

**Organizing Canadian theatre designers:  
The intersection of creative and precarious labour**

**by  
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## **Abstract**

Canadian theatre designers share many similarities with other freelance, creative workers in Canada. The conditions of precarity that define their working relationships are similar to those that affect workers in other sectors, such as film, music, television, and visual arts. This thesis begins by examining the existing literatures and research concerning creative and precarious work, primarily in Canada, but also internationally. Drawing on in-depth interviews of 55 designers from within the relatively small community of Canadian theatre designers, approximately 500-700 workers, I examine the working conditions that designers find challenging and seek suggestions for how they can be improved. Additionally, I explore the different models that designers have used to organize in Canada, Quebec, and the United States. By comparing these models with the interviews from designers, I conclude that the best way for Canadian designers to improve their working conditions is to build a closer relationship with IATSE, the union that represents stagehands and technicians. Finally, I identify some questions for further exploration, including the tension between artistic and worker identities, while also touching on the present circumstances of the Covid-19 crisis and the current conversations concerning racism and white supremacy within Canadian society.

**Keywords:** creative labour; precarious labour; labour organizing; theatre; designers; precarity

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to the Canadian community of theatre and live performance designers. To everyone who has organized, advocated for other designers, or otherwise supported the community in their own unique way. For all designers.

Bread for all, and Roses, too.

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## List of Acronyms

ADC	Associated Designers of Canada
APASQ	Association des Professionnels des Arts de la Scène du Québec
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and Person of Colour
CAEA	Canadian Actors Equity Association
CERB	Canada Emergency Response Benefit
CFM	Canadian Federation of Musicians
CSN	Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux
CTA	Canadian Theatre Agreement
CUPW	Canadian Union of Postal Workers
DwD	Drinks with Designers
ED	Executive Director
EI	Employment Insurance
ESA	Employment Standards Act
HoW	Head of Wardrobe
IATSE	International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees
ILD	International Labor Defense
IUPAT	International Union of Painters and Allied Trades
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
LORT	League of Regional Theatres
NAC	National Arts Centre
NASO	National Arts Service Organization
NIOS	Not In Our Space
OLRB	Ontario Labour Relations Board
PACT	Professional Association of Canadian Theatres
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PM	Production Manager
RRSP	Registered Retirement Savings Plan
SAA	Status of the Artist Act
TD	Technical Director
USA 829	United Scenic Artists 829
WGA	Writers Guild of America

# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Researching Canadian designers

Employment in the creative industries is growing sector of labour in Canada. The ability of this sector to deliver stable employment, and the extent of precarious working conditions, matters to creative workers and their communities. This thesis examines the working conditions of Canadian theatre designers through interviews with designers currently working professionally in the field. The Canadian Actors Equity Association (CAEA) and the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) are both labour organizations that represent other theatrical workers, and affiliation with each organization will be explored as potential options for designers to increase their leverage and bargaining power. As a member of the professional design community, as well as a board member of the Associated Designers of Canada (ADC), I am in the unique position of being able to study the issue both from the inside, as an actively practicing designer, and from the outside, academically, from a sociological perspective.

This thesis aims to answer two primary questions: “What are the working conditions that designers find challenging?” and “How can designers improve their working conditions?” Both of these questions have been talked about consistently within the design community for the ten years that I have been working as a professional designer. Organizations like ADC and Association des Professionnels des Arts de la Scène du Québec (APASQ) in Quebec and United Scenic Artists 829<sup>1</sup> (USA 829) in the United States are invested in improving working conditions for the designers they represent. All three organizations are examined as different models for designer representation. I also used interviews to interact directly with professional designers to understand their thoughts and opinions to ensure that a multiplicity of perspectives from the community contributed to these recommendations. The overall scope of this thesis is to make recommendations to improve working conditions for designers both individually and collectively. Narrowly, the goal of asking these questions is to make any possible direct improvements, for example methods for which theatre producers can more effectively support designers on a single production. More broadly, the goal is to find

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<sup>1</sup> United Scenic Artists 829 is a local of IATSE.

improvements in working conditions for the entire theatre community, through collective action that organizations like ADC can undertake on behalf of all designers. And, from the broadest perspective, the goal is to find relevance for other creative workers who experience precarious working conditions by examining how factors such as artistic identity affect labour organizing efforts and collective bargaining.

These questions are particularly relevant to the specific moment in time of 2020. Currently, almost the entire Canadian theatre industry is shut down due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and will be for the foreseeable future, especially since a limit on the size of public gatherings is one of last restrictions that will be lifted. This forced pause provides a unique opportunity to ask and explore these questions of improving working conditions, as we now have, to some extent, the capacity and perspective to identify the changes we want to implement once work resumes. Finally, there is relevance to the larger labour movement due to the widespread trend, since the 1970s, of labour becoming more precarious, less formalized, and generally moving away from the traditional standard employment relationship (Vosko 2000, p.3). There is no academic literature written directly about Canadian theatre designers or their working conditions. Theatre designers have frequently experienced the precarity of the “gig economy” and examining these conditions can provide relevance to understanding freelance working relationships. In addition to making recommendations to improve working conditions for designers, this thesis aims to contribute to the conversations among workers facing similar circumstances in other sectors.

## **1.2. The context of theatre designers in Canada**

While this thesis includes interviews from designers in Canada and the United States, its primary focus is Canadian designers<sup>2</sup>. Opinions from interviews with Quebec designers are discussed simultaneously with designers from elsewhere in Canada due to the similarities in challenging working conditions. Within the live performance industry,

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<sup>2</sup> In this thesis I refer separately to Quebec and Canada because the cultural and structural differences in employment relations for designers are significant. Canada (as used in the remainder of this thesis) therefore refers to all other provinces and territories, and Quebec is described and discussed independently.

designers are responsible for the conceptualization and supervision of the implementation of the creative elements of a show or production. They are hired to design theatre, dance, opera, or other live entertainment in collaboration with the director, choreographer, or other creative team members. For the most part, designers can be categorized into five main disciplines: set, costumes, lighting, video, and sound, although there are additional subcategories like props, or hair and makeup. Canadian designers are classified as independent contractors, and work on each live performance on an individual contract, typically outside of provincial employment standards legislation. As independent contractors, designers do not have a formal employer/employee relationship that would allow them to be automatically covered by federal programs like Employment Insurance (EI). Independent contractors do have the ability to voluntarily pay into EI, but it is a difficult process that includes a complicated application and a 12-month gap between registration approval and the ability to claim benefits. ADC is the professional organization that represents approximately 60% of Canadian theatre designers. That number is approximate due to the difficulty in delineating who “qualifies” as a designer<sup>3</sup>. ADC has a collectively bargained contract with the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT). The PACT contract only applies to ADC members, so PACT companies are able to undercut ADC minimum fees and working standards within individual contracts with non-member designers. Designers, or their agents, typically negotiate the fee for each contract directly with theatre companies and producers. These negotiations are usually one-on-one, and the designer and production manager often know each other personally or have worked together before. In these negotiations, there is often a significant power imbalance between the designer and the theatre company. The designer’s ability to negotiate a higher fee is limited to their individual negotiating skill, and theatre companies rarely are willing to increase their design fees much higher than their pre-budgeted amount.

Within the Canadian theatre industry, there are two other, larger, organizations that also represent theatre workers. CAEA is, similarly to ADC, a professional organization, not a union, but has an exclusive contract with PACT, giving them a historically stronger bargaining position than that of ADC. CAEA represents actors,

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<sup>3</sup> For example, is someone who typically works in film, but does one theatre design a year classified as a theatre designer? There is no definitive answer to that or similar questions concerning how to delineate the total number of theatre designers in Canada.

directors, choreographers, stage managers, fight choreographers, and some dancers. IATSE is a union that represents technicians and stagehands. Unlike ADC and CAEA, IATSE does not negotiate with PACT, as each of the IATSE contracts is unique to the individual employer that is certified. The memberships of CAEA and IATSE are much larger than ADC, which makes coordination between the three organizations difficult. However, a coalition was formed between these three organizations, plus the Canadian Federation of Musicians (CFM), to advocate for live performance workers in response to the industry shutdown due to Covid-19. Within ADC and the design community, conversations have historically occurred about whether or not it would be advantageous for ADC to join, or affiliate with, IATSE or CAEA, but no formal negotiations have ever been initiated.

### **1.3. The structure of the thesis**

This thesis will begin with a discussion of the available literature concerning theatre designers; outlining the similarities and differences that exist between designers and other creative workers, as well as touching on the tension between the identities of artist and worker (Chapter 2.1). The following section will establish the theoretical framework for the thesis, examining the freelance and precarious working conditions of theatre designers and how this precarity has been affected by the larger labour movement and economic trends regarding employment regulation and policy (Chapter 2.2). The methodology used to approach this topic as well as a discussion of the use of Participatory Action Research (PAR) to acknowledge my positionality as an active organizer within the design community forms the next section of the thesis (Chapter 3). The following two sections are grounded primarily in the interviews with working designers within the Canadian theatre community. First, the concerns and challenges that designers identified with their current working conditions are detailed and explored (Chapter 4). Second, the recommendations that designers gave during the interviews to improve their working conditions are outlined (Chapter 5). The following section examines the models that exist to represent theatre designers in Canada, Quebec, and the United States as well as a brief examination of the labour laws and employment classification that pertain to Canadian designers (Chapter 6). Finally, recommendations and conclusions are explored, in addition to some questions for future research. A limited examination is made of both the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on working

conditions and the current conversations about racism and white supremacy within Canadian theatre (Chapter 7).

## **1.4. Preview of high-level findings and conclusions**

One of the most important aspects of this research was the opportunity to interview designers in Canada, Quebec, and the United States because those interviews yielded similar responses in regard to the working conditions that designers find challenging. The commonality of challenging working conditions that designers experience working in disparate cultural and economic conditions, and in varying theatrical communities, speaks to the structural issues that exist within the typical European theatre production model. Additionally, all of the designers interviewed believed that collective solutions and actions are necessary to address challenging working conditions, i.e. these issues cannot be solved simply at the individual advocacy level. Finally, these interviews included executive staff at the main organizations that represent designers in Canada (ADC), Quebec (APASQ), and the United States (USA 829). Interviewing these staff members facilitated a deeper exploration of how these organizations function, and how the models upon which they operate can inform future organizing actions and strategies for Canadian designers. Based on the interviews conducted with designers and an examination of the models that are used to represent designers in Quebec and the United States, the primary recommendation of this thesis is for ADC to explore a closer relationship with IATSE to improve working conditions for Canadian designers.

## **Chapter 2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Creative labour**

#### **2.1.1. Lack of literature about theatre designers**

Canadian theatre designers are creative workers whose employment conditions are similar to other freelance workers, including work that is unstable, contains limited benefits or wages, and is affected by larger social and economic factors (Vosko 2005, p.3). The lack of regulatory structures for the work of theatre designers enhances those factors to create precarious working conditions. Creative labour is more difficult to define, but it typically involves artistic production or performance that is intended to entertain, inform, or enlighten an audience (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011, p.2). Consequently, although nothing has been written specifically about theatre designers in Canada, the exploration of other artists and freelance workers and their precarious working conditions is a useful starting point towards an analysis of Canadian designers.

To begin, it is useful to examine some of the cultural attitudes about other creative workers. De Peuter (2011) argues that there is a cultural sense in which, regardless of the precarious or exploitative nature of creative work, being an artist is still a prestigious occupation (p. 420). In addition to the prestige that can accompany artistic work, there is also the personal fulfillment experienced by creative or cultural workers. Butler and Russell (2018) write, "Freelance creative work is a labour of love where opportunities for self-expression are combined with exploitative working conditions" (p. 1666). Additionally, Morgan, Wood, and Nelligan (2013) argue that artistic workers within an occupation that appears creative perform greater sacrifices in order to succeed because of the perceived importance of self-sacrifice towards genuine and authentic artistic work (p. 403). These larger cultural attitudes all inform the socioeconomic conditions that affect the precarious working conditions of creative workers. Beginning this research by exploring the common conditions among freelance, creative workers, it is possible to understand how the experiences of Canadian theatre designers fit into larger cultural and labour frameworks.

### 2.1.2. Similarity among creative workers

By connecting the unique experiences of theatre designers to other cultural workers, I explore the similarities and differences of precarious working conditions on different groups of creative workers to gain greater insight into how precarity impacts designers. There have been several studies of artistic workers with similarities to theatre designers that have examined how artistic practice is affected by precarious, freelance working conditions. Hracs and Leslie (2014) describe difficult and problematic working conditions for freelance musicians in Toronto, which highlights the parallels between musicians and designers in terms of employment instability: “Creative work is also characterized by high levels of employment insecurity and perpetual networking” (p. 67). Another aspect of freelance, creative labour that has been studied is the necessity of unseen, emotional labour and the effect that it has on workers. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2008) examine the role of emotional labour amongst reality television producers, which effectively describes the relationship between many theatre designers and emotional labour, “[...]Including the way they are required to deal with the particular emotions generated in the course of their jobs, both their own and those of others – emotions which cannot be detached from an understanding of the specificity of cultural production” (p. 103). It is common for emerging designers to be offered “exposure”, rather than monetary compensation, for contracts early in their careers. Regarding the relationship of internships and, essentially, forced volunteering as necessary prerequisites of establishing oneself within creative industries, Warren (2014) writes, “The lure of artistic and creative work can be explained by a complex mix of monetary and non-monetary rewards: intrinsic motivators of personal satisfaction and social status; risk-taking despite the comparatively low probability of personal success” (p. 279). Finally, there is literature that questions whether workers in the creative industries are, unfortunately, characteristic of the increasing precarity across many sectors of employment due to the deregulation of labour standards within contemporary capitalism. The historical conditions of the British music industry as a “gig economy” (for example the majority of employment occurring within unregulated markets) have been used as a potential barometer for larger labour trends as overall employment markets become more atomized and precarious (Haynes & Marshall, 2018, p. 475). These examples from the precarious working experiences of other creative workers provide a strong

foundation for which to compare and contrast the conditions of precarity among Canadian theatre designers.

