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Theatres as risk societies: Performing artists balancing between artistic and economic risk

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how performing artists balance between economic and artistic risk-taking within the performing arts sector. The paper is based on a comparative study, including qualitative interviews with performing artists working in three different theatres in three different countries: England, Norway and the Netherlands. The paper discuss how different ways of organizing theatres and different theatre policy represent different systems of economic risk managing, and further how they facilitate artistic risk taking. The author identifies three different approaches to risk management in these three countries: a collectivization of risk, an institutionalization of risk and an individualization of risk. Theoretically, the paper makes use of, and criticizes the work sociology developed by Ulrich Becks and Richard Sennet, as well as welfare theory, including Esping-Andersen.

1. Introduction

In his seminal work, *The Brave New World of Work,* Ulrich Beck claims that work society has become a risk society, as the "Securities, certainties and clearly defined boundaries of the first modernity" is being replaced by "the insecurities, uncertainties and loss of boundaries in the second modernity" (Beck, 2000, p. 67ff). Several scholars have claimed that artists and creative workers are located in front of this transformation (Banks, 2007; Caves, 2000; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; McRobbie, 2016; Menger, 2006).

In most writings on this new "risk society", influential sociologists such as Beck (1992, 2000) and Giddens (1990, 1994) describe a society in which individuals living in a feeling of anxiety, vulnerability and uncertainty. People are seen to be highly aware of risk, and critical towards the institutions that produce them:

> The emphasis in contemporary Western societies on the avoidance of risk is strongly associated with the ideal of the "civilised" body, an increasing desire to take control over one's life, to rationalise and regulate the self and the body, to avoid the vicissitudes of fate (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002, p. 114).

In artistic work, the ideal is not to rationalise and regulate the self and the body. It is rather the opposite, artistic ideal includes immediacy, spontaneity, contemporality, scarification and irrationality (Heinich, 1996; Kris & Kurz, 1979 [1934]; Negus & Pickering, 2004; Røyseng, Mangset, & Borgen, 2007). According to these scholars, true artists do not avoid risk, they seek it.

In today's creative discourse, artistic and economic risk taking tend to be mixed up in a large pot commonly known as creative labour. The new creative worker is flexible, autonomous and independently working in "a dazzling environment of creative autonomy, sensory stimulation and personal fulfilment" (Banks, 2007, p. 4). Risk taking thus becomes an ideal without necessarily

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defining what the definition of risk involves.

In this paper, I question this idealization of risk taking, and ask whether these two forms of risk are actually opposites. I also question the diagnostics and grand theories developed by Beck and Giddens through a comparative study of artists working in three different countries, holding three different political approaches to risk management. Even though artistic and economic risk-taking has been commonly addressed in studies of artistic work (Banks, 2007; Bourdieu, 1998; Campbell, 2005; Caves, 2000; Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005; Lee, 2016; McRobbie, 2002, 2016; Menger, 2001; Oakley, 2009; Ryan, 1992; Santos, 1976), there are few comparative, cross-national studies analysing how artists manage risk within different political and organizational contexts. In this paper, I will analyse how different ways of organizing theatres and different theatre policies represent different approaches to risk management. I will then analyse how artists working in these theatres and these countries manage risk, both economically and artistically. Based on my findings, I question whether this "new world of work" in the creative sector is as much a result of political and managerial decisions as it is a "grand theory".

1.1. Managing economic risk

Making money is not a goal in cultural production. This general insight, described by Bourdieu as the *economic world reversed* (Bourdieu, 1993), has been the basis of numerous empirical studies of the art field (Craig, 2007; Craig & Dubois, 2010; Gustavsson, Börjesson, & Edling, 2012; Nylander, 2014; Pinheiro & Dowd, 2009; Plattner, 1996; Røyseng et al., 2007; Scarborough, 2017). Scholars have defended, nuanced and criticized Bourdieu's claim on artists' motivation for work and the division between an autonomous and heteronomous pole in art production.

Still, even though Bourdieu claims that artists working close to the field of restricted production "denies economy" (1993:331), he would probably not disagree when Throsby (1994) and others claim that most artists still wish to achieve a steady income as an artist. The key point in Throsby's analysis of a work-preference model for artist behaviour is the fact that artists derive satisfaction from work itself, and not from the income they generate (1994). They constantly balance economic and artistic considerations, yet still emphasize the latter the most.

The field of cultural production is further characterized by a labour market in which the excess of artists is generally larger than the demand for artistic production (Abbing, 2002; Casacuberta & Gandelman, 2012; Mangset, Heian, Kleppe, & Løyland, 2016). Artistic work has therefore often been associated with considerable economic risk (Abbing, 2002; Mangset et al., 2016; McRobbie, 2016; Menger, 2006; Throsby, 2010).

Menger describes how artists have developed several ways of managing economic risk (2006). Artists can be supported by private sources, public sources or they can hold multiple jobs. Menger further emphasizes how artists often work in cooperative-like organizations where they are pooling and sharing their income. Within the performing arts, small organizations, like dancing companies or theatre ensembles, are examples of this. Theatre organization, and therefore theatre policy, is not solely about creating an environment for creative processes, it is also about governing and managing economic risk for the persons involved.

