



BOMPAS & PARR
presents our

The Future of P-Leisure Report for 2027

The Future of Theatre

in association with
ARUP

Welcome to Bompas & Parr's Future of P-Leisure Report for 2027

THE ONLY TREND REPORT WITH RAZZLE DAZZLE.

FOR 2027, WE'RE LOOKING TO THE FUTURE OF THEATRE.

THE FUTURE OF
THEATRE IS THE
FUTURE OF
HUMANITY.

“I THINK PEOPLE HAVE SUCH A YEARNING FOR THEIR LIVES TO BE LIKE AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE. YOU'RE LIVING A FANTASY. YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN: A MADE-UP FANTASY. OUR CULTURE IS THEATRE. EVERYTHING WE DO IS.”

Randy Weiner, Playwright & Producer

Introduction

The Future of Theatre 2027

Theatre is one of the few remaining cultural forms that requires people to gather physically, experience the world collectively and open themselves up to uncertainty. In the age of the algorithm and social division, theatre's fundamental powers are becoming increasingly valuable.

And people know it.

As the latest stats show, public appetite for ritual and human contact is ravenous. 2024 saw more people attend West End shows than ever before - a cool 17.1 million people [Entrepreneur]. This popularity is part of something larger. Audiences continue to spend heavily on concerts, immersive events, performance, festivals, live comedy and dance.

“THEATRE CONTINUES TO BUCK THE TREND
AND GROW. SINCE THE PANDEMIC, WE’VE
SEEN CONTINUAL GROWTH”
Emma D’Souza, SOLT



OVER 17 MILLION PEOPLE
WENT TO SEE A WEST
END SHOW IN 2024.

SOLT



What has potentially weakened is confidence in the traditional institutional model of theatre. This is partly economic. Shows are becoming more and more expensive to make, and fewer are being made [SOLT].

It's also partly cultural. Theatre often lives in a state of contradiction. It garners great cultural respect, but remains socially marginal, in the grand scheme of things. It makes political gestures, but stays, itself, rather institutionally cautious. It displays talent, but lacks formal confidence. It's obsessed with relevance, but fails to produce a sense of urgency.

The future of theatre lies, then, in the medium recognising that it is no longer competing simply with film, TV or streaming platforms. Inertia and distraction are its main competitors. The excuses to stay at home have never been easier to make. The answer doesn't involve theatre trying to tell better stories, or even becoming more relevant. The answer involves theatre becoming riskier, more social, more local and more ambitious. The medium needs to get less defensive about what it is uniquely capable of doing.

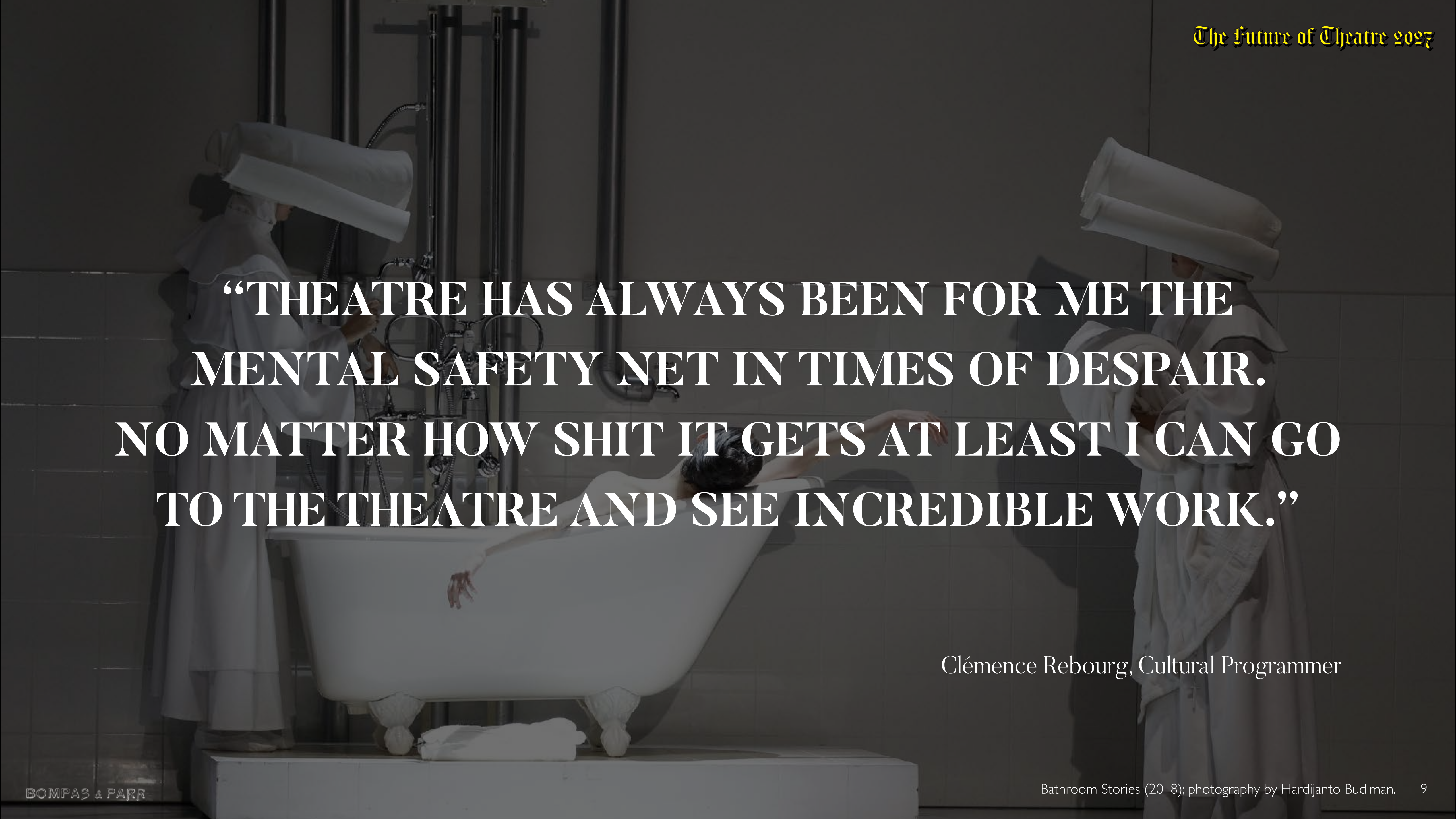


For some time now, immersive theatre and experiences have hugely expanded what theatre can mean, and the types of people who are attending. And the immersive sector, insofar as it is separate from “traditional theatre,” is doing well, by some metrics. By 2030, the global immersive entertainment market is projected to exceed \$185 billion [Grand View Research]. But its future is also uncertain. In May 2026, the immersive experience company Layered Reality announced that it had ceased trading, citing financial strains [The Stage]. More generally, the immersive sector is also yet to find a secure place within the wider ecosystem of theatrical entertainment.

The Bompas & Parr studio was and remains a major tastemaker in the world of immersive experience. But it is to the post-immersive that we must now turn: the next step in theatre’s adventure. Joining us in this quest are ARUP, our partners for this report. For 80 years, ARUP have worked tirelessly to engineer a more sustainable world, in theatres and beyond.

Together, we mean it - the future of theatre is the future of humanity. Not because going to the theatre is going to save the world, necessarily. But because theatre is quite simply made of the things that make us human. Physical presence. Having to be located somewhere on the earth. To love theatre is to love what makes us human.

A GOLDEN AGE OF THEATRE IS AHEAD OF US.

A photograph of a person lying in a white clawfoot bathtub. Two individuals in white uniforms and tall, cylindrical hats (likely hotel staff) stand on either side of the tub, attending to the person. The scene is set in a tiled bathroom with a shower fixture visible in the background. The image is dimly lit and serves as a background for the text.

