

Ducking and Diving:  
An evaluation and mapping of  
mid-career UK actors' and  
performers' career sustaining  
strategies

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Goldsmiths,  
University of London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

August 2021

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## **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Steven Sparling, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date: 18 April 2021

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following for their contributions to this thesis: Gerald Lidstone for his steady and unwavering guidance throughout this process; George Musgrave for helpful and actionable comments through multiple drafts of writing; Siân Prime and Adrian De La Court for inspiring conversations early on that helped to coalesce ideas; Robert Gordon and Cecilia Dinardi for a positive experience in my MPhil upgrade and for helpful comments; Jonathan Meth for reading several drafts and offering thoughtful feedback; Zehra Arabadji for always pointing me in the right direction; Heather Simpkins and Angela Songui for proofreading assistance; Sara Raybould, David Henson, and Gavin Baker who all contributed in some way to my ability to work full-time and pursue this PhD study.

All my research participants: your honest and thoughtful responses have been the lifeblood of this thesis — thank you for sharing so generously.

My family and my husband, Andrew: I couldn't have done it without your support.

Steven Sparling

April 2021

## Abstract

This thesis evaluates and maps career-sustaining strategies of mid-career UK actors and performers through the lens of creative entrepreneurship. Using semi-structured interviewing, this micro-qualitative approach traces on a granular level the freelance pathways of working actors navigating a competitive creative market. Contributing to the literature that explores the nature and experience of freelance creative labour, this study considers how the tension between economic and artistic logics informs strategic decision making in performers' career pursuit and how it requires both *proactive* and *reactive* actions, undertaken spatially in both *acting* and *non-acting* work environments. Building upon existing knowledge of project and network-based careers, this work links theories of multiple job holding with portfolio and protean career models and their relation to sustainability and resilience, with a specific geographic focus on mid-career UK actors and performers. A key original contribution is the PRAN model, which facilitates mapping the various spheres and motivations in which performers work in each of four quadrants: Proactive Acting, Proactive Non-Acting, Reactive Acting, and Reactive Non-Acting. It finds that career sustainability in a scarcity market, is derived from the ability to navigate, or *duck and dive*, between these different quadrants. This new knowledge assists actors in framing their choices and understanding their self-employment situation in a way that gives them a greater sense of agency over their career, and acts as a career planning and management tool. This study helps creative labour scholars to conceptualise project-based work in a scarcity environment that happens across multiple spatial markets and how that is navigated both practically and experientially by the actor.

# Table of Contents

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Declaration of Authorship .....   | 2          |
| Acknowledgements.....   | 3          |
| Abstract .....  | 4          |
| Table of Contents .....   | 5          |
| List of Tables .....  | 7          |
| List of Figures .....   | 7          |
| List of Abbreviations .....   | 9          |
| <b>1 Introduction .....</b>   | <b>10</b>  |
| <b>2 Literature Review .....</b>  | <b>34</b>  |
| 2.1 Economic Analysis of the UK Actors' Market.....   | 39         |
| 2.2 Cultural Economics of Acting .....  | 46         |
| 2.3 Sociological Examination of the UK Market .....   | 54         |
| 2.4 Structures and Organisations of Work in the Acting Sphere.....                                  | 65         |
| 2.5 Research Questions .....  | 82         |
| <b>3 Macro-Level Examination of UK Cultural &amp; Educational Policy Impacting<br/>Actors .....</b> | <b>83</b>  |
| 3.1 1979-1997 – Conservative Years – Thatcher/Major .....   | 84         |
| 3.2 1997-2010 – Labour Years – Blair/Brown .....  | 89         |
| 3.3 2010-2015 – Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition.....  | 100        |
| 3.4 Neoliberalisation of Higher Education: Implications for Emerging Performers<br>106              |            |
| <b>4 Research Methodology and Methods .....</b>   | <b>112</b> |
| 4.1 Part One: Methodology in Theory.....  | 112        |

|           |   |            |
|-----------|---|------------|
| 4.2       | Part Two: Methodology in Practice .....             | 121        |
| <b>5</b>  | <b>Empirical Findings: The PRAN Model .....</b>     | <b>140</b> |
| 5.1       | Proactive Acting Strategies .....                   | 145        |
| 5.2       | Findings.....                                       | 147        |
| 5.3       | Discussion of Proactive Acting .....                | 156        |
| <b>6</b>  | <b>Proactive Non-Acting .....</b>                   | <b>184</b> |
| 6.1       | Findings.....                                       | 184        |
| 6.2       | Discussion of Proactive Non-Acting.....             | 193        |
| <b>7</b>  | <b>Reactive Acting .....</b>                        | <b>202</b> |
| 7.1       | Findings.....                                       | 204        |
| 7.2       | Discussion of Reactive Acting.....                  | 210        |
| <b>8</b>  | <b>Reactive Non-Acting .....</b>                    | <b>239</b> |
| 8.1       | Findings.....                                       | 239        |
| 8.2       | Discussion of Reactive Non-Acting .....             | 243        |
| 8.3       | Complete PRAN Model .....                           | 252        |
| <b>9</b>  | <b>Pedagogical Application of PRAN Model.....</b>   | <b>253</b> |
| 9.1       | Arts Entrepreneurship Theory.....                   | 253        |
| 9.2       | Classroom Application of the PRAN Model .....       | 262        |
| <b>10</b> | <b>Conclusions.....</b>                             | <b>269</b> |
| <b>11</b> | <b>Appendices .....</b>                             | <b>279</b> |
| 11.1      | Appendix A – Sample Consent Form .....              | 279        |
| 11.2      | Appendix B – Demographic Survey Questionnaire ..... | 281        |
| 11.3      | Appendix C – Interview Data .....                   | 283        |
| 11.4      | Appendix D – Ethics Clearance.....                  | 289        |
| <b>12</b> | <b>References.....</b>                              | <b>302</b> |

## List of Tables

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| TABLE 1 – UK AVERAGE ACTORS’ EARNINGS.....                    | 41  |
| TABLE 2 – UK ACTORS’ AVERAGE WEEKS OF EMPLOYMENT.....         | 42  |
| TABLE 3 – EMPIRICAL STUDY PARTICIPANTS’ DEMOGRAPHIC DATA..... | 129 |
| TABLE 4 – HOUSEHOLD INCOME COMPARISON TABLE.....              | 181 |
| TABLE 5 - REFLEXIVE QUESTIONS FOR PRAN QUADRANTS.....         | 265 |

## List of Figures

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| FIGURE 1 - MAP OF THESIS PROJECT.....  | 124 |
| FIGURE 2 – STAGE ONE RESEARCH TERMS.....   | 141 |
| FIGURE 3 – STAGE TWO RESEARCH TERMS.....   | 143 |
| FIGURE 4 – PRAN MODEL FOUR QUADRANTS.....  | 143 |
| FIGURE 5 – ANSOFF MODEL (1957).....  | 144 |
| FIGURE 6 – PROACTIVE QUADRANTS MODEL.....  | 145 |
| FIGURE 7 – PROACTIVE ACTING QUADRANT.....  | 147 |
| FIGURE 8 – MARKET-BASED AND SKILLS-BASED CAREER EXPANSION EXAMPLES.....                            | 148 |
| FIGURE 9 – SUMMARY OF PROACTIVE ACTING QUADRANT.....   | 156 |
| FIGURE 10 – PROACTIVE NON-ACTING QUADRANT.....   | 184 |
| FIGURE 11 – SUMMARY OF PROACTIVE NON-ACTING QUADRANT.....  | 193 |
| FIGURE 12 – SUMMARY OF PROACTIVE QUADRANTS.....  | 200 |
| FIGURE 13 – INDICATIVE QUOTES FROM PROACTIVE QUADRANTS.....  | 200 |
| FIGURE 14 – RELATIONSHIP OF PROACTIVE QUADRANTS TO SUSTAINABILITY AND PORTFOLIO CAREER MODELS..... | 201 |
| FIGURE 15 – REACTIVE QUADRANTS MODEL.....  | 202 |
| FIGURE 16 – REACTIVE ACTING QUADRANT.....  | 204 |
| FIGURE 17 – SUMMARY OF REACTIVE ACTING QUADRANT.....   | 210 |
| FIGURE 18 – REACTIVE NON-ACTING QUADRANT.....  | 239 |
| FIGURE 19 – SUMMARY OF REACTIVE NON-ACTING QUADRANT.....   | 243 |
| FIGURE 20 – SUMMARY OF REACTIVE QUADRANTS.....   | 250 |
| FIGURE 21 – INDICATIVE QUOTES FROM REACTIVE QUADRANT.....  | 250 |
| FIGURE 22 – CONNECTION WITH RESILIENCE AND PROTEAN CAREER.....                                     | 251 |
| FIGURE 23 – COMPLETE PRAN MODEL.....   | 252 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| FIGURE 24 – RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRAN MODEL AND MAJOR THEMES ..... | 252 |
| FIGURE 25 – PRAN MODEL .....                                       | 272 |

## List of Abbreviations

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| BAME   | Black Asian Minority Ethnic  |
| Cf.    | Confer/conferatur – means ‘compare’  |
| CV     | Curriculum vitae – a brief summary of education, qualifications and experience                         |
| DCMS   | UK Government Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport   |
| DELHE  | Destination of Leavers from Higher Education   |
| Equity | British Actors’ Equity Association   |
| Et al. | Et alia/Et alii/Et aliae – means ‘and others’  |
| Etc.   | Et cetera – means ‘and other similar things’   |
| HESA   | The Higher Education Statistical Agency  |
| Ibid.  | Ibidem – means ‘in the same source’  |
| I.e.   | Id est – means ‘in other words’  |
| LGBT   | Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender  |
| P.     | Single page number   |
| PP.    | Multiple page numbers  |
| PhD    | Doctor of Philosophy   |
| PRAN   | Name of my empirical model – referencing four quadrants:<br>Proactive, Reactive, Acting and Non-Acting |
| Sic    | Latin – means ‘so, thus’ – used to show where an error or oddity is quoted directly                    |
| TV     | Television   |
| UK     | United Kingdom   |

# 1 Introduction

## Pedagogy and Practice

This PhD study starts and ends in the classroom. Prior to my first full-time teaching and Course Leadership contract in 2015 on acting and musical theatre conservatory-type programmes at a London university, I had spent 25 years working in the performing arts as an actor, singer, dancer, choreographer, agent, teacher and director in both Canada and the UK. Overall, I experienced the ups and downs of ‘show business’, and lived to tell my tale. While I was fortunate enough to realise most of my ambitions, I also recognised that a combination of moderate talent, decent training, good luck and a lot of privilege had made this possible for me. However, in the years since I launched my own performance career, the world has changed. For example, my two-year full-time theatre school training from 1989-1991 (in Canada) was in a group of only 12 students, with an average of 50-60 hours per week of contact time, at a cost of less than £500 per year in tuition fees. The programme I now found myself leading had 60 students in 2015, receiving 20-30 hours per week of contact time, at a cost of £9,000 in tuition fees, plus London living expenses. There were many contributing factors to the difference between my training and the training my students were receiving, which I will explore later, but none of those factors improved the odds of their success. When I graduated in 1991 into a regional Canadian market with a thriving local theatre scene, I received my first professional acting job within a month of graduation and qualified to join Equity, the actors’ union, within one year. The acting ecosystem of my regional Canadian city was reasonably balanced – with two actor training programmes, graduating about 20 new actors<sup>1</sup> a year between them, in a

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<sup>1</sup> I will use the term actor to denote both male and female actors rather than using the term actress to refer to a female actor. This is consistent with modern usage to avoid gendered labels for employment roles.

vibrant regional arts scene that was well funded by various levels of government. My students in London were graduating in the wake of the 2008 banking crash and subsequent recession from one of dozens of acting training courses, many graduating up to 100 a year, in a market that had been depleted of funding by successive governments, and overpopulated as a result of aggressive top-down institutional recruitment targets. My experiences of being a young actor, and those of my students, were chalk and cheese. My students were generally unaware of the macro-economic and political forces that had created the system into which they were graduating, but their hunger for performance and interest in testing their talents in the acting market were as strong as mine had been 25 years previously.

One of the courses I was assigned to teach these students was a final-year module, Professional Practice, on both the acting and musical theatre degrees. My first task was to determine what to teach these students that would prepare them for the performing arts market, where they would try to make their mark as actors and musical theatre performers. Some aspired to work in the West End, the National Theatre or UK TV and film, while others were overseas students planning to take the training back home. The central question I grappled with was how to prepare a curriculum specific enough to aid the UK students, but transferable enough that overseas students could apply similar steps when returning to their home markets. I wanted to address the challenges that might await them, without dampening their enthusiasm and dreams. I had an aim to help them to avoid some of the lows that I had experienced during my acting career, including sexual harassment, bullying, and being fired. Teaching at a post-1992 university<sup>2</sup>, with a widening participation agenda, many students came from working class backgrounds and were often the first ones from their family to attend university – meaning many were navigating uncharted territory. None came

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<sup>2</sup> Meaning a former college of higher education granted university status in 1992.

from 'showbiz' families<sup>3</sup>. They were graduating with an average of £50,000+ of student debt and relying on the 'bank of Mum and Dad' was not an option for most. The students were painfully aware that they weren't graduating from one of the 'top' drama schools (many had auditioned for those schools and not gained a place, while a few had gained a place at a top school but were unable to afford the higher fees); instead, the programme they were graduating from was, at that point, only about five years old and was not an established player in the market.

Looking back, despite the many odds stacked against them, some of those early students have clawed their way into the industry and found opportunities to earn their living (for periods of time at least) doing what they love and trained to do. But many more have not. Some made a conscious choice to go in another direction, such as getting a teaching qualification, or even becoming a pharmacist; others tried their luck for a few years before admitting defeat and moving on to another field. I do not know how they felt about this, but performing arts psychologist (and former ballerina) Hamilton (1997) writes:

“...no one [...] leaves this career without difficulty. Walking away from performing strikes at the heart of the student's self-esteem, leading, in some cases, to a marked deterioration in functioning...Often, it is difficult to consider other career paths, even after years of rejection and financial hardship. This is the point when illusions of 'making it' can be the most maladaptive” (p. 17).

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<sup>3</sup> Sinigaglia (2017) writing about performing artists “from humble social backgrounds” in France observes “... as they have generally been socialized outside the artistic field, the gap between subjective aspirations and objective chances is the widest [in] them [sic]: the less one knows about the reality of an artist's life, the more one's representations tend to be idealized, making it difficult to face reality, and leading to feelings of disappointment, frustration, and in some cases, career exits.” (p. 5). This is similar to findings from Friedman et al. (2017) who found significant class barriers for actors in the UK, including significant underearning by actors from working class backgrounds.

I was uncomfortably aware that of the 50 graduates from musical theatre and 30 from acting, only a modest proportion was likely to find work within the performing arts sector. The impressions I had from working in industry were supported by data, such as the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DELHE) survey produced every year by The Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA). Analysis by Comunian et al. (2010) of the 2004/2005 cohort found that out of all performing arts graduates across the UK, only 32% were found to be working in a 'creative occupation', while 68% were working in a 'non-creative occupation'. Demonstrating the regional disparity that is so common in the UK cultural sector, in London this skews to 45% working in a 'creative occupation' while outside of London it is only 27% (Ibid.). If, as this data suggested, only a third of the graduates were going to end up working in a 'creative occupation', was there not also a responsibility to make Professional Practice applicable to the other two thirds who would find themselves working in non-creative fields? What profession was I preparing them for – the ideal world of working in theatre or the reality many of them might face, where they would have to seek work elsewhere? Rather than set up a model of 'how to succeed in the performing arts', knowing that a majority of them would not succeed in that pursuit, I aimed to develop a curriculum that took a broader look at the world of work. I felt I had a responsibility to address the *real* UK labour market, both within the performing arts and outside, in a realistic and encouraging way, addressing the breadth of pathways that students would embark on, whether by choice or necessity. Instead of setting up the majority of them to 'fail', my aspiration was to create a curriculum where they could all 'succeed' in finding a pathway that would bring them intrinsic pleasure and provide for extrinsic needs, while (ideally) drawing upon the skillset they had developed over their acting or musical theatre degree. Thus, my desire for this PhD thesis was born. This thesis is, in many ways, the development of that curriculum.

## Research Scope:

“While it is widely acknowledged in the literature that careers in the creative field tend to be unstructured, often relying on part-time work and low wages, our knowledge of how these characteristics differ across the creative industries and occupational sectors is very limited” (Comunian et al., 2010).

“It is incumbent upon we social scientists and cultural studies academics to develop vocabulary and a methodology for tracing freelance pathways in the cultural sector. We need to be able to understand at the level of experience how this terrain is negotiated” (McRobbie, 2016, p. 25).

During my own performance career, I had years where I spent significantly less time performing and more time working in non-performing jobs, which is typical for the majority of actors. Over 25 years of this pattern, I developed a range of skills to earn money, including: typing and secretarial work, journalism and copywriting, teaching, and coaching and training in corporate settings. On this journey of work I discovered that my core skillset as an actor and performer<sup>4</sup>, could, with some tweaking, be used in a number of different ways. For example, my experience on stage and teaching voice meant that businesspeople and entrepreneurs were willing to pay me significant money to coach them on public speaking. I also found that my work on text analysis and Shakespeare meant I had an acute awareness of words and their power to affect others, which translated into the lucrative field of copywriting. Those jobs sustained my performance career for many years. Could I develop a curriculum and approach to teaching which encouraged my students to take such a broad view of their own skills and find creative ways to support and sustain their acting pursuit if jobs in their preferred field were not plentiful, in such a way that went beyond telling stories of my own experience, but which was instead rooted in data? Thus the focus for my empirical study, which would become this PhD thesis,

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<sup>4</sup> I will shortly discuss the different meanings of these terms.

emerged. I decided to aim my research towards mid-career actors working in areas that would be of interest to my students so that I could gather knowledge and experience from them about the challenges they faced in their own career pursuits and ways that they had found to overcome them. I wanted to learn from a broader array of actors what their strategies and approaches were to balancing and sustaining a career in a complex and competitive field. This knowledge and understanding, generated from empirical research, could better prepare graduates to thrive in a challenging freelance employment market.

This took me down the path of exploring existing academic literature that addresses the complexities of performers' working lives. I found an abundance of research looking at the working lives of musicians (Bartleet et al., 2012; Bennett, 2005; Comunian et al. 2014; Gross and Musgrave, 2016, 2017, 2020; Musgrave, 2017). I also found a significant literature that addressed the dancer, particularly focused on the end of dance transition, but also how the dancer could be better prepared earlier on in their training to anticipate the day they would need to transition to another field (Bennett, 2009; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri and Throsby, 2006). However, I found very little academic research that addressed these topics in areas that were relevant to my students: that of the actor or performer. The richness of emerging research exploring musicians' and dancers' working lives was simply not reflected in a similar analysis into the working lives of actors. I had identified a substantial gap in the literature that I could address. While there were some shared characteristics between musicians, dancers and actors – issues of precarity, oversupply of the market and high levels of competition for jobs, for example – there were also many ways that their working lives differed. Due to the athletic nature of dance, dancers have shorter careers as their bodies cannot sustain that level of work; this is less of a hindrance for actors and musicians (though ageism is still an issue). Musicians often can juggle many more different 'gigs' of varying lengths to piece together a living, whereas acting contracts, especially in theatre, tend to be multiple weeks in duration and do not really allow for multiple gigging at the same time.

Sinigaglia (2017) writing about France observes: "...the professional space of theatre remains more structured and institutionalized than music and other disciplines in the performing arts and draws more on public support" (p. 38), which I would agree is also true for the UK where acting work, particularly on stage tends to be more formalised and institutionalised.

In order to understand the structure of work, and particularly creative work, I turned to cultural studies, creative labour and organisational studies literature. There I found detailed literature that mapped out how work was structured within the German Fest system for actors (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2006, 2007; Eikhof et al., 2012; Haunschild, 2003, 2004; Haunschild and Eikhof, 2009; Ibert and Schmidt, 2012, 2014), where actors enjoyed year-long, or multi-year, contracts as state employees in the theatres. Within the Hollywood feature film industry, work happened on a contract-by-contract basis with teams of variously skilled artists and technicians coming together to create a feature film and then disbanding at the culmination of the project (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Faulkner and Anderson, 1987; Jones and DeFillippi, 1996). Both of these research fields gave me a vocabulary and a way of conceptualising how the working lives of actors and performers could be understood in these academic fields.

Understanding that one way a PhD thesis could make an *original contribution* to knowledge was through "trying out something in Britain that has previously only been done abroad" (Phillips and Pugh, 1987/1993, p. 62). I therefore determined I would use the structures presented in the German Fest system, and research from Hollywood, to interrogate the working structures of mid-career actors in the UK and at the same time generate knowledge that I could use in teaching my students. This led to the development of research on two levels: it would generate new knowledge on a theoretical level using creative labour and organisational studies lenses to examine the working structures of precarious freelance labour within the UK acting market, while also creating new pedagogical knowledge that could better prepare graduates for entering and succeeding in a precarious freelance acting

market. A research need for a deeper, more detailed and nuanced understanding of the structure of freelance precarious labour in the UK creative industries has been signalled by many leading scholars (Comunian et al. 2010; McRobbie, 2016), with a particular call for employment research specifically into actors (Dean, 2012). Likewise, a research need for deeper understanding of how to prepare creative graduates for challenging freelance markets has also been signalled by multiple scholars (Blackwood et al., 2019; Bridgstock et al., 2015; Coffield et al., 2019; Comunian et al., 2010; Lena et al., 2014). Therefore, my research addresses two acknowledged research gaps. In this way, the problem was identified in the classroom, which led me to empirical research with mid-career actors' experience. The knowledge from this research I have now brought back to the classroom to impart to graduates as they begin their own journeys into the creative industries.

### **Defining the Field**

What do we call someone who tells stories? Who uses their body, voice, and imagination to entertain, educate or enlighten an audience? Are they an actor, a performer, or an artist? To answer this, we must consider geography, academic orientation, and artistic tradition to better define *whom* I will be studying.

Geographical language differences appear in defining and naming the individual who puts themselves in front of an audience to tell stories. Comparing language used by the unions that represent workers in this field finds that the American unions, Actors' Equity and SAG-AFTRA, both use the term *actor* to describe their membership. British Equity, however, use different language to describe their members:

“We are a union of more than 47,000 performers and creative practitioners, united in the fight for fair terms and conditions in the workplace. We are actors, singers, dancers, designers, directors, stage managers, puppeteers, comedians, voice artists, and variety

performers. We work on stage, on TV sets, on the catwalk, in film studios, in recording studios, in night clubs and in circus tents” (Equity, n.dB.).

In the British Equity definition, they use the umbrella terms *performers and creative practitioners*, of which *actor* is one of the sub-genres. Spotlight, the leading UK casting website, uses the following description:

“Spotlight connects performers with roles in theatre, television and film productions around the world. Casting professionals choose Spotlight to cast their projects because performers on Spotlight are recognised as the industry’s best. Spotlight is the best way to promote yourself as a professional performer and be seen by casting directors” (Spotlight, n.d.).

Spotlight use the term *performer* exclusively, while Mandy Actors UK, a secondary casting website, uses the following description: “We are the world’s largest creative community of actors, film and TV crew, theatre professionals, child actors, voiceover artists, dancers, singers, musicians, models and extras” (Mandy Actors, n.d.). In their case, they use the terms *actor* and *theatre professional* as well as listing other sub-categories of performance.

I observe that while the Americans tend to use the term *actor*, in the UK the term *performer* is used as an umbrella term for individuals that work within the performing arts, of which the *actor* is a sub-genre. This would establish my field as the *actor* who is a *performer*. However, there is a second meaning for the word *performer*, particularly from the academic *performance* field that needs consideration.

Bial (2004) writes that performance deliberately sits in a liminal position between theatre and ritual, occupying both and neither simultaneously, and this liminal position creates a space where the mainstream can be challenged. Another understanding of the term is that it describes an artist who blends Western and non-Western performance practices (Schechner, 2013) such as in the work of Zarrilli (2006) who draws heavily on his studies

of *kathakali* dance-drama in his theatrical work. Performance, in this context, integrates movement, sound, speech, narrative and objects, while seeking inspiration from avant-garde and contemporary art and "...such confounding of categories has not only widened the range of what can count as an artmaking practice, but also what gives rise to performance art that is expressly not theatre; and art performance that dematerializes the art object and approaches the condition of performance." (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1999 in Schechner, 2013, p. 3). In a similar vein, Carson (2004) determines that performance artists do not work from characters previously created by other people, instead they draw upon their bodies, their experiences, and their histories and display this for audiences. Performance artist Marina Abramović describes it as such: "To be a performance artist, you have to hate theatre... Theatre is fake... The knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real." (O'Hagan, 2010; cf. Furse, 2011). While Abramović positions her work as the opposite of theatre, Kirby argues that the distinguishing feature of performance is that they deliberately aim *to not* do any acting. He writes:

"Acting means to feign, to simulate, to represent, to impersonate. As Happenings demonstrated, not all performing is acting. Although acting was sometimes used, the performers in Happenings generally tended to 'be' nobody or nothing other than themselves; nor did they represent, or pretend to be in, a time or place different than that of the spectator. They walked, ran, said words, sang, washed dishes, swept, operated machines and stage devices, and so forth, but they did not feign or impersonate" (Kirby, 1972, p. 3).

In consideration, the field I am studying is orientated *towards* acting, as opposed to *rejecting* acting, and my research subjects generally *embrace* theatre, instead of *rejecting it*. In addition, the field of performance that I am studying is rooted in Western rather than in non-Western performance practices. Therefore, upon evaluation, I do not think this academic understanding of the term *performer* applies to my particular field of study. While I see the application of *performer* as an umbrella term for my research

field, I do not see that my use of the term *performer* correlates with the academic realm of *performance*.

That established, there is a further narrowing down of my field, in that I am not studying actors to understand acting as an artistic process, rather I am studying acting as a labour market. I am interested in the complexities of what happens when acting services are exchanged for money, particularly when the actor tries to pay their rent and buy their food through exchanging these acting services, thus becoming what we might understand as a 'professional actor' or one who pursues acting in order to earn their livelihood. This takes my study away from an artistic examination and turns it towards an economic one. One way to define this field is that it is the market that operates under Equity, the British performers' union. This might be a limited field academically, but given that Equity has 47,000 paid-up members<sup>5</sup>, this is a sizeable labour field and worthy of academic study. There is also a long history both of the actor exchanging their services for money, and the organisation and protection of this labour through unions, that dates back to ancient Greece, where, by the middle of the third century BC, actors had formed a guild called the *Dionysian Artists*, who wielded significant power (Baumol, 1971). Therefore, the field of study that I am defining, the actor and their labour market, dates back over 2000 years. It is also worth noting that language use continues to shift and that new terms are emerging such as *content creator*, *theatre maker*, *creative*, or *storyteller* being used as much as *actor* or *performer* in current casting language. However, it is necessary to settle on terms for this research and therefore, my research subjects are all *performers* as a macro term, and *actors* as a micro term. I will therefore use both terminologies interchangeably as they are the two common nomenclatures that describe my research pool.

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<sup>5</sup> Spotlight, the major UK casting website for acting jobs have 'more than 65,000 members' (Sheehan, 2020, personal communication, 16 November) which might be a more accurate account of the number of actors in the UK market.

My field is further limited by the fact that I am focusing on the *jobbing* actor. This is the same delimitation of the field used by Dean (2005) whose research focuses on *jobbing* female actors instead of the *star* female actors as “...their labour market position differs from the majority of women performers in terms of choice in access to work; significantly enough to warrant separate consideration” (p. 763). She focuses instead on “...what were to be found to be common patterns experienced by ‘jobbing’ women performers, who share the general performer vocational attitude to acting [...] within the realities of perpetually oversupplied labour markets.” (Ibid.). This is comparable to research by Sinigaglia (2017) whose field is defined as *ordinary artists*. He writes “...this term does not imply a judgement on the quality of their output, skills, or supposed talent; it refers first to their working and employment conditions, and second to their position in the professional space. Unlike the stars of show business, ordinary artists know ‘neither fortune nor glory’” (p. 4). As I am looking through a creative labour lens, the labour conditions of *star* actors – paid large wages and in demand for work – are very different from the experience of the *average* actor who goes from job to job, i.e. the *jobbing* actor.

While the field I am examining could pejoratively be defined as ‘mainstream’, my students, and the nature of the course I taught on, were orientated in that direction. My teaching in Higher Education (HE) has been on courses orientated towards a getting an agent, meeting eligibility to join Equity and Spotlight, and developing the skills to respond to casting breakdowns and succeed in auditions with casting directors. This positions my research away from discussions of *avante-garde* artistic practice and towards a discussion of *creative labour* orientated towards a capitalist market. It is looking through a creative labour lens at the market transaction that happens as performers engage in an economy that involves: auditions; inputs from gatekeepers and intermediaries, such as agents and casting directors; an agreement negotiated through collective bargaining by a union (augmented by further negotiation by an agent), where the actor is paid for their creative labour

under set terms. I am interested in how the actor clears all of these hurdles to secure a job and how they process the many instances when they fail to clear these hurdles. I am also interested in how the UK actor is a cog in the performance machine that operates in a capitalist market, where the actor provides acting labour in exchange for money. The orientation of my research this way allows me to make comparisons to extant literatures of similar transactions of the German Fest actor (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2006, 2007; Eikhof et al., 2012; Haunschild, 2003, 2004; Haunschild and Eikhof, 2009; Ibert and Schmidt, 2012, 2014) and actors working within the Hollywood film project system (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Faulkner and Anderson, 1987; Jones and DeFillippi, 1996). The work I am examining, while not exclusively work that is commercial, as many UK theatres receive partial Arts Council funding, is certainly work that operates within a market economy and where labour is exchanged for payment. I am interested in the tension that this brings up between art and commerce, or what Bourdieu (1986) calls 'artistic and economic logics' (*cf.* Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007) and the actor or performer who situates themselves within this market is the focus of my enquiry.

While there is a small amount of research into actors' working lives in the UK, it is largely focused on various inequalities within the market (Dean, 2007; Dean and Greene, 2017; Dean and Jones, 2003; Friedman and O'Brien, 2017; Friedman et al., 2017; Layder, 1984; Randle and Hardy, 2017). Therefore I wanted to focus on the narrower field of actors' labour to address a research gap as outlined by Dean (2012):

"Are actors workers? Given their unusual visibility and longevity as an occupational group, the lack of research into performance labour processes and their regulation is of analytical interest. Performers are commonly regarded, inside and outside the academy, as exotic and atypical; both presumably to such a degree that there is little to be learned in any broad sense from studying them [...] Despite contemporary policy emphasis on the creative and cultural sectors [...] and increasing focus on nonstandard occupations more generally, the ancient occupation of acting has remained largely absent from employment research" (pp. 918-9).

Some may say that this market is already understood. However, I would counter such a suggestion with an observation from Eikhof and Warhurst (2013) who write there is a "...pressing need for more research of production within the creative industries and, with it, better understanding of work and employment. Assumptions and assertions must be displaced by evidence." (p. 18). There is assumed knowledge and assertions about actors' work, but that a lack of analytical research, particularly compared to the cognate fields of dance and music where far more extensive research agendas are being pursued to understand the structure of work in those fields, is apparent. Therefore, this research, looking at the field of *jobbing actors* through a creative labour lens, addresses a gap in the literature.

### **Defining the Problem**

Above, I quote scholars who highlight a lack of academic research focused on the actor, but why do I particularly think this is a problem requiring study? In this section I will use statistics about the UK industry to demonstrate many troubling aspects of acting as a labour market and why I believe further study into how these market factors influence actors' attempts to pursue a career or vocational path is a necessary addition to the field.

First, I consider Equity's 2013 member survey (n=3,804) which found that 37.7% of members earned less than £5,000 from acting in the previous year, while 11.2% earned nothing (a combined 48.9% of membership earned less than £5,000 from performance). If we consider an income of over £20,000 per annum to be a full-time income in the UK (the *London Living Wage*<sup>6</sup>), we find that only 13.6% of the Equity respondents are earning the London Living wage or higher from their acting. Equity's (2013) survey also reports that

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<sup>6</sup> The London Living Wage is the amount that campaigners are trying to establish as the minimum for cleaners and other service staff in London, which is currently set at £10.75 per hour or approximately £22,000 per annum (Trust for London, n.d.).

45.4% of respondents worked fewer than 10 weeks of the year as an actor. Similar results can be found in surveys from Casting Call Pro (The Stage, 2014) and Mandy Actors UK (BBC, 2018A). Likewise, global research into film and television actors' credits on IMDb<sup>7</sup>, with a large sample of 1.5 million male actors and nearly 900,000 female actors, found that 69% of male actors and 68% of female actors only have one year of entries on IMDb, meaning they only worked for one year in the industry (Williams et al., 2019). This data therefore suggests that for the great majority of actors, acting is a part-time job at best. While this is not new knowledge, we know very little about what actors do when they are not acting or how they *duck and dive*<sup>8</sup> their way through this precarity. Nor do we have research that tells us how actors *feel* about this roller-coaster competitive market.

With a scarcity of opportunity, we find many actors choosing to work for no money in the hope that this will move them closer to paid employment. In the aforementioned Equity study (2013) 46.1% of members had worked for no money in the previous year<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, Spotlight (2013) undertook their own research on this issue (n=50,000) polling both actors and casting directors. They found that 65.6% of Spotlight members do work for no-pay/low-pay or would do so. Furthermore, 87.3% of the casting professionals polled felt there was a place in the industry for no-pay/low-pay work (Ibid.).

There is ample evidence to show that this scarcity of opportunity is not shared equally across the industry, with high levels of inequality observed across the UK live performance and recorded media sectors manifesting as racism, ageism, ableism, classism, and sexism (BBC, 2018A; Drama UK, 2014; Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013; Gill, 2014; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012; Randle et al., 2015). It is unsurprising then that much of the recent research

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<sup>7</sup> Internet Movie Database, the industry website for tracking the film and television industry.

<sup>8</sup> *Duck and Dive* or *Ducking and Diving* is a slang term used for entrepreneurial or survivalist skills in creative fields (cf. McRobbie, 2016; Patten, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Of those who worked for nothing, 52% were not even paid expenses, therefore covering their own costs to participate.

specifically into UK actors' careers has focused on inequality such as: gender (Dean, 2005, 2007, 2008), typecasting (Friedman and O'Brien, 2017), class (Friedman et al., 2017), and diversity (Randle et al., 2007).

Even when actors do manage to secure an acting job, there are many reported problems in the work environment with 58% of female and 52% of male theatre actors indicating they have directly experienced bullying, harassment or discrimination while at work; while in film, 80% of women and 58% of men report being bullied, harassed or discriminated against on set (Federation of Entertainment Unions, 2013). Again, there is a real absence of research that addresses how actors *feel* about working in an industry with such high levels of inequality, discrimination, bullying and harassment. There is also little research that considers how, as workers in a labour market, they experience this field.

These statistics suggest an industry that is extremely challenging to gain work in and, when work is secured, to fulfil that work in. From a pedagogical standpoint, the industry is one that presents a challenge to prepare young actors for entry into it in such a way that protects them from some of the more harmful elements, many of which are at a systemic level and beyond the actor's control. However, what concerns me most as an educator training actors for this market, is recent studies that speak about poor mental health within the sector. The Mandy Actors 2018 survey of actors found that 63% of women and 48% of men struggled with anxiety; 59% of women and 61% of men suffer from stress; and 37% of women and 36% of men report having suffered from depression (BBC, 2018A). A 2015 Arts and Minds study (n=5,000 UK actors) found that 20% had actively sought help for mental health issues (Hemley, 2015)<sup>10</sup>. Research in Australia on performers and industry workers (n=2,900) found that the rate of attempted suicide in the

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<sup>10</sup> These findings are very similar to findings examining mental health in the music industry (Gross and Musgrave, 2016, 2017).

industry was more than double the regular Australian population (Hawthorne, 2015). A 2018 survey of the creative sector in Northern Ireland found 60% reported having suicidal thoughts, 37% had made plans for suicide, and 16% had made a suicide attempt (Shorter et al., 2018). The authors of the Northern Ireland report make six recommendations, including:

“Those involved in teaching in the arts should build in classes which identify risk and protective factors, identifying and strengthening social networks, create an understanding of the pitfalls, highlight resources available, and provide protective strategies” (Ibid., p. 7).

I draw the conclusion from this data that many actors currently in the industry are struggling and that this data points to serious structural problems within the industry, including low-pay, inequality, harassment, sexual harassment and bullying. I also question whether the actors’ training has done a sufficient job of preparing them for the competitive, precarious freelance side of the industry (*cf.* Hamilton, 1997) or whether their training has only focused on the artistic side of the craft. Many young actors have been left to learn in the ‘school of hard knocks’:

“...the reality of a career in the Creative Industries is that it is complex, multi-faceted and diverse and requires a broad range of skills and knowledge [...] rather than simply one road to success. The role of tertiary education institutions hoping to produce artists with lifelong sustainable careers in the arts must then include training for this type of complex career” (Blackwood et al., 2019, p. 18).

That actors are not being properly prepared is supported by The Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) 2014 survey of American fine and performing arts graduates, which found that 80% said their institution had helped them acquire artistic technique, but only 30% were aided in developing entrepreneurial skills and only 25% in developing financial and business management skills. (Lena, 2014, p. 11).

## Hypothesis

The hypothesis of my research is that taking a more entrepreneurial approach towards one's acting career, in particular focusing on *proactive* activities, one of three characteristics of *entrepreneurial orientation*<sup>11</sup> (Lee and Peterson, 2000; Lumpkin and Dess, 1996; Wiklund, 1999; Wiklund and Shepherd, 2005), leads to more positive outcomes and a greater sense of agency for the actor. This relates my research to the nascent field of *creative entrepreneurship* (or *arts entrepreneurship*) literature, which is about bringing an entrepreneurial mindset and skillset to individual and collective work within arts and culture spheres (Chang and Wyszomirski, 2015; Fillis and Rentschler, 2010; Gustafson, 2011; Hong et al., 2012; Patten, 2016). There is a long history of drawing parallels between creativity and entrepreneurship (Kirzner, 1978; Schumpeter, 1934) as both are, essentially, about creating something from nothing. They both seek to unlock the value that resides in ideas. Howkins (2013) writes: "Entrepreneurs in the creative economy operate as they do elsewhere but with the important difference that they deal in assets that are personal and lie within themselves [...] their job is to create new meanings of their own assets which interest the market" (p. 54). In the 21st century, these ideas have been embraced as ways to deal with a changing job market, especially following the 2008 financial crash. Florida (2011) writes "Every job can and must be *creatified*; every worker must be able to harness his or her own inner entrepreneur" (p. 388). In this environment, the idea of the creative entrepreneur who "is positioned theoretically at the nexus of creativity and entrepreneurship" (Patten, 2016, p. 24) has been part of the 'creative industries'<sup>12</sup> rhetoric. The two most commonly found viewpoints of creative entrepreneurship are either 'new venture creation' (i.e. creating businesses) or a way of empowering artists to

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<sup>11</sup> The other two being *innovativeness* and *risk-taking*.

<sup>12</sup> The creative industries are defined as "those industries that have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (DCMS, 2001, p. 5).

act more entrepreneurially through their art (*cf.* Beckman, 2011). I tend to view the latter as my orientation for the creative entrepreneur and I see it as a way to foster survival of the artist, as expressed here by Gustafson (2011):

“...most artists typically start their own micro-businesses. To continue their art past graduation and to make a living from it, artists must produce, market and promote, price, keep records, pay taxes and *act* like a business. In a word, they are entrepreneurs” (p. 30).

In addition, drawing on the work of Hong et al. (2012), it is important to acknowledge the psychological dimensions of the term creative entrepreneur insofar as it might be understood as a mindset to create opportunities rather than wait for them to appear. In a similar vein, as the term creative entrepreneur is difficult to define, authors often turn instead to listing qualities they ascribe to them; for example Fillis and Rentschler (2010) suggest the following characteristics:

“...self-belief and ambition, utilisation of creative business networks, high motivational levels, intuition, strong communication skills, ability to visualisation problems [*sic*], flexibility and the ability to break down physical and perceptual barriers [...] the adoption of a variety of problem solving styles and divergent thinking” (p. 18).

Perhaps the most comprehensive definition comes from Chang and Wyszomirski (2015) who write that arts entrepreneurship is:

“...a management process through which cultural workers seek to support their creativity and autonomy, advance their capacity for adaptability, and create artistic as well as economic and social value. This management process involves an ongoing set of innovative choices and risks intended to recombine resources and pursue new opportunities to produce artistic, economic, and social value (p. 11).

While I hypothesise that this entrepreneurial approach allows the actor to gain greater agency and autonomy over their career, I acknowledge that there are contributing factors to the ability to take this action – for example the inequality within the industry, which means that opportunities are not equally available to all. Research also points to an additional barrier to

entrepreneurial action, which is *emotion*. Doern and Goss (2013, 2014) look at barriers to entrepreneurship and consider how these barriers may not just be *obstacles* but can also be a *socio-emotional process*. (2013, p. 2). They explore a link between emotion and the ability to take entrepreneurial action, with a particular focus on the emotion of *shame*. In their model, this is where there is a threat to the social self which can be felt by the individual as embarrassment, inadequacy, vulnerability, isolation, rejection and failure (Ibid., p. 4). These feelings then result in energy being channelled inward to process emotion, rather than outward to take action (Ibid., p. 5), which they define as being the essence of entrepreneurship. Their empirical study is with entrepreneurs in Russia and they note how meetings between officials of the Russian state and the small-scale entrepreneur "...took place within a context of unequal resources where they had little scope to influence the outcome and had little trust in the motives of the other party" (Ibid., p. 7). Certainly, a connection between auditioning for acting jobs in the UK and meeting with the Russian state might be tenuous; however, I would argue that, given the empirical data we have already considered in terms of the precarity faced by most actors, but also systemic inequality and poor mental health of many actors, this *socio-emotional process*, and the negative feelings associated with perceived barriers of access to their chosen industry, *could* result in demotivating feelings towards actors taking entrepreneurial action related to their acting career. Therefore, a study of *only* the entrepreneurial actions that actors can take is insufficient, without also considering the underlying emotional landscape, i.e. how actors must react to multiple factors that are beyond their control and the impact this has on their motivation. Therefore, my research is also about developing *resilience* and finding tools and support networks to help actors process and rebound from difficult circumstances they often face, which could then allow them to take proactive steps that contribute towards their career advancement.

## **Structure and Content**

This introductory chapter establishes the field that I am studying, the research problem, its importance, and contextualises the problem within the literature. It also outlines my hypothesis, approach and some of the major contributions to theory and practice that come out of this research.

Chapter two surveys the relevant literatures from labour studies, organisational studies, and cultural studies that situate this research interdisciplinarily within existing bodies of academic research. It establishes comparisons with extant actor-specific research literatures, in particular research into the German and Hollywood markets for actors, while identifying gaps in the literature that this research will address.

Chapter three examines the political and economic factors that have impacted the UK cultural and HE landscapes resulting in the labour market that my research participants are engaged in and that my students were graduating into. In particular, I will address how neoliberalism as a leading ideology from Thatcher onwards has impacted the labour market and increased competition, while also creating circumstances that exacerbate precarity for artists seeking to work within that labour market.

Chapter four explains my methodology. I work through the methodological decisions made in determining the approach to study my research questions and present an audit trail of my research and the decisions made in undertaking this work. Through this process I establish the parameters of my research determining that I will undertake my enquiry using an idealist ontology and an epistemology of constructionism. These choices led to the choice of interpretivism as my research paradigm and a research strategy of using abductive research techniques. Given these methodological choices, I was guided to select qualitative interviewing as my most effective research gathering tool. I also discuss how my research participants were selected

and establish that I will undertake a self-reflection on how my findings can be applied within a pedagogical setting.

Chapters five to eight present and discuss my empirical findings. Chapter five presents my PRAN model, which maps the different areas in which actors work and the differing motivations behind this work. This model facilitates my evaluating and mapping of actors' career sustainability strategies and each chapter corresponds to one quadrant of this model. Chapter five also explores the *proactive acting* quadrant, examining ways in which actors make proactive efforts to expand their acting markets. This proactive work is in four key areas: addressing skills, addressing markets, balancing economic and artistic logics (Bourdieu, 1986), and engaging in entrepreneurial and/or business approaches to their acting career. I then broaden the discussion to consider how capital impacts on the actor's ability to take this proactive action.

Chapter six explores the *proactive non-acting* quadrant. I explore examples of actors proactively constructing work outside of the acting sphere. This is often a way for the actor to combat the precariousness of acting and give them a sense of agency through generating a more reliable income strand that the actor can turn to, either between acting jobs or alongside of acting jobs, as a way of managing the financial insecurity that many actors experience. I will explore several ways this maps out for different actors and consider their motivations for making these choices.

Chapter seven explores the *reactive acting* quadrant. In the reactive quadrants we see that work is undertaken with reluctance. Unlike in the previous proactive quadrants, where the actors were exercising a sense of agency over their choices, in the reactive quadrants we see that actors are making unwanted choices driven by the precarity of acting and the jobs they undertake are done with a clear prioritisation that they are temporary and only until preferred work is once again secured. In the reactive acting

quadrant, I explore the concept of 'next best' jobs and how they are reluctantly undertaken with an economic instead of an artistic logic.

Chapter eight explores the *reactive non-acting* quadrant. Jobs in this quadrant are often the least-favoured jobs available and are undertaken with a survival mentality. Work in this quadrant is temporary and is only held until 'something better' comes along, preferably in an acting quadrant. I discuss the relationship between this kind of reactive work and a loss of agency experienced by the actor and how this intersects with the concept of resilience. This chapter also summarises the empirical findings and their significance.

Chapter nine is a self-reflective discussion of the pedagogical application of my findings and how I use the PRAN model within the classroom as an education and training model to better prepare graduates for seeking work in a precarious, freelance acting market.

Chapter ten highlights and evaluates my contributions to knowledge and practice, discusses the limitations of the research, and sets out areas for further research.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation therefore aims to take a micro-qualitative look at the sustainability of mid-career UK actors through the lens of creative entrepreneurship (Chang and Wyszomirski, 2015; Fillis and Rentschler, 2010; Gustafson, 2011; Hong et al., 2012; Patten, 2016). It questions the role of agency in the actor's pursuit of a career and what proactive and reactive actions, if any, the actor can take to make their career more sustainable. It considers the role that resilience (Ibert and Schmidt, 2014; Ormrod, 2006; Rea, 2014; Seton, 2009) plays in supporting an acting career and looks towards those barriers that exist on a structural level that might

impede the actor's striving for a sustainable living, and theorises ways the actor can *duck and dive* around these barriers. It also broadens the existing discussion of multiple job holding (Abbing, 2011; Alper and Wassall, 2006; Menger, 2006; Throsby, 2001) and project- and network-based work patterns (Comunian and Alexiou, 2015; DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Faulkner and Anderson, 1987; Jones and DeFillippi, 1996) in order to address an economic need for many actors to work both within and outside the sector and generate ways to mitigate the psychological and emotional toll this can have on the actor. It therefore takes motivation into consideration and how survival can be a key motivation. In order to address a gap in the literature, this thesis examines these conditions at a micro-level, considering the individual actor's thoughts, feelings and actions towards their career and their results. I also consider the industry side and where their agendas and objectives might be in conflict with actors' needs. Through my examination I have generated new knowledge about the structure of the *ducking and diving* that UK mid-career actors use to sustain themselves within a competitive and over-subscribed industry. The research output is the PRAN model which provides a way of mapping and understanding the various spheres in which actors find themselves working and the motivation behind the work undertaken in each of these quadrants. This research contributes new findings to creative labour and organisational studies literatures, while also bringing a greater sense of agency to the actor working in a highly competitive market.

It also considers the pedagogical application of this model for emerging actors to better prepare them to succeed in a competitive, precarious freelance field. This addresses a need for better preparation of graduates in the creative industries to build sustainable careers in these precarious and competitive fields (Blackwood et al., 2019; Bridgstock et al., 2015; Coffield et al., 2019; Comunian et al., 2010; Lena, 2014). This in turn creates new pedagogical knowledge for creative entrepreneurship practice.

## 2 Literature Review

### Introduction

The aims of this literature review are to: firstly, determine what knowledge already exists in the area; secondly, identify gaps in the literature that can be used to formulate research questions; and thirdly, develop a theoretical framework within which to discuss my empirical findings. This literature survey is by necessity broad, due to the disparate nature of the actor literature which necessitates engaging in a number of different theoretical arguments. This does come with a sacrifice of some depth in order to cover a wide field within the limits of a thesis. This scope will allow me to comprehensively consider gaps in the literature and identify specific research questions for my empirical enquiry, while also providing a theoretical framework within which to analyse the findings.

In surveying the literature, the first thing that becomes apparent is that actors are the least researched group within the *performing arts* literature with musicians and their careers being far more extensively studied (Bartleet et al., 2012; Bennett, 2005; Comunian et al., 2014; Gross and Musgrave, 2016, 2017, 2020; Musgrave, 2017), followed in a distant second by research into the dancer and their career (Bennett, 2009; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri and Throsby, 2006), though this research tends to be about physical injury and about post-dance career transitions. Acknowledging an overall lack of research into actors, I therefore settled on three main fields of literature to review that in some way addressed the experience of the actor: cultural economics, sociology and organisational management, as each presented a sufficient nexus of research to allow for arguments to coalesce around a research position. I will present these findings as three distinct sections within this chapter, firstly reviewing cultural economics, secondly the sociology literature relevant to the actor, and thirdly, literature on structures and organisations of work within the performing arts. However, before addressing this literature, I

will address a universal theme across all of the literatures: that of *structure versus agency*.

## **Structure and Agency**

A common theme that emerges across the literature is the interplay between structure and agency in the actor's career. This sociological debate asks whether individuals act independently as free agents or whether their behaviour is determined by social structures (Bourdieu, 1972; Giddens, 1984). Structure is defined as:

“... a system of embedded or systematically patterned human arrangements (e.g. class, gender, ethnicity), social institutions (e.g. marriage customs, religion, culture) and historically developed forms (e.g. the law, markets, infrastructure) that determine the scope of action that is open to any individual human being” (Hartley et al., 2013, p. 5).

Agency is defined as “...the capacity of individuals to act independently or autonomously according to their own choices.” (Ibid.). This struggle is observed in much of the relevant literature regarding actors' careers where the structure of the industry or market acts as a restriction upon the individual actor's agency and ability to move within that structure. Eikhof et al. (2012), in their research on the structure and organisation of actors' careers in Germany observe that:

“The creative industries rely on creative workers making creativity available as a key resource. It would therefore be of both academic and practical interest to continue the exploration of individualized careers beyond boundaryless and into the more intricate and complex interplay between structure and agency that shapes the careers and lives of workers [...] and through them, the creative industries [as] a whole” (p. 85).

Therefore, the literature review in this chapter can also be viewed as an assessment of relevant literature related to structure/agency in the actor's career pursuits. The scholarly theories most often used in this discussion are

those of Bourdieu (1972, 1984, 1986, 1989, 1993, 1994, 1998, 2002), particularly his structural determinism of *the field* interacting with the individual's agency to acquire the capital they seek (Bourdieu, 1993) and Bourdieu's theories frequently appear in the various literatures discussed below. Thus, I will outline some of his key theories to establish a vocabulary that will appear throughout this literature review.

### **Bourdieu and the Field of Cultural Production: A Vocabulary**

Bourdieu provides a framework for discussing the actions and motivations within the creative and cultural industries. His concepts of *habitus*, *field* and *capital* are frequently used to examine the individual experience of artists within the creative industries literature, for example in creative writing (Brook, 2013); German actors (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2006, 2007); UK media (Hesmondhalgh, 2006); UK music (Musgrave, 2017); and UK film and TV (Randle et al., 2015). Bourdieu's general economy of practices challenges the idea that the creative industries are a meritocracy (*cf.* Boyle and Oakley, 2018; Brook et al., 2018, 2020; Gill, 2014). Instead, Bourdieu demonstrates how various forms of capital are unequally distributed and how these forms of capital act as a type of structural inhibitor and/or enabler of the individual's agency, or as Bourdieu (1998) notes: "capital finds its way to capital and that the social structure tends to perpetuate itself" (p. 19).

Capital can be understood as being either economic or symbolic. Economic capital refers to money, assets, property and the things that can be exchanged for them. Symbolic capital is made up of all the other forms of capital, including cultural capital and social capital, and is what the other forms of capital become when they are recognised and legitimised by others (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 17). Cultural capital can be viewed as an individual's social assets (manners, dress, education, etc.) and is accrued over time. Cultural capital can be convertible, under certain conditions, into economic capital (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 281), what Bourdieu calls *transubstantiation*: "...whereby the most material types of capital – those which are economic in

the restricted sense – can present themselves in the immaterial form of cultural capital or social capital and vice versa” (Ibid.). Social capital is a measure of the value of the relationships held by an individual and these relationships can be with other individuals, and/or with institutions and groups to which the individual belongs or is affiliated. Bourdieu (2002) suggests: “the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected” (p. 286). Different fields may have other forms of applicable capital, for example political, educational, or artistic capital. Capital takes time to accumulate and its potential to reproduce itself means it has longevity. Various levels of capital unequally dispersed amongst agents, means that the playing field is not level (Ibid.) and where individuals fall within the space is based on the relative amounts of capital they hold, which Bourdieu (1998) describes as *position takings* (p. 7). Those that share a similar position may have a shared set of customs, tastes, priorities, and behaviours; when these tastes and behaviours are internalised, they become a *habitus*.

Bourdieu (1998) defines the *habitus* as a “...generative and unifying principle which retranslates the intrinsic and relational characteristics of a position into a unitary lifestyle, that is, a unitary set of choices or persons, goods, practices” (p. 8). This habitus is sometimes described as “a feel for the game’, a ‘practical sense’ (*sens pratique*) that inclines agents to act and react in specific situations in a manner that is not always calculated and that is not simply a question of conscious obedience to the rules” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 5). In addition, the habitus functions temporally in two directions, with Bourdieu (1994) saying that the habitus is a ‘structured and structuring structure’, or that our past and present have ‘structured’ our habitus, and at the same time the habitus is ‘structuring’ our present and future choices. The habitus, while possibly shared with other individuals from a similar social class, is still an individual internalised set of patterns and assumptions; where the individual meets others and interacts is within the field. Neither

habitus nor field can act in isolation, but rather it is where the individual's patterns and assumptions (habitus) come into contact with others (with their own habitus) in the field.

The field can be thought of as akin to the playing field upon which a sports match is played out. Therefore, actors who are shaped by their own individual habitus related to their upbringing, come into contact with each other in the field where they compete to accrue capital. Hence, the field cannot be separated from the concept of power and dominance. "In any given field, agents occupying the diverse available positions (or in some cases creating new positions) engage in competition for control of the interests or resources which are specific to the field in question" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 6). Competition in the field can be for, and drawing upon, any of the forms of capital. In Bourdieu's language, this competition for capital amongst other players on the field is a kind of battle: "The position occupied in social space, that is, in the structure of the distribution of different kinds of capital, which are also weapons, commands the representations of this space and the position-takings in the struggles to conserve or transform it" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 12). This struggle for position-taking, achieved by using different kinds of capital as 'weapons,' sets up our discussion of actors' competition for jobs in a saturated employment market.

Fields are distinguished by specific logics or *doxa*, an example of which is the *art for art's sake* logic that prioritises certain forms of art (that have what Bourdieu would term high symbolic or cultural capital) over forms of art that generate money (higher economic capital) (*cf.* Caves, 2000; Frey, 2013; Menger, 2006). *Doxa* is defined by Bourdieu (1998) as "...an orthodoxy, a right, correct, dominant vision which has more often than not been imposed through struggles against competing visions..." (p. 56). The *doxa* is what we take for granted or that which "...goes without saying because it comes without saying" (Bourdieu, 1972, p. 169). *Doxa* is related to field and habitus and takes the form of "...apparently natural beliefs or opinions" (Deer, 2014, p. 115).

There is a danger in discussing actors' careers that it becomes fixated on money or the financial precariousness that many experience in a low-wage economy. However, Bourdieu reminds us that to really understand a social scenario we need to consider the other forms of capital in addition to economic, and thereby he rejects the reductionism inherent in economic analysis, developing instead what he called 'a general economy of practices' (2002). Bourdieu's theories help us to understand the inequality in the acting profession and provide ways to rationalise the widely varying careers experienced by actors. Having established a vocabulary of terms, derived from Bourdieu, which are central to the understanding of the structure/agency debate, this literature review will now proceed in three parts: firstly, reviewing cultural economics, secondly, the sociology literature relevant to the actor, and thirdly, literature on structures and organisations of work within the performing arts

## **2.1 Economic Analysis of the UK Actors' Market**

That actors are largely poor is not new information. Yet, transcending anecdotalism and more meaningfully ascertaining how low the wages really are, and therefore how difficult it is to be an actor in the UK, helps to frame my thesis. Operationalising such an abstract variable is of course difficult. However, the available data illustrates precarity and low earnings for the majority of working actors, and establishes the economic principles of supply and demand (Towse, 2010) and oversupply (Ibid.) and the impact this has on macro-level economics. Understanding how relatively poor the average actor is from their acting wages leads to questioning their survival strategies or how they *duck and dive* to meet their basic needs and the literature of cultural economics provides theories as to how the market functions and how individual artists survive in that market. In this way, I will weave together the existing data on actors' employment with a survey of the relevant literature from cultural economics.

## Data

Data explored in this section comes from three main sources: firstly, the 2013 Equity members' survey<sup>13</sup> which gathered data on employment from 3,804 members; secondly, the Casting Call Pro 2013 survey (The Stage, 2014) which surveyed 1,700 of their members; and thirdly, the 2018 survey by Mandy Actors<sup>14</sup> (BBC, 2018A) which surveyed 3,067 members. Table 1 presents these findings on actors' annual earnings from their acting work in the UK.

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<sup>13</sup> There are a few caveats regarding these survey results. Membership of Equity, in the UK, is not mandatory and over a certain threshold of earnings, members are asked to pay a percentage of their earnings from acting as dues; this creates a disincentive for those top earners in the industry to be members of Equity. Also, those at the top are not likely to benefit from the minimum payment levels established by Equity as their agent would be negotiating higher fees. Therefore, while this is the best data available for understanding employment for actors in the UK, its results must be read with understanding of the points raised above. The sample size (n=3,804) is large and randomly selected. The restriction on the data is that we cannot assume that Equity represents all actors working in the UK with outliers at the top and bottom of the earning scale likely not to have been captured. In addition, the demographic data on the survey shows that 25% of survey respondents were over 60, an age at which there is less acting work, which may skew the results.

<sup>14</sup> There are caveats attached to this data as well in that membership of Casting Call Pro (and later Mandy Actors who purchased them) is optional. They provide a service where actors can pay to access casting notices. It is important to note that these are secondary services and that the main casting service in the UK is Spotlight. In this way, their membership is not necessarily indicative of the entire UK body of actors, with their membership tending to skew towards young actors at the start of their career.

Table 1 – UK Average Actors' Earnings

| Study                                      | Sample Size | Income from Acting  |
|--|-------------|---|
| Equity 2013                                | n=3,804     | 0.7% over £100K,<br>1.5% £50-100K,<br>11.4% £20-50K,<br>19.1% £10-20K,<br>18.3% £5-10K,<br>37.7% under £5K,<br>11.2% nothing.<br>(6.9% no answer) |
| Casting Call Pro 2013<br>(The Stage, 2014) | n=1,700     | 2% £20k or more,<br>30% £1-5K,<br>46% less than £1K   |
| Mandy Actors 2018<br>(BBC, 2018A)          | n=3,067     | 63% less than<br>£5,000<br>13% more than<br>£20,000   |

While the distribution is slightly different, the overall picture is of actors who are not earning very much from their vocation. If we consider an income of over £20,000 per annum to be a full-time income in the UK (the 'London Living Wage'<sup>15</sup>), we find that 86.3% of the Equity respondents are earning below this threshold from their acting work and in the Casting Call Pro and

<sup>15</sup> The London Living Wage is the amount that campaigners are trying to establish as the minimum for cleaners and other service staff in London, which is currently set at £10.75 per hour or approximately £22,000 per annum (Trust for London, n.d.).

Mandy Actors surveys we find that only 2% and 13% respectively of respondents are earning above that threshold from their acting work.

Turning to the number of weeks worked as an actor, we find that the majority of actors spent only a portion of their year earning money from their chosen profession:

*Table 2 – UK Actors’ Average Weeks of Employment*

| Study                                   | Sample Size | Weeks Professional Employment in previous 12 months  |
|---|-------------|--|
| Equity 2013 (UK)                        | n=3,804     | 12.1% more than 40 weeks,<br>9.0% 30-40 weeks,<br>13.3% 20-30 weeks,<br>20.1% 10-20 weeks,<br>34.9% less than 10 weeks,<br>10.5% none,<br>(6.9% no answer. ) |
| Casting Call Pro 2013 (The Stage, 2014) | n=1,700     | Just over 60% worked on 1- 5 jobs paying at least national minimum wage,<br>nearly 20% failed to secure any paid   |

|                                   |         |  |
|-----------------------------------|---------|--|
|                                   |         | acting jobs.                                   |
| Mandy Actors 2018<br>(BBC, 2018A) | n=3,067 | 20% had no paid acting work in last six months |

These studies yield similar findings, i.e. that the majority of actors spend very little time being paid to be actors. The obvious question from this data is: Are actors working in other areas to subsidise their acting, as has been observed with musicians (Schlesinger and Waelde, 2012), and how does this compare with other workers within the larger ‘gig economy’ (Ross, 2009)? Conversely, what are the 34.4% who are employed for more than 20 weeks of the year doing that the 45.4% are not doing (Equity, 2013), i.e. why are they achieving better results and what could this mean? The simple answer, that they are just ‘better actors’, is not especially perceptive or insightful and this requires further examination.

