* (Bristol: BOVTS Productions, 1996).

Brownrigg, John, Briefing for a new theatre, *TABS*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (September 1965), pp. 8-14.

Burris Meyer, Harold, Vincent Mallory and Lewis S. Goodfriend, *Sound in the theatre* (New York: Theatre Art Books, 1979).

Campbell, John L. and Ove K. Pederson, *The rise of neoliberalism and institutional analysis* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Claridge, Tristan, *Bourdieu on social capital: theory of capital*, https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/bourdieu-on-social-capital-theory-of-capital/ [last accessed: 19 November 2020].

Cochrane, Claire, *Twentieth-century British theatre: industry, art, and empire* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Coleman, Terry, *The Old Vic: the story of a great theatre form Kean to Olivier to Spacey* (London: Faber & Faber, 2014).

Collison, David, *The sound of theatre: from the Ancient Greeks to the modern digital age* (Cambridge: Plasa, 2008).

Cook, Judith, *The National Theatre* (London: Harrop & Co., 1976).

Corry, Percy, *Internationales Theatre-Institut (ITI) Colloquium in Berlin 21st–25th November 1960*, TABS, Vol 18, No. 3, December 1960, pp. 31-32 (London: Strand Electric).

Corry, Percy, *Lighting the stage* (London: Pitman, 1954).

Corry, Percy, Stage planning and equipment (London: Strand Electric, 1949).

Corry, Percy, *Theatre technician's associate, TABS*, Vol. 19: No. 1, 1961, pp. 15-16, (London: Strand Electric).

Cotterill, Hugh, A Society for Theatre Research, *TABS* (Vol. 6, Issue 1, 1948), pp. 27-28, (London: Strand Electric).

Coventry City, *Municipal handbook* (Coventry: North View Press, 1962).

Curtin, Adrian, *Avante-garde theatre sound: staging sonic modernity*, Avante-Gardes in Performance (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

Davidson, Neil, *The neoliberal era in Britain: historical developments and current perspectives*, International Socialism: a quarterly review of socialist theory, Issue: 139, 5 July 2013, http://isj.org.uk/the-neoliberal-era-in-britain-historical-developments-and-current-perspectives/ [last accessed: 4 December 2019].

Davies, Andrew, *Other theatre: the development of alternative and experimental theatre in Britain* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Publishing, 1987).

Davis, Cecil, *The Adelphi Players* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

Davison, Sally, David Featherstone, and Bill Schwartz Davison, Introduction, in, *Stuart Hall: selected political writings*, ed. by Sally Davison, David Featherstone, Michael Rustin and Bill Schwartz (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2017), pp. 1-16.

Dean, Basil, *Mind's eye: an autobiography 1927–1972* (London: Hutchinson of London, 1973).

Delgado-Garcia, Christina, *Making time: the prefigurative politics of Quarantine's Entitled*, Performances of Capitalism, Crises, and Resistance (Springer Link, 2013).

Devlin, Craig and Sue Hoyle, *Committing to culture* (London: Franco-British Council, 2000).

Dillon, Patrick, *National Theatre, 1976, London, UK: architect Denys Lasdun*, in Modern Theatres 1950–2020, edited by David Staples (New York and London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 258-269.

D'Monte, Rebecca, *British theatre and performance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

Dorney, Kate and Frances Gray, *Played in Britain: modern theatre in 100 plays*, Plays and Playwrights (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

Dorney, Kate and Ros Merkin, *The glory of the garden: English regional theatre and the Arts Council 1984–2009* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

House of Commons, Eighth report from the Education, Science, and Arts Committee, session 1981–82. Public and private funding of the arts, volume 1, Report, (London: HMSO, 18 October 1982).

Elliott, Michael, *On not building for posterity*, *TABS* magazine, Vol. 31, No. 2, 1973, pp. 41-44.

Elsom, John, *Post-war British theatre*, revised edition (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

Elsom, John and Nicholas Tomalin, *The history of the National Theatre* (Worcester and London: Trinity Press, 1978).

Essin, *Theatre Topics,* An aesthetic of backstage labour, Volume 21, Number 1, March 2011, pp. 33-48 https://muse.jhu.edu/article/421027/pdf [last accessed: 2 August 2024].

Essin, Christin, Working backstage (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2021).

Eyre, Richard and Nicholas Wright, *Changing stages: a view of British theatre in the twentieth century* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2001).

Fair, Alistair, *A new image of the living theatre: the genesis and design of the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, 1948–58*, Architectural History, 54, pp. 347–382. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/architectural-history/article/abs/new-image-of-the-living-theatre-the-genesis-and-design-of-the-belgrade-theatre-coventry-194858/B9AA63B385623869904A26D62410F082. [last accessed: 4 December 2020].