### **2.1.3. The tension between artistic and worker identity**

The precarious conditions in which creative work often occurs presents unique challenges to building solidarity among artistic workers. There is often a high degree of autonomy for creative workers, which is offset by conditions of powerlessness and precarity (Toynbee, 2012, p. 95). The personal investment in creative work can cause artistic workers to be more likely to engage in self-exploitation, such as attempting to advance their career doing additional, unpaid work or building friendships based on their 'networking' potential (Morgan, Wood, and Nelligan, 2013, p. 403). As a result, there are specific reasons why a tension exists for creative workers between individual artistic identity and collective worker identity. The nature of creative work can be atomizing or isolating, and while unions and professional labour organizations are present- even strong in certain fields, such as theatre technicians unionized with IATSE- they are completely non-existent in others, for example graphic designers. Furthermore, the nature of freelance, creative work can include a new worksite and different fellow workers as often as every two to three weeks, limiting the ability of creative workers to foster solidarity with one another. More broadly, some creative workers experience little to no engagement with the labour movement, further limiting the possibility for a collective class identity. None of these obstacles are insurmountable, but they are very real, and require further examination in order to organize and support creative workers within precarious working conditions.

The tension between artistic and worker identities have historically been influenced by factors such as the relative strength of the labour movement. But, there is nothing inherently exclusive between the two identities. This tension can be attributed to the unique working practices of artistic workers, such as the potential for limited workplace autonomy due to their creative skills or prestige. Stahl (2012) writes about how this limited autonomy can create an uncertain workplace status for artists: "[...]Their abilities and reputations buy them room to work relatively autonomously but do not secure for them much in the way of workplace political power; managers retain power of command and can constrain workers' autonomy at will" (p. 75). The working practices for artists and creative workers exist across a diverse spectrum, so it is difficult to make any

general or universal claims, beyond that autonomy with limited workplace power can be a distinguishing factor in the perceived schism between artistic and worker identity. Additionally, Banks, Gill, and Taylor (2012) write about the individualization of creative workers, and how that autonomy can be harmful because it leads to “liberated” workers facing increasingly precarious conditions of employment, such as lack of job security or benefits, solely on their own (p. 2). Regarding artistic identity, Haynes and Marshall (2018) write about musicians who explicitly reject the label of “entrepreneur” even though they clearly demonstrate entrepreneurial traits, such as flexibility, networking, accepting risk etc., in their artistic working practice (p. 468). Traditionally, the individualistic entrepreneurial identity exists in fairly stark contrast to the collective worker identity. However, there is similarity to the circumstances of artists being resistant to any alternate identities, in favour of a solely creative identity. While it is difficult to draw any concrete conclusions from this review, I argue that an autonomous or individualistic artistic working practice can lend itself to a desire for the “unique” identity of an artist rather than the more common identity of worker. Further research and exploration are required to more fully examine why creative workers may be resistant to identifying as workers. Work environments that privilege individual autonomy without political power, the unstable, precarious conditions of creative work, and the potential lack of consistent worksite contributes to disincentivizing the embrace of the worker identity.

Finally, to demonstrate that artistic and worker identities are not inherently separate from one another, there are two examples, one historical and one contemporary, which illustrate artists embracing worker identities. In the 1930s in the United States, at a time when union density was significantly higher than present day, there was often less separation between artistic and non-artistic workers. Specifically writing about the Artists Union that functioned in New York City between 1933 and 1944, Lampert (2013) states: “The coalition of Artists did not view themselves as acting in isolation: members largely self-identified themselves as workers who were part of the labour movement” (p. 166). Furthermore, Denning (1998) relays the words of the painter Stuart Davis, and his connection to the labour movement within the same historical period: “It wasn't a choice...it was a necessity to be involved in what was going on...” (p. 54). There is not space within this thesis for an exploration of how and why these identities evolved and separated since that time period, but these examples demonstrate

that the contemporary tensions between artistic and worker identity have not always existed in their current form. Even in the present day, there are examples of artists fully embracing their identity as workers. Fisk (2016) writes about the Writers Guild of America (WGA), specifically during their 2007-2008 strike:

Although writers have always believed that talent is highly individual, and some have made millions while others barely scraped by, they united over their common issues and held their union together through tumultuous strikes, persecution of leftists, industry downsizing, and huge changes in the way that movies and TV are created and delivered. (p. 6)

The WGA example demonstrates that it is possible to understand the unique, individualistic working practice of creative labour and the role of talent, while also recognizing that embracing the worker identity is essential in protecting artists from exploitative and precarious working conditions. Therefore, although the tensions that exist between artistic and worker identities exist, they are also not insurmountable. The adoption of the dual-identities of worker and artist allow creative workers to join together in common cause to ensure that they can continue to create personally fulfilling artistic work while also using collective action and organization to mitigate the precarious working conditions within contemporary creative labour. There is no definitive answer to the question of why artists may eschew the worker identity, but there are examples of how conditions at creative worksites and cultural attitudes about creative work can increase the tension between those identities. By understanding those tensions and looking to periods in which those tensions were significantly lessened, the potential exists for overcoming them and forging harmonious artist/worker identities to build collective power among artistic workers.

The experience of the Hollywood writers is pertinent to designers. Although designers, especially in Canada, do not have the high-end financial outcome of making millions, there are designers who earn a comfortable living and designers who barely scrape by. Similarly, there is a belief in the individual nature of talent and sometimes a sense of competition between designers regarding who is offered certain contracts. The solidarity demonstrated by the writers to unite over common issues, even at tremendous risk to themselves as individuals can be instructive to designers. The more that designers can fully embrace both identities of artist and worker, without a conflict between the two, the stronger the potential will be to undertake collective action to improve working conditions.

## **2.2. Theoretical framework: Freelance precarious labour**

### **2.2.1. Freelance workers left behind by the labour movement**

Building upon the literature in the previous section about instances in which artists embraced a worker identity, this section will examine the larger interactions between creative workers and the organized labour movement. The strength of the labour movement has risen and fallen during the 20th and 21st centuries. One indicator of its relative strength is the ability to organize and support workers who exist on the fringes of the industrial and commercial sectors that have typically been the least densely organized. As Oakley (2012) writes, “The cultural industries have often been held up as an indicator of the way work is going[...].” (p. 66). When workers within the cultural industries are integrated and supported within the labour movement, it can be emblematic of the ability of the labour movement to reach all workers, not just those that are relatively easy to organize. The organization and engagement of creative workers within the labour movement is therefore potentially representative of the overall health and scope of the labour movement itself. While the contextual differences between contemporary economic forces and the 1930s/1940s are substantial, the engagement between the artistic community and the labour movement in that period provides a model for how the labour movement can effectively engage with creative workers on a broad scale. For the labour movement to truly engage and support the entire working class, it is essential for workers on the margins, including artists, to be the focus of organizing strategies, to ensure that no worker is left behind.

The relationship between freelance work, cultural working conditions, and the labour movement has differed significantly depending on location, historical period, and larger political and economic structural forces. So, it is nearly impossible to write about the nature of freelance work in broad strokes. A few authors have written about the evolution of freelance, creative work in Canada and the United States throughout the 20th and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, which is a useful starting point. Butler and Russell (2018) write:

Freelance creative settings are thus characterized by a widespread acceptance – albeit a grudging one – of extended periods of working

without remuneration or at a discount rate, which is further compounded by low trade union membership and a lack of collective bargaining. (p. 4)

The conditions for artistic work are not static in any way: they follow the broad economic forces, such as regulation of labour markets, that shape conditions for all workers. Several authors explore the effect of larger economic forces on the nature of creative work in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a period of tumultuous labour relations, from differing perspectives. Scott (2007) argues that the commodification of artistic practice limited individual artistic expression by examining the autonomy of the progressive, avant-garde composers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Schönberg, Berg, Webern, and Mahler. Scott writes: “Artistic culture was more and more difficult to sustain as an autonomous activity, as cultural productions were becoming available to people only in commodity form” (p.22). In response to the exploitative conditions that American film writers experienced within the same time period, Fisk (2016) outlines how collective action benefited individual writers: “Writers unionized in Hollywood for good reasons, and they remained fairly militant unionists because they understood the power of collective action in the early version of the “gig economy” that was Hollywood” (p. 6). These examples illustrate that the relationships between artistic workers and the labour movement have evolved due to changing economic, and political conditions, even within the same time period. What remains common is that precarious working conditions have historically existed within creative work and engaging with the labour movement for solidarity and organization is one of the ways in which creative workers have collectively attempted to limit that precarity.

Instances when artistic workers and the labour movement have organized or engaged in political action together have produced mixed results. There have been examples of success, such as the unionization of Hollywood writers within the WGA or the sustained presence of IATSE as an organizing force within the live performance industry. There has been difficulty finding common ground between traditional trade union organizers and creative workers who often have unconventional employment relationships, lacking a single employer or a single worksite (de Peuter, 2011, p. 422). Freelance workers and the labour movement have forged stronger connections on the outskirts of the labour movement itself as de Peuter (2014) describes, “Emerging at the margins of the union movement, however, are atypical workers’ associations exploring strategies for bringing together workers in nonstandard employment, including the self-

employed, across a variety of occupations” (p. 268). It makes logical sense that non-traditional organizing forces are more successful at interacting with creative workers based on their shared understanding of non-standard employment relationships. Looking towards solutions, workers' associations could perhaps act as a bridge between creative workers and traditional union organizers. Regarding the political activities of the labour movement in Canada in support of freelance artists, Vosko (2005) argues, “However, with the exception of Quebec, and more recently some enabling legislation in Saskatchewan, none of the provinces have enacted legislation aimed at improving the socio-economic situation of self-employed artists” (p. 168). The Status of the Artist Act<sup>4</sup> (SAA) is useful in that it allows freelance creative workers to form professional associations, among its other benefits, but it provides no concrete path towards certifying professional organizations as unions (Macpherson, 1999, pg. 356). Therefore, there is a need for the organizing and political activities of the labour movement to better connect with and support creative workers in order to improve precarious working conditions.

Finally, there are concrete examples of instances in which the labour movement was strong and vibrant enough that it contained the capacity to devote resources to organizing creative workers. These examples provide the basis for how a successful contemporary relationship between the labour movement and creative workers could be structured. It is also apparent that the level of involvement between creative workers and the labour movement in general is just as, if not more, affected by larger economic trends and circumstances than the specific relationship between established trade unions and non-standard freelance workers. As mentioned previously, the 1930s in the United States provided an example of when the labour movement itself included artists at its centre, rather than on the margins. Denning (1998) writes about The Popular Front as, “[...]The ground on which the workers theaters, proletarian literary magazines, and film industry unions stood: it was... a radical social-democratic movement forged around anti-fascism, anti-lynching, and the industrial unionism of the CIO” (p. XIX). Within the forces of the Popular Front, Lampert (2013) describes the Artists Union as, “[...]The leading voice for unemployed artists during the Great Depression. It was comprised of a

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<sup>4</sup> The Status of the Artist Act is a Federal Canadian Act that was introduced in 1995 to create a basic legal framework for professional artists.

militant group of artists organized into a trade union of painters, printmakers, and sculptors” (p. 157). Denning (1998) writes about the International Labor Defense (ILD):

The ILD was a radical legal-action group built by the Communist Party to defend jailed unionists, immigrants facing deportation, and African-Americans facing southern terror...The “labor defense” became central to the proletarian avant-garde, and many of the poems, stories, dances, songs and street theater sketches invoked the martyrs made famous by the ILD. (p. 66)

Between organizations such as the Artists Union and ILD, there was meaningful interaction between creative workers and the labour movement. This is not to say that these are the only circumstances that can foster such cohesion. However, it does provide an example for how this kind of support and advocacy from the labour movement can function for creative workers within precarious working conditions. Both historical examples point towards a strategy of embracing radicalism and labour militancy to attract and include creative workers. As contemporary labour movement strategy tends to avoid radicalism in favour of moderation, these historical examples demonstrate the success, and perhaps even necessity, of more aggressive strategies and their benefit in organizing and integrating non-traditional creative workers.

In terms of contemporary organizing of creative workers, there is a tension that exists between the ability of creative workers to engage in labour militancy and the nature of freelance employment. Especially for theatre designers and directors (who are represented by CAEA), there are very few guaranteed and repeated employment opportunities. For the most part, they depend on the relationships formed with the people with whom they negotiate contracts, both individually and collectively, in order to be hired again in the future. So, although there are some radical voices amongst creative workers, there is a tendency to temper creative labour militancy for fear of being unofficially blacklisted. A potential solution to this tension is for the organizations that represent creative workers to take on that collective militancy so that the burden does not fall to individuals. However, that places the workers who participate as board members or executive members of these organizations at a significant risk of being seen as the leaders or perpetrators, with little guarantee that their future employment is not in danger. As further exploration of USA 829 and APASQ will demonstrate, the fact that they have aligned themselves with larger unions does seem effective towards insulating the working leadership somewhat against repercussions from potential employers. As

long as creative work remains largely freelance, this tension between employment instability and labour militancy is likely to persist.

