A hand-drawn scribble in grey ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long, curved line extending upwards and to the right.

the
TAXIDRIVER,
the COOK and the
GREENGROCER

the representation of non-English speaking background people in theatre, film and television

Santina Bertone, Clare Keating, Jenny Mullaly, (abridged by Santina Bertone)

A Research Report commissioned by the Australia Council and prepared by Workplace Studies Centre in association with Effective Change and Communications Law Centre, Victoria University of Technology.

The Australia Council is pleased to publish this summary version report of *the Taxidriver, the Cook and the Greengrocer: The representation of non-English speaking background people in theatre, film and television* for the Australian arts community.

In a multicultural society such as Australia's, the arts can and do play many important roles. The findings of this report prompt some fundamental questions about how well and how fully the arts community draws upon the extraordinary diversity in our community. It asks how we react to and what we experience on our stages and screens and ultimately how we then present ourselves on the world stage.

foreword

The Council's purpose in commissioning this study is to provide every reader with a clear picture of the current reality of creative activity which reflects our diverse society. It was commissioned in 1997 and has three components to the research:

- Statistical analysis of ABS data from the 1996 census
- Survey of responses from a questionnaire to the Australian theatre sector
- Interviews with members of the theatre sector

In publishing the report, we are providing an opportunity to the arts community to involve themselves in creating a more dynamic performing arts sector. Some of the questions raised by the statistical analysis and the interviews suggest that actors, directors, managers and boards are facing difficult issues in their creative and marketing directions. The implication that the potential for innovation in the performing arts is hampered because of a lack of inclusion of Australia's multicultural society is one which affects us all.

We see this report as a part of an on-going dialogue with the arts community. It is amongst a number of resources which can be drawn upon to assist us in making astute decisions about how the arts can truly represent Australian multicultural society. We suggest that this report be read in conjunction with an earlier study published in 1994 by the then Office for Multicultural Affairs, *Access to Excellence*, in particular volume 4: *Performing Artists. "We are Here, We are Visible"* and the Council's 1998 publication *The World is Your Audience*.

The Council has commissioned three short essay responses to issues raised in the report, to encourage ongoing dialogue. The responses provide feedback from academic, theatre and film industry perspectives.

Inclusivity can be a sensitive arena and we anticipate, and encourage, continued debate. It is a necessary part of our artistic development. The Australia Council's Arts for a Multicultural Australia policy is one aspect of encouraging that development.

Please take the time to read this report with an open mind and be amongst those who will also be prepared to respond to the findings in it. If you would like to receive a copy of the full report, it is available by contacting the Australia Council on (02) 9215 9000.

Margaret Seares
Chair of the Australia Council

table of contents

THE AUTHORS	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	vi
ABBREVIATIONS	vii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	viii
1. AN OVERVIEW	2
2. WHAT PREVIOUS RESEARCH HAS FOUND	8
3. STATISTICS ON NESB REPRESENTATION	16
4. CONSULTATIONS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS	28
5. SURVEY OF THEATRE COMPANIES	48
6. CONCLUSIONS	62
RESPONSES	
'ACCENT-UATE THE POSITIVE'	
- Andrew Jakubowicz	66
'MY ETHNIC MOTHER DAYS ARE OVER'	
- Rosalba Clemente speaking with Barry Gamba	71
'THE PIZZA DELIVERY BOY IS STILL BLOND'	
- Donald Crombie	77

Santina Bertone (BA Hons), Grad. Dip. (Erg.), MA (IR) is Executive Director of the Workplace Studies Centre, Victoria University of Technology, where she has been coordinating research, consultancies and seminars for the past eight years. She has authored, jointly and independently, numerous books and papers on NESB immigrant and women workers, workplace and training reform, trade unions and productive diversity, including: *Immigrant Workers and Trade Unions* (1992), *Manufacturing Uncertainty* (1995), *Surviving Retrenchment* (1995) and *Training for What?* (1995). She is currently undertaking Phd. studies in the area of immigrants and workplace change within the federal system. More recently, she has published, with other co-authors: *Diversity and Dollars* (1998) and *Developing Effective Consultative Practices* (1998).

the authors

Clare Keating (BA, AIMM) is a partner of Effective Change Pty Ltd. Her work has spanned a range of human resource issues, but her particular areas of interest and expertise lie in training reform and development and productive diversity. She has published in both these areas. Her publications include *Good, Better, Best Practice: Putting the Principles of Adult Learning into Practice* and *Enterprise Bargaining and Ethnic Relations at the Workplace: A Story of Disappointment and Exclusion* (with Santina Bertone). Clare has also recently published, with other co-authors *Developing Effective Consultative Practices* (1998).

Jenny Mullaly (BA LLB) has been a research and policy adviser at the Communications Law Centre since August 1993. She is the co-author of information papers on *Access to Media and Right of Reply* (1995) and *Privacy and the Media* (1997) and contributed chapters on legal issues to *Making it Happen: The Cultural and Entertainment Industries Handbook*. Jennifer is also a member of the Committee of Management of Chamber Made Opera.

This study was undertaken jointly, with the researchers focusing on particular study tasks within a collaborative framework. **Santina Bertone** was project manager, coordinated all research activities and was chiefly responsible for: design and administration of the artists' questionnaire and theatre managers' questionnaire together with collation, analysis and interpretation of survey data. She also analysed the ABS statistics, undertook some stakeholder consultations and contributed to the literature review. Santina was chief writer of Sections 1, 3, 5 and 6. **Paul Whitelaw** conducted statistical analysis of survey data using SPSSX.

Clare Keating contributed to planning and development of the study, undertook most stakeholder consultations and wrote Section 4. She also contributed peer review to other aspects of the research process and writing.

Jenny Mullaly was chiefly responsible for collecting, analysing and presenting the literature review, and wrote most of Section 2. She also contributed peer review to other aspects of the research process and writing.

Santina Bertone abridged all chapters in the original report for this summary report.

As a multifaceted study undertaken over a very short timeframe, the contributions of numerous people were needed to ensure the success of this project. Apart from the research team itself, many individuals and organisations helped with advice, contacts and practical support. Despite the constraints, it was a real joy to work with artists and arts bodies on a topic which elicited considerable interest and ideas.

We wish particularly to thank Mark Stapleton, Manager, Policy and Planning at the Australia Council and Cecelia Cmielewski for liaising with the team on the conduct of this research. Thanks also go to the Media Arts and Entertainment Alliance (MEAA) for supporting the study and helping with advice and information.

acknowledgements

Chris Giddings of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Adelaide, was particularly helpful in providing high quality statistics at short notice, with many extra demands beyond the original brief. Thanks to Elsa Underhill, Senior Lecturer at Victoria University of Technology for scrutinising and commenting on the draft questionnaire, and Playbox theatre in Melbourne for trialing the survey questionnaire with a group of actors. We thank Lex Marinos, Director of *Carnivale* in Sydney and a (then) member of the Australia Council board, for taking a particular interest in the study, steering us toward information and issues we had not been aware of.

A little army of supporters and research assistants helped get the research going. In this regard, we are grateful to Victoria Marles, of the Communication Law Centre (CLC), who was responsible for developing the joint venture between the CLC and the Workplace Studies Centre, a rewarding experience which we hope will be repeated in future activities. We also thank Maree Fitzpatrick for her enthusiasm and effort in organising the theatre survey sample, the survey pilot and contacting all the theatre companies personally to gain their understanding and cooperation. Thanks also to Pierre Rosenkotter and Anjali Pal for carrying out follow-up work with the theatre companies during the response phase of the survey, and to John Walker of Effective Change Pty Ltd for assisting with the consultations and offering his incisive insights. Paul Whitelaw of Victoria University of Technology was the statistical 'whiz' who compiled and analysed all the survey data, always enthusiastically, efficiently and within short times.

Usha Sukumaran was especially efficient in processing the manuscript for this report and supporting its development phases, while juggling other major research reports prepared for strict deadlines. As always, it would be impossible to manage the research process without her unflagging administrative support.

And finally, particular thanks go to all the theatre companies, arts funding bodies, peak bodies, multicultural arts organisations, venues, agents and theatrical training institutions which participated in the consultations and the survey. More particularly, thanks to the hundreds of nameless artists working in theatres who took the trouble to fill out the survey, and add many pages of spontaneous, impassioned and often brilliant comments on the subject of non-English speaking background people in theatre. Their contribution is invaluable, and their words will be preserved by the Australia Council for future reference and understanding.

list of tables

SECTION 3

Table 1:
Australian population
by ethnic origin 17

Table 2:
Breakdown of Australian NESB1
workforce, (employed persons)
by region of origin 18

Table 3:
Proportions of employed artists in
the Australian theatre industry by
birthplace – NESB1s 19

Table 4:
Proportions of employed artists’
in the Australian theatre industry
by birthplace – NESB1s (contd.) 20

Table 5:
Proportions of employed artists
in the Australian theatre industry
by birthplace – NESB1s (contd.) 21

Table 6:
Proportions of employed artists
in the Australian theatre industry
by birthplace – Australia – NESB2 22

Table 7:
Proportions of employed artists
in the Australian theatre industry
sector by birthplace – Australia
(ESB Australians) 23

Table 8:
Proportions of employed artists
in the Australian theatre industry
by birthplace – Overseas (ESB
immigrants)..... 24

Table 9:
Proportions of employed artists
in the Australian film, radio,
video and television industries
by birthplace – NESB1 25

SECTION 5

Table 10:
‘Actors who were born in non-English
speaking countries enjoy good
opportunities to get paid work in
Australian theatre’. (Artists’ Survey,
n=194)..... 52

Table 11:
‘Where non-English speaking
background people are portrayed in
Australian theatre these tend to be
based on social or ethnic stereotypes’.
(Artists’ Survey, n=193) 53

Table 12:
‘Actors who were born in
Australia of parents from non-
English speaking countries enjoy
good opportunities to get paid
work in Australian Theatre’.
(Artists’ Survey, n=190) 53

Table 13:
‘It is easier for actors from non-
English speaking backgrounds to
get work in amateur theatre than
commercial or professional theatre’.
(Artists’ Survey, n=193) 54

Table 14:
‘Australian theatre adequately
reflects the multicultural nature
of Australian theatre’ (Artists’
Survey, n=194) 55

Table 15:
‘Australian theatre productions tend
to reflect Anglo Saxon culture, either
in content or style of direction’.
(Artists’ Survey, n=193) 55

Table 16:
‘If you answered no in Q 37, why
do you think this is the case?’
(Artists’ Survey, n=varies with
responses) 58

abbreviations

ABA:	Australian Broadcasting Authority
ABS:	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AFTRS:	Australian Film Television and Radio School
CLC:	Communications Law Centre
Colour Blind Casting:	Casting of actors without reference to their racial or ethnic characteristics
English speaking background (ESB or ESB1)	Born overseas in a country where English is the main spoken language
Non-English speaking background (NESB1)	Born overseas in a country where English is not the main language spoken
English speaking country (ESC)	Country where main language spoken is English
FACTS	Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations
NIDA	National Institute of Dramatic Arts
Non-English speaking country (NESC)	Country where main language spoken is not English
ESB Australian	Person born in Australia or overseas from a predominantly English background
ESB immigrant	Person born in a main English speaking country who has migrated to Australia
Anglo Celtic	Person of English or Celtic background
Anglo Saxon	Person of English background (not Celtic)
Second Generation Immigrant	Australian born child of parent/s born overseas
Second Generation NESB (NESB2)	Australian born child of parent/s born overseas in a non-English speaking country
MEAA	Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
UTS	University of Technology, Sydney

executive summary

This report is the result of a national study funded by the Australia Council and conducted by a collaborative research team consisting of researchers from the Workplace Studies Centre and the Communications Law Centre, Victoria University of Technology, together with consultants Effective Change. The research took place over a six month period, between January and June 1998. A full written report was prepared in July/August 1998.

The research investigated the extent and nature of the artistic representation of non-English speaking background (NESB) people in theatre, film and television, focusing particularly on theatre. It examined both the number of NESB artists employed in theatre, film and television and the nature of their representation, such as the types of roles played and the representation of cultural themes. The research did not deal with the representation of indigenous people in the arts, although a significant number of survey respondents identified themselves as indigenous. The methods used to undertake the study included:

- a literature review based on academic, policy-related and community-based literature;
- 25 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from 21 theatre organisations;
- a national mail survey of close to 1000 theatre employees from 80 randomly selected theatre companies (with a 25 per cent response rate); and
- a shorter survey of 80 theatre company administrators (55 per cent response rate).

In addition, the study analysed Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures for selected artistic occupations in film, television and theatre.

The study found significant evidence that NESB artists (particularly first generation) are under represented in all three sectors, with substantial under representation occurring in theatre, and more acutely, in television and film. NESB artists are numerically under represented relative to their proportions within the general Australian workforce and population. This

means there are far fewer NESB artists working in these sectors than would be expected from their numbers in society. The under representation is particularly pronounced for people of Asian, European and Russian backgrounds. While NESB₁ (first generation) people make up 14 per cent of the Australian workforce, their employment in artistic roles within theatre is only 9 per cent. European people are under represented by 50 per cent and Asian people by 60 per cent.

Overall, about one quarter (24.2 per cent) of all Australians are first or second generation NESB, but only 21 per cent of actors, 14 per cent of artistic directors and 17 per cent of actors/dancers/related professionals working in film, television and theatre are NESB₁ or 2. As a group, second generation NESB artists appear to fare better than the first generation. They are slightly under represented in theatre, but are well represented and in some cases over represented in film and television. In contrast, people of English speaking backgrounds (ESBs) were found to be over represented in theatre, film and television in comparison to their proportion within the Australian workforce and population. This means they have more chances to participate in artistic roles than their numbers in Australia would suggest.

From an artistic viewpoint, there is also evidence that NESB artists are largely restricted to minor, tokenistic or stereotyped roles which fail to offer a broad spectrum of performing opportunities. While most interviewees considered there was relatively strong cultural diversity in community-based arts and theatres, this was not the case in 'mainstream' commercial or funded theatres, where NESB people and communities were said to be under represented both numerically and in the content of works.

Interviewees suggested a range of reasons, but agreed that the greatest influencing factor was Australia's close cultural ties with England and English theatre traditions, forged during the critical years of post-war development. Examples cited to support this view included the recruitment of English staff into influential positions in Australian theatre and theatre education, and the adoption of English values and norms within the theatre world. Interviewees put the view that these values continue to influence Australian mainstream theatre and decision makers in government bodies, major theatres and training institutions to this day.

In contrast, many culturally diverse works were strongly criticised as stereotypical, tokenistic or cultural appropriation, such as when culturally specific roles were played by Anglo-Celtic actors. Contemporary mainstream theatre was felt to reflect middle class Anglo-Celtic values and preferences, while simultaneously excluding the values and aspirations of 'ethnic' communities and the working class.

These views appeared to be validated by interviews with senior people in major theatre organisations who believed that culturally diverse themes or works were not of particular relevance to their audiences and therefore not a key focus of the organisation. Representation of NESB people in these organisations was seen more as a case of casting an NESB person within existing works or employing an NESB staff member rather than re-evaluating the theatre program offered that season. In these instances there was no evidence of a will to develop or encourage theatre which 'acknowledges, reflects and responds to Australia's

cultural diversity' or a sense they had a responsibility to do so, if only through requirements of their funding support from the Australia Council.

Fortunately there were other theatres with a more contemporary Australian focus who firmly believed they had an obligation to 'tell Australian stories' and so include works which reflected the nation's culturally diverse population and range of experiences. These organisations had striven to meet this obligation in a variety of innovative ways which other theatres could learn from.

These general findings support those of previous research studies, most of which have focused on the artistic representation of NESB people, viz. what kind of roles do NESB actors play and how are issues relating to NESB people treated in the arts. Past research has confirmed the near invisibility or misrepresentation of NESB actors and themes.

The failure to present positive and accurate images of NESB people in the arts, or to explore issues relevant to them, sends a powerful message of exclusion to the NESB communities. Further, the community as a whole is ill-served by this failure to reflect the reality of Australian multiculturalism, in which NESB people in fact play a vast range of roles and are part of the fabric of everyday life. As reported above, the interviews found there was resistance to, or fear of cultural diversity from some parts of the industry, particularly mainstream theatre, but also in some community and regional theatres. This approach seems to have stemmed from two linked assumptions:

- c that cultural diversity in theatre is financially risky; and
- c that conservative theatre audiences will not accept culturally diverse themes and/or actors.

However, the numerous examples of successful community-based and mainstream work, together with some mainstream acceptance of culturally diverse theatre, clearly challenge the validity of these assumptions. While extremes of philosophical views were encountered, ranging from the social justice perspective to the laissez faire, there is an interesting new wave emerging, with potential to forge common ground. The new wave recognises both the cultural and economic potential of cultural diversity in theatre, arguing that if explored courageously and strategically, a range of new markets can be developed from 'ethnic' communities, mainstream audiences and internationally. However, success requires the combined factors of 'good product' and appropriate planning, management and marketing. It also requires a decisive move away from the traditional and some would say over-used formulae for selecting and presenting theatre works. Instead of the umpteenth repetition of Shakespeare's *Twelve Night* or Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, a theatre might consider promoting a totally new play based on the reality of modern, multicultural Australia.

In addition to strategic marketing, the interviews raised a common cry for new Australian works dealing with cultural diversity. It was recognised that these would not emerge spontaneously from the Australian arts scene. Many interviewees argued that, just as mainstream theatre is subsidised and nurtured from development to production, culturally diverse theatre would require support across all stages from conception to production (writing, directing,

improvements, although the extent of the problems identified suggests further concerted policy action is needed. The overwhelming view emerging from the study was that Australian theatre, and for that matter television and film, do not adequately reflect the multicultural nature of Australian society, but they are slowly moving towards this goal. There were many excellent examples of multicultural theatre works, television programs and films, but unfortunately, these tend to be the exception rather than the norm.

Theatres reported that commercial and/or cost recovery pressures were the single greatest factor influencing their programming. Most interviewees stated that reduced government subsidies over the last five years had had an enormous impact on theatres and their viability. At the same time, the growth of competition in the entertainment industry also impacted on the theatre industry. Mainstream theatres recognised the dilemma of increased commercial pressure, which had led to a growth in conservative decision making in programs, but they also recognised their audiences are ageing: 'We need to get the next generation of theatre goers'.

Regional and community theatres were more likely to view programming in terms of meeting the needs of their local communities, and if they had been successful in attracting funds had relatively greater autonomy in their programming.

The role of director was identified as critical to the portrayal of NESB roles. Some stakeholders emphasised the need to have a director from an NESB to achieve authenticity in the cultural portrayal of characters. Other stakeholders were less emphatic on this, but stressed the need for the director to have an openness to cultural issues and be able to seek the views of actors. Where there were neither actors nor a director from NESBs (which was the case in almost half of the theatres surveyed) it was felt that tokenism, stereotyping and cultural appropriation would inevitably result.

Advocates for a greater presence of NESB actors and cultural diversity in theatre argued that while NESB actors are not equally considered for generic 'Australian' or even non-specific characters, they are frequently not even considered for culturally specific roles, presenting a no-win situation for NESB actors. Various scenarios were discussed, highlighting inconsistencies and hypocritical attitudes, such as Greeks playing Italians, or Chinese playing Vietnamese and so on, while NESB actors were expected to accept the argument that they would not be appropriate in a Wilde or Shakespearean piece.

In contrast, theatres with a contemporary outlook presented examples of casting NESB actors in Australian pieces as *Australians*, without the demand of having to be the stereotypical Vietnamese/Italian/Lebanese/Macedonian etc. character. One theatre company illustrated the power of imaginative casting with the example of a piece set in a Japanese prisoner of war camp, with Japanese actors cast in the roles of Australian prisoners, and ESB actors cast in the roles of Japanese soldiers. The contemporary production of *Midsummer* in Sydney with a completely indigenous cast was another example of breaking traditional casting moulds. Both productions were critically and financially successful.

of the interviewees suggested that lower motivation to perform in theatre on the part of the NESB people was a factor. Rather, structural and attitudinal factors in the theatre industry were largely targeted, suggesting that cultural issues concerning the desire of NESB people to participate in the arts are of little or no importance.

Supporting factors were identified as well, such as: funding support and policy leadership by the Australia Council; the role of leading individuals; employing NESB people in appropriate decision-making structures; the role of appropriately skilled, ethnic market development officers; gains made through the work of production and/or theatre companies; developmental work with young people; and the support of the community.

Various examples of individual productions which broke the monocultural mould and which were financially and critically successful were mentioned, such as *Emma's Celebrazione*, *Tracking Time*, *Who's Afraid of the Working Class?*, *Medea*, *View from the Bridge* and *Tartuffe* (Kosky's). The work of specific theatres and organisations was also praised, including: Carnivale, Doppio Teatro, Playbox, Sidetrack, Teatro Oneron, Deckchair, Caca and Belvoir Street Theatre.

POLICY CONCLUSION

In light of the experiences reported from the 'new wave' of theatres, the authors are convinced that a truly culturally diverse Australian theatre industry can succeed, whether it be in community, regional, mainstream or commercial theatre. Moreover, it should be nurtured. If the notion of true 'excellence' is to be attained, it must be unfastened from a narrow 'high culture' Anglo-Celtic perspective to embrace a broader range of artistic expression and attainment. While the initiatives of the Australia Council and some State-based funding bodies are recognised and commended, further work in this area is needed. Recommendations have been made to the Australia Council in association with this report which we hope will be seriously considered.