In general social policy, risk management and the governance of risk have been central in the development of modern welfare states. According to Andresen (1999, p. 33), Western societies have developed different ways of managing social risk: Briefly summarized, conservative states have relied on the corporative structures and the family, liberal states have relied on the market, while social democratic states have relied upon a strong nation-state governing risk for all the citizens.

In culture policy, risk management for artists has also been crucial. However, the degree of state interference has varied. In some countries, such as the Nordic countries, artists' labour conditions have been subject to an explicit cultural policy; in other countries, such as Britain, cultural policy has only caused some implicit effects on risk management for artists.

The three theatres I will present in this paper manage risk differently. I find the typology of Esping-Andersen relevant in this sense as the general, social welfare policy of each country seems to affect risk management for performing artists. The social democratic country of Norway manages risk largely on a state level, in Britain risk is addressed to the market and the single artist, while in the Netherlands, or at least in the Dutch case, risk is managed collectively.

1.2. Artistic ensembles as risk management collectives

The collective nature of theatre production makes this art form particularly interesting for a sociological analysis of risk. Besides, theatre production is one of the most complex art forms when it comes to the plenitude of social actors involved, as it also integrates several other art forms (Becker, 1984).

Today, there exists several ways of organizing theatres. These different ways of organizing theatre production represent important structural conditions for how artists manage risk. Even though the funding government rarely provides clear statements on how theatre shall be organized, their allocations of funding help in promoting and protecting certain forms of organizations. This also makes the theatre organization a part of cultural policy.

Dragan Klaic distinguishes between two primary models of public, none commercial, theatre production: repertory theatres and autonomous theatre groups (2013:37ff). Repertory theatres have been the dominant model for theatres in Europe and the UK, ever since Konstantin Stanislavsky founded the Moscow Art Theatre in 1898. Together with Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, he developed a professional theatre company with an ensemble of actors and an ethos that encouraged collectivity (Klaic, 2013; Senelick, 2008). While private commercial theatres relied on some few star actors, the idea behind repertory theatres was an assumption that the company could sustain an ensemble of actors of different ages, capable of playing various roles, working and developing within the company for several years, maybe even for a lifetime. This made ensemble-based repertory theatres a safe working environment

for actors. Throughout the 20th century, hundreds of repertory theatres were established based on these idea, and still today, repertory theatre is to be found in most German-speaking countries, including the Nordic countries, as well as parts of eastern and central Europe (Klaic, 2013).

Due to the Baumol's cost disease[1] (1966) and various forms of institutional inefficacy (Løyland & Ringstad, 2007; Taalas, 1997), the maintenance cost of repertory theatres has increased; such theatres have therefore required substantial public support. In several countries, this has caused a reshaping of the theatre sector, in which the ensemble model has been abandoned in favour of theatres casting actors for one play only. In other countries, the ensemble consists of a proportion of permanently employed actors, regardless of whether they share a common artistic idea or work under one artistic leader. This is commonly referred to as *false ensembles* (Sirnes, 2001) or *institutional theatres* (Cohen, 2011; Mangset, Kleppe, & Røyseng, 2012). The increased need for subsidies has nurtured several debates on the organization of theatres and the public funding of performing arts (e.g. Haselbach, Knüsel, Opitz, & Klein, 2012).

Autonomous theatre groups (fringe groups, freie Sczene) are the second important model of organizing theatres. Gaining ground since the 1960s, these rather small companies emerged from students with a certain passion for theatre experimentation, or a general interest in politics, social criticism and anti-authoritarian protests (Klaic:44). In terms of both audience popularity and public subsidies, these groups have more or less always worked on the "fringe" of the large repertory companies. Still, in terms of organizations, many of these groups work on a collective basis drawing on the ideas of Stanislavski.

Different cultural policy and different approaches to organizing theatres make up the most important differences between my three cases, which represent the structural framework for artistic work. In addition to this, one may further assume that there are cultural differences between the three countries affecting the way in which artists manage risk, both economically and artistically.

When analysing the relationship between these structural factors, the theatre culture within the single country and the single artist's approach to risk management, I draw on the ideas of repertoire theory and Ann Swidler's concept of *strategies of action* (Swidler, 1986). The strategies that an artist chooses in order to manage risk incorporate both organizational structures, habits, moods and the view of the world that exists in the local and national context in which the actors work. I intend not to claim a causal relationship between cultural policy, theatre organization and risk management. I rather see this as the available "tool kit" of possibilities and limitations that artists build their strategies upon. In comparative cultural sociology, national cultural repertoires have been particularly emphasized as: "cultural tools that are unevenly available across situations and national contexts" (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000, p. 1). In this case, national cultural repertoires seem particularly relevant because models of theatre organization, labour conditions, cultural policy and general welfare policy are all shaped nationally.