### **2.2.2. Neoliberalism and freelance workers**

Economically, theatre designers are significantly impacted by the forces of neoliberalism. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the definition of neoliberalism given by Koenig (2018):

The crux of neoliberalism is the deregulation and privatization of the economy, both globally and on national levels. As both a political process and an ideology, the backers of neoliberal projects have explicitly sought to eliminate unions, weaken labor laws, and challenge the legitimacy of collective action to impact economic processes. (p. 513)

There is literature concerning the effects of neoliberalism on creative workers that helps draw parallels to the lived experiences of theatre designers, especially regarding the internalization of flexibility as a necessity for success within the creative industries (Lindgren, Packendorff, & Sergi, 2014, p. 1398). Among creative workers, contemporary neoliberalism has demonstrably affected working conditions and artistic practices through its structural effects on shrinking public artistic funding models, minimizing employment security, and diminishing collective labour action (Haynes & Marshall, 2018, p. 475). Furthermore, most creative workers have rarely benefited from state labour regulations that stabilized employment for other workers. They have historically experienced some conditions of precarity in their working practices and are uniquely positioned in their relation to contemporary neoliberalism (de Peuter, 2011, p. 419). As a result of the legacy of precarity and the influence of neoliberalism, creative workers exist on the margins of past, present, and future forms of economic institutions (Stahl, 2012, p.74). The precarity that creative workers experience is a model that capital can use for neoliberal advancement in other employment sectors and the labour movement should mobilize to prevent that regression. Specifically, freelance creative workers already encounter many of the conditions that neoliberalism actively advances: flexibility, bearing responsibilities that have typically been amortized amongst larger groups, and the fetishization of individualism, (de Peuter 2014, p. 264). Additionally, Banks, Gill, and Taylor (2012) write that, "For good or ill, workers in media, design and the arts are routinely held to exemplify the working lives and generalized practices of the 'worker of the future'" (p.2). Because one of the unique conditions of neoliberalism that creative

workers have experienced is, paradoxically, enforced flexibility, it is useful to further examine how theatre designers experience flexibility in their artistic working practices. The forces of neoliberalism affect all creative workers, including theatre designers, and their similar experiences lay the groundwork for common resistances and organizing strategies.

### **2.2.3. Precarity for freelance workers and all workers**

Workers have always been at a collective disadvantage against the power of capital, even when union density and labour movement strength were at their apex in the 1930s and 1940s in Canada and the United States. However, both the structural and ideological components of contemporary neoliberalism have severely hindered the ability of workers to identify with their own class interests and working-class solidarity for collective action. The need for workers to raise their expectations about what is possible for unions and collective structures to accomplish is specifically important because neoliberalism encourages workers to lower their expectations by disincentivizing collective action and support. Even if collective action is not immediately achievable, it is essential to engage in the discussions about what could be achieved in order to challenge neoliberal ideology (Gindin 2016). With worker identity diminished amongst both organized and unorganized workers within precarious conditions, it can be a struggle to find ideological and practical examples of worker solidarity.

Contemporary neoliberalism is a complex philosophy that influences workers in a myriad of ways. Rather than an exhaustive exploration of the effects of neoliberalism, I will focus on two specific issues: the invisibility of neoliberal ideology, and the discord that it sows within any collective action. By identifying the invisible divisiveness of neoliberalism, workers can recognize its impact and hopefully overcome the obstacles it creates towards successful labour organizing. However, even before addressing the ideology of neoliberalism, the ideology within precarity is a primary factor that must be examined. The conditions of precariousness typically encompass a worker's unstable day-to-day schedule, their financial insecurity, and uncertainty about the future. This built-in uncertainty prevents the stability and rationality needed to find hope and emotional energy to organize or engage in collective struggle with other workers (Deuze & Lewis, 2012, p. 164). From this starting point of internalized uncertainty, neoliberal ideology further wreaks havoc on workers within precarious working conditions.

Pinpointing neoliberalism or its effects is difficult, as hooks (2013) states, “In this imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy, it is easier for everyone to talk about race, gender, and even sexuality than to talk about class” (p. 8). Discussions of class should not be privileged above discussions of race and gender, especially in the analysis of the challenging working conditions that designers face, as an intersectional approach is essential. Issues of race, gender, and class intertwine in the creation of precarious working conditions for designers and other creative workers. The inability to talk about class works to the advantage of neoliberalism, further cloaking its effects within contemporary discourse.

Within this invisibility, the divisiveness of neoliberalism becomes naturalized, as the identity of the individual becomes primary, and any traditional or historic group identities become secondary (Kirk & Wall, 2010, p. 8). Especially for young workers who have been raised within neoliberalism, one of the most damaging effects of neoliberal ideology is its sense of permanence, and lack of expectation that situations or circumstances could improve. As Giroux (2013) states, “Victims of a neoliberal regime that smashes their hopes and attempts in order to exclude them from the fruits of democracy, young people are now told not to expect too much” (p. 206). Finally, neoliberalism asserts itself in very practical ways as well. Unemployment insurance has been called a “moral hazard” because it eases the burden of unemployment among precarious workers and thus incentivizes workers to constantly and desperately seek employment, at all costs (Lewchuck, Procyk, & Shields, 2017, p. 9). An ideology that violently offloads the public costs of unemployment directly onto workers as an individual issue to overcome requires a collective and organized response.

A counter to the individualizing force of neoliberal ideology is a collective worker identity, which is especially key for workers in precarious situations who do not necessarily have the same access to formalized organizational structures like unions. In eras of higher union density with a prevalence of the standard employment relationship, the union could often provide the necessary identity for workers to remain ideologically or identifiably independent from their firms or companies of employment (Workman, 2009, p. 35). However, with workers increasingly working for multiple employers or lacking either the ability or the opportunity to unionize, the union cannot always be the central point of contact for a broad-based worker identity. Thus, what is required is for a

class-based identity to become the rallying point for workers within precarious conditions. As Harvey (1995) writes:

The unique and extraordinary character of working-class self-organization has been that it has tried to connect particular struggles to a general struggle in one quite special way. It has set out, as a movement, to make real what is at first sight the extraordinary claim that the defense and advancement of certain particular interests, properly brought together, are in fact the general interest. (p. 83)

Akin to the common union rallying cry of “An injury to one is an injury to all”, the connection between an individual worker's experience of precarity and the interests of the working class to eliminate precarity must be made in order for a common identity to be forged among all workers. Collective goals and collective identity can work in a cyclical, self-reinforcing relationship in which stronger, broader working-class goals, such as eliminating precarity, lead to a stronger sense of identity amongst all workers. Unfortunately, unions as a collective expression of working-class struggle have often fallen short of embodying larger goals. Ross (2008) describes this process in her critique of “business” unionism, “[...]Business unionism posits a narrow community of interest served by the union, generally focusing exclusively on the immediate, dues-paying membership rather than the working class more generally” (p. 132). This focus solely on immediate, dues-paying members, as opposed to the working class as a whole, is the death knell for collective, working-class goals. Thus, a stronger sense of class consciousness and class identity, especially from labour unions and organizations, is a starting point towards raising expectations about what the entire working class can accomplish collectively.

In this section, I have explored neoliberal ideology and the effect it has upon workers, especially those experiencing precarious conditions of employment. Neoliberalism appears powerful and potentially unbeatable, due to its focus on the individual as the fundamental unit of society. A portion of this power is due to its invisibility and divisiveness which obfuscates the viability of other identities, such as union or working-class. Neoliberalism can hide in plain sight for workers within precarious situations, as their conditions of employment are practically designed according to its ideology. Finding the ability to develop a collective working-class identity is integral towards the solidarity necessary to combat precarity and neoliberalism simultaneously. Developing that working-class identity within the design community

begins with identifying the precarious working conditions that we take for granted and forging the solidarity to improve those conditions collectively.

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Qualitative methods**

Initial strategies for research design and execution for this thesis were formed within the final class project for the Qualitative Methods Class at SFU. This class provided an opportunity to design and execute a small qualitative project that could be used as a basis for the subsequent thesis research. For the project, I interviewed three Vancouver designers (Mishelle Cuttler, Jennifer Stewart, and Patrick Rizzotti), who then formed a designer advisory committee for the eventual thesis research. We first conducted a group interview where we discussed the issues that the design community faces and used that interview to determine the questions for the subsequent individual interviews. I then interviewed each of the three participants individually, using the four interview questions that we had collectively chosen. Those interviews were audio recorded, and I transcribed each one, and then analyzed the data using NVivo software. That analysis served to determine the interview questions for the thesis interviews themselves.

The decision to use qualitative methods was grounded in the desire to embrace and explore the multiplicity of opinions that I knew, from previous organizing experience, existed within the Canadian design community regarding challenging working conditions and how to improve them. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for participants to have significant flexibility in terms of the content and direction of the interviews. To that end, some of the most interesting interview material came from designers choosing to discuss topics or issues that I would not have thought to ask about ahead of time. Although I do have a fair amount of experience both as a designer and as an active community participant, I consider myself approaching this topic from a position of “non-definitive authority,” which led naturally to semi-structured interviews as the main qualitative tool for gathering data, as it allowed space for multiple narratives and viewpoints within the process.

### 3.2. Background on participatory action research

Participatory action research (PAR) as a guiding methodology made sense in conjunction with qualitative methods. I felt that there was no way that I could objectively separate myself as an interviewer from a member of the design community with an active stake in the desire to improve working conditions for designers. My interest in PAR involved using the methodology as a means to recognize my position as an organizer and advocate for designers within the design community and to use the focus within PAR on participant action to motivate future social change. Maggie O'Neill (2007) lays out the basis for PAR as a methodology:

PAR is rooted in principles of inclusion (engaging people in the research design, process and outcomes); participation; valuing all local voices; and community-driven sustainable outcomes. PAR is a process and a practice directed towards social change with the participants; it is interventionist, action-oriented and interpretive. PAR involves a commitment to research that develops partnership responses to developing purposeful knowledge (praxis); includes all those involved where possible, thus facilitating shared ownership of the development and outcomes of the research; uses innovative ways of consulting and working with local people and facilitates change with communities and groups. (Pg. 214)

I was interested in the use of PAR specifically as a method for organizing creative workers due to its ability to contain an agenda for social change, as well as the collective process of assembling knowledge of existing problems in order to strategize solutions (Brown & Strega, 2015). By using PAR for this project, I aimed to mitigate my positionality as an advocate for designers to organize more densely as well as to ensure that more voices beyond my own participated in the research design for the eventual thesis interviews.

In *Research as Resistance*, Rutman, Hubberstey, Barlow, and Brown (2005) write about the use of an advisory committee:

The advisory committee provided guidance to key aspects of the project, including: confirming the importance and potential contributions of the project to the community; helping to recruit participants for stages One and Two; confirming research interview questions and processes in Stage One; providing input on and helping us select potential strategies to implement in Stage Two; and providing input on our draft Stage One and Stage Two reports. (p. 165)

There are some key differences between the structure of this thesis and the research that Rutman et al. were conducting concerning youth and family service organizations. Primarily, I approached the research as an insider within the design community, so helping to recruit research participants was less important. As this thesis research consisted of a single phase of interviews, there was no need for the strategizing and reflection between stage one and two of the research. Instead, the advisory committee provided most of its input on general research design. The main contributions of the advisory committee involved determining the importance of the research to the community as well as significant discussions about research questions. The committee facilitated a plurality of voices beyond my own in the research design and ensured that other “insider eyes” are confident that this research is of use to the design community itself.

### **3.3. My positionality as an organizer**

I work as an organizer within the Canadian theatre design community. I serve as one of the board members for ADC and am one of the core members of the Vancouver Design Forum, a Vancouver-specific organization that is affiliated with ADC but also includes non-ADC members as well. I actively promote ADC membership within the community and am a contributor to The Designers Guild, a closed Facebook group for theatre designers that are primarily Canadian, but which includes designers working and living in other countries as well. I am not very prominent as a designer myself, but am likely more well-known as an organizer, especially through the contributions to The Designers Guild. As a result, I am aware that even among designers who were interviewed that I had not met before, it was possible that my pro-ADC, pro-union opinions would be known in advance. This is one of reasons that I felt that PAR was so appropriate to use as a methodology for this research. It allows me to embrace my positionality as an active organizer within the community and to forgo any sense of “objective research”. As Attwood outlines, the foundations of PAR involve:

The concept that people have a right to determine their own development and recognizes the need for local people to participate meaningfully in the process of analyzing their own solutions, over which they have (or share, as some would argue) power and control, in order to lead to sustainable development. (p. 2)

Although I had no desire to dismiss objectivity merely for the sake of dismissal, PAR unlocked the ability to work with designers, through the interview process, to analyze their own working conditions and make suggestions for improvement rather than being the sole arbiter of recommendations for change. This ability to inhabit similar intellectual and emotional space as the interview participants due to our shared occupation and stakeholder status made objectivity a somewhat meaningless concept. It also deepened and broadened the analysis of current conditions and possible suggestions for improvements. While I strove to keep my own opinions out of the interview process as much as possible, I am an active stakeholder in the design community, and using the PAR framework acknowledged and recognized that reality.