Turning to television and film, Williams et al. (2019) used data from the industry leading movie database IMDb and examined entries for 1,512,472 male actors and 896,029 female actors between 1888 and 2016 working globally in the industry. They found that 69% of male and 68% of female actors only have one year of entries on IMDb (meaning only one year where they were employed in the TV and film industry as actors). The authors observe:

“Long career lengths and high activity are found to be exponentially rare, suggesting a scarcity of resources in the acting world. [...] We also observe that that this dramatic scarcity unequally applies to actors and actresses, providing compelling evidence of gender bias. Moreover, the total productivity of an actor’s career is found to be power-law distributed, with most actors having very few jobs, while a few of them have more than a hundred. This indicates a rich-get-richer mechanism underpinning the dynamics of job assignments, with already scarce resources being allocated in a heterogeneous way.”  
(Ibid., p. 2)

With a scarcity of opportunity, many actors choose to work for no money in the hope that this will move them closer to paid employment. In the aforementioned Equity study (2013) 46.1% of members had worked for no money in the previous year<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, Spotlight (2013), the leading UK industry casting website, undertook their own research on this issue (n=50,000) polling both actors and casting directors. They found that 65.6% of Spotlight members do work for no-pay/low-pay or would do so. Furthermore, 87.3% of the casting professionals polled felt there was a place in the industry for no-pay/low-pay work (Ibid.).

The desire to have one's labour recognised through pay is a historic argument – for example in feminist ideas of 'wages for housework' where Federici (1975) argues that it takes a woman 20 years of apprenticeship (under her mother) to learn the skills of housework, but that this labour becomes invisible since it is not recognised with remuneration. Bracke (2013) points to a rise in unemployment and low wages for female workers as being contributing factors to the rise of the movement to have women's unpaid labour in the household recognised (p. 632). The high unemployment and low-wage scenario that Bracke recognises, aligns with the data seen above from Equity for the UK acting market. Couple this with a perception of acting not being 'real work', such as we find in Lazzaratto's (1996) 'immaterial labour,' defined as being "...a series of activities that are not normally recognized as 'work' -- in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes..." (p. 133), it is perhaps unsurprising that 87.3% of casting directors in the Spotlight (2013) survey felt there was a place for low paid and free labour within the industry. Unpaid labour is the 'thin edge of the wedge' of a larger discussion about the casualisation of work manifesting in patterns of

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<sup>16</sup> Of those who worked for nothing, 52% were not even paid expenses, therefore covering their own costs to participate.

the 'gig economy' and an active conversation regarding the 'creative industries' in the UK and unpaid internships as a key entryway into these industries (Bridgstock et al., 2015; Gill, 2014; Percival and Hesmondhalgh, 2014). This has been much discussed in the sociological literature related to how this reinforces privilege and inequality within these sectors. I will examine these arguments sociologically later. For now, it is important to focus on economic arguments vis-à-vis how an actor can survive in a labour market that advocates free labour. Equity, since 2014, has been running a campaign called 'Professionally Made, Professionally Paid', which states:

“Equity members are professionals: skilled individuals who bring their experience and their talent to every job. They deserve to be treated with the respect workers in other industries take as a given. They deserve decent pay. That's what Professionally Made Professionally Paid is fighting for. Low and no pay is a major issue for many Equity members. Too often performers and creatives are expected to give their time and energy for free, exchanging hard work for 'exposure' or 'CV points'. This particularly affects members at the start of their careers, and those without savings or economic support also find themselves priced out of the industry.” (Equity, n.d.A.)

The 'exposure' argument often made for actors, especially at the start of their career, to justify free labour, can be related to the Bourdieu's idea of accumulating symbolic and social capital through the unpaid labour. This accumulation of capital may be rewarded at some point in the future with access to economic capital, though the risk of whether this is operationalised or not rests with the actor (*cf.* Gross and Musgrave, 2016).

On a macro-level, the actor defies the financial logic of *homo economicus* as a rational profit maximiser – a “self-seeking individual” (Towse, 2010, p. 22) – in that they appear to pursue a career path that brings very few financial rewards, which counters the neoclassical economics view that producers aim to maximise profit. Yet, conversely and even paradoxically, it is still largely viewed as a glamorous industry that many young people wish to enter (Kogan, 2002), evident in an approximate 43% increase in the number of professional actors in the UK from 1994 to 2018 (Equity, 2018A; Jackson et

al., 1994). It is also in neoclassical economics that we encounter the relationship between supply and demand, or “stock and flow<sup>17</sup>” in a given labour market (Towse, 2010) where we find that an excess in labour supply results in lower wages, and vice versa (Ibid.). Given the statistics we have viewed above, economic theory might suggest that a surplus in the number of actors in the UK market (an increase in the stock) has resulted in low wages and high unemployment rates, as we have seen from the data. However, this data also leaves a lot of unanswered questions such as why would anyone want to be an actor with such overwhelming odds against success? What effects does an oversupply of actors in the market have on the actors’ ability to sustain a career? What are the contributing factors to this market oversupply? I will now turn to the literature of *cultural economics* to seek possible theoretical answers to these questions.

## 2.2 Cultural Economics of Acting

Cultural economics uses economic theory and statistical data to explore economic questions within the cultural sphere (Towse, 2010). It is a branch of economics, but is also connected to studies of sociology of culture and arts management (Ibid.). As such, it can provide economic theories that explain some of the phenomena observed in the statistical data on actors’ employment, for example, the wide distribution of earnings amongst UK actors with most earning very little and a small minority earning a great deal — what has been described in cultural economics literature as *winner-takes-all* (Caves, 2000). Winner-takes-all refers to the unequal distribution of earnings and opportunities between those at the top of the profession and those further down. In this way “...the very successful are rewarded out of all proportion to their talents and skills” (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011, pp.

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<sup>17</sup> “...the stock of actors is the number of actors in employment plus those actors who are unemployed and those who are working as waiters or taxi drivers but who are able to, and would prefer to, work as actors. The flow of labour services is the number of hours of labour or persons willing to work at any given wage rate.” (Towse, 2010, p. 298)

228-9). Top actors are paid high wages and, when in demand, can receive multiple concurrent offers of work. Neither of these benefits is enjoyed by average actors who tend to have long periods of unemployment between engagements and often earn only subsistence wages (Baumol and Bowen, 1966; Benhamou, 2011). According to economists, this vertical stratification is not necessarily based on talent, but rather on consumer behaviours, with Benhamou (2011) observing: "...market forces alone do not select naturally the most talented: selected performers may be untalented, and the inertia of consumer's behaviour leads them to dominate an increasing share of the market" (p. 56).

The cultural economics literature examines the significantly different outcomes achieved by individuals competing within the sphere, which leads to the so-called *Superstar* theory (Adler, 1985; Benhamou, 2011; Rosen, 1981; Towse, 2010), which concludes that barely discernible differences in levels of talent can still result in widely discernible levels of outward success in the form of financial earnings, critical success, audience numbers, and general word-of-mouth appreciation for who is a 'Superstar' in any given profession. A Superstar can seldom be replaced by a lesser-known talent without a negative impact on the project, and therefore, the Superstar is in a position to be richly rewarded due to their scarcity, as economic logic would dictate. Projects featuring a Superstar can increase consumer prices without risk of a decrease in demand (Benhamou, 2011; Caves, 2000) thus justifying higher remuneration for the Superstar. Superstars arise due to an information cost (Adler, 1985; Towse, 2010) to consumers associated with forming their own opinion as to who is worthy of receiving their attention and money. Instead, it often is more efficient for consumers to follow the crowd, known as the *bandwagon effect* (Towse, 2010) where individuals will follow what the crowd is doing (Caves, 2000), or the signposting given by 'experts' and/or 'critics', whom the consumer considers have a more qualified viewpoint than their own (Musgrave, 2017). This means that recognition gained can create a momentum of increasing visibility and success – referred to in the literature as the *rich get richer* theory (Williams et al., 2019).

*A-List/B-List* (Caves, 2000) refers to the vertical segregation of talent into those who are deemed to be at the top of the profession (the *A-List*) and those who are not (the *B-List*). Who is placed in each category is based on individual selection criteria; for example, it might be a consideration of the 'best' actor (as decided by awards or industry recognition) or perhaps on who draws the biggest box office. Even with differing criteria, at any time there are a number of actors who are considered A-List in theatre, television and film. Actors can practise, work on their craft and try to improve their ranking. However "...trained and mature creative agents settle on different plateaus of proficiency" (Caves, 2000, p. 7), suggesting little movement between strata is possible. B-List actors face a challenge in that they are often interchangeable, making it difficult for any B-List actor to stand out or negotiate for higher wages as they can often be replaced. This theory suggests that a B-List actor stands a small chance of obtaining a leading role that would give them a chance to stand out, as only an A-List actor can fill that position and maximise the project's earning potential.

One of the challenges of any creative pursuit is that it is impossible to predict who is going to succeed – labelled the *nobody knows principle* (Caves, 2000) which describes the risk and uncertainty that surround every creative decision. This has been examined in various fields ranging from book publishing (Thompson, 2012) to the music industry (Krueger, 2019). Due to the intervention of luck, many people are attracted to acting to see if they have what it takes to succeed, and since *nobody knows*, they might be a success (Caves, 2000; Menger, 2006). The attraction of winner-takes-all, with its promises of financial reward and celebrity, can attract many entrants, most of whom are overly confident about their own chances of success (Benhamou, 2011; Karhunen, 1996). It is only through trial and error that the aspiring actor determines whether they have the necessary talent and luck on their side. At each stage of their career, the actor must decide whether to press forward and accept the risk or to abandon their dream and seek an exit from the career (Benhamou, 2011). Menger (2006) writes: "...if talent can be

detected more rapidly, then quit rates in artistic professions will be much higher and turnover rates will help to form more realistic expectations about one's chances" (p. 790). This results in some actors clinging on for a lifetime, waiting for a break that never comes, which only adds to an oversubscribed profession. Using Porter's (1979) conceptualisation of competitiveness in a marketplace, it seems reasonable to suggest that acting as a profession has relatively low barriers to entry, but extremely high exit costs, which are more emotional than financial in nature (*cf.* Menger, 2006). There is an inherent contradiction in that higher education costs in general, including training for the creative arts, has become increasingly more costly over the last decade (see chapter 3.3 and 3.4 for further discussion), so for the average aspiring actor the costs, or barrier to entry, to the profession is high; however, formal training is not a requirement for success as an actor as countless untrained actors (or rather actors who are trained 'on the job') have proven over the years. So, while the average cost is high to train as an actor, there are always actors who bypass that and succeed anyhow. In this way, a professional training is not a job requirement in the same way it is for many other professions; therefore, we could still argue that the acting profession has relatively low barriers to entry. It is because of the high levels of competition to gain an entry to the profession that many young actors undertake a formal training to try to gain a competitive edge, but this training in and of itself is often not an industry requirement (for example both Equity and Spotlight allow joining either through a formal training or through proof of professional work allowing some actors to bypass the formal training).

Cultural economics provides some theoretical explanation of how artists compensate for insufficient incomes and what other sources of income they turn to for survival. This might take the form of subsidy from family or a spouse (Frey and Pommerehne, 1989; Towse, 2010), support from government or other forms of patronage (Davies and Sigthorsson, 2013; Frey and Pommerehne, 1989), or they might be driven to subsidise their work through additional earned income outside of their preferred area of work (Menger, 2006). Many engage in *multiple job holding* (Abbing, 2011;

Alper and Wassall, 2006; Menger, 2006; Throsby, 2001), whereby the artist holds several jobs simultaneously, often driven by necessity. When returns on the time invested in art-making are too low to sustain a living, jobs are often sought that will maximise income in the briefest amount of time in order to better accommodate the artist's practice (Throsby, 2001). Alternatively, by diversifying and seeking better paid opportunities for artistic work, they improve their financial standing. For some artists, multiple job holding is a way of managing professional risk:

“The range of various jobs may be compared to a portfolio of financial assets. This way of handling uncertainty has already been evoked [...] in the case of freelancers, who may insure themselves against downswings on the employer side as well as strengthen their position by building a career portfolio that is mixed with tightly and loosely coupled work associations. With sectoral diversification of hirings, artists may also be financially better off and have greater career continuity in a disintegrated labor market. Holding other jobs outside one's vocational field of activity corresponds to a better known scheme of occupational risk diversification [...] the portfolio model of occupational risk management offers insights for the dynamic study of how artists cope with uncertainty throughout their careers and allows us to maintain the centrality of choice of career path.” (Menger, 2006 p. 795)

Multiple job holding can take many different structural forms in how the working life is assembled and I will examine a number of different models later when I look at structures of work within acting. For now, we can use this theory from economics to begin to understand how actors are surviving when their earnings from their acting work are so low.

Remembering that the Equity (2013) survey found that 86.3% of their respondents were earning below £20,000 per annum from their acting work, we need to consider the relationship between low earnings, precariousness and precarity. *Precariousness* refers to the unpredictability and uncertainty that comes with low earnings and the lack of a stable income, leading to a feeling of insecurity and bringing emotional, psychological and physical strain to an individual and their family (Abbing, 2011; Butler, 2006; Gill and Pratt,

2008; McRobbie, 2002; Ross, 2009). Bridgstock et al. (2015) identify this as a problem in early creative careers when “Creative graduates can struggle through an extended education to work transition involving episodes of unpaid work experience and internships, additional education or training, and reliance on family, social security and/or ‘day jobs’ for financial support” (p. 335), which describes the structural constraints that are named as *precarity*. Abbing (2011) identifies the longer-term effects of low income and the precarity of being an artist, combined with a perceived lack of success in the career, that can result in social isolation and feelings of precariousness. While precariousness refers to the individual’s experience, precarity is used more to reference the structure that creates situations where workers are made to feel this way. Freelancing on self-employed contracts, being responsible for paying your own taxes, saving for a pension, maintaining flexibility to respond to opportunities, and intense competition for jobs can have a destabilising effect on creative labour (Davies and Sigthorsson, 2013). This is a bigger topic relating to a shift towards neoliberal-based political thinking and is frequently discussed in much of the current sociology literature in relation to the creative industries in the UK. I will outline many of the key arguments of this literature in the next section when I evaluate sociological literature relevant to my research. First, I will review some key theories to justify why artists engage in the risk of such a precarious pursuit.

One explanation is that the actor willingly participates in a risky economy lured by the status and rewards of success (Ross, 2009). Winner-takes-all economies, such as acting, only work when there are those who are willing to gamble on being the one who is successful. One view would be that statistics on low employment and low earnings for actors are readily available, so if an actor ignores their slim chance of success then any precariousness that befalls them is of their own doing (Abbing, 2011; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). However, we need to also consider who might be encouraging them to pursue this risky path and to what ends? Many people make money from the desire of young people to be involved in the arts and there are industries that exist around offering coaching, training and

support for actors. This includes drama schools that make money from a large body of aspiring actors (Menger, 2006) and an industry that benefits from an oversupply of talent. An oversupply in the market, with more artists than arts jobs, has long been acknowledged by cultural economists (Haunschild, 2003; Throsby, 2001; Towse, 2010). The economic arguments speak of an industry where oversupply has become a structural condition:

“...artists earn less than workers in their reference occupational category (professional, technical and kindred workers), whose members have comparable human capital characteristics (education, training and age). And they experience larger income variability, and greater wage dispersion. Taken together, these features portray oversupply disequilibrium. Moreover, they have been documented for so long that excess supply of artistic labor appears to be permanent and may act as a true structural condition of the arts’ unbalanced growth.” (Menger, 2006, p. 769)

Another possible explanation as to why actors choose to pursue a precarious career comes from psychology and the concept of *intrinsic motivation*.

Creativity researcher Amabile (1985, 1993) has contributed much to understanding motivation in relation to work, particularly operationalising what appear to be ‘labours of love’ rather than profit-driven enterprises. Amabile et al. (1994) define the major features of motivation as: “intrinsic motivation (self-determination, competence, task involvement, curiosity, enjoyment, and interest) and extrinsic motivation (concerns with competition, evaluation, recognition, money or other tangible incentives, and constraint by others)” (p. 950; cf. Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Ryan and Deci, 2000). One type of motivation does not rule out the other, with the authors observing that “creative artists, for example, may be strongly intrinsically interested in the artistic problem before them and, at the same time, be strongly motivated to win the recognition of their peers and the public.” (Ibid., p. 964).

This disparity in the arts, with artists receiving high intrinsic reward from their work, while at the same time experiencing low financial extrinsic reward, is not new. Economists and sociologists have examined the non-pecuniary forms of extrinsic motivation (i.e. competition, evaluation, recognition), which

they conceive of in Bourdieu's terms as social or cultural capital, and use this to try to explain artists' behaviour, which counters a normative pursuit of better paid work. Frey (2013) writes:

“...psychological aspects are important to consider in certain instances. Behavioural anomalies are one such aspect, suggesting that human beings deviate systematically from what is predicted by rational choice analysis (or more precisely, by subjective expected utility maximization) under identifiable conditions...” (p. 6)

Frey goes on to identify that while artists do respond to extrinsic motivation, such as money, they are also strongly motivated by intrinsic desires, particularly manifesting in an *art for art's sake* mentality (2013, p. 7). Frey also makes a key distinction when he says this prioritisation of intrinsic motivation over extrinsic, is found “... particularly for the first years in an artist's career.” (Ibid.). This is an interesting signal that perhaps this balance of motivation shifts over the duration of a creative career.

The concept of *art for art's sake* (Caves, 2000; Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007; Frey, 2013; Menger, 2006; Throsby, 2001) refers to a prioritisation of artistic expression (artistic logic) over attempts to make art that might have a commercial value (economic logic). Caves (2000) defines the property of *art for art's sake* as implying “that artists turn out more creative product than if they valued only the incomes they receive, and on average earn lower pecuniary incomes than their general ability, skill and education would otherwise warrant” (p. 4). It operates in conjunction with romantic ideas of poverty that are associated with the bohemian artist who situates themselves on the artistic fringes of society and views themselves as an artistic rebel – whether as a real position or an idealised position (Davies and Sigthorsson, 2013; cf. Banks, 2007; Comunian et al., 2010; Eikhof and Haunschild, 2006). Bohemian, or *bohemianism*, is a term that came out of 19th Century France to describe an artist who rejects the capitalistic ideals of the bourgeoisie, popularised by the work of Henri Murger. The bohemian is one who sees no value in extrinsic reward if it comes at the expense of artistic expression and

choosing to live in poverty is seen as noble if it means being true to your artistic inspirations. In some usage, this has become a stereotype of artists (Davies and Sigthorsson, 2013). This bohemian ethos underpins one of the main arguments of Abbing (2011), that artists choose to be poor, and that there are structural measures within art worlds to keep them poor, because poverty endows status upon the artist within some art circles:

“In many ways artists are not like others; they are considered to be better people. Art is good, beautiful and deep; and artists are creative, self-directed, authentic and able to realise themselves. Sometimes characteristics such as being uncommercial or even being poor have a positive value. In a society where the notion of authenticity and self-realisation is so highly rated, these stereotypes are particularly important.” (p. 345)

While the cultural economics literature provides theoretical explanations for the vast differences between individual actors' career experiences, it does not address the more human experience of being in a competitive market. Particularly, it doesn't address what the experience is of the B-list actor trying to enact agency where little is possible; therefore, I will now move on to evaluate relevant sociological literature to the working lives of UK actors to gain a deeper understanding of how this literature discusses the precarity and competition alluded to in the cultural economics literature.

## **2.3 Sociological Examination of the UK Market**

### **Inequality**

In the previous sections, I examined through data and economics how the UK acting market is one that is experienced by the majority of actors as being a market of scarcity; however, this scarcity is not shared equally across the acting profession, with much inequality evident in the market. A brief summary of some data will validate this claim. Research into role distribution at the National Theatre found that only 37% of roles went to women (Drama UK, 2014, *cf.* Dean, 2005, 2007, 2008) with similar findings

in UK film, where only 32% of roles went to women (Drama UK, 2014). Further to this, the Mandy Actors 2018 survey found that 82% of women earned less than £10,000 per year from their acting, while only 69% of men were in the same category (BBC, 2018A). They also found that 63% of women have a second job outside of acting to support themselves, while only 57% of men do (Ibid.). Research by Dean (2008) found that 57% of women surveyed felt that gender was the main factor jeopardising their acting employment, while only 6% of men thought this. BAME actors are also under-represented in all forms of media with Drama UK (2014) finding that only 4% of actors listed during a one-week period in Radio Times were from a BAME background. Besides gender and racial inequality, acting also perpetuates ageism – at the National Theatre 51% of roles went to actors under 34 years of age while only 19% went to actors over 54 (Drama UK, 2014). Musical theatre shows an even greater age bias with 91% of roles going to actors under 34 and only 2% going to actors over 44 years of age (Ibid.). People with disabilities are also under-represented – while 16% of the UK working age population has a disability (Great Britain, Department for Work and Pensions, 2014) only 3.5% of respondents to the Equity (2013) survey report having a disability. Similar findings can be found through much of the cultural studies literature highlighting inequality based on gender, race and social class (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013; Gill, 2014; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012; Randle et al., 2015). It is unsurprising then that much of the recent research specifically into UK actors' careers has focused on inequality within the acting labour market; i.e. looking at gender (Dean, 2005, 2007, 2008), typecasting (Friedman and O'Brien, 2017), class (Friedman et al., 2017), and diversity (Randle et al., 2007). For example, Friedman et al. (2017) found that 73% of actors in the UK come from households where a parent held a professional or managerial position (defined in that study as a middle-class family), while only 10% of actors come from working class backgrounds. They found that actors from working class backgrounds earned, on average, £10,000 less per annum than middle-class actors (Ibid.). This is significant, considering research by the Sutton Trust found that 67% of British Academy Award (Oscar) winners and 42% of Bafta winners were

privately educated (Kirby, 2016, p. 2). All of this research points to vast inequality within acting and the creative industries. But we cannot consider each of these under-representations in isolation, instead we must consider the "... intersections of different social locations, power relations and experiences" (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 2) when considering inequality.

The term 'intersectionality', labelled by Crenshaw (1989), observes that there is a complex interplay of factors that lead to social inequality, rather than just one contributing factor (Hankivsky, 2014). Crenshaw (1989) wrote how considering race or gender in isolation removed marginalised subsets within that group and instead focused on more privileged members within a group who were not additionally disadvantaged, and therefore ignored the more complex problems. Brah and Phoenix (2004) observe that:

"...the complex, irreducible, varied and variable effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts [...] different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands." (p. 76).

More recently, intersectionality has been a factor in analysing creative labour in the UK, for example in relation to disability in film (Randle and Hardy, 2017), the intersection of age, parental status and gender in the creative industries (O'Brien and Oakley, 2015) and as a component for examining an under-representation of women in Canadian theatre (MacArthur, 2016). What this research highlights is that the creative industries are unlevel playing fields and that there are many contributing factors to workers' inability to engage with the market.

## **Resilience**

In previous sections, I examined how the UK acting field is characterised by high levels of competition, a highly-stratified A-List/B-List structure, and significant inequality experienced by many. The situation described needs to

be addressed on two levels: firstly, systemic change on a macro level required across the entire field to make it a more equitable field, and secondly, an examination of any micro-level actions the individual can take to better improve their chances of success. There is some controversy about individualising the problem (Diprose, 2015; Gill and Orgad, 2018; Gross and Musgrave, 2020; Newsinger and Serafini, 2019), which I will explore below. I argue, though, that if we are looking through a lens of creative entrepreneurship, where the actor is running a micro-entrepreneurial venture, then what entrepreneurial skills can the actor call upon to address challenging market conditions? This brings us back to the debate of *structure versus agency*. Systemic change to address structural inequality is strongly needed for the sector, as suggested by the data highlighted above. Yet, at the same time, any agency the actor can enact to develop business skills and entrepreneurial resilience that can possibly help them to build safeguards in their working practices to buffer themselves against some of the deleterious effects of the precarity of much of the acting world is strongly needed. Of course, addressing that precarity on a sectoral level is essential, but if change is not forthcoming with any speed, and the market continues to be so highly saturated, can entrepreneurial resilience bring any aid to an actor/creative entrepreneur in a market such as I have outlined above? Or alternatively, is the struggling actor's only personal choice to leave the profession and retrain for something else? Is there another choice, beyond changing the industry (which is necessary), but that lies in further developing the personal entrepreneurial business skills of the actor while further strengthening personal resilience to persist in a challenging field? These are questions that I will explore next by contrasting the sociology and entrepreneurship literatures.

Resilience, in its purest sense, refers to an organism's ability to absorb shock or disruption and "...bounce back to its former shape or by its flexibility to change its internal structures when confronted with changing requirements from its environment." (Ibert and Schmidt, 2014). Much has been written about resilience with foci including place and geography (MacKinnon and

Derickson, 2013), human geography (Cote and Nightingale, 2012) and LGBT communities (Meyer, 2015), to give a few examples.

On the agency side of the argument are those who take a more benign stance on the development of an individual resilient attitude in order to withstand change. For example, in one of the only monographs from psychology looking at performers' careers, Hamilton (1997) suggests one way to counteract much of the negativity that surrounds being an actor is by learning to contain and frame feedback; for example "...viewing negative feedback as less credible than positive feedback, and interpreting ambiguous information in a way that is more favourable than reality" (p. 58). She suggests this can help the performer become more resilient, particularly when doubts about the performer's ability can grow as they fail to have an impact or evoke a response from others. The longer this recognition is unmet, the more vulnerable the performer becomes, which can lead to self-consciousness, shame<sup>18</sup> and questioning of self-worth (Ibid.). Clearly a way to deal with these negative feelings and the impact they potentially have on the career is necessary, and resilience is put forth as a way to counteract this (cf. Seton, 2009). Grit, as a synonym for resilience, is identified as a key characteristic for the 'outstanding actor' to develop in Rea's (2014) article on training actors:

"The psychologist Angela Duckworth isolated grit as one of the character traits most predictive of success in dealing with life's toughest challenges. She called it 'the tendency to pursue long-term, challenging goals with perseverance and passion', clearly an important quality for actors, who statistically face more audition rejections than acceptances. Grit gives an actor resilience and tenacity, both in dealing with the challenges on the rehearsal-room floor and the ups and downs of one's career path. Grit is a vital quality because most people lack it: they may want something, but often give up before they've reached it. Grit is a habit that can be acquired, but it

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<sup>18</sup> This term *shame* is important as it is the same emotion identified by Doern and Goss (2013, 2014) as being a barrier to entrepreneurial action in their own empirical studies.

requires motivation to succeed. Cluster traits are: resilience, perseverance, enthusiasm, and optimism.” (p. 238).

Much of the literature in this field is critical of individual resilience. To begin, Newsinger and Serafini (2019) make a distinction between how resilience is conceived in psychology and in sociology. They point out that “...it is self-evident that psychology concentrates on the individual, albeit influenced by his or her social, cultural and physical environment, while sociology is the science of social relations.” Therefore, psychology views resilience more as the ability to endure hardship, whereas sociology views resilience, as it is being used in our current political climate in the UK, as a by-product of austerity politics and the internalisation by the individual of neoliberal policies that shift responsibility from the state to the individual (Diprose, 2015; Gill and Orgad, 2018; Mirowski, 2014; Newsinger and Serafini, 2019). This adds a political dimension to the concept that is absent from the psychological definition. These arguments are contextualised as a response to the 2007/8 world banking crisis and the introduction of austerity politics in 2010 that brought large cuts across government spending<sup>19</sup>. This has resulted in a situation where “...power and responsibility can be redistributed in cultural sectors” (Newsinger and Serafini, 2019, p. 2), with the cultural worker often bearing the cuts that have come from the funding decisions above. On the individual level, Diprose (2015) succinctly views it as a message that participants have to lower their expectations of what is achievable for them.

Resilience is also viewed as being a highly gendered and racialised concept with one study identifying that, in women’s media, stories of resilience are often of white middle-class women who are viewed as paragons of resilience with their ability to lean into hardship and prevail (Gill and Orgad, 2018). This narrative excludes women who do not fit that profile and suggests that they are deficient if they are unable to withstand similar quantities of hardship

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapter Three for a more fulsome discussion of austerity politics and their impact on the UK creative industries.

and stress and not find a triumph narrative (Ibid.). Resilience is therefore viewed in some of the literature as a way of removing, or ignoring, the impact of class, gender and race on the individual's ability to withstand hardship (Newsinger and Serafini, 2019). This hardship is viewed as being inflicted by state cuts (for example to welfare, housing or funding to the arts), but it is having to be endured by the individual who is told they must develop resilience to lessen the impact of these cuts. Diprose (2015) gives the example of the fuel-poor household who are told to wrap up warm (exercising resilience against hardship) rather than questioning state policies which leave households in fuel-poor situations (p. 49). Diprose points out "perhaps a more pertinent question to ask of resilience is not so much whether it is sometimes necessary, but whether it is something for progressive politics to aspire to." (Ibid., p. 48).

Meyer (2015) points to the roots of personal resilience and argues for why this encourages inequality:

"...there are some limitations or even hazards when researchers and policymakers focus only on individual-level, or personal resilience. Cultural analysis would suggest that such an individual focus is rooted in western, and even more so, American, ideology that highlights meritocracy and individualism [...] meritocracy and individualism exalts personal triumph over adversity—the very essence of resilience. But such ideology can itself lead to negative health impacts on disadvantaged populations. This is because despite our thinking of personal resilience as an attribute of the person, not everyone has the same opportunity for resilience when the underlying social structures are unequal [...] the opportunity structure—the social, economic, and political structures that make success possible in society—are not equally distributed. Racism, homophobia, sexism, socioeconomic inequality, and other social disadvantages limit individual resilience. When individual resilience becomes an ideal, it can lead to adverse health outcomes through both its policy implications and actual increase in stress exposure to disadvantaged social groups." (p. 211)

Diprose (2015) likewise makes a link between capital and resilience, in that those with higher amounts of economic and social capital are better situated to be resilient, while Newsinger and Serafini (2019) link resilience to the ideal

of the 'bohemian artist'. They note that the individual artist is observed to adopt the idea of resilience and add it to a narrative of the bohemian artist who must endure hardship in order to facilitate their individual creative life (pp. 13-14) – a phenomenon they term 'romantic resilience'. The artist views their ability to withstand precarity as a "defining identity trait" (Ibid. p. 14) and resilience becomes part of their performative act that demonstrates that they "have what it takes" (Ibid.) to be an artist. They view that their possession of this trait is not necessarily possessed by all artists, which they perceive, gives them an edge. "As artists adhere to and reproduce a discourse of resilience, they contribute to establishing resilience as a dominant trait or attribute in the contemporary identity and social imaginary of the artist." (Ibid., p. 15). However, this discourse of resilience does nothing to resist the reach of neoliberalism, austerity or the precarity of artistic labour. In this light, resilience is viewed as an individual survival strategy, an example of the myth of the individual overcoming the odds, rather than a way to challenge the pervasive systemic harm done by austerity and the social structural inequality (Gill and Orgad, 2018; Newsinger and Serafini, 2019). Resilience becomes one more of the 'artistic identities' that the artist must amass to prove their devotion to art (Bain, 2005).

These critiques of resilience as an individual approach to counter precarity are rooted in the literature of sociology. I now turn to the entrepreneurship literature to view resilience through that lens, while continuing to contrast with opposing arguments from sociology, in order to thoroughly interrogate these concepts which are fundamental to my research.

## **Entrepreneurship**

Entrepreneurship is about identifying opportunities in a market, imagining new ideas and seeing them through to create something new (Bridgstock, 2013; Hartley et al., 2013) and there are many similarities between the artist and the entrepreneur, for example in their ability to see opportunities that others do not see (Ibid.). Also, a key similarity is developing the ability to

overcome adversity (*cf.* Szirmai et al., 2011), or indeed, to be resilient. One of the few researchers to discuss entrepreneurship in relation to the actor is Essig (2009) who writes about infusing the entire theatre school curriculum with a spirit of entrepreneurship (*cf.* Chang and Wyszomirski, 2015; Fillis and Rentschler, 2010; Gustafson, 2011; Hart, 2020; Hong et al., 2012; Patten, 2016). Essig plays on the original English translation of entrepreneur (coined by Say in 1803) to mean ‘adventurer’ and asks “...what are theatre artists if not adventurers?” (2009, p. 117). She envisions a curriculum that encourages: “taking risks (artistic, financial or personal) to create one’s own opportunities” (*Ibid.*, p. 118), developing an “...‘entrepreneurial mindset,’ meaning they are more creative, better at handling ambiguity, better at teamwork” (*Ibid.*) as well as teaching them how to “...recognize or create opportunity, manage and direct their careers, and launch their artistic ‘enterprise’.” (*Ibid.*, p. 119). She advocates clarity of vision and understanding market need (*Ibid.*, p. 120) and suggests that their marketability lies in their uniqueness. The theatre artist “...can exploit business knowledge and business practices to create opportunities for creative practice.” (*Ibid.*, p. 124). By doing so, “...students will be better prepared to manage the complexity and ambiguity of a theatrical career.” (*Ibid.*). As an actor myself, I respond to the inherent agency in Essig’s remarks as it suggests that the actor has the ability to take action even when marketplace and structural inhibitors might suggest otherwise. However, sociological conceptualisations can be critical of entrepreneurial narratives in connection with the arts as seen above.

Narratives of entrepreneurship encourage both competition with others and, crucially, competition with the self (Ross, 2009; Scharff, 2016). This encourages autonomy and a view that success rests with the individual and their actions, which this literature argues are neoliberal ideas and deny any role that the larger structure plays in the individual’s ability to succeed. This is especially true around the assumption of risk (Scharff, 2016) where the individual takes on risk, like a company would, as they view themselves as a business entity separate from being a person, an internalisation of the logics

of neoliberalism (Gill and Orgad, 2018) and, as Gill has written about previously, also encourages systemic discrimination (Gill, 2014). McRobbie (2016) is critical of what she perceives to be a movement to sell the glamour and excitement of entrepreneurship to young people, instead of encouraging them towards more traditional (and secure) forms of employment. McRobbie identifies that the narratives of 'entrepreneurship' often only speak of the 'success stories' and "how all the hard work eventually paid off" (2016, p. 12). Where risk is acknowledged it is "...written into the excitement of the undertaking [...] Insecurity is seen as part of the adventure." (Ibid., p. 15). When things do not work out, we saw above how suffering (and enduring) can become part of the bohemian ideals associated with resilience (Newsinger and Serafini, 2019). Scharff (2016), who has examined neoliberalism and entrepreneurship amongst female classical musicians, found that positive narratives of entrepreneurship can be curtailed by market forces: "In a context where the negative repercussions of deregulation were most acutely felt, entrepreneurial discourses ceased to be prevalent" (Ibid., p. 116).

Entrepreneurship literature has engaged with the concept of resilience or self-efficacy which gives insight into how entrepreneurs face challenges. I believe this has relevance to actors trying to get ahead in a competitive and precarious market. Doern and Goss (2013, 2014) show how negative emotions in Russian entrepreneurs have a constraining effect on entrepreneurial motivation and activity, directing attention and energy away from further developing their business. Doern (2017) has undertaken research into small businesses that were affected by the London riots of 2011, examining how they use existing resources (social, economic, and personal) as tools of resilience for themselves and their businesses in response to the crisis. Her research finds that these small business owners rely on a mixture of social networks, economic support, and critically, personal strength, such as inner strength, self-belief or self-determination in order to rebound from the crisis. She found that where entrepreneurs were able to use existing resources, and draw upon new ones, they were able to

be resilient and were far more likely to rebound, whereas where these resources are lacking, or they are unable to draw upon them further, they often end up in further distress and vulnerability (Doern, 2017). Her research considers how these resources can be proactively built up and how this is preferable to reactively trying to access them while in a distress situation, while also signalling that future research is needed into better understanding proactive and reactive strategies used by entrepreneurs and the impact this has on business survival (Ibid.).

In an extension of this work, Doern (2021) uses a boxing metaphor to evaluate how small businesses adapt to the COVID-19 crisis, determining that small businesses increase their chance of survival through four techniques: firstly, by frequently monitoring their business (or *checking the vitals*); secondly, by acting quickly to absorb shocks to their business and taking quick decisive action (or *blocking*); thirdly, by taking skilful moves to avoid future shocks (or *deflecting*); and fourthly, managing expectations and planning next moves (or *tactical awareness*). Collectively, these actions prove to help the small business owners to be resilient in the face of an external crisis and allow them to *go the distance* (Ibid.). Doern's focus on "...the different kinds of strategies entrepreneurs were using to increase their chances of small business survival and get through the crisis without being knocked out" (2021, p. 3) reflects my own research objective to focus on strategies actors (as solo-entrepreneurs) were taking to *go the distance* and avoid *being knocked out*. Again, Doern observes the value of "...being both proactive and reactive at the same time in order to overcome a crisis" (Ibid., p. 8).

Having evaluated a number of arguments both for and against the concept of resilience, this literature suggests that the concept of resilience would be helpful as a lens for analysing my empirical results. While I believe survival is necessary if evaluating the sustainability of creative careers, I also agree with Diprose that "we can do better than survive: we need to reconnect with our conviction, and bounce back from the brink" (2015, p. 55). When I speak

of resilience in later chapters, I am speaking of this reconnection with conviction – for the actor to remind themselves why they continue to want to pursue this path and then to bounce back in order to fight another day. Also, I argue that the individual actor does make a choice to engage in an overcrowded acting market and therefore resilience might be a necessary tool to develop to help them *duck and dive* their way through the challenge in whatever ways they can. This does not deny the privilege that some actors hold that better equips them to do so and how this creates inequality within the profession. We can acknowledge that the market is unfair, take steps to address the structural inequality, and at the same time exploit personal strategies to enact agency, while recognising also that inequality impacts on personal agency.

## **2.4 Structures and Organisations of Work in the Acting Sphere**

This third and final section of the literature review will examine literatures that could be considered organisational studies, examining how actors' work is structured in different markets. It will proceed in three subsections, the first focusing on Germany where there has been a reasonable amount of research undertaken on the structure of work for both actors and musical actors and how they engage with the structures of the German theatre system; the second looks at project-based and network-based work structures in Hollywood feature films; the final section surveys what little similar research there is on the UK market, which is particularly focused on the UK film industry. The aim of this final section of the literature review is to highlight a gap in the literature about the structure of actors' work in the UK and how that might be addressed through my research.

### **Resilience and Acting – German Musical Actors**

I would like to now consider a case study of resilience framed specifically for actors, as argued in relation to musical theatre actors in Germany in the work

of Ibert and Schmidt (2012, 2014). They discuss how there are high levels of competition within the market and then deconstruct this perception of competition for actors and argue for resilience as a tool for the actor to counter this. The abstract concept of *the market* is explained by Ibert and Schmidt as: "...the market constitutes itself on the basis of concrete situations, i.e. at a particular time and a given location" (2012, p. 354). This tends to be the audition, which "...forms the central context in which competition is concretized" (Ibid., p. 355). The authors theorise that actors take "...personally experienced competitive situations," or auditions, and then generalise them to form "...an abstract idea of the labour market as a whole" (Ibid.). In this way, the musical actors are socially constructing their own sense of the market and the competition in the market. The audition is experienced as the place where "...supply and demand coalesce..." (Ibid., p. 359). The actor then processes their audition experience and it becomes "...mentally scaled up to form an abstract notion of the market" (Ibid.). In this way the actor is constructing their personal interpretation of their experience of competition and abstracting from their personal experience to construct a picture of the wider industry. Actors learn to develop resilience to deal with this competition – though approaches seem to vary depending on career phase (Ibert and Schmidt, 2014).

Younger musical actors focus on trying to build up labour market experience, through various roles played and musical productions engaged in, in order to help them achieve professional resilience (Ibid., p. 12). The young musical actor hopes that by acquiring the right roles (preferably leading roles) with reputable directors and theatres they will be able to better access auditions or possibly even skip auditions and be cast directly in the future. This future orientated career viewpoint the authors call *telescopic* "... as it is clearly focused on a particular image" (Ibid.). It is also orientated to a future where they feel they will be better prepared than they are today. In doing this, the young musical actor "...almost completely internalize[s] the labor market requirements and make[s] them their second nature" (Ibid.). Older, more experienced musical actors found that this belief, that experience would

lessen the competition, transpired to be false. The authors find that the adaptation of self towards the marketplace is not the most effective resilience strategy (Ibid.). Instead, actors take a more *prismatic* approach to managing their labour search, meaning they try to access different segments of the market in Germany through having multiple CVs that highlight various facets of their experience and abilities. By focusing on adjacent markets, such as drama or film acting, they try to diversify their work opportunities and income and this is the favoured resilience approach of the more seasoned musical actors. However, Ibert and Schmidt (2014) find that "...institutionalized boundaries between these genres are experienced as highly rigid" (p. 13). Actors therefore, like the prism, have to have different facets that they show to the labour market. They do this by: "...selectively leaving out apparently undesired episodes in their CVs while emphasizing (or even inventing) supposedly relevant experiences" (Ibid., pp. 13-14). Some of these prismatic facets might also be outside of the performing arts, with the authors giving examples of musical actors who have built side businesses in coaching, teaching and training. These paths might both subsidise performing careers and also provide appropriate exit paths when performing is no longer feasible (Ibid.). Ibert and Schmidt (2014) consider the differences between the early part of the musical actor's career when they are looking to adapt to meet opportunities in the market compared with the latter part of their career where "...it becomes increasingly important to become adaptable to a broader spectrum of opportunities, including exit scenarios" (p. 1). This need to consider broader career options has two motivations: the low demand in the market for roles with a playing age over 45 and the accumulated physical and vocal strain from performing in musical theatre (Ibid.). They discuss how careers for musical actors fluctuate and the changes dictate how the individual musical actor constructs their version of 'resilience'. In the volatile market of musical theatre:

"...the concept of resilience can abruptly change its meaning. During phases of relative stability, it seems most promising to adapt oneself to foreseeable requirements posed by the environment. In more turbulent phases, however, measures to enhance adaptation are no

longer helpful. Adaptation too much to one specific environment might even restrict the ability to explore unknown or disregarded strategies that would open up new avenues of development. Paradoxically the valued entity has to change to stay the same (Ibid., p. 2).

This creates a scenario where the musical actor has to “...make a choice between further exploiting known strategies or investing in explorative new avenues.” (Ibid.). The authors take the creative labour concept of volatile labour markets and reframe it by considering the individual’s response through adaptation or adaptability to the market. This helps to “...better grasp the role of social construction, perceptions and agency in individual strategies that seek to respond to fundamental uncertainty and institutional ambiguity on volatile labor markets” (Ibid., p. 6), shedding new light on musical actors and resilience.

### **German Ensemble Actors**

The largest body of literature related to actors’ working lives analyses actors’ work in the German ensemble, or Fest, system. The first observation is that the structure of the ensemble actors’ work blends characteristics of being an employee along with features more commonly observed in self-employment, in what Haunschild and Eikhof (2009) call a *self-employed employee* status. On the one hand the *self-employed employee* has to be “...calculating managers of themselves as human resources” (Ibid., p. 157), while simultaneously seeing themselves as an “intrinsically-motivated bohemian” (Ibid.) working within an organisational structure. They explain that on the one hand those with an ensemble contract are full-time employees of the state with a regular salary, pension and benefits as well as guaranteed acting work for the duration of their contract; within this ‘security’, their time is tightly structured with schedules usually only produced by the theatre one day in advance, meaning they have little capacity to plan for activities outside of rehearsals and performances (Haunschild and Eikhof, 2009), suggesting being an employee. On the other hand, the actor takes on all of the responsibility (including cost) for the ongoing development of their skillset,

undertaking individual research and preparation for rehearsals requiring investment of time outside of the scheduled rehearsals, and an eye constantly on the next year wondering if their contract will be renewed and networking to situate themselves for their next contract – patterns more indicative of a self-employed worker. This dual position, as *self-employed employee*, also plays out in a tension between *artistic* and *economic logic* (Bourdieu, 1986). The actor's *artistic logic* is how they practice their craft and orientate themselves artistically in the hope that this will make them attractive to certain theatre managers who have their own artistic tastes and ways of making theatre, and hire actors who align with this (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007). However, in earning a living, the authors found that: "...for individual artists, professionalization of artistic practices via employment is crucial. Payments are made, that is practices produced with the intrinsic motivation of *l'art pour l'art* earn external, monetary rewards and thus become subject to economic logic" (Ibid., pp. 532-33). In other words, once the actor starts to exchange their acting services for payment (instead of acting being just a labour of love), then *economic logic* prevails. As an example, the authors observe that ensemble actors organise their personal life around their work (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2006) meaning friendships and love relationships with others in the industry become a decision made with an economic logic that enables and favours availability for, and responsiveness to, work opportunities (Ibid.). This subjugation of their personal life for their professional life has an economic logic to it and, despite appearances of art for art's sake or artistic logic, shows that crowded internal and external labour markets<sup>20</sup>, temporary work contracts<sup>21</sup>, and being at the whim of decisions made by theatre managers have put actors under extreme pressure to "...perform and to be employable. Consequently, they show extraordinarily high degrees of market-orientation, self-economization and

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<sup>20</sup> There are significantly more actors than ensemble contracts, so it is easy to replace an actor who has an existing contract (Haunschild, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Most contracts are only for one or two years – occasionally three years – and it is only after 15 years of employment at the same theatre that the actor receives a permanent contract with tenure (Haunschild, 2003).

economization of life.” (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007, p. 530). The trick for actors is to cloak this economic orientation so they appear to be motivated by an artistic logic for reputation’s sake (Ibid.). The authors found that despite an actor’s cultivated air of disinterest in the economic logic – what Bourdieu calls ‘an interest in disinterestedness’ – they are actually “...very aware of their return on investments. They compare time and energy invested in a project to returns in terms of praise by the theatre manager and critics, money and future role assignments.” (Ibid., p. 165).

Organisationally, within the German ensemble system, actors’ careers are boundaryless<sup>22</sup> in that actors tend not to stay in one theatre for their whole career. Instead, an actor’s career is developed by moving from one theatre to (hopefully) a larger more prestigious theatre<sup>23</sup>, by taking on higher profile work outside of their home theatre and by appearing in television and film projects (Eikhof et al., 2012). Thus, actors can find themselves with more than one employer at a time and as such their career can be viewed not as a ‘full-time job’ but as a series of simultaneous and sequential contracts requiring spatial mobility and personal flexibility on the part of the actor to better respond to this shifting terrain (Ibid., pp. 80-81). Spatial mobility, the willingness and ability to move between cities and locations, or to move from one ensemble contract to another, is a requirement at least during the first 20 years of the actor’s career (Haunschild and Eikhof, 2009). It is therefore common to find actors renting apartments (instead of buying) and owning furniture that can be easily moved to accommodate relocation for work

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<sup>22</sup> “Boundaryless careers unfold as people move among firms for projects, develop market niches rooted in competencies and strategies, and create opportunities based on prior performance and networks of professional contacts.” (Jones and DeFillippi, 1996, p. 89)

<sup>23</sup> There are approximately ten A and B house theatres, which are considered the top theatres with theatre managers who are ‘a la mode.’ (Eikhof et al., 2012, p. 73). These theatres can be found in the largest cities and they have the largest budgets (Ibid.). Out of the 2,350 contracts for actors at any one time in Germany, approximately 400 are at one of these top theatres, so competition is steep for one of them. Once you secure it, competition is steep to keep it (Ibid., p. 75). Geography then becomes a barrier for actors at smaller theatres as theatre managers attend performances at other theatres, but generally only in selected cities, making those actors working in smaller centres invisible: “Talent is spotted in Berlin, Hamburg and Munich, not in the provinces” (Haunschild, 2003, p. 919).

opportunities and generally living a nomadic lifestyle socialising and engaging romantically with other actors who share a similar nomadic and work-focused lifestyle (Ibid.). Eikhof and Haunschild (2006) propose that it is the adoption of this 'bohemian lifestyle' that helps to smooth over the many compromises required of their work. They show how this assumption of an art for art's sake priority of pursuing meaning in one's work can function within a market economy where actors have to compete for opportunities. They propose that the adoption of a bohemian lifestyle acts as a bridge between the actor's desire to live their creativity and the need to address economic self-management. The actors in their study perceived their work as "...a vocation rather than an occupation and felt called to devote their working life to the production of theatre as a greater good" (Ibid. p. 238). They highlight a tension that exists between art for art's sake ideals on the one hand and on the other a need to act as 'entrepreneurs of themselves' in a calculating manner in order to manage their careers. Examples of this include viewing their work environment as a 'theatre family' (Ibid., p. 239), which can justify the exclusion of friendships or relationships that exist outside of the occupational community (Ibid.) and viewing strategic career information gained through networking as 'theatre gossip' traded in the theatre canteen or at premier celebrations, thereby cloaking its economic motivation (Ibid. p. 238).

Eikhof and Haunschild (2006) discuss that despite an outward appearance of having security within this ensemble contract system, the actor is in fact precarious in their employment as their contract needs to be renewed each year. Haunschild (2004) points to reputation and social capital being the major currencies that the actor tries to accumulate and use to promote themselves within this market and to stay in employment (whether by having their contract renewed at their current theatre or by securing a contract at a new and hopefully better theatre). There are a limited number of roles per play that allow the actor to build their artistic reputation and everyone in the

ensemble is competing for these roles<sup>24</sup> (Eikhof et al., 2012). Casting within ensembles becomes highly politicised and viewed as a public declaration of an actor's value and worth within the ensemble (Haunschild, 2003). This is significant to the actor because the value of their stock goes up based on the roles they are assigned and the directors with whom they work (Ibid.). Agents are of "little importance in the German theatrical employment system" (Ibid. p. 921) so actors have to build their own professional network through people they have worked with and who know them in order to advance their career.

Actors have to go where the work is. For actors with a family and other non-work commitments this necessary spatial flexibility can prove to be a barrier to their engaging with the labour market (Eikhof et al., 2012). Women with caring responsibilities are viewed negatively by those in a position to give them opportunities, thereby further constraining their careers<sup>25</sup>. This leaves female actors with a choice: "the worker either remains childless and mimics the male career path or she compromises her career significantly – accepting smaller roles, working freelance or withdrawing from the labour market" (Ibid., p. 83). Female actors are already disadvantaged because competition to gain a place in drama school is greater and there are fewer female roles, particularly in the classic dramatic literature, factors which limit their opportunities to build their reputation (Ibid.). Couple this with the "narrow norms regarding corporeal aesthetics" (Ibid., p. 82) which disadvantage female actors more than their male counterparts and we find women dealing with more inequality in the workplace<sup>26</sup>. This intensifies as they enter 'middle-age', which authors define as 'over age 35' for women in theatre. At this age the available roles disappear rapidly leaving, generally, only 'mother-type roles'. There is considerable stigma if these roles are taken on too soon and

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<sup>24</sup> At the larger theatres these roles are often filled by guest artists, which means that ensemble actors are competing both within their ensemble and with the external market (Eikhof et al., 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Eikhof et al. (2012) speak of male theatre managers and directors who view female actors as having 'lost their bite' (p. 83) if they have competing non-work responsibilities.

<sup>26</sup> See Dean (2005, 2007) for a UK perspective, and Dean (2008) for a European perspective on this.

therefore female actors try to avoid these roles for as long as possible; but too often it comes down to playing the mother or not working at all (Ibid.).

The authors question the interplay of structure and agency faced by the actor within these career constraints. Their view is that the constraints "...combine as a set of conditions under which individual agency in career development centers on maintaining a constant state of readiness, of constantly being able to respond to the needs of the industry" (Eikhof et al., 2012, p. 84). They question what toll maintaining this constant 'readiness' takes on the actor. The authors signal a need for further research to understand in more detail the interplay of these features and the influence they have on "... when, how and why creative workers pursue and quit careers" (Ibid., p. 85).

What makes the work of Eikhof and Haunschild stand out is: firstly, the thoroughness with which they have interrogated the working practices of ensemble actors in the German market; secondly, that by examining their work through the lens of labour practices and human resources management practices they have identified how German actors do not fit into existing patterns of labour and how the 'self-employed employee' demonstrates characteristics of both employment and being self-employed; thirdly, they identify how lifestyle, particularly adopting the 'bohemian lifestyle' is a tool for adapting and reconciling their art for art's sake orientation with the need to be market-focused and strategic in building trans-organisational relationships, and how this is a strategy that actors use to balance artistic and economic logics; fourthly, they highlight the gender imbalances that exist in the acting industry and how women are disadvantaged at every career stage.

While I find this corpus of research comprehensive in its scope to examine the working practices of the German ensemble actor, it is also not entirely applicable to the UK market. Haunschild recognises this uniqueness when he states "...in other countries (e.g. UK, USA) neither public subsidies nor stable ensembles are as prevalent as in Germany, [therefore] the German

employment system might be an incomparable case.” (2003, p. 925). A few key facts about the German state theatre system quickly establish how it differs from the UK market. There are approximately 150 state-supported theatres<sup>27</sup> throughout Germany and each has 12-50 actors in its ensemble on contracts lasting one or two years (Haunschild, 2003). There are few opportunities in the UK for a stage actor to be employed continuously for this period of time outside of long-running West End shows. The size of the market is also incomparable. In Germany, there are about 9,000 qualified and active actors in the market (Ibid.) out of a total German population of 83 million people (i.e. 0.01% of the population are actors). By comparison, in the UK there are about 43,000 qualified and active actors on the market<sup>28</sup> out of a total population of about 66 million people (or 0.06% of the population), so both the quantity of actors in Germany and the concentration of actors for the population are lower in Germany than in the UK. There are some constraints on the German market that do not exist in the UK – Haunschild explains that “...due to language restrictions and the gate-keeping function of drama schools and theatre managers...” the German system is a largely closed one (2003, p. 910). Even with a restricted market, there are more actors than jobs. In 2000/01 only 2,413 out of 9,000 actors had ensemble contracts, or approximately 27% of actors. A total of 7,314 actors worked as ensemble or on guest contracts in both private and public theatres. German workers’ statistics show there was a 22.6% unemployment in 2000 for all of the performing arts in Germany (Haunschild, 2003), which we can compare with the UK unemployment figure for actors which is estimated to be at 92-95% at any time (Guardian, 2009; Nordin-Bates, 2012). For these reasons, I conclude that this literature, while being valuable for understanding some of the workings of German ensemble actors, raises more questions about how

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<sup>27</sup> It is illustrative to consider the level of state support they enjoy. According to Eikhof and Haunschild (2007) the most successful theatre earns 23% of their revenue from the box office, while the smaller theatres earn as little as 5-7% from the box office (p. 527).

<sup>28</sup> I am using for this number the membership numbers from Equity (2018B). Undoubtedly there are actors in the UK who are engaged in the market and are not a member of the union, so this number is likely to be higher.

actors in the UK, who are not working under this ensemble system, structure their working lives. It does however demonstrate the kind of comprehensive sector and geographic-specific research into the structure of actors' working lives that is missing for the UK market and sets an example of the kind of granular understanding about actors' careers that I seek.

I now turn to a body of literature on project-based working patterns in the feature film industry in Hollywood. This literature has become influential in understanding how project-based work structures operate within the creative industries.

### **Project-based work in Hollywood**

Project work is suitable when the individual tasks are complex and non-routine (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Jones, 1996) and feature in markets that are uncertain and changing due to unpredictable and swiftly changing consumer demand (Jones, 1996) which makes it nearly impossible to predict success (Faulkner and Anderson, 1987). Projects are a way to minimise the risk, given the uncertain outcome (Ibid.). Projects rely on informal personal networks rather than formal search and hiring processes (Jones, 1996). The literature tells us that this kind of network organisation helps to manage the risk of the project as each individual brought on board is vetted – individuals with significant experience are sought out for each role (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998) and where possible labour is drawn from a small pool which builds and reinforces recurrent ties (Faulkner and Anderson, 1987). This highlights how one's social capital and reputation are paramount in network organisations (Jones and DeFillippi, 1996). Hollywood is a "...small socially interconnected network" (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998, p. 133) and the number of ties an individual has determines their location within the network (Faulkner and Anderson, 1987). When joining a new project, a new recruit is socialised into the culture (Jones, 1996) which builds the individual's network and allows their reputation to spread (Ibid.). Each project sustains and/or builds upon the participant's network and anyone in that network could be the link to their

next job (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998). Participants "...work to be in transactions continuously" (Faulkner and Anderson, 1987, p. 888) though this can also result in high demands on personal energy, time and the family life of the worker (Jones, 1996). A project worker's employment terminates when their individual labour on the project concludes, which means to stay in employment they must constantly seek re-employment (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998). As a result, loyalty is to the industry and not an individual firm (Jones and DeFillippi, 1996) as companies form and disband with each project (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998). As the "...work organization is constantly created and recreated with each new project" (Jones, 1996, p. 68) the worker has to renegotiate their right to participate each time (Jones and DeFillippi, 1996).

Project-based work environments are observed to feature a sharp delineation between an elite central core and a periphery (Faulkner and Anderson, 1987), similar to Caves' (2000) *A-List, B-List* distinction. Those in the core group are more likely to use the same people repeatedly than those in the periphery groups (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998) and core members can often be observed to work on subsequent projects together (Ibid.). There are high levels of competition both to enter the industry and then to penetrate the inner core, where few remain (Jones, 1996). Labour must pass a series of steps, starting with gaining access to industry; to do so requires good interpersonal abilities, a high level of personal motivation and the ability to demonstrate persistence (Jones, 1996). Much early work is a form of test and the individual must perform well on every job to build their reputation (Ibid.). This leads to a high degree of uncertainty in the market; for example, which job is going to best develop their reputation, therefore leading to future opportunities (Jones and DeFillippi, 1996)? A career in Hollywood film thus becomes a series of competitions and negotiations in order to keep working (Jones, 1996). Each film credit is an opportunity to demonstrate talent and ability (Faulkner and Anderson, 1987) and the number of films you have completed becomes a proxy for your productivity and capability (Ibid.). Reputation is built through being associated with successful projects, while

projects that fail can diminish one's reputation (Ibid.). However, the authors also state that in Hollywood memory is short and both success and failure are forgotten (Ibid.). A bad reputation takes considerable technical talent or box office success to overcome (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998) and additionally the evaluation of reputation is a two-way process with talent also evaluating employers in order to decide which projects to take on (Faulkner and Anderson, 1987). The individual worker (or employer) develops a reputation built upon their history, which is made up of economic, artistic and social capital (Ibid.), thus their reputation becomes "... an estimate of human capital conveyed over social channels." (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998, p. 134). It is important to note that these researchers are not making a distinction between acting talent and other talent used in the making of film in their description of project-based film organisations. But a general observation that is likely to apply to actors is that where there exists an *oversupply* of talent, producers can obtain human capital more cheaply (Faulkner and Anderson, 1987).

The literature on project-based and network-based working patterns does help to identify how acting work in the UK differs in structure from what we previously saw in the ensemble contract working structure found in the German theatre. However, this project-based and network-based work material does not provide a complete answer to understanding the structure and organisation of UK actor careers for the following reasons. Firstly, the literature I have summarised is American in source and written about Hollywood, so it is not based upon empirical research into UK acting markets. Secondly, while this project literature does acknowledge scarcity (Faulkner and Anderson, 1987; Jones, 1996; cf. Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013 for the UK perspective) and the fact that labour may be working in multiple spheres of work (portfolio and protean working patterns) (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013), it does not examine how that is structured and the difficulties of sustaining job searches, not to mention social networks, in multiple employment spheres – both their preferred employment sphere and their survival jobs that fill the gaps.

## **Project work and scarcity**

I signal above that the research into project-based work in Hollywood does not really address how contract working operates within a climate of scarcity; however, we can obtain some answers to this by returning to the German musical actors research of Ibert and Schmidt (2012, 2014). These musical actors work outside of the ensemble model and are examples of multiple job holding (Abbing, 2011; Alper and Wassall, 2006; Menger, 2006; Throsby, 2001) in actors. Multiple job holding becomes necessary for these actors because a musical contract is not a full-time contract. The musical is just one part of the repertory season at a state theatre, but it might only be programmed for a handful of performances per month spread over a period of several months (Ibert and Schmidt, 2012). Because of the irregularity of performances, enough income to live on is not generated, so the musical actor either tries to take on additional guest roles in theatres that can work around this existing contract, or it becomes necessary to take on additional work either adjacent to performing (i.e. teaching or directing) or in an unrelated industry such as bar work (Ibert and Schmidt, 2012). All of the musical actors interviewed in their research did other forms of work beyond performing. These jobs served to "...counter uncertainty regarding income by spreading risk" (Ibid., p. 354). This included entrepreneurial activity to generate their own creative work, with examples given including developing solo performances, writing plays, performing with bands or creating theatre pieces. However, in most cases these projects were considered secondary and were sidelined when preferred theatrical employment became available (Ibid.).