Santina Bertone, Clare Keating, Jenny Mullaly, January 2000

AN OVERVIEW

1 .

1 . AN OVERVIEW

Mass immigration has made Australia a multicultural society. People from all over Europe, Asia, the Americas, Africa and the Middle East have emigrated here, contributing their labour, their tastes, ideas and lifestyles to create a new and interesting social mix. Today, Australia is home to people from over 150 different countries of origin. Two out of five contemporary Australians are either immigrants or the children of immigrants (Collins, 1991).

From pizza to souvlaki, yum cha to couscous, the culinary impact alone has been rich and exciting. It would be natural to expect that most other parts of our culture also reflect this ethnic diversity. In the arts, we might expect that a multicultural society would allow the full artistic and cultural expression of all its peoples.

The Australia Council takes a serious view of this proposition and is committed by its charter to foster a range of artistic activities reflecting the unique diversity of Australian culture. As a federal government body, it has developed policy that aims to 'recognise cultural diversity in the arts' and 'encourage a greater understanding and use of Australia's cultural diversity'.

In 1998 the Australia Council commissioned a study to measure the extent of multiculturalism in the dramatic arts. The study looked at the representation and input of non-English speaking (NESB) people within Australian theatre, with a lesser focus on film and television. As an English speaking country with English political, legal and cultural traditions, measuring the contribution of NESB artists might be seen as one way of seeing how far we have come as a multicultural society.

However, measuring the extent of multiculturalism in theatre and other dramatic art forms is not an easy task. We need to be clear about what is meant by such terms as 'representation' and 'contribution' and the notion that theatre ought to 'reflect' the multicultural nature of Australian society. Until now, most of our knowledge has been anecdotal, or, in the case of film and television, based on content analysis of a few programs and shows. Few studies (Castles et. al., 1994 and James, 1997 being exceptions) have actually surveyed the artists and other stakeholders in the theatre world to gauge their views and experiences on this topic. Nor has there been an attempt to

analyse industry-wide statistical data on the employment of first or second generation NESB artists in theatre.

This study aimed to fill the gap in our knowledge about these aspects, particularly with respect to the statistical data and by providing up-to-date survey data of the stakeholders. It looked broadly across the theatre industry at the reported experiences of theatre artists and managers, and examined figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on the numbers of NESB artists in film, theatre and television. It was a national study conducted independently by researchers from the Workplace Studies Centre and the Communications Law Centre at Victoria University in Melbourne, with significant input by consultants Effective Change. All research development and activities took place independently of the Australia Council, with research participants being assured of confidentiality and only broad findings reported to the Australia Council.

The main techniques used in the study were:

- a review of recent Australian literature looking at the representation of NESB people in film, television and theatre (undertaken in early 1998);
- semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders in the theatre industry (held between February and May 1998);
- a mail survey (conducted between April and June 1998) of 970 theatre employees, mainly actors, directors and creative team members. These worked for 80 randomly selected Australian theatre companies and groups around Australia;
- a further, simultaneous survey of theatre group managers from the 80 companies and groups;
- examination of Australian Bureau of Statistics data from 1996.

The study focused on professional or paid theatre artists rather than amateur/unpaid artists, although it is recognised that many artists find themselves doing both paid and unpaid theatre work at any given time. Moreover, actors and other artists often move frequently between roles in theatre, film and television. Despite the limitations of this approach, it is possible to argue that the payment of wages to artists symbolises how much their work is valued and recognised within a society's culture. In that sense, it might show how far society has truly incorporated multiculturalism within its artistic life.

THE ISSUES

Actors Joe Spano (Italian background) and Tony Le Nguyen (Vietnamese born) have been quoted as saying their ethnicity hurt their employment opportunities in Australian theatre, television and film. As Spano puts it:

Having an Italian background and an Italian name definitely made a difference in the period from 1980 to 1990 I was definitely marginalised and even up until today I have still played a lot more 'ethnic' characters than I have 'non-ethnic'. (Cohen, 1998: 25–26).

Similarly, Tony Le Nguyen found the only way to get acting work was by scriptwriting, directing and acting in his own play *Chay Vong Vong*, which focuses on his experiences as a Vietnamese Australian growing up in the western suburbs of Melbourne (ibid.). In this study, we investigate how typical such experiences are. We look at the numbers of NESB artists employed in Australian theatre as well as the kinds of roles and productions they are generally given to work in. We question how much Australian theatre has incorporated the immigrants' experiences and artistic insights. Has Australian theatre changed to incorporate more actors and plays from other countries? Has it included more plays about Australians from a range of countries? Or has it stuck to the standard English fare of Shakespeare or Anglo-Celtic–Australian writers such as David Williamson? And what does all this mean for the artists and Australian society as a whole?

The term 'ethnic' has been used in this report with some reservation. We recognise its potentially pejorative and racist meaning when applied to people of NESB origin but not to people of other ethnicities, such as Anglo-Celtic, who similarly belong to an 'ethnic' group. The important difference with Anglo-Celtic people is that, being from the dominant ethnic group in Australia, that ethnicity is often not acknowledged or recognised. Nevertheless, we have used the term 'ethnic' when quoting other writers or informants (such as interviewees), or occasionally when referring to non Anglo-Celtic artists and their works. We hope that no pejorative sense is inferred.

The available research literature clearly suggests that NESB people are under represented in all three media – film, television and theatre. ABS figures seem to back this up. For example, while about one quarter (24.2 per cent) of all Australians are first or second generation NESB, only 21 per cent of actors, 14 per cent of artistic directors and 17 per cent of actors/dancers/related professionals working in these industries are NESB.

If we assume that NESB artists are equally motivated to work in these industries, you would expect to find their numbers reflect the proportions of NESB people in the Australian population. We would also expect to see more NESB actors playing major roles in main stage theatre. But this is not the case, as the ABS figures show. There could be various reasons for these figures. NESB people may not be as interested in participating in the art forms. Some have suggested that NESB communities tend to discourage professional participation in the arts in favour of more traditional employment, as in business, law or industry. NESB people may also have less interest in the works and forms currently being programmed and presented. They may be less able to meet the demands of 'excellence' set by the mainstream culture, or their work may not be commercially viable. Alternatively, they may experience direct or indirect discrimination in relation to either funding, script development, casting, programming, artistic direction, marketing or decision making within these industries.

Why does the issue of representation matter? Apart from the philosophical issues – the importance of Australian productions reflecting our day to day cultural life – there are many reasons why it is important that NESB artists are fully represented. To begin with, if there are artificial limits imposed on NESB artists' opportunities to work, this would be both unfair and illegal, given our anti-discrimination laws. At both federal and State levels, Australia has equal

opportunity and anti-discrimination laws which expressly prohibit discrimination in employment due to race or national origin.

In addition, potential audiences from the NESB communities might feel alienated and unable to enjoy the artistic productions offered if most plays feature only English speaking background (ESB) actors. Australian society would be poorer if only the artistic contributions of one segment of its population – the Anglo-Celtic communities, such as the English, Irish and Scots – were represented. Various export and tourism opportunities to showcase our diverse ethnic talents might be missed. Finally, the development of a distinctly Australian (multicultural) theatre, as opposed to a more derivative, English or traditional Australian version, would be stunted.

How far has Australian theatre come in celebrating and reflecting the cultural richness of Australian life at the turn of the century? Does it portray ethnic groups as stereotypes or does it fully show the various roles which NESB people play in Australian life? These issues are explored more fully in the remainder of this report.

REFERENCES

Australia Council 1996 *Corporate Plan 1996–1999*.

Collins, J. 1991 *Migrant Hands in a Distant Land* Australia's post-war immigration, Pluto Press, NSW.

Cohen, J. 'Into the Mainstream. The Path Less Travelled ...'
Jo Cohen interview with Joe Spano, *Ethnic Voice*, Autumn 1998: 25–26.

'Vietnamese Actor Not Willing to Wait',
Nexus (newspaper of Victoria University of Technology), Vol. 8, No. 14, April 1998:3.

WHAT PREVIOUS RESEARCH HAS FOUND

2.

2 .

WHAT PREVIOUS RESEARCH HAS FOUND

For some years there has been a lively discussion in the literature concerning the representation of NESB people in film and television. It has raised concerns about the way minorities are portrayed in our culture, as well as the limited opportunities for NESB people to work as actors. In this study, we surveyed only the most recent Australian literature since the 1990s.

In searching for relevant reports, articles and papers, we adopted a dual definition of the term 'representation'. The first relates to information about the numbers of NESB people working in theatre, film and television in the roles of cast, director or member of the creative team. This statistical information allows an assessment of the level of involvement of NESB people in the dramatic arts. The second relates to the way that NESB people are portrayed in plays, film and television shows – what kinds of roles NESB actors play, what kinds of cultural issues are addressed, and by implication, what roles NESB actors do not play and what issues are not addressed. In this section, we provide only a brief summary of the literature review undertaken for this study.

GOVERNMENT STUDIES

In the early 1990s the Commonwealth Office of Multicultural Affairs commissioned four studies on the issue of cultural diversity in the media (Goodall et. al., 1990; Bell, 1992; Coupe et. al. 1992 and Castles et. al., 1994). The first three studies examined the presentation of NESB people in news and current affairs, but also gave some attention to the portrayal of NESB people in television dramas. They were unanimous in their conclusion that the Australian media do not reflect the diversity of Australian society, with ESB culture given privileged treatment as representing the traditional culture of Australia. They found that most advertisements excluded anyone of NESB while comedy programs relied heavily on stereotyped images of NESB Australians (Goodall et. al., 1990).

An analysis by Bell, 1992 of the popular television programs *Neighbours*, *Home and Away* and *A Country Practice* concluded that Australian television family drama was almost completely monocultural in the period studied, a situation he described as

'cast blanche'. None of the episodes examined by the study explored issues relevant to a multicultural society, nor did they feature NESB people as regular, normal or unproblematic characters. The few NESB portrayals suggested that such people are marginalised or excluded from society (Bell, 1992: 59–60).

Overall, the media was seen as failing to provide a strong, positive image of cultural diversity in our society, with multiculturalism shown as dealing only with superficial differences such as folk customs and cuisine (Bell, 1992: 82). Not surprisingly, NESB Australian audiences studied by Coupe et. al., thought that Australian drama rarely included non-Anglo people and tended to present limited and mainly negative representations when it did.

The fourth study was a wide-ranging qualitative examination of the situation of NESB artists in Australia, co-ordinated by Stephen Castles and Mary Kalantzis of the (then) Centre for Multicultural Studies at the University of Newcastle and published in four volumes. Volume 4, dealing with performing artists and written by Anna Messariti, covered the situation of artists in drama and most closely resembles the scope of our own report into theatre, television and film.

Its findings were very consistent with studies of the media. NESB artists regarded themselves as marginalised and stereotyped by contemporary dramatic institutions and productions, and the notion of 'excellence' applied to drama was seen as a highly problematic Anglo-Celtic construction. Audiences were generally perceived, particularly by commercial theatres, as Anglo-Celtic (Messariti: (i) and (iii), in Castles et. al., 1994) and shows such as *Neighbours* were popular because of the monocultural myth of Australian society they portrayed (ibid. 15).

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Extensive research into these questions has been conducted by academics at the University of Technology, Sydney and drawn together in Jakubowicz et. al. 1994 *Racism, Ethnicity and the Media*. Like the government studies, that research concluded that the Australian media have failed to engage fully and equitably with racial and ethnic diversity in our society (Jakubowicz et. al., 1994: 196). To change this, the authors suggest an overhaul of employment practices in the media, more attention to scripting, producing, directing and reporting of Australian society, together with more research on Australian audiences, their expectations and desires for change.

A number of conferences in recent years have also focused on the issue of cultural diversity in the media, such as that held by the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) in 1991 looking at scriptwriting, and two others hosted by the Communications Law Centre (CLC) in 1993 and 1995. These last two concluded there was significant stereotyping and tokenism in relation to NESB Australians and that for the average viewer, there was little evidence of change. In 1998, the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria held a conference on barriers to NESB artists gaining arts grants, offering ideas on ways these could be overcome.



AUDIENCE STUDIES

In contrast to the negative analysis of Australian media and drama, recent audience studies have shown that, by and large, Australian audiences want to see more productions which give an accurate representation of life in our multicultural society (Jakubowicz et. al., 1994; Nugent et. al., 1993). Participants in group discussions were critical of the lack of representation of NESB Australians other than limited or negative stereotypes. The casting practices of Australian soap operas, in particular, were criticised as leading to the portrayal of a white, Anglo-Celtic Australia that excludes 'ethnics', Asians, Aboriginals and blacks. Participants also criticised the use of NESB actors of one nationality or ethnicity to play a character of a different nationality or ethnicity, and the use of ESB people to play roles for which an NESB person could have been used.

Many participants felt that NESBs were not seen or were rarely portrayed, with more Asians and Muslims believing this than Italians or Greeks. American programs, in contrast, were perceived to include a greater number of NESBs than Australian programs.

Content analysis by the ABA study showed that in the course of one week, Australian television programs featured only 14 NESB characters representing only three ethnic backgrounds. The report concluded that although the level of representation of non-Anglo characters was limited, the nature of representation was generally balanced and diverse (Nugent et. al., 1993).

The Cultural Perspectives group has argued the need for arts organisations to develop more multicultural audiences if they are to stay commercially afloat and reap the benefits. In a resource book published by the Australia Council *The World is Your Audience*, the point is made that NESB people have half the participation rate in arts and cultural activities compared to other Australians (1998: 4). The other half is seen as an untapped audience which could be developed through strategies, in partnerships with 'ethnic' communities, to increase the participation of NESB people in the arts. In this sense, the issue of ethnic representation in the arts is seen as an economic one which Australian organisations can ill afford to ignore.

However, it is not seen only as an issue of filling seats with NESB audience members or simply encouraging more NESB people to attend existing art events. Rather, the very cultural content of the artworks being presented is questioned. Genuine audience development techniques would promote the development of more culturally diverse artforms that would in turn appeal to a wider range of people.

If Australian television reflects the end product of a monocultural process, script writing provides the origin of much of the cultural material dealt with in drama. A study by the Australian Writers' Guild in 1997 identified nearly 300 NESB scriptwriters, 40 per cent of whom responded to a written survey. The writers reported facing significant problems in getting their works produced, over and above those faced by writers generally. Sixty-eight per cent of first generation NESB writers cited such problems as stereotyping, language barriers, discrimination, a small market, difficulties breaking into the mainstream and lack of translating services. A large number (39 per cent) claimed they were victims of discrimination as NESB scriptwriters. The study made the salient

point that there is considerable diversity in the writing population in Australia, but so far, it has been underutilised or overlooked (James, 1997: 37).

COMMENTARY

For Lex Marinos, a long time Greek Australian actor, the current representation of NESB people in Australian drama sends the message that:

Whole sections of our society simply do not exist ... And the message that they receive from their exclusion on television is that they are not part of Australia. To disenfranchise so many people by perpetuating the image of Australia according to *Neighbours* is immature, irresponsible, inhuman and potentially damaging to our society. (Marinos, 1995: 37).

At an individual level, the feeling of being 'other' may affect the self-esteem and empowerment of young NESB people (CLC, 1993; Hawthorne, 1995). At the AFTRS script writing conference, writer Anna Maria Dell Oso said:

If you are not visible, it is hard for you to learn about yourself ... where you have come from ... where you are going. If you are not visible, it is next to impossible for others to learn about you ... to hear about life from your point of view. (Carmichael, 1991: 18).

Filmmaker Monica Pellizari has described how, when growing up, her feelings of alienation were exacerbated by what she saw on television:

I grew up addicted to television and yet never saw anybody that looked like my immediate family on screen. In the rare moments they were represented, they were misrepresented. (Colbert, 1997: 23).

While there is theoretical debate about how powerful such media representations are in shaping a society's culture – audiences are not passive recipients, and may subvert or invert what they see on television – Jakubowicz et. al., maintain that the media play a key role in defining social relations and ideas about race and ethnicity.

SUMMARY

The main findings from the literature are:

- c NESB people are under represented. There are too few NESB actors seen (especially on television).
- c The representation of NESB people tends to be limited. When NESB people are portrayed, it is often in stereotypical and tokenistic ways. The representation of Asians tend to be characterised by a lack of cultural sensitivity and failure to differentiate between Asian countries and groups within them (Marinos, 1995; Shaw, 1992). NESB actors are rarely given the chance to act outside NESB roles. Jakubowicz et. al. summarise the situation in Australian advertisements and soaps as: 'the cook, the thief, his wife and her grocer. NESB Australians are often portrayed as marginal to the fundamental unit of the family. They are usually subservient (e.g. cooks, waiters, grocers) or dangerous ...' (75).

- c The tendency to exclude NESB characters or to include limited and stereotypical NESB characters limits employment opportunities for NESB actors. Speculating on what sort of a career American film actor Robert De Niro would have had in Australia, Marinos concluded that:

He would probably have done some community theatre, some commercials for pasta and Mafia send-ups, a stint in a soap as a fruiterer, and an occasional role as a taxi driver. He would probably have had to supplement his meager income by being a taxi driver. I doubt that he would ever have played the lead in *Taxi Driver*.

(Marinos, 1995: 39).

- c The argument for increasing the presence of NESB actors raises issues for both NESB and ESB actors, such as the controversy in the United States where the Actors' Equity Association tried to stop British actor Jonathon Pryce from playing the role of a Eurasian in *Miss Saigon*.
- c The relative absence of NESB roles and the prevalence of stereotypes fail to reflect the multicultural nature of Australian society. This is variously described as a nostalgic depiction of pre-immigration Australia (Hawthorne, 1996; Brown, 1992) and as evidence of an unofficial and unconsciously operating White Australia policy (Marinos, 1995).
- c Issues relating to multiculturalism in Australia and the experiences of NESB people are not adequately reflected.

Television is seen as most resistant to properly reflecting Australia's cultural diversity, due to the commercial imperative and the notion that audiences cannot cope with anything other than tokenistic or stereotyped images of NESB Australians.

The commercial imperative – the need to maximise audiences – is seen as leading to lowest common denominator programming, thus reflecting the majority or dominant Australian culture. However, others have challenged this notion, suggesting that Australians will watch authentic depictions of multicultural life in Australia, provided they are well produced (Carmichael, 1991: 19).

The failure to see any accurate portrayal of their lives and issues has prompted some NESBs to seek opportunities to tell their own stories. Film and theatre are seen as providing more scope to do this. Examples include the films of Pellizzari and Kokkinos and author Christos Tsiolkas, all of whom have produced works exploring the experiences and lives of Australians of southern European backgrounds.

Others challenge the view that theatre has remained Anglocentric. Milne (1994) identifies various organisations which have been involved in producing multicultural theatre in recent years, such as Doppio Teatro, FILEF, Taqa, Passport Theatre, La Troupe, Filiki and Hildegarde. Indeed, La Troupe is committed to challenging stereotypes and making theatre about and for people to whom mainstream theatre is irrelevant (Rose, 1992). Theatre Oneiron, a Greek Australian performance ensemble, is another example of theatre which seeks to cater to the needs of an 'ethnic' audience which has been neglected to date (Kapetopoulos, 1991). As these sources are dated, it is likely the industry has

changed and some examples are no longer as relevant as others. Since the preparation of the original report new cases of contemporary multicultural theatre have been cited such as Doppio Parallelo and Northern Rivers Performing Arts.

This review has found that most references discuss the representation of NESB people in the second sense – the kinds of roles played by NESB actors and the treatment of issues relevant to NESB people. There is also a focus on actors rather than directors and other members of the creative team. The portrayal of NESB people on Australian television has attracted most discussion and debate, with fewer references relating to film and theatre. There are even fewer references to statistical information about the numbers of NESB people working in these media. The literature is dated, insofar as it takes time for current developments to find their way into published commentary. For example, the recent television drama *Wildside*, which has featured a range of NESB actors and themes and screened to critical acclaim, suggests that casting and scriptwriting for television may be changing to become more multicultural.

While the current environment may provide some examples of change, these do not, however, detract from the overwhelming finding in the research, that theatre, film and television fail to represent Australia's cultural diversity. This situation is not only detrimental to NESB actors, who find it harder to obtain roles, particularly roles that are not ethno-specific. The invisibility or misrepresentation of NESB people also sends a powerful message of exclusion to those communities. Society as a whole misses out on the benefits which a more accurate portrayal of Australian life might bring.

These benefits are wide-ranging and include the sociopolitical benefits of authentically describing the dynamics of contemporary Australian society and the issues that emerge from that as well as artistic benefits, both to contemporary audiences and NESB artists, who have an opportunity to hear and present diverse Australian stories.

REFERENCES

Australia Council 1998 *The World is Your Audience: Case Studies in Audience Development and Cultural Diversity*, June, NSW.

Bell, P. 1992 *Multicultural Australia in the Media*, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Canberra.

Brown, C. 'Ethnic Stereotypes in Television', *Cinema Papers* No. 87, March-April 1992: 34–36.

Carmichael, H. 1991 *Seeing is Believing: Scriptwriting in a Multicultural Society*, Office of Multicultural Affairs.