Additionally, I think it is important to outline my personal opinions regarding how designers could improve their working conditions before I began conducting the interviews. As a board member of ADC, I have worked to strengthen the organization since 2017. I have always been interested in the idea of designers joining either IATSE or CAEA in order to strengthen bargaining power as means of improving working conditions. Although this was a question I had often considered or discussed, it was done without any wholesome understanding of what that process would entail. For this reason, the interviews conducted with the staff members of APASQ and USA 829 were some of the most illuminating interviews, because they outlined how those organizations interacted with their larger union affiliates. Although I was interested in ADC exploring a relationship with a larger organization, my own personal opinion before conducting the interviews was that the best way for Canadian designers to improve their working conditions was to continue to strengthen ADC as an independent organization.

### **3.4. Research design and interview question development**

Based on the success of the pilot interviews, I continued with semi-structured interviews as the method for data collection. Theatre designers have a broad spectrum of backgrounds and working experiences. Ensuring that the interviews were flexible enough to allow for the participants to cover material that was personally relevant was helpful towards understanding their opinions and ideas. Furthermore, my background as an organizer within the design community has given me experience speaking with other designers in a casual manner. Informally structured conversations have often seemed to

make designers feel comfortable speaking very personally, so I wanted to strive to replicate those conditions with the interview process as much as possible.

The fact that the designers who participated in the initial research became the informal PAR committee was useful towards the subsequent research design and question development. They had already been through the interview process and we all had some understanding of the potential research structure and question design. We had a general sense of what would be the most beneficial questions for the interviews to address. Finally, we were able to use the class project as a testing ground itself for interview sub-sections and questions. Thus, some of the questions from the initial project remained similar, but others were adapted based on the experiences of the designer committee and me from the pilot interviews.

We decided that the thesis interview questions would be - 1: What are the invisible or under-appreciated aspects of working as a designer? 2: What working conditions do you find challenging as a theatre designer? 3: What would ideal working conditions look like? 4: How could theatre designers achieve those ideal working conditions? The questions and order were specifically designed to naturally flow through a process of designers identifying issues within their current working conditions, conceptualizing what better conditions would look like and, most crucially, examining how the design community could achieve those better conditions. Finally, in conjunction with the designer committee, it was decided to ask four optional questions about identity. Each participant was asked if they were comfortable disclosing their age, their gender identity, their sexual identity, and their ethno-racial identity. I asked these four questions at the end of each interview, with the option of having the recording devices turned off, if desired. The intention behind these questions was to see if any broader themes emerged based on any of the identifying factors and to also be aware of whose opinions were being collected for the thesis.

### **3.5. Designer interview selection and interview process**

Designers were contacted for interviews using two communication sources that are already well-established within the Canadian theatre design community. ADC distributes a monthly digital newsletter to all of its members via email. There is a Facebook group called The Designers Guild that is intended solely for Canadian theatre

designers, regardless of ADC membership status, with the moderators keeping control of who is admitted, to ensure that they are designers. This group also includes designers from Quebec, which allowed those designers to contact me to express interest in being interviewed. The same interview request notice was placed as a post on the Designers Guild and within the ADC newsletter. For the American interviews, Patrick Rizzotti, a member of the thesis advisory committee, personally made e-introductions between me and designers that he knew from New York City, where he previously lived and worked as a designer. I committed to interviewing every Canadian designer who expressed interest in being interviewed, so the Canadian sample was completely self-selected, but not exclusionary in any way. The American sample was more limited, but since I had no viable connection to that community, the e-introductions were necessary for initial contact. In total 56 people were interviewed: 51 practicing designers and five staff members of designer organizations, including ADC, APASQ, and USA 829. In-person interviews occurred in Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Hamilton, Stratford, Ottawa, Montreal, Vancouver, Victoria, and New York City. Additional interviews occurred over Skype with designers who I could not meet with personally in any of those cities. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 71 years old (two participants chose not to disclose their age) with a median age of 38. In terms of gender, 31 of the participants identified as female, 22 of the participants identified as male, two participants identified as Trans/Non-Binary, and one participant chose not to disclose their gender identity. In terms of sexual identity, 41 of the participants identified as heterosexual, 14 of the participants identified within the LGBTQ+ spectrum, and one participant chose not to disclose their sexual identity. In terms of ethno-racial identity, 45 of the participants identified as white, eight of the participants identified as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour), and three participants chose not to disclose their ethno-racial identity. Unless otherwise noted as a pseudonym, the majority of participants chose to use their real names for the interviews and subsequent quotations.

The interviews were typically 60 minutes in length, and were primarily conducted one-on-one, although two interviews occurred as a group: the three designers living in Victoria, and with two of the USA 829 staff members. The interviews took place in a variety of locations, and I tried to accommodate the comfort and convenience of the participants as much as possible. Most of the interviews occurred in their homes or offices, although some occurred in coffee shops or other public places. Each interview

was audio recorded for transcription purposes, and I also took notes during the interviews. Of the approximately 60-minute interviews, each section was afforded roughly 15 minutes, but was adjusted as necessary, depending on how much each participant had to say about each topic. Additionally, I asked follow-up questions within each topic, and tried to make the follow-ups as specific as possible to each designer, based on either their initial answers, general information about their design discipline or primary working location, or individually specific information about which I had prior knowledge. This was made easier by the fact that I was already familiar with roughly half of the interview participants in advance of the interviews. As much as possible, I tried to limit expressing my personal views within the interview to avoid influencing the answers of the participants. Each participant signed an informed consent form and everyone who was quoted directly had the ability to review the quotation(s) and context in advance of the thesis submission.

### **3.6. Analysis of data and writing process**

After the conclusion of the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed using online transcription services. To mitigate some of the transcription cost, some were auto-transcribed by computer software, which required me to correct some inaccuracies in the transcription; the remainder of the interviews were transcribed by humans, through online transcription services. I then analyzed all of the interviews using NVivo software to determine primary themes. The coding structure in NVivo was extensive, especially considering the breadth of background and experiences of the interviewees. Because of the wealth of interview data and NVivo coding, I utilized a secondary and a tertiary analysis. The secondary analysis involved reading through the data within each individual NVivo node and distilling it into main themes within the node. The tertiary analysis occurred concurrently with the writing process. As the sections concerning the working conditions and the recommendations of designers were written, I analyzed the data a third time, to ensure that it supported the representation of the data within the thesis.

The interviews yielded far more data than could ever be fully represented within the space limitations of the thesis. I considered this to be an advantage of the expanded interview structure, because it ensured a multiplicity of viewpoints, backgrounds, and experiences. The amount of data did ensure that there were plenty of issues, opinions,

and recommendations that could not be included. I attempted to, as much as possible, focus on the issues that were either the most common or the most unique, in that they were rare enough to be either exceptional or essential to include within the thesis. Very few of the interviews covered subjects or topics that could harm a designer's future employment prospects; however, protecting against this was a paramount concern of the process. Care was taken to ensure that all participants had every opportunity before, during, and after the interview process to consider the possible effects or implications of everything that they said.

## **Chapter 4. Designers' working conditions**

During the interviews with designers there were many working conditions that were identified as being invisible, under-appreciated, or challenging by producers and other members of the theatre community. Many of these were specific to individual design disciplines. While those discipline-specific challenges are certainly important, I have chosen to focus on the conditions that are common to all designers, with one notable exception: the costume design discipline, since many of its challenges are intersectional with gendered issues. There was a spectrum of opinions that accompanied almost all of these issues, with the exception of fees and compensation. There was unanimous opinion that designers are not paid enough to fairly compensate the work that they do or to even provide a reasonable living wage, in some cases. Regarding the other challenges that were identified, I have tried to fairly represent the variety of options that were expressed within the interviews.

### **4.1. Fees and compensation**

The most prominent topic that was represented within the interviews was fees and compensation. Every single designer interviewed expressed frustration with the low remuneration for designers, and often with how that compensation is determined. ADC members have the benefit of the PACT Fee Table, which sets binding minimums with PACT companies that can be negotiated above, and the Independent Fee Table, which are recommendations. The independent fee table is used when working with a producing company that is not a member of PACT (i.e. an "independent" company). The ADC/PACT Fee Table is collectively bargained with PACT while ADC calculates the Independent Fee Table, because there is no entity with which ADC can collectively bargain. Members are encouraged to negotiate above the minimums stipulated on the Fee Tables on all contracts, as the tables are intended as a base point for negotiations to build upon. Non-members of ADC can view the Independent Fee table, but the PACT Fee Table remains a proprietary document for members only. PACT producers often build their budgets based on the PACT minimums regardless of whether or not the designer is a member of ADC. In this way, the fee table negotiations with PACT affect most designers within the community. These fees still fall below what is required for a designer to earn a reasonable living wage, especially as the cities with the highest

concentration of designers, Vancouver and Toronto, also include comparatively high costs of living.

Also, this is not a problem unique to ADC members. In interviews with designers in Quebec, predominately represented by APASQ, and designers in New York, predominately represented by USA 829, similar discontent was registered with the level of designer compensation. As a basis of comparison, here are quotations from designers from all three regions, expressing similar discontent concerning lack of adequate compensation for designers:

(Canada)- It's still hand-to-mouth sometimes. Not really hand-to-mouth but feels hand-to-mouth. Sometimes you end up taking any job over no job, even if it's a job that's paying you half or two-thirds of what you know you would be making at another theater or should be making from that theatre. (Alan, October 30, 2019)

(Quebec)- This is not enough money to compensate me for the time it would take to do this design. This the minimum amount of money I need to survive through the length of your projects and you are not paying that. Do you want me to starve? What do you want? (Amelia<sup>5</sup>, October 20, 2019)

(New York)- If I were to break it all down, I'm sure I make minimum wage. I've never, never been fairly compensated. (John<sup>6</sup>, Feb 6, 2020)

As there can be significant discrepancies in overall compensation year-to-year for a single designer based on the contracts that they are offered in a particular season, it is difficult to definitively determine which set of designers, either in Canada, Quebec, or New York, are most fairly compensated. Suffice it to say, all three groups face comparable struggles. It should also be noted that while top-level Broadway designers can command significant fees in New York, those contracts are relatively few in number. Further in-depth comparative study would be required for definitive answers, but I suspect that Quebec designers are the most fairly compensated per show, because the collective agreements that APASQ has with producer organizations in Quebec are more

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<sup>5</sup> Although Amelia lives in Quebec, she is not represented by APASQ as they do not represent video designers.

<sup>6</sup> John is a pseudonym.

expansive that the agreements that USA 829 has with American producers. However, part of this is clearly an issue of scale, with APASQ only responsible for Quebec and USA 829 responsible for the entire United States. Overall, it is apparent that under-compensation is a systemic, industry-wide issue for designers. As there is fairly broad consensus about designers being underpaid, I will focus more on the potential solutions for rectifying that underpayment than expanding on the complaints themselves that were raised in the interviews.

## **4.2. Freelance working conditions**

Tied closely with the issues related to fees and compensation are the issues that arise from designers being classified as independent contractors. This is a key difference between Canadian/Quebec designers and American designers. Due to their representation by USA 829, American designers are classified as “fee-based employees”, which leads them to being on contracts that fall under two different sets of employment paperwork, W4 and 1099. Without delving into the differences between those documents, American designers have achieved steps towards being contracted as employees, in some circumstances, which has been incredibly advantageous for them. With several high-profile cases working their way through the American court system, USA 829 is keenly aware of the opportunities to continue to advance the interests of their membership towards being classified as employees, which includes healthcare and employment insurance benefits. In Canada and Quebec, designers are firmly classified as independent contractors. To be clear, there is no current legal challenge to this status, but there is an argument to be made that this is a misclassification. The employment relationships of designers most closely resemble either those of a dependant contractor or a hybrid of the independent/dependant contractor classification, due to the uniqueness of the design process. The preparatory work for a design, which may include conceptualization, drafting of construction drawings, and content creation does bear a fair similarity to that of an independent contractor. However, the implementation and technical rehearsal process more closely resembles the relationship of a dependant contractor as theatre companies schedule the hours that designers are required to work in the theatre. The consequences of workers being misclassified are substantial, as Koenig (2018) writes:

{...}The core problem of this system is the ability for employers to intentionally misclassify employees as independent contractors, especially in on-demand sectors, and among low-wage workers. In these circumstances, workers miss out on important workplace protections while employers reap the benefits of lower burdens on taxes, benefits, and insurance. (p. 516)

Whether or not theatre designers qualify as on-demand workers (most likely not) or low-wage workers (very circumstantial, but some designers have calculated their hourly wage as below minimum wage) is debatable, but the clear lack of workplace protections is evident in the design community. The fact that Provincial Employment Standards Acts do not apply to designers, due to classification as independent contractors, causes significant issues. Examples include not being compensated for overtime during hours in which they are scheduled into the theatre or being ineligible for employment insurance - which has become a prominent discussion during the Covid-19 crisis. Regardless, the difference between classification as independent/dependant contractors was not directly addressed in any of the interviews. However, many of the designers expressed frustration with how designers are contracted and compensated, which are examples of the unregulated employment conditions of independent contractors. Many of the recommendations to improve freelance working conditions included suggestions that would require more regulation in order to implement. Irrespective of how designers are classified, there is desire for some of the aspects of freelance employment to be more regulated, which may or may not be possible within the independent contractor classification.

One of the most common frustrations with the freelance system is the extent of precarity and employment instability that occurs within it. There are very few salaried resident designer positions that exist in the Canadian theatre industry, though the position used to be more common. While some designers can develop strong relationships with directors and producers and are sometimes all but guaranteed annual work at large festivals like Stratford, Shaw, and Bard on the Beach, precarity is still perpetually a concern. Even designers who work repeatedly at the large festivals, and have for many years, expressed that they still worry about whether or not they will continue to be rehired. This becomes even more concerning when those festivals undergo staffing changes at the artistic director or director of production position, as

Justin<sup>7</sup> mentioned in his interview, “I never know, even with directors I've worked with for 10 years, is this the end? Are we coming to the end or they're just not being upfront with me and they didn't hire me for the show because they're done with me?” (October 16, 2019). For designers who do not have any contracts that are annually offered, the precarity and uncertainty is even more pronounced.