These actors are seeking work across the German-speaking performance sphere, including Austria and Switzerland, which means that how they combine different forms of occupation is informed by how they need to be spatially-mobile and flexible to engage with the market and how this creates uncertainties specific to musical actors (Ibert and Schmidt, 2012). They

experience frequent changes in employment status from freelance to salaried to self-employed forms of employment. Work is on a project basis and even salaried employment periods are on fixed term contracts (Ibid.). In an attempt to earn a living, the musical actor takes on different forms of employment, both consecutively and also simultaneously (Ibid.); however, these patterns fall outside of the norm for German employment, making it difficult for the musical actor to access the German social security provisions during periods of unemployment. In addition, the spatial demands required for the musical actor to access their market challenge the norms of the labour market in Germany requiring 'new rules of the game' (Ibid.). It is also the musical actor's responsibility to maintain their own employability, requiring them to be constantly looking for new work and to take on an entrepreneurial role in the ongoing preparation for job market activities, which may include taking 'underpaid positions' in "...the hope to eventually access secure segments of the labour market" (Ibid.).

### **UK TV and Film Industry**

Project-based working structures have been examined in relation to the UK TV, film and audio-visual industries. For example, Blair (2001, 2003) observes in film that groups of freelance workers within departments sometimes form *semi-permanent work groups* under a Head of Department with this group moving collectively from one project to another (with the Head of Department taking on responsibility for finding the next project for the group), thus bringing some increased stability to the work prospects of those in the group and disrupting some of the uncertainties that come with a new group of individuals forming with each project.

While research into project-based work structures in Hollywood film observed an elite central core of workers who were hired, and worked frequently together, and a periphery of those who were employed less (Faulkner and Anderson, 1987), Blair (2001) challenges that positioning the market as dual labour market, with a core and periphery, is an oversimplification and that in

the UK film market “...movement within and between projects and work groups” (p. 167) means that a dual labour market understanding does not fully capture the nuance and flux of project work in film.

UK film/TV/media research has also focussed on issues of inequality within the sector, for example that of Wing-Fai et al. (2015; *cf.* Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012; Randle et al., 2015) who point to gender inequality, particularly exacerbated by parenting and caregiving responsibilities which, given the job requirement to appear fully committed to the freelance work, the female workers feel unable to advocate for any time off needed for familial responsibilities leading to a “...culture of silence” (p. 63). Further, they find that even the *potential* threat of female labour requiring time off for caregiving is used to justify hiring male labour (*ibid.*). Overall, gender inequality is reinforced through intersectional layers of age, parental status, class, disability and geography, which make it harder for women to sustain a career in film and television leading to women managing to ‘get in’, but rarely ‘get on’ in the industry (*ibid.*; *cf.* Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013).

Eikhof and Warhurst (2013) observe a similar phenomenon in the UK film industry that was observed above by Ibert and Schmidt (2012) for German musical performers, that nearly half of workers in UK film and TV (*cf.* Dex et al., 2000) are dependent on other jobs outside of the industry to support their work within the industry (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013, p. 9). They point out the constraint this brings as “...having to pursue other, non-familial sources of income can constitute a double disadvantage, limiting the time available for creative work and curtailing opportunities for networking and sourcing the work” (*ibid.*, pp. 9-10; *cf.* Friedman et al., 2017). Beyond the scarcity of work, we find that even when the artist is able to secure work, the reality for some is that:

“...unsocial working hours and geographical flexibility required in the creative industries add further constraints for workers with childcare

responsibilities, and such workers are predominantly female. Women find it particularly difficult to reconcile the long, unsocial working hours and working away from home with care commitments.” (Ibid., p. 11)

Again, as we have seen previously in much of the research that gets close to explaining the complicated factors that contribute towards careers and working lives within the creative industries, the authors are explicit that more research is needed to develop a more granular understanding: [there is a] “...pressing need for more research of production within the creative industries and, with it, better understanding of work and employment. Assumptions and assertions must be displaced by evidence” (Ibid., p. 18).

Finally, I will end with definitions of the more generic *portfolio* and *protean* careers models. The portfolio career (Blackwood et al., 2019; Handy, 1989), refers to a handful of concurrent jobs, or multiple streams of income, held by one person. “In an ideal scenario, such a portfolio is pro-actively assembled to suit individual needs” (Reid et al., 2016, p. 34). Introducing other forms of employment or sources of income allows the actor to subsidise their acting work and/or to support themselves between acting engagements, thereby spreading the risk. This ‘portfolio’ reference is a term that appears frequently in career literature particularly related to music careers where a portfolio of activities allows a musician to diversify their income sources and spread the risk (*cf.* Bartleet et al., 2012, 2019; Bennett and Bridgstock, 2015; Clague, 2011). A second model of multiple job holding is the protean career (Hall, 1976; Reid et al., 2016). The term was first used in this context by Hall (1976) to describe a worker who adapted the external form of their career to align with their personal values and their own definitions of success. The term, particularly in relation to workers in the creative industries, is now used more to describe a worker who makes changes driven by survival or in reaction to dangerous or precarious situations and is a “reactive manoeuvre to remain employable and attractive to the market” (Reid et al., 2016, p. 34). Named after the Greek god Proteus, who in anticipation of danger could change his shape in order to prevent capture, it is now used to describe a chameleon-like job structure where the creative worker adapts the external

form of their work to respond to opportunities and threats in their work environment. In terms of the actor, we might consider this as going from working as an actor in a play, to then, when faced with unemployment, taking work in a bar. The outward form of the employment (or 'gig') is different, even though the actor is the same, and is a strategy to avoid the dangers of unemployment.

## 2.5 Research Questions

One of the key purposes for undertaking this literature review was to identify gaps in the current knowledge to aid me in formulating research questions for my empirical study. Therefore, after reviewing the existing literature, I have developed the following research questions:

**RQ1.** Given the precariousness of pursuing an acting career, what strategies have mid-career UK actors found to aid them in sustaining a career over a longer trajectory of time?

**RQ2.** How can a creative entrepreneurship approach help with sustaining a career in a competitive and crowded creative field?

Through exploring these research questions, I aim to generate a better understanding of the proactive and reactive actions taken by actors, as labour within the creative industries, as well as portfolio working patterns of mid-career actors in a competitive and crowded field. While my focus will be on mid-career actors, the knowledge generated can be applied more broadly to freelance workers in the creative industries.

This chapter focused on the academic literature relevant to the structure of actors' careers and resulted in the formation of research questions that address gaps in the literature. In the next chapter I will situate this idea of exploring the actors' career structure within the framework of macro-level UK cultural and educational policy. If my questions that emerged from this literature review are about what *agency* the actor can enact, then the next chapter examines the *structure* that has encased the actor.

### 3 Macro-Level Examination of UK Cultural & Educational Policy Impacting Actors

“[Neoliberalism] ...is based on four processes of change in the political economy of capitalism: privatisation, deregulation, financialisation and globalisation. By 2000 these had become the norm in all parts of the world, and although the credit crisis and global recession of 2007-9 called the whole process into question, as of 2012 neoliberalism remains the dominant political philosophy across the world” (Radice, 2013, p. 408).

“The precarious livelihoods and working conditions of creative and cultural workers [...] are widely acknowledged in academic literature [...] However, this has often been invisible in the eyes of UK policy and policymaking” (Comunian and England, 2020, p. 1).

“When Margaret Thatcher’s economic adviser Sir Alan Peacock was told the value of the creative industries his response was ‘I don’t believe it.’ It is unclear whether he meant that the data were flawed or whether he did not want to be persuaded, but the use of the word ‘believe’ is telling. In any event, rational argument only gets you so far. Neither Labour’s creation of an arts minister in the 1960s nor the spending cuts imposed by the Conservatives in the 1980s were based on hard evidence; they happened because the politicians of the day had differing ideas about the function of the state and the role of culture in public life” (Holden, 2006, p. 49).

The insight above of Holden (2006) – that various governments in post-World War Two Britain have had different ideological attitudes towards the role and value of culture and education in UK public life, and the function of the state in delivering culture and education to the public – is key for the discussion of this chapter. In the survey of UK cultural and educational policy undertaken in this chapter, I propose that the interplay between political ideology and national culture from 1979 onwards (when Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government came to power) greatly influences how arts and culture (dis)function within the UK today. This macro-level analysis will be undertaken with a view to better understanding: firstly, the micro-level impact this has on the performer working within this structure; secondly, how governmental policy decisions have exacerbated the precarity experienced

by performers in the UK; thirdly, how social change (encouraged by government promotion of the sector) has created a greater awareness and desire of young people to work within the creative industries; and fourthly, how educational policy driven by market values has systematically oversupplied the market, creating greater competition, which inevitably has led to greater inequality and insecurity for freelance labour within the market. In doing so, this chapter will situate my micro-level enquiry into the structure of actors' working lives within a larger macro framework of government policy. I will show how government cultural policy has resulted in erratic funding and target-driven micro-managing of the cultural sector, which has weakened its infrastructure, while government policy has simultaneously encouraged an oversupply in the training of actors for the market, while stripping the actors' union of any real power to control the market supply or negotiate effectively for better pay and working conditions. The resulting significant imbalance between supply and demand, coupled with an eradication of social welfare benefits that might, in previous generations have helped to ease this precarity, mean that for the average UK actor a sustainable acting career has become unachievable to all but a few. Surveying 40 years of government policy relating to the cultural and educational sectors could be a thesis unto itself, so I have by necessity focused below on only that which is relevant to my examination of the field of acting and performance.

### **3.1 1979-1997 – Conservative Years – Thatcher/Major**

“With the advent of Thatcherism, culture came under attack both ideologically and financially, and was reduced to backward-looking nostalgia in the service of strictly instrumental economic ends” (Holden, 2006, p. 19).

“The Tories started their long march in the 1980s by ripping through Britain's socialist institutions: trade unions were shackled, publicly owned enterprise was privatised and council housing sold off. The results were clear: a few people got very rich, poverty rose and inequality widened. No subsequent government reversed these changes, instead bolstering them” (Fischer, 2020).

In the 1979 election, the Thatcher-led Conservative government won the general election with a 43-seat majority. Conservatives would win three further elections, leading UK government for 18 years. There is a case to be made that many of the market troubles for performers in the UK can be traced back to the election of Thatcher, including the eradication of arts funding and the political implementation of a project of neoliberalism<sup>29</sup> and enterprise culture. Thatcher advocated business sponsorship for the arts, rather than state funding – a thread that can be traced to today – and focused on opening up much of the UK to free market economics, including the arts. I will start by considering Thatcher’s mission to break up the power of the unions as having a lasting impact on the UK acting market.

### **Union Breakup**

The Thatcher government made a priority of breaking the hold of the unions, which she perceived made Britain uncompetitive in a global economy. Reducing the unions’ ability to disrupt work through lengthy strikes – such as those seen in the Winter of Discontent prior to her election – were key government priorities from the late 1970s onwards and during the 1980s the Conservatives succeeded in making it increasingly difficult for strike action to take place. They ended any *closed shop* requirements for workers in particular sectors to have to belong to the relevant union, thus eradicating their power to negotiate collectively and make demands as a unified body representing all workers in that sector. This action was directed towards the UK miners – politically conceptualised as the ‘enemy within’ – but actors, and their union, Equity, were unintended victims.

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<sup>29</sup> Neoliberalism is a school of economics and politics that aims to minimise the role of the state in all aspects of society, relying on *free markets* to regulate instead (Davies and Sigthorsson, 2013). Mould (2018) defines it as: “...the marketization of everything, the imprinting of economic rationalities into the deepest recesses of everyday life” (p. 11).

The British Actors' Equity Association, now called Equity, the union that represents actors in the UK, was formed in 1930 by a group of West End actors who united to protest against poor working conditions in the theatres (cf. Dean, 2007, 2012). Equity maintained restriction on the numbers of 'cards' that were given out each year to new members, thus limiting the number<sup>30</sup> of actors competing in the field, while also controlling who could call themselves an actor. Strict requirements meant entrants to the profession had to achieve a certain number of paid weeks work in regional rep theatre in order to earn their Equity card<sup>31</sup>, thus ensuring that those calling themselves an *Equity* actor had achieved a certain amount of professional work within the sector. Once they had their 'card,' they could gain access to a greater number of auditions and received a higher status within the industry. To some degree, this controlled the numbers of actors competing in the market.

Equity was one of the last unions to lose the 'closed shop' as a result of legislation (The Employment Act 1990)<sup>32</sup>. Prior to this, Equity wielded enormous influence and was considered one of the more powerful trade unions in the UK possessing the strength to negotiate better wages for their workers (Barnett, 2010). The loss of the closed shop meant Equity could no longer require performers to join its union in order to work within its jurisdiction and this is perceived by many to have weakened the union (cf. Dean, 2007, 2012) while also weakening any kind of threshold that must be met to be considered a *professional* actor and engage with the market, which has resulted in swelling numbers. While union membership in general

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<sup>30</sup> The use of guilds or associations to restrict the flow of entrants to a profession is not new, nor unique to performers. Towse (2010) reports that in 18th Century Italy there were more than 1,000 guilds ensuring quality, guiding prices, protecting trade secrets, guarding intellectual property and managing the flow of apprentices in order to limit supply within industries.

<sup>31</sup> Some also joined through working in Variety.

<sup>32</sup> The rights of unions were further diminished in 1992 by the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act passed by the Conservative government, and again in 2016 the Conservative government's Trade Union Act that further restricts ballot thresholds, picketing action and restrictions on union funding to politics.

across the UK is less than half of 1979 levels today (N. Jones, 2013), Equity's membership numbers have grown by approximately 52% in the last 24 years<sup>33</sup> (Jackson et al., 1994; Equity, 2018A). Also, it is important to note that these numbers only represent 'in benefit members of Equity', i.e. those who are paid up with their Equity dues. Because of the loss of *closed shop* status, Equity membership is not compulsory to work in the UK, so the true number of performers in the market during this period is certainly larger than these numbers indicate<sup>34</sup>. It is also worth noting that as the numbers of actors have grown, there has been an inverse reduction in the availability of social welfare that actors could draw upon for support. Previous generations had relied on what was colloquially referred to as 'the dole', to fill in the gaps between acting jobs and its impact on creative production has been signalled in much research (Lee, 2013; McRobbie, 2002, 2016; Taylor, 2015). The ability to *sign on* and receive a basic income kept performers afloat between acting contracts and the existence of social housing (until the stock was sold off) meant that performers could survive, and raise families, on low wages (*cf.* Clayton, 2016). As we will see, future governments have largely eradicated these benefits, making it harder to sustain a creative practice (Banks, 2017; McRobbie, 2016) thus meaning that while government's actions have increased the number of actors competing in the market, they have also minimised the supports that might have helped buffer them from the economic impacts of this oversupply.

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<sup>33</sup> The Office for National Statistics (n.d.) shows a 15% increase in UK population during the same period of 1994-2018. Also, we can observe that the rate of Equity growth is increasing: in 2012, there were 37,429 members; 2014 – 39,247; 2016 – 41,843; 2018 – 45,575. Later in this chapter I will discuss changes in Higher Education that I argue have fuelled this increase.

<sup>34</sup> Spotlight, the major casting website, has 'more than 65,000 members' (J. Sheehan 2020, personal communication, 16 November). This may be a more accurate reflection of the number of performers competing in the market as the vast majority of professional casting is done through Spotlight making membership compulsory for any actor wishing to access those auditions.

## **National Lottery**

In 1993, Thatcher's successor, Prime Minister John Major, established the National Lottery as a mechanism to generate revenue that went to five non-departmental public bodies for distribution, including what was then the Arts Council of Great Britain. This was a major shift, moving support for the arts from a completely centrally funded activity, to one partially funded from what might reasonably be thought of as gambling. Firstly, this signalled that art and culture were not important enough, like health or education, to be completely funded centrally as a public good (Holden, 2006). Secondly, another drawback of this lottery funding was that it could not be used for producing art, but instead could only be spent on one-off capital projects, either building new buildings or restoring old ones. This resulted in many impressive theatres across the country with little money to fund performance creation (Heartfield, 2005). The other problem with lottery funding was that the majority of people playing the lottery were working class, who were de facto indirectly funding the largely elitist metropolitan 'high-art' companies, such as the Royal Opera House (the largest recipient of public funding in the UK) who cater largely for upper- and middle-class London audiences. This acted therefore as a 'reverse Robin Hood phenomenon' or robbing from the poor to give to the rich (Walmsley, 2015).

## **Higher Education**

The foundation of HE was already eroding prior to the Conservatives coming into power, thanks to a decision in 1976 by the then Labour government to end the previous system of five-year plans in favour of annual settlements (Radice, 2013). The result of this was that "Universities were now required to negotiate in effect continuously with central government, in a national context of runaway inflation, budget deficits, deindustrialisation, and widespread industrial unrest" (Ibid., p. 411). A pay freeze was implemented for university lecturers and formal academic tenure was abolished, making it easier for academics to be fired. This was followed by the introduction of 'full cost fees'

for overseas students, who became a major source of discretionary funding for universities (Ibid.). Finally, strict controls of undergraduate student numbers, married with continuous declines in 'per student funding', resulted in rising student/staff ratios and increased class sizes – all summed up in celebratory terminology as *efficiency gains* (Ibid., pp. 411-2). These actions began a process of moving HE towards the free market; the implications of which we are still seeing today.

### **3.2 1997-2010 – Labour Years – Blair/Brown**

“When New Labour came to power, a set of socially instrumental outcomes was added: in addition to regeneration and ‘the creative economy’, culture was expected to help reduce crime, promote lifelong learning and improve the nation’s health” (Holden, 2006, p. 19).

“...the New Labour Party, under the leadership of Tony Blair, refined the now globalising creative industries policy framework, which sought to join together the value-adding promise of symbolic production, the intellectual property imperative, and the enterprise culture of Thatcherism” (de Peuter, 2014, p. 264).

Labour leader Tony Blair was elected in May 1997 with 418 out of 650 seats in Parliament, thus ending 18 years of Conservative leadership in the UK. After lengthy Conservative leadership, Tony Blair’s New Labour party was swept in on a tide of ‘Cool Britannia’ that promised a new renaissance of culture, originally conceptualised as the ‘cultural industries’ and now positioned as the ‘creative industries’. The numbers of people working in the cultural sector were swelling, with 600,000 people, or 2.4% of the working population, employed in the cultural sector in 1996 (Hewison, 2014). On the surface, the Labour years under Blair and Brown represent a ‘golden age’ of the arts in the UK. In 1997 the cultural scene in the UK was in a “decayed and fractious state, stale and starved of public funding” (Ibid., p. 1); however, by 2010, when Labour was voted out, the UK arts scene was very different. Government funding to the arts had doubled, free entry to museums and galleries had doubled footfall numbers, and significant building had taken

place across the UK's cultural infrastructure, while theatre companies such as the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and the National Theatre were thriving. However, Labour had maintained many of the neoliberal ideological principles introduced under the Thatcher government, adding ever-increasing layers of managerialism that shifted the focus in the arts from making art to generating revenue. Market forces, capital building projects, ticket sales, increased access, social inclusion, a focus on marketing and outreach, and drives to increase corporate sponsorship and private philanthropy, became increasingly important. Culture's value increasingly became evaluated based on meeting economic and social targets, rather than artistic or public-enjoyment targets (Holden, 2006). The arts were also now given an explicit moral objective, tasked to deliver "...lower long-term unemployment, less crime, better health and better qualifications" (Ibid., p. 29). This saw a shift from intrinsic values – the intellectual, emotional and spiritual benefits of the arts – to an evaluation based on their instrumental value, which reflects their ability to achieve social or economic purposes (Ibid.). While instrumental value, in and of itself, is not an inherently bad benchmark for spending public funds, more robust and nuanced methodologies are necessary to measure its impact; on its own, it does not give an adequate account of the contribution of culture to society. The Former Head of the National Theatre, Richard Eyre, wrote in a report for the House of Commons about the future of British Theatre:

"We can justify the subsidized arts on the grounds of cost effectiveness, or as tourist attractions, or as investments, or as commodities that can be marketed, exploited and profited from, but the arts should make their own arguments [...] they entertain, they give pleasure, they give hope, they ravish the senses, and above all they help us fit the disparate pieces of the world together; to try and make form out of chaos." (Eyre, 1998, p. 3).

## Third Way Politics

Blair's *Third Way* politics (Giddens, 1998) suggested a *central rail* approach to politics that was neither on the left nor on the right: "It is a third way because it moves decisively beyond an Old Left preoccupied by state control, high taxation and producer interests; and a New Right treating public investment, and often the very notion of 'society' and collective endeavour, as evils to be undone." (Blair, 1998, p. 1). Much like Thatcher, Blair's Third Way applauded 'entrepreneurial zeal' (Ibid.) and the power of markets over government regulation (Hewison, 2014). This was coupled with a decentralisation and a move to devolve more responsibility for culture to the regional level, which saw cultural autonomy shifting away from London towards the regional commercial and industrial centres where much of the infrastructure for live performance (the theatres) were owned and operated by local councils. These local councils had total control of cultural spending in their area. However, beyond a requirement to provide library services, it was at the council's discretion how and where to allocate arts funding, resulting in uneven provision across the country. When Labour was elected, about £190 million was spent by local council authorities on the arts in England (less than 1% of council spending) and a similar amount spent by Arts Council England; however, the motivation behind this spending had different aims – with the local council prioritising direct social and economic outcomes for their spend (aims increasingly encouraged by New Labour) clashing with Arts Council spending (at that time) that prioritised aesthetic excellence (cf. Harvie, 2013). In order to receive funding, arts producers began to pivot work towards social targets in order to meet Arts Council and local council requirements, branching out of theatres and taking work into prisons and hospitals:

"There is surely nothing wrong in using culture explicitly to reduce re-offending rates or to improve patient recovery times, as long as that is what the professionals have freely chosen to do, rather than been told to do, or obliged to pretend to do" (Holden, 2006, p. 26).

As the Labour years progressed, central funding to local authorities increased (though talk of autonomy still came with strong central policy control) and by 2009/2010 the combined spend across English local authorities on the broader arts and cultural scene (including sport, leisure, heritage, museums and libraries) had peaked at £3.5 billion; however, increased funding also came with an increased focus on ‘managerialism’ that saw *New Public Management* bringing “discipline and values of the market” applied to public service, meaning that cost/benefit analysis became the favoured tool for decisions about policies and programmes (Hewison, 2014, pp. 14-16).

### **DCMS and ACE**

Labour converted the Department of National Heritage (DNH) into the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which brought arts and sport together under the same helm for the first time<sup>35</sup>. Chris Smith, appointed as Labour’s first Secretary of State for Culture in 1997, took over a department that was one of the newest and least important or influential within government with a budget of £1 billion, or less than 0.5% of government spending<sup>36</sup> (Hewison, 2014). Labour devolved culture, sport and tourism to the newly formed Scottish and Welsh governments and returned responsibility to the Northern Ireland Executive.

Arts Council England (ACE) is a non-departmental public body of the DCMS and was formed in 1994 when the Arts Council of Great Britain (founded in 1946) was divided up into the Arts Councils of England, Scotland and Wales. In 2002, the Arts Council of England merged with the former independent regional arts boards into one entity: the Arts Council England (ACE). ACE

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<sup>35</sup> In 2017 digital was added to the name to become the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to recognise the increased importance of digital – a key platform of the ‘creative industries’.

<sup>36</sup> In the 2020-21 budget the DCMS received £1.7 billion – with inflation of 2.8% a year factored in, this is slightly less than 1997 levels (Harris, 2020).

has responsibility for distributing government and National Lottery funding to performing, visual and literary arts in England using the principle of 'arm's length funding' so that, in theory at least, allocation of funding is not dictated by central government; however, this freedom from interference can be illusory when the Chief Executive of ACE is appointed by the DCMS.

Under Labour, ACE's funding grew from £193 to £625 million between 1997-2010 (Mcloughlin, 2014), though it brought with it a focus on the lure of the for-profit 'creative industries' and the economic potential of the arts as well as a shift in focus from artistic excellence to return on investment: "From 1997 to 2013 the Arts Council moved from a protective, alternative or even anti-market position to a more returns oriented, explicitly capitalist one [...] this shift had a number of negative implications" (Mcloughlin, 2014, pp. 69-70, *cf.* Harvie, 2005). While ACE was never quite the arm's length benevolent supporter of the arts that it set out to be, after the global banking crisis of 2008-9, ACE became a:

"...profit oriented organization with an investment rhetoric that promoted the arts as a powerful instrument for rebuilding the economy in the wake of financial collapse. This shift [...] changed ACE. It was no longer a supporter of the arts that also recognized their ability to make money; it was now a distributor of government funds, mobilised in pursuit of sustainable investments" (Mcloughlin, 2014, p. 77).

With these changes, came an altered view towards the creative labour that worked within the market. *Focusing on the Artist*, a section within the 2001 ACE report, states that ACE prioritises support for "artists' careers, circumstances and livelihoods so that they are freer to concentrate on their creative work" (ACE, 2001, p. 6). At this point, ACE still spoke of insulating the artist from market forces. However, by 2009 artists were referred to in ACE reports as 'artists/customers' and competition for limited resources was emphasised (Mcloughlin, 2014). By 2009, ACE thus completed an institutional shift from a state supported arts sector to "... its own market in which pseudo-Darwinian logics hold sway and the desire for return is the driver for an increasingly competitive relationship that must, inevitably, see

some arts organisations 'win' [...] and others 'lose'..." (Ibid., p. 79). This period also saw a merging in ideology between the subsidised and the commercial arts sectors with the values of the commercial sector becoming dominant, making positive economic success the goal for all projects in the arts:

"...by entrenching economic valuation as a dominant measure ACE has narrowed the ways in which it chooses to value the arts and any social contribution they make [...] by 2009, the economic register was not only the dominant gauge of value, but it was also the goal to which the state supported arts were now explicitly directed" (Mcloughlin, 2014, p. 81).

This shift placed the subsidised arts as part of the for-profit *creative industries* whose goal is to contribute to the larger economy. This is a fundamental move away from arts that were largely about aesthetic pleasure and community and had the potential to make money, to arts for which making money is the priority:

"ACE has established a climate of winners and losers. It has shrunk the way we discuss the value of art. It has rendered the variety of arts' potential impacts less visible and, in its final effect, it has instrumentalised the arts into a position of willing economic subservience. All of which is a pretty damning indictment of a funding body that claims developing aesthetic excellence and increasing public access as the goals of its cultural policy" (Mcloughlin, 2014, pp. 82-3).

Holden (2006) makes a compelling argument for why the UK's cultural system fails to satisfy any of its stakeholders. He posits that politicians and policymakers are primarily concerned with the instrumental outcomes of cultural policy, i.e. a focus on the social impact of spend on culture, whereas the professionals (those who make culture) are primarily concerned with the intrinsic value of art and culture, while finally the public is primarily concerned with both the intrinsic value and with institutional value which "...relates to the processes and techniques that organisations adopt in how they work to create value for the public" (p. 17). These conflicting values mean that each group feels that what they are getting is either deficient or their priorities are

not being met. “Politicians want measurable, tangible results that help deliver government policy predictably, cost-effectively and on a mass scale, because that is the job of politics. But professionals work in the cultural field first and foremost because of their commitment to intrinsic values” (Holden, 2006, p. 32). This inevitably results in disappointment when intrinsically motivated artists are forced to pursue extrinsic targets.

## Theatre

Looking specifically at the impact these changes had on theatre, when Labour came to power in 1997, British theatre in general was not doing well<sup>37</sup> having been starved of investment for over a decade with the RSC nearly bankrupt and the National Theatre relying on musicals to keep its doors open (Hewison, 2014). Outside of London, the situation was even worse where the regional ACE funded producing theatres, or reps, were in a bad state with declining audiences and increasing debt loads. In response, in 1998 ACE hired Peter Boyden to produce a report on regional theatre (published in 2000) which confirmed that regional theatres were suffering, as were the new writers, directors, actors and technicians, who worked in, and were nurtured by, the regional sector. In-house productions were falling and the number of actor-weeks, or weeks of employment for actors within the theatres, were significantly down. Boyden’s report spoke of a declining influence that the regional theatres had, particularly for young people for whom “...theatre is no longer a natural part of the process of tribal self-definition and cultural reinforcement which drives leisure choices” (Boyden, 2000, p. 44). As a result of Boyden’s report, in 2002 ACE produced a *National Policy for Theatre in England* committing an additional £25 million a year for the next three years – a 72% increase to ACE’s theatre budget (Martin and Bartlett, 2003). A further £56.4 million was given in the form of project-based Grants

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<sup>37</sup> With the exception of some very successful British Musical Theatre productions such as *Cats*, *Les Misérables* and *Phantom of the Opera*.

for the Arts between 2003-2007, and 23 theatres, including the RSC, were recipients of 'stabilization' funding to aid with their deficits. The *Theatre Assessment 2009* reflected on the results of this additional funding, with positive results including many new artists and companies who had received financial support for the first time, a greater profile and capacity for BAME and disability arts companies, and better working conditions in the subsidised theatre companies, including better salaries, longer contracts, larger and more diverse casts, and longer rehearsal periods (Arts Council England, 2009). The report's findings were positive in all areas except that new writing had not received a boost; however, what the report does not highlight, and a critical issue for the government, was that despite an additional investment of over £100 million to the sector between 2002-2009, audiences had not grown. Despite investing hundreds of millions into culture, between 2005/6 and 2012/13 there was only a 2% increase, from 76.3% to 78.4% for those who had 'attended or participated in the arts' (DCMS, 2012). While this figure suggests that more than three quarters of the population engage in the arts, the data captures those who attend or participate only once per year (as a minimum). A 2009/10 report states that "...only a minority of the population has much to do with the arts on a regular basis" (Arts Council England, 2010, p. 17).

### **Selling the Dream**

During the same period, television audiences were growing for a new hybrid of talent show and public audition process that brought the performing arts as competition into the average UK TV watcher's living room with programmes such as *Opportunity Knocks*, *Stars in their Eyes*, *Operatunity*, *Britain's Got Talent*, *How Do you Solve a Problem Like Maria*, and *Fame Academy*, all promising that money, opportunity and celebrity could be 'won' through public competition, gaining lead roles at English National Opera or in the West End without going through a formal training or working your way up from the bottom of the industry (cf. Gunter, 2014). This led to an increased interest in working in the sector: "vocations are partly nurtured by media

representations of the artist's life – both as an unattainable dream and as the only way of envisioning the job.” (Sinigaglia, 2017, p. 10). The arts (like football) continue to be seen as a way for young people from ordinary backgrounds to achieve fame and fortune, which is linked to strongly held beliefs that the arts are a meritocracy (Banks, 2017; Gill, 2014; McRobbie, 2016; Oakley and O'Brien, 2016; O'Brien and Oakley, 2015). Presenting the arts as a 'winner takes all' economy (Baumol and Bowen, 1966; Benhamou, 2011; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011) encouraged many young people who had a desire to be a 'winner' (Menger, 2006). However, it may also have created an expectation among aspiring performers that undertaking a professional training is not required (Gardner, 2008), lowering any perceived barriers of entry to the acting profession. This aligns with other sociological trends that see a blurring of the lines between the *amateur* and *professional* artists (Holden, 2006). This has come about in the realm of performance partly through the loss of Equity's control of their membership, but more widely within the creative industries through access to technology which allows individuals to record broadcast quality media on their smartphone and potentially reach large audiences for free through digital platforms (Gauntlett, 2018). While many earn little from these pursuits, YouTube and Instagram have presented new avenues of fame and fortune to some lucky individuals and this has made the distinction between a *professional* performer and an *amateur* performer, already eroded by the loss of the union's control over who can claim this term, less distinct.

This is not to say that extrinsic goals, such as fame, money or the 'adoration of stars' (Sinigaglia, 2017), are the only motivator for young people to want to be performers. There is also a strong lure of the promise of self-expression from the arts (de Peuter, 2014) and a draw to the intrinsic satisfaction of being creative (*cf.* Amabile 1985, 1993; Amabile et al., 1994; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). That said, the decision to go from the pursuit of performance for intrinsic satisfaction, to the pursuit of it as a path for employment, is often clouded in a lack of understanding of what that pathway entails:

“Beliefs in the ideology of the gift and of predestination, in the inevitable consecration of the talented, constitute an *illusio* that is necessary in order to belong in the artistic field. These beliefs are particularly strong when combined with a very low level of knowledge of concrete job realities. Hence, the first career steps are the occasion of a sometimes-brutal confrontation between fantasized representations of the artist’s life and the mundane facts of everyday life for professionals in the performing arts” (Sinigaglia, 2017, p. 11).

Whether young people are attracted by the desire for self-expression, or the lure of success and money<sup>38</sup>, the increased exposure of the performing arts on television attracted many who wanted to try to become performers.

Whether the motivation was intrinsic or extrinsic, a greater demand to gain access to the performing arts was met by a corresponding rise in the number of training courses to facilitate this hunger (Benhamou, 2011; Menger, 2006). These social changes, fanning a desire for performer training, were happening while Labour was making significant changes to broaden the scope of the HE system, so in order to further unpack why government policy has led to an oversupply in the acting market, I will now consider Labour’s policies towards HE.

## Higher Education

Tony Blair stated that his three priorities in government were ‘education, education, education’ and Labour set an ambitious target to increase the number of 18-30-year-olds studying in HE to 50% by 2010, while prioritising access to low-income families (Lupton, 2013). This resulted in a rise in both student numbers and total HE spending, while at the same time *per student* resources fell, managerial controls increased, and teaching and research became secondary to the business of education (Radice, 2013). Tuition fees were introduced in 1998 and variable fees (up to £3,000 per year) were

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<sup>38</sup> Adam Smith wrote in 1776 “... the contempt of risk and the presumptuous hope of success are in no period of life more active than at the age at which young people choose their professions” (cited in Towse, 2010, p. 126).

added in 2004, thus beginning a process of shifting the cost of a university education away from taxpayers and onto individual students and their families (Lupton, 2013). Labour made some movement towards their self-imposed HE targets, with 46% of young people attending university in 2009/10 (against a 50% target), but the increase of working-class students had only risen from 27.9% in 2002/3 to 30.7% in 2009/10 (Lupton, 2013, p. 7). While overall university numbers had grown, access to education had only marginally shifted for working-class students.

### **Creative Industries**

While Labour was trying to increase the number of students going to university, they were also rebranding and promoting the arts and culture sectors, transforming them from the more conservative-sounding *heritage sector* or *cultural industries*, to the far more youth-orientated *creative industries*, and they began to aggressively promote the rechristened creative industries as a viable and desirable field for study and work for young people (Comunian et al., 2010; McRobbie, 2016). This rebranding also brought a narrower and more economically motivated understanding (Douglas and Fremantle, 2009) of a cultural sector. However, in championing the apparent successes of the creative industries, the government was also generalising the economic success of small segments of the creative industries as potential success for the entire sector, which was based on a lack of granular understanding that, for example the performing arts do not have the same economic potential as video game development. So, while there were positive economic successes within the creative industries, to paint the sector in its entirety as holding promise of good jobs for all entering it was not an accurate depiction (Comunian et al., 2010; cf. Banks and O'Connor, 2009).

Recognising that the UK's manufacturing sector had been dismantled under Thatcher and was not going to return, Labour shifted its focus to stimulating the *knowledge economy* where the UK could position themselves as leaders.

This also served to move Labour away from their traditional industrial working-class roots and towards a metropolitan knowledge economy elite. It is no coincidence that jobs in the creative industries or knowledge economy seldom came with the kind of union protections that had been fought so strongly against by Thatcher; the Labour government continued the eradication of unions in the UK by selling young people on the glamour and possibility of *entrepreneurship* within the creative industries (McRobbie, 2016). This selling of the creative industries, coupled with a relatively stable economy, has brought about significant growth in students pursuing creative degrees in the UK; with the HESA showing “steady growth of creative subject areas” (Comunian et al., 2010, p. 292). While Labour was celebrating the creative opportunity of entrepreneurship in the creative industries, the 1998’s *New Deal* changes to unemployment regulations continued to eradicate the social safety net that had provided some security to previous generations of artists.

### **3.3 2010-2015 – Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition**

“What have they [the Coalition government] done for *theatre*? They have damagingly shrunk English theatre’s ecology and exacerbated its structural inequality, enhancing its elitism and metropolitanism” (Harvie, 2015, p. 56).

If the Labour years are remembered by some in the sector with fondness, it is in contrast to the ‘austerity politics’ of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government that led the country between 2010-2015. Hewison (2014) compares the ‘golden age’ of the Labour years with the ‘age of lead’ under the coalition government (p. 2). To contextualise the impact of the Coalition years, we need to remember that for 13 years previously New Labour had promoted HE and the creative industries as a land of opportunity, particularly for students from working class backgrounds, which swelled the number of students pursuing creative degrees. As these students graduated, they had high hopes for the opportunities that would await them in the brave new world of the creative industries. It was these increased numbers of

creatives, and the promises they were given, that were then met with the Coalition realities I will now outline. It is also relevant that the changes wrought by the Coalition government were not completely ideologically driven, having come on the back of a global financial crisis in 2008-09 that severely impacted the UK's financial situation for many years. However, how the Coalition government chose to deal with this crisis, and the impact of their choices on the UK in general, and the cultural sector specifically, are the subject of this discussion, and critically the impact these choices had on current and future generations of actors and performers trying to sustain careers in the UK market.

Shortly after taking office, the then Culture Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, announced he was cutting DCMS staff by 50% and moving them out of their offices to relocate with another Whitehall department:

“This can be read as a clear signal that government intended to be even more distanced from policy initiatives and coherence than at any time since the Department [...] had been created by a Conservative government in 1992. It was to revert to ‘Culture’ being a marginal government department with diminished political clout” (Gordon et al., 2015, p. 51).

## **Precarity**

While the Labour government almost tripled the grant-in-aid to ACE from £179m to £453m in 2009/10<sup>39</sup>, the Coalition government, however, within six months of being elected announced an almost 30% cut to the ACE budget, with cuts imposed from spring 2012 (Harvie, 2015). However, the Coalition government should not just be judged purely on economic or numerical grounds, such as through the prism of ACE funding cuts, but also by the *impact* their cuts had on the cultural landscape. For example, in 2010 there

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<sup>39</sup> Despite this funding, the DCMS under Labour was the smallest Department of State (Gordon et al., 2015).

were 854 arts organisations receiving regular ACE funding, but by 2015 this was down to 664, a decrease of 22% (Walmsley, 2015). This was in addition to cuts to England's local authorities, resulting in reduced local council spend on arts, libraries and heritage by 22% across the board (Harvie, 2015); though these cuts were not equally distributed, with some councils, such as Somerset, cutting 100% of their arts budgets during the Coalition period (Walmsley, 2015). ACE's 2010-2020 strategy document already identifies "significant disparities in the level of arts and cultural opportunities and engagement across the country" (Arts Council England, 2010, p. 28) which predates the further 28% government cut to local authorities between 2011-15 (Harvie, 2015; Walmsley, 2015). "These multiple, widespread funding cuts have dramatically diminished England's arts ecology" (Harvie, 2015, p. 57). Alongside multiple cuts to companies (forcing some of them to close down) "...there is a general and pervasive damage caused to innovation, employment and smaller scale companies." (Ibid.).

## **Inequality**

The Coalition government's cultural policy had less of a focus on social instrumentalism (though access to the arts for all despite social or economic background was still a pillar) and more of a focus on financial independence for the arts, forcing arts organisations to find alternate sources of income beyond the government's purse. Reductions in government spend on the arts were 'counterbalanced' by an increase from 16.67% to 20% of National Lottery funds allocated to arts from April 2012 (DCMS, 2015). As noted by Walmsley (2015): "The use of Lottery funding to compensate for cuts in core funding is highly controversial as it appears to contravene the so-called 'additionality principle', which holds that government funding decisions shouldn't be influenced by lottery contributions". At the same time, the DCMS was encouraging arts organisations to find other sources of funding, such as philanthropy and independent fundraising, which was spun as a way for arts and cultural organisations to become "more resilient" (DCMS, 2015). What was not acknowledged was how a reliance on private funding of the arts

exacerbates systemic inequality, with the larger arts companies being better situated to gain funding from the Catalyst scheme (a government matching scheme), therefore allowing them greater leverage to attract private funding (Harvie, 2015). The result of this privatisation of funding is that it puts, according to Harvie (2015, p. 58): "...decisions about what's funded and produced into the hands of an unelected and unaccountable financial elite. It fosters inequality in both what it produces and whom it allows to determine what is produced". This 'winner takes all' attitude at the macro level with companies trickles down to the micro level in how ACE begins to talk about artists. In ACE's 10-year Strategic Framework for the period 2010-2020 they write (emphasis added):

"Without artists there is no arts sector. Talent is our primary resource. We need to support and nourish that talent and ensure that the public understands and values the contribution made to our society by artists of all disciplines. The economic context continues to offer challenges to creative practitioners in building their careers and furthering their professional development. In addition to making grants to individual artists, **we will work with our partners to ensure that our best artists can make a living** while developing innovative work and connecting with new audiences" (Arts Council England, 2010, p. 26).

An A-List/B-List division (Caves, 2000) is not new, but this is the first time, to my knowledge, of ACE expressing a mandate to support 'our best artists' which presumably means not supporting those who fail to meet the grade, which has the effect of further reinforcing A-List/B-List stratification. The result of this funding inequality is that the makers of the work are subsidising the work themselves through their labour outside the performance market. Gardner (2015) writes "Over the last 20 years when subsidy has risen markedly and buildings have expanded and taken on more staff, it is theatre artists who have remained the hidden subsidisers of the arts." (n.p.) Not only are artists subsidising their own work, but we can also see evidence of a freeze or drop in wages of freelance workers in the creative industries during this time. A report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (N. Jones, 2013) found that part-time earnings (representing most freelancers and artists) in the arts have fallen by 5.3%, leading Mark Robinson, former

ACE Director, to ask: “Are we squeezing our key nutrients – the artists and creative freelancers – and widening inequality in our own sector?” (Ibid.). Sir Ian McKellen observes: “One used to be able to live quite handsomely on a West End salary. Now you can’t” (Thorpes, 2010). While wages have been falling, social welfare benefits have largely been cut. This deterioration of the social safety net has made circumstances for UK performers even more precarious, meaning that “... the chances of ordinary people making it in arts and culture are further diminished” (Banks, 2017, p. 107; cf. McRobbie, 2016). While ‘making it’ is a difficult concept to define, given the low earnings that exist in the sector, it is nevertheless indisputable that “...broader cuts to arts and local authority budgets are further reducing opportunities and access to scarce public resources, disadvantaging the very poorest candidates striving to make a living from art” (Ibid.) This is increasing class-based inequality within the sector (Brook et al., 2020; Friedman et al., 2017).

### **Regional Disparity**

Besides financial inequality in the arts, there is also today significant regional inequality. The Arts Council of Great Britain’s (1984) publication *The Glory of the Garden: The Development of the Arts in England*, observed that an inequality of funding between London and the regions led to significant differences in artistic activity across all of England. However, little was done to change this (cf. Harvie, 2015). While there may have been good intentions to boost regional theatre, Dorney and Merkin (2010) write “asked to sum up their perceptions of the history of regional producing theatres in England since 1984, most people would characterise it as an era of crisis” (p. 1). In 2020, the Chair of the Arts Council England, Sir Nicholas Serota, referenced the 1951 *Few, but Roses* and posits a broader more collective vision by writing “we have come a long way since then. With this strategy, we hope to

prepare the ground for a blossoming of creativity across the country...<sup>40</sup>” (Arts Council England, 2020, p. 6). Yet, many cultural critics point to London’s continued hegemonic hold over the majority of cultural jobs. For young performers, the concentration of creatives in London affords much, such as the ability to network in Soho, and the access to industry decision makers that creates a pull resulting in young (and not-so-young) aspiring creatives feeling the need to see and be seen in London. McRobbie (2016) writes: “...there is a spatial dynamic, with only a few urban centres providing anything like the cultural infrastructure for gainful employment in creative fields” (p. 30). McRobbie also points out that in London, a creative freelancer can juggle five jobs and thus survive, whereas working in a less concentrated market they probably have to endure unpaid gaps between single jobs, therefore making creative work less sustainable (Ibid.). Banks (2007) writes about the geographic ‘clusters’ that create ‘centres of gravity’ around core cities that “... possess a critical infrastructure of actors and organizations involved in the emergent media and culture industry sectors – such as London, Los Angeles, New York and Paris” (p. 133). He explains that these core centres offer an economy of scale of production, an accelerated rate of “‘cultural’, symbolic, informational and knowledge flow” (Ibid.), and that the concentration of work facilitates the transactional social exchange that builds creative production (Ibid.). For these reasons, despite efforts to increase regional theatrical and filming production, London continues to be where the majority of professional acting casting is executed, even if the filming or production happens regionally. This puts pressure on professional actors to live in London or within a commutable distance of London (*cf.* Oakley et al., 2017). However, the cost of living in London has increased greatly with a BBC (2018B) study finding a 29% increase in the cost of renting accommodation in London from 2007 to 2017, which is having an effect on

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<sup>40</sup> Little did he know that this was just before COVID-19 would shut down the industry with a real threat of lasting significant damage to the sector. See further COVID discussion in Chapter four.

performers and pushing them to move further out of London (therefore having to extend commutes farther in order to access the labour market).

## **Higher Education**

With reference to the Coalition government's track record in HE, we find that despite an election pledge from the Liberal Democrats not to raise University tuition, in 2012 tuition fees in the UK trebled from £3000 to £9000 per year (Freeman, 2012). This was followed by a decision in 2015 (implemented in 2016) to change the maintenance grants that supported students in their studies to maintenance loans – adding to student debt (Guardian, 2016). A further rise in tuition fees to £9,250 was imposed in 2017. The effect of this has been that many underprivileged and underrepresented students who had gained access to training in the arts in the years leading up to 2010 were now "...more likely to be priced out of pursuing an artistic education or career." (Banks, 2017, p. 107). As has been seen in this historical mapping thus far, the relationship between ideologies of the state and HE have ramifications for actors entering the industry. As such, it is important to interrogate HE in a bit more detail.

### **3.4 Neoliberalisation of Higher Education: Implications for Emerging Performers**

In terms of an oversupply in the UK performers' market, a shift from HE as a *public service* with a focus on *common good* or *public interest* has, through a neoliberal lens, been focused instead on education that prioritises flexibility (particularly seen in casual contracts), targets or a results-orientation, and clearly defined personal and organisational targets (Olssen and Peters, 2005). Student numbers have increased across the sector with little increase in resources (Levidow, 2002) as HE has been forced to compete in a market economy. Theatre and Performance departments have not been immune to this swelling of student numbers and lack of commensurate resource

increases. As student numbers have increased, so has the rise of *specialist* degrees in the performing arts<sup>41</sup>. Where once a *generalised* performance training was offered, and graduates found various specialist niches in which they had interest and could gain experience/employment, we now find a vast array of *specialised* courses, such as: classical theatre, devised theatre, voice in performance, musical theatre, triple-threat musical theatre<sup>42</sup>, applied theatre, world theatre, theatre and social change, actor musicianship, physical theatre, acting and stage combat, acting and contemporary theatre, etc. There has also been a marked increase in the number of specialist MA courses, many of which rely heavily on overseas students paying increased fees. On the surface these specialist courses appear to be addressing a need to improve employability for students by training them for specific market niches, though this could also be seen as a way to disguise a significant increase in overall student numbers studying performance subjects<sup>43</sup>:

“Since the 1980s universities have been urged to adopt commercial models of knowledge, skills, curriculum, finance, accounting, and management organization. They must do so in order to deserve state funding and to protect themselves from competitive threats, we are told. Moreover, higher education has become more synonymous with training for 'employability' [...] By fragmenting people into individual vendors and purchasers, neoliberalism imposes greater exploitation upon human and natural resources” (Levidow, 2002, pp. 1-2).

These specialist courses, especially at the MA level, where their individualised curriculums are sold as either a way to ‘top-up’ a generic training or to allow students to change directions “...both promotes and naturalizes life-long re-skilling for a flexibilized, fragmented, insecure labour

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<sup>41</sup> This is not unique to theatre and performance, Gross and Musgrave (2020) draw the same oversupply conclusion for the training of musicians on music courses in the UK.

<sup>42</sup> I recently saw advertising for a ‘quadruple threat’ musical theatre training degree, which claims to add proficiency on a musical instrument on top of training in acting, singing and dancing to a professional standard.

<sup>43</sup> 30 students on each of four different degree strands suggests a different student experience from 120 students on the same degree; though this does not materially change the oversaturation of the market.

market” (Levidow, 2002, p. 12). This segmentation of student/customers for specific niche markets perpetuates a commodification of education (Ibid.) while also providing job security for academic staff to teach specialised curriculums that only they are qualified to deliver.

Some of these new specialist performance courses promote ‘links with industry,’ another hallmark of neoliberalism in HE (Olssen and Peters, 2005), which seeks to tailor graduates to industry requirements. Where no obvious career path presents itself, or the market is saturated, then the educational panacea is to offer ‘entrepreneurial skills’ to compensate for a lack of any real market demand for the subject area. Mode One knowledge, which was knowledge independent of its use or application, has fallen out of favour under neoliberalism and Mode Two knowledge, which is knowledge created for use and linked to a market environment, has prevailed (Olssen and Peters, 2005). Therefore, if the degree subject is not really linked to an existing market environment, then students are encouraged to develop their ‘entrepreneurial abilities’ to conjure up a market for their skills (cf. McRobbie, 2016). This shifts the risk onto the student. If they fail, it is because they were not entrepreneurial enough, rather than they were sold a skillset that had little market demand. This recognition that the number of students compared to the opportunities available post-study is beginning to be acknowledged in the music sphere, with Gross and Musgrave (2020) writing: “...we cannot keep cramming more and more students into this system while promoting an essentially mythological vision of what the music industry thinks about itself, and selling them the same dream. It is irresponsible” (p. 137). I argue that we need to start acknowledging this reality in the training of actors also; though I have yet to see much evidence of this awakening. I am not advocating that students should not be encouraged to study drama and performance – there are many valuable and positive skills that are developed in the course of acting training – however, as with music, acting cannot be considered to be a “viable, singular career option” (Ibid., p. 137). While many may engage with the acting market, the data explored thus far in this thesis suggests that very few of them will achieve a full-time sustainable living at it, and while many

say that this is commonly understood, there is limited evidence of training courses properly preparing students for this reality. Part of the problem of facing this reality is that the multitude of acting and performance courses are all in competition with each other to attract students. Academics fight to keep enrolment numbers up to preserve their courses and their jobs (*cf.* Radice, 2013), which does not incentivise them to necessarily lead with realistic market evaluations of students' chances of success after completing their degree programme. This selling of *best-case* scenario degree outcomes happens across the spectrum of HE from bachelors to PhD degrees<sup>44</sup> – neoliberalism and market exploitation have seeped into all levels of the institution (*cf.* Olssen and Peters, 2005).

As university courses and programmes have become more focused on producing graduates relevant to the world of work, I want to now turn my analysis to my own teaching of *Professional Practice*, which resulted in this PhD thesis. It may seem contradictory for me to argue that neoliberalism has made education more market orientated, while building curriculum for that market orientation. I believe the market has shifted significantly enough, through the more than tripling of the cost to the student of doing a degree, and the massive oversupply of the market from too many training courses training too many students, that it then becomes essential to equip these students to improve their chances in a market where the odds are stacked against them. We must be training students for the market that exists today, not the one we imagine exists. As Gross and Musgrave (2020) write about music training "...we have to consider the validity of purely vocational courses in a workplace dominated by the gig economy" (p. 138), so too does *Professional Practice* in the realm of acting training need to address the realities of a gig economy in an oversaturated market.

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<sup>44</sup> 70.1% of PhD graduates in the UK have left the academic sector within three-and-a-half years of finishing their PhDs (Hancock, 2020), which points to the scarcity of jobs in the sector. Of arts and humanities PhDs in employment outside of academia, 76.2% are in a non-research role (*Ibid.*)

That said, providing *Professional Practice* does not excuse or compensate for deliberately flooding the graduate market for profit. However, I believe responsibility for this lies with government, the institution, and compliant academics, not students. Therefore, I do not think the burden of trying to make sense of the gig economy and market imbalance should rest on students. Until the significant problems in HE are addressed, students must be equipped as well as possible to survive in a market made worse by the very people who are profiting by preparing them for this market. In the absence of equilibrium, I believe we owe it to students, whom we are charging £9,250 per year for an education, to do as much as possible to prepare them to compete in an over-saturated market of our creation. I therefore do not perceive a conflict of interest in speaking out about neoliberalism in HE, while also focusing on labour market orientation for graduates.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I sought to historically develop an argument which demonstrates how governments of all political parties have successively weakened the cultural infrastructure of the UK through erratic funding and managerialism, stripping the unions of power to control the quantity of workers in their field, selling a glamourised idea of a thriving creative industry, and encouraging many more students to embark on a creative degree, while making the cost of this degree significantly more expensive without improving available resources. These actions collectively have resulted in a significantly greater number of actors competing for opportunities in a precarious cultural market where very few are able to sustain a career, without properly training entrants to this market in how to manage a freelance gig-economy career.

I return to how I opened this chapter with the observation that how culture is viewed in a country, how it is supported (or not) by government, how

individuals are motivated and trained to work in culture, and the working rights and conditions of the workers in the cultural sector, are all directly or indirectly traceable back to political ideology (*cf.* Holden, 2006). This examination of the political ideology for the last 40 years in the UK has been one of neglect and a desire for arts and culture to function with as little financial contribution from government as possible. Free-market forces have been allowed to dominate both culture and education with no view that governments have a responsibility to ensure a healthy cultural and educational ecosystem; instead clinging to the ideology that market forces can achieve this better than government intervention.

## 4 Research Methodology and Methods

This chapter will be divided into two parts: firstly, I will present the analytical process and methodological choices selected to investigate my research questions; and secondly, I will report the audit trail of the research.

### 4.1 Part One: Methodology in Theory

#### Insider Status

The starting point for a project such as this necessarily involves determining my stance in relation to my subject. Given my lengthy professional experience as an actor it would be impossible to remove myself and study actors as an outsider. Therefore, my research stance, by default, is that of an 'inside learner' (Blaikie, 2007): 'inside' referring to my position inside this research group and 'learner' defining my aim to learn more about this group. Insider research has roots in ethnography, anthropology and sociology (Greene, 2014) and can be defined as studies undertaken by one who possesses existing, or *a priori*, knowledge of a particular community and its members (Merton, 1972). The insider can have an advantage as they bring existing knowledge of both the group and the subject so they are starting already with more foundational understanding (Greene, 2014). Also, interaction with study participants may be freer and without judgement, which can lead to the participants opening up more (Ibid.). Finally, an insider status can bring about an easier access to a particular group. However, there are disadvantages, such as an insider can be too subjective due to their proximity to the subject matter resulting in a loss of objectivity. Insider researchers may also hold biases towards the subject; they are frequently 'too close' to raise provocative questions and may project an excessive amount of their personal views onto participants (Ibid.). Hence, any tension between the objectivity of the researcher and the subjectivity of personal knowledge cannot be overlooked. Ultimately, I take the position that

neutrality as a researcher is in fact impossible (Hegelund, 2005), but more importantly undesirable as: “it is exactly the particular, individual point of view, with all of its subjective biases, idiosyncrasies, and distortions, that gives the ethnography its edge, its enlightening effects, its power” (Ibid., p. 660). I therefore determined that to attempt an objective outsider stance in this research project would be methodologically neither achievable nor, in fact, desirable.

With my research stance determined, given my inside experiential knowledge of the subject, it is next important to determine whether to include my own personal experience of acting in the research in the form of an auto-ethnographic approach. I determined that my ‘insider’ stance would inform my understanding and interpretations of the data gathered, but that the position of ‘learner’ compelled me to examine other actors’ views and experiences rather than my own. Therefore, I elected to focus on exploring the experience of other actors and not engage in auto-ethnography. Transparency about my insider/learner position would be necessary, acknowledging that my experience and inside knowledge would indeed impact upon my interpretation of other actors’ experiences, because it is impossible to separate myself completely from this research given that all social research is interpreted through the lens of the researcher (Blaikie, 2007). The argument for acknowledging the subjectivity of all research is “...because it is impossible for fallible human beings to observe an external world – if one exists at all – unencumbered by concepts, theories, background knowledge and past experiences.” (Ibid., p. 23). While acknowledging that the social actor constructs their own reality, additionally I acknowledge that as a social scientist I also construct my own interpretations of the actions and words of social actors, so there are multiple layers of interpretation based on multiple social constructions to this research.

While not choosing to engage in an auto-ethnographic approach to my main empirical study, I will engage in a self-reflection of how the knowledge created in this study can be applied in a pedagogy situation and how I have

incorporated findings from this research into my own teaching of acting and musical theatre students. This self-reflection will help to contextualise the findings back into the training of emergent actors and performers therefore helping to explore the impact of the research.

Having defined my relationship to my research and its subject(s) I then needed to decide how best to communicate my findings. Traditionally, academic research is presented in a third-person voice to suggest an objectivity of the findings. However, having established the subjective nature of my insider position, I determined, therefore, that choosing to use an objective third-person voice might obscure my involvement in the research, cloaking my subjectivity in objective language. Hence, I have chosen to take a more 'authorial voice' using the first-person (I) in my writing. It is argued that writing in this first-person voice is "...critical to meaning and credibility, helping to establish the commitment of writers to their words and setting up a relationship with their readers" (Hyland, 2002, p. 1093). Use of the first-person gives authority to the statements being made and makes clear to the reader the author's thoughts, and this transparency leads to better academic writing (Ibid.). Having determined my relationship with my research and research subject(s), as well as having made choices regarding my position in reporting that research, I needed to consider my research strategy.

### **Ontology and Epistemology**

Given my research questions, research stance and positionality, I had to next determine the most appropriate ontology and epistemology within which to situate this research. Ontology is our understanding of what things are or what exists (Davis et al., 1998) and is a philosophy that asks us to articulate our beliefs of what is 'real' and define what the nature of reality is (Sarantakos, 2013). Ontology is traditionally divided into two main camps: *idealist* and *realist*. An idealist ontology believes that there is no independent external world that exists in separation from our interpretations of it; whereas the realist ontology states that the natural and social worlds are believed to

have an existence that is separate from the interpretations of the observer (Blaikie, 2007). Returning to my interest in researching actors' markets in the UK, suggests that there is no universal truth that explains all of their experiences. Instead, by considering their micro-level experience, I can understand that the object of my research is how each individual actor understands and makes sense of their circumstances and their interpretations of the acting labour market and how, in turn, the actor makes choices about their reactions to these circumstances. In this way, the actor is constructing his or her own reality through their perceptions of what is 'real' to them and how they are going to react to this perceived truth. This interpretation positions my research under the *idealist* ontology, which believes that humans create their own versions of reality and what exists in the world. This ontology believes that truth is not a tangible external 'thing', but instead is constructed by the individual and co-constructed with others (Blaikie, 2007). It is in this process that humans give meaning and interpretation to their actions (and the actions of others) and understand and give value to the world around them. Consequently, my desire to better understand the micro-level experiences of actors competing in this market has greatly informed this ontological choice.

If ontology is our understanding of what exists, epistemology refers to how we come to know things, or how we know what we know (Sarantakos, 2013). It is the study of where human knowledge comes from and what the limits of knowledge are. Ferrier (1856) asked "what is knowing or the known?" – or more shortly, 'what is knowledge?' (p. 46). For research in the social sciences, epistemology determines in what ways "social reality can be known" (Blaikie, 2007, p. 18) and they "...make claims about which scientific procedures produce reliable social scientific knowledge" (Ibid.). The different epistemologies can be summarised as questioning the influence the observer has in constructing their understanding of knowledge. *Objectivism* understands that there is inherent meaning in external things and the researcher's job is to observe them (Gray, 2004). *Subjectivism* believes that there is no inherent meaning in things, except for what the observer imposes

upon them (Ibid.). Finally, *constructionism* believes that “meaning is not discovered, it is constructed” (Blaikie, 2007, p. 19). In terms of my research questions, I have to ask: What knowledge can be understood here? In considering these three options, I am led to a constructionism epistemology which says that: “...knowledge is neither discovered from an external reality nor produced by reason independently of such a reality. It is the outcome of people having to make sense of their encounters with the physical world and with other people” (Ibid., p. 22), or as Crotty (1998) succinctly states “there is no meaning without a mind” (pp. 8-9). This epistemology believes that we interpret our actions and the actions of others in social situations and we construct meanings out of them. There are no absolute truths, nor can knowledge be determined only from our senses; instead we determine meaning through how the individual makes sense out of something (Sarantakos, 2013). Therefore, the social actor is an active participant in constructing their own understanding of reality and is active in comprehending and ascribing value to incidents that occur as they go about their lives. This seems the most fruitful approach towards creating new knowledge in this area. Therefore, with regard to this project, I understand that the actors interviewed are constructing their own version of reality based on interpretations of their actions and those of others. In this way, the research subjects are active participants in constructing their own version of reality and I, as an insider/learner, am co-constructing an understanding of their reality.

The research paradigm in which a project sits is not really selected; rather it emerges out of the ontological and epistemological choices made. Therefore, the determination that the idealist ontology and the epistemology of constructionism are the best choices for examining my research questions leads me to inhabit a research paradigm of *interpretivism*. Interpretivism can be understood as:

“...people [are] constantly involved in interpreting and reinterpreting their world – social situations, other people’s actions, their own

actions, and natural and humanly created objects. They develop meanings for their activities together, and they have ideas about what is relevant for making sense of these activities...” (Blaikie, 2007, p. 22).

Therefore, interpretivism is an anti-positivist stance (Gray, 2004), whereby positivism suggests that there are knowable and testable truths that I as a researcher can discover, test and use to create theories that can be reliably applied broadly to groups. Instead, I aim to interpret how our social actors construct their own understanding of reality and acknowledge that this interpretation is filtered through my own understanding of reality<sup>45</sup>. I aim to explain behaviour and identify patterns without proclaiming the infallibility of these ideas; rather I offer them as interpretations that are “...culturally derived and historically situated” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Arriving at the most appropriate research paradigm then directed my choice of research strategy, which I will consider next.