**“THEATRE HAS ALWAYS BEEN FOR ME THE
MENTAL SAFETY NET IN TIMES OF DESPAIR.
NO MATTER HOW SHIT IT GETS AT LEAST I CAN GO
TO THE THEATRE AND SEE INCREDIBLE WORK.”**

Clémence Rebourg, Cultural Programmer

OUR PLAYERS

TOM BEYNON - Creative Producer - Path Ents

LUKE CAHALIN - Co-Founder - Unlimited Dream

MUNOTIDA CHINYANGA - Anti-Disciplinary Artist - Freelance

EMMA D'SOUZA - Executive Director, Audience and Commercial - SOLT

ANNA FOX - Director of Technical & Production - RSC

ANDRZEJ LUKOWSKI - Theatre & Dance Editor - TimeOut

JOSHUA MCTAGGART - CEO - Theatres Trust

RYAN METCALFE - CEO - Prevue

DARCY TROY POLLACK - Founder - Immersive Experiences Advisor - Swiss Cows

CLÉMENCE REBOURG - Cultural Programmer - Various

ALICE SAVILLE - Theatre Critic - Various

JAMES SEAGER - Founder & Creative Director - Les Enfants Terribles

ARIELLE TEPPER - Producer - Arielle Tepper Consultants

OTILIE THORNHILL - Senior Consultant: Arts & Culture - ARUP

BERTIE WATKINS - Artistic Director - Colab Theatre

RANDY WEINER - Playwright, producer, Theatre & Nightclub owner

MARK WILLIAMS - Deputy Chief Executive - HOLBA

BUT FIRST,
SOME DRIVERS.

Driver One

THE WEIRD BUT DULL (aka "slop")

54% of Americans are 'tired of hearing' about AI. What? Already bored?
[New York Post]

WHAT'S HAPPENING —————> WHAT'S NEXT

The world has never felt so creative, and yet so creatively dead. AI has massively expanded our ability to generate content. Some of it is mind-blowing. All of it is lacking in nuance, irony and sex appeal.

A backlash has started and it's only going to get bigger. Audiences will become endlessly fascinated by human error, improvisation and incompetence. Risk will command a premium. The sense that something could genuinely fail—or succeed through the rarest alignment of opportunities—will make it a must-see.

A dark, monochromatic image of an elephant's head and trunk, with a submarine hull and windows superimposed over its left side. The image is used as a background for the text.

**"THERE'S GOING TO BE A BIT OF A BACKLASH,
AND THERE IS ALREADY, YOU CAN SEE WITH
PEOPLE SCARED OF AI AND TECHNOLOGY."**

James Seager, Creative Director, Les Enfants Terribles

Driver Two

CAPTIVATING INCONSEQUENTIALISM

Politics has never been so performative.

WHAT'S HAPPENING —————> WHAT'S NEXT

We live at a time saturated with political discourse but detached from meaningful forms of institutional participation. There have never been more opinions, more outrage, more politics.

Yet institutional affiliation has all but collapsed. Politics has never been more theatrical. It operates as culture, spectacle, and self-expression rather than organised power.

It will become radical and disruptive to be institutionalised, the opposite of how it used to be. In this, theatres could become sites of participation and consequence.

Theatre may become valuable precisely because it can create actual stakes, discomfort & purpose.

Driver Three

THE ELONGATED BRINK

World military expenditure reached \$2,887 billion in 2025. [SIPRI]

WHAT'S HAPPENING —————> WHAT'S NEXT

Military expenditure is creeping up. International cooperation is fragmenting.

Environmental instability is coming on fast. We're feeling the heat. The race is on for institutions of all kinds to develop sophisticated forms of resilience.

The anticipation of collapse is what is shaping culture.

Theatre can be a place where we actively prepare for these eventualities. Emergency role-plays, ethical simulations, collective decision-making, rehearsals for civic stress.

Driver Four

THE BOOMER BOMB

The number of people aged 85 and over is projected to surge from 1.75 million to 3.6 million by 2049 [UK Parliament]

WHAT'S HAPPENING —————> WHAT'S NEXT

Ageing populations are reshaping cultural economics across Europe and beyond. Older audiences possess disproportionate wealth and have more available leisure time. Theatre already relies heavily on older audiences financially.

This shift raises questions. Do the cultural industries “age up” to meet the tastes of immersive audiences as they age? Or do they continue to appeal to younger demographics?

The future will split in two directions: high-comfort cultural hospitality versus high-risk experiential adventure.

Successful organisations will need to operate across both.

Driver Five

THE VANISHING MIDDLE-GROUND

By 2030, the global immersive entertainment market is projected to exceed \$185 billion [Grand View Research]

WHAT'S HAPPENING —————> WHAT'S NEXT

Many creative industries increasingly operate through extremes. You're a global megastar. Or you operate in underground obscurity. Middle-tier careers and institutions that rely more on subsidies, are becoming harder to sustain. This has major implications for theatre ecology. There are fewer pathways to success.

This bifurcation is likely to continue for some time. Giant spectacle institutions will flourish alongside highly experimental micro-scenes with low reach but huge local impact. But there is hope for an exciting middle ground, where budgets increase for experimental work, which must in turn serve the local communities of their venues.

Driver Six

EUROPEAN DRIFT

58% of people in Great Britain thought that it was wrong to leave the European Union [Statista]

WHAT'S HAPPENING —————> WHAT'S NEXT

The UK's relationship with Europe remains unresolved culturally and politically. British theatre historically benefited enormously from European touring circuits, subsidy models, artistic exchange, and more formally experimental traditions.

While it's unlikely that Brexit will be undone anytime soon, the drift Europewards is underway. It remains to be seen what Burnham will do in this respect. One thing is for sure: a Bre-entry would signal a deeper involvement with Europe than the UK had before, supporting mid-tier productions.

NOW, FUTURE DYNAMICS

THIS REPORT LOOKS TO THE 5 MAIN ASPECTS OF THEATRE'S FUTURE...

FORM

OUTREACH

CONTENT

SPACES

TALENT

FORM

One

POST-IMMERSIVE PLEASURES

**“I DON’T REALLY CARE IF BROADWAY COMES
TO AN END. I WOULDN’T CARE BECAUSE I THINK
THAT ENERGY MIGHT ACTUALLY BE MORE
INTERESTING FREED AND PUT INTO
SOMETHING LIKE A ROAD RACE.”**

Randy Weiner, Playwright & Producer

One

POST-IMMERSIVE PLEASURES

There is a strong desire among practitioners at the forefront of theatre-making to move beyond the word “immersive”, the creative structures it implies and the audience assumptions it involves. There is a general consensus that immersive means too much, and therefore too little.

Rather than take over entirely, “immersivity” is set to fragment and multiply, becoming an accepted language of theatrical experience. Traditional theatre will become better at integrating immersive techniques into productions, and immersive companies will become better at handling “traditional” theatre tools.

This will pave the way for a new era of exceptionally dynamic theatrical production, where every part of the audience experience is open for creative interpretation. This will be an era where experience designers and theatre directors work hand in hand. It’s an era where we’ll have heart-rending writer-led immersive theatre, with real depth and cultural longevity.

As such, the theatre of the future might look less like a cultural institution and more like a civic bunker, a social ritual, a psychological obstacle course or a town hall. Theatres, their foyers, eateries and auxiliary areas will then become ritualised civic spaces that people increasingly identify with.

The Future of Theatre 2027



Taylor Mac in A 24-Decade History of Popular Music. Photography by Little Fang
Photo (Teddy Wolff and Jenni Lark). Costume design by Machine Dazzle.

CRISIS PREPARATION HUBS

In Hawaii in 2018, during a period of US-North Korean tension, the local government mistakenly sent a signal to everyone on the island that read: 'Emergency Alert: Ballistic missile threat inbound to Hawaii. Seek immediate shelter. This is not a drill.'

For 38 minutes, everyone on the island could be forgiven for thinking that total annihilation was imminent. Was this, inadvertently, the greatest immersive theatre show ever made?

Theatres across London and the UK could partner with emergency services, local councils, even the MOD, to stage simulations and evacuation drills. Theatres could host regular LARPs of misinformation spirals, resource shortages and other public panic scenarios.

Cultural institutions in general could play an increasingly vital role as support frameworks and preparation sites for the unthinkable bad.