Additionally, the freelance system necessarily makes key portions of a designer's working process invisible. In the days when resident design positions were more prominent, the entire preparatory and conceptualization portion of the design process occurred, more or less, in view of the theatre company - often from a design office located in the same building as the artistic leadership. That was by no means a perfect system. In particular, the work of the costume designer remained less visible, as the costume facilities were often offsite, especially at the large festivals. Regardless, the more prevalent system of designers doing the preparatory and conceptualization portion of their design work from either a home office or private design studio ensures that the number of hours they work is even more invisible. Because this process is unaccounted for, and compensated by a flat fee, it is extremely difficult to demonstrate to theatre companies why this time should be compensated more fairly. However, if a designer were to divide their flat fee by a reasonable hourly living wage, the number of hours worked on the conceptualization (even without subtracting the hours in which they are scheduled into meetings, technical rehearsals, etc.) would make it impossible to receive a decent hourly wage, as Trevor<sup>8</sup> stated in his interview, “I know when the pay rate is broken down to those hours that you actually spend doing it, it gets to be a very meager wage and that becomes very difficult” (October 18, 2019). In order to continually be hired, designers have to perpetually design at the highest level, regardless of how low this drives their hourly wage.

Designers also have their own artistic integrity and fulfilment intertwined with their work. Rare is the designer who is willing to draw a hard line and allow a substandard design onto the stage because the theatre was unwilling to fairly and properly compensate them. As Brian stated in his interview: “You're going to continue until everyone is happy and excited about it. Just for myself, I'm not going to stop until I feel

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<sup>7</sup> Justin is a pseudonym.

<sup>8</sup> Trevor is a pseudonym.

satisfied” (October 16, 2019). Designers are aware that their artistic investment can be exploited to ensure that they continue to work on designs until they feel the design properly represent their vision, talent, and effort, regardless of whether or not the producer pays for it.

Finally, the very nature of the freelance struggles that designers face is itself invisible. For larger theatre companies, all of their artistic leadership and production management staff have stable, secure employment. When working with smaller companies, the production manager may be hired on a contract purely for that one show, but there are always key interactions between freelance designers and salaried employees at the theatre company. Designers interviewed had a broad spectrum of opinions about the extent to which they felt that the relatively secure employees of a theatre company could understand and empathize with the freelance circumstances of designers. I believe these opinions were quite often influenced by the individual experiences of each designer. However, the difference in circumstances between employees and freelance workers is significant. In the opinions of the designers who felt this difference most strongly, a lack of sensitivity to this disparity can have a negative impact on their working conditions. This negative impact can be felt at the micro level through the failure to understand how essential it is for designers to be paid on their contractually mandated dates. For a salaried employee with a predictable pay schedule, a late payment can be bad enough on its own. For freelance designers, a single fee instalment may be the only payment within a month, or more, and an untimely disbursement could result in a consequence as severe as eviction. At the macro level, there is ignorance (whether wilful or not) from theatre companies about the expectation of exclusivity of a designer’s time. Only in rare circumstances is a designer paid enough to be able to focus solely on a single project. Designers frequently have multiple designs, in different stages of production, occurring concurrently. Overwhelmingly, the designers interviewed expressed a desire to be paid enough so as to be completely exclusive to one show. Theatres must realize that they are not paying designers a living wage through the fees that they offer and that the time required to execute a design far exceeds the compensation. Designers typically understand that theatre companies face difficult financial realities that limit their ability to pay designers as much as they ideally desire. A greater understanding of the fact that the low fees that theatre companies offer

necessitates designers to be working on multiple projects simultaneously would help to bridge the gap between the experiences of salaried employees and freelance designers.

The overall effect of these precarious, freelance working conditions is that many designers transition either out of the industry entirely or to more stable positions within the sector, such as teaching, whether by choice or necessity. It is rare, in Canada, for a designer to work freelance for their entire career, as Justin<sup>9</sup> stated in his interview:

Most designers are at some point going to bail on the designing career, and around 40, 50. How many 60-year-old designers are out there? How many 50-year-old designers are out there? They're going to bail not fully necessarily, but they're going to find some other way to support themselves. They will teach and as well as design. (October 16, 2019)

This in itself is a pretty strong indictment of the industry, that it is financially and often personally impossible to work consistently and sustainably within the sector as it is designed to operate. Although economic issues were the primary push motivators that designers mentioned for either leaving, or wanting to leave the industry, health and family reasons were also mentioned frequently. The Canadian design industry exists at an intersection of highly skilled labour and highly precarious working conditions, which puts a tremendous amount of pressure on the designers themselves. Almost all current designers have at least an undergraduate degree, if not a graduate degree, and a lot of time and energy is invested into both acquiring the skills to be a designer and building the necessary personal relationships to be offered consistent contracts. But even as designers make this investment, the precarious working conditions of the industry are a barrier towards a sustained career in the sector. Without a decrease in freelance employment stability, an increase in the compensation for long, unregulated working hours, or both, it is easy to imagine that the number of highly skilled and experienced designers in Canada could easily diminish in the future. For many of these designers, the risks are not ultimately worth the rewards.

### **4.3. Support staff**

The amount of support and technical staff employed to help construct and build a design is a factor that affects the different design disciplines disproportionately. Without

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<sup>9</sup> Justin is a pseudonym.

a doubt, lighting design is the discipline that has the fewest issues being staffed appropriately. Scenic design may have a very wide range of outcomes, depending on the project. In small scale theatre, a lack of appropriate staffing can lead to additional, uncompensated asks of the scenic designer, such as sourcing, building, and purchasing all of the props or taking on the role of scenic painter. At a larger scale, scenic designers are often as well-supported as lighting designers. Sound and video exist in a similar place, in which they are typically given a low level of support, regardless of the size of the company or project. However, depending on the complexity and scale of the design, a minimal level of support can, in certain circumstances, be appropriate. Typically, these disciplines are unsupported, at least to some extent. Costume design, according to the interviews and my anecdotal experience and understanding, is understaffed even at the most advanced scales of production.

There are several reasons why costume designers are provided with markedly less support staff than the other design disciplines. First and foremost, the majority of costume designers have traditionally been mostly women, and the systemic gendered issues that occur in other industries regarding women being underpaid and unfairly treated apply in theatre as well. More specifically, each design discipline typically has a head of that design department who is responsible for overseeing the execution of the design (for example, a head carpenter supervises the set construction, a head electrician supervises the lighting design install, etc.). The technical director (TD) of the production supervises all of these departmental heads. Strictly speaking, all designers and departmental heads should have equivalent support and supervision from the TD. However, TD's have typically come from a sound/lighting/scenic background and almost never come from a costume background. It is extremely rare for a theatre TD to have the knowledge base to properly support the costume department, which often leaves that department isolated and under-supported. Furthermore, there is a terrible, but prevalent, assumption within theatre, especially with smaller-sized companies, that when a costume designer is hired, they are also expected to work as the Head of Wardrobe (HoW), for no additional compensation. In theatre, the HoW collaborates directly with the costume designer to manage the realization of their design. This includes managing the departmental budget and supervising the wardrobe staff of cutters, stitchers, and dressers, all of which are roles that require different skills and experience. The costume designer, except at very large theatre companies who keep a HoW on staff, is often

expected to execute this work required to realize the design, in addition to their design duties. Except in low-budget, independent theatre, no set designer is expected to do the similar management or construction work of the head carpenter or the head painter. Every costume designer that was interviewed spoke about how consistently their shows are understaffed and how they are frequently expected to perform this additional labour without compensation, or even the barest of recognition.

As mentioned above, the fact that a significant portion of costume designers are women contributes to their lack of support. As Mel stated in her interview, "{...}A lot of people seem to think it's because primarily costumes are seen as like "women's work". I don't know. It's a gendered issue{...}" (October 31, 2019). There is also the issue that the skill itself of wardrobe work has been devalued because of the gendered manner through which the concept of skilled labour itself is understood. In an interpretation of the work of Judith Butler, Proctor-Thomson (2012) writes:

{...}Such an approach would see the recognition of skill and the identification of creativity in self and others (and the material follow-on decisions to recruit specific workers and how to organize work) as neither true nor false, but as produced as truth through constant reiteration and repetition in discourse. (p. 139)

Similarly, for wardrobe work, the devaluation occurs through the constant repetition of it being deemed "women's work", completely divorced from the actual skillset of the labour. There is general consensus within the theatre community that wardrobe construction is equally challenging and specialized work as scenic construction, typical a male domain, both regarding significant skill. It is worth noting that the roles of cutter, stitcher, and HoW require different skillsets, but the costume designer can be asked to embody all of these roles, in addition to designer. Even when a set designer is asked to build or paint the set, there is at least common knowledge that these are distinct jobs. The same cannot be said for the roles within a costume shop. This devaluation of the labour for costume designers is influenced by larger societal attitudes about "women's work" but also specifically occurs within the theatre industry through the asymmetrical support and understanding that is offered to costume designers as opposed to set designers.

## 4.4. Working hours

Within the theatre industry, there is a unique working day construct known as the ten-out-of-twelve (10/12). It is a provision within the CAEA contract that allows for performers to work for 10 total hours out of a 12-hour day, the additional two hours being used for breaks. Once a theatre enters technical rehearsals, the company is allowed a certain number of 10/12s, and these become the longest, most exhausting, and most stressful days for the entire design team. In his interview, Jaymez described the struggle of working 10/12s: “I can work long hours, but I find it gets pretty straining on performers and they get pretty exhausted and by those last two hours sometimes it’s hard to keep everyone together, and you’re so easily distracted” (Oct 29, 2019). Additionally, because designers are independent contractors and fall outside of provincial employment standards regarding daily hourly work limits and overtime, they can often be scheduled either before or after the 12-hour period to do notes or have extra work time. It is established practice that these long days are used to create theatre productions, often because if a theatre company does not own its venue, it is cheaper to rent the theatre for fewer days but work longer hours. However, even theatre companies that own a venue utilize the 10/12, because the CAEA contract permits it, and 10/12s allows the company to complete technical rehearsals in fewer days, meaning a paying audience can see the show sooner and more shows can be booked within a season. Of all the designers interviewed, only one expressed any positive opinions about the long 10/12 days (their opinion was that the 10/12s can lead to bonding through struggle for the creative team). Almost every other designer expressed that the 10/12s were one of the most challenging working conditions, especially for designers who are also parents. But, even non-parent designers talked about how their creativity and productivity were completely exhausted once the 8-hour mark was surpassed. Interestingly, nearly every New York designer interviewed listed the 10/12 as the number one working condition that they wished that they could change. As Burke stated in his interview, “How do you stay in touch with your family? How do you deal with a family crisis? If you have a sick family member and you’re in a 10 out of 12. How do you see your kids grow up if you’re gone six days a week from sun up to sun down?” (February 7, 2020).

As Burke indicated, the daily toll caused by the 10/12 compounds into a week of technical rehearsals (known colloquially as “tech week”) that far surpasses the 40-hour

work week that is typical in other industries. Furthermore, because designers, depending on discipline, can design upwards of 20 shows per year, they can end up working beyond 40 hours for a considerable number of consecutive weeks. As Erin stated:

In a good season where I'm really busy... tech week is my life. I go, I do a tech week, and then two weeks later, I do another tech week, and then a week later, I do another tech week, and then four weeks later, I do another tech week. So, I'm doing a tech once or twice a month. (Oct 6, 2019)

As designers are often working these extended hours on different contracts for different theatre companies, the overall working pattern is not immediately obvious to all of the producers.

The CAEA contract mandates that performers get one day off per week, which traditionally is Monday within most theatre contracts. However, because designers do not have a mandated day off, they often end up working on the day off because that is the day that the set and costumes are not being used by the performers and thus can have notes and alterations done on them. As a result, set and especially costume designers often end up working 7-day weeks during the technical rehearsal process. For sound and video designers, especially those that create content as part of their designs, the 10/12 is a particularly vicious structure because the assumption often is that they will go home at the end of a 10/12 and make adaptations to existing audio/video content or even create new content, based on the technical rehearsals that occurred that day. They are put in a very difficult position, balancing the desire to please the director and make their design as complete as it can possibly be, against the basic necessities of life, like being able to get a few hours of sleep after a 10/12 in preparation for the next 10/12. As Ami stated in her interview, "And so you end up with zero time that you're actually allowed to be asleep or zero time that you're allowed to eat or anything else..." (October 5, 2019). Especially for video designers, whose content can take hours to render, there is little to no recognition of the time they are expected to spend adapting content during technical rehearsals.

Finally, as has been previously mentioned, the hours that a designer works during the pre-production portion of the process, conceptualizing, drafting, altering or adapting the design as necessary, before the design in any way begins construction is largely invisible. Part of this is certainly due to the fact that it is difficult to make the

working process visible to producers when it happens at home or in a studio. This is similar to one of the central findings of Bischooping and King (2019) in their exploration of the invisibility of cultural work: work performed at home tended to lack the social support and visibility of work performed in a 'traditional' workplace (p. 275). This is also one of the issues where the designers interviewed had some of the most diverse opinions. A few believed that it would be a hindrance to their personal artistic practice if there were any guidelines or limitations about the working hours of the conceptualization portion of the process. They also did not want there to be any hourly compensation for design time, since that could limit the amount of time they could put into their own artistic output. At the other end of the spectrum, several designers felt that it was appropriate for there to be limits on design time and that it should be paid hourly, similarly to graphic design, or other comparable creative labour. However, the vast majority fell somewhere in the middle, desiring there to be some sort of best practice to make the design time more visible and better compensated, but without placing any hard caps on the time a designer could spend on their own work.