Castles, S. Kalantzis, M., Cope, B., Gunew, S., Papastergiadis, N., Blonski, A., Hills, E., Messariti, A., Tsoutas, N. & Chandrabhanu 1994 *Access to Excellence: A Review of Issues Affecting Artists and Arts from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds*, Office of Multicultural Affairs.

- Colbert, M. Bi-Cultural Visions – The Films of Monica Pellizzari, *Cinema Papers* No. 117, June 1997: 22–25.
- Communications Law Centre 1992 *The Representation of Non-English Speaking Background People in Australian Television Drama* (Discussion Paper).
- Communications Law Centre 1993 *Media Self-Regulation and Cultural Diversity*, Sydney.
- Communications Law Centre 1993 *Self-Regulation and Cultural Diversity* (Conference Papers), Sydney.
- Communications Law Centre 1995 *Television and the Multicultural Audience* (Conference discussion paper and report), Sydney.
- Coupe, B., Jakobowicz, A. and Randall, L. 1992 *Next Door Neighbours*, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Canberra.
- Goodall, H., Jakobowicz, A., Martin, T., Mitchell, T., Randall, L. and Seneiratne, K. 1990 *Racism, Cultural Pluralism and the Media*, Office of Multicultural Affairs.
- Hawthorne, L., 'Soap opera in a multicultural Australia: Home and Away v. Heartbreak High' *BIMPR Bulletin* No. 15, November 1995: 33-35; also in Erickson H. (ed) *The Media's Australia*, the Australian Centre, University of Melbourne, 1996: 64–67.
- Jakubowicz, A. et. al. 1994 *Racism, Ethnicity and the Media*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- James, N. 1997 *NESB Research Project*, The Australian Writers' Guild, May.
- Kapetopoulos, F. 'Theatre Oneiron Crosses Cultural Bridges' *Artlink* Vol. 11, No. 1 & 2: 49.
- Marinos, L. 'Robert de Niro's waiting: Media images of ethnicity' in Guerra, C. & White, R. *Ethnic Minority Youth in Australia*, National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Tasmania 1995: 35–39.
- Milne, G. 'The Other Side of the Story: Multicultural Drama in Australia' *Meanjin* Vol. 53, 1994: 495–503.
- Nugent, S., Loncar, M. & Aisbett, K. 1993 *The People We See On Television: Cultural Diversity on Television*, Monograph 3, Australian Broadcasting Authority.
- Shaw, S. 'The Asian Screen Test' *Cinema Papers* No. 87, March-April 1992: 34–40.

STATISTICS ON NESB REPRESENTATION

3 .

3 .

STATISTICS ON NESB REPRESENTATION

Very few references give any hard data on the actual numbers of NESB people performing in theatre, film and television. Content analysis of particular television shows has been the basis for most estimates, but this gives no indication of the numbers of NESB actors across the board.

In 1993, the Media Arts and Entertainment Alliance (MEAA) estimated that less than 2 per cent of acting roles in mainstream television drama were played by Aboriginals and members of the 'ethnic' communities (quote by Anne Britton at the CLC's Self Regulation and Cultural Diversity conference). Two years later Britton suggested there had been a modest improvement to approximately 4.5 per cent, although this could be skewed by programs with 'ethnic' themes such as *Heartbreak High* and *Bordertown*.

Such figures as there are continue to be used in debates about cultural diversity. Marinos (1995:35) has made the point that 2 per cent is pitifully low compared to the 35 per cent of Australian society who are from NES backgrounds (including first, second and later generations).

As important as numbers are, others have argued that the profile and stature of NESB artists is an important indicator of their involvement in the arts. In a multicultural society we would expect talented NESB artists to perform a range of significant artistic roles. So the way that NESB artists are depicted in film, television and theatre is a key concern of any study of the representation of NESB people. This issue is examined in more detail in Section 4, while the question of numbers is examined in this section.

It is not difficult to measure the participation of first and second generation NESB migrants in the arts as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) collects census data on birthplaces, parents' birthplace, occupations and industry of employment. The discussion which follows is based on statistics from the 1996 ABS publication 'Employment in Selected Culture/Leisure Occupations'. It omits any analysis of Aboriginal representation, which is beyond the scope of the study.

REPRESENTATION ACROSS THEATRE, FILM AND TELEVISION

The census figures show that in 1996, there were 95 NESB₁ (first generation) actors out of a total workforce of 1506 professional actors, or 6.3 per cent of this occupation. As 14 per cent of the population were NESB₁, this represents less than half the number of NESB₁ actors one would expect to find.

Somewhat more NESB₁s (7.6 per cent) were employed in the category 'actors/dancers/related professionals' (117 out of 1144), but this still falls far short of what would be expected. Again, slightly more art directors (8.3 per cent) were NESB₁, while 16 per cent of program directors on radio/television were NESB₁, a figure that slightly exceeds the proportion of NESB₁s in the population (ibid.24). Using population statistics as a yard stick, this initial analysis shows that first generation NESB people are generally under represented as artists and creative team members to a very significant degree.

Second generation NESBs (NESB₂s – people who were born in Australia and had at least one parent born in an NES country) made up nearly 11 per cent of the population in 1996. English speaking background people born in Australia made up 64 per cent and migrants born in English speaking countries 8.4 per cent. Table 1 presents these population figures in full.

TABLE 1: AUSTRALIAN POPULATION BY ETHNIC ORIGIN

AUSTRALIAN BORN		
	NUMBER	% OF POPULATION
▣ ESB Australian (of ESB parents or indigenous)	11,338,292	63.9%
▣ NESB ₂ (at least one parent born in NES country)	1,889,484	10.6%
▣ SUBTOTAL	13,227,776	74.5%
OVERSEAS BORN		
	NUMBER	% OF POPULATION
▣ ESB immigrant (born in North America, UK and Ireland)	1,490,441	8.4%
▣ NESB ₁ (born in an NES country)	2,411,449	13.6%
▣ SUBTOTAL	3,901,890	22.0%
NOT STATED		
	NUMBER	% OF POPULATION
▣ (ESTIMATED)	623,163	0.5%
TOTAL	17,753,829	100%

▣ Based on 1996 Census Data, Australian Bureau of Statistics.
 'Not stated' includes inadequately stated, born at sea etc.

Compared to the population, the occupational figures indicate that ESB migrants are over represented. While they made up just over 8 per cent of the population, nearly double that proportion (15.5 per cent) were employed as ‘actors/dancers/ related professionals’ and again, 16.6 per cent as ‘actors’. Australian born people were also over represented, to a lesser degree – 74 per cent, compared to 64 per cent in the population. This suggests that migrants from English speaking countries have a much higher rate of employment in the dramatic arts than either NESB or Australian born people.

The proportions do not change greatly if workforce figures are used instead of population figures. In 1996, the proportion of NESB1s in the workforce was slightly higher (at 13.9 per cent) than the population figure (13.6 per cent). Slightly fewer NESB2s (10.2 per cent) were in the workforce compared to the population (10.6 per cent) but this also changes the picture very little.

Whether population or workforce figures are used depends on whether one feels that artistic participation should reflect demographics or the economic realities of people’s participation in the workforce. This report has adopted the latter view as the basis for most of its analysis.

The term ‘NESB’ is a crude and rather artificial way to categorise a large number of people originating from diverse countries. More information on how people of different ethnic origins fare in the arts can be gained by looking at their countries of birth. Because population and workforce figures for many birthplace countries are relatively small, the ABS combines these into major world regions, such as ‘Other Europe (excluding UK) and USSR’, South East Asia, North East Asia and so on. Table 2 shows the figures for such groups in the Australian workforce.

TABLE 2: BREAKDOWN OF AUSTRALIAN NESB1 WORKFORCE, (EMPLOYED PERSONS) BY REGION OF ORIGIN

REGION	NUMBER	% OF POPULATION
Other Europe and USSR	464,959	6.1%
Middle East and North Africa	70,901	0.9%
South East Asia	199,606	2.6%
North East Asia	100,242	1.3%
Southern Asia	75,334	1.0%
South and Central America	37,385	0.5%
Africa	44,660	0.6%
Oceania (estimated)	70,869	0.9%
TOTAL	1,063,962	13.9%

Based on 1996 Census Data, Australian Bureau of Statistics.
Oceania includes PNG, Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia.

The figures in table 2 will be used to assess the participation of people from various parts of the world in defined artistic occupations. In the following sections, we look more closely at the participation of NESB people in five ABS occupational categories across the three discrete industries of theatre, film and television.

REPRESENTATION IN THEATRE

The ABS publishes occupational statistics relative to two industries which would fit our general understanding of 'theatre', 'music and theatre productions' and 'performing arts venues'. Since the actual numbers in some occupations, such as artistic director, can be very small, some caution is needed in interpreting the figures. The ABS sometimes alters the figures to protect the confidentiality of individuals. Bearing this caveat in mind, it is possible to arrive at some general observations concerning the participation of NESB people in theatre.

The ABS statistics show that, overall, only 3 per cent of artistic jobs in theatre were held by people born in Other Europe (excluding UK) and USSR, compared to 6.1 per cent holding jobs in the workforce. This suggests only half the number of Europeans and Russians had jobs in theatre compared to the proportion who were employed overall. Table 3 provides more detailed breakdowns by occupation, with that of artistic director showing the highest level of under representation.

TABLE 3: PROPORTIONS OF EMPLOYED ARTISTS IN THE AUSTRALIAN THEATRE INDUSTRY BY BIRTHPLACE – NESB1S

COUNTRY OF BIRTH: OVERSEAS (OTHER EUROPE AND USSR)	INDUSTRY						TOTAL		
	MUSIC & THEATRE PRODUCTIONS			PERFORMING ARTS VENUES					
OCCUPATION	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%
Artistic director	0	54	0%	3	22	1.4%	3	76	4%
Artists & related professionals n.f.d	7	150	5%	0	18	0%	7	168	4%
Actors, dancers & related professionals	0	10	0%	0	-	-	0	10	0%
Actor	13	508	3%	5	143	3%	18	651	3%
Actors, dancers & related professionals	17	444	4%	0	27	0%	17	471	4%
TOTAL	37	1166	3%	8	210	4%	45	1376	3%

∴ **Note:** 13.6% of the Australian population and 13.9% of the Australian workforce were NESB1 (born in a country where English is not the main spoken language) in 1996, 6.2% of the population and 6.1% of the workforce were from Other Europe and USSR.

∴ **n.f.d** – not further defined.

∴ **Source:** 1996 Census Data (unpublished) and ABS Catalogue No. 6273.0 *Employment in Selected Culture/Leisure Occupations*.

Asians experienced an even higher rate of under representation, with only 2 per cent of artistic jobs going to people born in Asia, compared to 4.9 per cent employed in the Australian workforce. This suggests there were 60 per cent less Asian artists than would be expected on the basis of their numbers as workers. See table 4 below.

TABLE 4: PROPORTIONS OF EMPLOYED ARTISTS IN THE AUSTRALIAN THEATRE INDUSTRY BY BIRTHPLACE – NESB1S (CONTD.)

COUNTRY OF BIRTH: OVERSEAS ASIA (INCLUDES SOUTH EAST ASIA, NORTH EAST ASIA, SOUTHERN ASIA)	INDUSTRY						TOTAL		
	MUSIC & THEATRE PRODUCTIONS			PERFORMING ARTS VENUES					
OCCUPATION	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%
Artistic director	0	54	0%	3	22	14%	3	76	4%
Artists & related professionals n.f.d	13	150	9%	0	18	0%	13	168	8%
Actors, dancers & related professionals	0	10	0%	0	-	-	0	10	0%
Actor	9	508	2%	0	143	0%	9	651	1%
Actors, dancers & related professionals	6	444	1%	0	27	0%	6	471	1%
TOTAL	28	1166	2%	3	210	1%	31	1376	2%

∴ **Note:** 14.8% of the Australian population and 4.9% of the Australian workforce were born in Asia (out of a total 13.6% of the population which were NESB1 and 13.9% of the workforce who were NESB1) in 1996.

∴ **n.f.d** – not further defined.

∴ **Source:** 1996 Census Data (unpublished) and ABS Catalogue No. 6273.0 *Employment in Selected Culture/Leisure Occupations*.

Asians were either absent or significantly under represented amongst some categories (artistic directors in music and theatre productions and actors in both industries), yet oddly, over represented amongst artistic directors in performing arts venues.

Table 5 presents the proportions of Africans and Middle Eastern people (NESB1s) in theatre. It shows a slight level of under representation (1.4 per cent) compared to the general workforce representation (1.7 per cent). Interestingly, a much higher proportion (6 per cent) were artistic directors in the music and theatre industry, suggesting there was significant over representation. However, as ABS figures include white South Africans in the category of 'Africa' it is likely this reflects their higher rate of employment, in the same way that ESB people tend to be over represented generally.

TABLE 5: PROPORTIONS OF EMPLOYED ARTISTS IN THE AUSTRALIAN THEATRE INDUSTRY BY BIRTHPLACE – NESB1S (CONTD.)

COUNTRY OF BIRTH: OVERSEAS (MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA)	INDUSTRY						TOTAL		
	MUSIC & THEATRE PRODUCTIONS			PERFORMING ARTS VENUES					
OCCUPATION	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%
Artistic director	3	54	6%	0	22	0%	3	76	4%
Artists & related professionals n.f.d	3	150	2%	0	18	0%	3	168	2%
Actors, dancers & related professionals	0	10	0%	0	-	-	0	10	0%
Actor	11	508	2%	0	143	0%	11	651	2%
Actors, dancers & related professionals	3	444	0.7%	0	27	0%	3	471	0.6%
TOTAL	20	1166	1.7%	0	210	0%	20	1376	1.4%

- ⚡ **Note:** 1.7% of the Australian population and 1.7% of the Australian workforce were born in the Middle East or Africa (out of a total of 13.6% of the population which were NESB1 and 13.9% of the workforce who were NESB1) in 1996.
- ⚡ **n.f.d** – not further defined.
- ⚡ **Source:** 1996 Census Data (unpublished) and ABS Catalogue No. 6273.0 *Employment in Selected Culture/Leisure Occupations*.

In summary, the ABS figures show clearly that NESB1 people were significantly under represented in theatre, particularly in the case of Asians, and to a somewhat lesser extent, Europeans and Russians. In contrast, second generation NESBs (NESB2s) were represented at levels appropriate to their numbers, although this was not true of higher level artistic occupations such as artistic directors. The under representation of first and second generation NESBs amongst directors suggests that members of the ‘ethnic’ communities generally enjoy lower status in theatre than ESB people.

Table 6 sets out the full figures for NESB2 people in theatre, which for practical reasons could not be broken down into world regions

TABLE 6: PROPORTIONS OF EMPLOYED ARTISTS IN THE AUSTRALIAN THEATRE INDUSTRY BY BIRTHPLACE – AUSTRALIA – NESB2

COUNTRY OF BIRTH: AUSTRALIA NESB2 (at least one parent born in an NES country)	INDUSTRY						TOTAL		
	MUSIC & THEATRE PRODUCTIONS			PERFORMING ARTS VENUES					
OCCUPATION	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%
Artistic director	3	54	6%	0	22	0%	3	76	4%
Artists & related professionals n.f.d	11	150	7%	0	18	0%	11	168	7%
Actors, dancers & related professionals	3	10	3%	0	-	-	3	10	3%
Actor	60	508	12%	19	143	13%	79	651	12%
Actors, dancers & related professionals	40	444	9%	3	27	11%	43	471	9%
TOTAL	117	1166	10%	22	210	10%	139	1376	10%

∴ **Note:** 10.6% of the Australian population were NESB2 in 1996, and 10.2% of the workforce were NESB2.

∴ **n.f.d** – not further defined.

∴ **Source:** 1996 Census Data (unpublished) and ABS Catalogue No. 6273.0 *Employment in Selected Culture/Leisure Occupations*.

How did non-indigenous Australians of English speaking background fare in these jobs? The figures (which in fact include indigenous people) show a very close fit between the proportion of Australian-born artists and their numbers in the general workforce, suggesting a fairly appropriate level of representation. Compared to their representation in the general workforce (64 per cent), Australian born people were under represented in some theatre occupations, such as actors in performing arts venues (58 per cent) and artists and related professionals in music and theatre productions (58 per cent), but overall, their representation was similar to both the general workforce and the population.

TABLE 7: PROPORTIONS OF EMPLOYED ARTISTS IN THE AUSTRALIAN THEATRE INDUSTRY SECTOR BY BIRTHPLACE – AUSTRALIA (ESB AUSTRALIANS)

COUNTRY OF BIRTH: AUSTRALIA ESB Australian (of ESB parents and indigenous)	INDUSTRY								
	MUSIC & THEATRE PRODUCTIONS			PERFORMING ARTS VENUES			TOTAL		
OCCUPATION	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%
Artistic director	37	54	68%	14	22	64%	51	76	67%
Artists & related professionals n.f.d	87	150	58%	14	18	77%	101	168	60%
Actors, dancers & related professionals	6	10	60%	0	-	-	6	10	60%
Actor	332	508	65%	83	143	58%	415	651	64%
Actors, dancers & related professionals	290	444	65%	15	27	56%	305	471	65%
TOTAL	752	1166	64%	126	210	60%	1376	878	64%

- ⚡ **Note:** 63% of the Australian Population in 1996 were ESB Australian, and 64% of the workforce were ESB Australian
- ⚡ **n.f.d** – not further defined.
- ⚡ **Source:** 1996 Census Data (unpublished) and ABS Catalogue No. 6273.0 *Employment in Selected Culture/Leisure Occupations*.

The picture changes significantly when the proportion of ESB migrants in theatre is analysed. Since a number of industry representatives interviewed for this study suggested British people had a particularly high level of participation in theatre, we have broken the figures down into those born in the UK and Ireland, New Zealand and Northern America. The statistics definitely support the qualitative data drawn from interviews. Migrants from the UK and Ireland have 30 per cent higher participation in theatre (11 per cent) than in the workforce generally (7.8 per cent). In particular, they were over represented amongst artistic directors in both music and theatre productions and performing arts venues.

People from New Zealand were also over represented (4 per cent of artistic jobs compared to 2.3 per cent of the workforce) and North Americans particularly so (2 per cent of artistic jobs compared to 0.6 per cent of the workforce). Table 8 shows the figures for those born in UK and Ireland.

TABLE 8: PROPORTIONS OF EMPLOYED ARTISTS IN THE AUSTRALIAN THEATRE INDUSTRY BY BIRTHPLACE – OVERSEAS (ESB IMMIGRANTS)

COUNTRY OF BIRTH: UK AND IRELAND	INDUSTRY						TOTAL		
	MUSIC & THEATRE PRODUCTIONS			PERFORMING ARTS VENUES					
OCCUPATION	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%
Artistic director	5	54	9%	3	22	14%	8	76	11%
Artists & related professionals n.f.d	16	150	11%	3	18	17%	19	168	17%
Actors, dancers & related professionals	0	10	0%	0	-	-	0	10	0%
Actor	40	508	7%	19	143	13%	59	651	9%
Actors, dancers & related professionals	63	444	14%	3	27	11%	66	471	14%
TOTAL	124	1166	11%	28	210	13%	152	1376	11%

- ∴ **Note:** 8.4% of the population and 10.6% of the workforce were ESB immigrants in 1996, 6.3% of the population and 7.8% of the workforce were from UK and Ireland.
- ∴ **n.f.d** – not further defined.
- ∴ **Source:** 1996 Census Data (unpublished) and ABS Catalogue No. 6273.0 *Employment in Selected Culture/Leisure Occupations*.

In summary, the statistics show that in 1996, Australian-born people made up 64 per cent of the theatre workforce in selected artistic occupations, second generation NESB people made up 10 per cent, ESB migrants made up 17 per cent, and the remaining 8 or 9 per cent were first generation NESBs. ESB migrants seem to have done particularly well, at the expense of NESB1 migrants, who were significantly under represented. The other two categories (Australian-born and NESB2) were represented at about the right level relative to their concentrations in the general workforce. Asians had the greatest level of under representation in the theatre industry.

REPRESENTATION IN FILM, RADIO, VIDEO AND TELEVISION INDUSTRIES

The situation for NESB people in these industries is different from theatre, although NESB people continue to be under represented. Second generation NESB people have obtained a considerable share of jobs in these media, well over their general representation in the workforce, as have ESB migrants. In contrast, Australian-born people of English speaking origins are somewhat under represented. This suggests that the electronic media have provided greater opportunities for second generation 'ethnic' Australians than theatre, but confirms the continuing advantages enjoyed by migrants of English speaking origins, who have a higher level of participation than would be expected from their population numbers.

Table 9 shows the numbers of NESB¹ people from selected regions of the world employed in film, radio, video and television.