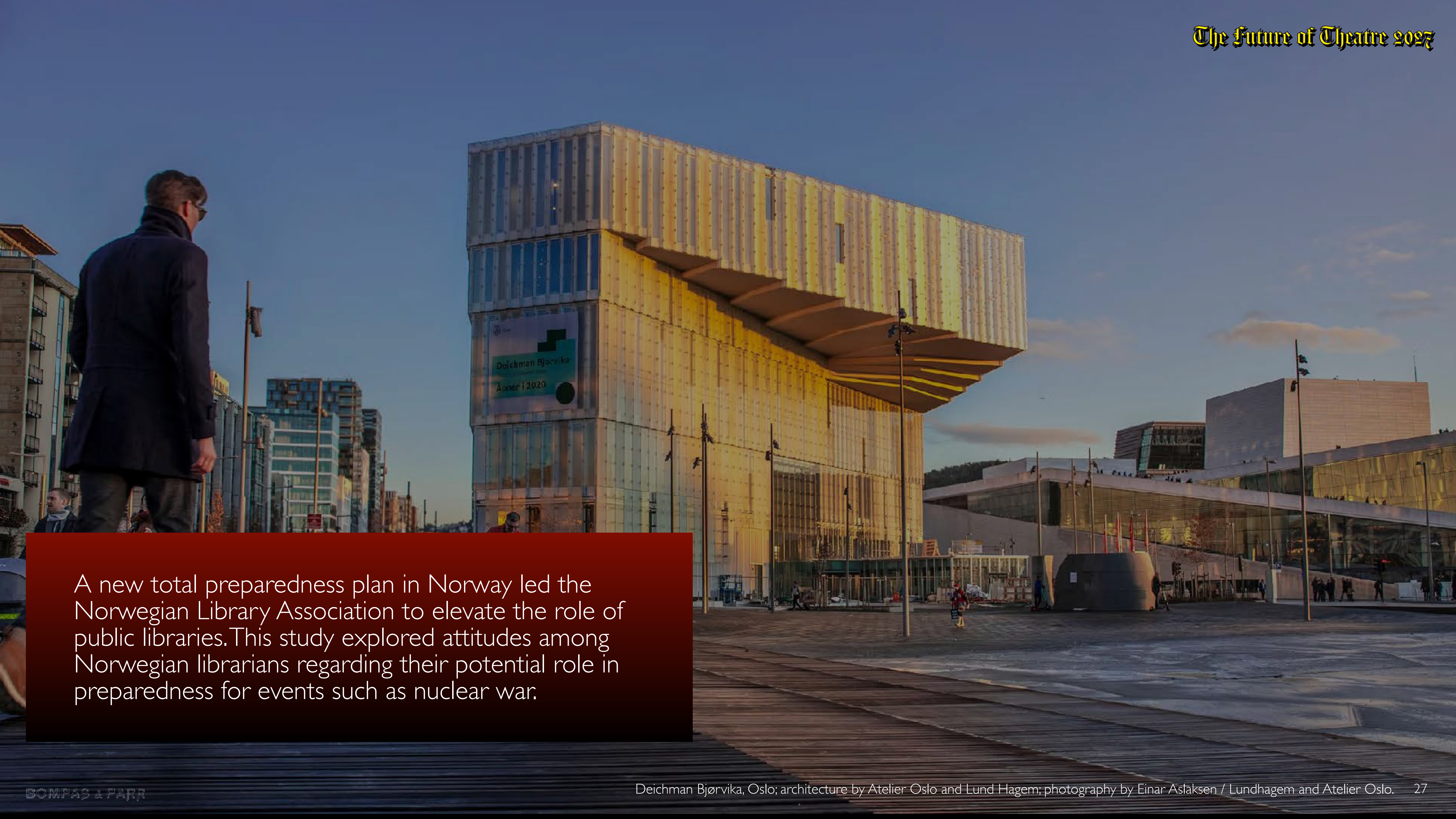


EMERGENCY ALERTS



Emergency Alert
BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT
INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK
IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS
IS NOT A DRILL.

Settings



A new total preparedness plan in Norway led the Norwegian Library Association to elevate the role of public libraries. This study explored attitudes among Norwegian librarians regarding their potential role in preparedness for events such as nuclear war.

LET AI RUN RIOT

People are finding morbid pleasure in the futile madness of AI, a creative energy that they feel is (or will be) denying them a career.

Watch as it (most probably) self-destructs.

In the future, one West End theatre should be given to Claude to run, just to see what would happen. It would follow trends, write shows, hire actors, direct them and then market its cultural products. Learnings from this institution could then be used by other theatres in the country to optimise.

“SURE, I DON’T HAVE A JOB,
BUT LOOK AT THIS DOG -
IT’S GOT A SIX-PACK.”
- Luke Cahalin, GRIN



THE INFAMOUS GLASGOW WONKA EXPERIENCE IN 2024 WAS PERHAPS THE FIRST EXPERIENTIAL CASUALTY OF AI SLOP. OR WAS IT? THE DISASTER WAS MADE INTO A SHOW, WILLY'S CANDY SPECTACULAR: A MUSICAL PARODY, WHICH DEBUTED AT THE EDINBURGH FRINGE. IT WAS EVEN RECREATED IN LA, WITH COMEDIAN ZACH GALIFIANAKIS.

Future Dynamics

The Future of Theatre 2027

ATTENTION ENDURANCE THEATRES

The Order of the 3rd Bird is a mysterious group of self-proclaimed 'attentional activists'. They claim, perhaps correctly, that our attention is being fracked, pressurised into jets of value by algorithms. Their aim is to resist this.

Paradoxically, attentional endurance has become a social media performative phenomenon. We have the TikTok practice of "rawdogging" on long-haul flights. No stimulation. No screens. No pages. No images. Just the seat in front of you.

Theatre shows are set to get long, really long, in which endurance becomes part of the point. Six-hour performances. No phones. No exits. Real-time breakdowns. Silence that goes on too long. Emotional situations that become almost unbearable.

In a distracted culture, sustained attention starts to feel almost spiritual.



TAYLOR MAC'S MAGNUM OPUS 'A 24-DECADE HISTORY OF POPULAR MUSIC' FROM 2017 LASTED 24 HOURS AND WAS A FINALIST FOR THE PULITZER PRIZE FOR DRAMA. STARTING IN 1776 AND ENDING IN THE PRESENT, IT REVOLUTIONISED LONG-FORM, IMMERSIVE THEATRE, LED BY THE MAXIM: THE PERFORMANCE IS THE RITUAL, THE AUDIENCE IS THE SACRIFICE.

CONTENT

London

A NEW AGE OF
AUDACITY

Two

The Future of Theatre 2027

A NEW AGE OF AUDACITY

The obsession with “relevance” has narrowed theatre’s imagination. People already live inside a nonstop storm of relevance. News alerts, outrage cycles, opinion warfare, doomscrolling. Theatres can’t keep up and therefore shouldn’t try.

Theatres that survive won’t do so because they’re relevant, but because they offer something nowhere else does anymore. The most successful theatres of the future will feel excessive, risky, overwhelming and unforgettable.

Audacity, not relevance, will become the metric by which we judge worthwhile theatre.



Not I by Samuel Beckett. Performed by Kelsey Gordon Powell at The Theatre on King (2015);
photography by Sam Tweedle / kawarthaNOW.

EXTREME ACCESSIBILITY

Accessible theatre is usually discussed as an obligation. The future lies in it becoming the frontier of innovation instead. Shows designed around non-visual storytelling may become overwhelmingly intense for sighted audiences too.

Performances built for neurodivergent audiences may accidentally produce entirely new aesthetic forms. Relaxed environments may generate deeper emotional honesty than rigid theatrical etiquette ever allowed.

The future may belong to theatres that stop treating accessibility as a task of translation and start treating it as a creative superpower.