Fair, Alistair, *Modern playhouses: an architectural history of Britain's new theatres, 1945–1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Fair, Alistair, *Peter Moro and partners* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021).

Fawkes, Richard, *Fighting for a laugh: entertaining the British and American armed forces 1939–1946* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1978).

Fay, Stephen, *Power play: the life and times of Peter Hall* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995).

Federation of Theatre Unions, *Theatre ownership in Britain: a report prepared for the Federation of Theatre Unions* (1953).

Findlater, Richard, *The player kings* (New York: Stein and Day, 1970).

Findlater, Richard, *The unholy trade* (London: Theatre Book Club, 1953).

Findlater, Richard, *The winding road to King's Reach*, in Simon Callow, *The National: the theatre and its work 1963–1997* (London: Nick Hern Books/National Theatre, 1997).

Fisher, Tony and Kelina Gotman, Introduction: theatre, performance, Foucault, in Tony Fisher and Kelina Gotman (eds), *Foucault's theatres* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 1-23.

Foster, Tim, *Playhouses and spaces for drama*, in *Modern Theatres 1950–2020*, edited by David Staples (New York and London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 77-86.

Foy, Kate, *Professional theatre: how can you tell?* https://katefoy.com/professional-theatre-how-can-you-tell/ [last accessed: 4 February 2020].

Fraser, David, *The Royal Exchange Theatre Company: an illustrated record* (Manchester: Royal Exchange Theatre Company, 1988).

Fraser, Neil, *Lighting and sound* (London: Phaidon, 1988).

Friedman, A. W., *Death and beyond in J. B. Priestley's Johnson Over Jordan*, New Theatre Quarterly, 22: 76–90, 2006.

Gale, Maggie B., *J. B. Priestley* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

Gale, Maggie B., *Women playwrights on the London stage 1919–1968*, Europa Vol. 1, No. 4 (1995), pp. 77–84.

Gale, Maggie B. and Kate Dorney (eds), *Stage women 1900–50: female theatre workers and professional practice*, Women, Theatre, and Performance (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

Gascoigne, Bamber, *Twentieth-century drama* (London: Hutchinson, 1962).

George, Colin and Tedd George, *Stirring up Sheffield* (London: Wordville, 2021).

Hall, Lyn and Stephen Wood, The National Theatre, *Stage by stage, the early years: 1963–75*, https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/sites/default/files/stagebystage-pt2_early-years.pdf [last accessed: 6 July 2019].

Hall, Peter, Introduction, in, *Adaptable theatres,* ed. by Stephen Joseph (London: Association of British Theatre Technicians, 1962), pp. 7-9.

Hall, Stuart, The Great Moving Right Show*,* in, *Stuart Hall: selected political writings*, ed. by Sally Davison, David Featherstone, Michael Rustin and Bill Schwartz (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2017). pp. 172-186.

Hall, Stuart, *The hard road to renewal: Thatcherism and the crisis of the left* (London: Verso, 1988).

Ham, Roderick (Ed.), *Theatre planning*, Association of British Theatre Technicians (London: The Architectural Press, 1972).

Ham, Roderick (Ed.), *Theatre: planning guidance for design and adaption* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

Hann, Rachel, *Beyond scenography* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2019).

Hartmann, Louis, *Theatre lighting: a manual of the switchboard* (New York: DBS Publications, 1970).

Harvey, David, *A brief history of neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Harvie, J, *Fair play: art, performance, and neoliberalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Harvie, Jen, *Theatre and the city* (London: Red Globe Press, 2009).

Harvie, Jen and Dan Rebellato (eds), *The Cambridge companion to British theatre since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

Harwood, Elaine, *Mid-century Britain: modern architecture 1938–63* (London: Batsford, 2021).

Hayman, Ronald, *The set-up: an anatomy of English theatre today* (London: Methuen & Co., 1973).

Hays, David, *Light on the subject: stage lighting – for directors, actors and the rest of us* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1989).

Hennessey, Peter, *Winds of change: Britain in the early sixties* (London: Penguin Books, 2019).

Hewison, Robert, *Culture and consensus: England, arts and politics since 1940* (London: Methuen Publishing, 1995).

Hicks, Mar, *Programmed inequality: how Britain discarded women technologists and lost its edge in computing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).

Hillman, Ellis, *Essays in local government enterprise: volume 1 – Hugh Jenkins, towards the civic theatre* (London: Merlin Press, 1964).