Within the interviews, this frequently sparked discussions about how designers identify themselves. Often the designers who identified first and foremost as artists desired as much autonomy as possible during the design phase, while designers who identified as workers desired more regulation, even if that could limit creativity. Although this is a potentially easy separation to construct, I believe that it is also a false dichotomy. Designers should not be required to choose between artistic autonomy and proper compensation and protections against being overworked. However, within the current theatre structure, that is the choice designers are most often faced with: whether or not to put additional, uncompensated hours of labour into working on a design, regardless of whether the producer is able to properly pay them.

## **4.5. Workplace harassment**

Many of the designers who identified as female or non-binary and/or BIPOC brought up harassment within theatre workplaces without any interview prompt. A few of the male and/or white designers also brought up harassment that they had witnessed in the workplace, typically that had occurred against female designers. Among designers who were over 30 years of age, many expressed the belief that harassment was decreasing in the work place, although nowhere near quickly enough. The main reasons

given for the decrease of harassment were the effects of the #MeToo Movement, especially given the proximity of live performance to the film/television industries, as well as larger societal changes towards a culture that is less forgiving and enabling of workplace harassment. However, there is also a general societal attitude that artists and cultural workers are somehow more progressive or enlightened than other workers. To that end, many designers expressed that harassment in theatre went unchecked or underreported for many years in part because of a belief that “things like that” do not occur among so-called progressive artists. Cases like the harassment perpetrated by Albert Schultz<sup>10</sup> while artistic director at Soulpepper Theatre in Toronto sadly and devastatingly contradict that narrative.

Workplace harassment and sexism cannot be easily disentangled from one another, but many designers did differentiate between the two experiences. Specifically, of the designers interviewed, discrimination and harassment based on sex or gender were described as much more prevalent than sexual harassment or unwanted touching, although the latter was also mentioned. However, Emily laid out what I believe to be an emblematic incident of the conditions in theatre that continue to foster workplace sexual harassment:

I just had a student show up at a work-study and was turned off because the guys opened a work cabinet and there were sexy lady pictures everywhere. You knew you were getting a student and you couldn't like not have that. Don't open that closet, man...The workplace hasn't changed enough, but when you're given warning you don't... And apparently the guy got all awkward and tried to cover it with this body, so it pointed it out more and she's just like “this is terrible.” How is this where we're at? How have we not moved forward from when I started 20 years ago? How is that still a thing? (October 15, 2019)

Disgusting incidents such as that indicate that much more needs to be done to ensure that a harassment-enabling culture is completely eradicated from theatre. Several designers relayed experiences of witnessing similar instances of harassment that clearly dispelled the tired idea of harassers being “bad apples” and instead illuminated that it is toxic workplace cultures themselves that play a primary role in fostering conditions in which unacceptable and inappropriate behaviour is tolerated and even encouraged. As

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<sup>10</sup> In January 2018, Schultz, the prominent Artistic Director of Soulpepper Theatre in Toronto, resigned his position after four women (Diana Bentley, Kristin Booth, Patricia Fagan, and Hannah Miller) filed civil lawsuits against Schultz for sexual harassment and misconduct.

such, it is the responsibility of theatre companies and venues to ensure that every single person that they employ adhere to respectful workplace behaviour to ensure that toxicity is dispelled.

## **4.6. Gendered/Racialized prejudice**

Akin to harassment issues, BIPOC designers and/or female and non-binary designers were much more likely to discuss gendered or racialized issues among the working conditions of theatre designers. However, many designers, regardless of gender identity, identified the gendered nature of costume design as a primary reason why female costume designers are much more likely to be underpaid and under-supported than other design disciplines. Issues of systemic and workplace racism were almost solely raised by BIPOC designers. A similar experience was consistently raised by both female and non-binary designers and BIPOC designers, of being treated differently, especially by white male technical staff. While there is certainly difference in how racism and sexism occur, this set of interviews did indicate some similarities of experience. As Jamie related in her interview:

I've had it where I've been the supervisor... and have been telling someone how to do something that they didn't know how to do and then had them turn around and tell me I was wrong. Then have them turn around half an hour later and explain to me why they were wrong. It was 100% just because they had no faith in me because I was a young female. (November 10, 2019)

Several BIPOC designers spoke of the often-overwhelming whiteness of theatre spaces as being just as oppressive as the culture of misogyny that creates gendered barriers and obstacles. As Fergie stated in her interview:

As a woman, as a queer Black woman, being in really white theatre spaces has been sort of a norm in my life, but they're deeply uncomfortable. They've never been comfortable. Usually there's some colleague who wants to immediately make sure I know they don't see color. (October 31, 2019)

The ubiquity of whiteness within theatre working spaces, especially for designers, certainly contributes to its invisibility. Multiple BIPOC designers spoke about the experience of feeling like they were being treated differently from white workers for racist reasons, but it feeling subtle enough that they could not speak to a specific, overt instance. This is the sort of experience that white designers must make the effort to

understand. The similarity of these specific experiences between female designers and BIPOC designers of being treated differently purely based on their gender and race speaks to the basis of how this discrimination occurs. Theatre workplaces will never be safe and accepting for all workers when they are uncomfortable for BIPOC, female, or non-binary designers. Opening up these spaces and ensuring that there is vibrant diversity and representation is essential towards workplace safety

All of these interviews were conducted before the murder of George Floyd by members of the Minneapolis Police Department which sparked a much-needed awakening of the conversations about how deeply ingrained white supremacy and racism are within the structures of Canadian and American society. While BIPOC communities have maintained constant momentum driving these conversations, finally it seems that white people are becoming more active and engaged. Additionally, this has led to much-needed conversations within Canadian theatre companies and institutions as they reevaluate the practices that have led to the exclusion and silencing of BIPOC theatre artists. The nature of these conversations differs from company to company, but one of the topics being discussed more prominently is the lack of BIPOC representation within organizational leadership structures. This lack of leadership representation has contributed to the opinions and concerns of BIPOC designers not being heard. More BIPOC leadership among artistic and organizational leadership would be a positive step towards addressing the exclusion and silencing that has historically occurred. I suspect, and hope, that if the interviews occurred in mid to late 2020 or beyond, that more white designers would speak openly about the racist and white supremacist structures within Canada and the Canadian theatre community. However, the very fact that it was primarily BIPOC designers who spoke about these issues illuminates how limited the scope of the conversation has historically been about racism and white supremacy.

#### **4.7. Health/Wellness/Parenting**

Nearly universal among all designers interviewed were issues of mental health, physical health, and challenges specific to parental responsibilities. Often these discussions overlapped and intersected with one another, but I will attempt to detail some of the most commonly mentioned issues. The physical health challenges included the long hours, the inability to take any sick days, the poor ergonomics of working spaces within theatres, and the barriers that are created for designers that have any

mobility issues or limitations. April spoke bluntly about how the working conditions of theatre design, especially the long hours, combined with her arthritis made it impossible to continue a career as a full-time designer, (a doctor's opinion was given to her concerning her career as a full-time designer). She surmised, "And so, most of them were suggesting, you've either gotta find a new career or you've gotta find a new way to do this job" (October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019). Multiple designers, especially those with parental responsibilities, outlined how the technical rehearsal schedule of 10/12s creates incredibly difficult childcare conditions. Additionally, because no freelance designer receives any kind of paid parental leave<sup>11</sup>, designers often have to bring young children with them to work. Designers shared both positive and negative experiences of ways that theatre producers had attempted to accommodate and integrate the needs of parents and their young children, but there is no doubt that parents face extremely challenging conditions as theatre designers. Finally, some designers expressed fears that having children could negatively harm their careers, as Sean stated in his interview:

I know a lot of designers who are scared to have children. They're scared to leave the industry for six months to a year for fear of being forgotten or passed over. It's, you're always chasing the golden egg. If you take time off to focus on family or other commitments, then out of sight, out of mind, there's always the fear. (October 15, 2019)

Mental health challenges, in one form or another, were mentioned by almost all of the designers interviewed. Extreme amounts of stress was one of the most common mental health issues mentioned, often in the form of a lack of work/life balance. As Erin stated in her interview:

So, I think we are all, all the time, making sacrifices in one or more of those areas in terms of personal health, artistic health, professional health. So, learning how to juggle those three balls kind of becomes your worth as a designer in the industry, but that's totally invisible except to other designers and some directors are aware of it but much fewer than you would expect. (October 6, 2019)

Especially during technical rehearsals, it is quite difficult for designers to be able to "leave work at work", especially because of the sense of one's design work reflecting directly on one's worth and identity as an artist. These mental health challenges due to stress are not unique to theatre designers and are shared by other workers who

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<sup>11</sup> Parental leave for freelance workers in Canada is available, but similar to voluntary, self-employed EI, it is a difficult process that few, if any, creative workers utilize.

experience precarious working conditions. Bajwa et al. (2018) state, “Gig workers also share health risks associated with the psychological distress of precarious work and lack of health and social insurance coverage in countries without publicly funded health systems” (p. 2). Thankfully Canadian designers are covered by general public health care. But, the lack of publicly funded mental healthcare, dental care, and other extended healthcare is sorely felt by designers.

Many of these health-related issues are interwoven with the precarious working conditions of freelance design. Because designers do not have the same level of security and benefits that workers within the standard employment relationship enjoy, it is far more difficult for designers to properly attend to their physical and mental health, as well as caregiving commitments. Mental health is becoming a much more prominent topic in the design community, when I began my career 10 years ago, it was almost never discussed. However, in order for these mental and physical health challenges to be fulsomely addressed, much further conversation about the working structures of the industry are required. The Covid-19 pandemic is focusing discussions about specific theatre workplace health concerns to prevent the spread of the virus upon the resumption of work, such as audience safety, sanitization of surfaces, etc. Designers should take advantage of this focus on workplace health and safety to amplify discussions about broader industry health and wellbeing.

#### **4.8. How do working conditions affect further organizing efforts?**

The challenges that designers outlined can be characterized within two very broad categories: financial and cultural. There is certainly overlap between the categories-- for example, a theatre with a limited budget which cuts support from the costume designer first, because that sort of thinking is ingrained within theatre culture-- but each likely requires a different type of organizing to overcome. Each category is unique, but also self-reinforcing and it is equally important to undertake both simultaneously. The design community could best address many of the financial issues by becoming more densely organized and more unified and collective in our negotiations with producers. The cultural issues require the entire industry to work together to eradicate the behaviours and practices that enable harassment and discrimination. Similarly, to financial issues, designers would have more power to collectively affect

working conditions -- for example, eliminate harassment and give more support to parents -- if they were more densely organized. The interviews with designers demonstrate that theatre designers need to simultaneously organize to address financial issues while providing vocal leadership within the broader theatre community to combat the cultural issues that unfairly and disproportionately affect BIPOC designers and female and non-binary designers.

These interviews with designers also highlighted the need for education among the design community about the protections from exploitation that are currently available through institutions like ADC. Many designers spoke about being taken advantage of during the first few years of their career, when they were unaware of both their general rights and the protections that could be available to them. This is similar to a finding of Hennekam and Bennett (2017) during their study of creative workers in Canada, the United States, and the Netherlands:

In line with research in other sectors, we also found many creative workers to be unaware of their rights. They appeared to be less protected than workers in many other industries; this was often reported in terms of the need to self-manage contractual issues or injuries, or in the acceptance that remuneration may not be received for contracted work. (p. 77)

Especially pertinent for designers is the perceived need to self-manage contractual issues or the acceptance that remuneration may not be received for contracted work, for example designs that are created in exchange for small honorariums or “exposure.” This speaks to the need for future organizing efforts to include more outreach to students in design programs at universities and to emerging designers. The design community contains the support structures necessary to ensure that no one has to self-manage contractual issues, and those structures need to be made visible to all designers.

Similar to the discussions about business unionism versus social unionism that were referenced in the literature review, designers need to embrace a broad, community-focus in future organizing efforts rather than engaging solely on financial concerns. While there is consensus that all designers are underpaid, there is a myriad of other working conditions that designers find challenging, including many that there was not space for within this thesis. The many physical differences between every unique theatre workplace and production schedule makes it impossible and unfeasible to create detailed legislation for every challenging working condition. But, what is clearly required

is for designers to have the power to ensure that they are always treated fairly and respectfully, as Seth stated in his interview, “An ideal working situation is a situation where designers are respected as equals to any other member of the company” (October 18, 2019). Further organizing efforts for designers need to establish that both individual and collective negotiations include the power and leverage for designers to ensure that they are fairly compensated, well-supported, and always have safe, healthy, and respectful workplaces.