The relationship between policy and risk management makes this paper politically relevant, as it analyses the strategies that artists make within the limitations and possibilities of organizational and national contexts.

2. Methodology

Even though I relate my analysis in this article to the work of Beck, Sennett and Esping-Andersen (1990 [2012], 1999), my epistemological approach has been rather inductive. This paper is part of a larger comparative case study of theatre policy, theatre management and artists' working conditions in theatres where the fieldwork and the qualitative interviews triggered my analysis and my theoretical approaches. Risk was therefore a topic explored and developed both during and after my data collection (Esping-Andersen, 1999).

The case study included one large theatre in Norway, England and the Netherlands, all among the most important, subsidized theatres in these countries, all working on a highly professional level and all receiving a considerable amount of public support.

The British fieldwork was conducted in a typical regional theatre in one of the largest cities outside of London; the Dutch fieldwork was conducted at one of the top theatre groups in the country, while the Norwegian fieldwork was conducted in one of the largest theatres in Norway. The study included 38 semi-structured, evenly divided onsite interviews, with professionals working in the three theatres, 20 men and 18 women. Nineteen of my interviewees were actors, while the others were both administrative and artistic executives, including the artistic directors of all three theatres.

When discussing working conditions with both actors and executives, economic and artistic risk taking became a central topic. Even though none of the interviewees dreamed about making big money on their acting, they were generally concerned with the question of how to provide for themselves and their families working as professional artists.

Even though I venture to claim that there exists some interesting national repertoires relevant for understanding how actors relate to risk-taking, the field of theatre is diverse. I thus find a short comment on representativeness to be necessary. The degree of national representativeness varies between the three cases. Based on the information I attained from the interviewees, as well as from former empirical studies (Dorney & Merkin, 2010; Heywood, Bilton, & Cummings, 2014; Mangset et al., 2012; Røyseng, 2007, 2008; Wennes, 2002), I venture to claim that both the Norwegian and British cases are somewhat representative of the working life in similar theatres in these countries. This does, to a lesser extent, count for the Dutch case. In the Netherlands, theatre groups have chosen different forms of organizational structures and different ways of engaging artists, as some of them work with an ensemble whereas others primarily hire freelancers. Nevertheless, most Dutch theatres have adapted a collective approach to theatre productions (van

[1] The labour-intensive nature of the performing arts institutions does not allow for rationalization as most other industries do. While the labour demand of most industries has been remarkably reduced, creating a play still requires approximately the same amount of people as it did 100 years ago. The rising costs associated with this have been described by the economists Baumol and Bowen (1966). In economic terms, this phenomenon is referred to as Baumol's cost disease.

Maanen, 2008, p. 127). Even so, generalizations based on single cases are challenging. I therefore encourage further studies of these relationships and a critical reading of my results. Now, let us get to know these artists and their daily life as actors.

2.1. Individualization of risk in Britain

First, we shall pay a visit to The British Regional Theatre (BRT), one of several subsidized theatres outside of London that perform a wide range of plays in different genres. In Britain, most theatres, including the BRT, hire actors for one play only. In the early 1980s, the BRT and most other British regional theatres used to work according to the Stanislavski repertory tradition, holding their own ensemble for one or two seasons, working on their own stage and presenting a repertory of plays. As a result, most British regional theatres experienced a financial crisis during that era. The politics of Thatcher entailed a reduction on state expenditures and increasing expenses, e.g. due to inflation, which led to the closure of several theatres (Turnbull, 2008, p. 72). Theatres that survived had to make drastic cuts and changes, which included the disbanding of both ensembles and repertory planning. Today, British subsidized theatres receive approximately 30% of their running costs from the Arts Council England.

BRT, as with most other regional theatres in England, BRT hire a cast of actors for three or four weeks of rehearsal, and additionally two to four weeks of performance, for every production. One of these actors, and one of my informants, is Hugh. His engagement at the British Regional Theatre started five months before rehearsals when the casting coordinator at the theatre called his agent and asked him to read for a part in a play. The part included some singing, and since Hugh is a decent guitar player and singer, he therefore had an advantage. Because of the large number of actors applying for jobs in the UK, casting directors choose actors who are perfectly suited for a particular role and have the right skills, a practice commonly referred to as “typecasting”. Typecasting implies that actors are recruited based on their appearance, which causes an actor to repeatedly play the same character. When I asked Melissa, a female actor, if people often get typecast, she says:

> I think you do. And more so with the loss of repertoire theatre where you could do a whole season, and you might have things that were out of your comfort zone that where challenging. You know, you might be a 20-year-old actress who plays an old lady, just because the nature of the season. Now you don’t get that. And, you know, it used to just happen to be on the telly, but now it happens in the theatre. You walk through the door, how do I perceive you? And that’s your type. […] I constantly play eccentric middle-aged ladies.