Hindson, Catherine, *London's West End actresses: and origins of celebrity charity, 1880–1920* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016).

Home-Cook, George, *Theatre and aural attention: stretching ourselves* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

Ingold, Tim, *Bringing things to life: creative entanglements in a world of materials* (Aberdeen: ESRC National Centre for Research Methods, July 2010). http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/1306/1/0510_creative_entanglements.pdf [last accessed: 12 December 2019].

Institute of Acoustics, https://www.ioa.org.uk/about-us [last accessed: 28 July 2019].

Institute of theatre Consultants, *About the institute of theatre consultants* https://theatreconsultants.org.uk/about [last accessed: 5 March 2021].

International Theatre, Engineering and Architecture Conference, https://www.iteac.co.uk/contact.php [last accessed: 28 July 2019].

Jameson, Frederick, *The political unconscious: narrative as a socially symbolic act* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

Jay, Peter, *Theatres, stages, and auditorium*, Architectural Review 133, March 1963, vol. CXXXIII, No. 793, pp 75-85.

Joseph, Stephen (Ed.), *Actor and architect* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964).

Joseph, Stephen, List of Speakers, in, *Adaptable theatres,* ed. by Stephen Joseph (London: Association of British Theatre Technicians, 1962), pp. 1-6.

Joseph, Stephen, *New Theatre Forms* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1968).

Joseph, Stephen, *Theatre in the round* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1967).

Kadushin, Charles, *Understanding social networks: theories, concepts, and findings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Kellner, Douglas (ed.), Introduction to the German Artist Novel, in, *Herbert Marcuse*: *art and liberation* Vol. 4. (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 1-17.

Kemp, Rick and Bruce McConachie, *The Routledge companion to theatre, performance and cognitive science* (London: Routledge, 2018).

Kendrick, Lynne, *Theatre aurality* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).

Kendrick, Lynne and David Roesner, *Theatre noise: the sound of performance* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

Kershaw, Baz, *The politics of performance: radical theatre as cultural intervention* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

Kershaw, Baz and Helen Nicholson, *Research methods in theatre performance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

Kipling Society (Peter Keating), Kipling, Rudyard, *The glory of the garden* (1911), https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/readers-guide/rg_garden_notes.htm [last accessed: 11 April 2022].

Knowles, Ric, *Reading the material theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Lane, Terry, *The full round: the several lives and theatrical legacy of Stephen Joseph* (Castiglione del Lago: Duca Della Corgna, 2006).

Larroche, Valerie, *The dispositif: a concept for information and communication science* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2019).

Latour, Bruno, *Reassembling the social: an introduction to actor-network-theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Law, John, Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics, in, *The new Blackwell companion to social theory*, edited by Bryan S. Turner (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), pp. 141-158

Law, John, *Material semiotics* (The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK, and Sami Allaskuvla, Guovdageaidnu, Norway), 30 January 2019: http://www.heterogeneities.net/publications/Law2019MaterialSemiotics.pdf [last accessed: 15 July 2021].

Lewis, Peter, *The National: a dream made concrete* (London: Methuen, 1990).

Linklater, N. V., *The achievement in drama*, in *The state and the arts*, edited by John Pick (Eastbourne: 1980).

Lockhurst, Mary, *Drama and World War 1: a companion to modern British and Irish drama* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

Lodwick, Keith, *Association of Theatrical Designers and Craftsmen – summary of V&A archives*, August 2002 (correspondence with Peter Ruthen-Hall, January 2017).

Luhmann, Niklas, *Introduction to systems theory*, edited by Dirk Baecker, translated by Peter Gilgen (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

Lukacs, Georg, *History and class consciousness* (Vignate: Bibliotech Press, 2017).

Lutterbie, John, *Theatre and dynamic systems theory* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

Mackintosh, Iain, *The Guthrie thrust stage: a living legacy* (London: ABTT, 2011).

Marcuse, Herbert, *Art as form of reality*, New Left Review, no. 74, 1972, pp. 1-14.

Marshall, Norman, *The other theatre* (London: John Lehmnann, 1947).

McGrath, John*, The bone won't break* (London: Methuen, 1990).

Millington, Bob, Tony Jackson and Athene Fielding, *Remembering Stephen Joseph: theatre visionary and pioneer* (Leeds: Book Empire, 2019).

Miniham, Janet, *The nationalisation of culture: the development of state subsidies to the arts in Great Britain* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977).

Mulgan, Geoff and Ken Worpole, *Saturday night or Sunday morning? From arts to industry – new forms of cultural policy* (London: Commedia, 1988).

Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, Part I, Mainstream Theatres, in *Making space for theatre,* ed. by Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Stratford: Mulryne & Shewring, 1995), pp. 118-152

Mulryne, Ronnie and Margaret Shewring, Part II, Newer Spaces, in, *Making space for theatre,* ed. by Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Stratford: Mulryne & Shewring, 1995), pp. 156-180.

Napier, Frank, *Noises off: a handbook of sound effects* (London: J. Garnet Miller, 1962).

National Council for Civic Theatres, *Survey 1964–65* (Sunderland: Thomas Reed and Company, 1964).

National Theatre, *The complete guide to Britain's National Theatre: the new National Theatre is yours, London on the South Bank* (London: Heinemann, 1997).

National Theatre: a place for plays, A symposium presented by the Association of British Theatre Technicians in association with the Royal National Theatre, 30 October 2016 (Cambridge: Entertainment Technology Press, 2016).

Nicholson, Helen, Nadine Holdsworth and Jane Milling, *Ecologies of amateur theatre* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

Nielson, Lara D. and Patricia Ybarra, *Neoliberalism and global theatres: performance permutations* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

O'Farrell, Clare, *Michel Foucault* (London: Sage, 2005).

Offord, John (ed.), *British theatre directory 1972* (Eastbourne Publishers, 1972).

Offord, John (ed.), *British theatre directory 1973* (Eastbourne Publishers, 1973).

Offord, John (ed.), *British theatre directory 1974* (Eastbourne Publishers, 1974).

Osbourne, Elizabeth and Christine Woodworth, *Working in the wings: new perspectives on theatre history and labour* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 2015).

Patey-Ferguson, Phoebe, LIFT and the GLC versus Thatcher: London's cultural battleground in 1981*, New Theatre Quarterly,* Vol. 36, Issue 1, February, 2020, pp. 4-16. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/new-theatre-quarterly/article/abs/lift-and-the-glc-versus-thatcher-londons-cultural-battleground-in-1981/623080E3F90124933760E772A407821B [last accessed: 31 January 2025].

Peacock, D. Keith, *Thatcher's theatre: British theatre and drama in the eighties* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999).

Pemberton-Billing, Robin, *The Octagon Theatre: concept to reality* (Bolton: Bolton Octagon, 2011).

Pennino, Anthony P. *Staging the past in the age of Thatcher* (Hoboken: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018).

Perryman, Michael, *Esteam: the science of theatre lighting* (no details).

Pilbrow, Richard, *A sense of theatre: the untold story of Britain's National Theatre* (Lewes: Unicorn Publishing Group, 2024).

Pilbrow, Richard, *Stage lighting* (London: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1971).

Pilbrow, Richard, *Stage lighting design: the art, the craft, the life* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2008).

Pilbrow, Richard, *A theatre project* (New York: Plasa Media, 2011).

Pilbrow, Richard and John Bury, *Society of British Theatre Designers*, correspondence letter, October 1975.

Prell, Christina, *Social network analysis: history, theory and methodology* (London: Sage Publications, 2012).

Presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister by Command of Her Majesty, *A policy for the arts: the first steps* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, February, 1965): https://collective-encounters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/A-Policy-for-the-Arts-Jennie-Lee.pdf [last accessed: 06 January 2022].

Priestley, J. B, *Johnson over Jordan* (Kingswood: Windmill Press, 1939).

Rebellato, Dan, *1956 and all that* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

Redcliffe-Maud, Lord, *Support for the arts in England and Wales: a report to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1976).

Reid Francis, *Seeing, hearing, and contact*, in, *Making space for theatre,* ed. by Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Stratford: Mulryne & Shewring, 1995), pp. 28-34.

Ridge, C. Harold and F. S. Aldred, *Stage lighting: principles and practice* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1936).

Roberts, Paul, Case study: The Stage – the evolution of technical job advertisements, 1939–1999 (2019).

Rowell, George, *The Old Vic Theatre: a history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Royal Exchange Theatre Company, *Words and pictures 1976–1998* (Manchester: The Royal Exchange Theatre Company, 1998).

Ruari McLean Associates, *Going on the stage; a report to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation on professional training for drama* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1975).

Schmidt, Theron, *Troublesome professionals: on the speculative reality of theatrical labour*, Performance Research, Volume 18, Issue 2, 2013, pp. 15-26. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2013.807161 [last accessed: 7 November 2018].

Shellard, Dominic, *British theatre in the 1950s* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

Shellard, Dominic, *British theatre since the war* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

Shellard, Dominic, *The golden generation: new light on post-war British theatre* (London: British Library, 2008).

Shewring, Margaret, *Theatre buildings: a design guide* (Oxon: Routledge, 2024).