TABLE 9: PROPORTIONS OF EMPLOYED ARTISTS IN THE AUSTRALIAN FILM, RADIO, VIDEO AND TELEVISION INDUSTRIES BY BIRTHPLACE – NESB¹

COUNTRY OF BIRTH: OVERSEAS (OTHER EUROPE & FORMER USSR, MIDDLE EAST, AFRICA, ASIA, SOUTH & CENTRAL AMERICA)	INDUSTRY											
	FILM & VIDEO PRODUCTION			TELEVISION SERVICES			FILM, RADIO & TELEVISION SERVICES UNDEFINED			TOTAL		
	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%	NUMBER	TOTAL EMPLOYED	%
Artistic director	3 ^R	12	25%	-	0	-	0	3	0%	3	15	20%
Artists & related professionals n.f.d	11	122	9%	9	139	6%	3	15	20%	23	276	8%
Actors, dancers & related professionals	-	-	-	0	3	0%	-	-	-	0	3	0%
Actor	3	173	2%	3	120	3%	3	45	7%	9	338	3%
Actors, dancers & related professionals	0	17	0%	0	15	0%	0	7	0%	0	39	0%
TOTAL	17	324	5%	12	277	4%	6	70	9%	35	671	5%

- ⚠ **Note:** 13.5% of the Australian population and 13.9% of the workforce were NESB¹ (born in a country where English is not the main spoken language) in 1996.
- ⚠ **n.f.d** – not further defined.
- ⚠ **Source:** 1996 Census Data (unpublished) and ABS Catalogue No. 6273.0 *Employment in Selected Culture/Leisure Occupations*.
- ⚠ This figure may have been altered by the ABS to protect individual identities, hence total number of artistic directors of different backgrounds in the industry exceeds 12 (the total employed).

The table is not a complete representation of all NESB₁ people, as it excludes those from Oceania and Southern and Central America. Nevertheless, with an overall participation of only 5 per cent, it suggests significant under representation (about 50 per cent) of NESB₁ people in these industries. This is particularly apparent for actors (only 3 per cent of whom were NESB₁) and actors, dancers and related professionals (0 per cent). Surprisingly, 20 per cent of artistic directors were NESB₁, a reversal of the pattern in the theatre industry, and suggesting considerable over representation.

ESB migrants were highly represented amongst artistic directors and actors, with an overall representation in jobs within these industries of 15 per cent (compared to 10.6 per cent of the workforce). Australian-born people of ESB origin were somewhat under represented across the industries, but at 62 per cent this would not be of great concern. The proportion of NESB₂ people in these industries was 14 per cent (compared to 10 per cent in the general workforce), suggesting the electronic media are more open to people of different cultural backgrounds than theatre, so long as they speak English and were born in Australia.

SUMMARY

The statistical analysis supports those who argue that the number of NESB artists employed in theatre, film and television is insufficient compared to their numbers within the population and general workforce. This is particularly true for first generation NESB artists, especially in theatre, and more so for Asians, although Europeans and Russians also face a high level of under representation. These findings contrast with the focus in the literature on under representation in television, which in fact seems to offer greater participation than theatre, at least to second generation NESB migrants.

Overall it appears that NESB migrants have fewer opportunities to make a living from artistic jobs in these industries than their Anglo-Celtic counterparts. It also means Australian audiences receive less exposure to people from a range of ethnic origins in artistic programs delivered by these industries. This may have implications for the nature and type of art works performed, with fewer of them reflecting the multicultural nature of Australian society than would otherwise be expected.

REFERENCES

Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996, *Employment in Selected Culture/Leisure Occupations* Catalogue No. 6273.0, and unpublished statistics based on 1996 Census of Population and Housing.

CONSULTATIONS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

4.

4 .

CONSULTATIONS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

A key feature of this study was the interviews held with 25 stakeholders in theatre, who between them represented 21 theatre organisations around Australia. These interviews provided rich and detailed information based on the personal observations of people who were highly placed within the theatre industry, such as art directors, casting agents, directors of art venues and funding agencies. Many backed up their comments with documentary material and further follow-up phone calls to clarify points. Spanning a cross-section of the industry, their comments on the issue of NESB representation within theatre offer a rare insight into the range of views on this topic.

While the number of interviews could not cover all organisations within the industry, those selected spanned several States and a number of major organisations, as well as community, regional and commercial theatres. As there were 320 theatre groups listed in the *Australian Performing Arts Directory*, a purposive selection was made with advice from the Australia Council to ensure that those with some depth of experience and ability to offer informed comment were included.

In addition to the theatre companies, interviews were held with representatives of federal and State arts funding bodies, relevant peak bodies of actors, employers and playwrights, multicultural arts organisations, production companies, venues, casting and theatrical agents and theatrical training institutions.

REPRESENTATION OF NESB PEOPLE IN THEATRE

The key issue was interpreted differently by many of the interviewees. Most interviewees from multicultural organisations, including community theatres, and some funding bodies, argued there was a fairly strong representation of cultural diversity in community arts programs, but NESB people were inadequately represented in mainstream theatre, both numerically and in the content of works. By 'mainstream' interviewees were referring to major funded theatres and commercial theatres where artists might expect to be paid for their work.

While many reasons were suggested, the main factor cited was Australia's close ties with England and English theatre traditions, forged during the critical years of post-war development. They gave examples of English staff being recruited into high level theatre positions, such as in major organisations and educational institutions, who had then influenced the norms and values adopted by Australian theatre. These values were thought to influence mainstream Australian theatre to the present day and were more closely aligned to English frames of reference than Australia's multicultural society. They were also seen to be middle class, contrasting with the values and aspirations of many working class 'ethnic' communities.

These views seemed to have some validity, since many interviewees (ranging from mainstream to regional and community) showed an inadequate understanding of ways in which theatre might promote the participation of NESB people and their communities. Many suggested the issue could be addressed by merely engaging an NESB actor or staff member. Some, including representatives of major organisations, saw cultural diversity in theatre as a worthy cause but not particularly important or relevant to their own audiences or organisations. In contrast, other theatres believed they had a responsibility to 'tell Australian stories' and therefore include works which reflected the nation's diverse population and range of experiences.

As one said:

To understand the broader culture, I need to hear stories from all our communities, to understand the incredible tapestry of this country I live in.

Others felt that the telling of such stories in theatre was impeded by entrenched attitudes:

This country is still having to deal with its own racism ... It is not conscious racism – it is deeply entrenched.

We've inherited a cultural paradigm that, like most of our institutions, is based on the colonial model ... People don't recognise the difference between English as the common language and culture. Being Australian is not the same as being English. The theatre doesn't reflect our culture. Theatre companies have pretended otherwise. That's how boards and funding bodies are set up.

It's a class issue. The arts sector is predominantly white middle class.
(quotes from separate interviewees).

However, the view from mainstream theatre was best exemplified by the person who said:

We are a general theatre company for a mass audience ... there is a danger in being all things for all people.

Clearly there was some debate about the mission which Australian theatre ought to pursue – should it appeal to the majority or 'mainstream' element of the community (presumably Anglo-Celtic audiences) or should it incorporate stories and artists from the vast range of ethnic communities in Australia? If the latter,

there was a variety of possibilities open to theatres, such as offering dramatic roles to NESB people, exploring cultural themes within dramatic works, producing works in languages other than English, presenting works written by NESB playwrights and presenting foreign language works from overseas.

Some organisations, most frequently those in the private sector, argued that their policies and practices were guided by the principle of excellence and were thus 'culturally blind'. Any creative artist or work which met the principle of excellence would be considered, irrespective of ethnicity or cultural issues. However, other stakeholders pointed out that 'excellence' is not a culturally neutral term and was often based on an Anglocentric view, with cultural biases determining what was considered to be 'excellent'.

POLICIES AND RECORD KEEPING

Very few organisations had policy or mission statements which expressed an explicit commitment to cultural diversity. Of those which did, the majority were organisations with a multicultural focus, such as community theatres and production companies, multicultural arts organisers and organisers of multicultural festivals. One organisation had adopted the Australia Council's *Arts for a Multicultural Australia* policy and tailored it to their organisation.

One regionally-based theatre had an explicit commitment to multiculturalism. Within its three year strategic plan were included such strategies as rotating artistic directors to ensure broad participation from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Other organisations had mission statements which supported broad and general goals, such as the development of Australian theatre or the pursuit of excellence, which they argued implied a commitment to cultural diversity. Some felt their commitment to cultural diversity was evidenced by related policies such as equal employment opportunity.

One organisation argued its mission statement and policies were framed to reflect the needs of its stakeholders, and that developing separate policies around cultural diversity would be retrograde and marginalise 'ethnic' communities.

Peak body organisations' mission statements pledged to uphold and respond to the needs of members, or member organisations, generally without specific reference to cultural diversity. Very few policies were identified, from the whole range of interviewees, which were specifically related to cultural diversity in casting, artistic decision making and programming.

In other words, there was little explicit commitment to ensuring that artworks performed by the companies told the stories of a broad range of Australians of different backgrounds nor that 'ethnic' community members would have a say in producing such works, either as directors or artists. A number of theatre groups complained their limited resources did not allow them to develop their organisational policies, as exemplified by this comment:

Generally people in theatre just get on and do the job. They don't spend too much time documenting their policies.

If most organisations lacked any formal policy on multiculturalism, their record keeping or data collection mechanisms on this issue were virtually non-existent. When asked if they kept ethnicity data about their staff and artists, such as country of birth or languages spoken, only one organisation reported that it did.

The National Institute for Dramatic Arts (NIDA) was able to give statistical information on first and second generation students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Their figures indicated that first generation (NESB₁) students were slightly under represented (at 11 per cent of enrolments) but second generation NESB students were over represented with 21 per cent of all students, and 31 per cent of acting students being NESB₂.

The NESB₂ student figures tend to undermine suggestions that second generation NESB people are more likely, due to cultural pressures, to move into traditional occupations, such as medicine and law, rather than the arts. This relates to the question of motivation, whether NESB people are as interested in pursuing artistic careers. According to the NIDA figures, they are.

Although some other interviewees thought their organisations collected relevant information, no further statistical information was received by the researchers. Consequently, the information on demographic data (both for staff and audiences) was highly impressionistic.

A number of organisations stated they lacked the time and resources to collect this information. Without it, however, it would be impossible to accurately gauge the extent to which Australian theatre reflects the cultural mix in the population. While employing NESB artists and staff in itself may not be sufficient to change the cultural content of Australian theatre, it may be a necessary factor in initiating change.

If a proforma report structure and guidelines were supplied, such record keeping could be implemented with relative ease, enabling objective data on the demographics in theatre to be collected. At least one stakeholder had never considered the idea previously (**I've never heard of it ... but I think it's a bloody great idea**), and was prompted by the question to initiate such record keeping in her own organisation.

There was a range of philosophical views on the collection of demographic data, particularly from funding bodies. The Australia Council argued that this information was needed to enable it to report on, and plan for, equitable distribution of funds, and to acquit their responsibilities in the expenditure of public monies. One interviewee from a State funding body, on the other hand, questioned the wisdom of collecting this data, which of itself would not provide meaningful information on the cultural themes addressed in artistic productions. There was some debate about the resources needed to collect and evaluate such data.

As one person put it:

It hasn't been collected because it hasn't been an issue. We are stretched to the limit of our capacity putting on the shows, that is the reality of it.



In the absence of such hard data, the issue of the representation of NESB people in theatre continues to revolve around impressions and subjective opinions. As earlier research has pointed out:

There is an appalling lack of information about the participation and success of NESB writers and artists. Where information does exist, the level of NESB participation appears to be below the proportion of the general population. Without more reliable measures, however, it would be impossible for these organisations to effectively plan to meet the needs of their NESB clients, or even be aware of the difficulties faced by NESB writers. (James, 1997: 20).

DECISION MAKING

(The lack of NESB representation on major organisations' boards) ... filters through to the work done by those companies. Where decisions are made, there is no advocate for NESB people. It is therefore not surprising they have low rates of employment of NESB performers.

What perpetuates this system (of cultural dominance) ... is the notion of 'excellence'. Before it is funded, it must be deemed excellent. But whose definition is it? If it can't be quantified, as it can in sport, for example, then it is subjective. Then it can only be informed by your active cultural heritage ... If all people making decisions have a common culture based on a common idea of what is excellent, then anything outside that won't be judged excellent, so it is excluded by the dominant, judging culture. (quotes from separate interviewees).

Decision-making structures and processes were considered the most significant in determining the portrayal of themes dealing with cultural diversity and/or the employment of NESB artists. Such decisions might relate to funding, programming, artistic aspects, casting and training of artists.

Interestingly, as the production of a play or other theatre work involves an intricate trail of decisions, often made by a number of independent organisations and individuals, interviewees from larger organisations were often ready to point to the influence of decision makers outside their own organisation.

It's really up to government policy/the funding bodies/ the board/the writers/the producers/ the directors/the casting agents/ the schools ... (garnered from various quotes).

In contrast, some large organisations did talk in terms of taking responsibility for such matters and providing leadership in the field and the community. Community-based and/or smaller organisations appeared to have greater autonomy to make decisions about programming, commissioning work, directing and casting. However, they were more reliant on the decisions of funding bodies for their existence.

FUNDING DECISIONS

As Australian theatre is highly subsidised, most interviewees felt that decisions and decision-making structures of federal and State arts funding bodies were the most critical. Government funding was considered vital to the success or failure of much theatre work in Australia, which would not generally survive on a solely commercial basis. Strong views were expressed on these matters as they related to the issue of cultural diversity. Interviewees were critical of a number of aspects, including:

- The nature of the application process for funding, which was perceived to be overly bureaucratic and difficult, and requiring a high level of English proficiency (although applications can be made in languages other than English, not many are aware of this).
- The lack of NESB members on decision-making committees and boards.
- The perceived low level of NESB artists who had received funding support.
- The lack of any funding criteria which could be seen as promoting cultural diversity in funded arts programs.
- The notion of 'excellence' as a selection criteria, which was considered to be culturally loaded and biased.

The Australia Council is the pre-eminent funding body for the arts in Australia, operating a number of funds, including the Theatre Fund, which allocates funding on a competitive basis within the theatre industry. Each Fund consists of seven part-time, non-salaried members appointed by the Minister for Communication and the Arts. These Funds receive advice from artists selected from the Register of Peers. Nominations for inclusion in the Register are open to anyone who, by virtue of their knowledge and experience, is equipped to make a fair and informed assessment of artistic work and grant applications. Peers assist a Fund in making decisions but are not involved in the final decision making.

Assessment of applications and final grant decisions are made by Fund members primarily on the basis of the information supplied in the application. These are assessed against published selection criteria set out in the Australia Council's Handbook. Due to limited funds, support for worthwhile proposals must often be refused even where they meet the selection criteria. Staff at the Australia Council assist the work of the Funds by providing information and advice to the Council, Funds, board and advisory bodies, providing information to potential grant applicants, administering the Council's grant programs and ensuring simple, fair and equitable processes.

Dealing with the criticisms in turn, the Council introduced a new grant program framework in 1996 which, in part, aimed to reduce the number and complexity of grant programs offered and improve artists' access to grant programs and criteria across all artforms. The Council has taken steps to increase the accessibility of funding processes to 'ethnic' communities in recent times, by holding workshops to explain its processes to artists of diverse backgrounds and advise them on writing funding applications.

The Australia Council has also sought to address the overall low application rate from NESB people and organisations. Public forums were held in Brisbane,

Melbourne and Sydney, with other cities to follow, targeting issues of cultural diversity after the first round of funding, and the number of applications relating to the *Arts for a Multicultural Australia* (AMA) policy increased in the second round of that year. However, there is no specific funding to implement the policy and no target or percentage amount allocated to its implementation.

Increasing the participation of NESB people on funding boards and committees is more difficult, since Fund members are government appointees. Where there has been a lack of representation of NESB artists, the Council has at times supplemented the process by inviting non-voting experts to attend discussions. This was recognised by Australia Council interviewees as only a partial solution. They emphasised the need to include artists and relevant experts from NESBs, to expand perceptions of excellence, to avoid cultural domination and exclusion and to successfully implement the AMA policy. Arts Victoria also reported including relevant peers and experts from NESBs on funding decision-making bodies.

With regard to a perceived low level of funding to NESB artists and organisations, data supplied by the Australia Council indicated that 9.1 per cent of all applications received by the Theatre Fund in 1997–98 (representing 43 applications out of a total of 473) fulfilled the AMA policy, however, 18 or 12.6 per cent of these were successful, compared to a success rate for all applications across the Fund of 30 per cent. These also accounted for only 11.1 per cent of the total Theatre Fund expenditure or \$831,234 out of the total expenditure of \$7,462,183. These figures may be on the high side, as one interviewee criticised the AMA policy of being so loosely applied that works of only marginal relevance to cultural diversity had been included.

In 1997 the Theatre Fund took a step towards introducing specific criteria relating to cultural diversity in the New Work and Development category. The Fund sought to support high quality work reflecting Australia's unique experiences and population, including projects of culturally inclusive excellence.

Overall, there are signs that the funding bodies are addressing the criticisms made by many interviewees, however, on available figures it appears that NESB artists and organisations currently receive proportionately less funding than those from the 'mainstream'. This may partly account for the low level of representation of NESB themes and artists in theatre.

PROGRAMMING

The programs which theatre companies decide to present determine the choices available to the theatre-going public. The single greatest factor cited by interviewees as influencing programming decisions was commercial and/or cost recovery pressures. Reduced government subsidies over recent years and the growth of competition in the entertainment industry meant that only those works considered to be commercially viable were generally included in a season's program.

As one put it:

When we only do eight productions a year, the pressure is on the box office. There is increasingly less incentive to take a gamble.

And another:

We make a conscious effort to find diverse plays, but it is hard to find suitable plays for us, because we need to get a large audience through the door ... Our subsidy is extraordinarily low, compared to the percentage of income – that forces us into a kind of conservatism.

Mainstream theatres recognised the dilemma in this situation, with many reporting a growth in conservative decision making in programming. Yet at the same time, many recognised that their audiences were ageing:

We need to get the next generation of theatre goers.

Regional and community theatres tended to view programming as having to meet the needs of their local communities. Where they had been successful in gaining funds, they had relatively greater autonomy in their programming. They also highlighted the opportunities available to them as well as responsibilities, such as performing outreach work to their broader community, and the difficulties of doing so in the light of recent funding cuts.

ARTISTIC DECISION MAKING AND CASTING

The role of the director was identified as critical to the portrayal of NESB roles, as exemplified by this quotation:

... actors have little control over (the point of view of the work). (When) it is controlled by a non-Italian or a non-Greek, and often NESB actors may be asked to do work that is culturally incorrect or offensive. Because the director is not NESB, therefore he has a monocultural view of our society ... so the play becomes directed from an Anglo point of view, and the characters become objectified.

Some interviewees stressed the need for more NESB directors, to achieve authenticity in the portrayal of characters, whereas others felt it was more important that directors be open to cultural issues and be able to seek the views of actors. Where there are neither actors from NESBs nor a director with a knowledge of the community group being represented, it was felt that tokenism, stereotyping and cultural appropriation were inevitable.

Casting was a strong topic of discussion by interviewees, with a range of views put about whether film, television or theatre were more or less likely to cast NESB actors. There were also attempts to delineate some of the more complex issues relating to casting of NESB and Anglo-Celtic actors across a range of roles. Advocates for a greater presence of NESB actors and cultural diversity in theatre argued that while NESB actors are not equally considered for generic 'Australian' or even non-specific characters, they are frequently not even considered for culturally specific roles, presenting a no-win situation for NESB actors.

Recently there was a production where two of the main actors were played by Anglos pretending to be (from ... community). If that were indigenous arts, we wouldn't allow it to happen. It would not be acceptable for Anglos to paint their faces black and pretend to be indigenous. But its seems OK for Anglos to play NESB roles.

I said I wanted a Greek Australian who may be bilingual, may be musical. When the Italian actress phoned, I asked ‘Why did the agency send her?’ ‘Maybe they just see me as a wog’. That happens all the time, getting people who are not from the right ethnic background, but the agent thinks that’s close enough.

The sad thing is there are a number of people from a non-English speaking background who, because of their accent, find it difficult to get parts ... They tend to be cast in culturally specific roles ... as the Eastern European, the Mediterranean or the ‘all purpose’ Asian.

(quotes from separate interviewees).

Responsibility for casting decisions varied across theatres and sometimes from production to production. In community theatres, productions often developed organically. People wanting to participate in productions more or less cast themselves and developed their roles through the preparatory workshops. In larger theatres, including major organisations, casting decisions were made by the director, sometimes the company’s artistic director, or a combination of both. Casting decisions were criticised by many interviewees as lacking imagination and perpetuating the likelihood that NESB actors would get less work.

On the other hand, theatres with a more contemporary outlook discussed examples of casting NESB actors in Australian pieces as *Australians*, without the demand of having to be the stereotypical Vietnamese/Italian/Lebanese/Macedonian etc. character. One theatre company illustrated the power of imaginative casting with the example of a piece set in a Japanese prisoner of war camp, with Japanese actors cast in the roles of Australian prisoners, and ESB actors cast in the roles of Japanese soldiers. The contemporary production of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, directed by Noel Tovey for the State Theatre Company in Festival of the Dreaming, with a completely Aboriginal cast was another example of breaking traditional casting moulds. Both productions were critically and financially successful.

Traditional and mainstream theatres were clearly more resistant to casting NESB actors, arguing first that their repertoire did not provide appropriate parts, and secondly, that their conservative audiences would not accept NESB actors (particularly those with foreign accents) in the parts. As one put it:

Where a play is culturally specific, it’s quite difficult for an audience to accept, for example, an Oscar Wilde play set in high class Victorian England, a foreign accent or colour on stage. In the classics, accents can be a problem.

TRAINING

Training of theatre artists was seen by many as a means by which English traditions had infiltrated Australian theatre and been perpetuated, for example, by including Shakespearean plays as compulsory audition pieces. One of the community theatre interviewees spoke of two young NESB people from the western suburbs of Melbourne, who had participated and developed with the theatre over some years, and had chosen to pursue acting careers on the strength of this. However, they were not accepted into a training institution, and were quite shattered by the audition experience:

How can our kids compete with private school kids from the eastern suburbs, who are perfectly comfortable reciting Shakespeare? But these were really talented kids who could really give something interesting and challenging in theatre.