**“INSTEAD OF FUNDAMENTALLY SHIFTING
THE FOUNDATION THAT WAS INACCESSIBLE
AND NOT INCLUSIVE, WE'RE TRYING TO ADD
ON RETROSPECTIVELY.”**

Josh McTaggart, CEO, Theatres Trust

BACK TO BACK THEATRE IS AN ACCLAIMED AUSTRALIAN THEATRE COMPANY WHOSE ENSEMBLE CONSISTS ALMOST ENTIRELY OF NEURODIVERGENT AND DISABLED ARTISTS. THEIR WORK CHALLENGES STEREOTYPES, EXPLORES SOCIAL ISSUES, AND REDEFINES WHAT THEATRE CAN BE. THEIR SHOW GANESH VS THE THIRD REICH RECEIVED INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION AND NUMEROUS AWARDS.

Future Dynamics

The Future of Theatre 2027

PROPERLY MODERN MUSICALS

It's slightly crazy that most musicals still use the pop-song formats of a bygone age. We're set to see an explosion in musicals that follow the musical trends of the present.

We're also set to see the opposite: the tropes of musical theatre abstracted, amplified and repeated to the point of mass hypnosis. Jazz hands, glitter and singalongs, reduced to their primary components.

Just imagine: a never-ending, single-note mass singalong in a theatre of thousands.

One note. Thousands of people. No ending. People arrive and join the note already in progress. Some stay ten minutes. Some stay all night. Some start crying for reasons they cannot explain. A civilisation exhausted by infinite choice may eventually rediscover the power of doing one thing together for an absurd amount of time.



“WHAT I REALLY YEARN FOR IS MORE NEW
MUSICALS THAT HAVE SONGS THAT
GENUINELY SOUND LIKE THE KIND OF
MUSIC THAT PEOPLE ARE LISTENING TO.”

Alice Saville, Theatre critic

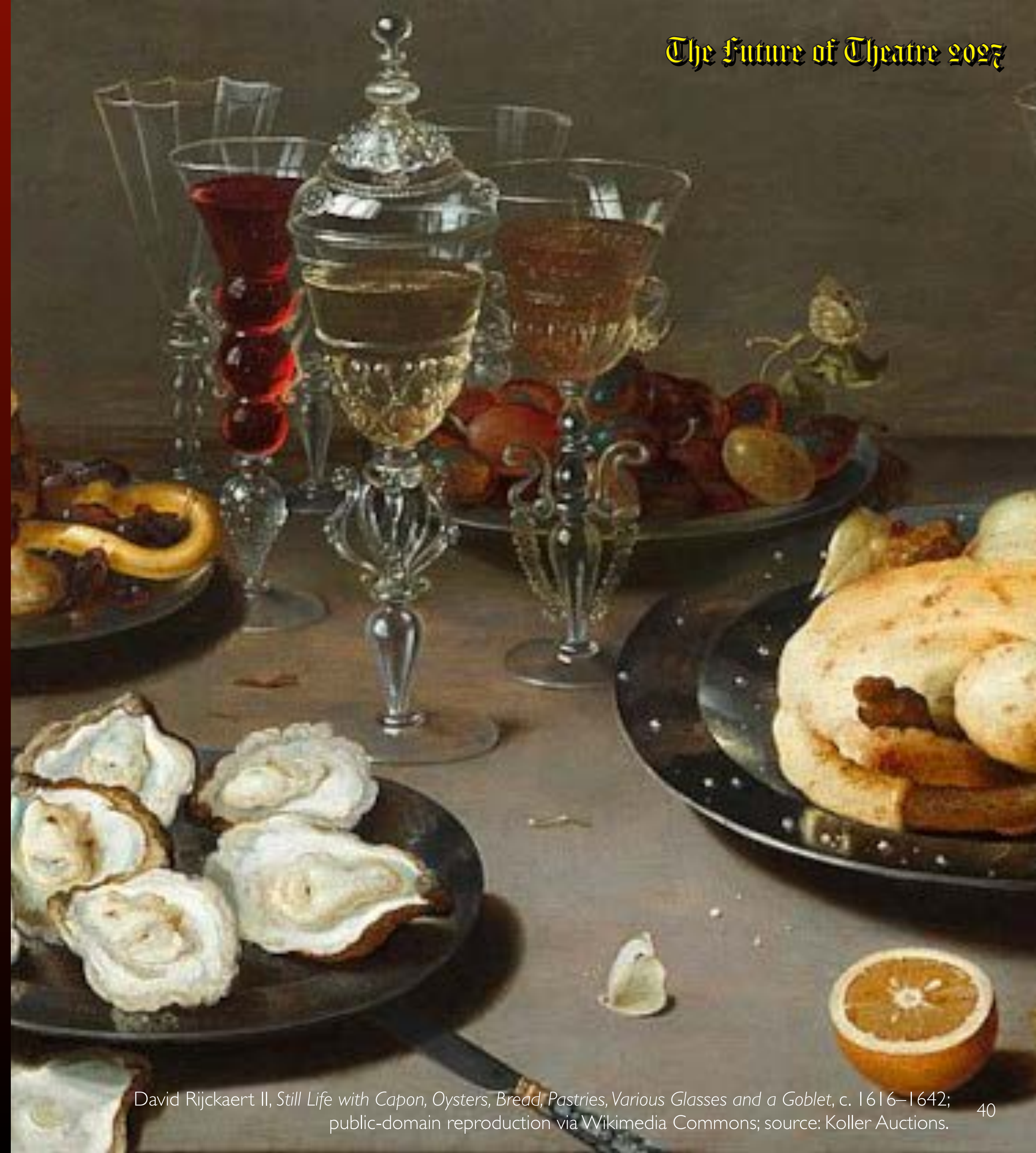
Future Dynamics

The Future of Theatre 2027

LET PEOPLE EAT, DRINK & FLIRT DURING THE SHOW

The future of theatre is Elizabethan, a period when theatre audiences were considerably rowdier. Theatres could have sustained collaborations with restaurants, club nights and even perfume brands to make multisensory, interactive theatrical experiences more habitual.

It's a vision of theatre that Bompas & Parr are pushing with the studio's design of the Museum of Shakespeare, around the archaeological remains of The Curtain Theatre, where Romeo and Juliet premiered.