## **Chapter 5. Designers' recommendations**

During the interviews, the first half was typically dedicated to discussing challenging working conditions, whereas the second half involved designers describing what ideal working conditions would look like, as well as how they could be achieved as a community. Generally, designers had more expansive thoughts about what ideal working conditions would look like than strategies to achieve them. However, there were still many ideas regarding how designers could bring about ideal working conditions, spanning from the small-scale (ways to continue to build our local communities) to the large-scale (a general strike or a series of one-day actions, akin to the Ontario Days of Action against the Harris provincial government.) As discussed within the theoretical framework, the success of any large-scale actions is dependent on enhanced solidarity amongst the design community, especially to prevent retribution against the leaders of any such action. The nature of these suggestions indicated that designers are actively thinking about solutions to these issues, and, most importantly, that collective action is required to make any noticeable improvements to designers' working conditions. That acknowledgement of the necessity of collective measures is an important step towards developing the solidarity within the community to pursue such actions. Even designers who are not members of ADC, APASQ, or USA 829 framed their answers in terms of the design community working collectively, not individually, to achieve improvements to working conditions.

### **5.1. Fee and compensation recommendations**

Although designers universally felt inadequately compensated for their work, recommendations differed about what a better system of remuneration could look like. For the most part, the recommendations that designers made concerning fees fell into three broad categories: improve the status quo (flat fee payment); work on an hourly basis; or a hybrid of flat fee and hourly compensation. By far the greatest number of designers felt strongly about improving the flat fee system as the best way to compensate designers. By comparison, only a few designers advocated for an hourly system, but they were very passionate about its importance towards properly recognizing the sheer number of hours that designers work on a project. The most interesting suggestion for a hybrid proposal came from the interview with Kevin. During

that interview, Kevin and I discussed a potential system in which a designer could be paid a flat fee for the conceptualization portion of the design and an hourly rate for the time scheduled in the theatre.

Suggestions for improving flat fee compensation tended to fall into two categories: methods for increasing the fees themselves, and ways to improve the circumstances surrounding payment of flat fees. The methods for increasing fees were a mixture of strategies. Designers mentioned negotiating with PACT more aggressively, however, I do not believe that many of the designers interviewed had ever actually sat at the bargaining table with PACT. That, in itself, is a reason for ADC to consider utilizing the open bargaining method that Jane McAlevey advocates, in which bargaining sessions are open to any workers within the affected unit, not solely the bargaining team (2012, p. 279) so that the membership is more aware of what negotiations with PACT entail. The more interesting suggestions about increasing fees involved the individual negotiations that designers, or their agents, undertake with theatre companies and how these negotiations can be utilized to demonstrate why a certain design contract should be paid at above the minimum level. In her interview, Deanna outlined the importance of this idea, as well as the challenges:

It's why fee negotiation is so critical, and to be able to not only value your time but value everything else that you bring into it...Again, as freelancers, we have no protections with that. Sure, as a designer, you can negotiate your own rate on the spot, but sometimes it can be pretty challenging to do that in the moment, and scary for someone who especially if it's their first job and they don't want to look bad to the producer, and they don't want to seem like a diva. (October 15, 2019)

Making the amount of time a designer works on a project more visible to producers was also a common response. Or, making the argument to producers that if they want a designer's time exclusively for a project, that the designer needs to be paid a fair living-wage for the time spent working on the show. Finally, there were plenty of considerations given to ensuring that designers are properly paid on time--which often does not happen-- even though it is contractually stipulated; or ensuring that designers are properly reimbursed for expenses incurred during shopping for costumes or building set models.

Beyond these general considerations, many designers discussed how to properly scale a fee for each design discipline. For sound/lighting/video designers, the number of

cues and the complexity of each cue affects the amount of time put into the design considerably. For lighting designers, it is a little less extreme, since the amount of time in the theatre for technical set-up and rehearsals often limits how much time can be spent creating cues. However, for sound and video designers who create content primarily outside of rehearsal hours, the amount of time spent creating content can vary considerably. Also, there is no limit on how much the content could be reworked during rehearsals, other than how willing the designer is to work long hours outside of rehearsal. Nevertheless, sound and video designers are understandably reticent to have the number of cues on a show dictate the size of the fee, as that could lead to producers labelling a show as a 10-cue show during negotiations, only to have the director ask for more content, putting the designer in an extremely vulnerable position if the producer refuses to pay for more cues. As Richard, a sound designer, stated in his interview:

Yes, well, it's because it's so content-based...you don't want to dictate the scope of the design by the fee or vice versa. Because once you do that, you're opening the door to exactly what you describe, where a producer may...an unscrupulous producer may ask for cues to be cut, so that they can pay you less if it's paid by the cue or an unscrupulous sound designer could pad it out with unnecessary cues, so they get paid more. You don't want to enter into that. (October 15, 2019)

A common recommendation from sound and video designers involved negotiating a bonus for designers that involved original composition, rather than the use of existing or found material. This is a difficult distinction, as the line between original composition and altering existing material can be blurry. However, of all the recommendations, that seems to be the most feasible. Its major downside is that it could disincentivize original composition in theatre work if producers cannot afford it. This is a suggestion that definitely requires important detail work in terms of implementation. It seems by far one of the best suggestions to accommodate for the varied scale of the work required in sound and video design.

The suggestion that Kevin and I discussed within his interview involved a hybrid method of compensation for designers, combining flat fee and hourly. Nearly all designers indicated that they would not want the time they spend researching, sketching, modelling, and otherwise conceiving of a design to be regulated at an hourly rate, because it could limit their artistic process. Many designers expressed frustration with the fact that they do not earn overtime, meal penalty, rest penalty etc. when the theatre schedules their working hours within the theatre, while performers and technicians often

do accrue those benefits. Kevin's suggestion was for designers to earn a flat fee for the conceptualization of the design itself, and then be paid an hourly rate for all of the time scheduled in the theatre, similar to the technicians. This is potentially a best of both worlds' situation for designers, in which they are still free to spend as much, or as little, time as they deem artistically appropriate on the conceptualization portion of the design. But, for all of the time in which they are required to be in the theatre, being paid hourly would account for the 12, or 14 or 16, hour days, the loss of meal breaks, the physical toll of being scheduled to work until midnight, and then to be back at 8 AM the next day, etc. Additionally, it would make the producers more aware of the sheer number of hours that designers are scheduled into the theatre. It should be noted that Richard's concerns about producers cutting cues to save money were mirrored by Kevin, who also mentioned some mixed feelings about this suggestion in terms of producers cutting technical rehearsal hours, even if the show needed that time, in order to save money. In that scenario, designers could lose income that they had been planning on receiving, whereas a flat fee can never be decreased after negotiations conclude. So, there would certainly need to be stipulations to ensure that a policy like that could not be abused by a producer, or by a designer purposefully dragging out the technical process to earn overtime pay, etc. It is a suggestion that would require more fine-tuning, but I think it is one of the most interesting, and fairest, methods of compensation for theatre designers that was proposed.

## **5.2. Freelance recommendations**

Interview participants also had a tremendous diversity of opinion with respect to their recommendations regarding improving the nature of freelance working conditions. The freelance system offers various broad benefits and drawbacks: the ability to have some choice about which projects to work on versus the economic uncertainty and instability of having little to no guaranteed work from season to season. Some designers strongly value the ability to have that choice of projects and accept the uncertainty that accompanies it, while others would happily sacrifice much of that choice in order to have more financial stability. There does exist in theatre, with some larger companies, the position of a resident designer, which involves a designer being paid a salary from the company to design a certain number of their shows and to also act as a staff representative of the design department. These positions are rarely, if ever, full-time and

allow the designer to also work on a limited number of projects outside of the resident company obligations. For some designers, this represents the ideal in terms of having a mixture of freedom and stability. However, the number of resident design positions in Canadian theatres continues to diminish, as it is now mostly the largest-scale festivals or companies that have those positions. The reasons for this diminishment are uncertain, whether as a cost-cutting move or to allow individual directors more flexibility in the design team that they hire. Reducing resident design positions also increases the number of individual designers who can design shows in a season. With fewer and fewer resident designer positions, it seems unlikely as a solution to the economic instability of designers moving forward, regardless of how many designers would support more resident design positions.

Interview participants put forward two proposals that address the issue of freelance employment uncertainty that there is value in exploring more fully. The first proposal involved more regulation concerning when designers could be offered contracts. In his interview, Justin<sup>12</sup> related that he had a friend who had recently graduated law school and that law firms utilize a “hiring day” in which firms make offers to recent graduates. The advantage of this occurring on a single day for the recent graduates was that they could weigh competing offers, rather than feeling pressured to accept the very first offer, owing to the need for stability to begin paying back student loans. Law firms found this advantageous because they knew that no one had been hired yet, so there was no wasted time in terms of making offers to anyone who had already accepted a position. Justin proposed that if there were several days in a calendar year in which PACT companies could make offers to designers, it would streamline the offer process tremendously and allow designers the ability to weigh competing offers. Frequently, designers accept an offer 8 months or 12 months in advance simply because they have nothing else scheduled at that point and then often have to turn down better offers that they receive later. Having contractual offers limited to every 3 months or every 6 months would allow designers to weigh competing offers and make a far more informed decision. Theatre companies would be restricted by this system, but, similar to the law firms, they would have the advantage of more certainty about a designers’ schedules and conflicts. Under the current unregulated system, a

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<sup>12</sup> Justin is a pseudonym

theatre often has to ask many designers about a project before they can find one who has space in their schedule. Limiting the days on which contracts could be offered could be as advantageous for theatre designers as it is for recent law school graduates.

The additional proposal mentioned by several designers was for theatre companies to make multi-year offers and commitments to designers. This system already exists, albeit in a very informal manner. There are designers who can essentially guarantee that a theatre company is going to offer them at least one show per season. However, often the designer does not know in which time slot the offered show will occur, which complicates scheduling other contracts without conflicts. A theatre company would be unlikely to offer a designer with whom they had never worked before a multi-year contract. But, it is reasonable that once a designer has established that they are a good fit with a company, that they could be offered a contract that involves designing one show a year for the next several years, and then to reevaluate the overall fit once those three years have passed. This does not necessarily solve the issues involved with long-term scheduling of contracts. But, having the certainty of knowing that there will be some work in the future would make financial planning more achievable and assuredly decrease some of the stress that designers currently feel concerning their economic instability.

### **5.3. Support staff recommendations**

While many designers identified lack of support staff as a challenging working condition, recommendations for how designers could positively affect staffing were difficult to conceptualize. For the most part, designers have limited control over how many crew and technical staff are hired to realize the design, unless they are in a powerful position to negotiate that into their contracts. ADC contracts do indicate that designers are not expected to perform any tasks outside of their job description as a designer. But, for sound and video designers especially, their job descriptions are new enough that they are quite fluid in terms of how the technology of creating and implementing design content is evolving. For complex shows, having musicians or animators or several other positions could be considered appropriate support staff, but that is quite a difficult request to mandate. The final product is viewed as artistically emblematic of the designer, which creates tremendous pressure and motivation for the designer to work outside of their job description in order to ensure that the design is

properly executed. This frequently happens to costume designers, wherein the wardrobe department is understaffed, and the designer is either implicitly, or even explicitly, expected to become part of the costume construction team for no additional compensation. Faced with the possibility of either being viewed as “not a team player” and perhaps not being hired in the future and/or not having the design fully realized, this is a problematic and challenging position for a designer. It is quite understandable why designers often make the decision to give additional, uncompensated work to a project.

One aspect to this issue that does differ between typical theatre production in Canada and the United States is the culture of assistant designers. Assistants are much more frequently employed in the United States than in Canada. Within Canada, it is typically only large festivals that employ assistants. Smaller productions may include assistants, but the designer most likely has to pay for the assistant themselves. In the United States, it is much more likely for a League of Regional Theatres (LORT) or Off-Broadway production to employ assistants, and Broadway shows often depend on assistants. Assistants are not a substitute for essential technical or supervisory roles, and, in some instances, union or venue restrictions may prevent an assistant from performing tasks that are considered covered labour by the respective bargaining unit. That said, if a producer hires an assistant, it can, in some cases, minimize the amount that a designer works outside their job description. Several designers did suggest that if Canadian theatres hired assistants as frequently as American theatres that this could ease the burden of expected, uncompensated labour by designers. But, that is potentially problematic, as hiring an assistant for design support is not the same as hiring the necessary technicians, wardrobe staff, or discipline-specific specialists.

It is difficult to formulate a cohesive strategy to ensure that designers receive adequate technical staffing to construct and realize their designs. For the most part, when working above the independent level, lighting and set designers tend to be quite well-supported. Set designers at the independent level are often expected to be the head carpenter, head of props, and head of paint, which is an overwhelming expectation. But, even at the highest levels of budget and scale, costume, video, and sound designers are often under-supported. There is a certain amount of education that likely needs to occur between designers and producers concerning why it is necessary to hire certain roles such as head of wardrobe or a video engineer. However, these are also not new issues; they are well known within the theatre community and there is

certainly resistance from producers, due to financial restrictions. In this instance, there are no clear recommendations, beyond continuing education for producers and ensuring that lack of staff support continues to be a visible issue.

## **5.4. Working hours recommendations**

Working hours is an issue where there is a fair amount of consensus about the ideal situation. A strong majority of designers supported working a maximum 8-hour day and a 40-hour week (8/40) during technical rehearsals, similar to other workers within the standard employment relationship, with overtime compensation if either of those limits are exceeded. That said, many designers identified this as the ideal but with the caveat that it was too expensive, in their view, for producers to create theatre within a more equitable schedule. In my opinion, this is an issue where designers need to collectively raise expectations and demand the reasonable working hours that other workers enjoy and that it is the responsibility of the producers to facilitate those conditions. However, Kevin mentioned that when he works out of town and away from home, he prefers working longer days so that there are fewer days he has to be away from his family. This is an interesting consideration and speaks again to the challenges that a design career poses to families, and designers with young children. Furthermore, it indicates the difficulty that can exist in the creation of generalized working structures for designers, especially when including family and caregiving commitments. Any improvements to the working conditions regarding scheduling and hours worked for designers need to incorporate the flexibility to allow designers to balance personal commitments with work obligations.