According to Melissa, typecasting is one consequence of single part casting, while another consequence is a constant state of flux and unpredictable working conditions for the actor with a limited time scope. When Hugh got the message that he was being cast for his part, it was only three months in advance before rehearsals started. He then had to prepare to stay for two months away from his home and family in London. Before leaving, Hugh had to make arrangements with his wife, and then he had to find accommodations in the city where he was going to stay for the next six weeks. In addition to a fixed salary of approximately £500 a week, Hugh received £150 a week for accommodations.[2] This left no space for any luxury such as a hotel room.

Towards the end of Hugh’s two months at the BRT, he had to focus on getting his next job, phoning his agent and attempting to get auditions. Economically, he may have survived for two weeks without work, but then needed to get a new assignment. Working as an actor in the UK is therefore a risky proposition: “As an actor, my job is constantly getting my next job”, Melissa told me. This attitude is also reflected when I asked Hugh what kind of job he preferred: “The fact is, if it was up to me to pick, that would be a luxury. That would be amazing.” Most of my British informants expressed a similar attitude. There is little room for developing artistic skills and strategically developing an artistic career, as simply getting a paying job is enough of a goal.

In Britain, the agent is crucial for the career of an actor. Several of the actors emphasized how the agent takes some responsibility for the actor’s career and are hence capable of helping them making strategic choices: “Thankfully you have got an agent who is of another opinion, and you also decide from the beginning if something is worth going for or not”, Hugh says. Simultaneously, the agent’s interest in not necessarily developing the artistic skills of an actor, but instead in providing a long-term well-paid job, is in his/her best interest:

> In some respects, it’s only in their best interest. If they make a success of one of their clients, then they’re commission is huge. Some of them will get comfortable knowing that if you do musical theatre, or get a year’s employment, they got a year’s commission, and that they don’t need to work for you again for the next 11 months.

Although all the actors I interviewed at the BRT appreciated the social character of their work, they also emphasized the lack of confidence in working with people they do not know. Working with new people, both actors and directors, may be inspiring for the persons involved. Still, such ever-new encounters also made the artists somewhat artistically insecure. When I arrived at the BRT to conduct my fieldwork, I expressed the wish to take part in the rehearsals, as I had done at the Dutch Theatre Group. However, Sarah, the artistic director of the BRT, was anxious about having me in the rehearsal room. This was the first week of rehearsals and she was unsure whether she or the actors knew each other well. She explained how many of the actors might feel insecure in this part of the production, which corresponded well with how she explained the pros and cons of working with an ensemble during my interview:

> It is also true that there is a certain depth in relationships that is very hard to get in four weeks, as there is a real trust that builds up between the actors [in an ensemble], which means that they are very supportive of each other, and therefore can go much

[2] http://www.uktheatre.org/Downloads/ratesofpay/UKTheatreEquitySubReprates20152016.pdf.

further and take far more risks than they would if they were not in that ensemble.

According to Sarah, the artistic director, ensemble-based actors are much more willing to take artistic risks than freelancers. This may also be caused by a certain fear of not getting a new job. When you do not know the director, you cannot be sure how he or she will respond to your involvement. John, one of the older actors, who has been in the business for almost 50 years, explains this precaution among actors:

> People worry. If you ever become too difficult, this would soon be known. There are actors who are known as being difficult, and there would be directors who think: I have heard that he or she is difficult; I don't want to use them.

Being creative, exploring new approaches in acting and taking artistic risks may be risky for the career of the actor, as well as his or her economy. Being loyal, conscientious and easy to deals with seems to be a better strategy.

2.2. Collectivization of risk in the Netherlands

Turning to the Netherlands, there are no large repertory theatres. The repertory tradition collapsed in 1969, when acting students interrupted a performance at the *Nederlandse Comedie* by hurling tomatoes at the actors. This was the start of a revolution within theatres, where the cultural policy shifted from supporting bourgeois theatre institutions to supporting independent, fringe theatre groups (Hamersveld, 2009, p. 183; van Maanen, 2008). Dutch theatres also differ from both British and European theatres through their division of production and distribution. The theatre groups produce the performances, while the theatre stages programmes and presents them. The Dutch Theatre Group (DTG) is one of nine theatre groups receiving approximately 70% of their running costs from the Dutch government. During the last decade, some theatre groups have gained a more dominant position in the Netherlands by being part of the *Culturele Basisinfrastructuur*.[3] This implies that they receive funding for a four-year period based on evaluations of their artistic and financial achievements made by an independent council. The DTG has received many positive evaluations, and has therefore received generous public support. Other theatre groups that receive poor evaluations may get quite dramatic funding cuts, a typical example of new public management (Olsen, 2009).

In order to understand how life may be as an actor in the Netherlands, I will introduce you to Johan, one of the 20 actors working at the DTG. Fifteen years ago, Johan graduated from one of the three renowned Dutch theatre academies and then started working for one of the big theatre groups in the Netherlands. After gaining some success in that group, one of the leading Dutch directors invited him to join his ensemble. He then worked with this director within two different theatre groups before becoming a permanent member of the Dutch Theatre Group. The career pattern of Johan is similar to many other Dutch theatre actors, as they work with an artistic director as part of "his" or "her" ensemble for a certain period of time.