OUTREACH

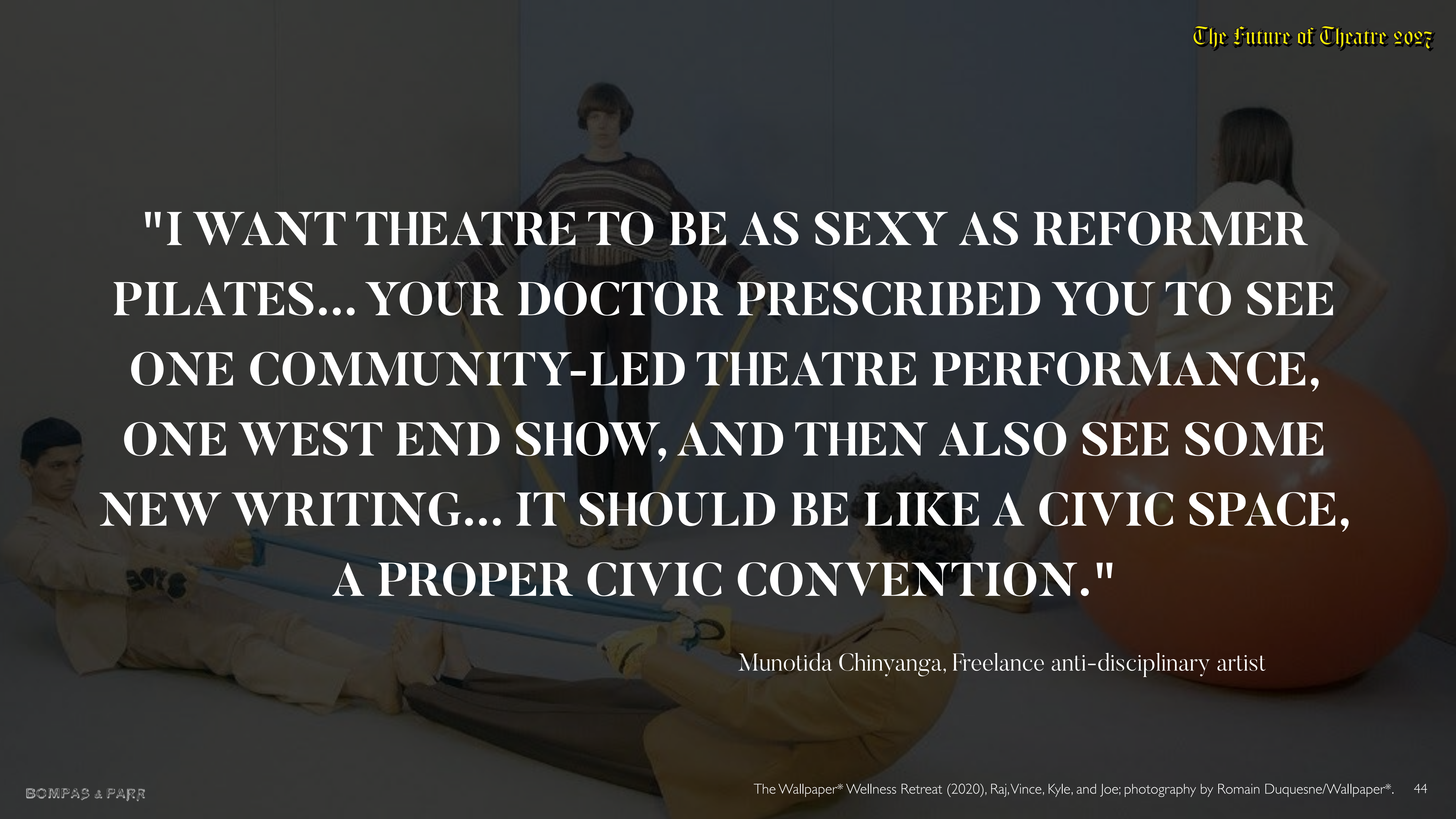
More

HYPE YOU CAN

BELIEVE IN

**“17M TO THE WEST END IS AMAZING, OF
COURSE, BUT IT’S NOT PART OF THE
NATIONAL PSYCHE IN THE SAME WAY
FOOTBALL IS, FOR EXAMPLE.”**

Emma D’Souza, SOLT



"I WANT THEATRE TO BE AS SEXY AS REFORMER
PILATES... YOUR DOCTOR PRESCRIBED YOU TO SEE
ONE COMMUNITY-LED THEATRE PERFORMANCE,
ONE WEST END SHOW, AND THEN ALSO SEE SOME
NEW WRITING... IT SHOULD BE LIKE A CIVIC SPACE,
A PROPER CIVIC CONVENTION."

Munotida Chinyanga, Freelance anti-disciplinary artist

Three

HYPE YOU CAN BELIEVE IN

People's desire to see a show has become more interpersonal, unpredictable and identity-led. It's less about people being drawn to individual shows or stories and more about them wondering: 'Am I the kind of person who goes to this kind of place? Do my friends go there? Will I meet more people like me there?'

As a result, theatres are going to work harder on their individual brand identities, making sure they stand out. They will look for non-conformist and counterintuitive ways to drive talkability.

At the same time, audiences are becoming resistant to over-explained culture. Over-marketing can reduce mystery before the experience even begins. The future of theatre may benefit from secrecy, myth-building and ambiguity.

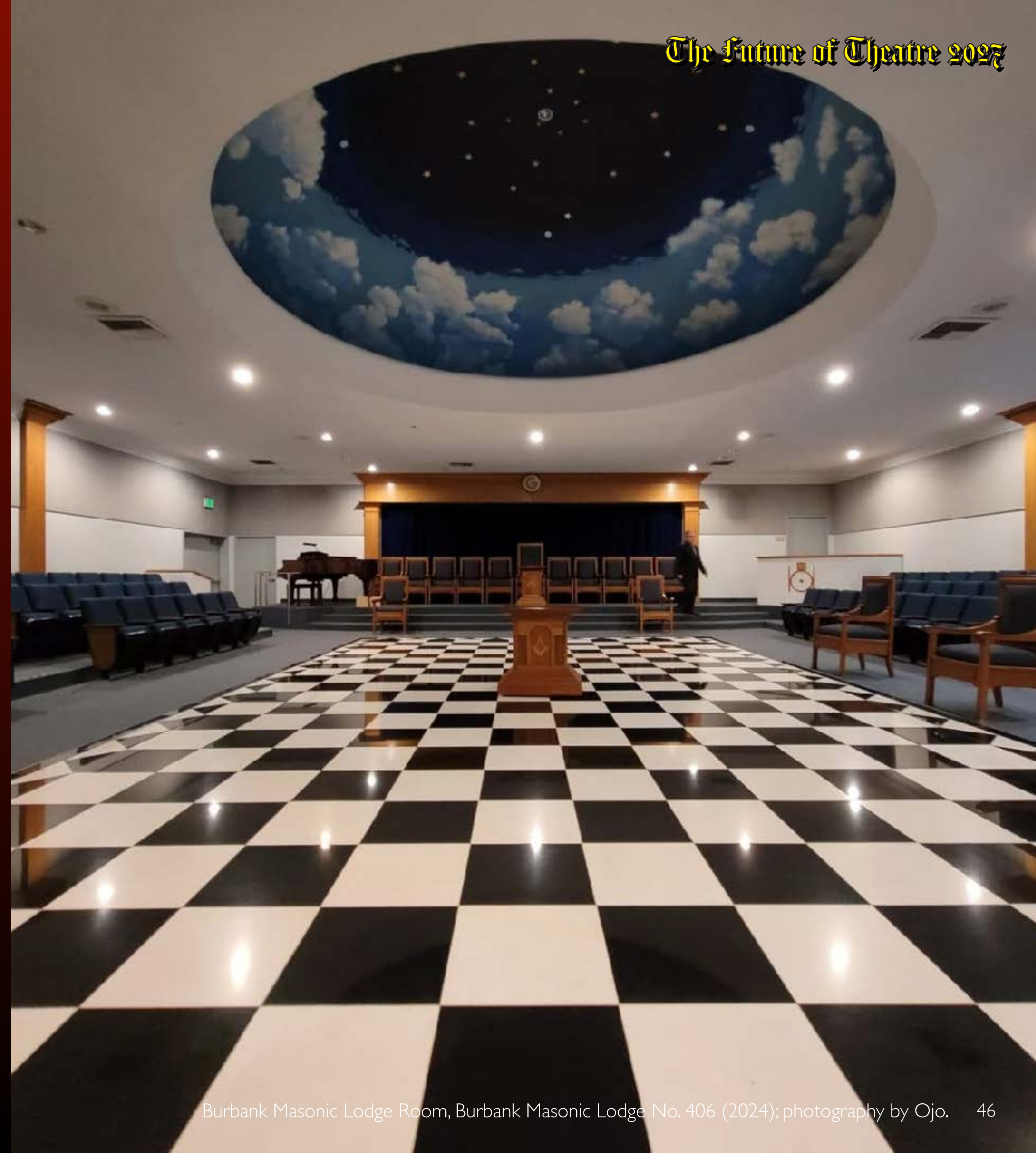


MARKETING LESSONS OF THE MASONIC LODGE

Audiences don't want to be part of your "social media strategy". Sometimes audiences don't want all the information they need. The last thing new audiences want to feel like is your "new audience". They're only sort of interested in the latest dynamic ticketing system.

We're set to see theatre marketing operating more like a secret society, the masonic lodges of yore. Subscriptions should be shady, full of secrets and seemingly pointless rituals. Comms should be obscure and unfriendly.

This is a vision of marketing that spreads like a conspiracy theory. For nothing, after all, takes hold like a conspiracy.



‘LOST’ OPENED IN SAVILLE THEATRE/ODEON CINEMA ON SHAFTESBURY AVENUE IN 2025. IT THRIVED ON MYSTERY. THERE WAS NO SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY, NO ADVANCE TICKETS, AND NO GUARANTEES. EVEN IF YOU MANAGED TO GET INSIDE, EVERYONE FELT SLIGHTLY LOST ALL NIGHT. FOR A WHILE, IT WAS THE MOST TALKED ABOUT EXPERIENCE IN TOWN.