## **Research Strategy**

The subsequent step was consideration of the four research strategies: *inductive*, *deductive*, *retroductive* and *abductive*. I determined the first three were not appropriate as they are more frequently associated with scientific research and positivist assumptions about an external and discoverable ‘truth’. In contrast, the abductive research strategy starts from a point of observation and then aims to develop and provide the most likely explanation for what has been observed, while recognising that other explanations may exist (Bazeley, 2013; Blaikie, 2000; Peirce, 1934). Abduction, therefore, goes from observation to explanation – an explanation that draws upon and is guided by both theory and context. The social world of the actor is considered, how they construct reality, how they give meaning to their world and, crucially, how this construction and interpretation of their world is

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<sup>45</sup> Both my own and the subjects’.

expressed through their language (Blaikie, 2000, p. 25). This helps the researcher explain what they have observed. My research seeks to understand the actor's motivations, to comprehend and then re-describe these using existing social science theories and terminology, while also pushing at the boundaries of existing theories (Ibid.). By doing so, my intention is to journey from an individual's statements towards more abstracted and theorised accounts of typical behaviours and situations. These accounts then have the possibility to extend the reach of existing theories and to create new theories and theoretical insights (Charmaz, 2008; Timmermans and Tavory, 2012) while also bringing elements of puzzle or problem solving to the process. In the process of solving the puzzle, theory is recontextualised which can lead to modified theoretical frameworks and fresh insights (Bazeley, 2013). Charmaz (2009) says: "we adopt abductive logic when we engage in imaginative thinking about intriguing findings and then return to the field to check our conjectures." (pp. 137-8). Therefore, abductive research lends itself to research that happens in stages, where hypotheses are created and then further tested in the field. Each hypothesis that emerges is a possible answer to the questions and this directs subsequent research stages (Blaikie, 2000). With abductive research strategies, theoretical ideas may be abandoned when they encounter cases that negate them (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). This requires a flexibility and transparency on the part of the researcher to also outline the theories that were tested and abandoned: "There is little methodological value in gathering confirming cases; the strategy is to look for negative cases or alternative explanations to account for the phenomena." (Ibid., p. 180). This strengthens the explanation by challenging it with cases, which has the scope to broaden or abstract the given theory or explanation. A final consideration for selecting an abductive research strategy is that by its interpretive nature it mandates the researcher to consider his or her positionality in terms of the research. In research that rejects positivist notions of truth and instead considers that truth is subjective, constructed by the individual and interpreted by the researcher, the researcher must be transparent about the particular lenses through which they view the research. Timmermans and Tavory (2012) state:

“We always occupy a certain position (as parents, as academics, as middle-class Latinas, etc.), and this position colors our vision, by (1) allowing us only a partial access to the field and shaping the way in which our interlocutors interact with us and (2) arming us with prototheories of the world, ways to “case” the phenomena in front of us that are already deeply ingrained in the ways we perceive the world” (pp. 172-3).

The researcher’s position to their subject is not merely filtered through their experiences, but is also informed by the “race-class-gender trifecta” (Ibid., p. 173) and through our politics, our readings, our theoretical training, etc. Our entire life determines how we construct and interpret reality. Abductive research strategy requires the researcher to consider this, to be transparent about it and to live with the inherent tension that it brings to the research. Timmermans and Tavory point out that this positionality, informed by a foundation in theory, provides the possibility of new discoveries, saying “...unanticipated and surprising observations are strategic in the sense that they depend on a theoretically sensitized observer who recognizes their potential relevance” (Ibid., p. 173).

### **Qualitative Approaches to Studying Actors**

Given the interpretivist research paradigm and my interest in actors’ micro-level experiences in maintaining a career in a competitive environment, I can consider a range of qualitative research tools to interrogate this subject and explore my research questions, including surveys, focus groups, participant observation and interviews. I was inspired by the detailed research on the German market surveyed in Chapter two and aimed to capture similar detailed and rich data on actors’ working lives in the UK and thus I determined that interviewing would allow me to gain the most granular level of detail, particularly as it facilitated asking follow-up questions to probe deeper into comments made by the interviewee that would enrich my empirical study. I aimed to capture their experience of the acting market, actions they took to penetrate that market, and their emotional experience of

the pursuit of this work, and the other qualitative tools considered did not allow for the same in-depth exploration of these experiences. It became apparent that the research method that will serve my research best is by carrying out qualitative interviews as this would allow me to delve deeper into individual actors' narratives and to capture the distinct language they use to describe and interpret their labour market, following in the vein of German research (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2006, 2007; Eikhof et al., 2012; Haunschild, 2003, 2004; Haunschild and Eikhof, 2009; Ibert and Schmidt, 2012, 2014). Having determined this course of action, I turn to address issues of sampling.

With the decision made to undertake qualitative interviews, I next had to determine how many people I would interview. There exists a vast literature on this topic addressing the question, 'how many interviews is enough?' Inevitably, the response is: 'it depends.' (Baker and Edwards, 2012). In order to explore typical and desirable qualitative research numbers, the authors (Baker and Edwards) asked leading academics to write short essays on the topic and their responses represent a range of opinions on the subject. For example, Wolcott's response is: "it depends on your resources, how important the question is to the research, and even to how many respondents are enough to satisfy committee members for a dissertation." (cited in Baker and Edwards 2012, p. 3). Others are more prescriptive, for example Adler and Adler "advise graduate students to sample between 12 and 60, with 30 being the mean" (Ibid., p. 5). Many point to the necessity for considering the epistemological tradition guiding the research to qualify this question. Quantitative research, by its positivist nature, looks for larger sample sizes in order to bring greater validity to results; however, qualitative research frequently has different goals and its defining feature is often the depth of analysis depending on the "richness, complexity and detail, rather than on statistical logic" (Ibid.). Additionally, there is the concept of 'saturation' to consider. Saturation is frequently a guide to qualitative interviewing and involves persisting in the interview process until no new information emerges. By employing this method, one reaches a 'point of

diminishing returns' where more data does not necessarily lead to new insights (Mason, 2010). The quantity of interviews to achieve saturation can depend widely on the homogeneity of the sample group. I decided to set a target of 25 - 30 interviews, a number and range that would allow for a multiplicity of opinion and experience within this homogeneous group and still be likely to reach 'saturation' in exploring the topic<sup>46</sup>. Other considerations in my sample size were: firstly, while the number of interviews would produce a large volume of data, this would be manageable; secondly, given the limited resources available to the project it remained achievable; thirdly, guided by an interpretivist epistemology, I placed the focus on the micro-level experiences of my participants rather than on positivist motivations to prove a theory, therefore 25-30 'micro-level experiences of actors' would be a rich vein of data to mine; and fourthly, with an abductive approach to the research this was a broad enough sampling to generate possible theories based on the results. In the second of this two-part chapter I will outline how I put these methodological choices into practice.

## 4.2 Part Two: Methodology in Practice

This section will document the audit trail of choices made during the execution of this research project. Using an abductive research strategy, with its exploratory iterative nature, allowed me to undertake this research in several waves<sup>47</sup>. Early in the research I undertook initial exploratory interviews in a first wave of data gathering. I began by exploring: *How do jobbing actors in the UK survive?* This was based on data indicating the

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<sup>46</sup> It is methodologically noteworthy that Ibert and Schmidt (2012) found in their German research that: "as the group of interviewees exhibits a high degree of homogeneity in terms of key social structural attributes, we were able to reach the point of data saturation relatively early and decided to conclude the interview phase after ten interviews" (p. 353). As we have seen in the work of Eikhof and Haunschild, the German market is a closed structure (linguistically and geographically), hence fairly homogeneous, which would explain this result. While the UK market is more diverse, the Ibert and Schmidt research suggests that saturation could still be reached with a reasonably small number of actors.

<sup>47</sup> Which was also practical as the PhD study was undertaken on a part-time basis while in full-time employment.

average earnings of UK actors were well below the 'London Living Wage,' which left me querying what actions UK actors were taking to sustain themselves when their acting wages were so low. Meanwhile, I was simultaneously surveying the literature while undertaking empirical research. Bazeley (2013) writes about this iterative form of research questions: "Questions cannot be adequately formulated without your having already completed some theoretical or practical work, and preferably both." (p. 46). In this way, I used the initial wave of my data gathering to open up my research questions and explore some of the concepts that were emerging from the literature. In these early interviews, I observed a pattern of proactive and reactive strategies that mid-career UK actors were employing to make their precarious acting careers more sustainable (*cf.* Doern, 2017, 2021).

Directed by my reading on abductive research strategy, I adopted guidance from Timmermans and Tavory (2012) who advocate strengthening your arguments by challenging them through negative cases or alternative explanations, so I decided to broaden my interviews beyond actors to also speak with industry professionals to gather their thoughts about the challenges that actors faced and solutions that they might employ to make acting careers more sustainable. Their accounts broadened my exploration considerably, as will be shown in my findings. I elected to stop my interviewing at 28 completed interviews. At that point, I determined that there was enough repetition within the responses to determine that I had reached a level of saturation where I could stop interviewing and undertake my analysis. With a focus on the micro-level experiences of actors as they struggle to survive in a competitive market, which required understanding how they make sense of their environment and the interplay between their environment and their interpretation of it, a smaller number of in-depth interviews were preferable to a larger quantity that had neither the depth of interviewing nor the depth of analysis. I chose to focus on quality over quantity. My aim was to "study reality from the inside, to understand it from the point of view of the subject" (Sarantakos, 2013, p. 147) and lengthy qualitative interviews with a smaller number of actors and industry

professionals allowed me to plumb the depths of experience of these actors and added to the richness of my findings.

I determined that the final step of my research project would be to consider how the findings from my empirical research could be meaningfully applied to educating young actors, particularly looking at how the knowledge generated from mid-career actors could be brought to curriculum development for final year actors from drama school and university training to better prepare them for sustainable career pathways. As I continued to teach throughout the data gathering, data analysis and writing up segments of my research, I was able to apply and test new knowledge and theories with students as I was developing them. Therefore, the final stage of my research design would be to engage in a self-reflection on how the PRAN model and the knowledge contained therein was being used by myself, and could be used by others, to train young actor performers towards more sustainable careers.

As my research was exploratory in nature, a 'flexible qualitative design' (Sarantakos, 2013, p. 128) was deemed the most suitable methodological construction of the research process. A flexible qualitative design process has two key characteristics. Firstly, it is pre-planned, to a certain degree, yet allows for maximum flexibility on the part of the researcher to consider and reconsider decisions as the study is undertaken. Secondly, it allows the researcher to move freely backwards and forwards through the steps of methodological planning, sampling, data collecting and data analysis. One step may trigger a reconsideration of (a) previous step(s) or an iterative fine-tuning as the research process unfolds (Ibid.). My research project took an iterative, reflexive approach with several cycles through desk research and literature review, interspersed with data gathering, analysis and reflection. See **Error! Reference source not found.** below for a visualisation of the research steps:

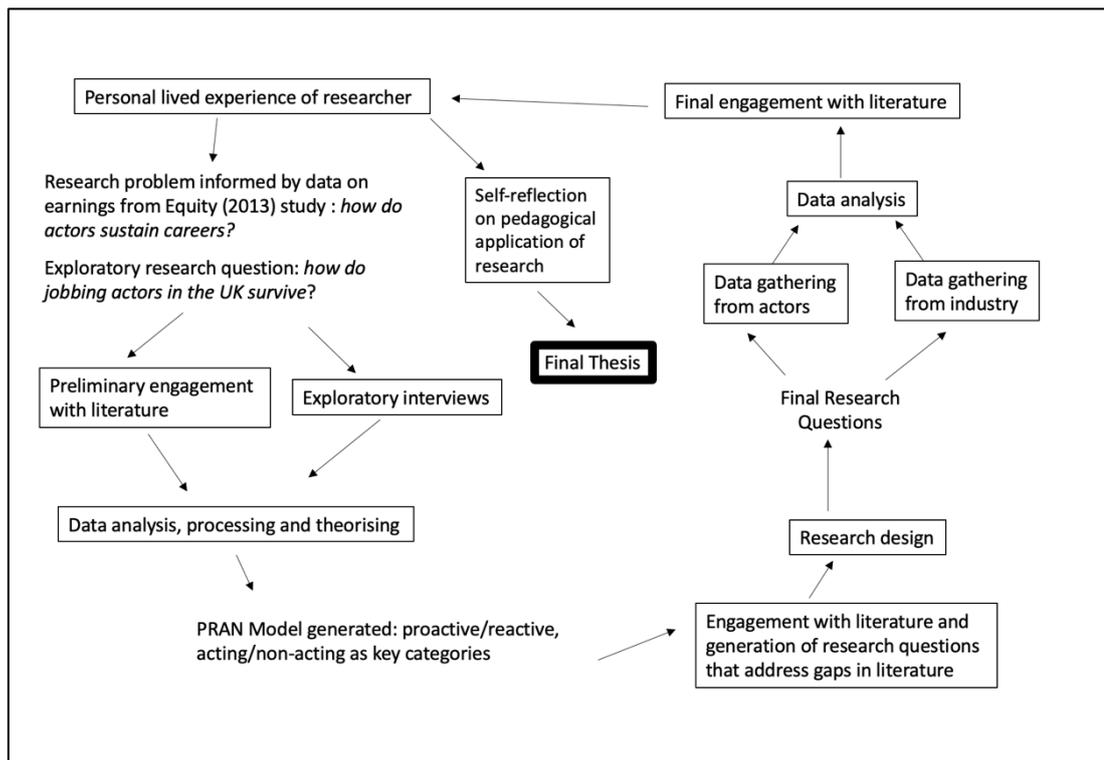


Figure 1 - Map of Thesis Project

## Data Selection/Sampling

### Sampling of Actor Participants

As the focus of this study was on strategies used by actors to guide their careers towards sustainability, I decided that my research needed to focus on actors who had been engaged in the profession for some period of time. New graduates would have little to say about the building of a sustainable career as they would not have had sufficient time to accrue experience in navigating the market. Therefore, I decided to focus on those actors who had spent a number of years working in the UK market. These subjects would have experienced enough market-generated challenge and turmoil to have developed strategies for coping in a highly competitive market. The parameters set for defining a mid-career actor were firstly, being at least ten years into an acting career, and secondly, to have been successfully employed and paid for acting work during that time. This would eliminate

those who had never managed to gain entry to the labour market. I focused upon London-based actors for three reasons. Firstly, the highest concentration of casting for the industry in the UK takes place in London, therefore it contains the greatest concentration of actors and represents the highest levels of competition for work. Secondly, London has the highest living costs in the UK (BBC, 2018B), and therefore presents the greatest challenges to the sustainability of an actor's career. Thirdly, as I was based in London, it was both logical and practical, given that this research project was self-funded, to concentrate my attention on actors that I could access geographically and within the limited resources available to me. Limiting my study within these parameters gave a clear delineation to the sample population and made it easier to find suitable candidates. In this way, a 'criterion sampling strategy' (Patton, 1990), whereby all cases must meet the criterion of the study, was utilised. Also, I applied 'typical case sampling' (Ibid.) whereby those selected were working, or had worked as actors, but had never broken through the ceiling to become 'Superstar' performers (Rosen, 1981; cf. Caves, 2000). As we observed in Chapter two, the percentage of top earning actors, or Superstars, is very small and therefore not representative of the majority of actors. For the purposes of this research project, I sought to capture the experiences of the average or 'jobbing' actor (cf. Dean, 2005; Sinigaglia, 2017), rather than the outliers, hence my 'typical case sampling' model is that of an average jobbing actor and not a Superstar. In addition, candidates selected had to meet the following conditions suggested by Flick et al. (2004):

- They have available the knowledge and experience that the investigators need;
- They are capable of reflection;
- They are articulate;
- They have time to be interviewed;
- They are willing to take part in the investigation (p. 169).

I also decided not to limit my study to only actors working in one sub-sector, for example musical theatre, TV or film. From my experience as an actor in the UK, I knew that most actors work across multiple sub-sectors and in

many cases this was a deliberate strategy to access additional employment markets. Therefore, unlike the Hollywood or German research examined in Chapter two, which did focus on specific sub-sectors, I chose to view the UK as being a project-based work structure and therefore an actor working in a variety of different sub-sectors was part of managing a project-based career where each individual project, or job, might be in a different sub-sector (for example a film project followed by a play). With a 92-95% industry unemployment rate (Guardian, 2009; Nordin-Bates, 2012) I speculate that most actors do not have the luxury to specialise in only one sub-sector. In addition, I was interested in how actors were *ducking and diving* between work in these different sub-sectors. For these reasons, I did not restrict my study to only one specific sub-sector. My interview candidates worked across a large swathe of the UK acting market (see Appendix C for further details).

Having outlined the criteria of the interview candidates, the next question was where these candidates would be sampled from. Random sampling, a hallmark of quantitative research, is often indicated as the best approach to ensure that results can be generalised to a larger population. However, it is not always "...the most effective way of developing an understanding of the complex issues relating to human behaviour" (Marshall, 1996, p. 523).

Therefore, a random sampling model was ill-suited to this project; one of the reasons for this is that:

"...it is well recognised by sociologists that people are not equally good at observing, understanding and interpreting their own and other people's behaviour. Qualitative researchers recognise that some informants are 'richer' than others and that these people are more likely to provide insights and understanding for the researcher." (Ibid.)

Having decided against random sampling, firstly, I started with participants who were known to me and then secondly, branched out using a 'snowball approach' (Patton, 1990) whereby one interview candidate recommends another, unknown to the interviewer, whom they believe to be a relevant candidate to complement the research. In this way, the research gathers numbers like rolling a snowball and this allows the reach of the researcher's

scope to be expanded beyond known individuals to capture a broader swathe of research participants.

Interviewing was done in two waves, the first in 2015 and the second in 2018. In the first wave, candidates known to me were selected based on my confidence that they possessed the ability to be reflective and would have interesting and varied perspectives on their acting careers. I was able to select individuals representing a broad range of experiences and perspectives:

“This can involve developing a framework of the variables that might influence an individual’s contribution and will be based on the researcher’s practical knowledge of the research area, the available literature and evidence from the study itself. This is a more intellectual strategy than the simple demographic stratification of epidemiological studies, though age, gender and social class might be important variables. If the subjects are known to the researcher, they may be stratified according to known public attitudes or beliefs.” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523).

Age and career status, as well as experience of the industry and the ability to reflect lucidly about their acting career were my key criteria for participant selection.

For the second wave of interviewing, I maintained the same focus on sampling London-based mid-career actors. In terms of selection, each candidate was ‘sourced’ over a period of four months and chosen by applying aspects of ‘theoretical sampling’ to guide this process. In theoretical sampling “the sample units are not ‘chosen’ by the researcher prior to the commencement of the study but during the study, guided by the knowledge that emerges during the study” (Sarantakos, 2013, p. 179; *cf.* Marshall, 1996). The reason for employing this method is to enable wider comparison within the sample allowing for greater variation in the findings (Sarantakos, 2013). For example, throughout the second wave I was attempting to strike a balance between different experiences, so if several interviewees had worked mostly in theatre, I would then seek the participation of a candidate

working predominantly in film or musical theatre for the purposes of broadening the range of perspectives gathered.

An attempt was also made in this second wave of interviews to seek out some 'outliers' – those whose careers might challenge the narrative of the majority of the actors interviewed. In questioning the results of my initial interviews, I asked if they were skewed in any way through a selection bias of choosing actors who were less successful or struggling in order to prove a hypothesis. In order to challenge this, in the second wave of interviews I included a few 'outliers' to the sample pool, in the form of those actors who were working frequently and earning a large portion or all of their income from acting. This decision was guided by an understanding that:

“Any given finding usually has exceptions. The temptation is to smooth them over, ignore them, or explain them away. But *the outlier is your friend* [authors' emphasis]. A good look at the exceptions, or the ends of a distribution, can test and strengthen the basic finding. It not only tests the generality of the finding but also protects you against self-selecting biases, and may help you build a better explanation.” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 269)

The actors participating in the second wave represented a combination of those known to me and those who were recommended through a snowball sampling. Consequently, some decisions about sampling were made in advance of the second wave of data collection, while other decisions were made during the process of data gathering based on emergent findings (Sarantakos, 2013) with a conception of my sampling as a form of an “...investigative process, not very different from detective work” (Ibid., p. 181).

All research participants signed a consent form confirming their willing participation in this project (see Appendix A). Upon confirmation of their participation, respondents were then asked to complete a brief anonymous demographic survey administered through Survey Monkey (see Appendix B). The demographic categories were determined using a common sense

approach as to how the sample might be broken down<sup>48</sup>. The demographics of the actor study participants are presented in Table 3. Note that bands with zero responses were considered and then excluded from the final output below; also, two male participants did not complete the survey – I have included them in the first category to give the gender balance of all respondents, but the remaining categories below represent 20/22 of the actor respondents.

*Table 3 – Empirical Study Participants’ Demographic Data*

| Gender |    |
|--------|----|
| Male   | 12 |
| Female | 10 |
| Age    |    |
| 30-39  | 2  |
| 40-49  | 7  |
| 50-59  | 5  |
| 60-69  | 6  |

| Education                |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| A-levels (or equivalent) | 1 |
| Some college, no degree  | 3 |
| Bachelor’s degree        | 5 |
| Diploma or Certificate   | 7 |
| Master’s Degree          | 2 |
| No qualifications        | 2 |

| Employment                      |    |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Acting is my only job           | 7  |
| Multiple jobs/sources of income | 12 |
| Not employed, looking for work  | 1  |

---

<sup>48</sup> In hindsight, I recognise the limitation of only presenting binary choices for gender.

| Household income  |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Less than £20,000 | 4 |
| £20,000 - £34,999 | 6 |
| £35,000 - £49,999 | 3 |
| £50,000 - £74,999 | 2 |
| £75,000 - £99,999 | 3 |
| £150,000+         | 2 |

| Years acting |   |
|--------------|---|
| 10-19        | 5 |
| 20-29        | 6 |
| 30+          | 9 |

| UK Drama School trained |    |
|-------------------------|----|
| Yes                     | 13 |
| No                      | 7  |

Four actor participants in my study came from a BAME background, while the rest were white. This representation of race, with 14% of BAME and 86% of white interviewees, is reflective of the makeup of the UK population as shown in the 2011 Census (Great Britain, 2011); though I also acknowledge that if I was designing the research again today, I would choose to increase the BAME representation within the research cohort. However, the absence of actors with a disability in my study is not representative of the 16% disabled UK working population (Great Britain, 2014). A total of 28 interviews were completed (22 actors and six industry professionals<sup>49</sup>), securely within my target range of 25-30 interviews. Further details of research participants can be found in Appendix C – Interview Data.

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<sup>49</sup> Industry participants will be dealt with next.

## Industry participants

As mentioned above, in addition to 22 actor interviews I also undertook six interviews with individuals working in a variety of professional roles (other than acting) within the sector, making a total of 28 interviews. This choice was in keeping with the abductive research strategy where "...there is little methodological value in gathering confirming cases" (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012, p. 180). Selection of industry participants was accomplished through purposeful sampling (Marshall, 1996) with interviewees chosen in order to gather a breadth of viewpoints on the subject. After identifying roles within the entertainment system that interact with actors, specifically director, casting director, agent, educator, newspaper critic and a representative from Equity, I then sought out individuals matching these roles with an aim to explore different segments of the industry and *triangulate* the research findings. Data triangulation (Denzin, 1978) is a choice to actively seek different sources, locations or time/space of data collection to produce richer descriptions of the phenomena. Miles and Huberman (1994) advise the researcher to look for triangulation sources that may hold different biases and differing strengths, thereby reinforcing the 'reliability' of gathered data. To lessen the intrusion of researcher bias (Guba, 1981), the active seeking out of conflicting viewpoints is encouraged and can lead to the discovery of new directions for our thinking and result in more complex explanations (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This triangulation process also embeds a verification process into the data collection by encouraging double-checking of findings and using multiple sources of evidence (Ibid.). However, as only one individual from each of these job roles was interviewed, it is not possible to generalise their responses as being indicative of the entirety of that section of the market, but for the purposes of this study they provide alternative viewpoints pertaining to actors' career sustainability.

I did not ask the industry participant interviewees to complete the demographic Survey Monkey survey, though in selecting individuals I aimed for diversity. In my final grouping there were equal representation of males

and females (three of each) and one of the six was from a BAME background. All industry participants signed release forms giving their informed consent to participate in this research (see Appendix A for sample consent form).

## **Interviewing**

Hour-long, qualitative interviews were arranged with participants in two waves, the first of which took place between February and June 2015 and the second between January and April 2018<sup>50</sup> (see Appendix C for further details of interviews). These interviews were a mixture of face-to-face, telephone and Skype interviews. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed with the transcripts subsequently verified against the original recordings for accuracy. All audio recordings and typed transcriptions have been stored securely in compliance with The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (All European Academies, 2017, p. 6) guidelines. The digital files are located on a password protected computer that is accessed only by the researcher and the corresponding personal details and release forms for each participant have been kept separate from the transcripts in order to protect the anonymity of the respondents.

A semi-structured interview technique (Gray, 2004) was used with a list of set questions, enabling me latitude to use follow-up questions to explore their responses further. The questions were deliberately kept simple in order to be accessible to my participants and not bias the discussion. The following ten questions were posed to all actor participants:

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<sup>50</sup> This gap was for several reasons: firstly, it allowed time for the MPhil upgrade process; secondly, it allowed time for further reviewing of the literature; thirdly, as my PhD study was undertaken on a part-time basis, it coincided with a period of full-time academic employment between 2015 and 2018.

1. What do you like and dislike about being an actor? Why?
2. What did you imagine being an actor would be like and what has the reality been?
3. What advice or insight do you wish you'd been given at the start of your career?
4. Are you able to support yourself and your family through acting? If not, what gets in the way?
5. What actions have you taken that have resulted in work?
6. What has prevented you from working?
7. Acting income tends to vary widely. How do you financially manage periods with no or little work?
8. Would you encourage others to pursue acting? Why?
9. What actions – whether on an individual level, an industry level, or a legislative level would help make acting careers more sustainable?
10. Is acting a 'career', a 'calling' or a 'vocation'? Why?

For the industry interviews the semi-structured interview format was also used, though the set of questions used for the actors was not appropriate for these interviews; therefore, the predetermined questions that provided the semi-structured format were different for each of the industry participants and were crafted to be relevant to their particular segment of the industry while leaving room for follow-up questions.

### **Data Analysis**

Transcribed interviews were uploaded to NVivo and this qualitative analysis software was used for the coding and analysis procedure. My coding was guided by practices from Bazeley (2013) and Bazeley and Jackson (2013); specifically, a descriptive coding practice was utilised whereby sections of text were coded with a word or short phrase describing the main idea of the statement. After the initial coding, I found that I had coded text to 53 different descriptive nodes. This was followed by a lengthy period of reading, sifting, reflecting and writing memos on these nodes (*cf.* Charmaz, 2008, 2009), initially considering them on a thematic level and eventually moving towards more theoretical examination that resulted in the creation of my PRAN model with four quadrants: Proactive-Acting, Proactive Non-Acting, Reactive Acting, and Reactive Non-Acting.

For the interviews completed in the second wave, coding was done using a *a priori* codes that had emerged from the findings of the initial round. The *a priori* codes used are the four quadrants identified in the coding of the initial wave of interviewing: Proactive-Acting, Proactive Non-Acting, Reactive Acting, and Reactive Non-Acting. Additional coding was performed on an inductive basis as the interviews were analysed when I identified contributing factors that helped to explain or illustrate the four principle *a priori* codes.

For coding the industry participant interviews, four *a priori* codes were selected from the previous two rounds of actor interviews as a starting point for coding the industry interviews. These codes were: *Proactive*, *Reactive*, *Sustainability*, and *Barriers to Sustainability* and aligned with the principal themes that had emerged from the actor interviews. Additional viewpoints from the industry interviewees that contributed meaningfully to the research were coded on an inductive thematic basis as they were encountered.

One early discovery in analysing the interview transcripts was that actors are generally talkative. While some qualitative researchers struggle to get their interview participants to open up and speak about their experiences, in this research project, the opposite was encountered. This has provided me with rich data to work with, but it also presented a challenge in how to properly represent what the interviewees have said. Due to the clarity of the responses, I have chosen to rely heavily on the actual words of the interviewees to 'tell their stories' through extensive use of quotations. This is a deliberate choice as the actual words used by the actors often convey the emotional context of their situations and so, in an attempt to engage with the micro-qualitative experience of mid-career UK actors, this thesis will favour allowing those micro-level voices to be heard verbatim (Morrow, 2005). This method was selected as:

“An overemphasis on the researcher’s interpretations at the cost of the participant quotes will leave the reader in doubt as to just where the interpretations came from; an excess of quotes will cause the reader to become lost in the morass of stories. Just as numbers contribute to the persuasive “power” of a quantitative investigation, the

actual words of participants are essential to persuade the reader that the interpretations of the researcher are in fact grounded in the lived experiences of the participants.” (Ibid., p. 256)

Also, the motivation for this research was to delve deeply into understanding actors’ thoughts, feelings and experiences, aiming for a ‘thick description’ approach (Geertz, 1973, Wolff, 2004), which brings a greater understanding and integration of the context of the words into the description. Therefore, I have chosen to deeply explore a smaller number of actors’ narratives with the aim of producing a ‘thick descriptions’ of their experience.

## **Ethics**

This research complies with all ethical regulations as outlined in the Goldsmiths Code of Practice on Research Ethics and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Ethical Guidelines. My research has been guided by the principle of reflexivity and throughout the research I have continuously reflected upon and appraised how ethical issues were being dealt with. My ethics assessment of the research was based on the following factors: firstly, I was not seeking interviews with minors or any other vulnerable communities; secondly, research participation was voluntary; thirdly, the parameters of the research were clearly described to all potential candidates; and fourthly, all participants signed a release form acknowledging their participation in the project. The only adverse consequence requiring management potentially resulted from critical comments made about the industry that could be directly attributed to a particular individual resulting in a negative impact to their employability, and therefore all interviews were anonymised. Standard procedures in qualitative interviewing were followed to ensure anonymity, for example: firstly, all identifying facts from their narratives have been removed; secondly, each interviewee is only referred to by an alphabetic reference; thirdly, audio files, transcriptions and signed Informed Consent forms are securely stored in password-protected files on a computer only accessible to the researcher; and fourthly, all participant data will be deleted five years’ after completion of

this PhD program. My research received ethics clearance from both the Institute of Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship and the School of Graduate Studies at Goldsmiths, and the signed ethics clearance application and its supporting documents can be found in Appendix D.

## **Validity**

In the positivist research tradition, research is evaluated for its *validity*, *reliability*, and *replicability* by asking the following three questions:

- Are these findings valid?
- How reliable are the research procedures to deliver the results?
- If this survey were administered to a different group, would it obtain similar results?

However, these concepts are not always applicable to social research using qualitative methods and particularly when working within an interpretivist tradition that "... reject[s] realism as an adequate basis for judging the value of research studies" (Seale, 2004, p. 529). When undertaking research in a constructivist vein, it is difficult to assess the findings on realism and objectivity (Ibid.); instead, other criteria must be applied to assess its quality, such as considering "...whether it promotes insight, understanding or dialogue, or [...] whether it gives voice to particular social groups whose perspective has been hidden from public view" (Ibid.). For research of this type, it is more reasonable to consider 'credibility' rather than 'truth' in assessing qualitative research (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 301). Research deemed 'credible':

"... indicates that findings are trustworthy and believable in that they reflect participants', researchers', and readers' experiences with a phenomenon but at the same time the explanation is only one of many possible "plausible" interpretations possible from data." (Ibid., p. 302).

Validity can be measured on two levels: internal and external validity. Internal validity assesses causal statements made in the study and questions whether any causation drawn from the study can be supported by the study; this is usually addressed in research design (Seale, 2004). External validity gauges how the findings from the study can be generalised to populations outside of the study; this is usually addressed through representative sampling that attempts to ensure that the population studied is not atypical (Ibid.). These are both valid considerations for a research aim that is more positivistic; however, again it is ineffective for research that is interpretivist in design. Therefore, working in qualitative constructionist research undertaken within the interpretivist tradition, it is important to improve internal validity by forging strong links between “concepts and their indicators” (Seale, 2004, p. 534) and by making explicit the connections “between concepts and the examples drawn from data. In this sense, qualitative researchers can be thought of as being concerned with a form of ‘measurement validity’. A good qualitative report exemplifies concepts with good examples” (Ibid.). This then shifts the focus from questioning the internal validity of the research to questioning the credibility of the findings.

Qualitative interviewing is time-consuming, both in the actual interviewing and in its analysis. Because of this time commitment there is often a smaller number of cases, or individual interviewees, considered. Therefore, in qualitative research using interviewing, there is an exchange of the breadth that may come through other forms such as surveys and questionnaires, wherein large numbers of participants can be probed, for depth where fewer participants are engaged but on a deeper level. This could be interpreted as having an impact on the external validity of the results. There is a counterargument to this which says that in-depth interviewing can find or reveal things not noticed or considered beforehand and in this way the originality and the discovery of the research should be the marker of its quality rather than its external validity (Seale, 2004). I have elected to go with the latter path, focusing on fewer actor narratives to allow for a more in-depth, ‘thick description’ approach.

Choices made to ensure the validity of my findings include: firstly, allowing sufficient time (generally over one hour) for each interview to facilitate going in-depth; secondly, seeking out a range of respondents with differing experiences and outlooks to avoid a homogeneity of response; thirdly, seeking out conflicting and negating viewpoints that challenged emerging hypotheses, resulting in deeper analysis; fourthly, reflexivity on my part throughout the process, to remain conscious of my decision-making processes and their effects upon the shape and direction of the research; fifthly, providing full transparency concerning these decisions in the writing up; sixthly, establishing an audit trail accounting for the decisions made throughout; and seventhly, triangulating the data by interviewing those who interact with actors from the industry side of the equation.

This discussion on validity ends with Corbin and Strauss's (2008) characteristics of quality research "...that [it] blends conceptualization with sufficient descriptive detail to allow the reader to reach his or her own conclusions about the data and to judge the credibility of the researcher's data and analysis" (p. 302). This principle guided me through my research and presentation of my findings.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the main methodological choices that underpin and direct my research project and explained my logic in making those choices. I have described the impact of these choices in determining the methodological choices made throughout this research project and an audit trail of methodological choices practised, and the decisions and rationale that guided me through this project's various stages, have also been outlined. Finally, it revealed the steps taken to address the ethics of this research and to uphold the validity of my findings. In the following four chapters, I will present the research findings from my empirical study and my theoretical

explanations of these findings followed by a fifth chapter which is a self-reflection on the pedagogical application of the PRAN model.

## 5 Empirical Findings: The PRAN Model

### Introduction

In previous chapters I have outlined my survey of the literature and my research methodology. The literature review determined gaps in the existing literature and the key questions that I would explore in my empirical study:

**RQ1.** Given the precariousness of pursuing an acting career, what strategies have mid-career UK actors found to aid them in sustaining a career over a longer trajectory of time?

**RQ2.** How can a creative entrepreneurship approach help with sustaining a career in a competitive and crowded creative field?

These questions direct my analysis over the next four chapters which form the empirical chapters of this thesis. In order to give structure to my understanding of the actors' employment terrain, I aimed to map out spatially the different locations where actors were working and their *motivation* in pursuing work in that space. This allowed me to create a four-quadrant model, that I am calling the PRAN model, explained within these chapters, with each chapter dealing with one quadrant of this four-quadrant model. Therefore, the findings are delineated as follows:

- Chapter six. Proactive Acting
- Chapter seven. Proactive Non-Acting
- Chapter eight. Reactive Acting
- Chapter nine. Reactive Non-Acting

## Development of the Empirical Model

The first key finding observed in my interviewing was that participants were engaged in a series of *proactive* actions to achieve greater stability in their careers, while at the same time *reacting* (in positive and/or negative ways) to events that were happening in their professional lives. This led to the first major thematic categories: *proactive* and *reactive* strategies used by actors (cf. Doern, 2017, 2021). These terms formed the x-axis of my emerging PRAN model shown in Figure 2:

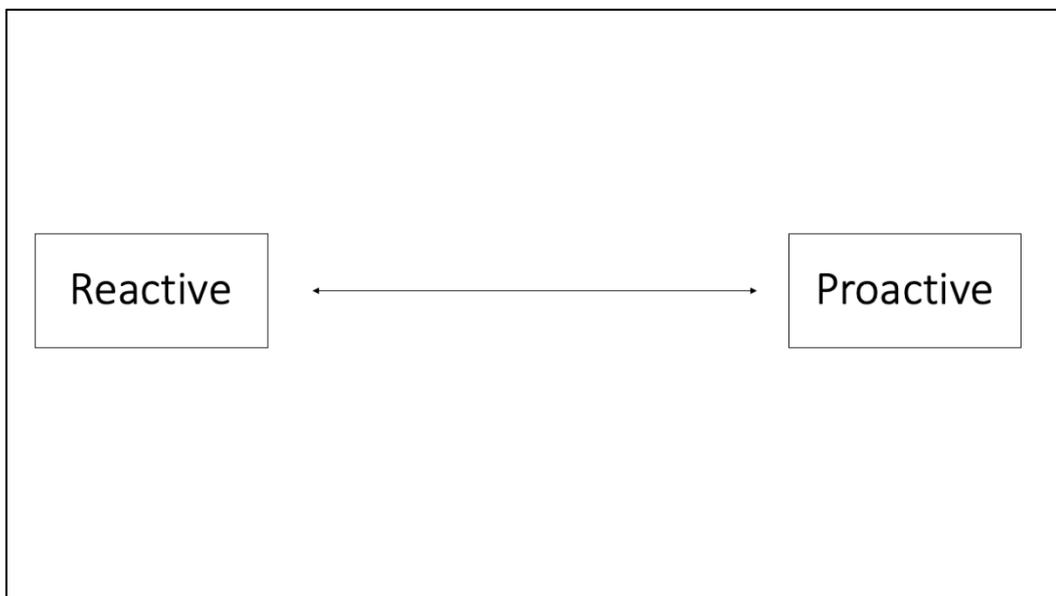


Figure 2 – Stage One Research Terms

For the purposes of this research, *proactive* is being defined as a forward-thinking process that anticipates events (positive or negative) and makes choices to best exploit or manage these situations if or when they occur<sup>51</sup>. *Reactive* is defined as a reflexive response, responding to events and

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<sup>51</sup> The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1993) defines 'proactive' as: "of a person, policy, etc.: creating or controlling a situation by taking the initiative or anticipating events [...] tending to make things happen" (p. 2361)

processing them as they are happening<sup>52</sup> and making decisions based on that event. When reactive strategies are linked with resilience<sup>53</sup>, this can be a way of processing the negative blows that come with pursuing a career, without setbacks becoming barriers to the actor being able to proceed. Here are two examples from my interviewing that express this idea:

“You also have to be really tough and not take the rejections [...] too personally. Even when you get zero feedback [...] you have to have a certain moral strength.”

Participant I

“It's one of the hardest professions, really [...] Thick skin, got to be tough. And if you want to do it, you persist. You carry on. You don't let things knock you down because no one cares, actually. You really fend for yourself, don't you?”

Participant H

These speak of an emotional resilience, or reacting to the difficulties without giving up, as a requirement to sustain a career over a period of time (*cf.* Hamilton, 1997; Ibert and Schmidt, 2014; Rea, 2014).

While coding interviews, a pattern emerged of strategies actors were utilising to manage this uncertainty. The actions that actors were taking were observed to have one of two motivations. The first was a proactive attempt to make choices that would lead to a more sustainable income, and the second were more reactive strategies, based on reacting to the hardship and competition. It was also observed that most actors were working both within the sphere of acting, but also outside of this in the larger employment market. This provided a y-axis to the emerging PRAN model, *acting* and *non-acting* work as seen below in Figure 3:

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<sup>52</sup> The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1993) defines 'reactive' as “constituting a reaction to a previous stage or a stimulus; caused by or exhibiting a reaction” (p. 2491).

<sup>53</sup> See Chapter two for a discussion of resilience.

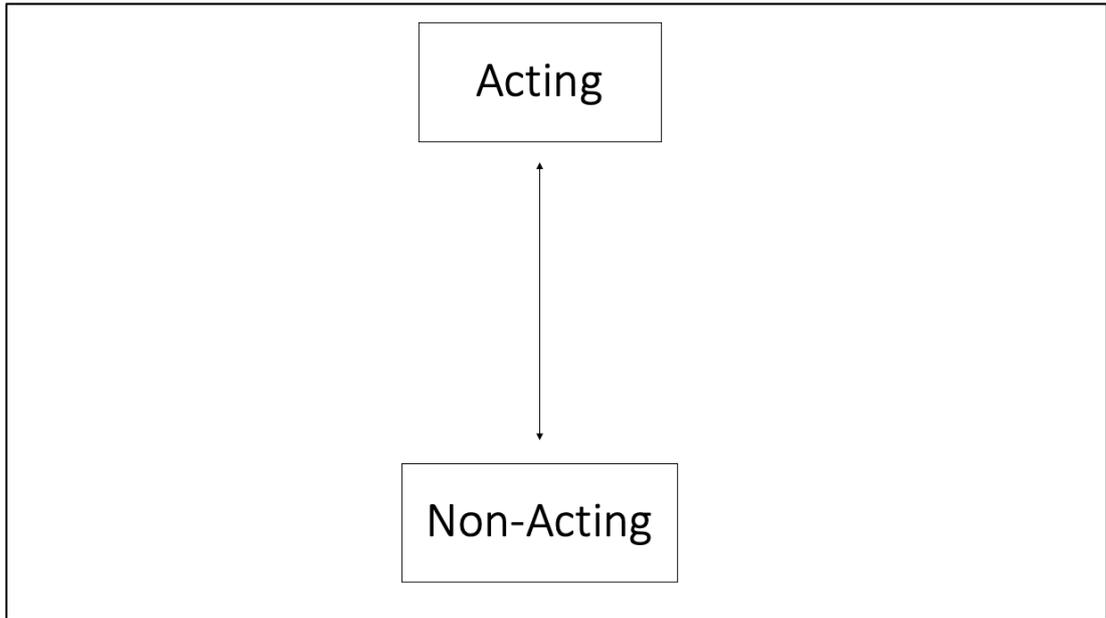


Figure 3 – Stage Two Research Terms

This then gave me four quadrants to a model that actors were dividing their working lives into, namely: *Proactive Acting*, *Proactive Non-Acting*, *Reactive Acting* and *Reactive Non-Acting* (what I am calling my PRAN model), see Figure 4.

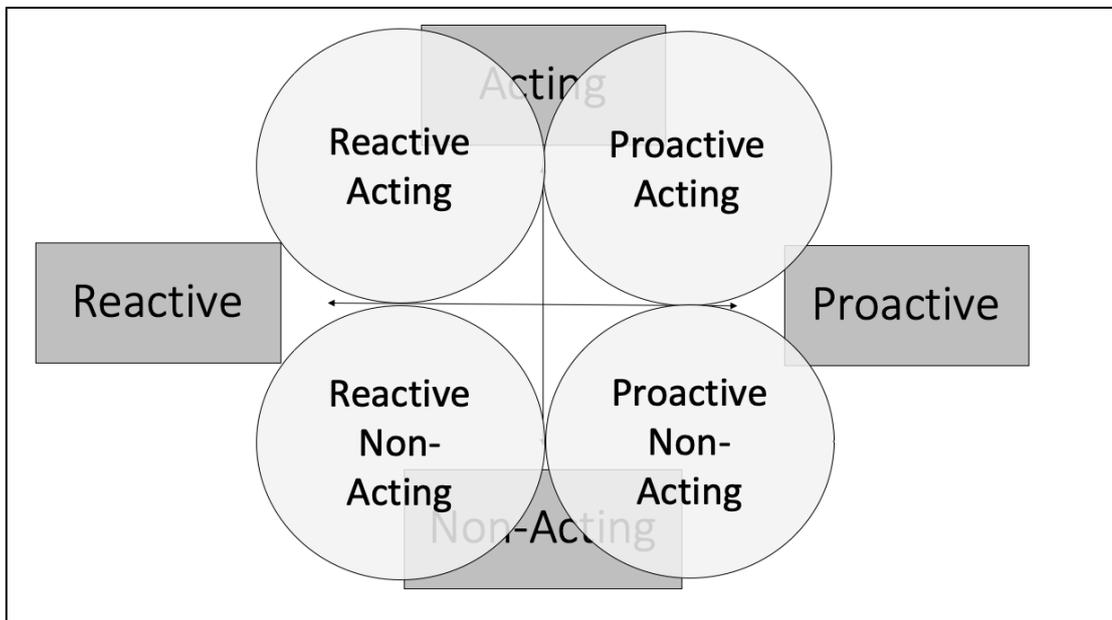
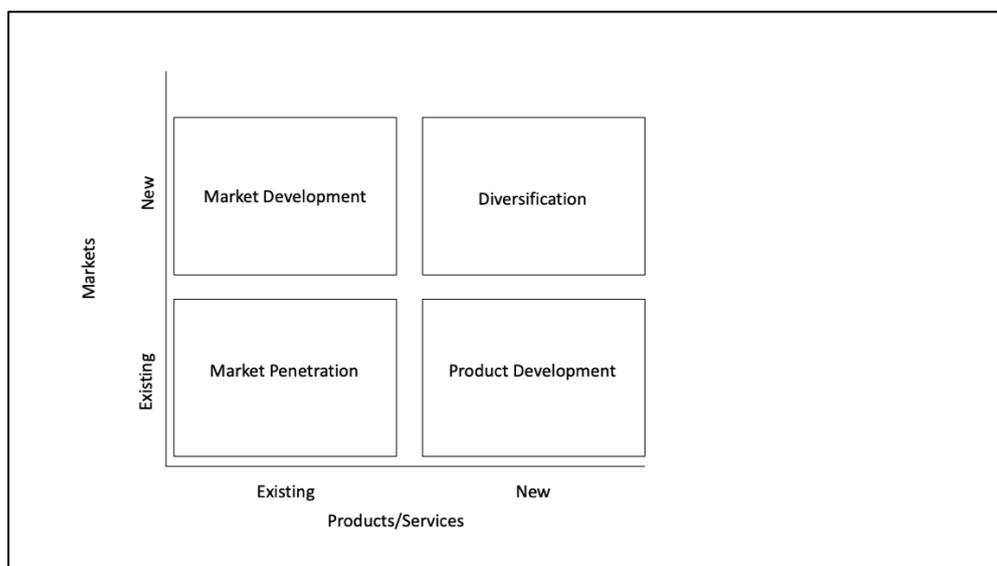


Figure 4 – PRAN Model Four Quadrants

In the following chapters, each quadrant will be presented individually, with examples of how the interviewees were describing their work therein. After examining them separately, I will look at how the components fit together into a model and how navigating between these quadrants provides a way in which the mid-career actor can make their career more sustainable.

There are similarities between the PRAN model and the Ansoff Model (Ansoff, 1957). In Figure 5. Ansoff's model, widely used in business, considers markets and products/services for a business and how each functions, both within its existing parameters, but also by expanding into new areas, and how this explains different business phases.



*Figure 5 – Ansoff Model (1957)*

The difference between the Ansoff model and the PRAN model is that the latter takes into consideration the proactive-reactive nature of acting. It considers that despite the best efforts or desires of the actor, with such high unemployment there may not be enough acting work available for acting to be the actor's sole income source, so they may end up working in other areas based on scarcity. Ansoff's model does not take into consideration business activities that might have to be assumed in order for the business to

remain solvent. My model also considers that multiple job holding (Abbing, 2011; Alper and Wassall, 2006; Menger, 2006; Throsby, 2001) and the protean/portfolio career models (Blackwood et al., 2019; Hall, 1976; Handy, 1989; Reid et al., 2016) are the norm for most mid-career UK actors. The PRAN model takes into consideration working both within and outside the acting industry, similar to the *prismatic* career model where musical actors in Germany were trying to access multiple markets both within and outside performing (Ibert and Schmidt, 2014). I will now move on to exploring the quadrants of the PRAN model.

### 5.1 Proactive Acting Strategies

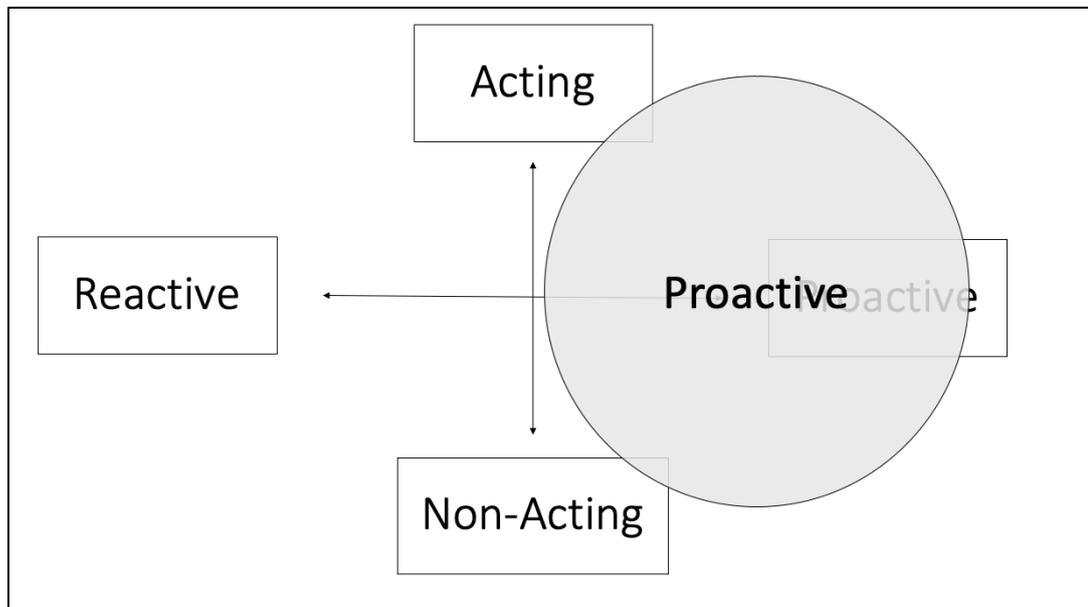


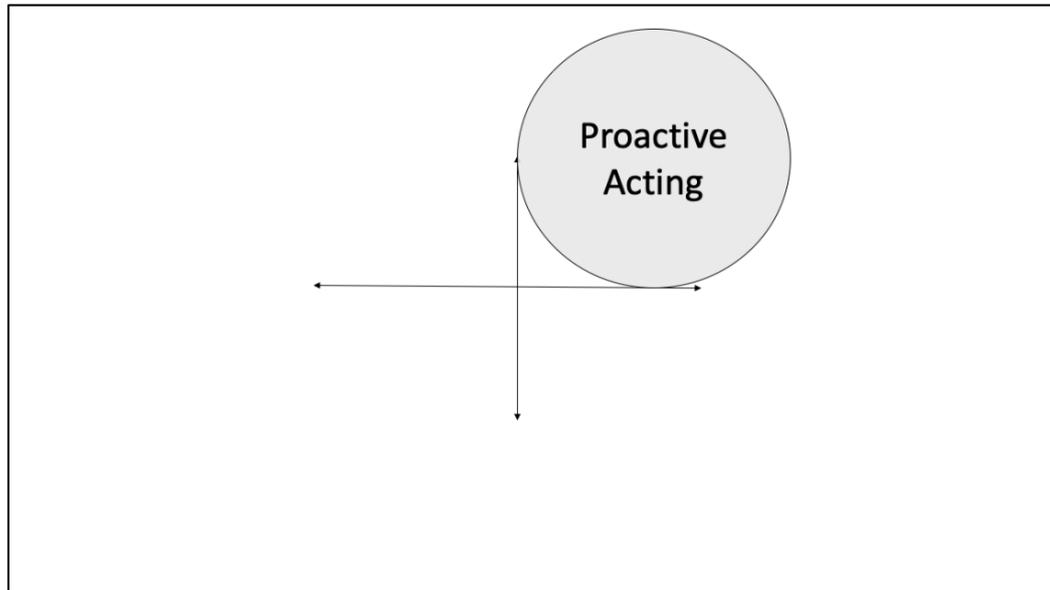
Figure 6 – Proactive Quadrants Model

## Introduction

Proactive activity was observed when the individual actor made strategic choices to further develop their skillset or to expand their acting market by adding an additional skilled work stream to a portfolio career (Blackwood et al., 2019; Handy, 1989; Menger, 2006). By introducing new markets and/or additional forms of employment or sources of income, it allows the actor to broaden their acting work, creating other income to support themselves between acting engagements. As one participant said, “I’ve never been able to fully support myself from acting, and I’ve done some amazing Equity jobs. And it doesn’t matter, because they’ll only last for six months. I have another six months of the year.” (Participant F). Having a portfolio of additional jobs allows for the remaining six months of the year to be filled in. While there is existing research in portfolio careers (Blackwood et al., 2019; Hall, 1976; Handy, 1989; Reid et al., 2016) and multiple job holding amongst artists (Abbing, 2011; Alper and Wassall, 2006; Menger, 2006; Throsby, 2001), there has been limited research into how this works in practical terms in the career context of actors. We viewed the project-based research in Hollywood films (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Faulkner and Anderson, 1987; Jones and DeFillippi, 1996) and the research into the German ensemble (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2006, 2007; Eikhof et al., 2012; Haunschild, 2003, 2004; Haunschild and Eikhof, 2009) and musical actors’ markets (Ibert and Schmidt, 2012, 2014), but not any research that specifically seeks to understand the UK market. Also, this research considers the opportunities for portfolio working both within and outside the acting context (what I call the ‘acting’ and ‘non-acting’ quadrants), which provide different prospects for broadening actors’ income and could increase the actor’s chances of having a more sustainable career (*cf.* Ibert and Schmidt, 2014). Therefore, this first empirical chapter considers the proactive actions taken by the actor to broaden the scope of their career within the acting sphere (‘proactive acting strategies’) separately from the proactive actions taken by the actor to add an additional skilled income strand outside of their acting sphere in order to

provide a firmer financial foundation ('proactive non-acting strategies'), which I will discuss in the next chapter.

## 5.2 Findings



*Figure 7 – Proactive Acting Quadrant*

Proactive acting strategies found interviewees taking action in four key areas:

- addressing skills,
- addressing markets,
- balancing economic and artistic logics, and
- engaging in entrepreneurial and/or business approaches to their acting career.

All of these were viewed as ways to stimulate or develop the market for their acting services. I will discuss each of these four categories using quotes from my interviewees to demonstrate these findings.

### **Addressing Skills**

Regardless of an actors' initial training (if any), in a crowded and competitive market one proactive approach that actors spoke of is to take continuing action to strengthen and develop their skillset in order to make themselves more marketable and to meet the casting needs of a variety of different

projects. This can be both a skills expansion for their current markets and a proactive choice to develop the necessary skills to move into adjacent markets for acting, such as accessing actor-musician shows or gaining work in voice-over and audio fields. Figure 8 shows examples of each of these approaches:

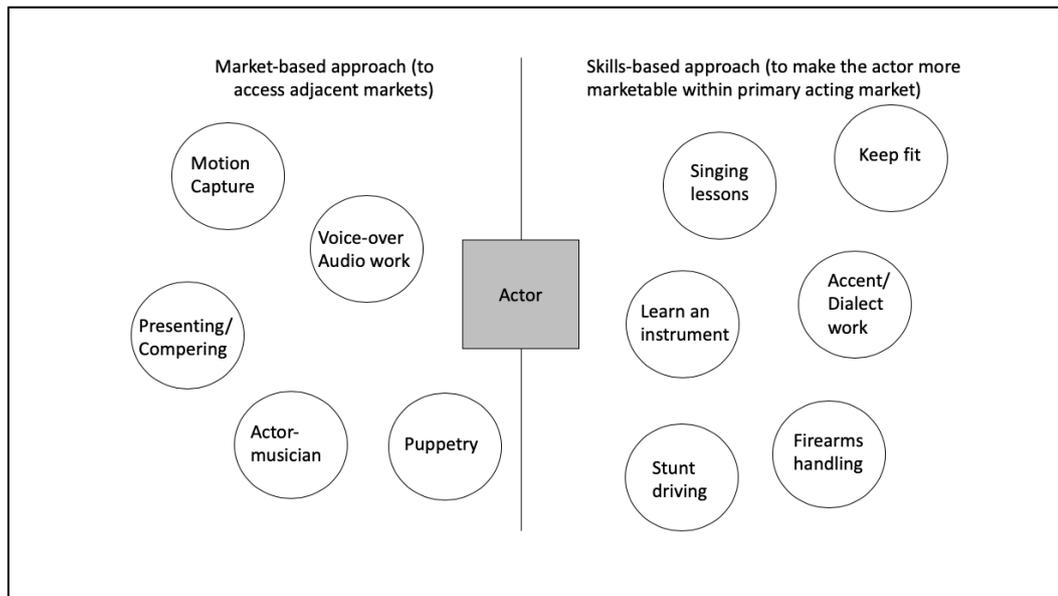


Figure 8 – Market-based and Skills-based Career Expansion Examples

One mid-career actor offers her advice for a sustainable acting career:

“I think it would be helpful if you... have as many tools available to you as possible so that you can fit into lots of categories... If you play an instrument when you're a kid, don't drop it [...] If you speak a language. Any one of these skills, you don't know, but keep them going.”

Participant I

In any crowded market, additional skills can help the individual to be more employable and a commitment to ongoing professional development can be a proactive way to give the actor a competitive edge. While this is what the actor above advises for others, she has chosen to resist this trend and specialise, in the hopes that she can distinguish herself through honing one particular skill:

“I think the problem with acting is you're supposed to be master of all trades. You're supposed to want to do a commercial, and juggle, and be able to sing opera and dah dah dah. That's fine. You don't have to do all of that. It's great for the younger generation if they can be all-singing all-dancing. They'll get certain kinds of jobs. I like to think what I've honed over the years is that there's only one of me. I know what I want to do. I'm not that interested in stage. I want to do film, that's what I'm good at. I think I know my product. And just to tune out all the comparison. That's taken me 20 years and it's not finished.”

Participant I

In this case, we see her focusing on film work in an attempt to be recognised as a specialist in this area and therefore work more. This is another approach to managing her career through focusing on one specific niche and aiming for excellence in that niche in order to rise above the competition instead of broadening her skills to try and tap into a broader range of casting opportunities. This self-knowledge is also an important career characteristic to identify both where one's strength lies, but also how to focus on that in order to be more competitive.

### **Addressing Markets**

Interview subjects were also taking a market-based (rather than skills-based) approach to their career strategy by developing skills and products for a different adjacent market. This can be understood as the prismatic career model (Ibert and Schmidt, 2014) where actors try to access different market segments. Participant E, for example, has created and packaged a series of performances and workshops that can be delivered to primary schools addressing components of the education curriculum. She describes her attempts to broaden her market in an effort to generate more income from her acting skills:

“More recently now what I'm doing is I'm selling myself as a theatre arts practitioner. So, someone who will go into schools, and I can do a workshop in something, or I've got loads of little shows that I can do for different ages. You know, storytelling performances, things like

that. So, I have a website set up for that to earn a little bit of extra in between other stuff.”  
Participant E

In this example, Participant E is creating a portfolio career (Blackwood et al., 2019; Hall, 1976; Handy, 1989; Reid et al., 2016) with an additional strand proactively created to broaden employment and earnings alongside of her continued pursuit of more traditional stage/TV/film acting opportunities. This is consistent with the findings of Ibert and Schmidt (2012, 2014) who found that, in an attempt to earn a living, German musical actors take on different forms of employment and these jobs can be both consecutively and subsequently pursued. The statement ‘to earn a little bit of extra in between other stuff’ indicates that this is one of several employment strands that Participant E is pursuing.

### **Balancing Economic and Artistic Logics**

Within the acting industry are areas of employment that are more commercial and thus generally more highly remunerated and there are other areas that are considered more ‘artistic’ and generally not as well paid. For example, adverts or role-play work (using improvised or scripted acting as a part of corporate training) are generally higher paid areas of work than most subsidised theatre or non-studio film projects. However, in my interviews, I found that not all work was necessarily considered equal by the interviewees. It was also apparent that actors sometimes close off avenues of employment as they do not value them as potential employment, or they are not their preferred areas of employment. In this we see the tension that exists between artistic and economic logics being applied to the career activities (Bourdieu, 1986; Haunschild and Eikhof, 2009). Given the low level of average acting wages (Equity, 2013), logic would suggest that any acting work that pays should be desirable, especially in a field with chronically low employment. However, interviewees suggested the negotiation of a subjective hierarchy as to what work each actor considered desirable. There was a strong pull towards acting work that demonstrates ‘art for art’s sake’

principles (Caves, 2000; Menger, 2006). Interview subjects spoke of a resistance to doing commercials or corporate role-play work out of a feeling that this work is not a suitable avenue for their skills. There is evidently a tension here between their artistic logics that orientate them towards certain kinds of work and an economic logic that orientates them towards revenue maximisation. Here are two examples of mid-career actors who have resolved this tension:

“So, I would say don't be snotty. Work out where the big earnings can come from in acting and don't be shy about commercials. My friend's done about four or five commercials already this year [...] it means she can carry on acting. It's good. She didn't go to drama school to do commercials, but it can keep her going...”