Within the DTG, there are several forms of contracts. Some last for one year, while others are more permanent. As we will see, while permanent contract are highly valued in Norway, Johan and his associates whom I interviewed did not seem to care very much about the length of their contracts; what mattered to them was whether they were part of the ensemble or not. Once you belonged to the ensemble, you were also part of the future plans of the director and the theatre regardless of your contract. Affiliation to the artistic community seemed far more important than legal contracts. Nonetheless, being part of an ensemble also implied a safe economic condition that provided the actors with a decent salary every month.

As an ensemble actor, Johan's possibilities to work outside the ensemble are somewhat limited. Because of the repertoire planning, the DTG has made plans for most of the actors some years ahead. Even though they might ask for a leave to perform in a movie etc., they are primarily committed to this group. Because of this commitment, working as an ensemble actor in the DTG does limit one's flexibility and freedom to work outside your group and because of this limitation, some Dutch actors prefer not to be part of an ensemble. Sylvia, one of the actors who was hired for one play only, told me that she had turned down several offers for an ensemble affiliation:

> I have a fear of being stuck, and that you must play roles that you are not so attached to. That's why I also chose my freedom, I can choose the project because I like the people or I like the director, and I also can play different roles.

Even though there may be some lack of freedom associated with being in an ensemble, there are certainly also some benefits concerning both personal financial predictability and artistic development. Thomas, one of the young actors I interviewed, emphasizes the latter when he argues why he joined the company. After making some great appearances on the screen as a young actor, he was cast in several movies that helped him to gain much recognition. Even so, he felt that the opportunities to develop as an actor were limited within this business. He was more or less always typecast playing the same "bad guy" character every time. When he got the chance to join the DTG ensemble, he really saw an opportunity to develop as an actor:

> When you film you know you should film for like a month, maybe two months. And then you are free for like two months. And then you are doing nothing. As a young actor, the most important thing I think is to just keep acting, keep reading plays, keep seeing plays, keep playing. Because if you stop, then you won't develop.

This young actor finds it important to act constantly, to play different characters and to learn from all the actors around him. He

[3] Ever since 1988, when the Arts Plan System came into being, bigger and smaller companies received a four-year subsidy. Through the introduction of the Basic Infrastructure for Culture, some companies gained the four-year support directly from the Ministry of Culture, while others received one-, two-, three- or four-year support from The Performing Arts Fund NL.

really appreciates the artistic community made possible through an ensemble.

The artistic community of an ensemble also helped create the confidence needed for artistic development. Once the director and the actors knew each other, it was easier for the actors to improvise and to influence the artistic expression of the play. Anna, a female actor, describes how this close relationship to the artistic director unfolds in rehearsals:

> I like to think about the whole show and not just my part. What are we doing? What are we saying to the world? Like this whole feeling of really trying to reflect the time and everything. And, I just feel with him [the artistic director], he doesn't even need to say what he wants, I already know what he wants.

According to the artistic director, this close relationship is one of the reasons why he has chosen to work with an ensemble:

> Working together on and on for years creates… we don't have to spend time getting to know each other. From day one we can start immediately. So you gain a lot of time, but more important, artistically, it's not because you work together that it becomes easier, because you become more critical to each other… so I think, in the long term, the condition for really great theatre is to work with an ensemble.

Still, the close relationship between the actors and the director, and the feeling of collectivity, does not appear out of nowhere. According to the Dutch actors, the maintenance of the ensemble is very important. At the DTG, there are no equity representatives to secure the right of the actors; instead, there is a position as the head of the ensemble who works closely with the actors. Throughout the year, the head of the ensemble meets with the actors two or three times, or whenever the actors need to discuss their career. Developing and maintaining artistic skills in the ensemble is considered crucial to maintaining the artistic quality of the individual actor, as well as the theatre group. If the company failed in doing so, their entire existence would be in danger, and the public support may be given to someone else.

2.3. Institutionalization of risk in Norway

Lastly, we shall get to know The Norwegian Theatre, which is one of the largest of the 18 repertory theatres in Norway, and some of the 60 actors working there. The theatre was established in the late 19th century, and is considered one of the most important cultural institutions in Norway, receiving approximately 80% of their running costs from state subsidies. Today, the theatre includes three stages and employs approximately 160 persons. The theatre has received steady public support for almost 50 years, and some of the actors have been part of the ensemble for almost the same period.

One of the actors working at the theatre is Erik, who graduated from acting school in 1992 and then started working at The Norwegian Theatre. Erik, as with many of his fellow actors, holds a permanent position at The Norwegian Theatre. The employer organization of Norwegian theatres, and the actors' equity in Norway, has agreed to a fixed number of permanent contracts. Once actors receive such a position, as they are protected through Norwegian labour legislation and the risk of losing their job, and thus having no income is more or less non-existent. "They can't fire us", one of the actors states. The steady public support all Norwegian theatres receive further implies safe working conditions for the employees. Without financial problems, the theatres are not allowed to fire their employees.