CHAMPION DIRECTORS

The current reliance on celebrity casting to sell theatre is effective but creatively limited. The future lies in expanding what “bankable identity” means, moving beyond TV names to celebrate directors, production designers and creative auteurs.

In Europe, auteur-led theatre already dominates, while the UK remains more writer-focused. Figures like Jamie Lloyd, Ivo van Hove, Emma Rice and designers such as Es Devlin suggest a shift toward creative leadership itself becoming the draw.



**“I LOVE THESE SHOWS WHERE THE
PRODUCTION DESIGN CAN BE A
CHARACTER IN ITS OWN RIGHT.”**

Darcy Troy Pollack, Founder, Swiss Cows

INDUSTRIAL MUSICALS WERE A GENRE OF MUSICAL THEATRE FUNDED BY LARGE AMERICAN CORPORATIONS FROM THE 1950S UNTIL AROUND THE 1980S. THEY WERE LAVISH, BROADWAY-STYLE, ALL-SINGING, ALL-DANCING PRODUCTIONS TARGETED AT THE EMPLOYEES OF COMPANIES LIKE FORD, GENERAL MOTORS, IBM AND THE LARKIN SOAP COMPANY.

VERY USEFUL THEATRE

We predict a resurrection of the industrial musical format for contemporary workers who are building careers in an ever-fluidifying techscape of anguish. This will be useful theatre that gives guidance on how to survive work, relationships, ageing, failure, money, loneliness, panic and parenthood.

It wouldn't preach, but it would be direct and open, offered generously, in the style of musical theatre. Just as employees would leave industrial musicals knowing how to make semiconductors, people should leave plays not just emotionally moved, but with a much clearer idea about how to live.

Audiences are perfectly entitled to ignore advice they don't want. That's not the problem. The problem is nobody serious is offering any.



SPACES

For

PLACES FIT FOR
PURPOSE

Four

PLACES FIT FOR PURPOSE

It is well understood that many theatre spaces are kept operational by a quiet army of people armed with gaffer tape, and many risk being out of date without investment. Most theatres in the West End were built for vaudeville shows. Building maintenance is causing significant financial strain on productions. In addition, traditional architectural styles often contribute to an outmoded sense of exclusivity in theatrical experience. As a result, formally experiential works are constantly required to repurpose meanwhile-use structures, pushing audiences out to the urban fringes.

In the shorter term, it may be possible for maintenance or construction to become a theatrical experience in its own right. This is already underway in some places. The completion of La Sagrada Família in Barcelona was funded entirely through private donations and ticket sales for people walking through the most spectacular construction site on earth. In the longer term, we predict a new era of theatre architecture that celebrates theatrical place and space, suited to the needs and expectations of modern theatre-makers and theatregoers.

These new theatre spaces could be designed to support a wider social experience around performance, including longer intervals and higher-quality bars and restaurants that feel like part of the show. Even basic conventions, like the 7.30pm start time, could be rethought. Instead of rushing straight from work, audiences might go home, change, and then attend. Theatre scheduling and hospitality need to evolve together to match how people actually live now.

80% OF WEST END
THEATRES REPORT
RISING ANNUAL
MAINTENANCE COSTS.



"WE SHOULD END UP IN A PLACE WHERE OUR CULTURAL SPACES DO NOT ACTIVELY KEEP PEOPLE OUT, OR ARE NOT PERCEIVED TO KEEP PEOPLE OUT... THAT'S WHAT LONG-TERMISM, FUTURISM LOOKS LIKE... WHICH IS ESSENTIALLY ANTI-OPPRESSION."

Josh McTaggart, CEO, Theatres Trust

EMOTION TESTING FOR THEATRE DESIGNERS

We need more people who love theatre to build theatres. We also need more arts leaders who feel really confident about engaging in capital projects, and more building professionals who love the arts.

If you want to design a theatre, then you have to prove that you cried at the end of Kneehigh's *Tristan and Yseult*. If it didn't move you, then you are welcome to go and design tunnels and sanitation infrastructure.



Future Dynamics

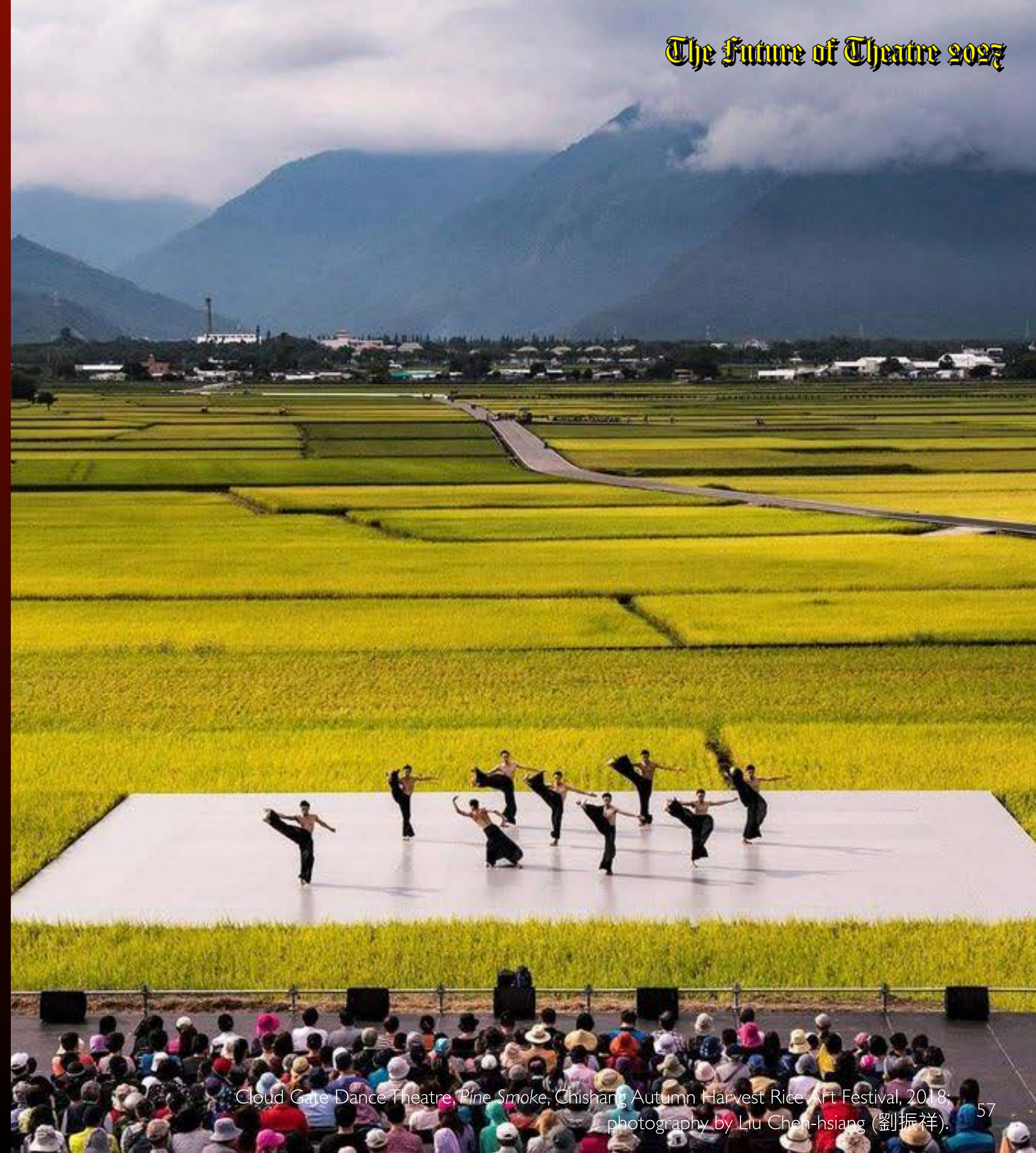
The Future of Theatre 2027

AGRICULTURAL THEATRE

Bring back touring theatre that moves with the agricultural calendar, echoing medieval seasonal performance cycles. Shows arrive at sowing, lambing, harvest and midwinter, each one shaped by local labour and weather.