There were also positive comments about training institutions, and interviewees from the institutions were able to clearly articulate their responsibility to all Australian students. The NIDA student profile indicated very good participation levels of NESB students. While the Victorian College of the Arts was unable to provide student demographic data, the College had appointed an audience development officer for a 12 month term, under the Australia Council funded *Audience Development Project*, specifically to identify and address systematic barriers preventing access by NESB students. Both institutes discussed the need for openness in artistic relationships to allow for ‘learning from each other’, particularly in relation to providing and directing appropriate roles. In addition to NIDA’s diploma and degree course, the institute runs a range of workshops and events under its ‘Access’ program. Fees are charged for participation in these events, but there are no audition requirements.

While having appropriate organisational policies and procedures was identified as important to ensuring a culturally inclusive institution, the role and attitudes of individual teachers and senior management were seen as critical. Unless decision making, behaviour and attitudes of senior staff reflected organisational objectives, the policies were not seen to carry any weight. Training institutions also suggested that funding cuts over recent years had created anxieties and induced conservative decision making.

MARKETING

While there was reasonably broad consensus amongst interviewees that Australia’s cultural diversity was under represented in theatre, a range of views emerged as to whether markets exist for culturally diverse products in theatre. These can be classified into four categories:

- c mainstream, traditional
- c market development
- c mainstream, contemporary, and
- c community based.

Mainstream, traditional

This view is based on a belief that mainstream, largely Anglo-Celtic audiences would be alienated by products which strayed from the norm, leading to financial failure and loss of audiences. Australia’s small population was considered too small to support a wide range of diversity in theatre, while the precarious funding and financial base of many theatres led them to avoid unnecessary risk taking in programming.

We put on a program a couple of years ago around issues of cultural diversity and we were getting 10 per cent of the audiences we needed to break even. We had nights where there were six people in the audience.

Another interviewee explained:

Our audience is largely from an English speaking background, except for the fact that there is a large proportion of central Europeans. The core of (our subscription) is European Jewish intellectuals who came after the war, but we don't attract a lot of new immigrants. The latter are less likely to come to the theatre ...

And another:

We are not very good at getting the (Italian) community in ... it could be due to our image as an establishment expensive theatre. Who knows?

While adherents to this view might have wished for things to be different, they took what they considered a pragmatic approach and continued to offer and market products which drew traditional audiences to the theatre.

Market development approach

The market development school of thought essentially countered the mainstream, traditional view. While it acknowledged the decline in traditional audiences, the emphasis was on attracting the next generation and generally broadening the market. These interviewees argued that with the right product and appropriate market development strategies, audiences, including mainstream audiences, will embrace a range of culturally diverse theatre. As a recent review of *Medea*, performed in Australia in Greek, stated:

Greek Australians in what is the world's third largest Greek city relished a rare opportunity to see one of the great mythic tragedies performed in their mother tongue ... (Lee Cristofis, *The Australian*, 1/6/98).

These interviewees argued that, far from there being no market for culturally diverse products in theatre, there was no will to produce them. The issue was more an ideological than economic issue.

Why does Ford know how many Vietnamese people buy their cars and nobody knows who's participating in the arts? Because nobody wants to know. To break into the ethnic market, you need to do real market research, including fiscal and demographic analyses. It's their taxes. We need to give them their product. (quote from interview).

Sophisticated market research and market development were seen as critical, but generally overlooked, strategies for success. As one explained:

We've proved our capacity to open major institutions to ethnic audiences through tailored and targeted marketing.

And another observed:

Why do some bad ethnic productions still pack houses in the suburbs? Of course ethnic communities want to see their stories on stage. But without adequate funding and imperfect production values, they're not picked up by the mainstream, they're not even considered.

The lack of any audience demographic data from any of the theatre stakeholders interviewed supports the contention that little or no market research is undertaken. In 1996 Arts Victoria commissioned a large market research study investigating participation in the arts and entertainment industries, but with no ethnicity data collected in the initial research, the subsequent marketing strategies were not designed to develop 'ethnic' audiences. The recently released Australia Council publication *The World is Your Audience* specifically focuses on the development of NESB audiences, arguing that to avoid this is to overlook a large untapped market. Involving members of the target 'ethnic' communities who have skills in marketing was cited most frequently by interviewees as a successful strategy. The Australia Council agrees:

The opportunity for communities to directly participate in and manage cultural activities, to participate as equals, is shown time and again to be central to long term audience development. (Australia Council, 1998: 4).

MEDEA: CASE STUDY

During the course of this research, the National Theatre of Greece toured Melbourne and Sydney with its production of *Medea*. The play was presented in modern Greek, with English subtitles. Tickets were expensive, starting at \$70.

The Melbourne production, sponsored by the Greek Orthodox Community Theatre, was based at Her Majesty's Theatre, very much a mainstream, traditional venue with 1600 seating capacity. The production ran over three nights and was sold out each night.

Critical factors in the Melbourne success were identified as:

- c appointment of Corporate Relations Manager to manage the event;
- c extensive research and development undertaken with planning commenced 18 months before the event;
- c break-even targets established from the onset, with advertising and publicity budgets set within these limits;
- c number of productions limited to three;
- c advertising campaign strategies developed for the Greek community and the broader community;
- c reputable mainstream publicist engaged;
- c use of dramatic black and white advertisement and spectacular colour poster;
- c multimedia advertising for Greek community, including SBS, radio, and newspapers;
- c broader community advertising in broadsheets (*Age, The Australian*);
- c good concession prices for group bookings;
- c invitations to members of the Greek community – across range of ethnic, community, political, religious groups etc; and
- c promotional material included in events publicity targeted at international visitors.

In short, the Melbourne tour was managed strategically, with sophisticated research, planning, risk and financial management, advertising and publicity, and also due consideration of the large Greek community, and therefore potential arts market. In contrast, in Sydney, there was no publicist engaged, different visual images were used in some of the advertising, there was no television advertising, and some criticism that marketing to the Greek community failed to take into account sensitive community issues. There was also a last minute decision to add a further night. Through a combination of these factors, the production ran at a loss in Sydney.

Mainstream, innovative

Producing works of a culturally diverse nature, reflecting Australian society was an important goal for stakeholders from contemporary theatre companies. As one said:

We're sick of international tourists going to the big productions like the *Phantom of the Opera*, which they can see in New York, London and so on, and we can't get them to come and see uniquely Australian stories.

They believed they had made inroads in producing a broader range of culturally diverse theatre in the last 10 to 15 years, but acknowledged it was still at an inadequate level. The challenges involved were viewed as a combination of good market development and script development (that is, cultural content), but all were confident they could achieve their goal, without alienating their more conservative, Anglo dominated audiences. As one observed:

***Medea* was tremendously successful a couple of years ago. The entire Greek population came out to see it. Huge Anglo audiences came out to see *Emma*. It's a fallacy that an audience doesn't exist for these kinds of play.**

Contemporary theatre companies acknowledged that Australian theatres operate in a small marketplace, however they believed there were a number of untapped markets including:

- c the international tourist market;
- c 'ethnic' (viz. NESB) audiences; and
- c a younger and broader mainstream audience.

Interviewees were concerned that large commercial productions (such as *Les Misérables*, *Cats*, *Phantom of the Opera* etc.), having no cultural relevance to Australia had largely captured the international tourist trade. They believed there was scope for further work with tourist development bodies to market uniquely Australian theatrical products to international tourists, citing the current popularity of crossover/fusion work and the range of possibilities that exist for this in Australia.

There was a similar belief in the scope for bringing 'ethnic' audiences into contemporary theatres. A number of theatre companies could point to some success with specific works and specific communities, but felt they were not consistently bringing in 'ethnic' audiences. Contemporary as well as community theatre companies emphasised the need to work collaboratively with ethnic

communities, using specialised knowledge of the community, and targeted marketing strategies, such as advertising in popular 'ethnic' press, community radio and SBS.

Community theatre

We sought to progress beyond the stereotyped images of colourful costumes, folkloric dancing and ethnic food, to engage with contemporary artwork, second generation people and relate that to the broader culture and contemporary arts. It is interesting how uncomfortable people are with that notion. They seem to be happier with stereotyped images of colourful costumes and so on, but they are not so keen to have it being part of the mainstream culture. (quote from an interview).

Presenting works around themes of cultural diversity is, certainly for community theatres in areas of high cultural diversity, their *raison d'être*. Working for and with the local community are the principal aims of community theatre companies. While they are not-for-profit organisations, they reported that reduced funding support has intensified the focus on breaking even. Nevertheless, many community theatres reported making considerable losses.

These types of companies emphasised the importance of working with members of the community in all facets of the creative process (writing, directing, acting) and in business functions, including marketing. More than other interviewees, they were prepared to articulate what they viewed as the critical components of marketing to 'ethnic' communities:

We had been trying to involve the Vietnamese community for six years with little success, until we employed a bilingual, bi-cultural worker. He's had heaps of acting experience in theatre, film, television. He could talk to the Australia Council but also had credibility with the community and could also bring all his experience and sense of being bi-cultural and having gone through the whole gamut of migration experiences, including cultural, political, personal and family experiences. Until you get people like this who can make the work, write, direct, perform and create an audience, it's very difficult to change anything.

BARRIERS AND SUPPORTS TO MULTICULTURAL THEATRE

The foregoing shows how detailed some interviewees' views were concerning the various problems they perceived in Australian theatre's treatment of multiculturalism. When asked specifically what factors or barriers were responsible for this situation, they cited the following:

- c **Domination by English traditions, values and norms** – the failure of Australian theatre to evolve its own unique character being attributed to the narrow pool of decision makers. Anglo-Celtic dominance was seen to derive from the sheer numbers of Anglo-Celts in key positions within organisations and committees, but also in the more intangible areas, such as values, norms, interpretations, judgements of cultural excellence, decision-making processes and so on.

- c **Lack of will** – partly as a result of this dominance, interviewees argued that there was no will to develop culturally diverse traditions in our theatres. Some extended the cultural argument to include class barriers, suggesting that theatrical products generally only catered to a middle-upper class, Anglo-Celtic audience. Migrant communities were perceived as working class, and therefore outside most theatre’s area of interest. Mainstream theatres were seen not to question why their plays with culturally diverse themes or actors failed. Instead a lack of success became a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- c **Lack of funding** – it was argued that limited funding, including infrastructure support, bred conservative programming and artistic decision making. Without medium to long term financial security, theatres were less likely to take risks. Similarly, without development funds, theatres do not have the resources to develop quality productions which would bring audiences in sufficient numbers to make the production viable.
- c **Discriminatory processes** – organisational processes, such as funding applications and entry to training institutions were seen to weigh in favour of ESB artists and against aspiring artists of NESBs. Examples included: complex and cumbersome procedures, requirements for written applications, instructions given in complex, bureaucratic language and compulsory Shakespearean audition pieces.
- c **Conservatism of theatre-going audiences** – most mainstream theatre stakeholders argued their audiences were conservative and therefore would not accept culturally diverse products.

When we used (actors from NESBs) in a Shakespearean play, we received letters of complaint because they both had accents.

Australians are not ready for theatre which challenges their comfort zones.

Our audience is predominantly Anglo-Saxon, and therefore not necessarily interested in a range of issues – but we recognise that this is a ‘chicken and egg’ argument. (quotes from separate interviewees).

- c **Size of the market** – it was argued that Australia’s small population, and smaller ethnic communities, meant the market was too small to support culturally diverse works.
- c **Lack of appropriate marketing expertise** – some theatres reported they simply did not know how to attract ‘ethnic’ audiences and, as they were currently so pressured by funding cuts, were unable to develop this expertise.
- c **Lack of risk taking** – at the micro-level, some interviewees felt that producers and directors failed to take risks in the selection of plays, and then in the casting and direction of the plays. For example, in casting actors from NESBs in traditional, mainstream work (such as the plays of David Williamson) in generic roles:

Producers and directors who can’t actually see beyond the possibilities of the obvious are a really huge factor, the vision of how you could potentially see this piece working, and see beyond the cliches and stereotypes restricts the development of Australian theatre.

- c **Lack of appropriate plays and roles** – many complained there were not enough plays and/or parts for NESB actors. This argument was traced back to a lack of support for NESB playwrights to develop their work, and also to the insular views of well supported ESB playwrights.
- c **Language** – as theatre fundamentally relies on text and language, this was raised by some as a barrier to developing work for audiences from a range of language backgrounds or for English language texts to reach NESB audiences. This was contrasted to other artforms, such as opera, physical theatre and music, where language was not as great an issue.

In all these interviews, it was interesting that no mention was made of the possibility that NESB people might be less interested in playing artistic roles in theatre than, say, ESB Australians. The motivational factor has been cited by some outside this study as a possible cause of the lower participation rate by NESBs in theatre. However, the fact that it was not mentioned in this series of consultations or the literature suggests that other, structural factors, such as market size, audience composition and funding decisions, may be more important.

On the other hand, a number of interviewees were able to identify factors which might help to support the development of culturally diverse theatre. The support factors which they cited were fewer than the barriers:

- c **Funding support and leadership by the Australia Council** – while the lack of specific funding support was identified as a barrier, many interviewees saw the Council as a key support in the development of culturally diverse theatre. Other interviewees applauded the policy development work undertaken by the Council. They argued the need for at least 10 to 15 years lead time before the effect of policies such as *Arts for a Multicultural Australia* was evident.
- c **The role of leading individuals** – some interviewees felt that generational change was taking place, with NESB people, often second generation, gradually gaining positions of influence in theatre. These individuals were seen as making a difference, although it was believed there was not enough of them.
- c **The role of appropriately skilled, ethnic market development officers** – theatres frequently attributed their success in culturally diverse productions to the role played by specialised NESB staff (community liaison officers, market development officers and so on). Being able to combine expertise in the arts, with a knowledge of how to appropriately package, market and target products for NESB audiences was seen as a critical success factor. Other factors included a knowledge of cultural norms, traditions, popular trends and enlisting the support of influential members of the community.
- c **The demonstration effect of successful cases** – the researchers encountered numerous examples of individual productions which were financially and critically successful as well as culturally diverse. They were cited as examples of what is possible and generally thought to have contributed to the development of markets for multicultural theatre. A small selection of these includes: *Emma's Celebrazione*, *Tracking Time*, *Who's Afraid of the Working Class?* *Medea* (a number of productions), *View from the Bridge*, *Tartuffe* (Kosky's).



The work of specific theatres and organisations across the country in most capital cities and in regional areas was also praised. These included: Carnivale, Doppio Teatro, Playbox, particularly their work in Asia, Sidetrack, Teatro Oneiron, Deckchair Theatre, Taqa and Belvoir Street Theatre, and others since the research was conducted have mentioned the Melbourne Workers Theatre and the Northern Rivers Performing Arts (NORPA).

- c **Development work with young people** – the contribution of young people from diverse communities was cited as an obvious support for the future development of culturally diverse traditions and products. This work included that of community theatres, NIDA through its Access Program, and the general education system.
- c **The support of the community** – while there was considerable discussion about what audiences will and won't attend, community theatres and theatres which had produced culturally diverse plays reported that both NESB and ESB audiences are willing to support and attend interesting culturally diverse plays.

SUMMARY

The overwhelming impression from the interviews is that there is a strong measure of resistance to, or fear of, cultural diversity, particularly within mainstream theatres but also amongst some community and regional theatres. Such resistance seems to rest on two linked assumptions:

- c cultural diversity in theatre is risky, and
- c conservative theatre audiences will not accept culturally diverse themes.

However, the numerous examples given of successful community-based and mainstream work which had challenged orthodox practice in this area undermined these assumptions. Together with the wide acceptance enjoyed by these cases, some real doubt was cast on whether cultural change is indeed so difficult or risky as claimed. If, as contended by some, resistance is based more on ideological grounds than on fear, the path to change will be more difficult. However, this may be overcome by linking subsidies with specific grant requirements that theatres support culturally diverse works.

While extremes of philosophical views were encountered, ranging from the social justice perspective to *laissez faire*, it was encouraging to see a new wave emerging, with potential to forge common ground. The new wave recognises both the cultural and economic potential of cultural diversity in theatre, arguing that if explored courageously and strategically, a range of new markets can be developed from 'ethnic' communities, mainstream audiences and internationally. Such new markets will depend critically on changing the cultural content of theatre works to ensure they are truly diverse.

However, the simultaneous success and failure of *Medea* provides a warning that success requires the combined factors of 'good product' and appropriate planning, management and marketing. In that case, the National Theatre of Greece's production in Melbourne was a great commercial success, while its production in Sydney ran at a loss largely because ethno-specific marketing and the engagement of a publicist had been neglected.

In addition to strategic marketing, however, the interviews raised a common cry for new Australian works dealing with cultural diversity. Just as mainstream theatre is subsidised and nurtured from development to production, culturally diverse theatre requires support in the stages from conception to production (writing, directing, casting, production). And just as providing opportunities for communities to participate in and manage cultural activities is central to success, the same opportunities for direct participation in the creative process are vital.

The most valuable finding emerging from the qualitative, interview-based research was that a truly diverse Australian theatre can and does succeed, whether it be community-based, regional, mainstream or commercial theatre. With some additional supports and systemic changes, there is a genuine opportunity for this to develop more broadly in the theatre sector.

REFERENCES

- Australia Council 1998 *The World is Your Audience: Case Studies in Audience Development and Cultural Diversity*, June, NSW.
- Christofis, L. 'At last, Medea as the Victim', *The Australian*, 1 June 1998.
- James, N. 1997, *NESB Research Project*, The Australian Writers' Guild, May.

SURVEY OF THEATRE COMPANIES

5 .

5 .

SURVEY OF THEATRE COMPANIES

THE THEATRE MANAGERS' SURVEY

In this section we report on the findings of the other, pivotal part of this research – a national survey of artists (cast, directors and creative team members) and theatre managers in 80 theatre companies.

Twenty five per cent (or 199) of the artists surveyed responded and filled out the survey, compared to 55 per cent (or 44) of the theatre managers. The theatre companies surveyed were based in all six States, with nearly half of those responding based in NSW, 27 per cent in Victoria, 9 per cent in Queensland, 5 per cent in South Australia, 7 per cent in Western Australia and 5 per cent in Tasmania. None in the NT or ACT responded to the survey.

The number of full-time employees of these theatres was generally small, with more than half employing 0–5 employees, 30 per cent employing between 6 and 20 full-time employees, 7 per cent employing 21–40 and only 11 per cent employing between 41 and 100 full-timers. A larger proportion of theatre companies indicated they had part-time employees. Again, the numbers of such employees were small, for example, 41 per cent had 6–20 part-time employees. Volunteers were also used, with 15 per cent reporting they had 6–20 volunteers.

These results show the theatre industry as consisting predominantly of small companies which rely heavily on part-time and volunteer artists/employees. All companies employed at least one cast, director or creative team member, a third employed 1–5 people in these roles, a further 36 per cent had 6–10 people in these roles, 21 per cent employed between 15 and 60 people and 8 per cent had 100, 120 and 400 people in these roles. Many of these, particularly cast members, would have worked unpaid, as volunteers.

Theatre managers were asked to estimate the number of NESB people, both first and second generation (NESB1 and NESB2) currently employed by their theatre companies. Most companies employed few or no NESB1s, 45 per cent saying they had none or did not know, and a further one-third of companies

employing only one. In spite of the low employee levels in these companies, these figures seem extremely low, given the proportion of NESB1s in the population (14 per cent).

In contrast, 18 per cent of theatres said they employed between 2 and 5 NESB1 employees, and another 6 per cent had between 6 and 12 NESB employees. Two of the theatre managers indicated they were unsure whether employees were NESB, as they could not tell them apart from other employees. This suggested no official records were kept on employees' country of birth, and backs up the findings from the interviews with various stakeholders, which also found there was little or no record keeping in this area.

The reported situation with NESB2s seems a little better than for NESB1s, as somewhat more theatre companies stated they employed at least one NESB2 person, although nearly half employed none at all. Again, some theatre managers reported they found it hard to distinguish NESB2 people from those of other backgrounds, such as Anglo-Australians.

There seems to be a contrast between those theatre companies which employ at least some NESB1 and NESB2 people and those, almost half, who by their own report do not have a multicultural workforce. This sits very strangely with the multicultural reality of Australian society and its workforce, a quarter of which is first and second generation NESB. It also suggests that, where NESB people are employed, their numbers are not even across the theatre industry, rather they are concentrated within a small number of theatre companies, possibly those with a more multicultural orientation such as community-based theatre companies. In fact, a third of the major organisations, most of the commercial companies (83 per cent), one-third of the community-based companies, three-quarters of the youth companies and three-tenths of the 'urban other' companies did not employ any NESB artists or did not know if they did.

Most of the theatre companies reported having low annual turnovers, with just over half earning more than \$100,000 a year and the remainder earning less. The majority (62 per cent) received government subsidies. State government seemed to be the most common source of subsidies (45 per cent), followed by Federal Government (32 per cent) and local government (25 per cent), although the biggest grants came from Federal Government. Some companies accessed funds from more than one source.

Half the companies had been operating more than 10 years, and two-thirds reported running 1–5 productions in the previous 12 months, 17 per cent had 6–10 productions and a further 17 per cent had presented more than 10 productions in the past year.