Permanently employed actors in Norway occasionally also perform in movies or in other theatres as well. As permanent employees, they have the right to an unpaid leave after a certain period. This makes such a position both safe and flexible.

The working conditions of the actors working at The Norwegian Theatre are more or less like other Norwegian civil servants. They earn about the same as a teacher, they have a decent public pension and receive benefits from several welfare schemes. Permanently employed actors are typically "insiders" in the labour economy (as described by Lindbeck & Snower, 2002). The Norwegian system therefore creates relatively strong borders between the insiders and the outsiders, between permanently employed actors and freelancers (Bergsgard & Vassenden, 2015; Mangset et al., 2016).

The Norwegian theatre is a typical institutionalized theatre in which the actors constitute the core of the artistic staff. While artistic directors come and go, the actors tend to remain. During the 15 years Erik has worked as an actor at The Norwegian Theatre, he has worked under seven different artistic directors, some of them for six years, and others for only one. When a new artistic director is appointed, he has to adapt to the existing ensemble of actors, and the actors have to adapt to him, though this adaptation is not necessarily easy. The new artistic director cannot select actors based on his own wishes; he has to make use of the already employed actors. Consequently, how the different artistic directors approach this challenge differs. Nonetheless, this quite often results in excluding certain employees. Tom, one of the actors, says:

> At this theatre, two or three actors get very few parts. This represents a great burden for them, because they are not able to perform and use their skills. And then, when some show-offs stroll around the building bragging about the character they are going to play, actors who are neglected feel very, very small.

This citation highlights two important aspects of Norwegian repertory theatre: 1) the fact that theatres keep actors employed, even though they are seldom cast, and 2) the importance of a healthy working environment within ensembles that entails the inclusion of all the actors. According to several of the actors, there is a great psychological burden attached to being an unemployed/employed actor in the theatre. To avoid this, it is of great importance that the artistic director "herds" his ensemble in a good way, thereby ensuring that all the actors get parts to play, and that they are able to develop their artistic skills.

Some theatres suffer from a long-lasting lack of ensemble maintenance. According to cultural economists, this may be observed through the lack of efficiency in such organizations (Løyland & Ringstad, 2007; Taalas, 1997). As developed by Stanislavsky, the

ensemble model underlies the organizational foundation of the theatre; however, the ethos of the ensemble thinking has largely been abandoned. When a new artistic director implements his artistic visions for the theatre, the actors belonging to the ensemble do not necessarily fit his or her demands. Yet, building up an entire new ensemble that fits the artistic ambition of the artistic director is almost impossible due to the labour legislations of the permanently employed actors. Instead of adapting the programming to the actors of the ensemble, the artistic directors tend to neglect some of the ensemble actors for the benefit of freelance actors working on a piece-to-piece contract. Grete, one of the older actors explains this practice:

> If the artistic director appreciated his ensemble and the people belonging to it, he gave them chances. In the old days one did that, because the ensemble was the only people they had available. When creating a repertoire you made it in relation to the strength and weakness of the ensemble. What one does now is: "Damn, we have no one for that part, ok, we just need to hire someone."

The practice described by this actor is typical for what Sirnes has described as "false ensembles" (2001), i.e. ensembles unified only on a social and economic level, and not on a joint artistic idea.

2.4. Performing artists and economic risk

Ulrich Beck describes a transition in modern societies, "from the system of standardized full employment to the system of flexible and pluralized underemployment" (1992:140). The work situation in the three theatres may well be interpreted through such a description. However, while Beck describes this as a diachronic development in all modern societies, I find important national differences between such systems.

Actors at The Norwegian Theatre and The Dutch Theatre Group benefit from standardized employment, working primarily at a single location.[4] In Norway, economic risk for artists has been managed through a stable cultural policy, grounded in a social democratic policy that favours institutional theatres with several permanent employed actors. Erik and his peers, both in his and other Norwegian theatres, benefit from this. In the Netherlands, Johan experiences safe working conditions due to the artistic director's desire to stage plays in a repertory theatre with a permanent ensemble. He chose to do so primarily due to artistic reasons. Moreover, in order to do so, he needs a staff of trained actors at his disposal trained to play a certain repertoire.

Hugh, and most other British actors, experienced a "risk-fraught system of flexible, pluralized, decentralized underemployment" (ibid:143). This makes Hugh a typical representative of the new underemployed creative worker (Banks, 2007; Gibson, 2003; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Hesmondhalgh, 2012; McRobbie, 2016). As with most British actors, Hugh is not working full-time. He is always on the hunt for new jobs, whether in theatre, television, radio or commercials. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) discuss the personal consequences of artists working within this risk society of underemployment. Similar to Hugh, the everyday experiences of their informants included a constant worry about what job to do next. This led to "nervousness, anxiety and even panic [being] a regular part of their working lives (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011, p. 122).