Venues become temporary and mobile: barns, fields, village greens, markets. The work changes with the land around it.

Theatre becomes cyclical again, embedded in real time, not abstract programming schedules or fixed urban institutions.



THE HASTINGS TRADITIONAL JACK IN THE GREEN IS A HUGE POPULAR, FOUR-DAY ENGLISH MAY DAY FOLK FESTIVAL. SINCE ITS 1983 REVIVAL, IT HAS GROWN INTO ONE OF THE UK'S LARGEST MAY CELEBRATIONS. THE EVENT ROUTINELY ATTRACTS TENS OF THOUSANDS OF VISITORS WHO GATHER IN HASTINGS OLD TOWN TO CELEBRATE FOLKLORE & NATURE.



CRUISE SHIP TROUBADOURS

Cruises are perfect venues for cultural experiences in an increasingly uncertain world. Their mobility makes them resilient to unpredictability. If something goes wrong, just leave.

We can see a world of itinerant, seafaring, high-culture troubadours. Entire theatre companies aboard cruise ships crossing the Mediterranean, the Baltic, the Indian Ocean, staging ambitious work tied to wherever they dock.

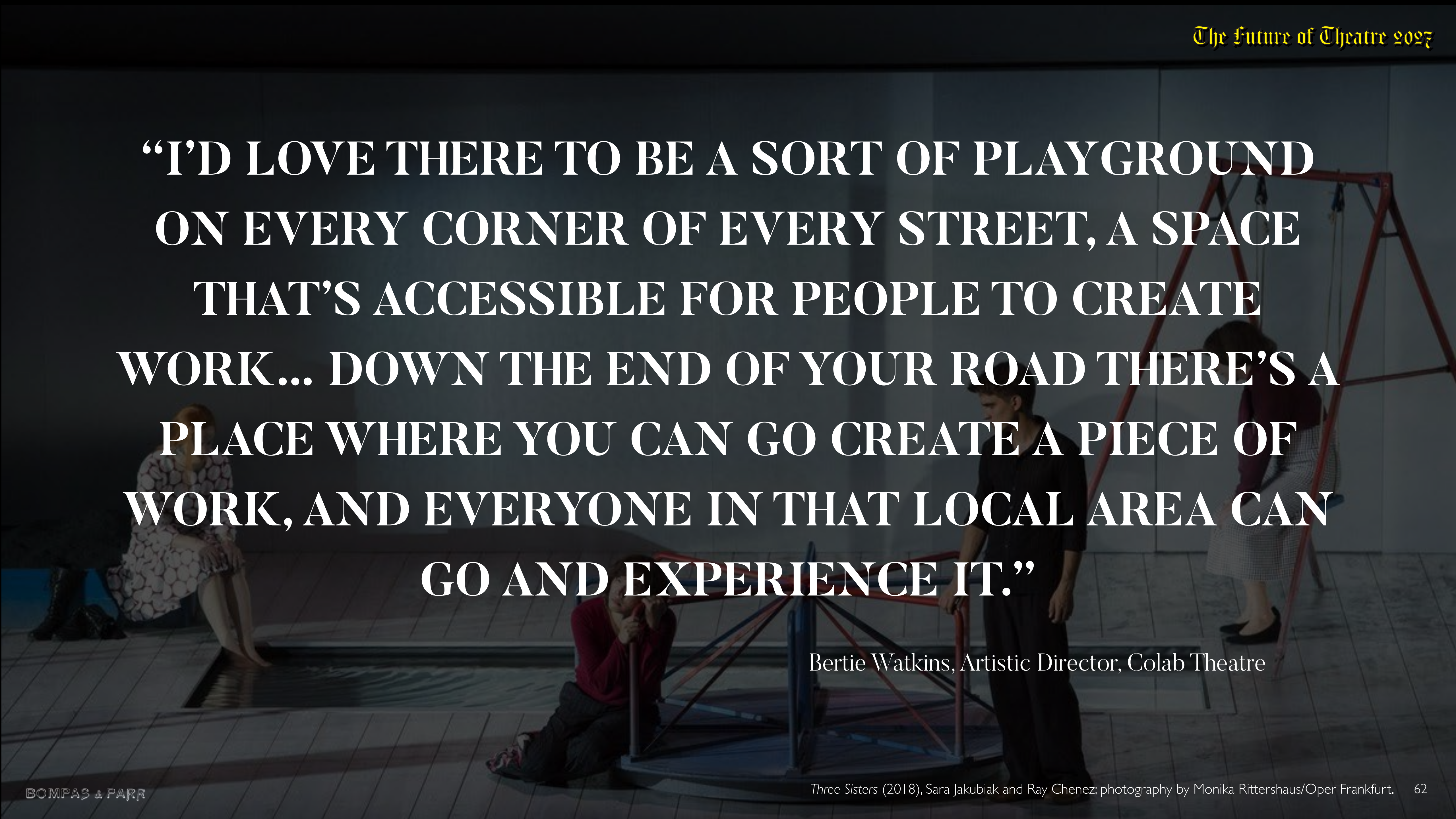
Ancient tragedy in Greece. Climate dramas in sinking coastal cities. Portside operas, floating repertory companies, serious artistic exchange instead of casino jazz and exhausted cover bands. The cruise ship becomes a wandering cultural state. It would be part conservatoire, part embassy, part touring festival, carrying theatre physically through the world.



TALENT

Time

OPTIMISED
INCUBATION

A photograph of a playground at night. In the foreground, a person in a red shirt is crouching near a blue and red play structure. To the right, a person in a dark shirt stands near the same structure. In the background, a person in a patterned dress is sitting on a bench. The playground is illuminated by streetlights, and the ground is paved with wooden planks.

**“I’D LOVE THERE TO BE A SORT OF PLAYGROUND
ON EVERY CORNER OF EVERY STREET, A SPACE
THAT’S ACCESSIBLE FOR PEOPLE TO CREATE
WORK... DOWN THE END OF YOUR ROAD THERE’S A
PLACE WHERE YOU CAN GO CREATE A PIECE OF
WORK, AND EVERYONE IN THAT LOCAL AREA CAN
GO AND EXPERIENCE IT.”**

Bertie Watkins, Artistic Director, Colab Theatre

Five

OPTIMISED INCUBATION

Theatre in schools is in a terrible state, with cuts and other challenges causing dramatic declines in the theatre education of young people. At the same time, the physical spaces where they can get together after school are disappearing. Clubs, youth centres and informal hangouts are shrinking, leaving a growing gap in everyday social life.

That isolation will only intensify with the impending UK social media ban for under-16s. Theatre now has both a chance and a responsibility to step into that vacuum as a living, urgent space for connection and belonging.

OVER THE PAST 15 YEARS,
A-LEVEL DRAMA ENTRIES
HAVE FALLEN BY 52%.
– The Stage



Future Dynamics

The Future of Theatre 2027

PUT THEATRES IN PLAYGROUNDS (...AND PLAYGROUNDS IN THEATRES?)

Once TikTok vanishes from the lives of under-16s, playgrounds could step up their design as physical performance spaces. We envisage a world in which performativity starts in the playground, with stages becoming regular parts of these environments. Instead of fixed stages, children's play spaces could become living sets designed by world-class designers like Es Devlin.

They'd be sculptural, interactive environments that shift storytelling into everyday movement and imagination. Theatre would no longer be something you go to, but something embedded in daily life from its very beginnings.