THE ARTISTS' SURVEY

Of the 199 artists who responded to the survey (a significant slice of the industry), 59 per cent were currently employed in theatre, 27 per cent were employed elsewhere, a further 9 per cent were unemployed and 5 per cent were retired or students, the rest gave no answer. Nearly three-fifths were currently employed in theatre and it is likely that most of the others had been recently employed but were between theatre jobs.

Most respondents had had a lengthy career in theatre, with nearly two-thirds having been involved for 6 years or more, and almost four-fifths for 3 years or more. The length of time spent in theatre work indicates this sample of people had considerable experience on which to draw for their answers to the questionnaire.

Many theatre artists spend periods in paid and unpaid work in the theatre industry, and this group was no exception. More than half (56 per cent) had been in paid theatre work for up to 2 years, some much longer. Twenty-eight per cent had been in paid theatre work for more than 5 years. In comparison, nearly all (96 per cent) had been in unpaid theatre work for up to 2 years.

They were employed by a wide range of theatre companies, with a third employed by funded professional urban theatres, 12 per cent by other urban theatres, 11 per cent by youth theatres, urban and regional and 15 per cent by amateur theatres. Four per cent worked in urban commercial theatres.

Two-thirds were cast members in their companies, one-tenth were directors and 21 per cent worked as creative team members. More than half of the respondents were female, 44 per cent were male. Most respondents (58 per cent) were under 35 years of age, but a tenth were over 55.

As would be expected from other information collected in our study, the majority of respondents (68 per cent) had been born in Australia, the next largest group (16 per cent) were immigrants from the UK and Ireland, New Zealand and North America and 16 per cent were from NES countries. In the latter category a vast number of birth countries was represented: Argentina, Germany, East Timor, Chile, Philippines, France, Egypt, Austria, Hong Kong, Poland, Russia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Holland, Zimbabwe, Croatia, Lebanon, Uganda, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Yugoslavia, Italy, Japan, Singapore, Macedonia, Chile, Czechoslovakia, Greece, China, Malta and the South Pacific.

Amongst the Australian born respondents 11 per cent had at least one parent who had been born overseas in an NES country, and were classified as NESB2 for this study. Eighty-five per cent of respondents indicated they spoke English at home, but 12 per cent were bilingual, a few were trilingual and 4.5 per cent spoke only one, foreign language. A large range of languages was represented amongst those who were at least bilingual. In 65 per cent of cases where two or more languages were spoken, English was the first language listed on the survey form.

ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS REGARDING NESB REPRESENTATION IN THEATRE

Theatre managers were asked: 'What are your general impressions regarding opportunities in theatre for both first and second generation NESB people?' The 39 written responses indicate a range of views, however, 60 per cent perceived serious, distinct problems for NESB artists, although 18 per cent felt the situation was improving. At one extreme were the following comments:

I believe that there are not many opportunities available to both first and second generation NESBs across the board in theatre, film and television. I find this appalling given Australia's diverse multicultural background. Theatre, film and television do not endeavour to

represent, nor support a true reflection of Australia's colourful culture. It is still very conservative in this sense. (manager of an urban 'other' theatre company).

And the comment of another manager from an urban 'other' company:

It is very hard for NESB people to find work due to a narrow casting policy in the entertainment industry.

And one from an urban commercial company:

If NESB practitioners are going to find work, they have to create it for themselves. There are limited niche roles for particular nationalities but the presence of those with accents playing traditional English speaking roles is minimal.

Seven respondents saw improvements in opportunities for NESB artists, particularly in community-based or 'ethnic' theatre groups, as one of these comments illustrates:

I feel that the opportunities are growing rapidly for NESBs, especially in urban areas with the emergence of 'ethnic'-based groups (which attract funding). NESB (representation) is limited in the mainstream 'performance' because of shows produced i.e. white-based UK/USA product and even Australian content. (manager of an urban community-based theatre).

Six respondents (16 per cent) saw no problems for NESB artists at all:

Good – the theatre community I work in is supportive and responsive to all issues and people. I rarely encounter negative attitudes that are uninformed or undeserved. Our outlook is if the people can perform their job at a high level of excellence then background or personal characteristics are of secondary importance. (manager of an urban 'other' company).

In between were the few managers who saw problems facing all artists, with no particular added difficulty for those who were NESB.

On a positive note, the written comments included a number of 'success stories' of ways that multicultural theatre had been created in some cases, for example:

(This company) has employed first and second generation people from NESB in the past in both administrative and creative roles The company worked with refugees in 19 ... to create a production focusing on issues they faced adapting to a new country, winning a human rights drama award. (manager of an urban major organisation, some details omitted to protect confidentiality).

Another manager from a regional community-based company commented:

I haven't had much involvement with first generation NESBs but with several second generation people, all of whom have been amazing in their skill and knowledge.

Artists responding to the survey generally agreed that ‘it is hard to get paid work in Australian theatre’, 88 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement. While most respondents, regardless of ethnicity or gender, saw limited opportunities for actors and artists generally to get paid work in theatre, some groups were more confident. Young people, those currently employed, those in better funded and long established theatre companies, and those in unsubsidised theatre were less likely to see difficulties (the notion of paid professional work in the latter is probably less relevant to those artists). Most respondents agreed there was little funding support to become an actor in Australia.

When asked to respond to various statements concerning the opportunities for NESB Australians to participate in theatre work, the results were generally consistent and striking. Only 11 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that NESB Australians enjoy good opportunities to get paid acting work in theatre, with most (59 per cent) disagreeing.

TABLE 10: ‘ACTORS WHO WERE BORN IN NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNTRIES ENJOY GOOD OPPORTUNITIES TO GET PAID WORK IN AUSTRALIAN THEATRE.’ (ARTISTS’ SURVEY, N=194)

RESPONSE	NUMBER	%
☐ Strongly Agree	3	2%
☐ Agree	18	9%
☐ Neutral	58	30%
☐ Disagree	64	33%
☐ Strongly Disagree	51	26%
TOTAL	194	100%

Anglo-Australians (those born in Australia to ESB parents) were more likely to respond neutrally to this statement, but few of them agreed with it. NESB1s were more likely to strongly disagree with the statement (48 percent), with somewhat fewer (36 per cent) NESB2s strongly disagreeing. This suggests that first generation NESB people perceive they have more problems obtaining paid acting work than either the second generation or ESB Australians. On the other hand, all four ethnic categories (ESB Australians, ESB migrants, NESB1 and NESB2) had high rates of disagreement with the statement, with, for example, half of the ESB Australians disagreeing. Interestingly, respondents who had significant experience in paid theatre work were more likely to disagree with the statement. Overall, the longer people had been in paid theatre work, the more they disagreed that NESB people enjoyed good paid work opportunities, suggesting they were speaking from a strong base of experience.

A similar statement in another part of the questionnaire elicited a similar response. To the statement: ‘Actors whose first language is not English enjoy good opportunities to perform in Australian theatre’, only 13 per cent agreed or strongly agreed, 34 per cent were neutral and more than half disagreed or strongly disagreed.

A contrary or more negative statement was put in the questionnaire: ‘Where non-English speaking background people are portrayed in Australian theatre these tend to be based on social or ethnic stereotypes’. Almost two-thirds agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, 22 per cent were neutral and a minority (13 per cent) disagreed. More women than men perceived there were stereotyping problems, perhaps because women themselves often confront gender stereotypes in art. Young people were less likely to see problems, whereas those in the middle years (30–39) saw the issues very strongly. These results are shown in Table 11.

TABLE 11: ‘WHERE NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING BACKGROUND PEOPLE ARE PORTRAYED IN AUSTRALIAN THEATRE THESE TEND TO BE BASED ON SOCIAL OR ETHNIC STEREOTYPES’ (ARTISTS’ SURVEY, N=193)

RESPONSE	NUMBER	%
☐ Strongly Agree	38	20%
☐ Agree	88	46%
☐ Neutral	42	22%
☐ Disagree	23	12%
☐ Strongly Disagree	2	1%
TOTAL	193	100%

If NESB1 artists were seen to have problems, did respondents perceive similar problems for NESB2 artists? The answer to this is more equivocal, since many more respondents (50 per cent) were neutral or unsure in their responses, however, only one-fifth agreed that second generation NESB artists enjoyed good opportunities. The results are shown in Table 12.

TABLE 12: ‘ACTORS WHO WERE BORN IN AUSTRALIA OF PARENTS FROM NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNTRIES ENJOY GOOD OPPORTUNITIES TO GET PAID WORK IN AUSTRALIAN THEATRE’ (ARTISTS’ SURVEY, N=190)

RESPONSE	NUMBER	%
☐ Strongly Agree	5	3%
☐ Agree	36	19%
☐ Neutral	95	50%
☐ Disagree	42	22%
☐ Strongly Disagree	12	6%
TOTAL	190	100%

Clearly, the responses so far have confirmed the patterns of national statistics on the distribution of NESB1 and NESB2 artists in the theatre industry, that is, respondents generally saw problems for such people getting paid work as artists. That being the case, the later responses may shed some light on where respondents felt the best opportunities for NESB people lie. Table 13 illustrates the answers to the statement that opportunities are more abundant in amateur or non-professional theatre, as suggested by some theatre stakeholders in the interviews and some managers.

TABLE 13: ‘IT IS EASIER FOR ACTORS FROM NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING BACKGROUNDS TO GET WORK IN AMATEUR THEATRE THAN COMMERCIAL OR PROFESSIONAL THEATRE’ (ARTISTS’ SURVEY, N=193)

RESPONSE	NUMBER	%
☐ Strongly Agree	8	4%
☐ Agree	59	31%
☐ Neutral	102	53%
☐ Disagree	20	10%
☐ Strongly Disagree	4	2%
TOTAL	193	100%

There was no strong consensus that amateur theatre offered more opportunities, although a third of respondents did indicate this. Far more respondents seemed to be unsure. NESB1 and NESB2 respondents were more likely to agree with the proposition than ESB Australians, but more than half were neutral or disagreed.

Another question elicited responses to the proposition that ‘ethnic’ theatres provided more opportunities for NESB artists. This statement gained considerably stronger support, with 63 per cent agreeing/strongly agreeing, nearly a third neutral and few disagreeing.

Did respondents see similar difficulties for ESB artists in getting paid work in Australian theatre? In fact, a high proportion (69 per cent) agreed/strongly agreed that ESB actors find it easier to get paid work in Australian theatre than NESB actors, only 9 per cent disagreed.

Of particular interest is the fact that there were few significant variations in these responses, whether by age, gender, ESB/NESB status, length of career or theatre company characteristics. In other words, respondents gave more or less the same responses regardless of their personal characteristics. This suggests that perceptions of difficulties confronting NESB artists are fairly universal.

Other questions explored the reasons for this perceived situation, by asking respondents to react to certain propositions. The statement was put that Australian audiences tend to be dominated by people of Anglo-Saxon background. A large majority (70 per cent) agreed, only 11 per cent disagreed.

When asked to say whether they thought Australian theatre adequately reflects the multicultural nature of Australian society, a high proportion (58 per cent) disagreed/strongly disagreed, as shown in table 14.

TABLE 14: 'AUSTRALIAN THEATRE ADEQUATELY REFLECTS THE MULTICULTURAL NATURE OF AUSTRALIAN THEATRE' (ARTISTS' SURVEY, N=194)

RESPONSE	NUMBER	%
☐ Strongly Agree	10	5%
☐ Agree	37	19%
☐ Neutral	36	19%
☐ Disagree	79	41%
☐ Strongly Disagree	32	17%
TOTAL	194	100%

In their responses to this statement, the survey respondents echoed the general consensus found in the literature, the statistics, the interviews and managers' survey. In fact, there was a high level of consistency in the findings from all these data sources, suggesting that concerns about cultural diversity in Australian theatre are valid. Two questions attempted to gauge how much responsibility for the relative lack of multicultural content in Australian theatre was due to programming or scripts. The results show that a large majority (70 per cent) agreed with the proposition that: 'Australian theatre productions tend to reflect Anglo-Saxon culture, either in content or style of direction', as illustrated in table 15.

TABLE 15: 'AUSTRALIAN THEATRE PRODUCTIONS TEND TO REFLECT ANGLO-SAXON CULTURE, EITHER IN CONTENT OR STYLE OF DIRECTION' (ARTISTS' SURVEY, N=193)

RESPONSE	NUMBER	%
☐ Strongly Agree	36	19%
☐ Agree	99	51%
☐ Neutral	32	17%
☐ Disagree	24	12%
☐ Strongly Disagree	2	1%
TOTAL	193	100%

Again, nearly two-thirds agreed that 'Most Australian theatre productions are based on English language scripts or on English theatre traditions'. Finally, one

question sought to gauge the extent to which organisations felt that NESB audiences tend to patronise their own 'ethnic' theatre works. The answers were strongly in favour of this statement, with nearly half agreeing, but many remaining neutral (41 per cent).

In summary, most artists who responded to the survey did not feel that Australian theatre adequately reflects our multicultural society. NESBs were most likely to feel strongly about this, and most felt that Australian audiences are dominated by Anglo-Saxons. Very high proportions of respondents attributed this to the predominant use of Anglo-Saxon productions and scripts, they were more equivocal about whether NESB audiences tend to patronise their own 'ethnic' theatre works, and there was little variation between the way different groups answered these questions.

This section concludes with some selected comments from the artists themselves, who contributed several dozen pages of comments based on their thoughts and experiences. While they cannot all be reproduced here, they illustrate some of the majority findings discussed above:

No actor wants to be relegated to parts concerning one's own background (or sex), we want the opportunity to make a living and be challenged in many different directions.

Funded theatre in Melbourne is becoming more and more narrow in its nature, conservative and commercial. Most of the subscribers to MTC and Playbox appear to be elderly citizens of English speaking background. I believe that because the target audience is conservative and represents only one sector of society that theatre employers are also conservative to cater for the audience's desires. It also seems that most employees are of English speaking background. It generally seems that the funded artistic work is suffering from racial prejudice and will not take risks with employing artists from non-English speaking backgrounds, although I don't see why it should be a risk.

It would be great to see greater flexibility in how actors of non-English speaking backgrounds are used. Usually actors who are not from Anglo-Saxon background must have their ethnicity explained or justified within theatre productions, actors of Anglo-Saxon ethnicity are never expected to justify their ethnicity or race.

As much as I am reluctant to use the North American model there are some exemplary ideas in effect – I am aware that in US/Canadian theatres they employ actors in ensembles irrespective of their race, sexual appearance or background (accent, class) and deliberately cast them in roles that challenge audiences' perceptions so that the performer has the chance and the ability of seeing the character and not the dressing. In Australia, we are still preoccupied in projecting what we think our culture should be and not comfortable in the fact of who we are.

Not all comments were of this nature, as the following shows:

I think the approach used in this questionnaire was far too simplistic, probably because it is attempting to serve political ends. I am an artist first and last – politics may be used only as a topic for artistic

comment, not an end in itself. If the creative team for a project aims for excellence then all decisions will serve that end. What you should be asking is whether there is wide enough cultural variety in theatre in Australia – but that is the business of the artists themselves – art is a gift to the community and it becomes perverted by attempts to steer its progress through perceptions or imposed views of political correctness. Funding bodies should fund artists on EXCELLENCE ONLY. The community, through the artists, will determine what subjects are of interest.

EXPERIENCES OF NESB ARTISTS IN AUSTRALIAN THEATRE

This section deals with the reported experiences of both NESB and ESB artists with issues of perceived racial discrimination, barriers to participating in theatre, the roles of different types of theatres and directors and questions regarding the range of artistic roles available. Once again, while the results are based on the subjective assessments made by the survey respondents, they offer a wealth of detailed and statistically robust insights into this area.

When asked whether they had personally experienced any instance of ethnic or racially-based discrimination in theatre, a large minority (23 per cent) answered 'yes'. Asked to rank, in order of importance, the perceived basis of the discrimination, a high percentage (40 per cent) mentioned accents, 34 per cent racial appearance, 31 per cent the attitudes of casting agents and 11 per cent the attitudes of directors.

The issues of accents and racial appearance were often mentioned in interviews with the stakeholders, with general agreement that people who look or sound different from the mainstream often encounter obstacles in theatre. The perceived importance of casting agents and directors is an interesting insight that is worth further investigation. It tends to support the viewpoint of many interviewees that decision makers can form a large barrier to the aspirations of NESB artists.

Nevertheless, when asked if artists felt they had the opportunity to perform any creative role in theatre, very few (6 per cent) indicated that ethnic barriers affected their opportunities. Far more referred to insufficient employment and the limitations imposed by their own experience and ability.

Asked which kinds of theatres provided the best opportunities for NESB artists, almost three-quarters of respondents indicated urban youth, followed closely by amateur urban theatre, regional youth theatre, funded professional urban theatre and amateur regional theatre.

Almost a third of respondents thought that a director's ethnic background might affect the level of participation of NESB artists in theatre. Consistent with this, a majority (60 per cent) felt there was not a reasonable balance of roles in Australian theatre for NESB people and those of other backgrounds. Nearly a third were not sure. A very large proportion of NESBs (81 per cent) answered 'no' to the proposition that there was a reasonable balance of roles, ESB respondents were more likely to be unsure, although nearly half answered in the negative. Of those who answered 'no' a further question tried to gauge the perceived reasons. Table 16 presents the answers.



TABLE 16: ‘IF YOU ANSWERED NO IN Q 37, WHY DO YOU THINK THIS IS THE CASE?’ (ARTISTS’ SURVEY, N=VARIES WITH RESPONSES).

RESPONSE	NUMBER	%	TOTAL NUMBER
Not enough parts for NESBs	42	43%	N=98
Reluctance to place NESBs in ESB roles	29	32%	N=90
Society is still predominantly ESB	15	19%	N=80
Audiences are predominantly ESB	11	15%	N=70
NESB people are overlooked	-	-	-
Directors are predominantly ESB	7	9%	N=77
Other	2	29%	N=7

What stands out clearly from this table is the perceived importance of the lack of roles written for NESB actors, but this is also related to the level of support given to NESB writers for performance. As the Australian Writers’ Guild showed in 1997, Australia has a large number of NESB writers for performance (300 identified in that study), but many feel they are unable to overcome various barriers to having their works recognised. The next most frequently rated factor is reluctance, presumably by directors and other decision makers, to place NESBs in artistic roles. Again, these findings are consistent with those obtained from the interview phase of this study.

The final structured question which respondents were asked was: ‘Do you think the number of non-English speaking background actors in Australian theatre reflects the number of non-English speaking background people in the population?’ The answer was predominantly ‘no’ (64 per cent), although many were unsure (30 per cent), with only a small group (6 per cent) answering affirmative. Again, NESB1 respondents had the highest ‘no’ response (89 per cent) and NESB2s the next highest (81 per cent). The comparable percentages for ESB Australians (53 per cent) and ESB migrants (61 per cent) were high, suggesting that the way people answered was not dependent solely on their own personal experience.

SUMMARY OF THE SURVEY DATA

The major findings from both surveys – the managers’ survey and the artists’ survey – point to a dominant theme: that there are significantly more problems for NESBs artists in getting paid work in Australian theatre, particularly first generation NESBs, than

people from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds (note that the survey referred to these as 'Anglo-Saxon').

The managers' survey indicated cause for optimism, however, as the situation was changing – more ethno-specific theatre groups were seen to have emerged, and a range of culturally diverse productions had been produced by youth, community, regional, other urban and non-language-based theatres, such as circuses and puppet theatres.

The very fact that managers acknowledged the problems – which have been documented in the literature, and appear to be supported by national statistics – is encouraging. On the other hand, it was of concern that high proportions of theatres reported that they did not employ any NESB₁ or NESB₂ artists. This suggests that opportunities may be limited to a small range of theatres, by most indications, the more contemporary, non-mainstream companies.

Apart from the limited opportunities for NESB₁ artists, the majority of respondents agreed that ethnic stereotypes hampered the prospects for NESB people to work in theatre. Some respondents felt that amateur theatre offered better opportunities for NESB artists than commercial theatres (this was also supported by the interviews), NESB artists themselves were most likely to agree with this.

If this is true, NESB artists may be restricted to the unpaid or less rewarding areas of the theatre industry, which would not assist them in making a living from their art. This also raises income equity issues vis-a-vis other, seemingly more advantaged groups in the industry. Considerably more respondents felt that ethno-specific theatre companies offered better opportunities to NESB artists.

In contrast, there was a general consensus that ESB artists enjoyed more opportunities than NESB artists. It was also generally agreed that Australian theatre does not reflect the multicultural nature of Australian society. The questions relating to the dominance of English traditions in theatre and English language scripts and ESB audiences elicited similarly high agreement, although South Australians and Victorians were less likely to agree that audiences were dominated by ESB Australians. More NESB respondents were critical of the English language dominance over theatre styles and scripts, and again, respondents from the more established and well funded theatre companies were less likely to agree.

Finally, the survey respondents provided a mass of written comments at the end of the questionnaires, many of them passionate and well thought out, indicating that the issues canvassed there had hit a chord. While survey data can only provide a snapshot in time of the views expressed by a self-selected group of people – those who were randomly selected to participate and chose to complete a questionnaire – the results of this survey are very consistent with those of the previous two stages of the research: the literature review and the stakeholder interviews. They all show the problems faced by NESB artists in theatre, as well as film and television, and all point to some recent developments indicating an improvement in the situation. However, the extent and nature of the problems suggests that further concerted policy action is needed.