The most obvious difference between the actors working in a British context, and the Dutch and Norwegian context, is the *individualization* of economic risk. The UK creative workers 'are being expected to test out the water of working life without welfare or with substantially reduced welfare', Angela McRobbie states (2016:58). While such risk is managed on a collective level in the Norwegian Theatre and in the Dutch Theatre Group, economic risk is addressed to the single artist in the British Regional Theatre.

2.5. Performing artists and artistic risk

The independent creative entrepreneur has been promoted as the representative of the future economy and the idealistic form of labour market organization. The self-employed artist is his own boss, and has the flexibility and autonomy to develop his artistic and creative project. He is considered a true entrepreneur, both artistically and economically, placing all his bets on his artistic project. This "Romance of being creative", as Angie McRobbie puts it, has penetrated much of recent policy debates on creative work. However, several empirical studies paint another picture of the actual experience of persons involved in creative labour (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Mangset et al., 2016; McRobbie, 1999, 2016; Oakley & O'Brien, 2016).

The scope and empirical data in this study do not allow me to judge which system of organization leads to the best performances. Nonetheless, the feedback given from the artists provides some interesting insights into how this different system facilitates artistic development and artistic risk-taking.

First, let us focus on the creative potential in acting. Actors who belong to an ensemble, both in Norway and he Netherlands, have some influence over their work. At The Norwegian Theatre, Erik may take part in an artistic council that makes joint decisions on the repertoire of the theatre,[5] and he may also influence what role he might get. In The Dutch Theatre Group, the actors were not heavily involved in the programming. However, in rehearsals, their opinion was emphasized when the artistic director was directing. In Britain, actors were engaged after most decisions were made, whereas in rehearsals they were cautious about expressing their opinion, instead considering themselves as "a cog in the wheel", as Melissa said.

A striking difference between the ensemble actors and the freelance actors was the confidence in their work. Most of the actors in the DTG felt a confidence toward both the artistic director and their colleagues. This allowed them to be vulnerable, experimental and to challenge themselves without fear of risking their future career. Being part of an ensemble also implied that the actors were

[4] It is worth noting that both Norwegian and Dutch actors tour as part of their job; nevertheless, this travel is organized and paid by the employer.

[5] The actual influence actors may have in such an artistic council may, however, be limited (Mangset et al., 2012).

encouraged to play several different characters. Their cast was not limited to "bad boys" or innocent, pretty girls, as they were challenged to play a wide range of characters.

In Britain, the work of most actors is limited to playing characters that suit their appearance and their special skills; hence, the possibility to develop additional creative skills as an actor is limited. Because of the thousands of available actors, an artistic director can choose the exact character best suited for a specific role. This practice of typecasting has also caused a situation in Britain where actors of certain social backgrounds are over-represented (Friedman, Laurison, & O'Brien, 2016). From the directors point of view, the absence of an ensemble may imply a flexible situation in which he may choose the exact actor best suited for a certain role. The flexibillity of the actor, however, is limited to repeatedly playing the same character.

With reference to Teversky and Kahnmann, Richard Sennett claims, "being at risk is inherently more depressing than promising" Sennett (1998, p. 83). The flux character of freelance acting and the everlasting hunt for auditions is similar to what Sennett refers to as *ambiguously lateral moves* (Sennett, 1998, p. 85). This characteristic within the network society implies that persons are moving sideways from one occupation to another, not knowing if this is considered a career step or not. "Inherent in all risk is the regression to the mean. Each particular role of the dice is random. When my English informant describes auditioning, it is all about repeatedly throwing the dice:

> Once you have done the audition, forget about it. Move on. If you get it, great, but if you don't, you are already prepared for that. But when you hold on to something so tight and you get your hopes up, it takes a long time to do that. I can say, 21 years in the business, and I am still just getting the hand of doing that kind of thing,

Even so, in the enterprise-led creative sector, 'the worker has only themselves to blame for the shortcomings of their business or occupational disaffection – it is the individual who is not creative, pushy or talented enough (Banks, 2007, p. 61ff), "your own life, your own failure', as Beck puts it (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 24).

If one returns to Bourdieu and his division between a heteronomous an autonomous pole (1993, 1996), the lack of freedom associated with the British model may push the actors in a heteronomous direction.

Based on my empirical findings, I venture to claim that artistic and economic risk-taking are separate actions, maybe even opposites. While working in a collective ensemble reduces economic risk, it may allow the artist to take more risks artistically. When the actors know their fellow actors as well as the director, they may feel more confident taking parts or challenges outside their comfort zone. The importance of such collectivity in the arts has been addressed by several scholars (Becker, 1984) and in several empirical studies (Craig & Dubois, 2010).

The assertion that safe economic conditions nurturing artistic risk taking further challenges the myth of the starving artist, described by novelists such as Henri Murger, Knut Hamsun and Franz Kafka, and scholars such as Kris and Kurz (1979 [1934]), Heinich (1996) and Bourdieu (1996). It also challenges the way in which these myths have been adapted as ideals in the creative labour discourse and in neo-liberal cultural policy (e.g. McGuigan, 2016).