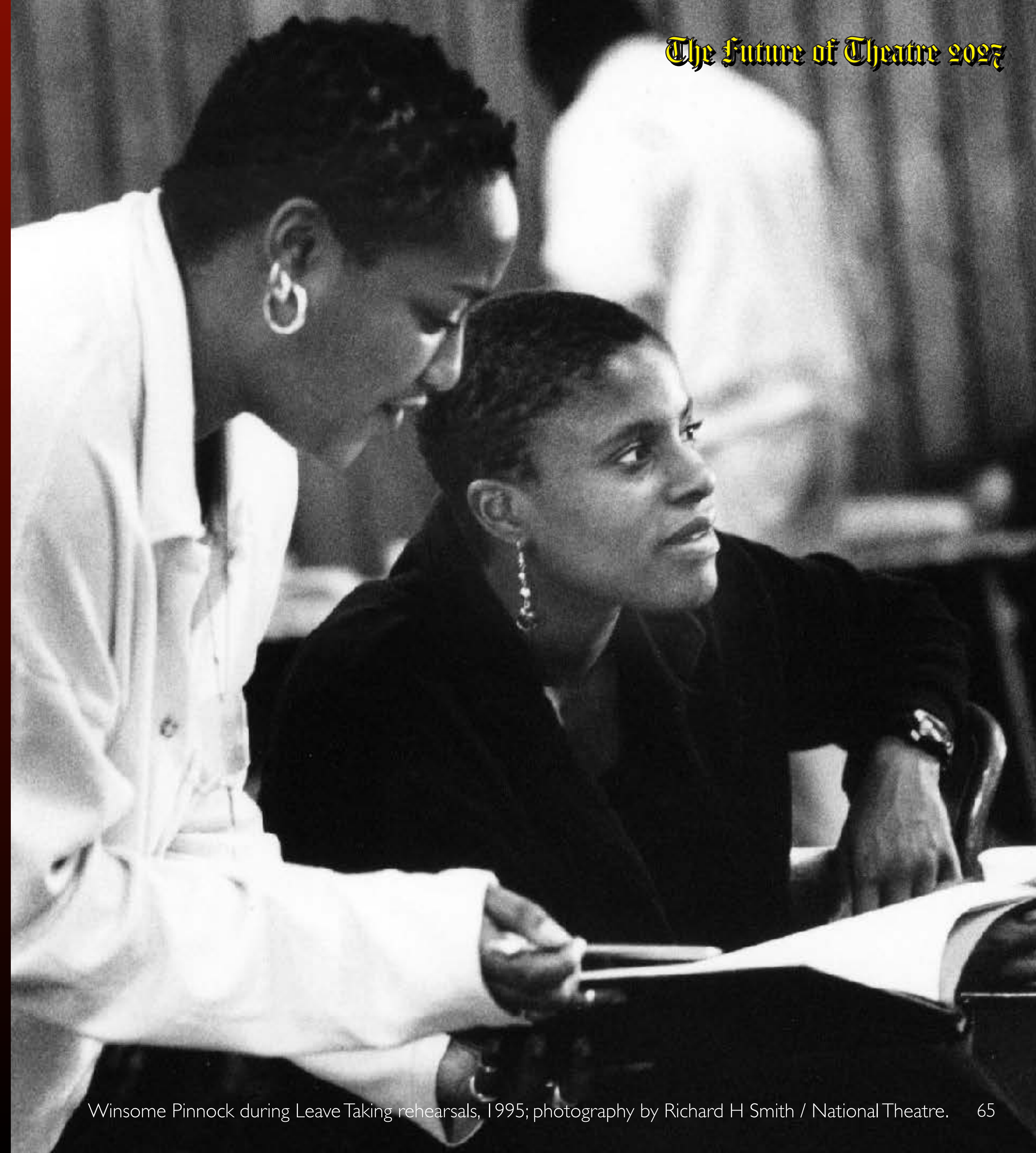


NATIONAL SCHOOL OF WRITING

The UK theatre ecosystem is heavily writer-led, yet it has no single, centralised national writing school feeding the industry. Unlike acting, ballet, art or film, writing is still treated as something private, intuitive, even “untaught.”

That reflects a romanticised belief that writing cannot be formally developed. But if theatre is serious about its future, it needs structured training.

A National School of Writing would professionalise, diversify and actively grow the next generation of voices.



GIVE PERFORMANCE ARTISTS WEST END SHOWS

Why not put Florentina Holzinger's *Seaworld Venice* on in the West End? Bringing performance artists into the West End could transform commercial theatre. Durational, drop-in works would replace fixed narratives with living, evolving spectacles that audiences can enter and leave.

Relatively low-cost but visually magnetic, these performances would disrupt traditional programming, creating flexible experiences that reflect contemporary attention spans. They would provide a route for emerging talent to enter large, otherwise intimidating performance spaces.



Florentina Holzinger, *SEAWORLD VENICE*, Austrian Pavilion, 61st Biennale di Venezia, 2026; photography by Nicole Marianna Wytyczak.

AT THE AUSTRIAN PAVILION OF THE 2026 VENICE BIENNALE, CHOREOGRAPHER AND PERFORMANCE ARTIST FLORENTINA HOLZINGER TRANSFORMED THE PAVILION INTO A PERMANENT LIVE INSTALLATION WHERE AUDIENCES WANDERED THROUGH FLOODED ROOMS, RITUALS AND DURATIONAL PERFORMANCES. PART THEME PARK, PART CATHEDRAL, PART WATER-TREATMENT PLANT, SEAWORLD VENICE BLURRED THEATRE, PERFORMANCE ART AND SPECTACLE. IT PROVED THAT AUDIENCES WILL QUEUE FOR HOURS TO WITNESS SOMETHING STRANGE, RISKY AND IMPOSSIBLE TO CATEGORISE. (LABIENNALE.AT)



Florentina Holzinger; SEAWORLD VENICE, Austrian Pavilion, 61st Biennale di Venezia, 2026; photography by Nicole Marianna Wytyczak.

THE FUTURE OF THEATRE IS...

FORM

OUTREACH

CONTENT

SPACES

TALENT

Thank You

For further details, please contact:
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BOMPAS & PARR

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Macro-scale trends

Social

CHANGING PUBLIC APPETITE
Theatre is one of the few remaining collective, physically co-present cultural forms, gaining value in an age of isolation, distraction and algorithmic mediation.

AGEING POPULATIONS
Older audiences have wealth and leisure time, while younger audiences prize experiential outcomes.

CONNECTION AND LONELINESS
With youth centres, clubs and live hangouts declining in number, and social media restrictions for under-16s incoming, theatre offers a possible civic space for connection, identity and belonging.

IDENTITY
Location, belonging and local heritage may all play an increasingly important role in the long-term financial sustainability of theatres.

Technological

GAMING
The maturity of gaming culture has not only transformed how audiences wish to experience live culture, but will increasingly influence the technical delivery of productions.

AI SATURATION AND FATIGUE
AI is both a creative threat and opportunity: it has the potential to enable theatre-makers working in constrained environments, but risks cultural lifelessness, creating demand for human error, improvisation, risk and live unpredictability.

IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES
The growth of immersive entertainment points to expanded audience appetite, but the next phase may move towards being “post-immersive”: immersive techniques becoming a broader theatrical language rather than a standalone category.

Economic

COST OF LIVING
Increased cost constraints across the board are having a broad range of impacts on the market.

RISING PRODUCTION COSTS
Traditional theatre models are under financial pressure: shows are more expensive to make, fewer are produced, and venues face rising maintenance costs, particularly in ageing theatre estates.

POLARISATION OF MARKETS
Prior research points to a vanishing middle ground between global spectacle and underground micro-scenes, with mid-scale work squeezed by subsidy pressures and commercial risk.

SECONDARY SPEND
Theatres are encouraged to rethink bars, restaurants, intervals, start times and wider social experience, integrating hospitality more deeply into the cultural offer.

Environmental

CLIMATE INSTABILITY
Environmental instability requires institutions to build resilience and preparedness. Alongside driving changes for sustainable operations, theatre could become a rehearsal space for civic stress, evacuation, flooding, misinformation and crisis response.

URBAN HEAT
In a warming world, our cultural assets will play an important role as social infrastructure, including acting as cool spaces for local communities.

Political

FOREIGN POLICY AND DEFENCE
Rising defence spending and geopolitical instability indicate a more fragile world, creating cultural demand for preparedness, collective simulation and institutional resilience.

BREXIT
Against the backdrop of Brexit’s long-term economic effects, one possible future is a “drift Europewards” through artistic exchange, touring networks and subsidy models.

ACCESSIBILITY
Accessible and inclusive design is central to future cultural relevance and innovation.