Participant I

“I wouldn't get into role play because of my silly romantic notions, and that cost me another £4,000 a year because I was a stubborn f—k [...] They really do all have to do it. [...] It just really clicked. You don't have a choice. You have to. During the years I was romantic, I stayed up the scaffolding in Bristol mixing cement, thinking, oh, it's just coming. It's just around the corner. Trevor Nunn [celebrated theatre director] will have me back. I just did [name of play], so that must mean I'm at the National [Theatre] now for several years. It's bollocks.”

Participant C

In the first example, Participant I says that her friend ‘didn't go to drama school to do commercials, but it can keep her going...’ in this we see that her artistic logic does not prioritise commercials; however, with time and experience, the economic logic inherent in this compromise becomes acceptable. In the second excerpt, Participant C speaks of how role play was initially rejected in the hope that work at the National Theatre, which more closely aligned with the actor's artistic logic, would materialise rather than having to accept work driven by an economic logic.

Participant N, an agent, proposes that work begets work (*cf.* Williams et al., 2019) so actors should seek out opportunities to practise their craft and this will allow them to improve their skills and build on their abilities, thus

presenting an artistic logic argument. However, she also argues for a need for an economic logic at times, saying: “you can be very famous in your front room, but that's not going to pay the mortgage. It's ply your trade in a way that's going to earn money” (Participant N). She states that sometimes taking the jobs that do not 100% interest you, or that do not pay a great salary, are worthwhile because they allow you to ply your trade and keep building your craft. The waiting for optimum opportunities to come does not necessarily help the actor to use their craft and improve it. As she points out, “there are no shortcuts” (Participant N) so actors must be willing to take the necessary small steps towards building a career. In this, she presents a combination of both economic and artistic logic that support building a career over a longer trajectory.

### **Engaging in entrepreneurial and/or business approaches**

I also found actors proactively taking a business-like or entrepreneurial approach (Chang and Wyszomirski, 2015; Fillis and Rentschler, 2010; Gustafson, 2011; Hong et al., 2012; Patten, 2016) to their career by focusing on activities, such as networking, marketing and self-promotional activities, with the aim of generating new connections and strengthening existing ones in order to increase their reputation and network of contacts who are in hiring positions within the marketplace (casting directors, directors, producers). This might include emails or letters sent to industry gatekeepers, strategically keeping in touch with industry contacts, or attending networking events. Here are two actors' accounts of their marketing efforts:

INTERVIEWER: “What actions have you taken in the past that have resulted in work?”

PARTICIPANT D “An example would be since coming to the UK...I did regular mailings to Complicité, and then last year right before Christmas I did a two-week R&D [research and development] with them on a new work. And when I got into the room on the first day, the woman that I had been mailing, came up to me and assured me that I was there because of my mailings. And they wanted me to know that they were effective. And that was really heartening to hear.”

“Well, you know, there's obviously all the usual stuff about keeping in contact with people, going to see things. If you do get work, then constantly reminding them that you still exist [...] One used to write letters. Of course, that doesn't happen quite as much now. It's more just a quick email, or social networking [...] They've got a new guy in the agency called [Name] who is amazing. He goes to everything, he's completely committed to that kind of networking thing. But not in a horrible way [...] He goes to any kind of conference, or talk, or Equity stuff, or Spotlight stuff, and just chats to people. And he's doing really well. He's been out of drama school less than a year and he's already had lots of work. He goes to interviews and gets recalls. There's obviously something working there for him. I think it's partly his manner. Obviously, I know he's talented as well. But he makes it his business, really. He's constantly in touch with people, and constantly looking, finding things out, meeting people, doing all that. I would certainly recommend that people new to the business did all that.”  
Participant E

The key point to this latter description is that the actor ‘makes it his business’ – this is the essence of the approach being suggested here to take a more entrepreneurial approach to managing one’s acting career. Another entrepreneurial approach might also include what would be thought of in business terms as ‘branding’ as explained here: “I think other things you can do are to make yourself seem like a new brand [...] I think new headshots, a voice reel can really help. I mean, these are all the tools, aren't they? A strong showreel... I think that can really help. It's certainly helped me” (Participant I). The agent also highlighted the necessity of this work: “...actors have to realise that from the day they graduate from drama school or university, they are the sole proprietors of their own business. And they need to run their career as a business” (Participant N). This attitude was echoed by the casting director: “being an actor is not a passive occupation. This idea that you sit and wait for your agent to call you is very misguided and you've got to move forward yourself. You absolutely have to find work and you have to be part of the industry” (Participant AA).

Not all actors see that this marketing activity is a role they should be taking, instead feeling that this is the domain of the agent, to whom they hand over responsibility for the management of their career:

INTERVIEWER: "Did you used to write letters and things?"

PARTICIPANT G "Never. Always had an agent...And I'm very bad at networking with people. After shows people go out drinking, meeting important people. It's never been my thing."

"...my agent's always the one that brings people. I don't think I've ever done that and I don't think I'm very good at it either. I'm not a networker. I've never been very good at that. So, I don't know how I would do it without an agent.

Participant H

The actor-agent relationship can be a source of anxiety in the actor's life. At the heart of the conflict is the question of who carries the responsibility for finding the actor work. Participant K discusses this in relation to his fiancée, also an actor:

"I had this discussion with [fiancée] the other day where she was saying, 'oh I just want a job'. I know she's started questioning – she changed agents about nine months ago. She's done a few bits and pieces, but her agent hasn't suddenly gone, these are all the doors I've opened for you, which I think she was hoping that she would do. She was saying, 'oh God, I'm really worried I've made a mistake moving agents'. And I said to her [...] if I can make a list of every single thing that I can do on my own and tick all those things off, and then the only thing that is left to me is to change agents, that's when you change agents."

Participant K

We see expressed in this quote the two positions on this; on one side is the actor who takes a proactive entrepreneurial approach to their career, and on the other is the actor who feels that finding work opportunities is the job of the agent. The question at the core of this is how much responsibility does the actor assume for the business development and lead generation work of an acting career? Participant Q gives his position:

INTERVIEWER: "What actions have you taken in the past that have resulted in work?"

PARTICIPANT Q: "I change agents quite regularly."

INTERVIEWER: "Why is that?"

PARTICIPANT Q: “Because it's a bit like my personal life. If it ain't working out – I'm not a great one for thinking, oh it's going to work out. I'm not a stayer. I'd rather be on my own. I've represented myself for a big chunk of my career as well. [...] I don't think anyone did a good enough job, and of course the moment I start representing myself I'm never out of work because I'm always on the blower.”

Participant Q is an actor who works extensively; he also takes an active role towards the management of his own career and this gives him greater agency rather than deferring this responsibility to his agent. Some additional proactive actions that actors expressed taking in relation to their acting career include:

- Being agreeable
- Working hard
- Developing grit
- Seeing acting as a calling, not a job
- Gratitude
- Confidence
- Focus on what you can control
- Physical/mental fitness – keep your product in good shape
- Keep chipping away, longevity
- Prioritise living a complete life
- Positive mindset
- Be in the moment
- Keep studying and improving
- Learning to cope with the repetition of being in a long run

Below, in Figure 9, I present a pictorial figure of the key ideas represented by this quadrant:

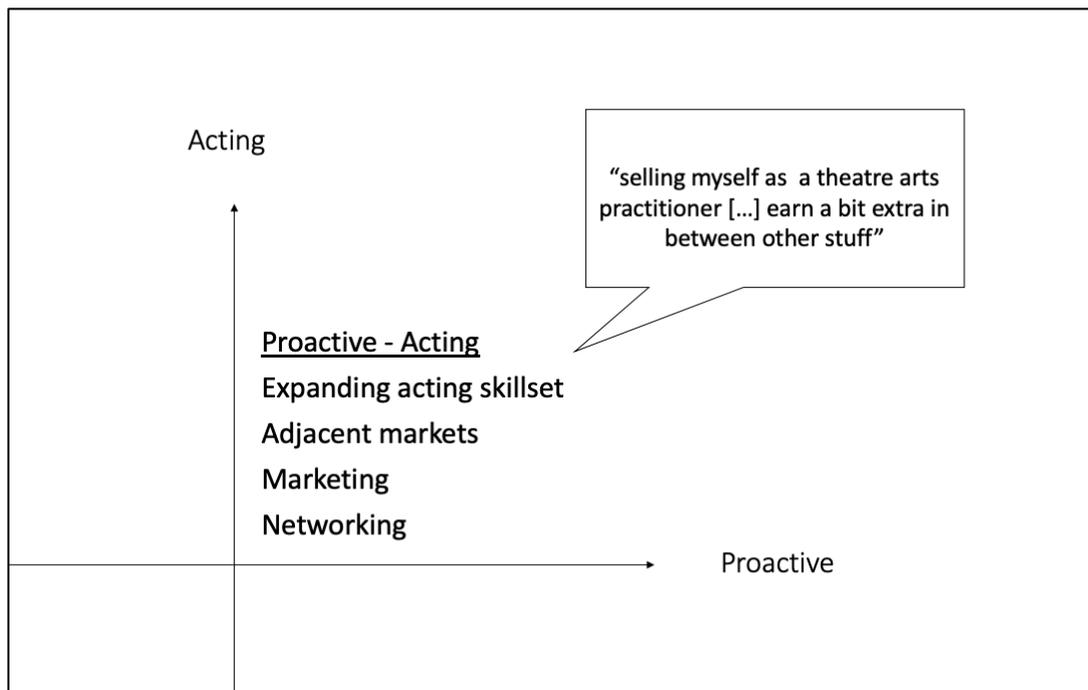


Figure 9 – Summary of Proactive Acting Quadrant

### 5.3 Discussion of Proactive Acting

#### Market Requirements

In the model above, I have identified that a skills-based and a market-based approach are proactive ways that an actor can increase their market for their acting work. However, my research showed that there is a foundational understanding that must underpin these efforts that not all actors appear to have; this foundation is about better understanding how the industry functions and how they can work within that framework. An example of this, given by the casting director, is for actors to have greater clarity on what micro-sectors of the acting field they are interested in and why. She says: “I think an awful lot of actors don't really know what it is about the industry they want to be in, which bit of it, what they like. Do you just want to be wanted for anything, or do you want to do something very specific?” (Participant AA). This focusing on a key area was expressed above by Participant I who chose to focus on film work. That being said, the majority of actors were taking a

broader approach, trying to work in multiple sectors of the industry in the hope of piecing together a living. This appears to be motivated by scarcity – since the majority of actors were unable to earn a full-time living in just one micro-niche, they were resorting to creating a portfolio career, or taking a prismatic view (Ibert and Schmidt, 2014) towards their career to spread the risk and increase the opportunities to earn. This is not the only front where I observed a differing viewpoint between actors and industry; there are also conflicting views about the roles of actors, agents and the casting directors:

“They [actors] think we [casting directors] are the key to the kingdom. But they also think their agents are the key to the kingdom, and actually we know that the relationship between casting directors and agents is incredibly important. Trusting an agent, relying on them and actually believing what they're telling you, is crucial to how we work.”  
Participant AA

Here, we have an example of *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1972), or an unwritten rule about how a field functions. We also see how the *habitus* (Ibid.) of the agent and casting director might differ from the habitus of the actor – and how this can lead to conflict in the field. An example is the role of the agent as the intermediary between the actor and the director/producer who makes the hiring decisions<sup>54</sup>. The actor, in a desire to work, wants to be considered for a wide range of roles, wants the opportunity to have auditions and be able to demonstrate their skills to the market, yet, because there are so many actors, there have to be control mechanisms in place to limit the number of actors under consideration. One way this happens is in the trust relationship between the casting director and the agent. The casting director trusts that the agent is only submitting the best actor for the role, not all of the actors within their roster who could possibly play this role. The casting director is looking for the agent to make filtering decisions as to who they submit, so that the casting director has a limited pool to choose from that consists of the best and most suitable choices. This means that the agent has to be honest

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<sup>54</sup> See Brkić, 2018 for a discussion of the Arts Manager.

about the abilities of their client [the actor], which sometimes means not putting actors up for certain roles that are beyond their current ability or casting type. This can be a point of contention with actors who tend to overestimate their own castability, yet the agent cannot do this without potentially eroding the relationship of trust with the casting director. This is where the teamwork of all three is necessary, in that the actor needs to trust the agent's decision about what to submit them for (even if this means the actor has fewer auditions than they would like) and the casting director needs to trust that the submissions made by the agent are credible and competent.

This trust can easily be eroded. From the actor's perspective, they want their agent to champion them and promote them, but from the casting director's perspective, they are looking for the agent to be a quality control and a filter. In this way, the actor is hoping for the agent to expand their possibilities, while the casting director is looking to the agent to reduce possibilities; there is an inherent tension therein. Part of the proactive activities for the actor to pursue is to have an agent they trust, who also has the trust of the casting directors. It also means that actors need to be realistic. The casting director's statement "they think we are the key to the kingdom" suggests that actors want to be opened up to the heights of the industry without realising that this is earned over time. As the agent points out: "...you do get people who think there's a shortcut in" (Participant N). It is also necessary to accept that: "Not all actors are going to be successful, and not all successful actors are going to work all the time. The ones we know about, the Tom Hollanders, the Eddie Marsans, those character actors, are pretty busy. There is a sea of people who aren't." (Participant AA).

As we saw, one way that actors try to deal with this scarcity situation, and take proactive action towards creating career opportunities, is through marketing themselves to industry contacts, for example through writing letters or emails to casting agents. However, many of my interviewees

suggested that again this might not be having the desired effect. A casting director, for example, told me:

“You've got to market yourself much more carefully. That's not about just being in people's faces, it's about canny marketing and really thinking about what people want, why might they want you at the moment, what are they doing. Being aware of what directors are working on, which casting directors they work with, what's their taste, what sort of line do they take. That's more important. Being a strategic actor, I think, is much more important, truthfully. There are some people who are good at it and some aren't.”

Participant AA

Again, we see a doxa appearing of how actors should be positioning themselves from the point of view of industry players. The key to successful marketing, from her point of view, is research so that the marketing is targeted. This is quite different from the approach that actors often take to their marketing where they are using very broad approaches to anyone in the industry without understanding what the individual does and how the actor's skills might be of benefit to them. The casting director speaks of a young actor who did his research and managed to effectively connect:

“There's an actor who wrote me a letter. It was just a really good, short, something about it was amazing [...] He always drops me a line when he's doing something, by email. He says, you'll like this one. It's not corny. It's not nerdy. It's not sycophantic. It's literally properly keeping in touch [...] And that came from a little letter that he wrote that just happened to be on my desk. Just happened to come at the right time. He obviously assessed what was the right time, and he doesn't get in touch too often.”

Participant AA

There are lessons from this anecdote that can be instructive to the actor in how to manage their communications in a way that will be useful to them, open up opportunities, and invest in the long-term cultivation of relationships. Her narrative typifies the way that networks function within the network-based market of the UK acting industry (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Faulkner and Anderson, 1987; Jones and DeFillippi, 1996). In her example above, the young actor's letter resulted in a meeting with the casting director, which led

to her recommending the actor to an agent. She said of this: “He had a very unusual face and I thought, hm. I met him and I cast him, and I said to an agent, you know, he's really interesting. Oh, that's really interesting, because this casting director, she also said that. So, she met him, and she took him on.” (Participant AA). We see in this anecdote how a ‘good word’ or ‘advance press’ about an actor which acts as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1989) can open doors. The more the actor can do to create symbolic capital, the greater their chances of success: “The more of an energetic buzz there is about you for good reasons, the more likely it is that I will be interested in casting you.” (Participant AA). The question for actors is how to build this buzz. Again, the casting director told me:

“You're as good as what you're doing. Even if you're not working on a project, if you're doing something else [...] I think anything you do makes you more interesting as an actor, but it makes you more visible and it makes you engaged with the work in some way.”  
Participant AA

This statement points to the actor who stays active, whether acting or not, remaining attractive to the industry. I will continue to explore other ways the actor can stay active both within and outside acting in this chapter and the following.

One strategy performers use to remain attractive to industry is through their use of social media. Participant R explains how he has secured auditions from Twitter, but how it is also part of a longer investment in building his network:

“I have a Twitter account that has nothing personal on there at all, but I will retweet and connect with casting directors and directors. It feels a bit sycophantic quite a lot of the time, but I try and hone that back a bit and make it real. And yeah, it works. Casting directors of big telly programmes, I write and say, I watched that. I thought it was brilliant when I honestly do. And they respond back. You don't know the full effects of it, but I feel like that kind of online networking, when I do write three months later, they've connected with me on Twitter. I

mean, I remember people I connect with, so I think it does make a difference.”  
Participant R

This is possibly a generational thing, in that the younger actors interviewed do speak more about the positive career effects of social media: “I am very proactive with Twitter, Instagram, Facebook. When I've got guaranteed shows I try to make sure that everyone knows” (Participant K), whereas some of the older actors had far less interest and saw less value in using social media to build their acting careers. However, again I find that the industry may view this differently. The casting director is negative about the use of social media: “I do it by the work. I don't do it by people linking in with me or trying to be my Facebook friend or any of that [...] I simply do it by the work.” (Participant AA). Again, we see an emphasis on the work which implies that the quality of the acting ability is far more beneficial than the attempts to network through social media. This contrasts with my findings from actors who felt their social media efforts were worthwhile<sup>55</sup>. If casting directors were able to see more people for consideration for a job, perhaps actors would not feel that they needed to market themselves quite so aggressively in order to compete for opportunities. The casting director argues that it is less about being known by the industry individuals and more about being viewed as ‘good’ by the industry. This reputation, which comes from symbolic capital, appears to have far more value than the efforts of the actor to introduce themselves to the market. While the casting director might be willing to give a chance to an unknown, if they do not impress them with quality then they are not likely to be given further opportunities: “I'm not going to bring in bad actors for something. That's not how it works.” (Participant AA). If the casting director believes someone is good, then they may try to convince other participants in the casting process (director and producer) to consider them; this is an example of the casting director's social capital

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<sup>55</sup> It is worth pointing out that this is just one casting director's perspective. Others may have very differing opinions about this.

(Bourdieu, 1989) being used to boost the actor – demonstrating how network-based work patterns (Grugulis, and Stoyanova, 2012) operate. In this way they can become the champion of an actor they really like: “If I want to promote somebody, if I want to get somebody into something, if I feel that this is an actor that I think is really good, it’s persuading people of my point of view.” (Participant AA). This speaks to the idea of the casting director as a gatekeeper to the industry (Layder, 1984). If their subjective judgement of an actor is that he or she is not very good, then they will not call them in to audition, whereas if their subjective view is that they are really good they can try to fight for them. In this way, the casting director acts as a filter as to who gets seen by the director and producer. The only thing the actor can control in this is to try and be the best actor they can be and do well in their auditions. However, in this scenario their ability to succeed rests on the subjective judgement of the casting director. In the German literature, we saw that the key gatekeeper is the theatre manager who selects actors, sometimes in consultation with directors, based on their own subjective tastes (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007; *cf.* Brkić, 2018). In this way, the casting director (in the UK) and the theatre director (in Germany) wield enormous power and their tastes often determine which actors are given opportunities to work. Consequently, they act as a primary filter for the industry and their subjective judgement of talent or suitability impacts on the actor’s ability to earn a living in the industry.

In the last ten years, there has been a shift in the TV and film industry away from live auditions towards ‘self-tape’ auditions, where the actor is asked to film their audition themselves at home without any guidance or direction. The casting director might use the self-tapes to create a shortlist for an in-person recall or the director might cast directly from self-tapes. It may be that this allows the casting people to see more people, which might widen the pool to more candidates; I assume, in fact, that this practice is prevalent because it also brings a reduction in cost to the casting process, shifting the financial

responsibility onto the applicant<sup>56</sup>. While there are many factors that can be criticised about this practice, it is increasingly found in the industry. However, this chapter is about proactive strategies the actor can use towards their acting career, so learning to meet the market and engage with them under their terms is a critical component to this work. To this end, we can see two actors with contrasting attitudes towards self-tape auditions. The first accepts what the industry wants:

INTERVIEWER: “What do you think about self-tapes?”

PARTICIPANT W: [laughs] “I’ve done lots. That’s the way of the future now. That’s the way it’s done. I’ve got my own kit. I’ve got my own back screen, blue, I’ve got tripods, I’ve got lights. I’m ready for it [...] I know a lot of people moan about it, but that’s how people want to do things. You’ve got to change with the times. I’ve been in the industry now 26, 27 years and it’s changed a lot even since I started. It goes on evolving so you have to evolve with it. Yes, I’d prefer to be in a room with a director and the producer, but they don’t all want to do that. They’re not all actors’ directors, so you’ve just got to do what they require, and you’ve got to get used to doing it. If you don’t want to do it, you’re not going to get very far.”

The second is more resistant:

“What don’t I like about it these days? F—king self-tapes, excuse my French. What’s the point about a self-tape? How can you judge yourself? You get a phone call at 5:00 in the evening from your agent and it has to be in by 6:00. Now sometimes if I’m teaching that means I miss out on the audition anyway, or.... And then they want it learnt as well. How can you suddenly learn? You’ve got to get the lighting right; it’s all got to be... I hate self-tapes. You are asked to prepare practically, for your audition, the entire show.”

Participant Q

It is noteworthy that Participant W works more regularly in TV and film than participant Q; this may be due to a difference in their attitude to self-tape casting, though we cannot assume causation as there may be other

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<sup>56</sup> This reflects broader trends in employment that shift more of the risk and cost onto the individual freelancer (McRobbie, 2002; Menger, 2006; Ross, 2009). See discussion of risk and precarity in Chapter two.

contributing factors. Self-tapes require the actor to meet the market. If the industry wants self-tapes, then a proactive strategy is to learn to be good at making them, while at the same time, it may be necessary to develop a resilient attitude about the things they do not like about the profession. I will shortly explore the role that capital plays in the actor's ability to make choices as to how they engage with their market, but it is salient that Participant Q has enough accumulated financial capital that he can be quite selective about the jobs he takes, which means that if he does not like the self-taping process, he does not need to engage with it. The agency that his financial capital affords him allows him to be dismissive of the process of casting because he is not dependent on the outcome; whereas Participant W, who is supporting a young family, has more incentive to bend to the market requirements. This kind of flexibility and negotiating of tensions that exist when there are competing desires, or logics, is my next topic of discussion.

### **Artistic Versus Economic Logic**

Many of the actors spoke of a tension between jobs selected with an artistic logic (Bourdieu, 1986; Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007), also conceived of as an art for art's sake orientation (Caves, 2000; Frey, 2013; Menger, 2006), and needing to balance this with earning income to stay solvent and meet their financial requirements, or decisions motivated by an economic logic (Bourdieu, 1986; Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007). Unless actors are subsidised or are willing to take on non-acting work to cover their bills, for many, consideration must be given to choosing acting jobs with an economic logic, particularly when they have a family to support. Participant J talks of the compromises he has to make with two children and why he takes lucrative concert work when not working in theatre and film:

“You hate ever having to refer to money. You know, if we could get by on just doing what we love and not need to worry about money, then

we would<sup>57</sup>. Unfortunately, it does become an issue and you start to sound like a mercenary. But I have certain overheads. It means I can't go and work in a bar because I would never be able to do enough hours to earn enough money to pay my rent and my bills and look after my children. So, I need certain money coming in. So, those kind of concerts will help if I get enough of them.”

Participant J

In Participant J's account, we see the balancing between the artistic logic, which he would prefer to use as the decision maker, being overruled by the economic logic necessary with having children. Participant Z, who has three children, also speaks of the balance between shorter, more artistically satisfying jobs, and longer contracts (often in musicals) that provide some security. He also discusses how he tries to balance the lower earning jobs with higher earning ones:

“The last couple of years before [touring musical], I had two years of really good, nice work. Stuff that I was really interested in. All short jobs – three months here, another three months there. A week here, a week there. It was great. It's one of the things I always wanted to do after having many years of long contracts. I was desperate to get three or four credits on my CV in one twelve-month period instead of just one. I worked with some great directors, did really interesting roles, but all rubbish pay, really. Because they're all small jobs. Personally, I was very happy and very satisfied [...] So just by the fact that I wasn't earning great money, we were still able to sustain our lives and our responsibilities. So, I've had two years of not earning great money, and now I'm going to have a year with [show] where I'm earning a lot more.”

Participant Z

This balancing act of lower paid work with higher paid work seems to be a critical skill for sustaining a career over a longer trajectory. In particular, it was highlighted by several actors that plays don't pay as well, partly because they are shorter runs, and so in order to sustain a living, actors try to balance them out with either more lucrative media work and/or with longer running

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<sup>57</sup> We see here the actor's habitus that reinforces an art for art's sake stance in which ideally money would not be discussed or considered.

West End or touring theatre. Participant J talks of compromising by taking a less interesting role in order to have a one-year contract at a West End theatre as he had been doing a number of lower-paying plays:

“I don't want to do jobs for the sake of working. A portion of [West End musical] was that. It was taking a year's security knowing that for the last couple of years, although I'd worked, plays don't pay quite as well. And you're always looking for another job because they're such short contracts. But taking a year in town at the [prestigious West End theatre] with an amazing piece of theatre, I was like, yeah. There's a small compromise there because the part doesn't do very much.”  
Participant J

We see here the compromise that he has made to play a part that ‘doesn't do very much’ in exchange for the financial security of a steady job for a set period. The desire to focus on artistic logic is favoured by many actors:

“...the last couple of years I've been doing a lot of critically acclaimed things that don't pay well, which is interesting. [laughs] It seems to be where the energy is at the moment, in the better shows that are not necessarily in the West End where obviously salaries are better.”  
Participant M

In his case, he is able to make this work as he also does lucrative voice-over jobs and he receives spousal support, meaning the additional income and subsidy allow him to take the critically acclaimed work when the wages are lower. This is also an investment in his career as he acknowledges that putting these prestigious theatre companies on his CV has opened the door for him to obtain more jobs in TV. Therefore, these lower paid theatre jobs are helping him to build his symbolic capital and he is able to use that capital to gain entry to more lucrative areas of employment. This is an example of ‘transubstantiation’ (Bourdieu, 2002) where symbolic capital can be transformed into other forms of capital. In this we observe that the balance of work needs to be considered not just over the course of a year in order to stay solvent, but also over a longer trajectory where some lower paid work can be considered part of one's apprenticeship or a way to accumulate symbolic capital (even if it provides little financial capital at the time) that can

be redeemed in the future. This long-term view appears to be another strategy for sustaining a career. However, it must be acknowledged that this formula becomes more complicated the more financial responsibilities the actor has. Participant M has no children and a spouse who contributes financial support, which makes the risk of earning less in the hope of accumulating artistic capital possible. Not all actors have this kind of subsidy, which leads to inequality of opportunity (*cf.* Brook et al., 2020; Friedman et al., 2017).

While theatre can provide a steady pay cheque, there are other areas of the industry where actors can earn more money in a concentrated stint of work. Participant W, who at the time of our interview had recently finished a 17-month contract in a musical, gives a concrete example of this:

“Put it this way. Since I got back from Canada in [musical] I've made quite a lot of money. I've made a year's worth of money in a matter of probably 12 days? 15 days? [...] I did a TV series [...] which comes out in a couple weeks. I made a lot of money on that. I've got about three commercials that are going to be playing in the States and I made a lot of money on that.”

Participant W

In his case, as an example of the ‘winner takes all’ aspect of the performance industry (Baumol and Bowen, 1966; Benhamou, 2011; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011), 12- or 15-days’ worth of media work can provide for an entire year’s financial needs. This financial windfall puts him in a good position for the remaining portion of the year where he can focus on projects without the strain of having to meet certain financial targets. While this seems like an excellent balance between theatre and TV/film work, other actors find it hard to balance the security of having long theatre runs with being available to explore other options such as media work. The long runs in theatre productions can afford actors a sense of security and a regular pay cheque, but they can also come at an opportunity cost as it means they are not available to audition for other work leading to a trade-off between security and risk. One actor who has been in a long-running show explains:

“I've been doing the show for 2 1/2 years now [...] I think the security I would have got might on the other hand have meant I wasn't available for other jobs, meant I wasn't, you know, I wasn't in the mix. I do try and work quite hard at staying relevant and not being completely disconnected and living in a bubble of doing a show. But also, there's.... who knows what I would've done had I done one year and then gone; do you know what? I'm done.”

Participant K

Of course, this is an example of Caves' principle of 'nobody knows' (2000). This actor might have had other, better, opportunities come along, but he also might have had to spend a lengthy period of time working in a job unrelated to acting. It is a risk and so actors must navigate risk in order to open themselves up to new opportunities. Particularly when actors would like to branch into other areas of the industry (such as moving from theatre to TV/film), there is a risk involved in keeping their schedules free for this work. Participant Z, who works a lot in plays and musical theatre but wants to do more TV work explains:

“I've had discussions with my agent about doing more TV and everything. There are three of them in the office and one of them said, the trouble is, you need to be available and you're never available because you're always working in these long theatre contracts.”

Participant Z

He acknowledges the risk that would be involved for him to take time away from theatre contracts in the hopes that some TV work might materialise is not just a financial one:

“Those periods where I've been out of work I've been pretty miserable. I just think I'm best when I'm working, so I don't know how capable I am of saying, right, I'm going to give myself a year out of the theatre and just see what happens in terms of TV. I don't know what sort of frame of mind and what sort of person I'd be if I did that.”

Participant Z

The inverse of this argument is that it can also be very difficult to be content in a long run, particularly if you do not find your role very fulfilling. Participant

J, who took a year-long contract in a show in order to provide some financial stability for his family, found that his mental health suffered as a result of this decision:

“It's hard enough doing eight shows a week for a year, but when you're doing very little eight times a week for a year, then you start to go a little bit crazy. I got very low. Mildly depressed. Ah, even though I know that it was finite. Even though I knew that there was an end to that contract. But that's back to the mental health, you know, where you go in your mind when you're thinking, I'm not doing what I love here. You know, but also thinking... I think it was because I'm earning great money. I'm earning really great money but it's coming at a cost. So, I'm like, would I rather be poor and healthy in mind, or would I rather be rich and going a little bit crazy?”

Participant J

We see in these examples that finding work as an actor is filled with risk. ‘Nobody knows’ (Caves, 2000) is pervasive in every decision where the outcome is unknown. Learning to manage this uncertainty is a key sustainability strategy for actors. Some actors try to manage this uncertainty by not just relying on market opportunities, but instead taking a more entrepreneurial role in creating opportunities for themselves, which I will discuss next.

## **Entrepreneurship**

For the actor, creating their own work is a proactive strategy that both enables a development of their creativity, but also allows for a greater sense of agency over their career. If actors cannot get through the door to audition for projects, then for many the alternative that allows them to still be visible within the industry is to create their own projects. Industry interviewees felt that there were many positive reasons why actors should consider making their own work. Firstly, it connects them with the larger industry. As the casting director puts it: “You are the industry. If you make your work, you are the industry.” (Participant AA). Secondly, the ability to make work is seen as a proactive strategy towards crafting a more sustainable career and is part of what the educator interviewee has introduced at the acting training institution

where he teaches: “What I try and do here is to encourage them to make their own work and to do things. I think that is absolutely crucial to their survival and to helping sustain a career.” (Participant S). He tells of one of the students who created a short solo show that she subsequently was invited to present at The National Theatre which was then turned into a television series. This is not the norm, but it does represent that this self-generated work can help to launch actors into the profession<sup>58</sup>. He tells of how another student’s self-created piece became the key that unlocked several doors:

“There was another student who'd been doing one of the solo pieces, he went up for a meeting with an agent and the agent said, I heard you did this really interesting solo piece [...] He said, could you show me a bit of it now? [...] So, he did his quarter of an hour solo piece there in the office and the agent took him on. Then the agent said there's a job coming up. I'd like you to see this casting director. So, he went to see the casting director and the casting director said, I heard you had this really interesting solo piece. Do you think I could see a bit of it? [...] And he got the job. So, it was an example of where that allows people to be proactive and creating their own work to do something. So, they're going into the profession not feeling like victims.”

Participant S

Making their own work is strong proactive step that actors can take that moves them towards a more entrepreneurial ownership of their own career. It can give them a greater sense of agency in their career and can help them to accumulate symbolic capital. By being visible within the industry, they give themselves greater chances of accruing symbolic capital (or of creating a buzz around themselves as the casting director spoke of). Also, if they are writing and/or creating, then they are also creating intellectual property which has the potential to generate revenue for the actor.

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<sup>58</sup> See Friedman and O'Brien (2017) for a discussion of the actor creating their own work as a way to overcome typecasting.

Creating their own work can be driven by an entrepreneurial spirit, but it can also be a way to keep busy during lean periods. Keeping busy, as opposed to 'sitting around', is a way to foster resiliency by not allowing the negative thoughts that can accumulate when not working to take hold of the actor. Participant K explains: "Doing something is better than doing nothing. Producing a small concert in your local theatre is much better than sitting around complaining that no one wants to hear you sing or no one wants to hear you do your monologues. Just do something." Other actors explore writing, producing and directing as ways to expand their skillset and explore other areas of the industry that might be of interest to them and might also at some point become additional revenue streams<sup>59</sup>. This is a way of expanding their market and taking a portfolio approach to career development by adding additional portfolio areas of working:

"I've also started writing. I wrote and directed a short that went to Toronto [...] which was a miracle [...] like, I just need to be doing this, so just got a crew of people together and made a low-budget short. And subsequently I have continued doing that [...] So I just was like, yes. I need to be writing or whatever the hell I can be doing."  
Participant M

Sometimes, creating their own work is about the intrinsic value of staying engaged in acting, even when the work is not there, to 'stay in the game' and ready for opportunity. The casting director suggests that making their own work is a way for the actor to "...keep providing fuel [...] for your soul to project you forward into other things" (Participant AA). However, it is important to acknowledge that while creating their own work undoubtedly brings creative rewards and a sense of agency, there are also no guarantees of external recognition of the project. Again, aligning with Caves' (2000) 'nobody knows' principle, self-created work may not recover its costs or

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<sup>59</sup> Ibert and Schmidt's research into German musical actors found that many of them were engaging in entrepreneurial activity to generate creative work (writing plays, playing in bands, etc.) but most of the time this work was secondary and was put to the side when they could secure theatre employment (2012).

generate a profit. Crucially, not all actors have the financial resources available to take these risks; in this way we see the impact that capital has on the options available to actors to self-produce. One actor tells of the one-man show he created and why he eventually had to stop producing it:

“I find it's very, very difficult to do something like that [...] to put it on, would take [...] three weeks of rehearsal to get it right [...] plus, it needs piano and accordion, and musicians are expensive. So, to get it to make money is very difficult. In fact, [director and producing partner] and I had a partnership going and we suddenly realised to keep the bank account going was costing us money. So, we dissolved the partnership, paid back everything we owed to each other [...] took back the money that we'd initially put in and found that over two years we'd made £400 each. I did conceive a certain admiration for those who are on the business side of the business. I started to realise how difficult it can be.”

Participant T

Participant T found that supporting his own entrepreneurial venture for any length of time when it was only just covering costs became unsustainable. However, for other actors the risk of creating their own show can pay off. We see in Participant Q how proactively creating a cabaret act was a way to manage a career transition from younger roles into character roles:

“I got myself a cabaret career together. I did an album. It got me invited out to New York. I got spotted in New York. All of a sudden – I was helped, don't get me wrong – but it was me going, I got to 28, 29 and I thought, I don't look juve lead<sup>60</sup> anymore [...] I don't want to be a chorus boy. I don't want to be an understudy. F—k, what am I going to do? [...] so I got myself a little act together singing at a hotel in the West End, built up a bit of a following there, and then before I knew it, within a year I was singing in New York. Got spotted out there, did a season at [major cabaret venue in New York]. [Legendary Broadway performer] took me under her wing. I had people writing – [major Broadway composer] wrote me songs. I was very, very lucky. But that was me going, I don't want to do that anymore. And I regularly do that. Then I got onto the ships as well, did my cabaret on the ships. Toured the world [...] over a period of eight years.”

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<sup>60</sup> This is a reference to 'juvenile lead,' a character type of the younger leading man in theatre.

## Participant Q

For Participant Q, creating his own work has paid off for him, bringing both intrinsic and extrinsic reward. He has taken an entrepreneurial approach to developing a product (his cabaret) and exploiting it to maximise opportunity. This has helped him balance both his artistic and economic logics. Through his efforts, he has accumulated considerable capital, both financial and symbolic, which aids him in how he is able to navigate the acting market. Of course, not all actors have this available capital, so next I will discuss how capital contributes to an inequality on the playing field for actors.

### Capital

For Participant Q (account above) the symbolic capital gained from his successful cabaret career opened up new opportunities for him to gain further financial capital – an example of Bourdieu's transubstantiation theory (2002). He describes how he landed a great job:

“He rang me – this was on the Thursday morning at 10 o'clock. He said, what are you doing for the next few months? I said, do you know what? F—k all. He went, do you want to go to the Caribbean? And I went, doing what? He said, doing your cabaret act, but we're setting up an academy at this five-star resort in Barbados. Do you want to go for six months? He told me the money, it was £2000 a week for six months. And I went, I'm there.”

Participant Q

In this instance, Participant Q had a product (a cabaret act he had created), symbolic capital accrued through a successful run in New York, and social capital in terms of relationships with other industry individuals. Without these various forms of capital, this lucrative work opportunity would not have been available to him – the job was not advertised or auditions held for it – instead it was filled through a network-based search (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Faulkner and Anderson, 1987; Jones and DeFillippi, 1996).

Unsurprisingly, given that so much work in acting comes about through network-based searches, many actors spoke of proactive activity to increase their social capital through expanding the network of people who know them. Participant J emphasises getting along with people to make him more employable:

“...my ethos is always to put in the hours, do a great job, be good to everybody. I mean, that's who I am as a human being. [...] But certainly, in our industry, if you want to make sure that your career will at some point start to look after you a little bit, then you've got to do that at the start.”

Participant J

What he expresses about having a “career [that] will at some point start to look after you a little bit”, is the essence of what I am defining as a sustainable career and for him being well liked is a profitable way to network and be in work more often. He is an actor who works a lot and as he expresses below, much of this work comes through his network:

“I know that there are certain directors, there are certain casting directors, there are certain actors who think of me when a part comes up that's appropriate. And that's great. I mean for the last [...] if I go back at least six, seven jobs, I've worked for each of these people once before at least or something like that. [...] There's one director I've worked with five times now and he's incredible [...] I've ended up working with incredible people because of one particular man, um, and I can always trust that if at some point or another he's doing something that I'm right for, he will call me in. I don't always have to audition, which is great. That's always a sense of momentum. That's always a sense that you've got somewhere.”

Participant J

Sometimes it is not an immediate network of contacts but secondary relationships through mutual contacts that can favour an actor. This demonstrates a feature of social capital observed by Bourdieu (2002) where an individual can benefit from the social capital of someone they are connected to; in this way the social capital of knowing one individual brings a

validation by another unknown individual<sup>61</sup>. Participant K talks about how social capital from his previous job helped him win over the director leading to his first West End show:

“I just think if you were to backtrack my career, you know, I got my West End debut because in the audition I did the scenes and I did them well. We then got talking about a guy I worked with on [previous job] because the director went, oh, you worked with [actor from previous job]. He's so lovely [...] I was like, yeah, I was his cover. Such a lovely guy. What a workhorse [...] I'd seen that [actor from previous job] was in a programme called [name of TV series]. And I went, oh, I've just heard - I haven't seen [name of TV series] yet, but I've heard it's really good. And we had a little chat. And there was... maybe that was the little increment that got me over the top, that gave her the faith in me to trust me to do a role in her West End show.”  
Participant K

In this case, Participant K was proactive; he had kept up his research about what people in his network were doing, and he was able to parlay his social capital and his knowledge of what this network was up to into a talking point with the director. This proactive use of his network helped him to secure the work and further expand his social capital with new colleagues and industry contacts. Both of these actors (Participants J and K) are successful theatre actors, so it is worth questioning what role the symbolic capital of being a successful actor contributes to people knowing them and wanting to cast them. In this we see that the various forms of capital reinforce each other (Bourdieu, 2002). This is why A-List actors (Caves, 2000) remain in the A-List and why B-List actors struggle to move up.

### **A-List/B-List**

A fundamental way that the A-List actor and a B-List actor experience the industry differently is in remuneration for their acting work and the effect this

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<sup>61</sup> This is also an example of 'network reputation' (Ibert and Schmidt, 2012) which is "...about acquaintances by acquaintances" (p. 352).

has on their career options. Being paid a wage that allows the performer to sustain a career and develop other interests (business or otherwise) would be the ideal scenario, but it seems only to be experienced by those at the top of the profession. Participant Z is successful within the realm of musical theatre and has worked almost continuously for 25 years. Here he explains how he always felt he was being well paid because he possessed specialist skills, but also as a recognition that his earnings might need to support him during periods of unemployment:

“...when I entered the profession, of course I was young. I was 21. I was earning the first money I'd ever earned. I felt like I was rich. It gave me a sense that I was being paid for my specialist skills that I'd trained for. I felt that the reason why I was earning good money was because also as performers [...] you expect to go through periods of unemployment. So, you get paid well in order to sustain those periods of unemployment until the next job. I just wonder now in 25 years, I think...I may not have first-hand experience of it because I have always been pretty much working and I've had some very well-paid jobs. [...] I wonder now whether actors or performers don't feel they're getting paid for their specialist skills. I think that comes also from the fact that maybe Equity is an open shop. Times have changed economically. I don't feel like we necessarily get paid – we don't get help to stay in the profession financially [...] I see young people I work with now and I just think, how do they do it? [...] I don't know if there's a sense amongst producers that they're just paying people for what their services are at the time, and that's it. Then after, they don't care what happens to them anymore. Whereas I felt when I first came into the profession – not because anyone had taught me that, it was just a sense that I had, that I was being paid because I had specialist skills. And I was maybe earning above average for the hours I was working because also, that was going to sustain me through periods of not working in order for me to continue pursuing the industry and provide my skills to another producer on another job where they'd want my skills.”

Participant Z

This perspective, that the employer is paying you well out of a recognition of your value, but also out of a recognition that the salary earned now might not just be supporting you in the present, but also in the future, is likely to be experienced only by those who have reached the higher levels of their industry and have amassed enough symbolic capital for them to be valued in

this way. The fact that Participant Z has been steadily working for 25 years speaks of his value to the industry and this is reinforced by the fact that he has been 'very well-paid' on some of these jobs, where they would only be compensating him at this level if they considered him worth it or viewed him as an A-List actor. These are not experiences shared by B-List actors. We see here the A-List/B-List phenomenon (Caves, 2000) where those who are at the top of their profession experience the profession in a very different way from those who are on the B-List or the ordinary 'jobbing actor'. A few examples of the B-List actor's experiences illustrate this difference.

Participant T has worked consistently for many years; however, he came to theatre quite late and has never accumulated significant symbolic capital. He has sufficient capital to work regularly in West End ensembles, but not enough to play larger (better paid) roles. As such he has the vantage point of someone who is a working B-List actor:

INTERVIEWER: "Do you think you're fairly paid for the work you do?"

PARTICIPANT T: "No, I think most craftspeople and professional people – I'm talking about plumbers, builders, doctors, lawyers, accountants – wouldn't work for the money we work for. No way."

INTERVIEWER: "Do you foresee a day when you'll retire or stop acting, or would you like to die on stage?"

PARTICIPANT T: [laughs] "I don't see myself retiring, no. I'm 67 now and I still like it. I still like going to work. I have – touch wood – excellent health and no, I can say I still like working. I still need the money. But no, I don't see that happening at all."

He still enjoys the work, but also emphasises that he has a financial need to continue working. If he had been better paid for the work he did, this might not be the case. This is contrasted with Participant W, who is a decade younger, but also works more in TV and film, where he is better paid. His TV and film profile perhaps help him achieve better wages for theatre work. We see the difference in his opinion of his compensation:

INTERVIEWER: "Do the rewards outweigh the difficulties?"

PARTICIPANT W: [pause] "They do, yes. They do for me. The rewards of doing a wonderful project and being part of it. And, yeah,

obviously the financial rewards as well. I don't do it to be a millionaire, but I want to be paid for what I do.”

INTERVIEWER: “Do you feel that you're paid fairly for the work you do?”

PARTICIPANT W: “Yeah I am.”

While Participant T does not feel actors are fairly paid compared to other professionals, Participant W feels he is fairly paid. This perhaps reflects that they are on different pay scales due to their strata within the acting industry; both actors are probably considered B-List, both are likely to be known equally to casting people, but Participant W has more symbolic capital owing to having played more TV and film roles (including small parts in some Hollywood blockbuster films) than Participant T who has almost exclusively worked in musical theatre. This stratification of the acting industry, and the stratification of financial reward that accompanies it, can be observed in the following statement from Participant Y, who has been an actor for over 40 years, but never moved beyond being a B-List actor:

“I'm 63 now and I've got three credit cards and a bank loan and a little bit of money in the bank. I can't retire. I can't... Maybe it would be a different answer if I were successful, but I've not been successful. I've been barely a jobbing actor. I think that's a maturity... All the actors I know, if they're not famous, they're all the same, just jobbing actors that are struggling, struggling, struggling. A lot of them would say, oh no, I'd do it all again and struggle and struggle and struggle, but I don't think I would.”

Participant Y

In this case, Participant Y lacks the financial capital to allow him to consider retirement. He never managed to amass the symbolic capital that would allow him to obtain more lucrative work in the industry, which has resulted in his feeling marginalised and regretting his choice to become an actor. I contrast this with Participant Q whom we previously saw followed up a busy theatre career by creating a lucrative portfolio income as a cabaret performer and who has both significant social and symbolic capital accumulated through years of quality work in the business. He has also managed his finances well, which have allowed him to accumulate financial capital. The

cumulative effect of this capital is that he is able to be selective of the work he accepts. Here he describes setting parameters for his agent: “What was great, it brought up a serious conversation [...] about the work I'm prepared to do and the work I'm not prepared to do, and the money. If it doesn't come to the director, the part, the venue, monetarily, then I ain't doing it.” (Participant Q). He is in an enviable position to have this level of agency over his career, but this has largely come about through a series of proactive career choices he has made that have resulted in his accumulating significant social, symbolic and financial capital, which collectively have given him considerable agency. This allows him to set the parameters of the work he will accept.

While Bourdieu's theory of capital is that once accrued it tends to last (Bourdieu, 2002), within the Hollywood project-based work literature Faulkner and Anderson (1987) observe that neither successes nor failures are remembered for long. Success and achievement in the short-term do not necessarily change the actor's status in any long-term way. Participant R tells how he landed a small part in an independent film where he was working alongside an actor who had been on *The Bill* for 25 years. He describes the first day:

“I walked into the room and there were two people I recognised from TV, who've been in TV for years. *The Bill*, which used to be a soap opera here, he was in it for 25 years and a really well-known face on telly. And I just thought, why is he doing this? He said the script was great. Work dries up for everyone. So, things like that have reminded me that everyone is – no matter what level you're at.”  
Participant R

The key statement here is that ‘work dries up for everyone’ and so learning to take proactive action is a critical step towards sustaining an acting career for the majority of actors. However, success can also prove to be a barrier to taking proactive action. Participant K talks of the challenges his fiancée, a successful TV actor who had a leading role in a soap opera for several years in the past, is facing now that work is not quite as plentiful. The fact that her

fame meant that, at one time, she didn't really have to chase opportunities, now makes it harder for her to take the proactive steps that might help her to get back into regular work.

“She's just won a ton of awards at different independent film festivals for a film she did a couple of years ago. And she's not the most proactive person, I guess because she had so much of her career where she didn't need to be. Things came to her. And a lot of things still do come to her. But I'm like, you should be tweeting about that. You should be writing to people and writing to the directors and saying, thank you so much for casting me in that film. I'm really privileged that I've won this award. Your scene is in my show reel, by the way, here's the link to my show reel and I hope to see you soon. She doesn't do that, I think out of just – she's never had to do it. She feels a bit cringe doing it.”

Participant K

This quote illustrates the difference between Participant K, a B-List actor, and his fiancée, who was once an A-List TV actor, and how the previous success can prove to be an impediment to the ongoing proactive effort needed to sustain a career now that the spotlight on her has faded. We can compare this to Eikhof and Haunschild (2006) who tell how even actors with ensemble contracts (full-time jobs in the German theatre market) still have to be active in their self-marketing.

## **Frugality**

Finally, I want to discuss an interesting observation from the demographic data I gathered on my research participants. 20 out of the 22 actors I interviewed completed an online demographics survey and analysing this data provides interesting insight. 40% of respondents said that acting was their only job while 55% said they had multiple jobs/sources of income (and 5% were unemployed). It is then instructive to look at their respective household incomes:

Table 4 – Household Income Comparison Table

| Household Income | Acting Only (40% of respondents) | Multi-jobs/incomes (55% of respondents) |
|------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Less than £20K   | 38%                              | 9%                                      |
| £20k-£34K        | 25%                              | 27%                                     |
| £35k-£49K        | 0%                               | 27%                                     |
| £50k-£74K        | 25%                              | 0%                                      |
| £75k-£99K        | 13%                              | 18%                                     |
| £100K+           | 0%                               | 18%                                     |

What can be safely observed in the figures above is that those actors who choose to only act have much lower household incomes than those actors who have multiple jobs or incomes. 38% of those who reported that acting was their only job also live with a household income of under £20,000 per annum. I must also acknowledge that the actors taking the survey may not have understood that the question was about household income and were reporting their own personal income instead, so there is a margin of error here; but if the actor is London-based at less than £20,000 per annum they are earning below the London Living wage. Nevertheless, it does suggest that there is a compromise that actors make in choosing to only focus on acting, which might be living with a much lower income, rather than trying to boost their income by taking on additional forms of work<sup>62</sup>. For some actors, this then becomes a lifestyle choice, whether they wish to only act and live frugally, or whether they want a higher income and can only achieve that through taking on additional paid work beyond acting (and there is a clear correlation in the above data where the actors who report multiple jobs/incomes also skew higher on household income). This collective data is a clear illustration of Frey’s (2013) analysis that:

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<sup>62</sup> This validates the ‘work preference’ model (Abbing, 2002, 2011; Throsby, 1994) that theorised that when artists reach a certain income threshold they prioritise making art over generating more income. My findings suggest that for some actors, once an income threshold is met, they keep their time available to pursue their acting.

“Faced with under-earning, actors, like all entrepreneurs and businesses face three choices: leave acting; reduce costs and/or try to stimulate demand for their acting services; and seek outside funding, whether from Government, private benefactors, family or by subsidising their acting with non-acting work.” (p. 13).

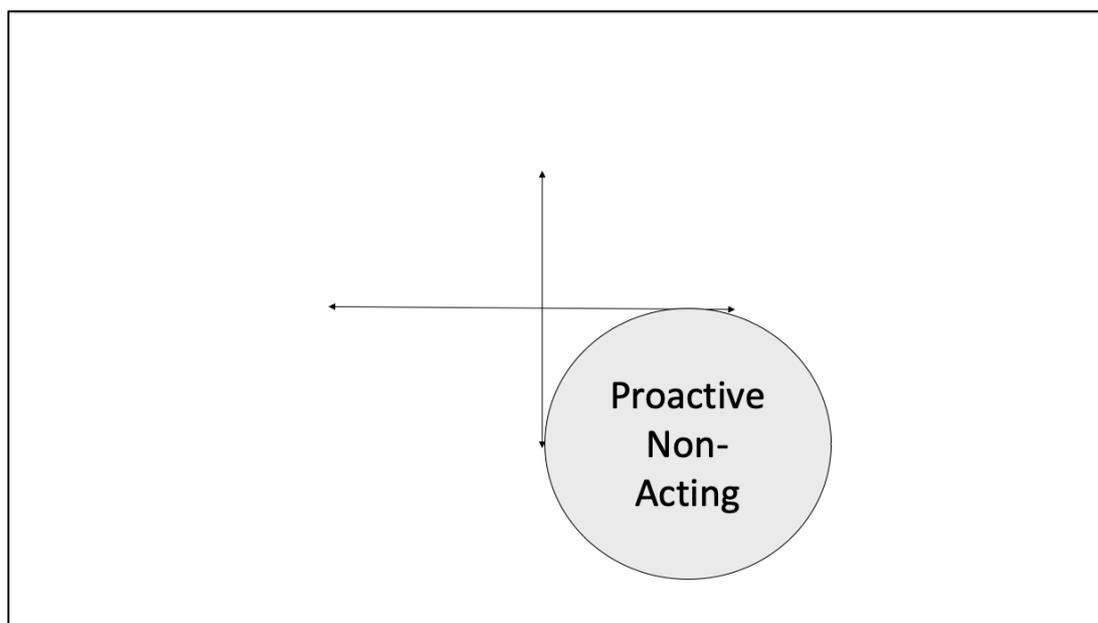
We can read in the data above that the actors in this research group have either reduced their costs in order to survive on a very low income or are subsidising their acting work through non-acting work. For some actors a proactive choice towards their acting career may be to live frugally on a low income to allow them to have the focus on just their acting career. While much of the earlier discussion has been about boosting income or boosting work as an actor, an equally valid approach may be to curtail expenses to the point that the actor can live within what they are able to earn from their acting. However, 55% of my respondents do work in multiple jobs or have multiple sources of income, so in the next chapter I am going to present my findings and discuss proactive steps I found actors taking to work outside of their acting work.

## **Conclusion**

The proactive acting quadrant is where I observed actors taking deliberate action to manage and steer their acting careers. This happened in four main ways: firstly, through expanding the actor’s skillset; secondly, by expanding the actor’s acting market; thirdly, by balancing artistic and economic logics; and fourthly, by engaging in entrepreneurial and/or business-like approaches to their acting career. I also examined the advantages for actors creating their own work while acknowledging the restrictions that capital plays on the actors’ ability to assume this financial risk. Finally, by examining the demographic data there emerged a correlation between a sole focus on acting (instead of subsidising acting with other work) and low household incomes and I postulated whether living frugally was a strategic choice to allow the actor to focus on acting. It may also be a causation, i.e., by limiting

themselves to only acting resulted in a low household income. As stated earlier, one of my interests in this research was to identify ways that actors are able to have agency over their acting careers, even with the existence of significant structural barriers. Considering the ways that actors can *duck and dive* their way around these barriers through the proactive choices they can make, presents opportunities for the actor to be empowered through a greater sense of agency. In this chapter, I have outlined some of the ways I found that actors could do this, while also acknowledging that structural barriers, such as varying amounts of capital, do support or impede this effort to have agency. In the next chapter, the proactive non-acting chapter, I will consider ways that actors make proactive choices to diversify their income by working outside of the acting sphere.

## 6 Proactive Non-Acting



*Figure 10 – Proactive Non-Acting Quadrant*

55% of the mid-career actors interviewed in the study reported having multiple jobs or income sources. In this chapter, I will discuss performers taking proactive action to add a non-acting parallel income stream to their portfolio of work to counterbalance the precarity of performance work (*cf.* Ibert and Schmidt, 2014). The interviewees used different ways to describe this, but they were describing a portfolio career (Blackwood et al., 2019; Hall, 1976; Handy, 1989; Reid et al., 2016) or protean career (Hall, 1976; Reid et al., 2016) with an additional non-acting career component in the mix with their acting. This section will first explore the actor's need or desire for non-acting income followed by considering some of the proactive non-acting strategies actors have implemented to meet this need.

### 6.1 Findings

To situate this topic, I reiterate that Equity's (2013) survey found that 49% of respondents earned less than £5,000 per year from their acting and only

14% earned over £20,000. It is unsurprising that the precariousness of these low earnings can fuel anxiety about the actor's future:

“... you have to make sure that you've got other strings to your bow, that you're properly qualified in something else... Certainly prepare for your future. Think about are you still going to be living hand to mouth into your 60s?”

Participant E

For Participant E, worrying about living ‘hand to mouth into your 60s’ is a manifestation of her feelings of precariousness in her current situation and projecting that forward into her future<sup>63</sup>. Uncertainty about one's financial future can cause a lot of distress, so here having ‘other strings to your bow’ and being ‘properly qualified in something else’ help to manage the uncertain future that comes with acting. However, this does not mean the actors would discourage others from pursuing acting, but rather they view this as a kind of insurance policy:

“So, I just think it's essential to have something else. When I talk to [...] young people [...] they go, oh, you're an actress. I'd love to be an actor [sic]. I always say to them, that's absolutely brilliant. I'd never say you should not do that, but you absolutely have to have something else going on. Because very few people are working all the time, so what are you going to do?”

Participant I

In this view, having ‘something else going on’ is presented as a proactive strategy (and a necessity) for an aspirant going into the profession. Likewise, Participant H expresses uncertainty about the sustainability of acting:

INTERVIEWER: “What do you think individuals could do to make their careers more sustainable, if anything?”

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<sup>63</sup> This is relatable to the ‘telescopic career’ model presented by Ibert and Schmidt (2014). In their model the younger actor telescopes forward to a future where they are successful; in this case the jobbing actor telescopes forward to a future where living hand to mouth may not be desirable.

PARTICIPANT H: “It's a hard one to answer, really, because it's so up and down all the time. I think the best thing anyone can do in this business is to have a skill, is to have something else to be able to do because being an actor is a great job, and it can pay you a great wage, but I just think if you're just able to top it up, to back it up – if you've got another skill.”

This additional skilled income stream can be a stabilising income, but can also prevent the actor from having to take on what were described as ‘crappy jobs’ that can undermine one’s enjoyment of life. These ‘crappy jobs’ are explored further in the final of these four categories: reactive non-acting work (see Chapter nine). What Participant F, below, is expressing is a motivation for a portfolio career where the additional income streams are also types of work that you enjoy or feel valued doing, giving the actor a sense of agency and also avoiding the unhappiness that can come from doing work that you feel you have no choice over or that does not appeal. This is a proactive strategy leading to a more sustainable income, while also contributing to resilience:

“I wish someone would have told me to train in something else so I wouldn't have to do the crappy jobs that I've done in my lifetime... I wish they'd said learn a skill that you love alongside of it, like now, yoga. So, you have a better sense of day-to-day living. The truth is you need something else other than acting... And get another skill that makes you happy. Don't be miserable in the call centre, you'll shoot yourself. It's just not worth it.”

Participant F

While actors may have a desire to stabilise their income through additional skilled work in the form of a portfolio career, this can be challenging because stage acting is often an all-or-nothing pursuit that does not lend itself well to portfolio working patterns with several simultaneous income strands. Unlike the German musical work described by Ibert and Schmidt (2012, 2014), with actors working part-time over a lengthy period, stage acting in the UK is almost always a full-time contract. This pattern of full-time acting, followed by a lengthy period of time being unemployed until the next acting job comes along, is more of a protean career model (Hall, 1976; Reid et al., 2016),

where the outward shape of the career changes and takes on different appearances, often based on a sense of danger, rather than a portfolio career model. To illustrate this, Participant H (below), at the time of the interview, was in her early 30s and understudying the female lead in a West End musical. Despite having worked steadily for over a decade, she desires to create more stability in her life. She expresses a frustration about acting, that it does not lend itself well to portfolio working, in that if one finds a secure well-paid non-acting job it is a risk to give it up for an acting job, especially if the latter is a short contract. Portfolio working (Handy, 1989) implies multiple jobs that run concurrently; whereas when most acting jobs come up (especially in theatre) they are full-time and often involve working away from home<sup>64</sup>, which can make sustaining an additional secure well-paid, non-acting job difficult alongside acting:

INTERVIEWER: “What things have prevented you from working, if any?”

PARTICIPANT H: “Nothing has prevented me from working. The only thing, last year I'd finished [Touring Musical] in February [...] I obviously needed a job. Nothing was coming up in this business, so I took a job [caring for her brother's stepson]. It was a proper job, PAYE, monthly paid. So, I took the job and I was there for a year. A couple of things came my way from my agent, and I really had to think about whether I wanted to do a three-month job or a month summer season knowing that I would have to give up the stability of the job that I was doing. So, I prevented myself, really. I was asked to do [Touring Musical] again... But I couldn't. I'd have loved to have done it, but I wouldn't have been able to go back to the stability of that job. I made the decision and I said to my agent, look, unless it's... a long run – which a lot of people my age don't want a long run, but I do because I want that stability – I said to him, I don't want to be put up for anything unless it's a long run [...] Nothing physically has ever prevented me from doing a job, but I prevented myself because the stability started to become very important to me. Also with the transition into applying for a mortgage and things like that. The only thing that's prevented me is myself trying to create a bit of stability and thinking, actually this isn't worth it. It's only worth it if it's something I

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<sup>64</sup> The spatial flexibility (Eikhof et al., 2012) puts additional demands on actors, particularly on families and relationships.

really want to do that's going to provide me with employment for a lengthy amount of time.”

Participant H's need for stability is making her question whether acting can provide this. Her attitude towards acting, seeking out only lengthy contracts that will provide her with long-term employment, runs counter to bohemian (Abbing, 2011; Comunian et al., 2010; Eikhof and Haunschild, 2006) and art for art's sake (Caves, 2000; Frey, 2013; Menger, 2006) ideals, or even Throsby's work preference models (1994, 2007), which would suggest that the actor would prioritise her acting work over any non-acting work; but we see in Participant H's account that she turned down short-duration acting work if it meant giving up the security of a non-acting job. This is a prioritisation of economic logic over artistic logic and can perhaps be understood because this actor already has over ten years of regular employment as an actor, moving up the ladder to play larger roles and so some of the 'art for art's sake' artistic logic, that is prevalent at the start of her career, has worn off<sup>65</sup>. Perhaps she feels she has achieved what she wanted out of acting; therefore, she can be more strategic in her decision making using an economic logic<sup>66</sup>. She is actively trying to determine what else she can do besides acting in an attempt to diversify her income and provide a greater degree of safety and security in her life<sup>67</sup>. She says:

INTERVIEWER: “Do you have ideas of what you could do in the future that you would enjoy?”