CONCLUSIONS

6 .

6 . CONCLUSIONS

This study of the representation of NESB people in theatre, film and television has tapped a number of data sources, both primary and secondary, ranging from statistical, content analysis, interviews and written commentary, to survey data and a review of past literature. Throughout this body of information a consistent and recurring set of themes has emerged:

- c First generation NESB people are under represented numerically as artists, whether it be in theatre, film or television, with the under representation being more acute in television and film than in theatre. Put simply, the number of NESB people working in artistic occupations within these industries does not reflect the proportions of NESB people in the community, or the workforce. Asians are particularly disadvantaged in this regard, although Europeans are also under represented. There is no suggestion in any of the data or literature that a lack of interest in these art forms is the issue, rather that various attitudinal and institution barriers exist to restrict the participation of NESBs. There is a dominant view throughout a large section of the theatre industry, validated by authoritative statistics, that NESB¹ artists enjoy less opportunities to work in theatre than other, ESB background Australian artists.
- c With this under representation comes both ‘invisibility’ and ‘misrepresentation’ of NESB people and their communities, sending a powerful message of ‘exclusion’, that they don’t belong to the ‘mainstream’. Where NESB people are represented, they are generally caricatured or limited to stereotypes – hence the title of this report ‘The Taxi Driver, the Cook and the Greengrocer’, which characterises the limited roles NESB people get to play. On the other hand, a refreshingly new wave of theatre is emerging which relates and celebrates the many stories of NESB Australians, and/or challenges the way Australians view traditional roles and artworks. Some theatres have successfully adapted the ‘classics’ or developed new, contemporary works – many to critical acclaim, and have reaped the financial rewards. Some are recognising the large potential of new, untapped ‘ethnic’ and international markets for the new type of theatre and the new cultural content which is emerging.

They have also learnt that Anglo-Australians will embrace such theatre when it is properly marketed and developed.

- c Second generation NESB people may also have some problems, perhaps in the way they are spread through the theatre industry, but overall, their representation is broadly commensurate with their numbers in the population and the workforce. In some parts of the electronic media (television and film) they are over represented. Some concerns still remain, however – for example, with their low representation amongst artistic directors in theatre, and the perceptions of many survey respondents that NESB2 people who behave or look different from the mainstream enjoy less opportunities. This study did not investigate how many NESB2s of different ethnic origins are employed in artistic roles in the three sectors. However, the qualitative data (interviews, written comments, literature review) suggest that few second generation Asian Australians or others of distinct racial appearance would gain employment. Anecdotal data from NESB2 artists tend to support this.
- c ESB migrants (those from the UK, Ireland, NZ and North America) are over represented in theatre, film and television, taking more than a proportional share of artistic roles, and particularly strategic decision-making roles, such as artistic director. Anglo-Australians who were born in Australia, however, have a share of artistic roles proportional to their share of the population, and to that extent appear to be appropriately represented. The restriction is therefore on the numbers of NESBs, who receive less roles. Some interviewees have suggested that the dominance of English theatre traditions and scripts can be traced back to the dominance of Anglo-Celtic migrants within influential theatre positions in Australia.
- c Where NESB people do participate in theatre, particularly the first generation, it is in less well funded areas such as community theatres, youth theatre groups, ethno-specific companies and others where new art styles and organic forms of theatre are being experimented with. There were some outstanding examples of commercial theatre where NESB people featured – such as large scale ethno-specific productions, circuses and puppet theatres – but the general consensus was that ethno-specific theatre was ‘riskier’ than mainstream productions. NESB people generally had to create their own art, their own stories and productions, if they were to gain significant work in the theatre world.
- c There is some evidence that NESB people do not enjoy a proportional share of arts funding in Australia, revealed by interviews, statistical data and the literature review. Often the environment in which funding bodies operate is not conducive to people who are different or have special needs, although the Australia Council and other bodies have in recent years taken specific steps to assist such groups, for example, through a range of funding workshops designed for the ‘ethnic’ communities. Some local councils have also established programs aimed at NESB arts communities, and State governments have devoted resources to multicultural arts.
- c There were extremes of philosophical views expressed by theatre industry stakeholders in this study, from those supporting a social justice perspective to a laissez faire perspective, but most were aware of the under representation of NESB artists, in both senses of the word: numerical and artistic. Some were very concerned to correct this problem and had participated in the new wave of theatre, based on community development,

often followed by commercial success. Despite the fears of those who said that cultural diversity in the arts does not pay, numerous examples of commercially successful multicultural productions were presented. However, they depended for their success on strong partnerships with 'ethnic' communities, good planning, management and marketing. There was also a suggestion that, like 'mainstream' arts, culturally diverse arts need to be carefully nurtured and supported with grants. The Australia Council has recently gone some way to doing this, by funding a range of multicultural audience development officers in 1999.

- c Notwithstanding the range of concerns indicated by this study, many interviewees and survey respondents felt that things were changing for the better. While the overwhelming view was that Australian theatre, film and television do not adequately reflect our multicultural society – a view shared by most ESB artists, as well as NESB artists surveyed and highlighted in the OMA report of 1994 *Access to Excellence* – many are at least moving towards this goal. There were many excellent examples of multicultural theatre works, television programs and films, particularly coming from the second generation. The fact that the study evidently tapped into many passionate views about the subject is itself heartening – where people care about the issue, there must certainly be acknowledgement and some desire for change. The challenge is to change the exception to make it the rule.
- c In view of these developments, the authors are convinced that a truly culturally diverse Australian theatre industry can succeed, whether it be in community, regional, mainstream or commercial theatre. As indicated, the signs of such change are there. Moreover, it should be nurtured, both by policy and specific funding criteria. The community is ill served by an industry which does not fully utilise the talents and passions of all Australian artists, whatever their ethnic or racial origin. If the notion of 'excellence' is to be genuinely attained, it must be unfastened from a narrow 'high culture' Anglo-Celtic perspective to embrace a broader range of artistic expression. Theatre is an art form which has flourished successfully in non-Anglo-Celtic cultures around the world, it is hard to believe that our multicultural arts community has little of excellence to offer. This much has been recognised in the forthcoming Olympic 2000 arts festival *A Sea Change*, which has recognised the international advantage of presenting a unique Australian arts program of widely diverse productions, drawing on the experiences of all Australians – including indigenous and Anglo-Celtic Australians.

While the initiatives of the Australia Council and some State funding bodies are recognised and commended, we urge the funding community to expand its efforts in this area, through carefully targeted policy and funding criteria. Recognising the environment of reduced funding and subsidies for the arts, there is nevertheless some scope to make funding more accountable and consistent with the overall policy aim of promoting a fair and culturally diverse artistic community.

We also call on the theatre and television communities to take responsibility for their role in promoting a largely monoculture image of Australian society, and to learn from other more contemporary cases of artforms which do give free play to our diverse talents. The evidence in this report should reassure them that there are significant benefits to doing so, and that there is a moral and artistic imperative that it be done.

RESPONSES

'ACCENT-UATE THE POSITIVE':

implications and possibilities raised by
"The Taxi Driver, the Cook and the Greengrocer"
– Issues and strategies in ethnic minority
participation in theatre, film and TV.

Prepared as a discussion paper for the Australia Council
Andrew Jakubowicz
Professor of Sociology UTS
Visiting Professor, RIHSS, University of Sydney.

Look, you only have to turn on your TV set at 6.30 or at 7.00 o'clock, and have a look at the most popular Australian soap operas overseas: *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. Look at the representative view of Australia we are giving to people in England and Europe, and other associated countries. It's one of a predominantly blonde, surfy, blue-eyed, Anglo-Saxon background community. And that is wrong. Because the people I believe who have the power in this country in terms of television – the owners of the television stations, the owners of the media – are predominantly Anglo-Saxon. And I don't believe we'll see a change until more people from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds begin to find themselves in those professional positions: positions of management, people who are in control of the media. Because they are the only people who can understand the discrimination that has been faced by millions of people in this country. Because they have lived through it. And unfortunately that process in Australia has been very slow.

Nick Giannopoulos (From 'Who participates? – Identifying diversity -The Media-Representation', *Making Multicultural Australia – a multimedia documentary*, Interview 1996, NSW BOS 1999).

A director once described to me the problems he had in creating a realistic sense of Australia, in a prime time TV drama series. He came from an 'ethnic' background and knew the city in which the series was set had a high proportion of 'ethnic' people – but the producer only ever let the writer have them appear as stereotyped victims or threats. Never heroes. The director raised this issue with the producer, only to be told to do his job and butt out with his PC views. The advertisers didn't want

wogs in their programs as it alienated the great unwashed. The director bit his lip, and played some of his own culture's music in the background of a café scene. It was the closest he ever got to taking a stand.

This type of anecdote has been the staple of the underground discourse which ethnic Australians working in the entertainment industries – especially mainstream television drama – have used to sustain their belief in the legitimacy of their own histories when the public culture denies their existence. It is set against the desperate and unfulfilled desire of many Australians to see their culture reflected in the world of public narratives of the social. Whether it be in the realm of comedy, drama, even news and current affairs on television, the Australian film industry with all its perverse fascination for the underbelly of the society, or theatrical productions with their exploration of identity, there is a misfit between what Australia knows itself to be as a multicultural nation, and the representation of that diversity in cultural artefacts.

Tony Brannigan, head of the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) and long time defender of the commercial television industry's often reported failure to deliver to its audiences in relation to cultural diversity, was quoted recently in *The Age*, saying it's true that commercial television is not a full reflection of society in all its complexity, but, he asks: 'Is it anywhere?' (28 Jan. 2000). There is a bored air of frustration among industry heavy hitters at the recurrent and ineffectual plea by what they see as the multicultural industry for action. In the market place, the consumer they say will vote with her dollar – and she's not asking for wogs at mealtime – nor necessarily in the theatre, in dance or music performance.

Which brings us to the key issue raised by the report – is the current situation reported in the industry a problem or not? And if it is a problem, what sort of problem and for whom? What role does the Australia Council have in this situation?

PUBLIC CULTURE AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

There can be little doubt that the public consensus on the benefit of multiculturalism that reached its height towards the end of the 1980s has been shattered. Hansonite politics aside, and she was one of the key proponents of abandoning multicultural policies, the conservative end of town has never been really comfortable with the idea that the Anglo-cultural hegemony in Australia should be eroded. Assimilation was always the most heart-warming position for them to take, as it insidiously privileged their values, and suggested that in the hierarchy of civilisations (an idea which underpinned the 1902 White Australia legislation) they sat at the top of the heap. A century later the inheritors of this perspective have had enough whining from the rising ethnic minorities about their place in the sun. They will get their place when they are indistinguishable from the ruling elite – and then of course there will be no discrimination against them.

Recent research from QUT suggests exactly this – Aussie lookalikes from immigrant parents are appearing in the media quite widely, but not in any roles which reflect the diversity of the culture within the society. Distinctly different faces are much rarer, and different accents are almost totally absent. And this still despite *Wogs Out of Work* being one of Australia's most successful stage productions ever (at one time five companies were on the road with sell-out

performances from Wollongong to Perth. Yet although *The Wogboy* movie is pulling big audiences, the dream girl in this representation of contemporary Australia is still a 'skip chick'. Does the minority always have to have its escapist dreams of power occur in the arms of the ruling elite (a position advanced by Black African psychiatrist and liberation leader Franz Fanon in the 1960s when talking of *Black Skins and White Masks*)?

REFLECTION – NUMBERS, CULTURES, VALUES

The VUT report to the Australia Council on 'NESBs' in the performance arts argues that representation is the crucial concept. The report's authors suggest that the cultural cringe contributes to the problem, in that Australian performance ideologies genuflect towards Britain, and fetishise British culture – from accent to content to performance. In part this worry at the British connection – played out in our post-colonial society in many contradictory ways – leads to a quest for typically Australian representations. Yet the extraordinary hybridity of Australian society in the third millennium seems too often to evade the capacity of the performance industry managers to respond.

Representation really falls into three segments for consideration – the numbers of people in the industry in relation to their numbers in society; the way in which cultural diversity is represented in 'mainstream' culture; and the specific access minority or hybrid cultures have to mainstream and minority audiences both.

The numbers thing is fairly clear – wog voices, appearance and cultural interests mean that you are marginalised, finding a life in circus, puppetry and community theatre. However, if it is only your parents who are the wogs and you're white or white-ish and can play at being a 'skip', you're on your way. There is a chicken-egg problem – casting agents say they can't find good wog actors, so parts don't get written. Writers say their producers won't let them write parts; producers say writers can't write the stories. Someone has to break the circle of exclusion; waiting for a generational change three generations after post-war immigration began is too slow a pace.

The cultural diversity question is more complex – and while the VUT report refers to the issue as a cause of under representation, it is rather more important than work opportunities. It is about the capacity of the society to cope with cultural change on a global scale. Some of the most exciting stuff in Australia is happening within and across the boundaries of ethnicity and culture, on the edges rather than at the centre, where gender identity, sexuality, politics and desire interpenetrate, to produce the seething intensity of the cities and suburbs. Here it is not 'social problem' or 'political correctness' that is on show, but the lived realities of life being done as hard and as sharply as anywhere else (outside the centres of overt war – and for Indigenous people not even that qualification is in order). The failure to have mainstream performance push across that boundary lessens us all in our shared humanity. It also means we are culturally deprived of critical cross-cultural skills in communication and understanding.

In a complex global society, communication within and across diasporic communities raises other questions of representation – why cannot minority communities claim the right to have access to those scarce public goods of cultural expression in forms they understand and enjoy? Where are the

obligations on producers whose profits come from their access to the public goods of the broadcast spectrum or the cable licenses to ensure that all parts of the society can express themselves to themselves, and to others? Here we are not solely talking about writing scripts and characters into Anglo-morphic performances to render them more culturally interesting, we are also talking about the development within minority communities of their cultures and the right they have to cultural development. Minorities are not 'folk communes' but vibrant changing networks which stretch across the planet.

A POSSIBLE WAY FORWARD

The VUT report documents features of the Australian industry which are well known. Those who have successfully resisted change for decades will say – well, what's new? As though that was a perfectly valid reason (still) for doing nothing or as little as they can get away with (almost the same thing). But from this report, as well as other launching pads, the potential exists for moving the whole debate (and more importantly) arts practices forward.

The Australia Council has had a worried history in relation to *Arts for a Multicultural Australia*. It has never achieved whatever participation 'targets' it has set, and always bemoaned this failure publicly, while getting on internally with practices which some fear reinforce these problems. Yet the Council can take a critical role as a broker in a vision of Australian performance (and other arts) which moves us positively into the new millenium.

The Australia Council should explore as a matter of urgency the development of a national centre of excellence in arts for a multicultural society, concentrating on issues of representation, audience development and content creation. Such a centre of excellence has been under discussion in the multicultural arts world for at least the past four years, yet lack of leadership has stymied the innovation – a problem exacerbated by the climate of distrust and fear associated with attacks on multiculturalism.

Such a centre would mark Australia on an international scale as a multicultural nation aware and proud of its capacity to build the arts in ways which exemplify the cultural diversity and interaction of the society. It should not be an edifice, a concrete building separate from the arts world. Rather it should be a strategic body, seeking partnerships with the big players in commercial media, the ABC and elsewhere, and with the national performance companies and leading State companies. It should be concerned with professional development of performers (again in collaboration with institutions such as VCAE, NIDA and Fremantle). It should work with writers to develop mentor projects, and seek innovative scripts for development, production and performance.

Now all of these things have been done in a smaller way a number of times, and sometimes they have had valuable outcomes. But the knowledge and experience are lost to the wider industry, whereas they should be nurtured and communicated, built on as an invaluable experiential resource. This 'corporate knowledge' is one of our most precious resources, which we squander repeatedly, by allowing one-off projects to flower and die. Sometimes we try to document them, but the human capacity needed to realise their lessons for other organisations is lost.

The VUT report throws a beam of light into a shadowy place; the Australia Council now should take on the responsibility of bringing up the floods, and illuminating a pathway into a more creative and diverse cultural future. Only the Council is placed to innovate in this way, either on its own initiative, or as a strategic partner with another body of national standing.

MY ETHNIC MOTHER DAYS ARE OVER

Performer and artistic director, Rosalba Clemente, spoke with Barry Gamba about acting, casting and issues raised in 'The Taxi Driver, the Cook and the Greengrocer' report.

Barry: You've had experiences both as a freelance actor and director, and also as an artistic director of a State theatre company. I'm interested to know what were your experiences as a freelance artist, and how would you say these have influenced the way you operate now as an artistic director?

Rosalba: My days as an artistic director are so young but they certainly are going to be influenced by my experience. Freelance actress? Well, it's so much easier being a director and an artistic director as an Italian woman in this country, I can tell you that.

Being an Italian actress in this country is very, very difficult. I guess I was luckier than most in some ways. I did play Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and Gertrude in *Hamlet*. Tobias Learner wrote *Witchplay* for me, and that went around the country. I played Phedra for Michael Gow in the first thing he did for New Stages at the Sydney Theatre Company, and I've worked at Belvoir Street as a performer upstairs and down. I've had a reasonable amount of work.

Apart from Phedra, I really never got to play anything terribly sexy, which was interesting. I think that because I look the way I look, I often got cast as the mad, bad, ugly, quirky type of person. So the way that I look has definitely influenced my acting career. I definitely got cast in stereotyped ethnic roles, usually in television and film and to a lesser extent in theatre.

Barry: What were those roles?

Rosalba: When I got to my early thirties [the 1990s], there was a year where I found myself playing the Italian mother or the Greek mother or the Lebanese or Macedonian or Turkish mother. I remember my agent ringing me one day and saying, 'Now, it's another mother'. And I said, 'I'm not doing anymore mothers'. 'But this time it's Burmese', and I said, 'Forget it. My ethnic mother days are over'.

I realised at that stage that my range as an actress was going to be severely limited by the way that I was perceived by directors and producers. From the very moment I left NIDA and all the way through my career as an actress the primary response to me, especially from a mainstream perspective, was – ‘She is great. What do we do with her?’

That legacy was with me, right from the start, and travelled with me. So I probably had to make more of my own work than some other actors. I got quite engaged in producing *Witchplay* and travelling around the country on my own. This is the experience of many NESB artists that I know, that they have had to go down this path of making a lot of their own work and opportunities. I do feel that I have been luckier than most but it does not exclude the reality that the next generation are still finding it very difficult.

Barry: How did you turn to directing?

Rosalba: Directing turned to me. It came knocking on my door and I was avoiding responding to it. And destiny took me by the scruff of the neck, and the last time it came knocking on my door I turned around and said, ‘Yes. I’ll have a look at this’. And that’s been what’s taken over my career. But acting is my central passion and my approach to directing is very performer focused. Acting is what I rejected my family for initially. All that’s been healed now. But for an Italian girl from my background to come away to Sydney to become an actress ... it was a monumental thing. I gave away a teaching career. I gave away my family for a period of time.

Barry: How has that range of experiences affected the way you’ve cast things as a director or the way you’ve constructed programmes as an artistic director?

Rosalba: It has affected the way that I’ve cast things. I still believe that you cast the most talented person for the role, and that will never change with me because I think you have to give the role to the person who’s absolutely right. Casting is not a political exercise it’s an artistic one.

I have cast ethnics in traditionally non-ethnic roles for mainstage. I cast Tony Poli in *The Club* and Mark Saterno, both from Italian backgrounds. And I didn’t do that as a political statement. I thought those two actors were fantastically right for those roles. So Mark played Jeff and Tony Poli played Jerry alongside David Field, Don Barker, Syd Brisbane and Francis Greenslade. And it worked. It was a great success.

I cast Arki Michael as Mac in *Don’s Party*. And everybody went, ‘You’re mad. Mac’s not Italian’. And I said, ‘Well, Arki Michael’s going to do the most brilliant job. You just wait and see’. And he was absolutely fabulous. Nobody even thought about whether he was from an ethnic background. And there he was – short, little and dark, and obviously Greek. But he walked into that room and everybody just thought he was a real cracker Aussie.

Barry: Do you think it was a stereotype he was doing of Aussieness, or was he an actor doing a finely observed characterisation?

Rosalba: He’s an actor who did a finely observed characterisation because great actors can. Actors can make you believe just about anything if they’ve got inherently the right qualities for the role. And I cast him for his qualities, not for his ethnicity,

and the fact that he's an absolutely sublime comedian. It was the same in casting Lucia Mastrantone and Caroline Mignon in *My Vicious Angel* – not one person or critic even questioned whether their ethnicity worked against the play because they are both such superior performers. Just this year I cast Caroline in *Blithe Spirit*.

Barry: A number of people interviewed in the 'Taxi Driver' research talked about the role of the director being particularly important in shifting the audience's perceptions. They felt that the role of the director was pivotal in challenging ethnic stereotypes.

Rosalba: I couldn't agree more. That's why I cast Tony as Jerry and Arki as Mac. But I have also cast Tony as Peter in *Emma Celebrazione*. Tony's also played Peter in *Emma – Celebrazione* for me, so it's also a way of saying, 'Look, these guys can play beyond the Peters in *Emma Celebrazione*, Laura Lattuada isn't just an Emma, she can be something else as well.' Yes they should be in Shakespeares; they should be represented right across the spectrum of what we do.