2.6. Risk management through theatre policy

The organization of theatres is both a result of decisions made by the executives of the theatre, as well as a certain cultural policy for theatres. The development of the various organizational systems presented in this paper seems closely connected to both the cultural- and welfare policy exercised by these countries. Esping-Andersen's three models of welfare state solidarity in the management of risk may also be traced to the three different approaches to cultural policy in these three countries (See e.g. Kleppe, 2016 for a discussion of this relation).

British cultural policy hardly pays any attention to the social welfare and economic risk of artists (Kleppe, 2016). In contrast, as McRobbie points to in her work on the politics of creative labour, the individualization of risk in the creative sector has been glorified as 'a model for how various jobs and careers could shape up in the neoliberal era' (2016:70). The key factor of such policies in terms of governmentality, she claims, is the "presumed reduction in costs to the state or employer for these so-called young creatives who must be responsible for themselves [and thus] shoulder the burden of risk" (McRobbie, 2016). Through such a cultural policy, England has succeeded in maintaining the most cost-effective theatres in Europe. Simultaneously, such a policy has created an environment for the artists working in those theatres consisting of a combination of high economic risk-taking, but a limited possibility to take artistic risks. The creative worker of Britain is not primarily an entrepreneur, but rather a self-employed worker in a Marxist sense, selling their labour power to those who pay the most.

In the Netherlands, risk has largely been addressed to the collective theatre group receiving state support. Through an active cultural policy inspired by the logic of new public management,[6] arts organizations have been granted support based on their achievements. In the case of The Dutch Theatre Group, this has resulted in an organization that "invests" in all their employees, knowing that they are all important parts in the puzzle of making great art. This investment is crucial for the future work, stability and development of the theatre group. It further implies that the artists are given a space for taking artistic risks without risking too much of their economy. In line with Esping-Andersen's description of a corporatist approach, risk management in the Dutch Theatre Group is "pooled" and shared by all members of the artistic ensemble (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

In Norwegian repertory theatres, risk management has been institutionalized in covering the actors who (once upon a time) managed to get a permanent contract.[7] For those artists, economic risk is more or less absent. For some of the permanently employed

[6] The way in which these evaluations have been done, and what measurements they emphasize, is part of another discussion.

[7] In both Norway and the Netherlands, there are certainly many freelance actors carrying much of the risk themselves as the British actors do.

artists, this situation may create a fertile ground for artistic creativity, including artistic risk-taking, artistic creativity and career development. For others, including those who have been repeatedly left out of the casting made by several shifting artistic directors, the possibility of artistic development has decreased, leaving them as actors with a salary, though with little work and limited careers. Simultaneously, while England has maintained some of the most cost-effective theatres in Europe, theatres in Norway rely heavily on state support and occupy an increasing share of the culture budget (Kleppe, 2016; Løyland & Ringstad, 2007).

3. Conclusion

As Abbing (2002) and several other scholars have stressed, artistic work is virtually synonymous with overcrowding, under-employment, low income and hence risk (Abbing, 2002; Alper & Wassall, 2006; Craig, 2007; Gielen, 2009; Mangset et al., 2016; Menger, 2006; Santos, 1976; Throsby, 1992). McRobbie's ingenious exposé on how the recent discourse on creative labour has redefined these as pros rather than cons. In this age of creative rhetoric, critical empirical investigations of the relationship between artistic creativity and artistic economy are greatly required. In this paper, I have benefitted from comparative data, including three countries with a different policy and welfare approach to cultural production. I have also worked inductively to understand and analyse this part of artistic work life, and the reasons for the national differences.

However, my case study approach is limited, and calls for supplemental studies in order to make conclusions that are more general. My data is collected in some of the most prestigious theatres in these countries, but how about smaller, fringe companies? And what about other creative sectors, both within the performing arts and others? I further benefitted from a limited set of 38 interviews and only one case in each country. I thus welcome any further empirical investigations that may question my subsequent findings:

First, I find distinct and interesting coherence between the organization of welfare policy and the way in which risk is governed and managed in these three countries. Second, I find that economic and artistic risk-taking stand in opposition to each other rather than being similar. Artistic risk-taking seems to be much easier to facilitate in safe and predictable working conditions than in an individualized work life, thereby implying everyday economic risk-taking. Third, while institutionalized repertory theatres and a Nordic welfare approach to cultural policy comes with a price that is evident in rising cultural budgets, the price for the cost-effective neo-liberal British theatre policy is addressed to the single artist. He or she is situated at the bottom of the food chain without the benefits and protection that have been associated with employment. Lastly, the brave new world of creative work, both celebrated and strongly criticized by several scholars, is not a "law of nature". The comparative approach of this study, and the analytical insights from comparative cultural sociology, shows how both cultural policy and management strategies strongly affect labour conditions and economic risk management for the single artist. The development towards a "Braziliation" of work (Beck, 2000) is most of all a deliberate development, both in the creative sector and maybe in the general labour policy as well.

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