PARTICIPANT H: “Yes. This is literally something I'm thinking about every day at the moment... I don't know whether I would want to remain in the business if I wasn't acting. I want to look at opportunities and see what opportunities I've got... I'm really interested in the special effects makeup side of things. I think it's all very well training in

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<sup>65</sup> This is also an illustration of what Frey (2013) observed about intrinsic motivation, that a prioritisation of intrinsic motivation over extrinsic motivation is particularly seen in the early years of an artistic career. Here we see that 10+ years into the career this has reversed.

<sup>66</sup> It is also a possibility that her response is a gendered response and that as a female in her 30's she is more acutely aware of the risk she faces in precarious employment (Dean, 2005, 2007, 2008). I will consider gender in my findings in Chapter eight.

<sup>67</sup> See Ibert and Schmidt (2014) for a discussion of exit strategies for actors (*cf.* Benhamou, 2011; Hennekam and Bennett, 2016; Menger, 2006).

those areas, but essentially, you're probably still going to be self-employed, and I think I want a skill that's going to make me employable, do you know what I mean? [...] So, I've got ideas flying around my head, but I really just need to knuckle down and actually research what I can do. I said to my fiancé I might start doing some promo stuff in the day just so that I can get in with these companies in the event that I find myself out of work. Then they know me. He said, you're probably better off to spend the money and the time that you've got to retrain in something else. So, I think probably this time next year I will be finding something to retrain in, so that I've got something else to fall back on. That's quite important to me at the moment, at this stage of my life, having another skill that I can earn money from.”

We see that she is planning to invest both time and money into developing an additional skilled area of employment that she will enjoy. This is driven by a desire to ‘make me employable’, consequently other areas that would result in further self-employment, and therefore additional risk, are dismissed. Having ‘something else to fall back on’ is an antidote to the precariousness of an acting career. It is important to note that she is understudying lead roles in the West End, so she is working nearly at the top of her profession and yet she is actively trying to determine how to create some stability in her life. This speaks to the uncertainty of working in the theatre and that success as an actor does not mean that these fears go away. What is interesting about this finding is she is describing a position of precarity and uncertainty about her future, and yet she is employed in a good acting job with a healthy salary and long history of work, yet still she does not feel safe being just an actor<sup>68</sup>. This speaks to the depth of need in some actors to find a more stable foundation than acting can provide, which I think counters a lot of bohemian generalisations about artists (Abbing, 2011; Eikhof and Haunschild, 2006; Newsinger and Serafini, 2019). We will see throughout these empirical chapters examples of actors working at high levels within the UK industry and still expressing a strong sense of precariousness about their employment and a desire for more security,

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<sup>68</sup> Again, this may also be a gendered response (Dean, 2005, 2007, 2008; Eikhof et al., 2012) with significant research pointing to decreased opportunities for female actors beyond 30.

therefore, demonstrating this is not isolated to struggling actors. Even steady work does not necessarily bring security.

Another interviewee was considering a financial investment to train in executive coaching, to pursue alongside her acting:

“I'm thinking about next year spending about £7,000, £8,000 doing an executive coaching course at the Tavistock Centre<sup>69</sup>. It's just something I'm thinking about because it sort of builds on all the stuff I've done so far. I know I'm good at it. It could earn me really good money but still be flexible enough to still act. We'll see.”  
Participant I

Here, she is not looking to replace her acting career, but rather for something that is ‘flexible enough to still act.’ Acting is still the first priority, even if it is not earning her enough money to fully support herself. The executive coaching is something to do in addition to her acting career and is a proactive choice to allow her to continue to pursue acting with some job safety and financial security. In this, it is clearly a decision made with an economic logic to allow her to continue to act or to support her artistic logic. We see then the economic logic being used as a way to leverage a continued pursuit of an artistic logic.

One surprise from the interviews was some of the professional skills that actors possess, whether from a previous career that they have carried forward to run parallel to their acting or as something they have trained in to do alongside their acting career:

“Someone that I was working at Les Mis with was a plumber. Another actor that I've worked with is an air traffic controller [...] Someone else is a builder.”  
Participant H

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<sup>69</sup> The Tavistock and Portman Centre is a Foundation Trust and part of the NHS. They offer a unique approach to mental health that weaves together clinical research, education and training.

“One of my ALRA<sup>70</sup> students [...] is a GP... and she's going through the ALRA course at 36. And she's staying up to date on that material, the GP material. She works at half term in particular. She's a locum GP [...] and she has every intention of getting an agent and going through the whole – so it's vocation.”

Participant C

The examples so far have been sole-trader service businesses, such as executive coach, yoga teacher, plumber, etc. However, some of the actors interviewed are engaged in entrepreneurial activity, with one having borrowed heavily to invest in London property in order to generate rental income, while another set up a communications consultancy that employs several members of staff. Both of these ventures are much higher risk than we have previously seen, but both have the promise of greater long-term returns; however, this does not come without additional stress and anxiety:

INTERVIEWER: “How do you financially manage periods with no or little work?”

PARTICIPANT B: “I find other work [...] I have, because I'm a chancer, managed to acquire two flats here. So, I have rental income, although I have a whacking great mortgage on that flat. I have rental income from one property. I just bought the freehold [of her multi-dwelling home] because nobody else would. I do crazy stuff like that and I think, 'Oh my God, oh my God', I can't sleep, and then it either works out or it doesn't. But it generally does.”

Participant B is, in her own words, ‘a chancer’ meaning she is willing to accept the entrepreneurial risk of these ventures. She indicates the impact this risk can have on her, in the form of not sleeping. We can compare this to the case of Participant E whose husband (discussed below) is a successful actor with major TV, film and stage credits, for whom success has come later in life. He also founded and operates a side business that provides safety and stability for his family, but causes additional stress for him in juggling two demanding professional careers simultaneously. He is an example of an

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<sup>70</sup> ALRA stands for Academy of Live and Recorded Arts.

actor with a portfolio career and is a prototypical example of a proactive non-acting strategy to provide for his family:

“[Husband] has a company. He runs [Company], which sort of uses communication skills, but it's not really to do with acting. And that pays the mortgage. That's what keeps us going, really [...] There was a period when the kids were little and I couldn't work, and [Husband] was setting up [Company] when we struggled. We didn't earn any money and it was tough. Then [Company] started to become successful and started to support us, and that got easier... I mean, I guess that [Husband] would probably say that he now has a career in acting. But he's only just recently stopped going into [Company] on a daily basis. I mean, running a company at the same time as having a career. There was a period, actually only about 18 months ago, where he was working at the National [Theatre] in the evenings and going to [Company] all day and running [Company] and doing all of that. That was ridiculous, and stressful and horrible because he was trying to actually run two careers at the same time, which is no good for any of us, particularly for him. But he couldn't not do [Company] because he was working in theatre and that doesn't pay enough money.”  
Participant E

We see in this account that even working at the National Theatre did not sufficiently provide for looking after a family so it was necessary to subsidise his acting work with the side business.

These proactive non-acting strategies are what allow many actors who are under-earning from acting to continue to pursue acting and still provide for the needs of their families. These proactive jobs are a choice; they are areas in which the actor has invested time and money in developing an additional skill, or assumed risk and/or invested time and capital to build a business, that will be an additional income stream and support them when they are not working, leading to a more sustainable path. They also give the actor a greater sense of agency over their own career and family life in response to an industry that is unpredictable and precarious. Below, in Figure 11, is a graphical representation of the key ideas from this proactive non-acting quadrant:

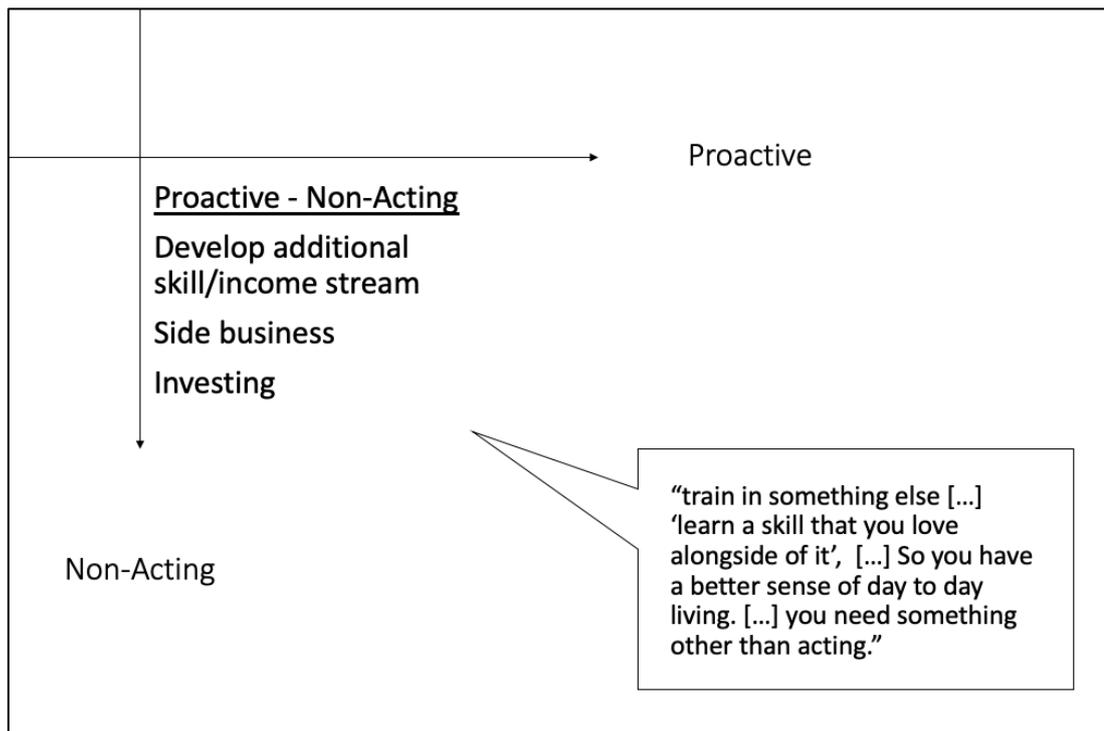


Figure 11 – Summary of Proactive Non-Acting Quadrant

## 6.2 Discussion of Proactive Non-Acting

### Managing Risk

The first point of discussion is that the advice to have a ‘second string to your bow’ was frequently heard from research participants:

“I’d say to anybody entering the acting profession, equip yourself with some skill that you can earn money with because you will need it at some point. I know somebody, for instance, who has got very good office skills. When he’s not working, he can always pick up temp work in offices.”

Participant T

Here, we see the interviewee advocating that actors develop a secondary skill that they can have available to earn additional income; however, it’s interesting to note that he himself feels he does not have this secondary skill and has largely survived with acting alone (plus a wife who worked full-time in a non-performing job). Participant Y, who is of a similar age to Participant

T, reflects on his career: “Now I look back and I think, maybe an actor does need a second string to his bow, as it were. I think it's very difficult putting everything into one basket as an actor. I just don't think the work's there.” (Participant Y). It is interesting that in both cases a second string to the bow is something they would recommend for other actors, though not something they have created themselves. Participant W, a busy actor in both stage and film, also keeps up a side business. He explains:

“Acting is pretty full-time, but I do run a small boutique security company and I do still do close protection bodyguard work for a major security company [...] I could do a day job with them which will pay anything from £250 to £300 and I can go to Africa on a three- or four-day job, which is not a problem because you're just away for a few days. [...] But also, I'm a great believer in going out and doing other stuff in life, not just everything to do with acting. That's where my security [work] has come into play [...] That's kept me going. Then you come back from a job and then boom, you know, you have an audition.”

Participant W

He probably works enough that between him and his wife (who works full-time in a non-performing job) they could support their young family, but his security work also feeds him in other ways and is both short-term and flexible. His side business could be a proactive choice to keep as a diversification strategy and a form of insurance in case the acting work dries up (a way of managing the risk), and/or it could be simply that he enjoys the work, and it diversifies his life. As he says, ‘I'm a great believer in going out and doing other stuff in life, not just everything to do with acting’. What is unspoken is whether there is also an economic logic to this choice. This is similar to what we saw earlier with Participant E whose husband continues to run a company even though he is working almost full-time as an actor; however, with two children to support it helps to alleviate the risk if the unpredictable acting career should drop off. These are both examples of actors with families who also maintain side careers even though they are working extensively as actors. The observation that even actors who are

working a lot still structure their lives based on precarity and risk speaks to the uncertainty of being an actor in the UK.

## **Agency**

Another interesting case is Participant R whose acting career is not on the same level as Participant W (above who does security work), but he has made a conscious choice towards building a career that integrates proactive acting work with proactive non-acting work in order to give himself greater agency in his life:

“I've taken a permanent job two days a week that's flexible. I can move those days around and it has holiday pay. The kind of work I'm getting, which is, if I'm lucky, a day's filming a month, but more likely two days one month, nothing for two or three months. That might work on the days I'm not actually at my normal job. Or I could move those days, or I could take holiday. So, for me, I feel I'm not in my ideal place yet, because I'd like to be getting, like I said, a week's work, a month would be brilliant. But I think even if I got that I'd try to keep my in-between job going.”

Participant R

With his current acting work, he can still accommodate a part-time administrative job that allows him both financial freedom and flexibility to pursue his acting career on his own terms. This permanent portfolio career seems like a compromise that works for him and gives him a sense of agency over his life and career:

“For me, having a two or three day a week job that earns enough to pay for everything in life – not massive holidays, but enough to live happily – that has given me the freedom to pursue the work I want. I'm not sure if everyone can see their life like that. For me, if I get an acting job it's an added financial extra because my life can exist on my own side. That's definitely made it sustainable.”

Participant R

Participant R has made proactive choices to build a life that includes the security of a part-time job and still allows him the flexibility to participate in the industry at a level that is sustainable to him.

Participant Q has added a proactive non-acting teaching strand to his portfolio career, and we see in the following quote how the income from teaching, which is work that he enjoys, allows him to have the agency to say no to acting work that comes along that he is not interested in pursuing:

“A couple of weeks ago my agent sent me four scenes in a really nice, interesting part in a new film that starts filming next week. The casting director wanted to see me. It was to do a self-tape, but I had to learn seven pages of dialogue. One was a monologue. So there's all that and it was to clash with three days of my teaching at [theatre school], which pay me very well [...] I said, let's cut to the chase. What's the money? They said the daily rate was £175 a day. I said, I'm earning more than that in a day at [theatre school], so I said no. Again, part of that conversation she said, I really get where you're coming from. I said, I'm not being grand. I don't think I'm bigger or better than anyone else. But that actually is going to do nothing for my career, doing those four scenes. One of them ... two of them might even end up on the cutting room floor.”

Participant Q

What is significant about this is that we see the actor not prioritising acting work over non-acting work<sup>71</sup>, but instead weighing up the value of the acting work towards the overall arc of his career and determining that this work will not help him progress further up the career ladder. In other words, weighing the artistic logic of the acting work and deciding that the value of the teaching work was greater than what would possibly be ‘earned’ in the acting work, therefore prioritising an economic logic. This shifts the equation from the actor who takes a scarcity-driven decision to take other work when their acting work is not available and tips it towards a portfolio worker who assesses opportunities against their own values and needs, and determines

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<sup>71</sup> Which we might assume an actor would do based on Throsby's (2001) work preference model.

where their work energies will be allocated according to a balance of both artistic and economic logics.

### **Contribution to Acting**

The previous two examples were of actors whose proactive non-acting job gave them the agency to be selective about the acting work they were taking on; however, I also found actors for whom their non-acting work directly fed into their acting work. As an example, Participant W, discussed earlier and who runs a side business doing security, talks about how his side job helps him meet people that boost his acting career:

“I used to run security at the [prestigious private members club] in Soho [...] so I meet people in the industry out there. That has got me jobs in the past or got me to meet people who I've then gone in to audition for.”

Participant W

In this case, Participant W's side job helps him to actively boost his network and interact with people in the industry. Also, given that a lot of his casting is playing police officers and CIA agents, it probably does not hurt for him to be first encountered in a security context. His side job actually places him well for industry gatekeepers to easily perceive of his casting bracket and where to slot him in projects<sup>72</sup>.

The casting director also points out that the non-acting jobs that many actors do as part of a portfolio career can be beneficial to how they are perceived in auditions. She observes how doing additional things besides acting, can make them more interesting to a casting professional:

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<sup>72</sup> Typecasting also restrains many actors by narrowly binding them in restrictive literal casting (Dean, 2005; Friedman and O'Brien, 2017). In this example, we see the positive effects of typecasting, where it is very clear to a casting person where in the panoply of characters to slot an individual actor (*cf.* Layder, 1984).

“It's about coming in with an energy that is tangible, really. So you're writing a book, you're doing a PhD. You have to be engaged and active in some way in the industry. Then I think your luck changes. Oh, you're translating this at the Arcola now. Oh gosh, that's really interesting. Then you go on another ride with somebody else you've met from that job, and then you find yourself being cast in something.”  
Participant AA

She points out that what can appear to be a diversion for the actor can keep them in a proactive state, ready to seize opportunities that arise for them, rather than allowing themselves to become passive when not in acting employment. In this way, the portfolio and protean career models can not only support the acting career through a diversification of income, but also provide inspiration for the acting career by helping the actor to stand out from other actors who are less proactive.

## **Conclusion**

This proactive non-acting chapter has been an examination of the 55% of interviewees who indicated that they had multiple jobs or sources of income. It was an attempt to evaluate and map out where and how they were structuring working lives that included work both within and outside acting spheres and also to understand their motivations for dividing their working lives in this way. The key motivation was the precarious nature of acting and this portfolio career approach was a way for them to manage the risk. It appears to have also given a sense of agency to the actor in that it was a proactive choice they could make to manage the risk inherent in their pursuit of acting. In my interviewees I saw that the risk was temporal in the sense that some of them had experienced the precariousness of acting in the past and had taken steps to stabilise their path, others were working through the process at the time I interviewed them in trying to find ways to establish a more solid foundation in their careers. Others, even those who were working quite regularly and earning a full-time income from acting, were still telescoping into the future and questioning whether the work would continue

to sustain them and therefore evaluating proactive non-acting strategies to avoid "... living hand to mouth into your 60s" (Participant E).

While there can be a desire to have a second income, the reality of structuring it can be challenging. We therefore see examples, such as Participant H, of mid-career actors using an economic logic rather than an artistic logic to determine that certain jobs, in her case a three-month acting job, was not worth giving up her stable non-acting job for. This contrasts with accepted theories of 'work preference' (Throsby, 1994, 2007) that suggest artists will prioritise their artistic work in an attempt to maximise time spent on art. One of my findings from this study is that by mid-career some of the pull of art for art's sake, or a prioritisation of artistic logic over economic logic, may start to fade (*cf.* Frey, 2013), particularly in actors who have a family or are looking to start a family, such as Participant H, where the precarity of acting becomes less appealing and therefore the desire for something secure outside of acting to support their work starts to strongly emerge.

Actors spoke of these proactive non-acting jobs as not only giving them a sense of agency over their careers, so they were less reliant on having to take every job on offer, but also that this work outside of acting can help fuel their acting work, therefore suggesting that there is not a competition between the different quadrants of their careers, but rather that they support each other in a synergistic way.

Reflecting on the two chapters on proactive strategies together, it is observed that the motivation for actors in most cases is the same. It is through the scarcity of work for actors and the precarity of working on projects with uncertainty of how long the gaps might be between projects that leads many actors to try to use their agency to take proactive steps to build a firmer foundation under themselves. This often means taking a portfolio career approach where they are trying to establish multiple income strands, which might be both within and outside the acting spheres, in an attempt to boost their earnings and to open themselves up to more markets where they

can be productively engaged in work using their skills. Figure 12 illustrates the key ideas of these two proactive quadrants:

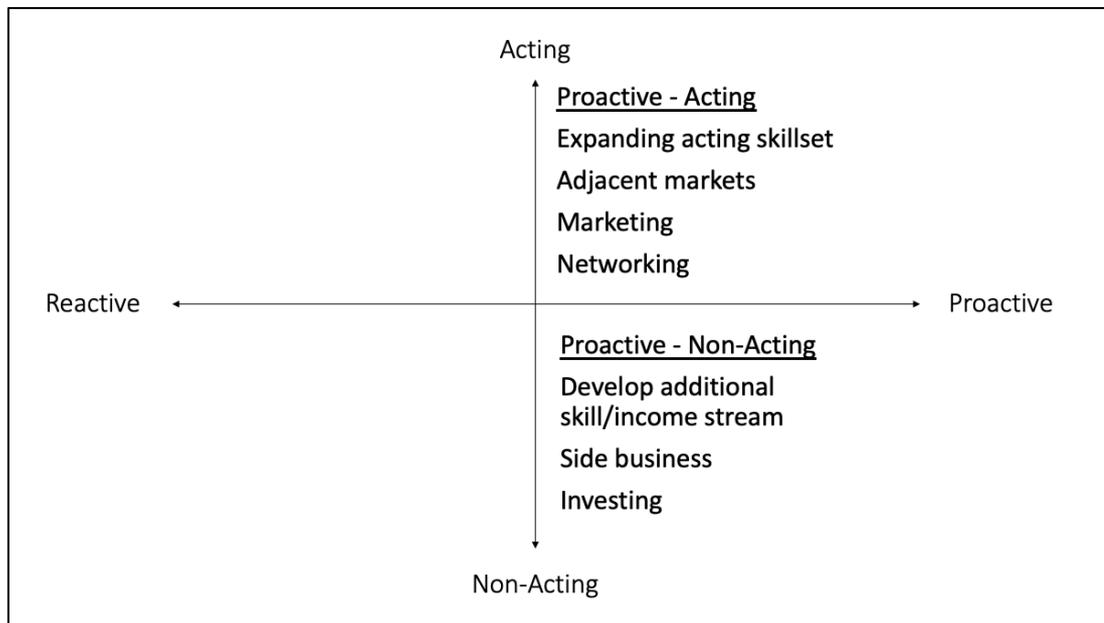


Figure 12 – Summary of Proactive Quadrants

Figure 13 provides an indicative quote from each of these quadrants:

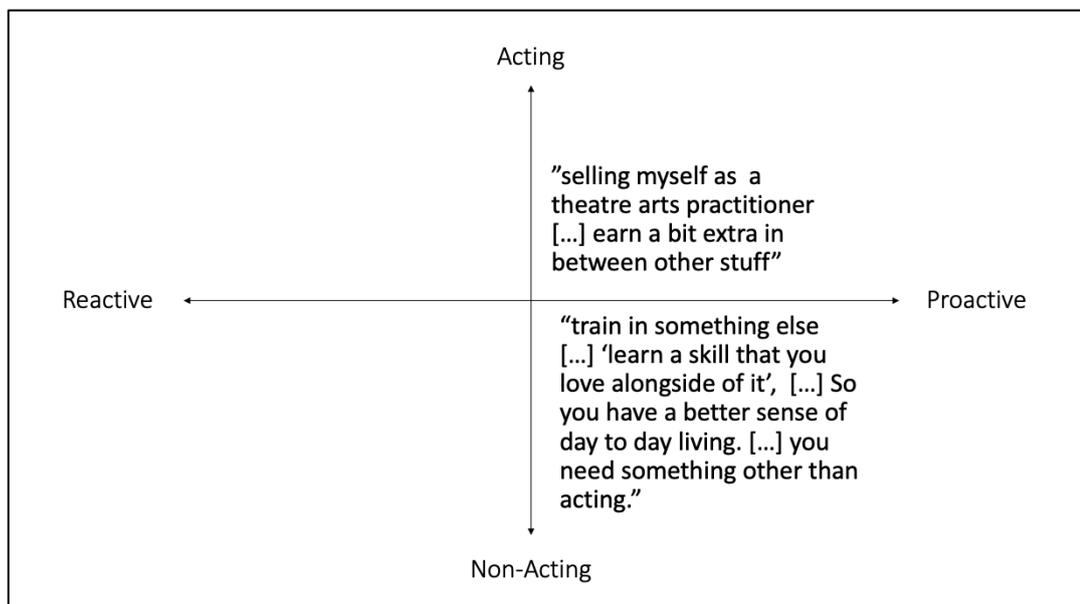


Figure 13 – Indicative Quotes from Proactive Quadrants

These proactive strategies, whether enacted in or outside of the acting sphere of work, help actors to have more agency over their careers. Taking a portfolio career approach leads to a diversification of income and helps to spread the risk of pursuing acting, which contributes towards a more sustainable career through smoothing out some of the *ducking and diving* experienced in a precarious acting career.

Figure 14 shows the linking concepts of sustainability and the portfolio career in these two proactive quadrants:

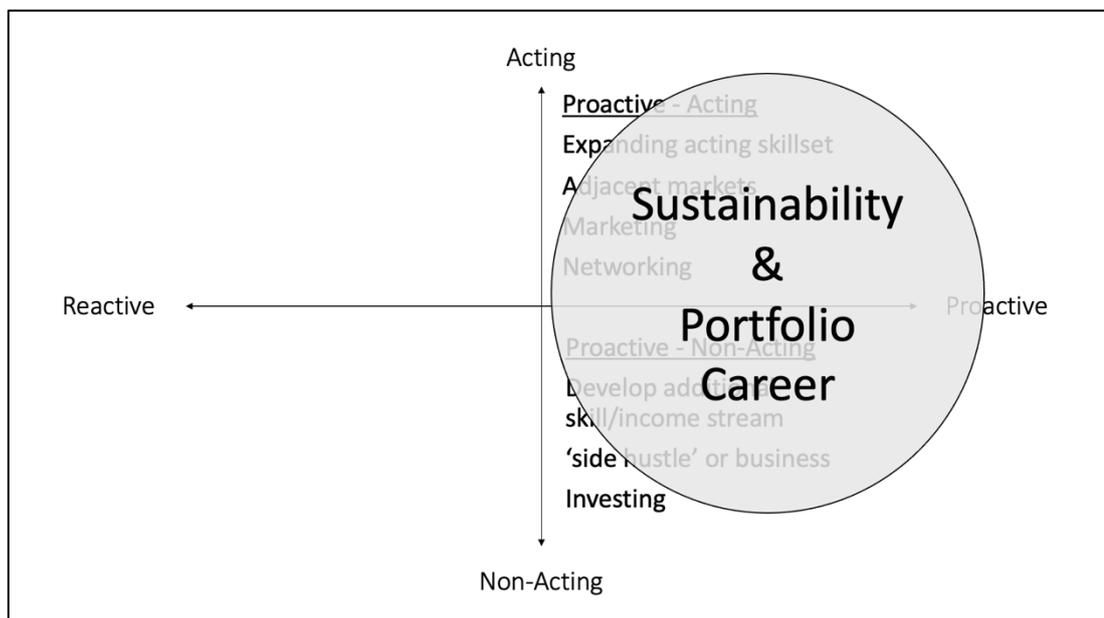


Figure 14 – Relationship of Proactive Quadrants to Sustainability and Portfolio Career Models

The planning and strategising required for a proactive career approach are not necessarily available to every actor or desirable to them as avenues of pursuit. Therefore, many actors are forced into reactive positions and forms of employment, which I will examine next in the subsequent two empirical chapters.

## 7 Reactive Acting

### Introduction

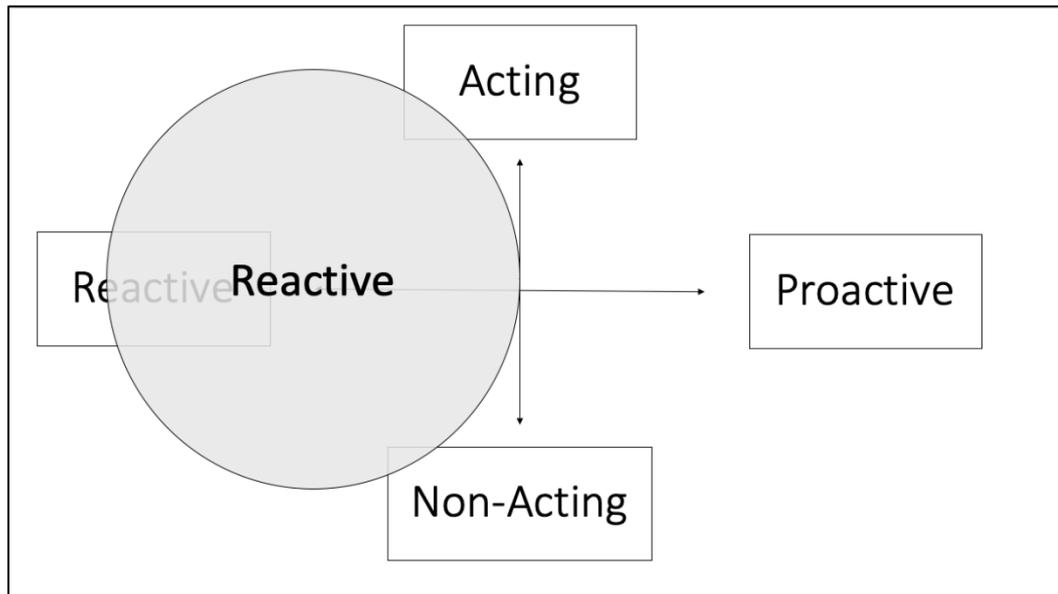


Figure 15 – Reactive Quadrants Model

In the previous two chapters, I outlined the proactive acting and non-acting quadrants. In the next two chapters I will outline the remaining reactive acting and non-acting quadrants. However, first, I will give a macro-level overview of how these reactive quadrants are conceived.

Auditioning and seeking employment in a competitive and saturated market inevitably leads to disappointment more often than success for the majority of actors. With chronically high unemployment amongst UK actors there simply are not enough acting jobs to go around for the number of actors pursuing them; therefore, statistically speaking they are likely to hear *no* far more frequently than *yes*. Knowing this on an intellectual level and experiencing frequent rejection on an emotional and psychological level, are of course two different things (*cf.* Doern and Goss, 2013; Hamilton, 1997; Rea, 2014). This is where the actor needs to learn how to *react* to what happens to them in a way that allows them to ‘stay in the game’. This can be viewed as another form of *ducking and diving*, staying mentally and emotionally flexible and marshalling resources to bounce back and persist –

or what is often referred to as *resilience*<sup>73</sup>. In this, I am linking together key ideas: the protean career (Hall, 1976; Reid et al., 2016) and resilience (Hamilton, 1997; Ibert and Schmidt, 2014; Rea, 2014) with the reactivity of having to take unwanted or unexpected jobs both within and outside acting.

When unemployment hits, unless there is other financial capital available (savings or credit, spousal or family support, inherited wealth, or other means of financial support), the actor must react with survival instincts to ensure their basic needs for food and shelter are met until they can next be engaged in work. In the absence of available acting work, and driven by danger, they may shift their identity from being an actor, to take on other work identities such as being a barista or waiter in order to survive. This is not a judgement of these jobs; however, they are not the work that the actor would prioritise or prefer to be doing. This is the *protean career* model (Hall, 1976; Reid et al., 2016) where the outward shape of the career changes in response to danger. I will look at the role of resilience in this, which requires the actor to remain positive and to psychologically and emotionally *bounce back* from the disappointment of needing to work in areas that are outside their preferred employment (*cf.* Doern 2017, 2021; Doern and Goss, 2013, 2014; Ibert and Schmidt, 2014). The protean career and resilience are strategies that contribute towards sustaining an acting career, but they also demand a lot emotionally and psychologically of the actor, so I will consider the toll this takes and how actors (try to) develop resilience to deal with this.

While examining the topic *reactive*, I am also going to draw upon my industry interviews to highlight some structural factors and pervasive attitudes within the industry that negatively impact on actors and create circumstances that demand resilience. This has a twofold purpose: to highlight inequality and to assess *ducking and diving* strategies.

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<sup>73</sup> See Chapter two for further interrogation of the concept of resilience.

My interrogation of these reactive strategies will be split into two chapters. This chapter will look at reactive acting strategies, i.e. reactive strategies within an acting sphere, which reflects that sometimes actors take acting jobs they do not really want to take in order to stay in work. I will also explore that even acting work comes with challenges and will examine how actors react to these challenges. The subsequent chapter examines reactive non-acting strategies, i.e. reactive strategies within a non-acting sphere, which is a reflection, that for many actors a scarcity of work in acting forces them to take survival jobs in non-acting categories of work.

## 7.1 Findings

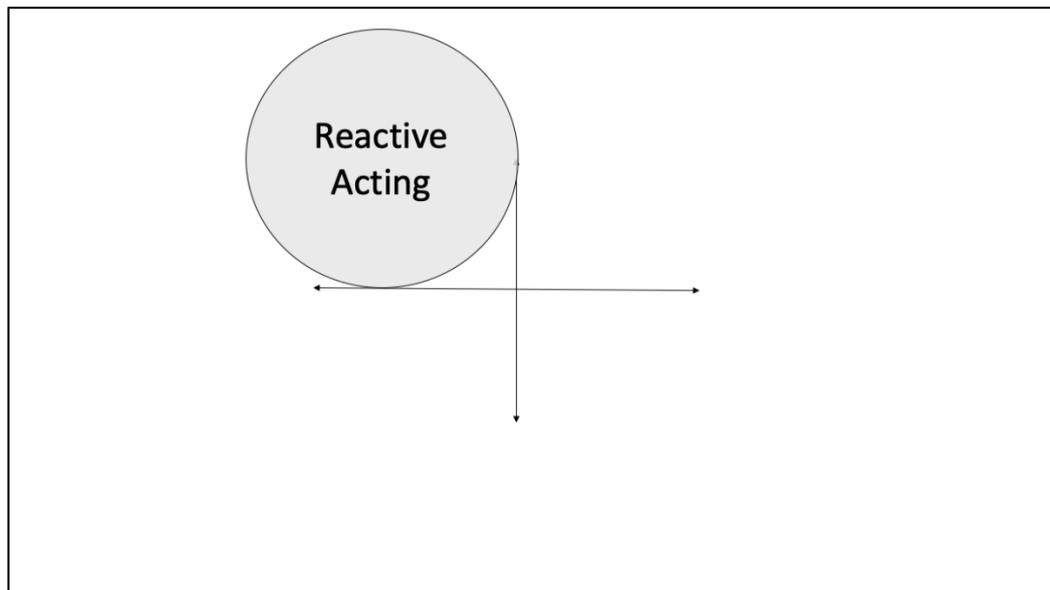


Figure 16 – Reactive Acting Quadrant

Reactive acting activities can be when actors use their acting skillset, but in an area outside of where they have normally looked for work; however, it is viewed as a temporary activity to sustain the acting career, rather than a strategic move to broaden their professional skillset. We will observe that some of the jobs described in this chapter were also forms of work examined in Chapter six – proactive acting strategies. The difference is that in the proactive acting chapter, this work was viewed as a conscious *proactive* choice to expand their acting market to include these fields in an attempt to

broaden their employability, whereas this chapter will view accounts from actors of this work being a *reactive* choice due to scarcity of acting work in their preferred area, therefore motivated through precariousness rather than proactive choice. The difference between the two, while subtle, is about agency. The actors in the proactive quadrants had a sense of agency over their decisions, that they were in charge of their career and were making this choice with agency. In contrast, in this chapter we will see accounts that suggest a lack of agency surrounding these decisions. Agency, or perceived agency, therefore, is the major distinction. Work in this chapter is seen as temporary and subordinate to their core acting work, and selected with an economic logic, and it is implied that it will be dropped as soon as acting work that more closely aligns with artistic logic becomes available.

One example of this pattern can be seen in actors' relationship with teaching. Teaching acting, voice, movement or presentation skills are areas where actors earn money outside of acting. In this instance, I am making a distinction between the actor who chooses to teach and seeks further qualifications as a teacher with an intention to have an ongoing relationship with teaching (in which case it is a proactive non-acting strategy), as opposed to the actor who fills in as a teacher or teaches as-and-when the work is available without looking to properly qualify as a teacher and with an intention to return to preferred acting work whenever it is available:

“...I think teaching is one of the things that obviously works. Teaching perhaps in relation to your work [...] I'm very friendly with a well-known actress around the corner who does a lot of teaching because she doesn't act all the time. And that's what pays their bills.”

Participant A

In this case, teaching happens because the actress does not 'act all the time,' rather than a deliberate choice to pursue teaching as a parallel career path. It is what 'pays their bills' rather than an additional career path, so it is a reactive stance and an example of protean working patterns.

Participant B, who has been acting for over 30 years, has earned income in many creative ways:

“You just do what you have to do. I modelled clothes [...] you can spread your wings and do radio, you can do telly, you can do role play, you can do stage. You can do all kinds of stuff... there are ways to survive as long as you don't think that you're defined by them. Just kind of keep your eyes on the prize and do what you have to do [...] I've recorded hypnotism tapes. I've read pornography for the blind for the RNIB, because they need it too. You know, there's stuff around if you keep your ears open and do it... So, I do fill-in jobs... and the fill-in jobs are usually connected with acting [...] I'm proud to be a jobbing actor. I don't need to be a star. I'm proud to earn my living, buy my food, pay my rent by acting. And if I do other things around it to support myself, like role play, which I'm very proud of doing as well. I think it's good for your brain. Then do that. But you don't have to wait tables. You really don't. There are other ways of doing it.”

Participant B

Participant B refers to these as ‘fill-in jobs’, which indicates that they are not seen as the main occupation, but as a reactive strategy to support herself when there is no acting work available, without resorting to non-acting work such as waiting tables. She takes a very pragmatic view of this work and regards it as a strategy for survival, viewing it within the larger sphere of acting. Faced with gaps in employment she pragmatically does ‘filling-in jobs’ in order to remain solvent. She is also vocal in her opposition to the concept of a portfolio career or proactively choosing an additional career path running parallel to acting.

“Know who you are and don't feel humiliated by having to earn money not being Hamlet or some wonderful thing. So, it's not like get a second string to your bow and find another profession but find a way of earning money ... when you need to pay bills.”

Participant B

Participant B appears to have substantial agency around her choices, though other accounts in this chapter will show that this is not a universal feeling.

Some of this ad hoc acting work can pay quite well, for example role-play work in the corporate arena, but because it is viewed as opportunistic (as-and-when it happens), rather than a market that is strategically pursued and developed, it may not generate an income that can be lived on. We see below with Participant A that it is viewed in a reactive stance (the work happens when it happens), rather than something that is pursued in a proactive way and none of it produces a living wage; it is instead a piecemeal income. In this way, it shares some characteristics with portfolio working patterns where income comes from several sources, but it is more haphazard and appears more as a shape-shifting protean pattern. She says:

“I earn virtually nothing as an actor. It's pocket money.”

INTERVIEWER: “I thought the audio work was quite lucrative.”

PARTICIPANT A: “Yes, but it doesn't happen very often [...] So I'll maybe earn £1500, £2000 a year from that, plus the add-ons, which will be appearances. I do a lot of conventions. So that adds up quite a lot. It's not strictly speaking income. It's expenses, but they can be quite nice expenses. The corporate work is probably, again, between £2000 and £3000 a year. It's pocket money.”

For other actors, this reactive acting work, while not reliable income, can still contribute significantly to financial stability. Participant C, below, tells how the benefits expressed from this income are evident but, counter to what we might assume with an economic logic, he does not actively pursue it:

INTERVIEWER: “Before you were able to pay off the flat was it more of a struggle?”

PARTICIPANT C: “Yes, but I had gotten there with the role play. And I did some independent coaching around something called the Actor's Toolkit for a couple of clients. I'm still open to that work, though I don't pursue it, really. It does come in now and again. And that bout of work a couple of years into my role play career sort of cleared my debts.”

Even though this work is reactive (not actively sought) it still makes a vital contribution to many actors' annual incomes and allows them to remain active professionally and available to audition for work that is more desirable. Again, applying a purely economic logic, it is questionable why the actor does not do more of this work, given that it is lucrative, but this comes down

to the work preference theories (Throsby, 1994) where the artist prioritises the work that is closest to their art for art's sake ideal, or a prioritisation of artistic logic.

Some actors, when work is not available in their preferred areas, view any kind of work that in any way uses their actor skillset as preferable to taking non-acting work. This exhibits a tension between needing to take work (an economic logic) and a desire for it to be as close to their artistic priorities as possible (an artistic logic). This can lead to a form of 'cloaking' (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007), where economic logic is cloaked as artistic logic in order to preserve the actor's bohemian reputation. We can see an example of this behaviour here with Participant Y:

“...when I've been out of work, I've tried to do jobs that improve... well add something to your acting. I've done costume character work for a costume character company and that's supported me for a long time as an extra income. Dressing up as Disney characters and that. Pub quizzes. I worked for a company that does pub quizzes. A friend of mine does pub quizzes so I've been a quiz master. I do life modelling<sup>74</sup> now as well. So, I do all these different things which I feel are a bit arty.”  
Participant Y

We see his preference for jobs that feel 'arty' to more prosaic subsistence work (or reactive non-acting work). It is an interesting form of resilience to find a positive spin on jobs that might not be appealing to other actors or fulfil the narrative of how they imagined their career was going to be. In his case, these jobs help him to feel connected to his calling when he is not being employed as an actor. For other actors, they prefer to work far away from the industry if they are not able to act. Making choices between *second-best* (or *next-best*) options is, I suggest, a form of resilience.

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<sup>74</sup> Life modelling refers to posing for drawing and painting classes to sketch the (usually nude) human form.

What is interesting in light of Participant Y (above) is that multiple job holding is normally perceived as being a situation where the artist who needs secondary work aims to earn the most amount of money in the least amount of time in order to free up time for artmaking (Throsby, 2001). My study finds that this may be different for the actor. Participant Y does not prioritise earnings in order to free up time, instead he accepts (what I assume) are lower earnings in order to work closer to his preferred area. This is, I think, partly a reflection that while the painter can aim to earn sufficient money in a second job to free up time to paint in their studio, the actor needs to bide their time until another acting opportunity comes along, so maximising earnings in the shortest period of time is not the priority. Instead, since they do not know when the next opportunity to act will come, they take the *next-best* option of choosing to work in something that at least feels a bit ‘arty,’ which is a decision made with artistic logic, rather than trying to maximise earnings during non-acting periods, which would be an example of economic logic prevailing.

This observation does support my theory that these kinds of acting jobs are indeed reactive, i.e. reacting to a lack of work in their preferred area (acting), but choosing to still exercise their identity as an actor in temporary work that they deem is *second best*, but related to their preferred work; however, this work would be abandoned at the first opportunity to take on a ‘proper’ acting job. Work in this reactive quadrant is therefore driven by *necessity* as its key characteristic. Figure 17 below summarises this quadrant:

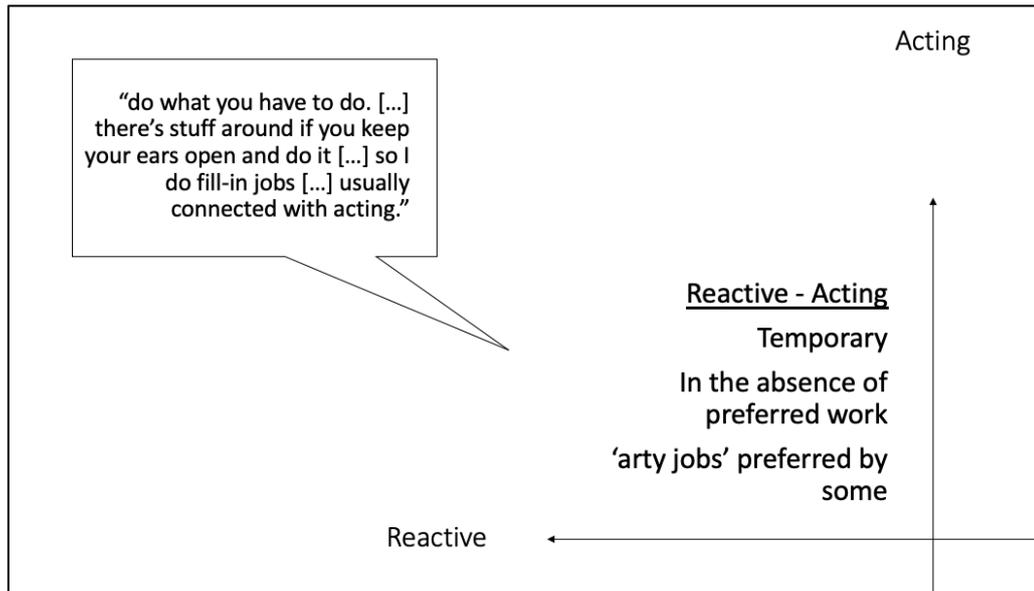


Figure 17 – Summary of Reactive Acting Quadrant

## 7.2 Discussion of Reactive Acting

### The Nature of Work

I am going to broaden the discussion from only looking at reactive acting jobs to consider how and why actors have to be reactive to situations and circumstances of their acting careers. Learning to be adaptable and flexible, and more importantly, to develop *resilience* in order to *bounce back* from setbacks are necessary skills for sustaining a career and, as we will see in the remainder of this chapter, trying to pursue an acting career in the UK is very difficult and requires constant reaction to, and processing of, circumstances often beyond the actor’s control<sup>75</sup>. By looking at this, the aim is to understand in greater detail the mental and physical strain that actors are put under (or put themselves under) trying to remain in a challenging

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<sup>75</sup> We should consider this in the context of the Mandy Actors survey (BBC, 2018A) that reported that within UK actors 63% of women and 48% of men surveyed struggled with anxiety, 59% of women and 61% of men reported suffering from stress, and 37% of women and 36% of men reported having had depression.

employment market and how this might impact their ability to navigate this market (*cf.* Doern and Goss, 2013, 2014).

One of the criticisms of work in the creative industries is that it is billed as being ‘unlike work’, as in working in a job that is ‘creative’ is so wonderful that you do not even realise you are working. Banks (2017) writes:

“The brash disciples of the ‘new’ economy enthusiastically trumpet the virtues of cultural work – seemingly a dazzling environment of creative autonomy, sensory stimulation and personal fulfilment. Cultural work, it seems, is hardly like work at all.” (p. 4).

The reality of working as an actor in the UK, from the accounts of my interviewees, is that there is a large part of it that is simply toil: putting up with situations they are not 100% satisfied with, compromises that have to be made, and times when they have to take the rough with the smooth. Here I will examine some of these reactive actions that actors spoke of in order to better understand the relationship between compromise and resilience. I will consider more broadly the range of reactions, reactive strategies and resignations that come with pursuing an acting career in the UK. I will also consider that an acting career does not happen in isolation; other people are involved, and whether that is family, colleagues, industry gatekeepers or other professionals, there is conflict and compromise necessary to work with other people. In this section, I observe many of the dreams and ideals of an ‘art for art’s sake’ ideal career challenged by the realities of work; or in different framing, the tension between artistic and economic logics in the workplace. I am going to highlight some of the negative feelings that actors experience related to their work, consider what role these negative emotions may play in their ability to take action to propel themselves forward in their career (or take entrepreneurial action), and examine what role resilience plays in their persistence to keep going despite hardship.

## Precariousness of Acting

Many actors start out with high hopes of what they will achieve in their careers and most settle over time for what they can actually achieve, given the constraints of the marketplace. For an actor with a healthy attitude there is an acceptance of this:

“I think I just thought I was going to be, sort of, in film and TV and well known and have a lot of money. And that's not been the reality. [laughs]. But at the end of the day, as I've grown, I've felt that I'm not really interested in that. When it really comes down to it, I'm just interested in what I can produce in the job that I'm doing at the time.”  
Participant Z

For others, to work as an actor sometimes requires them to compromise and consider jobs they may not completely want to take. An example of this is assuming cover roles<sup>76</sup> in stage productions. Faced with a choice of not working, or working with the additional responsibilities of taking on a cover, it often comes down to how much the actor wants to, or needs to, work. We see in this actor that this is a reactive choice:

“I know when I've been offered jobs and I've gone, I would never. I won't do that cover. I won't do a cover again. Then you get offered a year in something and you go, screw it. Because you want to work for a year. You don't want to be in a shop for a year. So it comes down to that.”  
Participant V

In this example we see a reactive choice, or resignation, that accepting a cover responsibility that you would rather not do is preferable to the alternative of working in a non-acting job. It's the *next-best* choice. While this

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<sup>76</sup> The cover, or understudy, learns the role and is ready to assume the part in performance if the person playing the role is sick or on holiday. It is hard work, often learning the role with very little rehearsal or direction. It is also stressful because you are never quite sure if and when you might be performing requiring a constant readiness and a patience, which can be a delicate balancing act.

evidences the rationalisation of this choice, it does not speak to the emotional labour of taking on responsibilities you would rather not assume. These unpalatable choices are often driven by an economic logic. While actors would generally prefer to make career decisions based on artistic logic, the reality of sustaining a career sometimes means that economic logic plays a deciding role. Participant R explains how the high cost of living in London negatively affected his ability to pursue acting:

“I guess the reality hit me when I thought, let's try this and come to London. Suddenly I had to pay monthly rent. The reality was having to keep a house going while you're trying to do all these other things. Definitely for maybe three years [...] there was no money for fun. Money just went on staying alive. That's when acting suffered as well, because I thought, I've got to go out and have a drink tonight and then I'd cock up an audition because I hadn't prepared properly. Or I wouldn't go to an audition because I'd think, oh I need the money for this.”

Participant R

Sometimes actors would like to accept an acting job but are unable to as the pay is too low: “I did get asked to do an audition for a Shakespeare play. I got the part and it was for a whole summer doing the open-air Shakespeare around the corner from Russell Square. Um, and I couldn't afford to do it.” (Participant K). The inverse of this is that sometimes actors accept jobs because the pay is attractive: “I don't want to do jobs for the sake of working. Um, a portion of [high profile musical] was that. It was taking a year's security knowing that for the last couple of years, although I'd worked, plays don't pay quite as well.” (Participant J). These are the individual choices that the actor must make, weighing up considerations of both artistic and economic logic for a job to determine if it is worth taking, but here we see situations at both ends of the pay scale where economic logic determines the choices made.

Reacting to situations that we have viewed so far inevitably brings up emotion in actors, so learning to process negative emotion, which we could consider as part of resilience, is necessary when so many actors are experiencing precarious livelihoods (*cf.* Doern and Goss, 2013, 2014). The

mismatch between supply and demand means that actors are going to fail to secure more jobs than they succeed in booking. The reality of being an actor in the UK, where a 92-95% unemployment rate is the norm (Guardian, 2009; Nordin-Bates, 2012), is that they are going to fail a lot more than they are going to win. It also means that 'perfect jobs' that meet all the criteria of their artistic logic are statistically not plentiful. So, what compromises are made to work and keep working? Looking at mid-career actors it is inevitable that some will have been better able to deal with the disappointment than others: "I hate the brittleness of it, really. It's changed so much in the time I've been working in so many different ways. There's less work and there are more people. There are so many more schools just churning people out." (Participant X). Even when actors do book work, perfectionism or high expectations of self (which are probably fostered by so much competition and a sense that there are always others to take the actor's position) means that it can be hard to enjoy the work when they do get it. Participant Z says:

"That's not to say that it's not tough, because I've had lots of ups and downs personally. Not necessarily being employed, but just personally. Not being satisfied with what I'm doing workwise, the quality of what I'm producing. I can be full of self-doubt. But I think part of that spurs me on to keep going. I'll never be satisfied, but I think that's what makes me manage to keep going, in a way."

He is able to frame this self-doubt in a way that spurs him on, but this is not always possible. Participant V explains how some personal issues she was facing meant that she was not really able to work for a year between jobs:

"I did [panto] for [panto company] last year, had a fairly dreadful year on a personal level. If I say I had a mental breakdown it makes me sound like I had a screw loose. I wasn't very well. I was having huge nerves and anxiety problems. It was a life balance problem as well with a relationship. It meant I wasn't auditioning well, couldn't really audition. Couldn't really even work. I had some time out. Then I didn't work again until [panto in West End] this year. That's again almost [...] a year out."

This highlights another challenge towards employability in acting careers, that as freelance workers there is no mechanism of support for periods when

the actor is unable to work due to physical or mental strain, other than basic state benefits (which, as we saw in Chapter three, are much harder for actors to claim than in the past). Unlike employees, who have statutory sick pay and often have access to benefits programmes, self-employed workers have to assume this risk themselves. If they are unable to work, it can leave them in a precarious position.

## **Gender**

While I did find actors of both genders expressing feelings of precariousness about their acting careers, my research echoed existing research (Dean, 2005, 2007, 2008) that remaining in employment in the UK acting market is harder for women, particularly from about 30 or 35 onwards. I observed within my interviewees a higher proportion of male actors who felt a sense of agency over their careers than I observed in the female actors interviewed – though exceptions were found on both sides of the gender divide. I will illustrate this with some examples from the male actors:

“I always used to be a yes man. Again, my agent a couple of weeks ago said to me, there's an audition for a workshop. I said, I'm not auditioning for a workshop. Then she said, if you get through the first round there's a recall. I went, a recall for a workshop? I'm sorry, sitting down for two weeks working on a pile of shit that's never going to see the light of day, no they don't deserve my time. I'd rather be at home watching the telly for £500. Do you know what I mean?”

Participant Q

INTERVIEWER: “Have you ever turned down any jobs?”

PARTICIPANT T: “Once or twice.”

INTERVIEWER: “What was the reason for that?”

PARTICIPANT T: “Not enough money, joke money. I mean literally joke money. You would be working for nothing effectively after you paid your expenses or actually having to pay to work. I remember one job I wouldn't even go for the audition because they were playing games. I could tell that it was little people pretending to be Hollywood producers. I thought, no. I am a professional. I deserve a certain amount of respect for what I do, where I've been, who I am. It was obvious that certain people weren't going to give it, so I said no.”

“There have been certain jobs that have come up that were away from home that I wasn't interested in. Luckily, I was in a position to say no, I'm not really interested in this. Let's keep looking for something else.”  
Participant Z

It is an important consideration that these three male actors have high symbolic capital and are well known in the industry with solid recent work behind them. They also have financial capital, both accumulated through work and investments, but also in the case of Participants T and Z through spouses who work and contribute to the household expenses. It seems plausible to suggest that having high artistic and financial capital, and the security of a second income, reduces the risk to the actor and subsequently it is easier for them to express agency in their career choices. In the absence of these supports, agency might be harder to find. Now I contrast their statements with examples from the female actors interviewed. Participant X has had a higher profile career than the three male actors quoted above, but her account of her current career situation is very different:

“I mean, there have been some horrible, awful, so many lows I can't even begin to go into it, really. Awful, humiliating moments of suddenly – because my career's been so – I mean, there have been times when I've been hailed as the next best thing and people have got incredibly excited about me, and then I've been through periods where I can't even get an agent. Still here I'm still struggling to get into the room [...] They go, 'no one knows who you are.' I go, 'that's actually not true. People do know who I am.’”

Participant X has sufficient financial capital to make decisions based on artistic logic, which does allow her to exercise some degree of agency in terms of choosing not to work, as displayed here:

“... as a woman, my value and my currency was so much based on my youth and beauty and that the roles for older women, I'm not really interested, they don't drive the narrative forward. If I'm just going to be someone's mum that says yes or no and doesn't get anything to sing, then I would much rather stay home, really.”

In contrast, we can see in the narrative of Participant P what can happen when there is no financial capital and there is a real precarious threat. This danger can force an actor into taking whatever they can get in order to survive. When Participant P's own performing career wound down in her mid-30s, she found herself as a single mother with four children to support forcing her to take any work she could get. She describes taking on an array of reactive acting and reactive non-acting jobs: "Anything to make a buck [...] God, it was absolutely murder. Really, when you think about it, what you actually achieve, what you do [...] I didn't have much option. I mean, I just had to work to keep the wolf from the door." (Participant P). In her account, we see her moving between performing work and, reacting to the precariousness of her situation, taking whatever other jobs she could get in the industry, in a reactive way and driven by a need to provide for her family. Her lack of financial capital meant that the agency to say no or pick and choose how she wanted her career to happen, was not possible and she had to do whatever was necessary to survive, changing her outward form – from performer to teacher to chaperone – to keep away from danger. This is the definition of a protean career, and it is difficult for the actor to affect much agency under these circumstances.

We have seen in these examples how agency cannot be considered in isolation. It is related to capital, precariousness, and subsidy in a delicate balance. Each actor, and their situation, is unique in the combination of these factors. Ideally, all actors would accumulate sufficient financial and symbolic capital that they would be able to exercise agency over their career choices; however, this is not the case. Even the female actors who continue to find work past their first 10 years do not seem to find it easy or feel secure that they will continue to succeed in finding work: "I see some people rolling with the punches so much better than I ever did. I just was unable to do that. I feel like it's a death by a thousand cuts, I really do. Then I must be fairly brave, because I keep going. I'll probably never work again after this." (Participant X). Nor do they necessarily feel that the industry respects them:

“What I don't like about it is that you're not as respected as the casting world believes you are. They will say that everyone's treated very nicely, but I don't think there's any sense of us having a life beyond the age of 30. I think we're sidelined, especially women. Very sidelined. You hit 30 and women from 30-45 don't seem to exist for the most part in writing. That I really dislike, about theatre particularly.”  
Participant V

These are women who have worked repeatedly at the top of the UK theatre industry, and yet it is an example of the competitive nature of the acting profession that they are reduced to feeling this way about their careers. It seems from these interviews that it is the repeated setbacks over a lengthy period of time that undermine the female actors' confidence in themselves, particularly when faced with an industry where they do not really see a place for themselves anymore. I could continue for some length discussing gender differences in my findings; however, within the limited amount of existing research on UK actors, gender inequality is one area that has already been researched to some degree (Dean, 2005, 2007, 2008; Williams et al., 2019; *cf.* Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013; Gill, 2014; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012) and therefore I am going to continue to focus my discussion on areas that I determine to be less well-researched. However, I signal that there is room for significant further research on gender and the intersectionality of gender and other areas of inequality within UK acting, but that is beyond the scope of my research questions.

## **Competition**

A mismatch between supply and demand means there is an enormous amount of competition for every role, which can result in actors feeling they are treated like a commodity, rather than as a professional. Participant V tells us of her expectations of the industry leaving college and what the reality has been for her:

“I thought I'd be going for auditions two or three times a week, really focusing on the work and having a great time. It would be scripts and some commercials, and then there'd be some dance. And people

would really take the time and all this kind of stuff with you. The reality is you might get one audition a month and no one gives a shit. If you screw it up, they do not care. Get to the back. I'm not interested. [...] No one's prepared to take risks. Whereas you think it's the same nurturing environment you're going to get in college, it's just not. It's very exposing and daunting when you leave. You just think, oh God. [...] You don't realise that the minute you're not a grad, those opportunities are completely gone. Then you're kind of in the slog with everybody else.”

Participant M explains that if you are not an A-List performer you are not that important:

“So, you know, I mean, I think the things that are tough are [...] it's not always treated well, in this country, for sure. And the only remedy against that is having a bigger profile. Obviously, certain places exist that are very committed to art. But I guess those that are more committed to commerce can fall into that maltreatment unless you have that certain profile.”

Some actors tire of this never-ending cycle of auditions, rejection and compromise and it begins to undermine their love for what they do:

“...you're very hopeful when you first come out and you're much more prepared to go with the slog of it. As you get older you do get tired of it. I can see why a lot of people drop off along the way, because sometimes it just becomes too tiring. It feels like an endurance test.”

Participant V

This feeling of it being an endurance test, which can be exacerbated by long periods without work, can become quite damaging to the actor's motivation to persevere:

“I think you go in thinking it's unlikely I'm going to have to take other work. There will be loads of auditions, there will be more opportunities, more parts available. I'm not going to be the one that lets myself down or lets myself go or wants to do other things. You think you're going to have this mechanical relentlessness about you that you can't maintain and you wouldn't want to maintain. It's the bravado of youth. You're that gung-ho about it and that fixed on it [...] but when you get out into it, other people have decided stuff too and the casting world is just so cut-throat. Nothing really prepares you for that.”

Participant V

## Last-Minute Casting Culture

Another way that actors feel abused is the frequently short notice they receive for auditions, particularly when there is material to prepare. One actor speaks of receiving material the night before for an audition: "...I think, why couldn't you get that a day earlier? I really could have given my best. So, the kind of short time scales of all that I find frustrating." (Participant R). From Equity's perspective, this is an issue of power and that the industry benefits from the status quo:

"One of our big problems with casting sessions is you'll get a call today to come tomorrow. There's no way whoever's commissioned that piece of work decided on Sunday we're going to produce something tomorrow. That was decided last year. So why is it that the casting directors do this? It's because they want to maintain a sector that's like that (SNAPS FINGERS). Because it's in their interest for it to be like that. It doesn't have to be, does it?"  
Participant O

Why it might suit the casting directors for it to be so last minute is an interesting question. One possible explanation is that it is a way of narrowing down the talent pool. There are fewer actors who can drop everything and be available at a moment's notice to audition, so it is possible this is a way of creating a more manageable number of actors to audition. It does create a hurdle, thereby limiting the pool to actors who have the available resources and capital to be ready at all times, observed as "...a constant state of readiness, of constantly being able to respond to the needs of the industry" (Eikhof et al., 2012, p. 84). We can see the same phenomenon in the following comment from the casting director defending last-minute casting and the pressure it puts on actors with caring responsibilities:

"That may be the case, but how are those people in that position [of being able to attend last-minute casting]? It's usually because they're working successfully as actors already. It's a sort of cycle. If you're a really good actor and you're doing really well, then you can afford childcare. I get it, and I agree to a certain extent with that. But at the

same time, I think it's true for all sorts of careers. If you want it, then you have to go for it, don't you? And sacrifices are made and all of that. It's hard. It's cruel. You've really got to want it more than anything.”