Barry: Have you seen the movie *East is East*, about a Pakistani family living in London in the '70s? The director, an Englishman, Damien McDonald, said in an interview that he could direct the film with insight because he felt directors like Ang Lee had successfully proven that you could deal with a culture that wasn't your own. Ang Lee is the Taiwanese-born director who's made films like *Sense and Sensibility* set in 19th century England, and *Ice Storm* set in middle class America in the '70s. Do you think that's true? Does it cut both ways? Is a director's cultural background important in dealing with specific cultures on stage or film?

Rosalba: That's a hard one because sometimes it matters and sometimes it doesn't, depending on the individual talent and empathy of the director. I really think that's true. The fact that I'm an Italian woman that has no interest in football didn't stop me from doing a great job on *The Club* and equally didn't stop me from doing a great job on a play that is basically about Italians in *A Little Like Drowning*.

But Kate Woods did a great job directing *Looking for Alibrandi*. She wasn't from an Italian background, yet I've worked with another director on another film who was directing a film about Italians who didn't get it. And I think it really is about the director's skill in being able to enter the world or if the director has some kind of response to that world that makes them want to inhabit it and understand it fully, because a lot of directors can get it wrong when they enter a culture that is not their own. It's very, very challenging.

I had a very challenging time when I directed the world premiere of *Radiance* for that reason. I don't think that I was fully equipped to deal with that play at that time for a number of reasons. I feel more fully equipped now. I'm a wiser and a more mature person and more skilled artist. I've become more politicised in that whole area too and I've got a lot more indigenous friends and connections in that area now than I did more than 11 years ago.

Barry: How would you rate the general situation at present? Has there been a shift?

Rosalba: There has to have been some kind of a shift otherwise I wouldn't be the artistic director of a State theatre company. So something is changing and it's probably not changing fast enough for a lot of people. It's not changing fast enough for me in my lifetime, I know that.

Barry: Looking at the change that has occurred, how do you think that's been achieved?

Rosalba: I just think it's because we got out there and worked and slogged. That's what I really believe. I believe the reason that we're moving forward is because NESB artists are out there, they're making their own work or being given work and excelling. When we did *A Little Like Drowning* at Belvoir St Theatre, it was a group of us who got together. Rosie Lavevich had this great script. Khristina Totos, Dina Panozzo, Nicholas Papademetriou and I got together with her and formed a little collective. We got money from Australia Council.

Barry: So you were an outside hirer?

Rosalba: That's right. But we went and we thought how do we get this project on in a space like Upstairs Belvoir? We have to do it ourselves; there's no other way. So we got together, we got money from the Australia Council, we were all about \$3000 out of pocket by the end of the process but we'd actually got a play up in a higher profile space. That was important to us at a time when we were feeling marginalised because of our ethnicity. People came, they loved it, it moved my directing career forward and it created subsequent work for those actors. It was about us getting out there, making ourselves seen. You can't ignore the squeaky wheel – that is my philosophy. I think if you squeak loud enough somebody's got to sit up and take notice. It's about being relentless and chipping away even when the obstacles seem absolutely huge and I think that's why things are changing, that there's a greater recognition. SBS has also helped shift the Anglo-centric bias.

Barry: Another observation in the report is that theatre audiences are growing older and there is not enough work being done on nurturing a newer audience, a younger audience.

Rosalba: I think that is true. We're addressing that as much as we can at State Theatre South Australia, but I think in general, it is a very true thing. We've developed a programme now called Club 26, which means that if you are under the age of 26 you can buy a theatre ticket to any of our shows for the price of a movie. And we've actually got 3000 subscribers this year to that. Three thousand! Which means that they're there and they want to come.

Barry: How important are ethnic communities as a potential new audience?

Rosalba: When I did *Emma Celebrazione* for the third time, a small percentage of my audience were people like my parents. The greater percentage of the audience was a mainstage and general public type audience who always love it. So if I'm bringing my people to the theatre that's a very wonderful thing and it happens in a small way when I do things like play Serafina in Rodney Fisher's production of *The Rose Tattoo*, or *Emma Celebrazione*. I've got the best opportunity of getting them there with that kind of work. But I'm talking about my parents' generation of people. They're very hard to get to the theatre and I don't know that we should be concentrating on them too much. It's fantastic that some times I've had an opportunity in my career to put stories on the stage that talk to that older generation of Italian people. But that's not the only audience that we're interested in harnessing.

Barry: You don't think that specific *Emma Celebrazione* audience would come to other shows in your program?

Rosalba: No, I don't think they would. Not the older generation Italians. The younger ones have more diverse tastes. But I am trying new things. I'm engaging quite a lot with the Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission in Adelaide and what we did for *How I Learned To Drive* was to hold a forum on Women, Art and Peace. Paula Vogel, the play's author, was here from New York, and we invited her to speak and invited business people, politicians, but also community leaders and community workers in non-English speaking areas.

We had a turn-up of about 300 people to the forum and they were all NESB people or if they weren't NESB then they were actually engaged in working in those areas politically or with those communities. It was quite an amazing night. Most of those people didn't normally go to the theatre. We did the forum and then they came in to see the show and then hung around afterwards for a drink and some food, and some of those people have actually come back for *Equus* because they had such a powerful experience. So, it's also about us finding interesting ways to engage these diverse communities.

There's one way of tackling the problem, which is; 'OK, I'll do more work like *Emma Celebrazione*'. But I don't want to be constrained by having just to do that kind of work because I happen to be an Italian and I happen to be a woman. I love culturally specific work but they're not the only stories that I want to tell. So there's something about doing more of those stories that reflect the stories of those people out there that make them come to you, but there's also something about harnessing new groups of people with ideas. This forum, for example, made a broad range of ethnic groups come to us for a different reason. This is a play written by a New York writer. It really doesn't have anything to do with being an Italian, being a Greek or Asian, Indigenous, Irish – being anything. It's got to do with this universal chord of truth that it struck all around the world, which has to do with the ideas, the issues. And this amazing writer has managed to deal with a topic that is devastating and morally complex at the same time and still entertain us!! So, how do you actually get people who don't normally go to the theatre to come and watch work that broadens their perspective and their taste palate as well?

And every company is different. I think what's often happened with this particular company I'm working for at present, is that there have been these 360 degree shifts that people have tried to make overnight. It is not a subscriber base that can deal with that. In this case it's more about if you want to engage with your tribe, your community, your people, your audience, then you really have to listen and then give them back a challenge. Listen to them and then give them back something that will challenge them. And if you spend enough time listening and they can see that you're listening because you're giving them some of what they want, then they'll stretch themselves that extra mile for you sometimes. And therein lies the challenge in mainstage ... to stretch the margin between low and high risk work.

Rosalba Clemente is the Artistic Director at State Theatre South Australia. She has also directed for Belvoir St, Playbox, Anthill, Vitalstatistix and Teatro di Migma, and performed nationally for companies including Company B Belvoir, Sydney Theatre Company, State Theatre South Australia, Giffin Theatre and Entracte.

THE PIZZA DELIVERY BOY IS STILL BLOND

A response to the VUT report by Donald Crombie.

I should explain before I begin my response that I have worked as a film director for approximately 30 years in Australia. In that time I have made feature films, television drama and commercials. I trained in theatre production at NIDA, but I have not worked in the theatre. My experience of theatre is as a consumer of mainstream product at STC, QTC, SATC, Belvoir St and the Ensemble.

The report reinforces with statistical and anecdotal information what I have known for many years; that NESB artists are under represented in film, television and theatre, both as performers and creators.

I agree that the failure to provide positive and accurate images of NESB people sends a message of exclusion to them and the community is ill served by this failure to represent our society accurately.

As a consumer of theatre, I agree that the productions I see reflect the Anglo-Saxon culture in content and style. The companies I attend play to largely conservative, middle class Anglo audiences. I believe this audience is the primary reason for the programming decisions and the exclusion of plays that accurately reflect the present society. This audience is also the reason for the non-employment of NESB artists who have an accent.

Although the report is weighted towards theatre, many of the comments about theatre are true for film and television. An example on page x of the Executive Summary regarding the recognition of cultural and economic potential of cultural diversity in theatre applies equally to film, as the producers of *Looking for Alibrandi* and *The Wog Boy* discovered this year.

Film, television drama and mainstream theatre are both subsidised from development to production. To have a culturally diverse film and television product will require that

the funding bodies actively seek out and encourage NESB creators and nurture their development. This may not be successfully achieved until there is greater NESB representation on boards and in staff positions such as project officers who are the first point of contact for a NESB creator who may have problems conveying written or verbal concepts in English.

I found the research findings and summary of the representation of NESB people in theatre interesting and, from my experience as a consumer, accurate. However, as I don't work in theatre, I should confine my further remarks to film and television.

I think the report is weakened by not having contemporary research on NESB participation in film and television.¹ As well as interviewing the theatre companies, I think the researchers should have interviewed the film and television production companies and individual producers to discover accurate figures of NESB participation in their industries as creators and artists.² The research mentioned, such as Bell's analysis of *Home and Away* is eight years old. Other comments about NESB participation in film and television appear anecdotal only. The film and television industry is important. It consumes hundreds of millions of dollars of government funding annually, it employs thousands of people, it earns export dollars and it is arguably the most effective way to promote Australia overseas. An example being *Crocodile Dundee's* boost to tourist numbers out of the USA.

The Australian film and television industry was re-established in the late 1960s by the then Coalition Government because of the growing concern amongst parliamentarians that Australian school children were more familiar with the history, myths and legends of the wild west of the United States than they were with those of their own country. This was as a direct result of that nation's hugely successful export motion picture industry, a fact not lost on Senator Vincent and Prime Minister Gorton. Which is why if we are to continue to have a film and television industry it should accurately portray the society it reflects and our diverse ethnic talents should be able to tell their stories, which are Australian stories.

There is another powerful argument why our film and television should more accurately represent the true multicultural society Australia is. The visual media passes down our history, our myths, and our legends. Filmmakers are as important for this reason as teachers and film has a role to play by showing people how they came to be what they are and how they relate to each other.

My experience in film and television agrees with the report's finding that NESB artists are under represented as performers and if NESB creators wish to be involved in original work that reflects their lives within the broader community they have to generate it themselves (*Monica Pellizeri A Fist Full Of Flies*).

¹ 11.5 per cent of people working in film and TV production in 1996 are NESB *AFC 'Getting the Picture'*.

² 23.2 per cent AFC applicants 1998–99 are NESB. *AFC annual report '98-'99*.

I agree with the Executive Summary finding that theatre, film and television do not adequately reflect the multicultural nature of Australian society. The report suggests film and television 'are slowly moving towards this goal'. This may be true of feature films, but I don't believe it is for television.

I believe the feature film industry to be more adventurous in producing culturally diverse stories and in the employment of NESB artists than television. Although the lead actors in the two successful films this year, *Looking for Alibrandi* and *The Wog Boy*, had Australian accents, NESB accented artists were limited to supporting roles.

At this year's AFI Award screenings, 25 feature films gave an interesting snapshot of the industry and supports my proposition that the feature film industry offers opportunity to NESB creators and artists. Five films (20 per cent) had stories derived from aspects of the multicultural experience in Australia. Six directors, three writers, eight lead actors and at least 12 supporting actors are from the NESB communities. These figures are broadly equivalent or better than the quoted 24 per cent NESB participation in the total community. Whether NESB participation in this year's films is greater than previous years and is evidence of an increasing output of culturally diverse films is something further research could discover.

I agree that NESB artists are not considered for Australian roles in film and television and that they are also denied culturally specific roles. In this year's AFI award screenings there are examples of ESB actors playing NESB roles. Sacha Horler plays a Russian in *Russian Doll* and John Bluthal and Ron Haddrick play Greeks in *Beware of Greeks Bearing Guns*. It's interesting to note that the latter film is directed and written by a Greek Australian, John Tatoulis.

The report is critical of this practice, but it is also simplistic to suggest that if a role is written for a NESB character of a particular culture, then an actor of that culture must play the role. It may be that there is not an actor of a sufficient experience available from that culture. Casting leading roles in a feature film is a critical decision and involves more than just acting ability. Star quality comes into play and very few people have it. An example is Pia Miranda in *Looking for Alibrandi*. The girl has something far more than acting ability, she has the magical 'it' that defines a star from an actor and is one reason why people pay money to go to a cinema. There has to be latitude for directors and casting agents to find the right person for a role even if the chosen actor is not culturally correct. Talented actors can play across cultural divides. Meryl Streep when questioned on how she, an American, could play the quintessential English heroine in Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* replied, 'I am an actress'.

Commercial television is more conservative in choice of material and cast. I believe it will remain so until generational change in senior management brings new attitudes and a willingness to reflect Australian society as it actually is, rather than reflecting the mainstream Anglo society. The day that *Halifax FP* becomes *Halabi FP* or *Tanh FP* will be the day that I accept our television is truly reflective of the society it broadcasts to.

Television is resistant to accurately reflecting Australia's cultural diversity. Perception amongst management is that the audience, that is the majority Anglo audience, won't accept anything other than tokenistic and stereotyped images of

NESB Australians. There is a fear of invading the comfort zone of Anglo-Australians, which could adversely affect ratings. It is the same for commercials. Advertisers appear to pitch to the Anglo-Australian community and the casting reflects this. The pizza chef might be cast as a stereotypical Italian, but the pizza delivery boy is the blond Aussie, because as a leading casting agent told me, the audience 'doesn't want wogs coming to the front door'.

It is true that people who look or sound different from the mainstream Australian society will find it difficult to work in television. Television management is resistant to an actor who has a 'foreign' accent. My experience from dealing with commercial television management is that there is prejudice against NESB performers.³

The report suggests that because of shows like *Wildside* and earlier, *Bordertown* and *Heartbreak High*, casting and script writing for television may be changing to become more multicultural. I believe that is overly optimistic and if there has been change it is minimal. Certainly, there are NESB characters appearing in support roles in television drama (the Indians in *SeaChange*) Alex Dimitriades did play a lead in *Wildside*, but Dimitriades (presumably a NESB2) has an Australian accent, so is acceptable. A casting consultant told me that lack of a foreign accent is essential to getting work in television drama and for speaking roles in commercials. In support roles, NESB actors with accents are used, but the role is often stereotypical.

Looking for Alibrandi and *The Wog Boy* also support an argument that a mainstream audience exists for films that depict a NESB culture with NESB artists playing lead roles. Though it should be remembered that *Looking for Alibrandi* was adapted from a successful novel, widely read in schools and *The Wog Boy* was derived from a successful stage show with a lead performer, Nick Giannopoulos already a popular television performer. However, with appropriate market development strategies by producers and distributors, other good product with cultural diversity should succeed in the mainstream cinema and television.

On page ix of the Executive Summary the report says that second generation NESB artists fare better than first. That is true, but I doubt if second generation NESBs are 'over represented' in television unless this is based on statistical comparison with the general population. I don't believe any NESB artist, 1 or 2 would agree they were over represented in television compared to ESB artists.

The role of the funding bodies in taking responsibility for a more accurate representation of Australia in film and television is important. Film and television development is subsidised by the Federal and State Governments and production is part subsidised, so the AFC, FFC and State film bodies can influence what is developed and produced.

³ I made a movie of the week for a commercial network where the principal character was an Afrikaner South African. 'Why does he have an accent?' asked the head of Network Drama. 'Because he's an Afrikaner'. 'But can't he have an Australian accent?' A compromise was reached. The actor played the role with an English South African accent.

Without government funding, the Australian film and television industry would cease to exist. It is in the development phase that any bias towards ESB creators can be corrected and NESB creators can be sourced and developed.

It is not necessary to have NESB directors to achieve authenticity in the portrayal of NESB characters. It is important that directors do the necessary research and employ cultural advisers so that the portrayal is correct and not offensive. That is part of the job.

Casting agents are important as they bring potential actors to the director's attention. They are all biased in favour of or against some actors (though not necessarily NESB actors). Feature film directors have more control over casting than television directors where network executives have final creative control.

I agree with the broad conclusions to this report (Conclusions Section 6) except I would be more cautious about saying that television is moving towards reflecting our multicultural society. I don't see sufficient evidence of this, and don't accept that NESB artists playing support roles in drama productions is any real evidence of change. Maybe there is less overtly stereotypical representation of NESB characters (Con the Fruiterer seems to have disappeared) but that doesn't indicate to me a reason to believe television production will more accurately reflect our society in the near future.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

One way to increase NESB creators and artists participation in film and television is to prove that they and their product has appeal for the Anglo mainstream audience. The trail has been blazed and it is now important to encourage and develop people of NESB so the whole community can benefit from their talent.

The boards of the State and Federal film bodies should have NESB representation to the level of the general community. NESB project officers should be employed to assist NESB clients maximise their chances of being funded.

It is important to not treat people who show talent as a one-off project. Creative people need to be developed and when a person shows raw talent they should be nurtured over several projects of increasing complexity to bring them to a point where they are commercially viable as creators.

I would like to see more initiatives like Metro Screen's recent Multicultural Mentor Scheme, where four first time filmmakers were funded to make a five minute film.⁴ This was a fascinating exercise for me, and three of the films showed that their creators had sufficient ability to be developed further. The films revealed the familiar observed from the perspective of another

⁴ I was a mentor on one of the films. The NSW Film and Television Office, and SBS Independent funded the Multicultural Mentor Scheme.

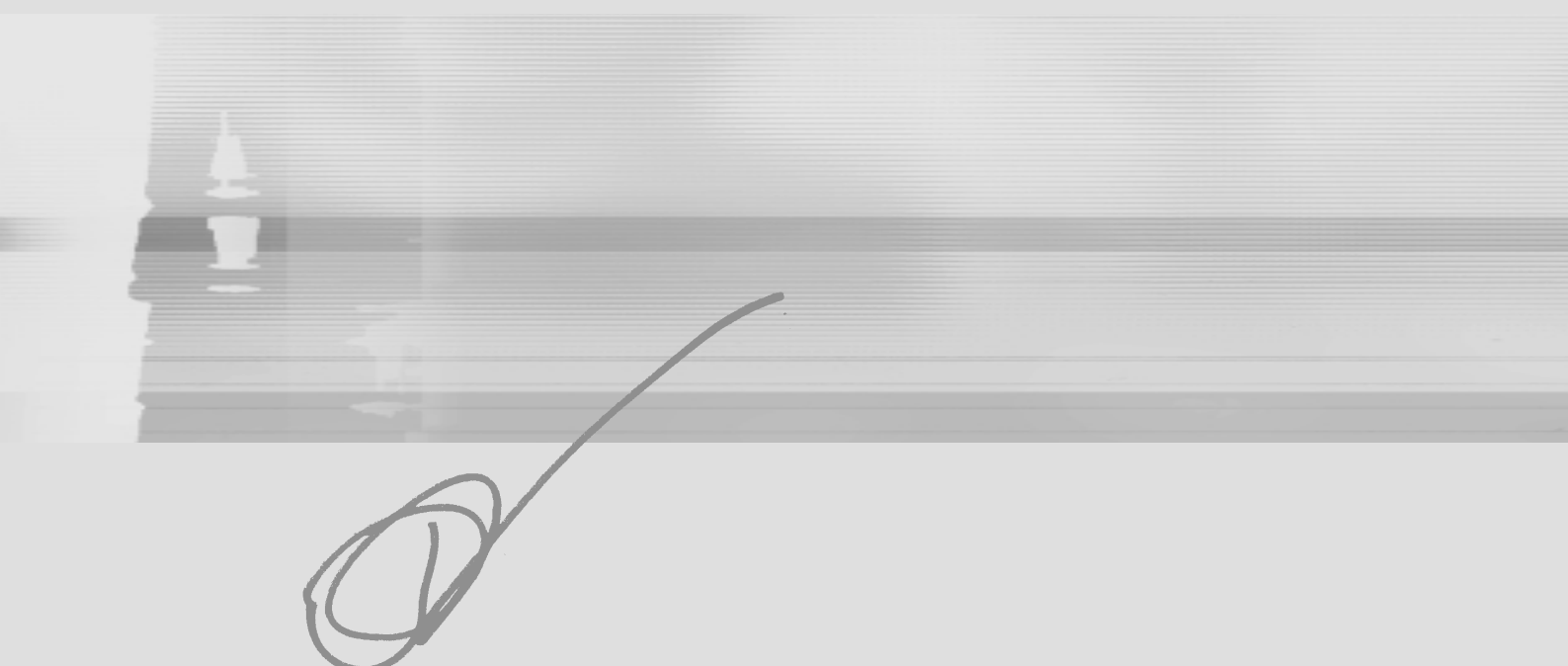


© **Australia Council**
November 2000
ISBN 0 642 47231 9

Published by the Australia Council
372 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010
PO Box 788 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

Telephone: 02 9215 9000
Toll free: 1800 226 912
Fax: 02 9215 9111
Email: mail@ozco.gov.au

www.ozco.gov.au



Design: ANTART

FRONT COVER PHOTOS (centre-left to right):

1. Zulema Capielli - photo by Louis Capielli. **2. Annibale Migliucci** - photo by Franco Baldi / Europhoto **3. Annette Shun Wah** - image from the movie *Floating Life*
4. Jay Laga'aia - photo by Philip le Masurier **5. Juan Modinger** - photo by Stuart Campbell **6. Alejandro Machuron** - photo by Sally Hone

with thanks to Multicultural Arts Management