Sinclair, Andrew, *Arts and cultures: the history of the 50 years of the Arts Council of Great Britain* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995).

Smith, Adam, *Wealth of nations* (London: Woodsworth, 2012).

Society for Theatre Research, *History*: https://www.str.org.uk/about/history/ [last accessed: 19 November 2020].

Society for Theatre Research, *Public notice*, 15 June 1948: https://www.str.org.uk/about/history/ [last accessed: 18 November 2020].

Soltani, Farokh, *Radio/body: phenomenology and dramaturgies of radio* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

Southern, Richard, The history of adaptable theatres, in, *Adaptable theatres,* ed. by Stephen Joseph (London: Association of British Theatre Technicians, 1962), pp. 13-16.

Southern, Richard, *The open stage: and the modern theatre in research and in practice* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953).

Southern, Richard, *Unusual forms of stage*, in *Actor and architect*, edited by Stephen Joseph, p. 48-57, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1965).

Thatcher, Margaret, *The Downing Street years* (London: Harper Collins, 1993).

The Guardian, *Richard Pilbrow Obituary*, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2024/jan/08/richard-pilbrow-obituary [last accessed: 21 December 2024].

The Stage, Advertisement, 21 September 1939; 3, 1939. Proquest, Entertainment Industry Magazine Archive, The British Library, Music, Radio, and the Stage.

The Stage, Advertisement, 13 September 1962, 4248. Proquest, Entertainment Industry Magazine Archive, The British Library, Music, Radio, and the Stage.

The Stage, Advertisement, The Stage (Archive: 1995–2000). Proquest, Entertainment Industry Magazine Archive, The British Library, Music, Radio, and the Stage.

The Stage, *The Stage yearbook 1915–1969* (London: The Stage Offices, 1915–1969).

Theatrecrafts, *Frederick Bentham Obituary*, https://www.theatrecrafts.com/pages/home/archive/people/frederick-bentham/#:~:text=Obituary,his%2042%20years%20with%20Strand [last accessed: 21 December 2024].

Standing Advisory Council on Local Authorities and the Theatre, *Preparing a brief for a theatre building* (Essex: Essex County Council Supplies & Transport Department, 1965).

Sterne, Jonathan, *The audible past: cultural origins of sound reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

Strong, Judith, *Theatre buildings: a design guide* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

Taylor, Philip M., *The project of Britain: British overseas publicity and propaganda 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Taylor, John Russell, *Anger and after: a guide to the new British drama* (London: Methuen & Co., 1969).

Taylor, John Russell, *The rise and fall of the well-made play* (London: Routledge, 1967).

Taylor, John Russell, *The second wave: British drama for the seventies* (London: Routledge, 1971).

Theatres Advisory Council, *Technicians training in the theatre industry: a joint survey commissioned by the Manpower Services Commission and the Theatres Advisory Council from NOP Market Research Limited* (TAC Working Party Report, 1984).

Toley, A. T., *The poetry of the forties* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

Trewin, J. C., *Drama, 1945–1950*, Arts in Britain (London: Longmans for the British Council, 1951).

Trewin, J. C., *Drama, 1951–1964*, Arts in Britain (London: Longmans for the British Council, 1965).

Turnbull, Olivia, *Bringing down the house: the crisis in Britain's regional theatres* (Bristol: Intellect, 2008).

United States Institute for Theatre Technology, *About USITT,* https://www.usitt.org/about [last accessed: 24 November 2020].

Vinen, Richard, *Thatcher's Britain: the politics and social upheaval of the 1980s* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009).

Warden, Claire, *British avant-garde theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012).

Wehlburg, Albert F. C., *Theatre lighting: an illustrated glossary* (London: Drama Book Specialists, 1975).

Whitworth, Geoffrey, *The making of a national theatre* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951).

Williams, Raymond, *Drama in performance* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999).

Williams, W. E., *The theatre today in England and Wales: the report of the Arts Council Theatre Enquiry* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1970).

Young, Martin, *In memory of the Q-file: spontaneity, digital automation, and deskilling in theatre lighting*, TDR 68, Issue 1, (March, 2024), pp 143-156 http://doi.org/10.1017/S1054204323000564 [last accessed: 23 January 2024].

Young, Martin, *Stage managing wasted time: the temporality of the theatrical workplace*, Shakespeare Bulletin, Vol. 38, Issue, 1, (2020), pp. 35–66.

https://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=en&user=zcCFdCkAAAAJ&citation_for_view=zcCFdCkAAAAJ:u-x6o8ySG0sC [last accessed: 24 December 2024].