Participant AA

This could be read as a way of limiting the casting pool to those who are already successful actors<sup>77</sup>, with an assumption that they are then casting from the best anyway. Also, she is setting a high barrier in terms of the actor's commitment to acting 'you've really got to want it more than anything.' This speaks of a projection of bohemian ideals (Diprose, 2015; Newsinger and Serafini, 2019) onto the profession, where 'sacrifices are made' in order to prioritise one's art making. This contrasts to a vision of acting as a profession with a skilled labour force who deserve to be treated in a professional way as per Equity's 'Professionally Made, Professionally Paid campaign,' which I discussed earlier. The agent, as well, feels that it is a career that you need to be willing to sacrifice a 'normal life' for:

“Because obviously you get to the age of 31, 32, 33 and you want a mortgage, you want to get married, you want to have babies. And unless you're working, this industry is not very friendly towards people who want that normal life. You've got to somehow as an actor make your normal life fit in with the career, whereas most other people, the career fits in with their normal life. [...] As you become more successful, obviously you have the luxury of having that.”

Participant N

Again, we see that there are two sets of rules: one for 'successful' actors, who are afforded a 'normal life,' and one for less successful actors who need to 'make [their] normal life fit in with the career', which becomes another form of A-List/B-List segregation (Caves, 2000), but this time determining who gets to enjoy a 'normal life.' This is similar to the 'bohemian lifestyle'

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<sup>77</sup> Only 16% of respondents in the Casting Call Pro 2013 membership study (n=1,700) earned 100% of their income from acting. Two thirds of respondents earned up to 25% of their annual income from acting. By limiting casting to those who are 'working successfully as actors already' is to significantly narrow the employment pool and reinforces the 'winner-takes-all' qualities of acting (Baumol and Bowen, 1966; Benhamou, 2011; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011).

identified in the German literature where actors choose to remain flexible and unencumbered (postponing families and buying homes) to remain responsive to the employment market (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2006). It is unsurprising that actors sometimes become 'fed up' after a certain period of time and this lack of agency over their career and life is destabilising for an actor.

## **Agency**

If I have shown that career sustainability is developed through the actor's ability to take proactive and reactive action towards their career, then agency, or the ability to take this action, seems to be a foundational understanding to this. Those actors that feel they have agency over themselves and their career are better equipped to take action; actors who do not feel they have agency over their career will find it difficult to take action (*cf.* Doern and Goss, 2013, 2014). I will look at few examples to illustrate this.

In Participant V we see an actor developing a sense of agency, but this has only been found quite recently after a long period of lacking agency and accepting whatever the industry demanded of her:

"When I was younger [...] I was very much, no, it's just this cut-throat. Absolutely played ball. Didn't think to complain. If I was expected to be there seven days a week, 24 hours a day, that's what I'd have done. I think I used to feel a lot more self-pressure in that I would just accept the way things were and the status quo. I wouldn't challenge the status quo and I wouldn't have expected any more from myself. I wouldn't have expected that I could get a holiday. Holidays were luxuries and actors did not get them. I was very much more like, that's fine. I am falling on my sword for my career, martyring myself for it, and I worked really, really hard. I felt I had to work hard. Now I'm a bit, you kind of want someone else helping you out. You get to a point where you're like, is that all there ever is? Is it only ever going to be a slog? I think the truth is to a degree, yes. That has definitely got more wearying. Once you get established, you're more tempted to sit back. It's not that you take your foot off the gas, but you're much more inclined to sit back and you can see, that casting director isn't totally

going to forget me now after 20 years. I don't need to write to him every other week.”

These experiences can lead to a lot of negative feelings about the actor's career and can lead to actors leaving the profession<sup>78</sup>. The educator says:

“I think a lot of people drop out because they become quite cynical about the profession. They just are sick of it, fed up with it [...] They've probably been treated badly. They've probably worked with directors of a wide variety of competence. They probably haven't had ideal parts. They're probably not the star actor they dreamed of being, so their dreams might not have come true. They're trying to do this job, which is poorly paid [...] If you can think decades of doing that, it just wears you down. Your idealism floats away quite quickly and you're supplementing your dream by having to do other jobs. [...] What happens to all those dreams? I think they just get worn down. It's not many people who can sustain that upbeat energy and brightness and optimism throughout a whole career.”

Participant S

As shown in the literature review, there are very high levels of depression and anxiety amongst the acting population, which I propose is partially linked to actors not feeling in control of their lives. In order to try and deal with this, Equity has had to bring a trained counsellor onto their staff. The Equity rep explains:

“We've just employed a new worker, a nice young guy who came from the Samaritans, just to deal with well-being because so many of our members present themselves as being harmed from what happens to them over time. Because it is punishing, isn't it? You want to do something, and you can't do it.”

Participant O

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<sup>78</sup> Eikhof et al. (2012) signal a need for further research to generate a more granular understanding for “...when, how and why creative workers pursue and quit careers” (p. 85).

## Masking and Cloaking

He speaks of the helplessness that many actors experience when they want to be acting and they aren't able to, which has a negative effect on their motivation and their ability to do their job. The challenge comes when they are unable shake off this negative energy when the time comes to 'sell themselves' in an audition. The casting director explains:

“Somebody coming in really depressed because they haven't worked for a long time [...] or they haven't got any of the jobs they've been up for, who starts blaming it on their agent, that's not going to inspire anyone's confidence. Somebody coming in who may be trying to mask all that and just wanting it, probably will do better. But that's the game, isn't it, of looking like you don't really, really need it when you really, really do.”

Participant AA

This quote reveals one of the *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1998) of acting, which is that the actor has to mask their true feelings when they go for the audition and appear that they do not really need the work. The educator draws a relationship between the ability to cloak these feelings and grit or resilience:

“But lots of things happen to us in our life. Illnesses, social things, psychological things that happen, and it can go up and down. Again, successful people have more grit and resilience, so they pick themselves up more quickly than the unsuccessful people.”

Participant S

This resilience may be the mask that the casting director speaks of. Even though they might be experiencing negative things in their life, it is still essential for the actor to go into the audition and project a professional demeanour. And perhaps appearing to be successful enough that the actor doesn't need the work is part of the game being played, even though we know that due to low earnings and steep competition the actor probably does need the work. This *doxa* to appear cool, successful and dissociated from the results, i.e. cloak any economic need, perpetuates bohemian ideals in the profession and acts as a barrier to the actor's success. This puts

enormous pressure on the audition. Similarly to Ibert and Schmidt (2012), who speak of the audition as the nexus where the abstract idea of competition is experienced, it also is the nexus where the actor has to prove their bohemian credentials through acting as if they are successful enough not to need the work. This puts incredible pressure on both the actor and the audition. What complicates this further is that the audition is a short window of time for the actor to not only prove their bohemian ideals, but also to demonstrate their acting abilities. If they do not succeed in the window of time then the opportunity for them to work with that casting director may be over. The casting director says: "Actors are directed to do something and if they don't take direction or they don't respond in a way that illuminates the character in some way, then it hasn't worked. And then it stops." (Participant AA). The first thing to consider about this statement is the assumption that the direction given is good or understood by the actor. So, dismissing the actor for whom it 'hasn't worked' may be an unfair dismissal, but it designates that the casting director has more power in this situation and therefore is able to determine the rules of engagement. In this scenario the actor is not only trying to understand the direction and illuminate the character, but simultaneously trying to mask the fact that they might really want or really need this job. We can see that this balancing act makes large demands on an actor whose confidence might already be eroded (*cf.* Hamilton, 1997).

## **Reputation Management**

I now turn to an interesting finding, where an actor with an extensive work history now experiences long gaps between acting jobs where she needs to find other forms of work:

"...you're still finding that you're having to fill the space in between times with these jobs, these little jobs. What you are prepared to do dwindles all the time. It's not that there's anything wrong with working front of house, but I just can't anymore. I just can't. It's not a good idea for me to be seen by David Grindrod [major casting director] selling

programmes. It looks like career death [...] Last time I did it [front of house] was on the [Kenneth] Branagh season, and I did it specifically because I wanted to watch the Branagh season for free and watch them work. It was an absolute brilliant education. I saw loads of casting people and they were like, what are you doing here? I said, I'm working here casually to watch this lot, what do you think? So, you could explain it away. [...] Now I hide in wardrobe departments doing the laundry for the shows [...] I'll wash all the jocks and all the socks because it's out of the way. It's behind the scenes and it's hidden.”  
Participant V

We observe here a negotiation between proactive and reactive choices. Her preference would be to act all the time, but because this is not possible for her, and because she does not have other financial support that allows her to not work between acting jobs, she is forced to take alternate forms of employment out of a necessity to earn. The fact that she feels she cannot be seen to be selling programmes suggests a lack of agency over choosing where she can earn additional income and suggests that to be seen selling programmes might result in a loss of symbolic capital that has been built up over many years through her work as an actor. This capital can be undermined, in her view, by being seen to be needing to work in other ways, drawing attention to the fact that she is not 100% employed as a performer. Her rationale is that it is the external perception of the career, or a subjective judgement of the actor's worth, that is projected on the actor (*cf.* Bourdieu, 1989). By internalising this view, she 'hides' in wardrobe departments 'washing jocks and socks' as a way to pay her bills without undermining her symbolic capital. This seems to be both reactive (to the shame of being seen to not be employed as an actor), and proactive (it is the best available choice). This difficult balance between proactive/reactive and between precariousness/prestige is one that must be addressed if the actor is to look at developing resiliency. For many actors, their preferred choice is not available, so they are often having to decide what the *next-best choice* is. I argue that this *next-best choice* making is a form of resilience as it requires weighing up options that are not really the ones you want and deciding which one best moves you forward, while you continue to go after what you really want.

## Parenting and Caregiving

Another area where actors are forced into being *reactive* is when they have children. For many actors, having children is part of a 'normal life,' and yet acting is an industry that is terribly unaccommodating for jobbing actors with children, with no consideration given to the conflict between childcare and acting. The casting director expressed that actors have to be willing, at the last minute, to drop everything to attend an audition:

"...if somebody says, 'I want to meet you'. What's your priority? Obviously, your family is your priority, but if you really want to be an actor, then you've just got to make it look possible. You've got to drop everything, and you've got to just be there. We don't want to hear how difficult it was for you to get there or how you've had to cancel a day's work and actually probably you've lost money doing it. That has to be the actor's choice in the same way that casting directors like me, when I had children most of the time you had to pretend you didn't. Everything's fast and tight and you just had to get on with the job. No one wants to hear that you've got babies at home [...] You've just got to get on with it, and actors have to as well."

Participant AA

This attitude makes an unreasonable expectation of the actor to have on-call childcare available at short notice. Not only is there a logistical challenge for this, but there is a cost implication which makes this prohibitive for many low-earning actors. This access to affordable childcare is on Equity's radar:

"One of the principal issues for our women members is around the lack of affordable care. So we're doing a big piece of work at the moment where many employers in this area in something called the Society of London Theatre – where what we're looking at is SOLT subsidising a West End-based crèche [...] One of the things that does concern me though, coming back to the issue of low pay, is even if it's subsidised, will our members be able to afford [it]?"

Participant O

Parents are often put into uncompromising situations that impact on their ability to be employed. The casting director gives an example:

“I did have on a project I was doing [...] which had a two-day turnaround on an improvised TV police procedural, a woman whose agent said she couldn't come at 12:00 because she had to do the school pickup. Could she come at 1:00? I said yes, that's fine. The director won't be there, but she can come and I'll tape her. She came and she was great. She was really great, but the director had met somebody at 12:00 and therefore had a rapport with them and had done the work. Often, the interview is the rehearsal on television. Therefore, even though I thought this other woman was better, he went with the person he'd met. She was also very good and they'd had a moment. This other woman said, 'God if only I'd known, I'd have got someone else to pick up my children'. The answer is, you've got to do that straight away. You don't do [...] can I come later because I'm going to pick up my children? You get the call, you then make the changes straight away and take the meeting.”

Participant AA

While it is probably true that the person who is able to 'make the meeting' is the person who is most likely to get the job, it is questionable whether filtering people based on availability to take last minute meetings is an appropriate way to search for the best talent. Does this become a way of limiting opportunity to a more manageable pool of talent? This reinforces an A-List/B-List stratification as the A-List actor can afford to have available childcare and is not likely to be juggling a portfolio career, so they can be responsive in this way (*cf.* Banks, 2017; Friedman et al., 2017). This also appears to disproportionately affect female actors. Male actors did speak of challenges of juggling acting and parenthood, but the male actors are expressing different issues – women express barriers in accessing auditions, while men express barriers juggling working as actors and being a parent. One male actor says: “There have been plenty of times in my working life where I've thought, this industry isn't conducive to having a family” (Participant Z). He has juggled an active performing career and being father to three children; however, he acknowledges that his ex-wife quit her own performing career to look after the children, which made it possible for him to focus on working to provide for the family. Another working dad, separated from the children's mother, explains how competing schedules of his children's school and his work are sometimes a source of conflict:

“...so, it ended up being what felt like too much of a compromise because kids are at school during the day and then I work at night. So, the only time you're looking for is a Sunday and your holidays. Um, that's a roundabout way of saying that's another like and dislike. And that's what leads to sometimes, ah, the sense, ah, that I do wish I had another skill.”

Participant J

His case is interesting as he is an A-List actor, who works consistently in well-paid areas of the industry, and he is articulating that he sometimes wishes he had another skill so he could do work other than acting as it can conflict with his parenting responsibilities; conflict can be found at all levels of the industry.

Female actors also spoke of difficulties in juggling children and maintaining a West End performing career:

“What happened was I was in [West End musical] for 3 1/2 years. I managed. When the nanny thing got too hard – you know in the olden days people didn't rehearse so much. They kind of learned it and then you did a dress rehearsal and that was all you did. [Resident director] got more and more thingy [sic] about these rehearsals, and she would call two a week. So it got really, really hard for me to do the matinee on Tuesday and two other rehearsals. I really began to get worn down.”

Participant P

Family life was a frequent topic within my interviews, and it appears to be a significant barrier for many actors in their ability to sustain an acting career. Further research in this area, again, is greatly needed to address the inequalities engendered by these cultural practices.

### **Oversupply**

Sometimes, though, actors feel that they are not respected by the pay offers that are made by producers. With such high unemployment it is difficult to

argue for higher wages. Here we see one actor's frustration regarding a pay increase on a long-running production:

“My last round of contract negotiations, they had the audacity to say, ‘it's a really difficult time economically’, when we had that study published saying profits in the West End are up 10%. Now, how, if profits are up 10%, can you justify a 1.3% pay rise? [...] it just doesn't sit right with me politically, but it also doesn't sit right with me career-wise.”

Participant K

He recognises that the actor has no ability to negotiate for higher wages as there is always someone else who will be willing to do it for less money. This creates little leverage for negotiating for higher wages. The casting director explains that they work to a fixed budget for a production:

“You work to the budget that you're given [...] If you need more money, you can ask for it. Sometimes you'll get more money for actors if the actor is money worthy. You can't exceed your budget. Your hands are tied. Yes, most actors will work because they want to work.”

Participant AA

The actor who is deemed to be ‘money worthy’ is not likely to be a B-List actor, so they usually find themselves working for lower wages – and are glad to be working at all. This is an inevitable outcome of oversupply in the market driving down the value by eliminating scarcity, which results in B-List actors struggling to be paid adequately for their work. This oversupply also affects the kinds of roles the actor gets to play. As the casting director explains: “There are only so many leads and so many jobs. Everybody else is a supporting actor. There are an awful lot of people to choose from.” (Participant AA). As there are more supporting roles than lead roles, it therefore is far more likely that the actor is going to be cast in a supporting role, which may not contribute as much to their symbolic capital. This makes it harder for the B-List actor to move up into lead roles or to earn enough income to sustain a career.

There is no avoidance of the effects that an oversupply of actors has on the market. The Equity rep tries to put a positive spin on this:

“The positive is lots of our members are in work, but it's short term and then you're always looking at your next job. If you can be in that golden opportunity of things overlapping, then that's perfect, but often they don't overlap. But sticking with the positives, it can work. It doesn't work for many people.”

Participant O

This oversupply of actors, and the resulting high levels of competition within the market, create challenging circumstances for actors. Equity voiced concern about the role of drama schools in this market supply question:

“I've looked at drama schools and I've thought, okay. What's your role here? In other sectors those organisations not only maintain good practice in terms of having a discussion around are our graduates going into good, sustainable work, but would also be involved in a discussion with the employers around a very simple thing, which is in terms of supply, what numbers are we talking about? [...] It has to be addressed because one of the reasons this sector – the pressure on pay is partly to do with oversupply. It's not in the educational provider's interest to have that discussion. It's not in the employers' interest to have that discussion.”

Participant O

In his comment, he points out that the status quo both serves the institutions who make money from the desire of young people to enter the profession, but also that the employer benefits from an oversupply as this gives them a large pool of talent to cast from and drives down the wages they have to pay (Towse, 2010). Therefore, neither educational institutions nor employers are incentivised to question the oversupply of actors to the profession, yet this is one of the strongest barriers to sustainability for actors<sup>79</sup>. The Equity rep, who has come into this sector as an outsider, observes that “...it is a sector

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<sup>79</sup> There is an information cost to employers because there is such a large pool of talent. Because they cannot possibly know all the available actors, they need to hire intermediaries (casting directors) who have knowledge of the market to help them sort out who is actually

[...] where in truth, in terms of the key players, particular employers and engagers, as we call them [...] the maintenance of the status quo is in their interests.” (Participant O).

What I did find in my interviews was a general insensitivity or lack of concern from industry about the impact of the status quo on actors. Some of the views expressed by industry players were both surprising and seemed particularly insensitive. Perhaps this is explained by another observation from the Equity rep: “...we lack regulation in a variety of ways across the piste in terms of the employment sphere. One of the ways in which this sector benefits from that lack of regulation is anyone can be an agent. Anyone can be a casting director.” (Participant O). While there are The Casting Directors’ Guild (CDG) and the Personal Managers’ Association (PMA), these are voluntary organisations and there are no formal training requirements to be either a casting director or an agent<sup>80</sup>. One of the reasons often cited for an oversupply of talent in the creative industries is a low barrier to entry (Towse, 2010), but we do not also consider the low barriers to entry to be an industry gatekeeper. Agents and casting directors wield enormous influence over the working lives of actors and yet there is no training required for the job and it is a self-regulated market. Next, I will show some of the ways that this is problematic.

### **Problematic Industry Attitudes**

Not all actors will be A-List – in fact, the majority will be B-List – but this should not deny all actors professional treatment while working. Young

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good and worth employing. These intermediaries are paid for by the employer, so the oversupply does result in search-related costs for them.

<sup>80</sup> As of January 25, 2018, the CDG have a Code of Conduct (<http://www.thecdg.co.uk/casting-directors-guild-code-of-conduct/>) which is a very positive step forward and addresses many of actors’ concerns regarding the auditioning process. The PMA also has a Code of Conduct, although it is noteworthy that almost the entirety of the six-page document (<https://thepma.com/wp-content/uploads/PMA-CODE-OF-CONDUCT-FEB-2019.pdf>) is about the handling of contracts and money with only one clause, number five, about the welfare of the client.

actors, who may be eager to gain an entry into the profession, may be more willing to make concessions on their treatment than older actors who have been around for a while. This anecdote from a teacher/director points to an exploitative attitude towards actors:

“About 10 or 15 years ago [...] I started up another theatre company here and I did all the wrong things. I didn't have enough funding and I didn't have enough time [...] There were actors in their 50s and actors in their early 20s who were full of idealism. The actors in their 50s were quite cynical. It was another job and they were thankful to have the job. When it came to a crisis [...] there was a moment I said, look, I haven't got enough money to pay. Can you wait 'til next week when we open at the [name of theatre]? There will be a bigger box office coming in. There was this huge crisis in the company. The younger ones were idealistic, they said, yes that's fine. The older ones said, yes, but you've got to pay us. I said, what should I do? One said, well take out a second mortgage. One got her agent to ring me. The agent was very threatening and rude, and I probably lost my temper. She then had an arrangement with her agent [...] unless I paid her in cash every performance before the performance, she wouldn't perform. So really holding a pistol to my head. I thought that was so cynical [...] At that moment I thought, I will never work with 50-year-old actors again. I will just work with young people who have the integrity and vision that chimes with what I am doing.”

Participant S

If actors are trained professionals, offering their skills under a contract, they should not be asked to work without payment or delayed payment. It is not a lack of 'integrity and vision' on the actor's part to expect to be paid on time for services rendered and this expectation should not be another barrier to having a sustainable career for an actor. Labour law would certainly support the 50-year-old actor here. The fact that this is framed as a lack of 'integrity or vision' undermines the experience and professionalism that a 50-year-old actor brings into an employment situation. In the interviews with mid-career actors, it was mentioned several times that producers had a preference to hire younger actors as they were cheaper and willing to put up with a lot more. It raises questions about the degree to which the business model is built upon commodifying and exploiting young people. The Equity rep was very critical of the sector:

“Frankly, I'm disgusted with what I see. I've worked for trade unions all of my working life [...] I've never come across – I'm not saying that for extreme effect, just as a matter of fact – I've never come across a situation as bleak as it is – [...] But it is a sector [...] where in truth, in terms of the key players, particular employers and engagers, as we call them, and agents, and casting directors and some drama schools, the maintenance of the status quo is in their interests. It's not a sector that's joined up in a way that even agriculture, which is a pretty difficult sector, is better joined up, in terms of supply of labour, regulation, quality of working lives, health, safety and welfare. Something peculiar goes on in this sector which means that it generates phenomenal wealth, and we know that, but [...] it simply isn't shared fairly. The fundamental problem for me coming into the Union is that it doesn't surprise me that predatory behaviour persists and grows because by its very nature, sadly, it is a very predatory sector.”

Participant O

Also, discrimination is still rife within the industry as this remark from an educator at a leading UK conservatoire demonstrates:

“People who come from an affluent background, have a good education, they will be exuding more level of confidence. They will bring more confidence into auditions, into meetings. They will have more natural authority. It's just easier to employ those actors. It's like yes, I can rely on that person. Somebody who is less articulate, comes from not a very affluent background, they may have a good raw energy, but they may be a higher risk. They may not have the confidence or the discipline to sustain a career, it may be up and down.”

Participant S

Friedman et al. (2017) have already written about a class problem in UK acting (*cf.* Brook et al., 2020), but there is clearly a long way to go to address class-based discrimination as this quote demonstrates.

Where actors feel precarious, and that they have to fight for every opportunity to practise their craft, may lead them to accept situations where they could be vulnerable<sup>81</sup>. The Equity rep explains:

“...it's about poor workers being exposed to predatory behaviour because of the imbalance of power. It's about insecure work. If you don't have those conditions, I'm not saying you don't have sexual harassment, because you do have sexual harassment in financial services, but [...] those two elements, poor pay and insecure work, is the breeding ground for where we are now.”

Participant O

What further complicates this is that there may be a complicity in actors to allow a desire to advance in a crowded and competitive market to interfere with their better judgement. Actors want to believe that in a ‘winner-takes-all economy’ they can be a winner. It is in the industry’s interests to perpetuate this myth and the actor becomes a willing participant (*cf.* Abbing, 2011; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). The problem with this, as articulated by the Equity representative, is that in order for the actor to have agency over themselves and their career, they need to be fully cognisant of what they are dealing with, but the actor is often not willing to look objectively at the situation. He explains:

“Agency assumes all sorts of factors coming together that you're really pushing against, because agency assumes that you've got a fully conscious – conscious in terms of understanding and appreciation – individual in front of you. If they manifestly have in their consciousness something that's unrealistic and improbable, then your ability to achieve agency is so ruptured, isn't it, for want of a better word. And I say that because often what we do within Equity are cases that members bring to us and you think... how did you get into this situation?”

Participant O

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<sup>81</sup> It helps to contextualise this with findings from the Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU, 2013) whose survey found that in theatre 58% of women and 52% of men had directly experienced bullying, harassment or discrimination and this rises to 80% of women and 58% of men in film.

Wilful ignorance on the part of the actor can lead them into situations that can be predatory and yet a desire to get ahead means that actors sometimes accept greater risk than they should. He gives an example:

“I had an email sent to me this morning from a guy who's put up this thing on Facebook appealing to young women. It basically says, zero-budget production. I want to make a film. I've got a spare room in my house. Who fancies coming to the Forest of Dean for two weeks? It screams dodgy, for lack of a better word, and lots of our actors have weighed in saying, what's going on? They're actually outnumbered by the number of young women saying, 'I'm interested'.”  
Participant O

Here we see that common sense, which should say ‘going to spend two weeks in a stranger’s house in the Forest of Dean to make a film is dodgy’ is over-ridden by a hunger for any break they can possibly get to gain entry into an oversubscribed industry and so they ignore any wariness and charge forward. If an actor is hungry for a break, it is difficult to foster a sense of agency in them as they are willing to give their agency away in order to have a glimmer of an opportunity of getting ahead in their career. It is this hunger that is capitalised on by unscrupulous individuals within the sector. What is perhaps even more worrying, is that the person who should be looking out for them, their agent, is not necessarily warning them of the danger, as indicated here:

INTERVIEWER: “So, would you warn a young actor if they were going to meet someone that perhaps had a reputation?”  
PARTICIPANT N: “What and get sued for slander?”  
INTERVIEWER: “Do you think those agents who were sending young women to meet Weinstein, did they know what was going on?”  
PARTICIPANT N: “I don't know because I'm not party to what goes on in their office [...] I imagine that probably people thought, watch out, he's a bit of a letch. I mean, let's face it. You know, you've been in the position yourself, haven't you? And you know it. You know who's a letch and who isn't. And it is a bit of a joke, isn't it? You know...”

What is worrying about this is an acknowledgement of the awareness of an individual that is possibly a predator, but it is viewed as ‘a joke’ and the fear of being sued for slander overrides any responsibility to look out for their

client who might be attending an audition. This prioritising of the business reputation over the personal safety of the client speaks to an industry that is predatory and desperately needs education and more robust professional practices. But ultimately, there has to be some agency on the part of the actor who chooses to participate in this industry, on these terms, and so greater knowledge and transparency is needed. Also, these findings point to gaps in education and training both for actors and for industry.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, I want to return to the early part of this chapter to review the core understanding of what I mean in my model by reactive acting work. Actors take jobs for a variety of reasons that can be dominated by artistic or economic logic. I observed that theories of multiple job holding (Abbing, 2011; Alper and Wassall, 2006; Menger, 2006; Throsby, 2001) and work preference (Throsby, 2001) do not necessarily reflect what I observe in patterns with my study of UK mid-career actors, where some chose to accept lower earnings to work closer to what they perceived as 'arty' rather than taking higher paid work elsewhere in order to free up time to be an actor. I examined the concept of *next best* jobs and where actors do and do not feel a sense of agency around this compromise.

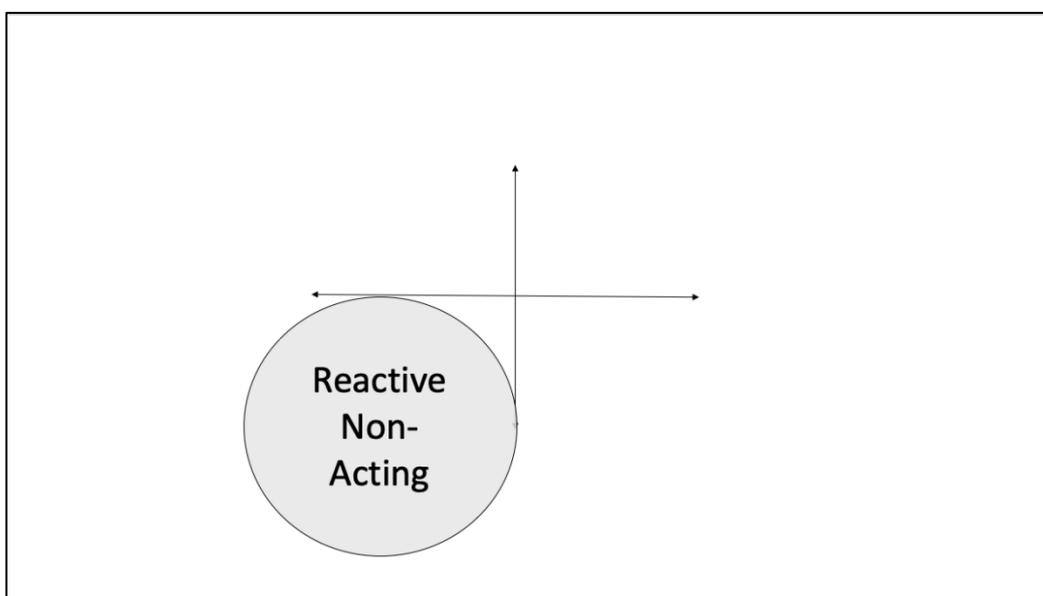
I broadened the analysis out to consider ways that actors have to be reactive towards their careers and the inherent challenges in work. Some key findings from this research include: firstly, that trying to sustain the actor's optimism over time is challenging, especially when they have to hide or cloak what they are feeling; and secondly, significant gender differences in how the industry is experienced. I also considered the interaction between actors and other industry players. From this, a key finding was that industry puts a number of barriers in front of the actor's ability to sustain a career, especially with last-minute casting and an insensitivity towards parenting and caring responsibilities. These are related to the imbalance between supply and demand, but they are also, I believe, about position-taking and jockeying for

power within the field. Specifically, a greater appreciation or understanding from casting directors of the challenges faced by actors to respond to last-minute castings would certainly open the casting process up to a greater number of actors, though the status quo might be beneficial as a way to limit the number of contenders. This research also questioned who benefits from the status quo, particularly training institutions that profit from producing actors in a much greater quantity than the industry needs and an employment market that benefits from a large pool of trained talent to draw upon as this drives down wages (Towse, 2010). This proves to be a structural barrier to actors sustaining a living, creating high levels of competition, and requiring many reactive strategies from the actor to remain available and ready to seize opportunities in the market. This state of constant readiness (Eikhof et al., 2012) is both exhausting to maintain, and also puts huge demands on mental, physical and financial resources of the actor. There are also significant gender differences in how this is experienced. Anyone with a compassionate eye for the actor as a key supplier of labour within the acting market would question whether it is necessary for the market to function in this way and whether it really fosters the best conditions for actors to practise their craft. Finally, I found some shocking remarks from industry players around actors with caring responsibilities, actors from working class backgrounds, and a prioritisation of being sued for libel over safeguarding clients being sent to audition for known predators. These attitudes are reprehensible and indicate a marketplace where actors are forced to be unnecessarily reactive towards both limited opportunities, but also limiting and discriminatory beliefs. It is perhaps unsurprising to find so many actors struggle not only with mental health, but find it challenging to sustain careers under these conditions. The only way they do sustain through this is by drawing on deep reserves of resilience.

## 8 Reactive Non-Acting

Reactive non-acting jobs are the typical survival jobs, or sometimes called 'joe jobs', taken by actors between acting contracts such as working in a bar or shop. This work is often pursued with regret, but is necessary and driven by an economic logic. As soon as possible, these jobs are left behind as the actor moves on to work that is more desirable (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; Throsby, 2001).

### 8.1 Findings



*Figure 18 – Reactive Non-Acting Quadrant*

This protean pattern of working (Hall, 1976; Reid et al., 2016), where you might be working as an actor for a period of time followed by a period of time where necessity means you work as a waiter or in retail, is linked with the idea of resilience. In the UK, acting work is on a project basis, similarly to Hollywood films (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Faulkner and Anderson, 1987; Jones and DeFillippi, 1996). Projects have fixed start and end dates – though cancellations and truncations of contracts are not unheard of. Sometimes actors are able to secure the next acting job before the current one ends, though this is rare, and many actors first experience the precariousness of

the field when an acting job ends and there is nothing to take its place. It is often in these situations that actors find themselves in a *reactive* situation, reacting to the fact that their employment has ended, and they have nothing else to go to. Unless there is some kind of financial cushion, it becomes imperative to quickly secure other work in order to survive:

“The first time I was really out of work was in 2009. I had money saved because I was living at home with my parents. So, I had no outgoings anywhere apart from my mobile phone bill [...] a bit of rent to my mum and dad... I lived on my savings for a year until I went to the bank and realised that I actually had no money, and then got a front of house job, which pays peanuts.”

Participant H

Getting a front of house job was a reaction to realising there was no money in the bank. The danger presented of not having any money in the bank<sup>82</sup>, prompted a reactive non-acting job to be secured to provide this actor with enough income to survive and continue auditioning until the next job came along. Actors undertake a wide range of non-acting reactive jobs:

“I do not know an actor who survives just on acting alone. I do other things. I wait tables in a restaurant [...] And I teach yoga. I also freelance with a designer and help him. So, you juggle many balls.”

Participant F

“I have done all of those sorts of call centre type jobs. I have worked in shops, quite a lot of retail stuff. I've worked in Santa's Grotto. I've done office, admin-y type of stuff.”

Participant E

PARTICIPANT D: “Usually I can temp. Then I do some role play for King's College London as a patient. And then unemployment benefits.”

“I was a painter/decorator for eight years.”

Participant C

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<sup>82</sup> Albeit after one year of living off savings while living with family, which are privileges that not all actors have.

“I sold perfume in Harrods [...] There are ways to survive as long as you don't think that you're defined by them. Just kind of keep your eyes on the prize and do what you have to do.”

Participant B

Participant B expresses the mindset of many actors towards this kind of work: firstly, it is something you ‘survive’, as in something that is a temporarily uncomfortable experience that will pass with time; and secondly, a need to guard your personal self-identity from defining yourself as a retail employee, rather than as an actor. What we see in this quadrant is a practical acceptance that these jobs are necessary for survival, but an expressed desire to make the duration of time working in them as short as possible so as to enable returning to more desired areas of work. The low-pay, low-skill and low-status attached to these jobs, coupled with the fact that they are not working in their preferred area of employment, make them undesirable, but necessary.

Some interviewees were thinking ahead to their future and wondering if these ‘filling in’ jobs would be possible or desirable as they aged. It seems to be understood by actors that the precariousness of pursuing acting work is easier to deal with when younger. This may be because the young think, or hope, that this precariousness is a temporary fixture to be endured until they reach a greater level of success; this is the *telescopic* career view expressed by Ibert and Schmidt (2014) where the focus is on some point in the future. By the time the actor has reached mid-career there is probably less expectation that things are going to significantly change for them<sup>83</sup>. This questioning of whether acting is a sustainable career comes up in conversation with mid-career actors:

“Equally, it's deeply insecure. You do sometimes wonder how you're going to pay for things, and where you're going to be in 15 years, 20

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<sup>83</sup> In this we see that by mid-career the A-List/B-List division has been formulated (Caves, 2000) and there are few opportunities for the actor to move up.

years' time when you're 60 and you can't quite wait tables anymore. But then that's a long way off, and you can't really think like that in our profession. There's the compromise. You very much live in the moment in this profession. And that's all you can do.”

Participant E

Not all actors view these kinds of jobs in a negative light; for some, they suit their circumstances and aspirations:

“I know an actor who's 56 who's working behind a bar in Putney. He's great. He loves it. Pays his bills, doesn't give a shit. He lives above the pub. It's a great life for him. Why not? He's got no obligations, you know.”

Participant F

There is evidence of support networks amongst actors who refer these kinds of ‘fill-in’ jobs to each other or pass them from one person to the next; in this we see the kind of network-based work environments that rely on social capital, as we saw within the Hollywood model (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Jones and DeFillippi, 1996). Actors helping other actors creates its own kind of safety net amongst actors:

“... because of social media now, you know people create these pages. There's something called The Hustle. So, I think there's a lot of things out there for performers to do. Not that a lot of people want to do it, but you've got call centres, you've got promotional work. You know, I always see stuff going on. So that kind of creates a bit of relief knowing that there is always something. But I guess the important thing is that you can earn enough to pay the bills.”

Participant H

Figure 19 below summarises the key ideas from this quadrant:

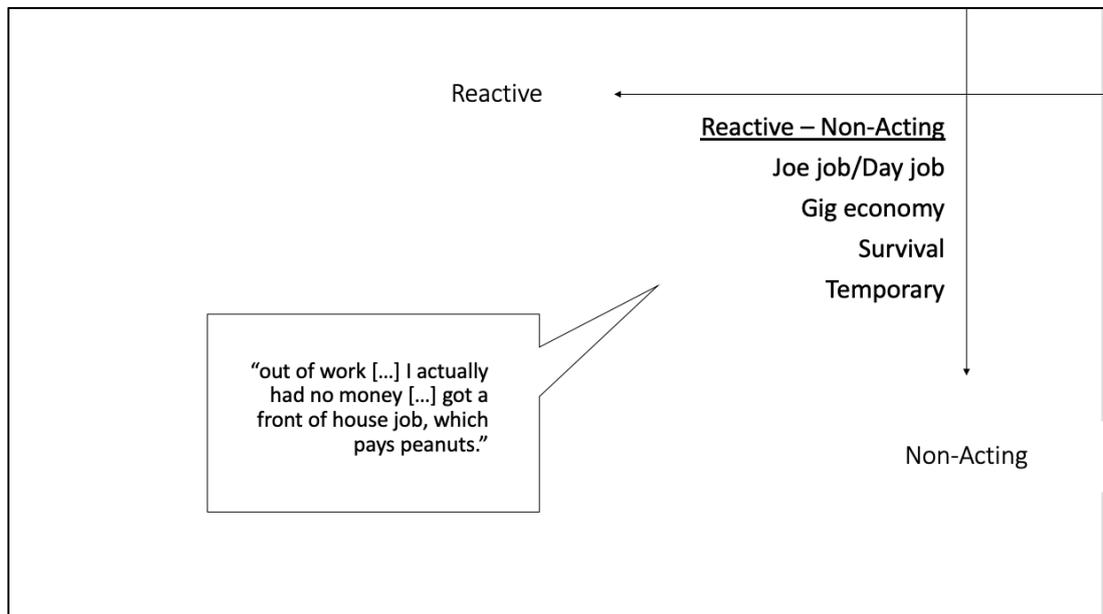


Figure 19 – Summary of Reactive Non-Acting Quadrant

## 8.2 Discussion of Reactive Non-Acting

### Agency

Reactive non-acting jobs tend to be low-skilled and poorly remunerated, they can also undermine the actor’s sense of agency, as it is not where they would choose to spend their time and earn their income:

“There used to be all those other kinds of jobs – the phones, deliveries, all that kind of stuff. I did all those when I was young, um, and hated them, of course. Just constant reminders that you’re not doing what you want to be doing. Um, I never like going back to something that I’ve done before. So eventually you run out of ideas.”  
Participant J

This work reinforces that they are not working in their preferred area. The difficulty comes when the actor is mid-career and hopes that they are

finished with having to take jobs in this quadrant, yet the unpredictability of the industry means that they can never rule it out. Participant V explains how years of acting experience do not make her immune from having to work in this quadrant: "...it doesn't get easier. I think because you change and 20 years down the line [...] it's like shit, I never thought I was going to have to work front of house again. I threw all my shirts out and then had to go buy another load." This confrontation with the job market is driven by the precariousness of acting work. Actors can delay looking for other work in the hope that something in their preferred area is going to come along, but this can leave them in circumstances described as: "trying to tread water or keep their head above water" (Participant L). Undoubtedly, this is not an empowering feeling. It does not help that many of the casual jobs that actors take up are exploitative:

"I hear about horrible jobs. The call centre jobs and the promo work where you're standing on the street corner handing out free cans of Red Bull or deodorant or whatever. When you ask that person what they're getting paid, they're still getting paid £10 an hour. When I graduated drama school 12 years ago I was getting paid £10 an hour. It doesn't take a maths genius to realise that the wages that we've got coming in have actually gone down over the years."

Participant K

Actors have a skillset that make them highly employable, particularly in jobs that are customer facing, but they are not always rewarded for this skill. This may be a case of market oversupply in acting spilling over to create an oversupply in the market of casual jobs that actors often take, therefore depressing wages. Participant K discusses feeling very undervalued when he was doing promotional work:

"They want me because I'm an actor. They want me because I'm intelligent, I'm articulate, I'm engaging, I'm personable. I can read body language so if someone comes up to me and they're in a fluster I know exactly what to do. They want me because I'm an actor, and yet they won't pay me."

## Barriers to Acting

A need to earn money outside of acting through multiple job holding can become a barrier to returning to work in acting:

“It's quite difficult for people to find satisfactory jobs that they can work around the acting commitments. Often you might get a phone call, can you come to an audition in two hours? You've got to be able to drop everything to go to that. Not many jobs will allow that.”

Participant S

Because of the short notice that often happens in the industry, it is challenging for actors to find jobs that allow them to remain close to the auditions (which are generally in London) and be available at short notice. This can force actors into the reactive non-acting category of work (jobs such as waiting, bartending, call centre work) as they tend to be flexible and are often working evenings and weekends, which allows the actor to keep their days free for auditions. The problem with these jobs is they pay very little, generally not even the ‘London Living Wage,’ which traps actors in cycles of poverty. If they try to take on more skilled proactive-non-acting work, which pays better, this work is often not as flexible (higher pay generally comes with increased responsibility), which makes accessing auditions difficult. The industry does not seem to have much sympathy for the predicament this puts actors in as these two comments from an agent and a casting director demonstrate:

“I think actors must realise that if they are going to do part-time jobs, they have to be flexible. That's where the careers don't sustain. People suddenly find the part-time marketing job is beginning to take over. And I think, you know, the first time you say to your agent, sorry, I can't go to that casting or audition because I have a work commitment, you know, it's the beginning of the end of their career as an actor.”

Participant N

“You've got to make it look like that [acting] is your priority. If it's not your priority, then casting directors may say, well are they an actor or a teacher?”

Participant AA

These comments seem to ignore the fact that earnings are sufficiently low for most actors that they are forced to have to engage in multiple job holding to support themselves. Or rather, it seems that the agent and casting director are suggesting that all actors can have the single focus that is possible for A-List actors. The first quote from the agent suggests that actors having additional part-time jobs is a choice, when in fact it is usually a necessity. This is a projection of bohemian ideals on the actor that are not realistic. In the second quote from the casting director, it is quite limiting to think that the actor cannot be both an actor and a teacher. This challenges findings from Chapter seven that a proactive non-acting income strand, as part of a portfolio career, can be a valuable diversification strategy and help support an acting career. This again suggests that the casting director is blinded to the financial reality of most actors. This blindness, whether wilful or not, serves to reinforce A-List/B-List divisions and privileges actors with financial capital. These realities are even more challenging as employment contracts in the entertainment industry are often short in duration. This creates a cycle of the actor constantly having to seek out new interim employment, which can be stressful. The Equity rep says:

“Even a production in a small theatre, the idea and the commission for it can take place over a long time. There's no need to just make quick demands of our members, which then creates rupture in their lives because they have to leave the job that they've got. They might be in a production that lasts for two weeks because they want it on their CV and then they're back looking for work.”

Participant O

## **Portfolio Career**

It is possible for reactive non-acting jobs to turn into portfolio careers, where what starts out as a necessity, either to earn money and/or to fill in time,

becomes something that is enjoyable and is sustained alongside of working. Here Participant L speaks of an A-List actor taking on work as a gardener:

“...a friend of mine, she'd done a big television series for five years and then couldn't get any work in her 40s. Her passion was gardening, so she thought, I'll go and start gardening for other people, which throughout her late 40s and 50s she'd done alongside her remaining a TV and film star. The things that probably make her a good gardener, and why people book her again, are the very skills she uses as an actress, which is that she can engage with people, and she can hold a conversation, she can listen. All the things we're supposed to do when we're working.”

There are two things interesting about this, one that an A-List actor should find herself taking gardening work in the first place and then that she kept this up for a lengthy period of time while ‘remaining a TV and film star’. I don't have further details of this anecdote, whether it was because the income from TV and film work was not sufficient to support her and so she did the gardening work out of a need for additional income, or that she found herself with lengthy periods of time between engagements and this was a way of keeping herself busy and feeling useful, or both. Either way, it is an interesting example of portfolio and protean working patterns and also a useful example that resilience and a proactive/reactive approach to managing a career are not just required from B-List actors.

### **Exit Ramps**

Some actors decide to leave the industry completely and turn their attention full-time in a new direction where their acting training may find new relevancy (*cf.* Ibert and Schmidt, 2012, 2014). Participant L explains how his work in the corporate training sector brings him into contact with lots of former actors who are thriving in new careers:

“...a drama training is fantastically useful, and although lots of people give it up by the time they're 30, if you go into marketing agencies or advertising agencies in London, they've got an awful lot of people. I know when I'm doing training at those places, you meet really good

people who are account managers and then it comes out, I went to drama school. You think, yeah, of course you did, because you can actually talk to people and you're a human being. And that's a brilliant investment and getting a return from it probably far more than you'd have got if you'd stayed in acting."

While actors may find possibilities outside acting in new careers, it is disappointing if that is the inevitable conclusion for most. Existing creative industries research considers *barriers to entry* (Bridgstock et al., 2015; Gill, 2014; Percival and Hesmondhalgh, 2014) and *barriers to exit* (Benhamou, 2011; Menger, 2006); however, based on my research, I theorise that there is an additional barrier, which is the *barrier to sustainability* specific to B-List actors. B-List status can act as a form of structural barrier to sustainability in that the lower social, symbolic and financial capital afforded to, or accrued by, the mid-career actor with B-List status acts as a structural inhibitor to their ability to sustain a career. Coupled with high levels of competition in the market, where they struggle to distinguish themselves, means they are constantly dealing with issues of precarity that can force the actor towards an exit ramp from the industry (*cf.* Hennekam and Bennett, 2016). If the actor's desire is to stay in the game, while barriers exist to move the B-List actor onto an exit ramp from the industry, this creates a situation where the actor has little agency over what is happening to them. The B-List actor has to fight to stay visible and gain diminishing opportunities. With an intersectional view, combining this precarity with other forms of inequality, whether related to gender, race, sexuality, disability, age and/or class, it is remarkable how many actors manage to remain in the game beyond a few years. What this research endeavours to do is to bring attention to the cost that this struggle has on actors' psyche and well-being.

## **Conclusion**

The reactive non-acting quadrant examines the work that actors do when faced with the precarious situation of being unemployed from acting. As actors age, both chronologically, but also in their years invested in the acting

market, the reactive non-acting jobs appear to take a greater psychological and emotional toll on the actor, particularly due to the loss of agency that they represent. Neither agent nor casting director seemed particularly sensitive to the restrictions of actors needing to take on other forms of work, which further reinforces easier job market access for A-List actors and those with access to capital. B-List actors, unless they have the means to avoid working in non-acting jobs, can find barriers erected for them in accessing the employment market through the precarity of their work situation and a need to engage in other forms of non-acting work in order to survive. Their need to work outside of the acting sector, meets a last-minute casting culture that is insensitive to how this restrains access to large swathes of the acting population, which then acts as a *barrier to sustainability* as it can force actors onto an exit ramp that leads them away from the industry (*cf.* Hennekam and Bennett, 2016). This only seeks to reinforce A-List superiority and keep acting within the reach of the privileged (Brook et al., 2020; Friedman et al., 2017) and considers how A-List status acts as an additional class barrier that privileges a limited number of actors who have easier access to the employment market and influences who is able to *duck and dive* their way around the numerous structural barriers.

Considering the two reactive quadrants together, Figure 20 reviews their main features:

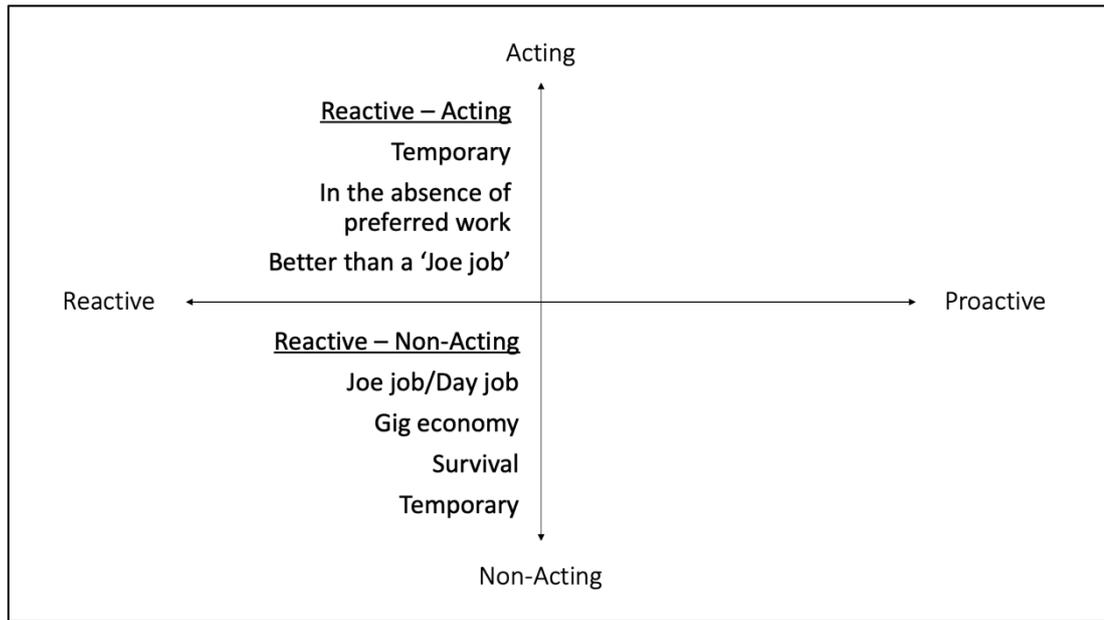


Figure 20 – Summary of Reactive Quadrants

To reinforce how these quadrants are experienced by the actor, I present a key quote that encapsulates each quadrant from the perspective of the actor below in Figure 21

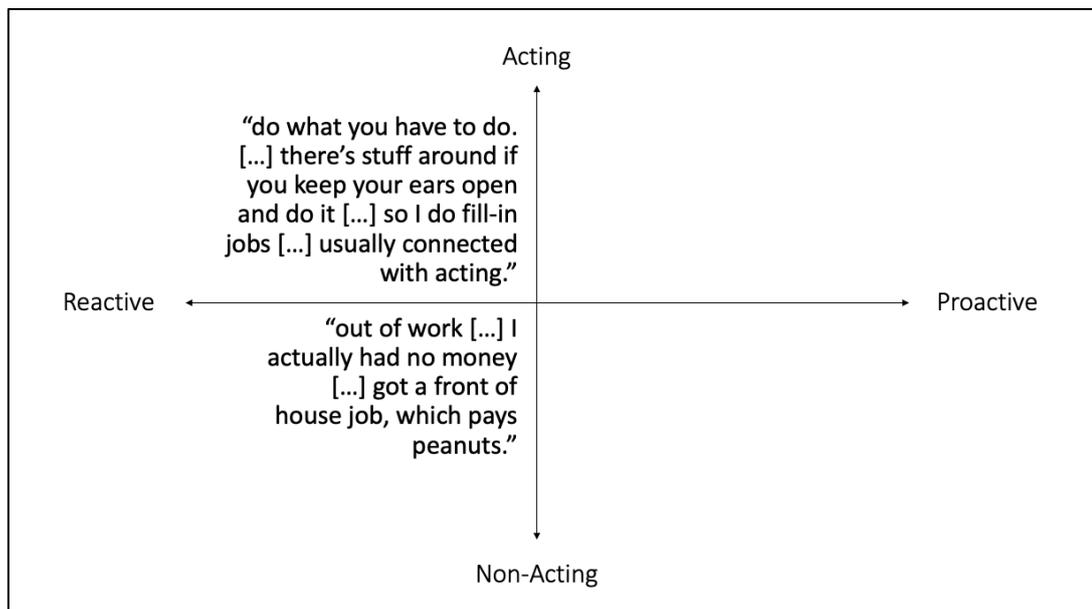


Figure 21 – Indicative Quotes from Reactive Quadrant

Finally, I show that there is a connection between these reactive quadrants and the concepts of resilience and the protean career and how they are necessary tools for the actor to sustain themselves through periods without preferred acting work, see Figure 22

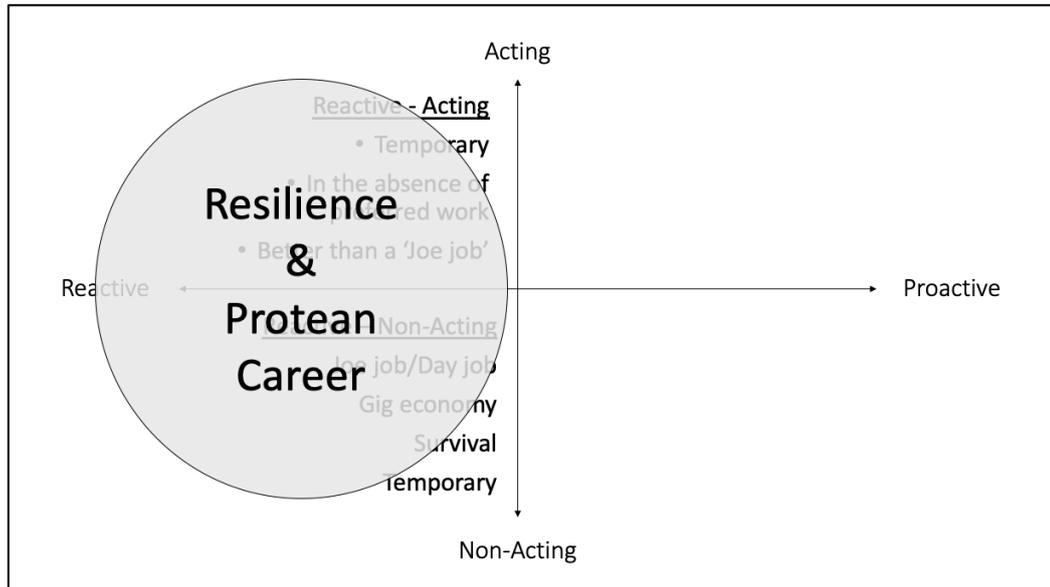


Figure 22 – Connection with Resilience and Protean Career

### 8.3 Complete PRAN Model

In Figure 23, I compile the complete PRAN Model built up over the last four chapters:

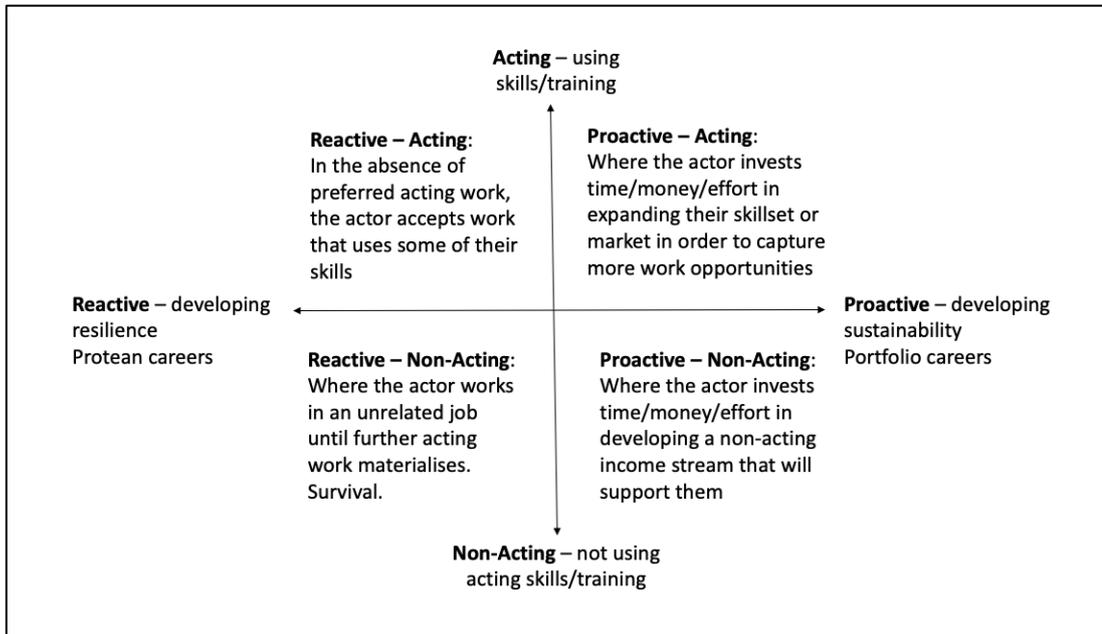


Figure 23 – Complete PRAN Model

while Figure 24 shows how key themes relate to the PRAN Model:

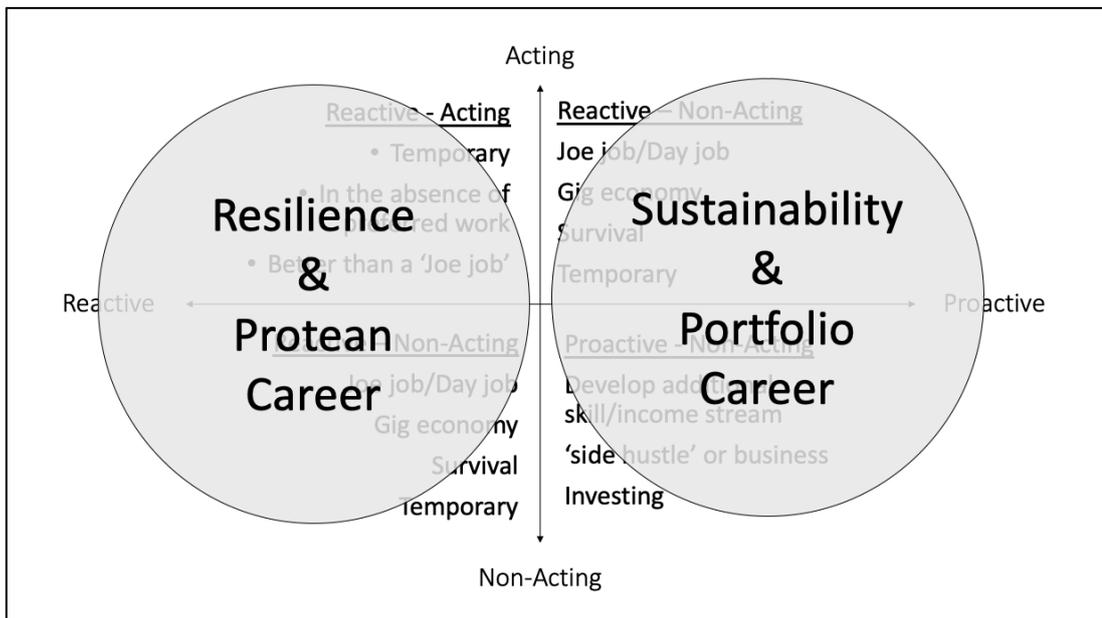


Figure 24 – Relationship between PRAN model and major themes

## 9 Pedagogical Application of PRAN Model

### Introduction

In Chapters five to eight, I discussed findings from my empirical research that collectively create my PRAN model. In this chapter I will engage in self-reflection on how I have incorporated the PRAN model, and the knowledge contained therein, in my own teaching, and also exploring whether *ducking and diving* as an entrepreneurial sustainability skill can be taught. My thesis is that creative entrepreneurship as a skillset, if taught to emerging performers, can equip them to better manage the requirements of protean and portfolio working patterns, especially competing in a scarcity market. The PRAN model is a framework to examine the market and proactively develop strategies to deal with potential and actual difficulties, thus helping young actors to move from a position of being *reactive* to market forces to moving towards being *proactive* and thus giving them agency and self-efficacy over their career path. This relates back to the research of Doern (2017, 2021) looking at resilience in entrepreneurs and small business owners and relating it to boxing with its strategic mix of absorbing shocks, making skilful moves, and tactical planning to avoid shocks and how these combined actions contribute towards entrepreneurial resiliency. This chapter reflects on how these skills can be proactively taught to emerging performers.

### 9.1 Arts Entrepreneurship Theory

Arts entrepreneurship scholar Hart (2020) identifies one of the key barriers to change in the arts:

“One of the core obstacles both artists and entrepreneurs face is the status quo, which can be defined as the existing power structures or present states of affairs [...] In their respective quests for change, artists and entrepreneurs will experience inevitable pushback, as the status quo seeks to preserve or expand its power, rather than acquiesce to the many unknown outcomes of change. [...] People in

general tend to view the status quo, even when unjust, as preferable or desirable. This can make efforts towards change especially challenging. With this in mind, arts entrepreneurship instructors serve their students by teaching them to face and otherwise overcome these obstacles” (p. 11).

The status quo in actor training has been to almost exclusively focus on craft skills<sup>84</sup> with a limited amount of career orientation training in the final year.

This orientation appears to assume that graduates will only work in the performing arts ignoring data that indicates this is unlikely to be the path for the majority of graduates (Comunian et al., 2010; Equity, 2013; The Stage, 2014). The findings of the research project undertaken herein suggest that it is important that this status quo be challenged to better prepare graduates for real careers in the creative industries which are “...complex, multi-faceted and diverse and requires a broad range of skills and knowledge [...] rather than simply one road to success” (Blackwood et al., 2019, p. 18). Preparing graduates for ‘lifelong sustainable careers in the arts’ (Ibid.) must explore the complexity of creative industries’ work which, considering that Equity’s (2013) survey of members found that 65% of members work fewer than 20 weeks per year in performance, requires the majority of performers to either be financially supported in some way (Frey and Pommerehne, 1989; Towse, 2010) or embrace portfolio and protean project-based work patterns combining performance and non-performance work (Bajoriniene and Jusky, 2019; Bridgstock et al., 2015; Coffield et al., 2019; Comunian et al., 2010, 2014).

Statistics on the live performance sector show that the status quo has generally failed in equipping performance graduates to sustain *both* performance careers and positive mental health (BBC, 2018A; Hemley,

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<sup>84</sup> The Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) found that amongst recent graduates 80% said their institution had helped them acquire artistic technique, but only 30% were aided in developing entrepreneurial skills and only 25% in developing financial and business management skills (Lena, 2014, p. 11).

2015; cf. Gross and Musgrave, 2016, 2017, 2020). Performing arts psychologist, Hamilton (1997), writes how young performers who are uncertain of what to do to launch or sustain a career are susceptible to “...significant narcissistic vulnerability [...] marked by experiences of acute self-consciousness, a tendency towards shame, and painful questions about self-worth<sup>85</sup>.” (p. 70). This can lead young performers to assume they are untalented if they are not gaining career traction, without fully understanding how strongly the oversupply of the market has challenged their chances of gaining an entry position. Each audition brings the young actor face-to-face with Ibert and Schmidt’s (2012) observation that the audition “...forms the central context in which competition is concretized” (p. 355). This can induce a spiral of self-criticism and negativity which appears in data on poor mental health within the sector (BBC, 2018A; Hawthorne, 2015; Hemley, 2015; Shorter et al., 2018; cf. Gross and Musgrave, 2016, 2017, 2020). Research on the relationship between precarity in the industry and impacts on mental health is far more advanced in the field of music, compared to performance, for example in Gross and Musgrave’s (2020) monograph *Can music make you sick? Measuring the price of musical ambition*. My research findings point to a clear need for further research into a similar phenomenon in the acting/performance industry, which my research begins to address.

However, there is an opposite danger in trying to prepare students for a challenging work environment which is: “...that students – already bombarded with depressing news about changes to the world of work – simply did not ‘hear’ anything past the introduction; the sense of initial panic generated was enough to swamp everything that came afterwards” (Coffield et al., 2019, p. 18). This is echoed by the Precarious Workers Brigade (2017) who caution that students can be left “paralysed and demoralized” (p. 6) with a binary choice between “fight (competing) or flight (dropping out)” (Ibid.).

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<sup>85</sup> Research in the School of Arts and Cultures, Newcastle University, in 2018-19 observed: “a notable increase in students expressing anxiety over their ‘employability’ and their lives post-graduation” (Coffield et al., 2019, p. 3).

This highlights the delicate balance necessary between needing to adequately prepare graduates so they know what steps to take (and feel they have the necessary skills and support to take those steps) without overwhelming them or creating fear in them about the challenges they may face. Faced with a difficult choice of how to address this precarity through pedagogy, the status quo has been to leave students to figure the career out themselves in a form of ‘School of Hard Knocks’ approach, which can lead to painful disappointment. I propose that time spent realistically assessing students’ strengths and weaknesses (through the use of the SWOT<sup>86</sup> tool, for example) can help students identify where they may have a competitive advantage in the market and identify where they may need to seek additional training, while examining the market to determine opportunities and threats; this can lead a student to better planning and properly defined goals based on a clear and realistic market understanding, rather than graduating with unsubstantiated dreams and an unclear pathway. Hamilton (1997) notes:

“Some performers may need help to manage the changes that occur during this career without becoming chronically overwhelmed by either positive or negative events. Other performers may require more of a balance between the way things are (realism) and the way they might be (idealism), while planning for inevitable events, such as ageing, retirement, or making a career transition. It is important for performers to assume an active problem-solving approach toward necessary changes rather than avoiding responsibility or hoping for outside intervention” (p. 88).

This active problem-solving approach is modelled in the proactive quadrants of the PRAN model.

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<sup>86</sup> The SWOT is a commonly used business planning tool to assess an individual’s or enterprises’ strengths and weaknesses (internal to the individual or enterprise) and opportunities and threats (external to the individual or enterprise) (Helms and Nixon, 2010).

## Acting Theory as a Window into Entrepreneurship

In looking at my application of the PRAN model and building upon the research of Hart (2020), there are many ways that actor training, particularly in its use of the imagination as a primary tool, can be a way to teach the creative entrepreneurship skills necessary for emerging professionals. As an example, Stanislavski (1957/2013) writes “If you are looking for something, don’t go sit on the seashore and expect it to come and find you; you must search, search, search with all the stubbornness in you!” (p. 84) which calls to mind the active problem-solving approach advocated in psychology (Hamilton, 1997) and the proactive quadrants of the PRAN model discussed in chapters six and seven.

Another example of this is Stanislavski’s *magic if* (1936/1987). This is one of the key elements of his approach to acting, which teaches the actor to ask themselves ‘what if’ questions to get inside the reality of the character and enter into the imaginary circumstances of the world of the play. By asking ‘what if’ questions, such as ‘what if I was a young girl in the Russian provinces longing to be back in Moscow?’ starts to stimulate the actor’s imagination (*cf.* Hart, 2020). Using the PRAN model pedagogically engages with the same *what if* approach, but encourages students to consider ‘what if’ they take proactive and reactive action in both performance and non-performance work spheres? What might the outcome be? By encouraging students to explore challenges of the industry from the relative safety of the classroom and mentally rehearse how they would deal with these challenges, using ‘what if’ conversations, becomes a mental rehearsal for engaging in the marketplace, much as sports psychology advocates the use of mental rehearsal in order to prepare for an event (Maisel, 2011; Nordin-Bates, 2012). In this way, I argue that the mental rehearsal of navigating a performance career, that can come from students working their way through the four quadrants of the PRAN model, aids in preparing them for a competitive and often challenging marketplace by rehearsing these situations in advance (with a focus on ‘rehearsal’ being another application of the

acting process) and understanding in practical, rather than just conceptual ways, the potential need for compromise or negotiation required to circumnavigate challenges to succeed in a difficult market. This increases their self-confidence and self-efficacy, having rehearsed navigating the challenges they may encounter (Medaille, 2010; Plotnick, 2015). This builds an understanding within students that they have choices, which develops a stronger sense of agency, or perceived agency, over their career path.

A final application of Stanislavski acting theory to creative entrepreneurship teaching is how the PRAN model helps to break down monolithic ideas such as 'the industry' or 'an acting career' into more manageable, actionable steps, similarly to the way that an actor is trained to break down their script into units, sections and beats/bits (Stanislavski 1936/1987; *cf.* Hart, 2020). This allows students to analyse a performance career before embarking on one, pedagogically guiding students to break down their ideas of a performance career into smaller and smaller units, focusing on choices and actions linked towards goals, in the same way that Stanislavski's approach uses actions towards objectives (*ibid.*).

However, not all approaches to acting translate so well to entrepreneurial teaching. There are entire schools of acting technique, such as that of Meisner (Meisner and Longwell, 1987) that are built upon the premise that 'acting is reacting' and that it is the actor's craft to respond to external stimuli and follow through on instincts. This can be highly desirable for acting; and yet sometimes less desirable for managing a performance career, where sometimes analysis of a situation, and being able to step back and reflect, leads to sounder choices. The PRAN model helps the performer to analyse situations encountered in the employment sphere with greater consideration and make informed choices, rather than simply reacting (*cf.* Hart, 2020). This can be viewed as using Bourdieu's logics of practice (1986) allowing students to practice weighing up decisions against both artistic and economic logics to make more considered career decisions. The work in my class, i.e. exploring, questioning and discussing the 'real world' experiences of

research participants quoted herein, and discussing how they *duck and dive* their way through the various proactive and reactive choices they may have to make as they navigate the UK industry, helps students to develop critical thinking skills and to balance impulse with rational examination. In so doing, students learn to “... analyze the strengths and weaknesses of their ideas and urges” (Hart, 2020, p. 20). The instincts that are honed through acting training are highly beneficial, but when it comes to *ducking and diving* through the creative industries, reflex and instinct are not always enough; developing the critical thinking and reflexive skills to evaluate opportunities and threats, along with contextualising choices by leveraging the individual’s strengths (as in the SWOT analysis), can help to make better-informed career decisions.

### **Reactive Actions and Resilience**

In Chapters seven and eight I discussed the reactive elements of pursuing a performance career and breaking down many ways that actors have to deal with difficult situations and still find the ability to rebound – in its truest sense being *resilient*, i.e. bouncing back after sustaining a blow (Doern, 2017, 2021; Ibert and Schmidt, 2014; see Chapter two). Exploring the reactive quadrants of the PRAN model from the safety of the classroom allows the teacher to discuss the less attractive sides of a performance career, such as facing endemic unemployment. With 65% of performers working fewer than 20 weeks per year in performance (Equity, 2013) it is both practical and prudent to acknowledge in a meaningful way the reality of unemployment, to explore some of the difficult choices or compromises that often have to be made to take on jobs outside of one’s field of interest and discuss the financial and emotional supports that may be accessed during these periods. Engaging with the first-person accounts contained herein acts as a form of Stanislavski’s *magic if* (1936/1987) by considering how students will process unemployment and what steps they will take should they find themselves in that position. Students can consider what they might do to create a proactive non-acting income strand to support them until their next acting opportunity

comes along, or maybe they imagine the 'what if' they are thrown into the reactive non-acting quadrant and have to take a job in a bar or a shop? Having read the accounts that accompany the PRAN model, as well as their own conversations with actors, they realise that firstly, this is a normal experience that most performers face and secondly, their next performance job will eventually come along *if* they keep pursuing it. In imagining 'what if' they are unemployed, class work can discuss the need to establish support networks (emotional and/or financial) before unemployment is experienced. My premise is that by doing this imaginative work in advance, they will be better prepared to confront it and take active steps to enact greater agency while drawing upon resilience to persist until new work is won. This gives them a greater sense of self-efficacy in the knowledge that even in a difficult situation such as unemployment, it is possible for them to have agency, to make positive choices that support their long-term goals, and to draw upon support resources to help them through. It is important for educators to remember that "...giftedness is not synonymous with resiliency..." (Hamilton, 1997, p. 7) and even gifted performers need training and education in how to be resilient in a challenging career. One way to do this is to discuss and celebrate failure. So often the narratives of performance careers are about the successes, so training is a time to also celebrate the failures and the losses in order to prepare students that in the 'snakes and ladders' game of pursuing a performance career there are snakes as well as ladders. Recognising that many performers experience career hardship, disappointment or loss at some point helps to normalise this and students can pre-emptively develop strategies to help process and overcome these setbacks should they be encountered, thus making them less debilitating.

By spending time unpacking the reactive quadrants, class discussions can address topics such as the bullying, harassment and sexual harassment that occur in the performance world (Federation of Entertainment Unions, 2013); and more importantly, make them aware of codes of conduct and ways to report transgressions. Other topics of conversation can include the many layers of inequality that exist within the performance sector as well as how

change is happening, and can be encouraged to happen, to make the sector more equitable for all. This can address how students can, and should, take action to further the fight for change in the industry (Coffield et al., 2019). All of this centres on the reactive elements of the industry and identifying opportunities and resources to aid students to take action, whether individually to advocate for themselves and/or collectively to advocate for sectoral change. This builds a sense of agency, that they do not have to just 'react' to the industry, that they can take action, stand up for themselves when they have been mistreated, and can reach out for support when needed. Understanding the role of unions and collective action, as well as developing individual advocacy, makes them stronger. This work will, hopefully, in time counter some of the alarming mental health statistics about performance (BBC, 2018A; Hemley, 2015) that I argue may partly be caused by the lack of agency experienced by so many performers.

This work also accepts that not all graduates are going to succeed in launching or sustaining a performance career. Whether by choice or necessity, changing career paths is not easy for performers.

“For the most part, traditional training programmes in the performing arts promote a narrow vocationalism, leaving many performers with few resources outside of this profession. Making a career change could then be emotionally devastating<sup>87</sup>, even for the very young.” (Hamilton, 1997, pp. 78-9).

The PRAN model, by evaluating and considering career paths both within and outside the performing arts, helps to ease this transition, by the early evaluation of the breadth of their skillset and the many locations in which their skills could be valuably applied. Should a performance career prove to be unachievable or unsustainable, the student has already considered other

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<sup>87</sup> Hamilton (1997) points out that the motivation for career changes makes a significant difference: “Are they reaching out for a more attractive alternative, or are they being forced out by default, because they are unemployed, burned out, tired of touring, or need to be practical about their future?” (p. 79).

options that might be available to them and identified support structures that could help them with this transition.

## **9.2 Classroom Application of the PRAN Model**

The pedagogical model I am presenting has been tested through my own teaching both at a university-based conservatoire in London and subsequently at a college-based conservatoire in Canada. This shows that the PRAN model, while developed through an empirical study of UK actors, is process-based and adaptable to different cultural contexts. To demonstrate how I have applied the PRAN model in my teaching, I will explain its practical use as the central pillar in my curriculum for a final-year *Professional Practice* class I taught in 2020 on a four-year college-based conservatoire training programme at a Canadian Institution. In doing so, I will address the useful applicability of the theoretical PRAN model as a pedagogical tool, through demonstrating how it was used as a springboard for exercises and assignments to more fulsomely prepare students for the acting market. In order to quantify its usefulness, I have gathered reflections from students as they worked their way through the quadrants of the PRAN model. Their first-person remarks speak to how they have found utility in the model and how its application has helped them to better understand the market they aspire to enter.

### **Curriculum**

In my 2020 teaching, I used Chapters five to eight of this thesis as assigned reading for students, spread over several weeks. Each chapter delves into a particular quadrant of work and the research participants' statements act as mini-case studies giving students first-hand accounts of mid-career actors' experiences of work in that quadrant. I asked students to reflect in writing on the content and we have group discussions about what the defining features of work in that particular quadrant are. In the course of doing this, it allows us

to discuss priorities, values, and individual pathways of interest for students, allowing them to identify what is important to them for a career, instead of unquestioningly pursuing a status quo pathway. In the course of this reflection, many students identify a desire for family and a home life, which allows for an exploration of work-life balance and how acting can be part of a portfolio career or portfolio life that might include family and other personal commitments.

Students undertake 'informational interviewing'<sup>88</sup> (Bolles, 1970/2009) with working performers, as primary research into performers' careers, and map out their career activities in the different quadrants of the PRAN model. They are encouraged to ask questions like: What specific areas of the industry do you work in? Did you ever take on any jobs you did not really want to do? How did you manage this? Do you work outside of performance? What do you do? What proactive steps do you take to find or keep employment in performance?, etc. After undertaking the interview, students write a short profile and share them in a group. Each student contributes three of these profiles, totalling nearly 150 unique performer profiles, demonstrating to students the breadth of performance pathways available to them. This also allows students to challenge dominant narratives of what *success* is in the performing arts and build up a more nuanced and research-grounded understanding of the complexity and reality of work within and outside of performance. Other benefits of this exercise include helping students to develop networking skills, helping them get over their fear of reaching out to individuals to ask for help/support, building their network of contacts and knowledge of industry players, and formulating a picture of the industry that includes them as a participant; as well as more broadly developing qualitative research, interviewing and concise writing skills.

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<sup>88</sup> A commonly used job exploration technique involving short, directed interviews with individuals working in a particular career field.

Students create an individual post-study plan. Because of the high level of uncertainty in 2020 with COVID-19, they were asked to create three different two-year plans using the GAP planning tool framework, which asks the planner to consider the outcome against three possible outcomes: Good, Average or Poor<sup>89</sup>. They are asked to map out steps they can take proactively in both performance and non-performance spheres and also identify tools for resiliency, including identifying financial, emotional and practical supports they can access. They also undertake a budgeting exercise: firstly, determining their *cabbages* budget, articulating the lowest amount they would need to survive on, and secondly, creating their *champagne* budget, which is an aspirational budget, to begin to understand what their 'ideal' lifestyle would cost and if/how that might be accessible on performance wages<sup>90</sup>. This leads to discussions about how they can increase their value to producers, therefore commanding higher wages, and/or how they might subsidise performance wages to make their desired living standards more achievable. This allows me to discuss the findings from Chapter five linking a correlation between lower household incomes and individuals for whom acting is their sole job.

Looking more granularly at how the PRAN addresses different areas of career preparation, Table 5 has questions students can ask themselves relevant to each PRAN quadrant to fully prepare for the breadth of a freelance performance career:

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<sup>89</sup> This comes from the PRINCE2 project planning methodology (Axelos, 2017).

<sup>90</sup> I credit Ian Chance who introduced cabbages and champagne budgets on the MA in Creative Entrepreneurship programme at the University of East Anglia.

Table 5 - Reflexive Questions for PRAN Quadrants

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Reactive – Acting:</b><br/>If you take a performance job that is not really desirable, or find yourself in a performance job and things are not going well, what can you do? Who can you talk to? What resources are available to you? How will you protect your physical/vocal/emotional/mental resources? What proactive steps can you take to find your next (better) job?</p>  | <p><b>Proactive – Acting:</b><br/>What specific areas of the industry interest you? Where will you focus your pursuit of work? What skills might you develop to access other markets? How can networking, marketing and other business skills help you?</p> |
| <p><b>Reactive – Non-Acting:</b><br/>If you need to take a 'joe job' for a period of time, how can you make it a positive experience? What skills can you learn from it? Who can you turn to for support? Is there anything you can do to take more agency in the situation? How will you keep your performance skills sharp while doing this job and what action steps will you take to look for work in a more preferred area?</p> | <p><b>Proactive – Non-Acting:</b><br/>What other interests do you have that you could pursue when not acting? Is there a side business you could start that would help you to stabilise your acting work?</p>   |

This personal reflection on the PRAN model guides students to think in portfolio working patterns from the start of their career (*cf.* Blackwood et al., 2019; Latukefu and Ginsborg, 2018). This is not only preventative, to help equip performers to be better prepared for an often precarious career, but it also encourages young actors, who often have very narrow experience of the world, to think more broadly. This echoes what Stanislavski (1936/1963) wrote encouraging artists to experience life fully:

“A real artist must lead a full, interesting, varied and exciting life. He should know not only what is going on in the big cities, but in the provincial towns, faraway villages, factories and the big cultural centres of the world as well. He should study the life and psychology of the people who surround him, of various other parts of the population, both at home and abroad” (p. 11).

The knowledge, experience and understanding that come from working in non-performance jobs, with non-performers, helps give this breadth that

Stanislavski speaks of, while also helping to offset the precarity of the performing arts.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout my research I have argued that the structural forces of the performing arts, particularly an extreme oversupply of the market and steep competition for opportunities, along with generally low wages for all but the most successful actors, create conditions that make sustaining a performance career very difficult for all but the luckiest or those who have other means of support (Friedman et al., 2017; Menger, 2006; *cf.* Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013; Gill, 2014; Gross and Musgrave, 2020; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012; Randle et al., 2015). There is much evidence in my own research and that of others that the *status quo* approach to preparing actors for the profession is *not* succeeding for many. Therefore, I have experimented with teaching based on a more pragmatic view of the profession, derived from and supported by scholarship, which promotes an active problem-solving approach, as advocated by Stanislavski (1957/2013) and Hamilton (1997).

The PRAN model developed herein, and its pedagogical application, guides actors towards a proactive approach to crafting a career that suits them, rather than accepting a *status quo* narrative of what an actor *should* aspire to. In my classroom, through working their way through the four PRAN quadrants, students connect more strongly with their own personal needs and desires for a career and how they might structure a pathway that supports this. Based on my research and experimentation I predict this will lead to better outcomes, in terms of life and career satisfaction, than *status quo* approaches have historically (BBC, 2018A; Hemley, 2015).

## Contribution to Practice

My empirical research was undertaken with UK mid-career actors, those who were 10+ years into their careers. In previous chapters, I have discussed the precarity and uncertainty that my interviewees spoke about. My overall thesis is that rather than the *status quo* approach, that leads to disappointment for so many performers, that a better alternative is to take a more strategic approach to managing a creative career, one informed by creative entrepreneurship, that can lead to a greater sense of agency over career outcomes by focusing on proactive activities, while developing resilience to counter some of the harmful side-effects that can arise from competing in a crowded market. This theory informs my pedagogy. The question then becomes: Will the students, whom I have taught using the PRAN model, be better equipped to deal with the challenges of pursuing a performance career? It would only be in a longitudinal study that surveyed these students in ten years' time to see if they are having better outcomes than the participants in my empirical research that I would be able to quantify the true impact of the training. In the absence of this longitudinal study, what I can rest upon is that if mental health is observed to be poor in actors currently in the market (BBC, 2018A; Hemley, 2015), then by challenging the *status quo* in actor training, through more fulsomely addressing the needs of an emerging actor and preparing them in a more holistic way to sustain a performance career in a challenging market to have greater resiliency towards the more reactive elements of the profession, then there is a greater chance of better mental results and more sustainable career trajectories. I have confidence that I have prepared students for the *business* of art as much as the *craft* of art and armed with these skills and this understanding they will be better prepared to deal with the uncertainty of the path and will have greater agency over the choices available to them.

Therefore, my contribution to practice is the PRAN model, which can be used as a pedagogical tool for young actors to more fulsomely prepare for the 180-degree totality of pursuing a freelance performance career that requires

an ability to skilfully and proactively manage project-based and portfolio working patterns, while also developing a range of reactive and resiliency techniques/strategies in order to process and rebound from failure and disappointment. By better equipping graduates with these skills, the PRAN model helps to better prepare graduates for 'lifelong sustainable careers in the arts' (Blackwood et al., 2019, p. 18).

## 10 Conclusions

In this final chapter I will summarise and assess my research in order to draw conclusions on my findings, assess their significance and limitations, as well as recommend future research. The research summarised herein was focused on two research questions:

**RQ1.** Given the precariousness of pursuing an acting career, what strategies have mid-career UK actors found to aid them in sustaining a career over a longer trajectory of time?

**RQ2.** How can a creative entrepreneurship approach help with sustaining a career in a competitive and crowded creative field?

### Summary of Findings

The major findings from my empirical research are as follows:

The **Proactive Acting** quadrant explored the proactive steps that actors take to try to expand the scope of their acting work which came in four forms: addressing skills, addressing markets, balancing economic and artistic logics (Bourdieu, 1986; Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007), and engaging in entrepreneurial and/or business approaches to their acting career (Chang and Wyszomirski, 2015; Fillis and Rentschler, 2010; Gustafson, 2011; Hong et al., 2012; Patten, 2016). These activities were undertaken with the aim of building a more sustainable acting income.

The **Proactive Non-Acting** quadrant explored how performers counteract the precariousness of acting through the addition of a non-acting job/career strand as part of a portfolio (Blackwood et al., 2019; Handy, 1989) or protean (Hall, 1976; Reid et al., 2016) career pattern to work synergistically to support their acting and give them a greater sense of agency over their career.

The **Reactive Acting** quadrant found that resilience (Doern, 2017, 2021; Hamilton, 1997; Ibert and Schmidt, 2014; Rea, 2014) is a key reactive strategy necessary to manage the *ducking and diving* of an acting career; however, this can vary depending on the amount of symbolic and economic capital available to the actor. Additionally, acting as a profession is experienced quite differently for A-List versus B-List actors (Caves, 2000), while also highly gendered in its inequality (Dean, 2005, 2007, 2008). Finally, actors often find themselves forced to engage in cloaking or masking behaviours to hide their negative experiences and emotions, thus adding a psychological dimension to *ducking and diving* and requiring resilience.

The **Reactive Non-Acting** quadrant explores jobs undertaken by actors with an economic logic and is work that is generally endured rather than enjoyed and is abandoned as soon as work that more closely aligns with artistic logic materialises. The negative feelings of work in this sector, particularly that of shame, can inhibit the ability to take entrepreneurial action that would help move the actor out of this quadrant (Doern and Goss, 2013, 2014). Finally, increased marginalisation from the profession can make it difficult to find a pathway back in (cf. Williams et al., 2019), creating barriers to sustainability, where structural barriers that reinforce A-List/B-List divisions (Caves, 2000) result in systemic barriers to actors' ability to sustain a career (Eikhof et al., 2012).

The **Pedagogical** findings point to the classroom value of the PRAN model, which can be used to more fulsomely and realistically prepare graduates for the 180-degree totality of pursuing a freelance performance career that requires an ability to skilfully and proactively manage project-based and portfolio working patterns, while also developing a range of reactive and resiliency techniques/strategies in order to process, and rebound from, failure and disappointment. By better equipping graduates with these skills, the PRAN model aids in preparing graduates for 'lifelong sustainable careers in the arts' (Blackwood et al., 2019, p. 18).

## The PRAN Model

The major output of my research is the PRAN model summarised in Figure 25 below. This model responds to two calls from the literature. Firstly, it is a way of mapping out Frey's (2013) analysis that:

“Faced with under-earning, actors, like all entrepreneurs and businesses face three choices: leave acting; reduce costs and/or try to stimulate demand for their acting services; and seek outside funding, whether from Government, private benefactors, family or by subsidising their acting with non-acting work.” (p. 13).

As under-earning is not a one-time incident for most actors, but rather an ongoing pattern, this model conceptualises, for the first time, how countering this under-earning is operationalised within the acting career and how the actor navigates between the choices outlined by Frey on an ongoing basis. Secondly, it responds to McRobbie's (2016) challenge that:

“It is incumbent upon we social scientists and cultural studies academics to develop vocabulary and a methodology for tracing freelance pathways in the cultural sector. We need to be able to understand at the level of experience how this terrain is negotiated.” (p. 25)

My research provides this granular, detailed, nuanced understanding of the terrain of freelance work for UK actors – a previously unexplored area in the academic literature. While an acknowledgement of under-employment amongst acting populations is not new, detailed and nuanced understanding of the structure of this under-employment, as well as how it is experienced on the micro-level by the actor, and how this experience colours the ability to take ongoing entrepreneurial action, are all new and significant contributions to knowledge. As Comunian et al. (2011) writes:

“While it is widely acknowledged in the literature that careers in the creative field tends to be unstructured, often relying on part-time and temporary work as well as on low wages, our knowledge of how these

characteristics differs across the creative industries and occupational sectors is very limited.” (p. 291)

The PRAN model brings a greater understanding of the unique characteristics of how this is operationalised for actors and performers.

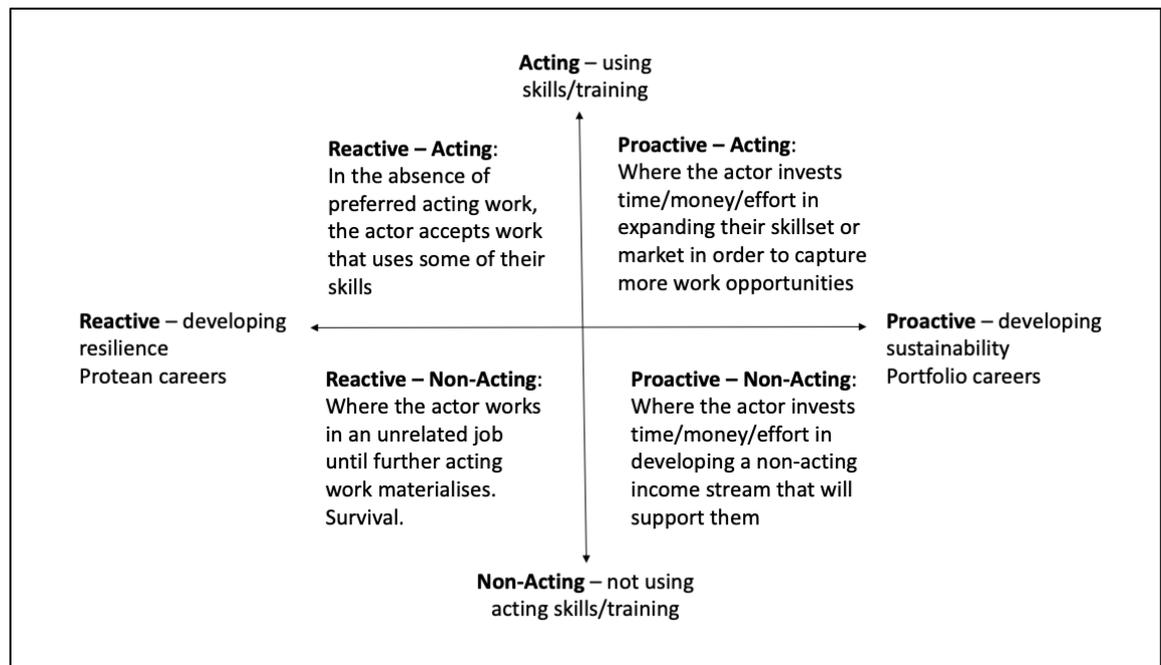


Figure 25 – PRAN Model

The PRAN model allows creative labour scholars to conceptualise, map and evaluate ‘at the level of experience’ how the actor, ‘faced with under-earning’ navigates their way through the three choices outlined by Frey (2013) above. It is by negotiating movement between these quadrants, colloquially referred to as *ducking and diving*, that the actor creates a more sustainable acting career. This pathway is not easy, and there are many structural inhibitors that make it harder, meaning the burden of navigation falls on the individual actor. It therefore becomes necessary for coping mechanisms, such as resilience, to support the actor in this challenge. The alternative is to make the first of Frey’s choices outlined above and leave acting (or be forced out of acting through reduced options). Hence, the PRAN model is a way to *evaluate* and *map* how the actor who is both under-earning and does not want to leave acting, can negotiate their way through the terrain of the other

options outlined by Frey above. It returns us to Chang and Wyszomirski's (2015) definition of 'arts entrepreneurship' as:

“...a management process through which cultural workers seek to support their creativity and autonomy, advance their capacity for adaptability, and create artistic as well as economic and social value. This management process involves an ongoing set of innovative choices and risks intended to recombine resources and pursue new opportunities to produce artistic, economic, and social value” (p. 11).

In *ducking and diving* between quadrants of the PRAN model, actors are involved in what Chang and Wyszomirski describe as 'an ongoing set of innovative choices and risks intended to recombine resources and pursue new opportunities' motivated by a desire to 'support their creativity and autonomy.'

### **Significance and Implication of Findings**

This research provides a more nuanced and granular understanding of how actors structure their working lives to accommodate work both within and outside of acting. This expands and enriches existing knowledge of the structure of work in acting. For example, research on project-based work in Hollywood (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Faulkner and Anderson, 1987; Jones and DeFillippi, 1996) does not account for how scarcity requires workers to seek work spatially across multiple markets, whilst research into the German market (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2006, 2007; Eikhof et al., 2012; Haunschild, 2003, 2004; Haunschild and Eikhof, 2009; Ibert and Schmidt, 2012, 2014) is not fully comparable to the scale of precarity in the UK acting market that lacks the security of longer-term state theatre contracts available to German actors. Prior research on multiple job holding (Abbing, 2011; Alper and Wassall, 2006; Menger, 2006; Throsby, 2001) theorises multiple sources of income, but does not map this out, nor bring a granular understanding of how this is managed by actors. This thesis contributes new knowledge to all of these research conversations. It also demonstrates how protean and portfolio career models (Blackwood et al., 2019; Hall, 1976; Handy, 1989;

Reid et al., 2016) work specifically with mid-career UK actors and how this approach contributes towards sustainability. In addition, this study makes a contribution to research pertaining to inequality in the UK acting market (Banks, 2017; Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013; Friedman et al., 2017; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012; Randle et al., 2015) by exploring how the unequal distribution of capital reinforces A-List/B-List divisions in the market and structurally traps B-List actors or moves them towards exit ramps (*cf.* Hennekam and Bennett, 2016). It also shows how fostering resilience (Doern, 2017, 2021; Ibert and Schmidt, 2014; Ormrod, 2006; Rea, 2014; Seton, 2009) in the actor to deal with the *second best* nature of so much of the work they find themselves having to do helps them to 'stay in the game'. Finally, this research contributes to the creative entrepreneurship literature (Chang and Wyszomirski, 2015; Fillis and Rentschler, 2010; Gustafson, 2011; Hong et al., 2012; Patten, 2016) by modelling how micro-level proactive actions taken by the actor can contribute to their ability to sustain an acting career over a longer trajectory (*cf.* Doern 2017, 2021).

It is tempting to look for structural changes that can address these issues; however, given the allure of winner-takes-all economies (Benhamou, 2011; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011) and the propensity for young people to dismiss risk and overestimate their ability to succeed (Towse, 2010), it is unsurprising that a large actor training industry has emerged that is oversupplying the market. However desirable for the actor's chances of success, structural changes to address oversupply are unlikely to happen in a market economy such as the UK. Therefore, I conclude that it comes down to the individual actor, fairly or unfairly, to determine how to *duck and dive* their way through a market where 92-95% unemployment is considered the norm (Guardian, 2009; Nordin-Bates, 2012).

The implications of my research are a pathway for the 'jobbing' actor to have increased agency while trying to sustain a career in a challenging market. The PRAN model presents an opportunity for the actor to map their activities, plan proactively where they can take action to develop their acting career

and evaluate the effectiveness of these choices. This gives the actor the agency of managing their acting career, rather than simply reacting to external forces. However, it is highly likely that even the most well-planned acting career is still going to experience setbacks, especially given the extreme competition in the market, so the ability to navigate the reactive quadrants with a resilient attitude becomes an essential tool for sustainability.

A further implication of my research is that this model can be used, and has been used successfully, as a training tool for better preparing emerging actors for the marketplace and equipping them with career planning and career management tools. Learning to consider career decisions as a creative entrepreneur, utilising both economic and artistic logic (Bourdieu, 1986), is a learned skill and runs counter to many art for art's sake (Caves, 2000; Frey, 2013; Menger, 2006) tendencies that are more normally taught to acting graduates. My experience of teaching this to students is that it is empowering as they understand how their active choices can shape their opportunities and their ability to sustain themselves over a longer acting trajectory (*cf.* Essig, 2009). My hope is that over time this increased sense of agency will combat the high levels of depression and anxiety found in the acting population (Hemley, 2015). In acting, as per any career, disappointment can be a significant barrier to proactive action (*cf.* Doern and Goss, 2013, 2014) so I posit that any steps the actor can take to foster a greater sense of agency over their career and the choices available to them helps in leading to a more sustainable career. Whether the actors I have trained with the PRAN model will experience more sustainable careers will not be known for 10+ years, but my research shows that they can benefit from the wisdom of the mid-career actors gathered herein and the PRAN model can help them to guide themselves towards more sustainable acting careers.

## Limitations and Further Research

The sampling technique of this project was specific in its focus on London-based mid-career actors. Whilst I claim validity for that specific pool of actors, the applicability to more regionally based actors in the UK may be more limited due to the differences between the London market and the regional markets. The opportunity to test the PRAN model against a larger randomised sample would further test its efficacy and evaluate the level of *ducking and diving* engaged in by actors in other geographic locations. Also, while triangulating my research through the inclusion of industry professionals brings greater richness to my data, given that there was only one of each of the industry categories, i.e. agent, casting director etc., it is impossible to generalise from their findings. Whilst I highlight attitudes expressed by these industry interviews that I observe create systemic barriers to actors' ability to sustain careers, these conclusions must be adopted cautiously in light of the small sampling of each of these industry representative roles. Therefore, future research looking specifically at the interplay between actors, agents and casting directors with a larger sample pool would be beneficial.

In hindsight, my definition of 'mid-career' should have been more specific. For the purposes of my sampling, I defined it as 10+ years into the actor's career. However, upon analysis it is clear that some of the actors I spoke with who were 10+ years into their careers were not truly 'mid-career,' but were in fact 'late-career' actors and their perspectives are those of late-career, not mid-career. If I were to repeat the study, I would focus on actors who were 10 – 20 years into their careers, giving my sample a ceiling in order to sharpen its focus. I think there is research to be done on actors in the 50+ and/or 60+ age brackets as they are substantial in number and many of them are not in a financial position to retire. Further research would better understand their needs. Conversely, there is also a need for further understanding of the first ten years of an actor's career in order to determine

in what ways they can maximise the opportunities afforded to them early in their careers.

Desirable future research would include considering the experiences of actors who leave acting. I have (perhaps unfairly) tended to assume that actors leave with a sense of 'failure' at not having achieved a sustainable acting career (*cf.* Hamilton, 1997), but this may not be true. Some actors may choose to 'pivot' away from acting in many other directions and it would be instructive to know their experiences of this pivot and what transferable skills they found from their acting. Finally, further research is needed to consider how gender affects the opportunities for the actor and how mid and late careers are experienced differently for female actors than for male actors (as well as considering the experiences of non-binary actors).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

I have learned a lot about myself as a researcher through this process and realised much about my own personal experiences of being an actor. This has brought me a greater understanding of what some of the contributing factors might have been to my own successes and failures, which has made me feel more compassionate towards my own acting career. One of the outcomes I hope for, for actors from this study, is for actors to have greater compassion towards their own career outcomes. While my aim is to help actors have greater agency – or at least perceived agency – over their careers, there is also a need to accept that there is much that is beyond the actor's control and learning to accept this is a major component of resilience.

It is difficult not to perceive that I am discouraging people from pursuing the acting profession. As an employment market, there is much about it that is unfair and dispiriting, not least of which are the incredibly high levels of competition. The market oversupply is because many people crave that moment of brilliance when the audience falls silent, the light hits the actor's face, and they tell a story. When it all comes together, it has an incomparable

rush. For many actors, all of the hustle, heartache and struggle is worth it for that one moment in which they shine. The addictive nature of acting means that, like drug addicts, actors will sacrifice everything to get that hit. Perhaps it is flawed to expect something so illogical to stand up to a logical scrutiny such as this thesis.

At the end of this study, I conclude that many are called, and few are chosen, for a truly sustainable career in acting. For all the rest, it remains with them as a personal choice how long they will continue in pursuit of their dream. Like the historic quest for 'Eldorado,' so the journey to be a successful actor is one where few find gold. While the ideas contained in this thesis cannot promise gold, it is my wish they can make the journey a little less tumultuous. I salute every actor who fights the fight on a daily basis. My respect for you has no bounds.

# 11 Appendices

## 11.1 Appendix A – Sample Consent Form

Informed Consent Form – Institute of Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship (ICCE) – Goldsmiths College, University of London.

**Title of proposed project:** How can UK actors make their careers more sustainable? And what is their experience of trying to sustain an acting career in a competitive market?

This study into mid-career actors (defined as 10+ years into a professional career) examines issues of sustainability related to UK acting careers. Qualitative interviewing is used to better understand the conditions under which UK stage actors work, the pressures they face from a highly competitive and over-subscribed work environment, and how they cope with this and compensate for it. The purpose is to develop curriculum that can be used in the training of actors that will ideally help them to sustain careers over a longer trajectory.

Participant's Understanding

- I agree to participate in this study that will be submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MPhil/PhD at Goldsmiths, University of London.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary.
- I understand that all data collected will be limited to this use or other research-related usage as authorized by Goldsmiths, University of London.
- I understand that I will not be identified by name in the final product.
- I am aware that all records will be kept confidential in the secure possession of the researcher.

- I acknowledge that the contact information of the researcher and his advisor have been made available to me along with a duplicate copy of this consent form.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time and ask for my records to be deleted.
- I agree to participate in an interview lasting approximately one hour and to complete a short demographics survey.
- I have the right to not answer any questions and have the right to terminate the interview at any time.
- I consent to the interview being audio recorded and for the researcher to make notes.
- I agree to anonymised quotes being used in publications.

Participant's Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher:** Steven Sparling, 07958610977 or email: s.sparling@gold.ac.uk

**Advisor:** Gerald Lidstone, 02072964255 or email: g.lidstone@gold.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about your role in the project, you may also contact the Chair of the university's Research Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee, Professor Simon McVeigh, via the REISC Secretary on (0)20 7717 3338 or email: k.rumsey@gold.ac.uk.

## 11.2 Appendix B – Demographic Survey Questionnaire

### Actors Career Sustainability Questionnaire

Top of Form

1. Are you male or female?

- Male
- Female

2. Which category below includes your age?

- Under 29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- Over 70

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- A-levels (or equivalent)
- Some college but no degree
- Bachelor degree
- Masters degree
- Diploma or Certificate
- PhD or equivalent

Other (please specify)

4. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

- Acting is my only job
- I have multiple jobs or sources of income

- Not employed, looking for work
- Not employed, NOT looking for work
- Retired
- Disabled, not able to work

Other (please specify)

5. What was your total household income for the past year?

- Less than £20,000
- £20,000 to £34,999
- £35,000 to £49,999
- £50,000 to £74,999
- £75,000 to £99,999
- £100,000 to £149,999
- £150,000 or More

6. How many years have you been acting professionally?

- Under 10 years
- 10-19 years
- 20-29 years
- 30+ years

7. Did you train at a UK drama school?

- Yes
- No

Bottom of Form

### 11.3 Appendix C – Interview Data

| Participant | Date of Interview | Category & Work Areas                                   | Gender & Age  | Nationality | Race  |
|-------------|-------------------|---|---------------|-------------|-------|
| A           | 08-02-15          | Actor – Stage, TV, Voiceover                            | Female<br>50+ | British     | White |
| B           | 03-03-15          | Actor – Stage, TV, Film, Radio, Voiceover, Training     | Female<br>60+ | American    | White |
| C           | 02-03-15          | Actor – Stage, TV, Film, Voiceover, Training            | Male<br>50+   | American    | White |
| D           | 16-03-15          | Actor – Stage, Physical Theatre, Circus, Street Theatre | Female<br>40+ | American    | BAME  |
| E           | 10-04-15          | Actor – TV, Stage, Radio, Voiceover                     | Female<br>40+ | British     | White |
| F           | 18-04-15          | Actor – Stage, (previously Opera)                       | Male<br>60+   | British     | White |
| G           | 13-04-15          | Actor – Stage, Physical Theatre, Devised Theatre        | Female<br>40+ | British     | White |
| H           | 04-06-15          | Actor – Stage   | Female<br>30+ | British     | White |
| I           | 08-06-15          | Actor – Film, TV, Training                              | Female<br>40+ | British     | White |
| J           | 25-01-18          | Actor – Stage, Film, TV, Concerts                       | Male<br>40+   | British     | White |
| K           | 19-01-18          | Actor – Stage, Film                                     | Male<br>30+   | British     | White |
| L           | 01-02-18          | Actor/Writer/Director                                   | Male          | British     | White |

|   |          |  |               |                       |       |
|---|----------|--|---------------|-----------------------|-------|
|   |          | – Film, TV   | 60+           |                       |       |
| M | 16-02-18 | Actor – Stage, TV,<br>Film, Voiceover              | Male<br>40+   | American              | BAME  |
| N | 15-01-18 | Agent – Stage, TV,<br>Film                         | Female<br>50+ | British               | White |
| O | 19-02-18 | Equity Rep   | Male<br>40+   | British               | BAME  |
| P | 27-02-18 | Actor – Stage,<br>(previously Dance)               | Female<br>50+ | British               | White |
| Q | 27-02-18 | Actor – Stage, TV,<br>Film, Recording,<br>Cabaret  | Male<br>40+   | British               | White |
| R | 01-03-18 | Actor – TV   | Male<br>40+   | British               | White |
| S | 01-03-18 | Educator – Leading<br>UK Conservatoire             | Male<br>50+   | British               | White |
| T | 02-03-18 | Actor – Stage<br>(previously Opera)                | Male<br>60+   | British               | White |
| U | 13-03-18 | Director – Stage                                   | Female<br>30+ | British               | White |
| V | 19-03-18 | Actor – Stage                                      | Female<br>30+ | British               | White |
| W | 19-03-18 | Actor – Stage, TV,<br>Film, Voiceover              | Male<br>50+   | British &<br>Canadian | BAME  |
| X | 21-03-18 | Actor – Stage,<br>Recording<br>(previously Opera)  | Female<br>50+ | British &<br>Canadian | White |
| Y | 23-03-18 | Actor – Stage, TV                                  | Male<br>60+   | British               | White |
| Z | 27-03-18 | Actor – Stage, Film,<br>TV, Recording,<br>Concerts | Male<br>40+   | British               | White |

|    |          |                                       |               |         |       |
|----|----------|---------------------------------------|---------------|---------|-------|
| AA | 13-04-18 | Casting Director –<br>TV, Film, Stage | Female<br>50+ | British | White |
| BB | 24-01-18 | Newspaper Critic –<br>Stage           | Male<br>60+   | British | White |

### **Aggregate Data on Experience**

In order to ensure confidentiality for my research participants, I am not able to provide specific details of each participant's experience; however, I can provide aggregate data to give an idea of the breadth of experience captured within the research.

#### **Companies Worked For**

Classical Theatre Co.  
Globe Theatre  
The National Theatre  
Southwark Playhouse  
Sonia Friedman Productions  
Royal Court Theatre  
The Bush Theatre  
Royal Shakespeare Company  
Graeae Theatre  
Barbican Theatre  
Complicité  
Edinburgh Festival  
Really Useful Group  
Cameron Mackintosh  
Theatre Renegade  
Actors of Dionysus  
The Paper Birds  
InBetween Theatre  
The Factory  
Oxfordshire Theatre Company  
Big Space Productions  
London Classic Theatre

The English Theatre of Hamburg  
Middle Ground Theatre Company  
Chichester Festival Theatre  
ATG (Ambassador Theatre Group)  
Michael Grandage Productions  
Manchester International Festival  
Donmar Warehouse Theatre  
Landor Theatre  
Regent's Park Open Air Theatre  
Paul Nicholas Productions  
David Ian Productions  
Disney Theatrical Productions  
Steppenwolf Theatre Company  
Young Vic  
Liminal Stage Productions  
Omnibus Theatre  
The Print Room  
Theatre503  
BBC Proms  
Soho Theatre  
Bill Kenwright

#### **Regional Theatres**

Theatre Clwyd  
Derby Theatre  
Mercury Theatre  
Northcott Theatre  
Theatre by the Lake  
Worcester Swan

Coventry Belgrade  
Orange Tree Theatre  
The Mill at Sonning  
Sheffield Crucible Theatre  
Dundee Rep  
Royal Exchange Manchester

Sidmouth Summer Rep  
Birmingham Rep  
Stoke New Victoria  
Hackney Empire Theatre  
Bath Theatre Royal  
York Theatre Royal  
Nottingham Playhouse

Leicester Haymarket  
Rose Theatre, Kingston  
Northern Broadsides  
Perth Rep  
Richmond Theatre  
Birmingham Stage Company

### **Opera**

Avignon  
Toulon  
Nice  
Monte Carlo  
Nimes  
Montpelier  
English National Opera  
Glyndebourne

Canadian Opera Company  
Scottish Opera  
Glimmerglass Opera  
Vlaamse Opera  
Opera North  
National Theatre of Prague  
Opera Holland Park  
Chicago Opera Theatre

### **Festivals**

Ink Festival  
Budva Arts Festival

### **Circus**

Mimbre

### **Street Theatre/Site Specific**

La Fura dels Baus  
Theatre Merchants

### **Children's Theatre**

Kazzum Arts

### **Devised work**

Presented at London, Edinburgh and Brighton Fringe Festivals  
Barbican Pit (Pit Lab Residency)

### **Television**

The Crown  
Mr. Selfridge  
Wolf Hall  
Holby City  
Peep Show  
Shakespeare and Hathaway  
Call the Midwife  
Emmerdale  
Wallander  
The Bill  
Peak Practice  
Grange Hill

Poirot  
Dr Who  
Coronation Street  
Casualty  
Waterloo Road  
EastEnders  
Inspector Morse  
The Honourable Woman  
MotherFatherSon  
Channel4  
BBC Wales  
Tiger Aspect

Hat Trick Productions  
Sky 1  
Fox Networks Group

Amazon Studios  
Sky Atlantic  
Channel 5

### **Film Producers**

Working Title  
Lodestar Films  
Cavalier Features  
Merchant Ivory Productions  
British Lion/USA Films  
Warner Brothers

Paramount Pictures  
Elation Pictures  
Harvey Weinstein Productions  
20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox  
Sony Pictures  
New Line Cinema

### **Audio/Radio Producers**

Big Finish  
BBC Radio 4

### **Other**

Corporate Role-play  
Training  
Fan Conventions

### **Participants' Training**

#### University

Cambridge  
Manchester University  
University of Kent

#### Conservatory/Drama School

East 15  
American Conservatory Theatre  
Bristol Old Vic  
Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama  
Royal Central School of Speech and Drama  
Millennium Performing Arts  
London Academy of Performing Arts  
Royal Ballet School  
Sylvia Young Theatre School  
Guildhall School of Music and Drama  
National Youth Theatre of Great Britain  
Laine Theatre Arts  
London Studio Centre  
Steppenwolf Theatre

#### Additional Training

Teatr Piesn Kozla  
Studium Tetralne

The Desmond Jones School of Mime and Physical Theatre  
Told By an Idiot  
Improbable Theatre  
Complicité

## 11.4 Appendix D – Ethics Clearance

*Ethical Approval Form (EAF1)*

CONFIDENTIAL

GOLDSMITHS COLLEGE University of London

*Research Ethics Committee*

NAME OF APPLICANT.

Steven Sparling.....

DEPARTMENT ICCE.....

This form should be completed in typescript and returned to the Secretary of the Research Ethics Committee, for any research project, teaching procedure or routine investigation involving human participants or animals to be undertaken in the College or by or upon Goldsmiths College staff outside the College.

1. Title of proposed project:

How can UK actors make their careers more sustainable? And what is their experience of trying to sustain an acting career in a competitive market?

2. Brief outline of the project, including its purpose:

In the UK, hundreds of drama school and university drama graduates flood the market every year full of dreams of having a successful acting career. Many will never find an entry level job in the industry and most will have left the industry within five years. Of those who do become actors, nearly 50% work fewer than 10 weeks per year (Equity, 2013). For all but the most successful actors, acting is not a sustainable career option.

The purpose of the project is to better understand the conditions under which UK stage actors work. The pressures they face from a highly competitive and over-subscribed work environment and how they cope with this and try to compensate for it. The purpose is to determine if we can embed in the training of actors skills and career management strategies that will help them to succeed and to sustain careers over a longer trajectory.

In order to better understand these conditions, I will do 25-30 qualitative interviews with UK actors and others who work in the industry such as directors, educators, agents, etc.

3. Proposed starting date: March 2018

4. If external grant funding is being secured, does the research need ethical approval prior to the initiation of that funding?

N/A – Self-funded

5. Has the project been approved by an Ethics Committee external to the College? If so please specify.

(NB for projects so approved, applicants may if they wish submit a copy of that application, but should sign the back of the form and return it as specified above)

N/A

6. Please provide an ethical self-evaluation of the proposed research. Reference should be made to the ESRC Research Ethics Framework, to professional guidelines (such as provided by the BPS, the BSA or the SRA) or to guidelines by government (e.g. GSR) on ethical practice and research. You may wish to provide your response on a separate sheet.

Please see Appendix One

7. State the variables to be studied, topics to be investigated, procedures to be used and/or the measurements to be made. (Please attach a separate sheet if necessary)

The research design involves 25-30 semi-structured qualitative interviews with mid-career actors (defined as 10+ years into their careers) and some individuals who work in adjacent roles in the industry (casting directors, agents, Equity). These questions explore the respondents' personal experiences of the acting profession, their thoughts/experiences related to sustainability of acting careers, etc.

The set questions are:

1. What do you like/dislike about being an actor and why?
2. What did you imagine being an actor would be like and what has the reality been?
3. What advice do you wish you'd been given at the start of your career?
4. Are you able to support yourself and your family through acting? If not, what gets in the way?
5. What actions have you taken that have resulted in work?
6. What, if anything, has prevented you from working?
7. Acting incomes tend to vary widely. How do you financially manage periods with no or little work?
8. Would you encourage others to pursue acting? Why?
9. What actions, whether on an individual level, an industry level, or a legislative level would help make acting careers more sustainable?
10. Given the recent events around Harvey Weinstein and Kevin Spacey, have you had any personal experiences related to workplace sexual harassment or bullying? Have you witnessed any?
11. Is there anyone else I should speak with?

As the researcher was a professional actor for 25 years there is a good understanding already of the topic and the ability to easily build rapport and understand the responses from participants. This insider-researcher stance should make interviewees feel more comfortable talking about the challenges they might have faced in their careers knowing that they are not judged and that the circumstances of their lives are understood.

8. Specify the number of and type of participant(s) likely to be involved.

25-30 Interviews

9. State the likely duration of the project and where it will be undertaken.

Interviews will take place between March – July 2018. Project will be undertaken in the UK.

10. State the potential adverse consequences to the participant(s), or particular groups of people, if any, and what precautions are to be taken.

The only potential adverse consequences to the participant might be if critical comments they made about the acting industry were directly attributed to that individual which could negatively impact their employability; therefore all interviews will be anonymised. Standard procedures in qualitative interviewing will be followed to prevent this: audio files, transcriptions and signed Informed Consent forms will be securely stored in password protected files on a desktop computer in the researcher's personal home. Data will be deleted after five years' time. Also, all participants will participate voluntarily and sign informed consent forms.

No other potential adverse consequences have been identified by the researcher.

11. State any procedures which may cause discomfort, distress or harm to the participant(s), or particular groups of people, and the degree of discomfort or distress likely to be entailed.

None. Interviews will be conducted at a mutually agreed time and location. No discomfort or distress is anticipated. They will be informed they don't have to answer any questions they do not wish to answer.

Also, because the researcher was also an actor, there is a shared professional bond which should make the participants feel both respected and understood. The insider-researcher stance will prevent them from feeling like they are being studied from the outside.

12. State how the participant(s) will be recruited. (Please attach copies of any recruiting materials if used).

Initially, a targeted-sampling strategy will be used with interviews set up with actors and industry people of the researcher's acquaintance, with an aim for a broad representation of gender, age, experience and ethnicity. A snowball approach will then be used to broaden the research pool.

13. State if the participant(s) will be paid, and if so, provide details and state reasons for payment.

No payment will be made for participation. All participants will be voluntary.

14. State the manner in which the participant(s) consent will be obtained (if written, please include a copy of the intended consent form).

Consent will be discussed at the beginning of the interview and the consent form will be gone through together ensuring it is all understood. Two copies

of the informed consent form will be signed; one copy for the participant and one for the researcher. Form is in Appendix Two. [See Appendix A]

14a. Will the participant(s) be fully informed about the nature of the project and of what they will be required to do?

Yes, the aims of the research will be completely transparent and are communicated in advance of the interview.

14b. Is there any deception involved?

None.

14c. Will the participant(s) be told they can withdraw from participation at any time, if they wish?

Yes, this is on the informed consent form and will be verbalised at the start of interviews.

14d. Will data be treated confidentially regarding personal information, and what will the participant(s) be told about this?

Personal information is limited. A short 7-question demographics survey will be sent to interview participants in advance of the interviews (using Survey Monkey). This is anonymous and is simply to gather some demographic information about the interview pool (questions are about age, gender, education, household income). Copy included in Appendix three. [See Appendix B]

Audio files and transcriptions will be securely stored and deleted within 5 years of completion of PhD. Participants are informed of this at the time that consent is collected.

14e. If the participant(s) are young persons under the age of 18 years or 'vulnerable persons' (e.g. with learning difficulties or with severe cognitive disability), how will consent be given (i.e. from the participant themselves or from a third party such as a parent or guardian) and how will assent to the research be asked for?

All participants are over 18 years of age and none are from a 'vulnerable persons' category. All are participating with a full understanding of the research and their consent freely given.

15. Will the data be confidential?

15a. Will the data be anonymous?

Yes.

15b. How will the data remain confidential?

The interviewee will be assigned a letter (ie Participant H) at the time of the interview and all transcription will only be with that letter designator. At no point are the responses linked to a named individual except in a password protected Excel file held by the researcher on a home-based personal computer.

15c. How long will the data be stored? And how will it be eventually destroyed?

Data will be stored for five years after the submission of the PhD. At that time, all electronic files will be deleted and paper transcriptions shredded.

16. Will the research involve the investigation of illegal conduct? If yes, give details and say how you will be protected from harm or suspicion of illegal conduct?

No.

17. Is it possible that the research might disclose information regarding child sexual abuse or neglect? If yes, indicate how such information will be passed to the relevant authorities (e.g. social workers, police), but also indicate how participants will be informed about the handling of such information were disclosure of this kind to occur. A warning to this effect must be included in the consent form if such disclosure is likely to occur.

No

18. State what kind of feedback, if any, will be offered to participants.

All participants will be given the opportunity to read the final dissertation.

19. State the expertise of the applicant for conducting the research proposed.

Researcher has successfully completed Goldsmith's research methodology courses in both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and has 25 years' experience working in professional acting in the UK and Canada which brings a strong understanding of the topic and the participants.

20. In cases of research with young persons under the age of 18 years or 'vulnerable persons' (e.g. with learning difficulties or with severe cognitive disability), or with those in legal custody, will face-to-face interviews or observations or experiments be overseen by a third party (such as a teacher, care worker or prison officer)?

N/A

21. If data is collected from an institutional location (such as a school, prison, hospital), has agreement been obtained by the relevant authority (e.g. Head Teacher, Local Education Authority, Home Office)?

N/A

22. For those conducting research with young persons under the age of 18 years or 'vulnerable persons' (e.g. with learning difficulties or with severe cognitive disability), do the investigators have Criminal Records Bureau clearance? (Ordinarily unsupervised research with minors would require such clearance. Please see *College Code of Practice on Research Ethics*, 2005).

N/A

23. Will research place the investigators in situations of harm, injury or criminality?

No.

24. Will the research cause harm or damage to bystanders or the immediate environment?

No.

25. Are there any conflicts of interest regarding the investigation and dissemination of the research (e.g. with regard to compromising independence or objectivity due to financial gain)?

No.

26. Is the research likely to have any negative impact on the academic status or reputation of the College?

No

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ALL APPLICANTS

Please note that the Committee should be notified of any adverse or unforeseen circumstances arising out of this study.

Signature of Applicant

Date 19/02/2018

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TO BE COMPLETED BY HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Please note that the College Research Ethics Committee should be notified of any adverse or unforeseen circumstances arising out of this study or of any emerging ethical concerns that the Head of Department may have about the research once it has commenced.

Has there been appropriate peer review and discussion of the ethical implications of the research in the department (i.e. with yourself as Head of Department or the Departmental Research Ethics Committee or Research Committee)?

Yes

Are the ethical implications of the proposed research adequately described in this application?

Yes

Signature of Head of Department

Date 19/02/18

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Appendix One

Ethical Self-Evaluation of Proposed Research

Steven Sparling – PhD candidate ICCE

01/02/18

I will undertake a self-evaluation of the ethics of my proposed research titled:

How can UK actors make their careers more sustainable? And what is their experience of trying to sustain an acting career in a competitive market?

This research will comply with all the ethical regulations as outlined in the Goldsmiths Code of Practice on Research Ethics and the ESRC Ethical Guidelines. While undertaking my research, I will be guided by a principle of reflexivity; throughout the research I will be periodically reflecting and evaluating on how ethical issues are being dealt with and I will seek guidance from my Supervisors or the Goldsmiths Research Ethics Committee should any challenges arise regarding the ethics of this research project.

For the purpose of this document, I will use the categories of the ESRC to further discuss my proposed research.

**1. Research should aim to maximise benefit for individuals and society and minimise risk and harm**

Existing research supports that UK actors are generally under-employed and poor (49% of British Actors Equity members earn less

than £5,000 per year from their acting- Equity, 2013) which contributes towards a worrying crisis of mental health amongst the acting population (Hemley, 2015). This research aims to better understand why conditions for UK actors are generally so poor and to try to determine what, if anything, can be done to help them. As hundreds of students enrol in drama schools and university acting programmes every year, it attempts to understand if we can better train actors to deal with the difficulties of a competitive industry. While the benefit of this to society as a whole is questionable, it does impact a sizeable number of young people who choose to go down what appears to many to be an attractive career pathway.

## **2. The rights and dignity of individuals and groups should be respected**

Participation in the qualitative research will be entirely voluntary and with their informed consent. The researcher will monitor their well-being throughout the interview and participants are informed that they do not have to answer any question they do not choose to and that they can terminate the interview at any time. They are also informed that at any time after the interview they can ask to be withdrawn from the study and their data erased. The participants are viewed as partners in the research and the final research will be shared with them. They will also be updated as the process entails so they are kept abreast of any changes. All audio files and transcripts will be securely stored under password protected files. Their name and personal details will be kept separate to their audio file and transcript and their transcripts and audio file will be assigned a letter so that the responses are kept anonymous.

## **3. Wherever possible, participation should be voluntary and appropriately informed**

Participants will be asked to sign an 'Informed Consent' form and they will be provided with a copy they can take away with appropriate

information and contact details for the researcher and the research supervisor. They will be informed of any changes to the project and give an opportunity to read the final dissertation.

**4. Research should be conducted with integrity and transparency**

The research uses a semi-structured format and participants can ask to view the questions in advance. Participants will be chosen through a combination of purposeful sampling, to engage with a variety of different opinions and viewpoints, and also snowballing where participants will be asked to nominate others that the researcher should speak with.

**5. Lines of responsibility and accountability should be clearly defined**

The informed consent form that participants are required to sign indicates who the researcher is and who the academic supervisor is, with contact details provided for both in case they have any concerns and a further contact given for the Chair of the Goldsmiths Research Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee.

**6. The independence of research should be maintained, and where conflicts of interest cannot be avoided they should be made explicit. Any conflicts of interest in interviewing participants will be made explicit at the time of the interview and also will clearly be articulated in the dissertation. At this time, no conflicts of interest have been identified.**

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