Most designers were quite explicit that they both preferred working shorter, more conventionally 'normal' hours and that there is nothing inherent about the theatre creation process that requires working excessively long hours. This is an example of the tension for designers between artistic and worker identities. These long hours are presented as an artistic necessity, but it is only the financial limitations of producers, and the CAEA 10/12 structure, that necessitates long hours. In fact, several designers – including April and Kevin-- spoke about Theatre Calgary, one of the largest regional theatres in Canada, experimenting with an 8/40 structure for their technical rehearsals. Their production staff studied alternative scheduling and found that, because their IATSE technicians accrued significant overtime working 10/12s, it was essentially no different in

terms of the overall financial bottom line to work an 8/40 schedule. The fact that they own their venues and are not required to rent space was a primary factor in this calculation, and companies that rent venues consequently do not have the same financial flexibility. However, this demonstrates that this is a feasible structure for theatre production. In fact, part of their decision involved trying to limit the stress placed on theatre workers by the 10/12 schedule. The combination of giving workers more time off and the relatively similar financial costs made the decision to work 8/40 quite feasible. If other theatre companies were to move to this schedule, it is quite likely that there would be significant support from the design community.

The creation of a theatre schedule is largely guided by the contract under which the CAEA members on a production are employed. The IATSE contract, if within a union venue, also plays a role, but it is more likely for IATSE members to work overtime than a CAEA member. In this way, CAEA plays a significant role in determining a designer's schedule, although indirectly. Currently, there are no formal trilateral discussions or negotiations between CAEA/PACT/ADC to address issues like scheduling that affect all parties. Bringing these organizations together on an annual basis to ensure that these common issues are discussed would be a significant first step towards creating working hours that are more equitable and less stressful for the workers involved.

## **5.5. Anti-Harassment recommendations**

CAEA's Not In Our Space Policy (NIOS) is the most comprehensive anti-harassment policy that exists in the Canadian live performance industry. Union des Artistes, who represent performers in Quebec, have a similar program known as L'Aparté. I am most familiar with the NIOS policy, so I will focus the recommendations in this section on that policy. NIOS creates clear guidelines about acceptable workplace behaviour for all creative workers and details a fairly robust reporting and disciplinary process. One of its greatest strengths is that it is written to be applicable to all workers and workplaces involved in the creation of live performance. Organizations like ADC and IATSE have individual codes of conduct, but they solely apply to their own membership, whereas NIOS seeks to apply to all working professionals. Although everyone is technically covered by it, the policy can only be used to make complaints against CAEA members directly and, conversely, some of its resources are only available to CAEA

members. This limited scope could be improved if it became the standard for other organizations.

NIOS is such a strong policy that PACT, ADC, and IATSE could easily adopt it as a baseline for all theatre anti-harassment policies. Currently, there is informal support for NIOS by ADC, but little option for how ADC members could be more fully covered by it. In addition to NIOS, each PACT company typically has their own individual company harassment policy. IATSE's anti-harassment policy and procedures are the responsibility of the company or venue with which IATSE has its contract. Therefore, although NIOS is quite strong, there are hurdles to its full realization as a complete industry standard. As mentioned above, a CAEA/PACT/ADC relationship would be useful for discussing scheduling issues. Likewise, a CAEA/PACT/ADC/IATSE commission would be necessary to both standardize any anti-harassment policy and procedures. There are assuredly legal and organizational barriers to such an adoption, but it is the recommendation of the designers who were interviewed that broadening the reach of NIOS would be one of the most effective ways to combat the harassment that designers face in the workplace.

Related to the strengthening of NIOS, further education of producers is needed regarding their responsibility in addressing any harassment that occurs during one of their productions. As mentioned above, any harassment issues regarding IATSE members (whether members reporting being harassed or being accused of harassment) on a theatre production is the responsibility of the employer, typically the producing company. Many companies are either unaware and/or unequipped for this responsibility. Furthermore, it is often the individual "company culture" of a theatre producer that sets the tone for how workers are treated and treat each other on a production. Nearly all designers interviewed expressed that they felt theatre producers could do much more to ensure that their individual workplace cultures create and facilitate respectful conditions for all workers.

During most of the interviews in which designers mentioned harassment, I asked a follow-up question along the lines of "Do you think harassment in theatre is more or less prominent than in other industries?" The most common answer was that harassment in theatre occurs at roughly the same rate as other industries. There were some designers who thought it was either more or less common, but they were a small

minority. With that perspective, it is evident that these issues are not isolated to theatre nor can be dealt with as simply a matter internal to the sector. The large-scale and broad work to eradicate harassment must also occur on a societal level in addition to an industry level. In that sense, NIOS could perhaps even be used as a model for other industries because, in my understanding, it is more comprehensive than the anti-harassment policies in other industries. By providing the model for what a broad-based, sectoral anti-harassment policy looks like, the theatre industry could help lead the way towards the larger societal goal of the eradication of workplace harassment.

## **5.6. Gendered/Racialized recommendations**

Gendered and racialized issues are closely tied to the harassment issues detailed above. However, there are several key points that require further elaboration. The two most prevalent gendered issues mentioned in the interviews were the barriers experienced by designers who are parents or have other caring responsibilities, especially women, and the lack of support for costume designers, in part because costume design and production is seen as traditionally “women's work.” Both of these issues require solutions and recommendations, in addition to anti-harassment initiatives. There are some initiatives that are intended to aid designers who are parents, but they tend to occur on a show-by-show basis, without any large-scale structure or permanence. In her interview, Beth spoke to the fact that there are no wide-reaching supports for parents:

And it's been a thing that I've been pushing with my agent and that we've talked about with ADC about how do we deal with it, how do we make it possible or more possible or what resources are there? I created a Facebook group of theater parents. It's a secret group... (Oct 3, 2019)

The independent contractor classification of theatre designers compounds the problem of support for parents, as there is no continuity among employers regarding the support that is available or offered. Designer parents enhancing their community connections through a closed Facebook group is a strong first step towards developing the necessary structures of support. The involvement of ADC, perhaps through helping to develop resources or guidelines for parent designers to send to producers would likely be a helpful next step. While that type of mutual aid would certainly be beneficial in the short-term, more permanent and structural changes are required to properly support designers

with parental and caregiving commitments. It could be useful for ADC and designers to look to the larger labour movement for solidarity and solutions. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), was instrumental in securing paid maternity leave for its members following its 1981 strike, after which other unions were soon able to negotiate similar benefits. The difference between the employer/employee and employer/independent contractor relationships certainly makes it more difficult for a similar strategic action or outcome for parent designers. It also took collective, large-scale action to achieve those benefits, which is something that is difficult given the size of the design community. However, given that ADC and CAEA members who are parents both deal with very similar situations in terms of childcare, a formalized committee or initiative between the two organizations could perhaps generate the momentum necessary with PACT and other theatre producers to begin to develop consistent supports for parents. During the Covid-19 pandemic a coalition of ADC, CAEA, and IATSE has been collectively advocating for live performance workers to the federal government in terms of the extension to the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and the creation of a universal basic income proposal. This collective structure could also be utilized to help other unions and labour organizations advocate for a national, public child-care system to help support all parents, especially those who work in freelance or precarious conditions.

Removing the devaluing stigmatization of costume design and labour as “women's work”, regardless of the gender identity of the person performing the labour, begins with education that demystifies the process of costume design and construction. For far too long, male production managers and technical directors have claimed an ignorance of how costumes are constructed and have not offered the support that other designers and production departments receive. This education can occur at a variety of scales. For example, in university theatre programs, classes about technical direction or production management should have an equal focus on costumes and wardrobe as on the disciplines of sound, video, lighting, and set. Furthermore, current TDs and PMs must undertake the labour themselves to learn the skills required to support costume designers and wardrobe staff. The extent to which they learn actual wardrobe skills is less important than fully understanding the entire process of design and construction, again similarly to the other disciplines, so that costume designers and heads of wardrobe are not so frequently required to take on labour that should be handled by a

TD or PM. Several months ago, in Vancouver, Amy McDougall, the heard of wardrobe for Bard on the Beach, very generously led a tour of the wardrobe facilities for Vancouver TDs and PMs so that they could learn more about how a costume shop operates. On one level, it is astonishing that this had to occur -- no one would ever consider leading a tour of a carpentry shop just to understand how it operates. Yet, this reflects how wide the education gap currently is. University theatre programs are key towards these efforts. It is typical for all design and technical students to get a tour and a basic understanding concerning the operation of a scenic carpentry shop. The same tour and basic orientation should be given for costume shops as well. Initiatives like that must be undertaken to demystify how a costume shop operates so that designers and costume workers can be properly supported.

Several BIPOC designers spoke of the discomfort that they commonly feel in all-white spaces, which is characteristic of many theatre workplaces in Canada and Quebec which have historically existed as colonial and/or majority white spaces. Creating more inclusive and comfortable spaces for BIPOC designers is the responsibility of white theatre artists and the brunt of the labour and advocacy should not be expected to fall on BIPOC designers and workers. In her interview, Fergie spoke about the need for white theatre artists and workers to educate themselves about both the issues that BIPOC theatre workers face as well as potential solutions. ADC is beginning the process of undertaking some of this labour, including helping to support panels that discuss how designers can better support BIPOC casts and performers, and also facilitating equality, diversity, and inclusion training for its board members. There is a tremendous amount of work to do, but it is clear that it is not enough, and has never been enough, for designers to simply be personally “not racist”. Designers must be actively Anti-Racist in order to ensure that racism and white supremacy are removed in all of their forms from our workplaces. The conversations that are currently occurring concerning racism in Canadian theatre must not fade away or lose prominence, especially as discussions surrounding the return to work post-Covid 19 become more prevalent. Additionally, white designers must continue to find ways to contribute to working spaces being truly safe and comfortable for BIPOC designers. There are likely no broadly applicable methods to achieve this, but it is the specificity that is integral. The key is for white designers to be continually pushing themselves, pushing other designers, pushing theatre companies, and pushing everyone who can be pushed to ensure that inappropriate language, racist

microaggressions, and racially-motivated work assignments are never tolerated within our workspaces. Due to the enhanced conversations recently within the Canadian theatre community about issues of racism and white supremacy, section 7.5 of this thesis includes a conversation concerning how designers can undertake actions to improve working conditions for BIPOC designers.

Theatre companies have a primary role to play in increasing appropriate and equitable representation and diversity through their hiring practices. There have been increased efforts to this end, but they tend to be focused on the most “visible” members of a production, typically playwrights and performers. These efforts should be recognized, but also expanded to include any workers involved in live performance, including administrators, production staff, designers, and technicians. Diversity efforts cannot solely be limited to the most public and visible creative workers. In an interview conducted in July 2020, Mishelle spoke to this point exactly: “But I feel like in order to get there, it's like, we all have to really, really keep pushing so that they don't just say, ‘Well, we'll just cast more people of color on stage’ (July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020). Obviously, more equitable casting processes for BIPOC performers are an essential part of the process, but this cannot be the only step. Overcoming and eradicating systemic racism and white supremacy requires a more fulsome effort beyond the workers that are most visible to the public. It is essential that the voices and experiences of BIPOC designers are centred within discussions of challenging white supremacy. A strong example of this centring is the We See You, White American Theatre campaign:

As the calls for long overdue change sweep every aspect of our society, we as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color theatre workers are meeting the moment, developing a new social contract for our work environments that cares for and sustains our artistry and lives. (We See You W.A.T. 2020)

Many BIPOC theatre artists collaborated to create an incredibly comprehensive document entitled *BIPOC Demands For White American Theatre*, which includes demands for all aspects of the theatre industry, including working conditions, hiring practices, funding, and cultural competency. While written primarily for the American theatre industry, it is completely applicable to Canadian theatre as well. This resource lays out clearly the concrete actions that can and must be taken to make theatre safer and more equitable for BIPOC workers and artists.

At the time of this writing, some Canadian theatre companies are undergoing expansive audits of their entire company, hiring practices, and workplace cultures. These audits have been motivated by the conversations about racism and white supremacy within Canadian theatre that were sparked by the murder of George Floyd. Several theatre companies in Vancouver are hiring BIPOC theatre artists to help examine the working practices of their respective companies. This is the scope of effort that is required to begin to truly address the problem of entrenched white supremacy. But, the results and sincerity of these efforts will not be known for some time, especially since very little hiring is currently occurring. That said, whether or not the overwhelmingly white artistic leadership structures across Canada are willing to step aside, make space, and encourage BIPOC leadership will be one of the most telling signs of their commitment to creating a truly respectful and inclusive artistic working culture.

## **5.7. Health/Wellness/Parenting recommendations**

One of the key recommendations for overall health, wellness, and parental support came from the interview with Megan, who said “We need to realize that we are replaceable, in the best way possible” (October 4, 2019). It is common among theatre artists, especially designers, to hold the belief that our jobs are so uniquely individual that no one could possibly step in to replace us, even temporarily. This is part and parcel with the horrifying expression “The show must go on” that has led to countless examples of people working through significant illnesses and injuries because of the martyr complex that it creates. Nathan Carroll (2018), a Canadian actor, outlines how dangerous this idea is:

During my lowest points in Winnipeg, I wanted nothing more than to know that the show could go on without me. That I could go home, access every resource and support available to me, and ensure that I didn't harm myself, without the fear of compromising my future relationship with the theatre or damaging my reputation in the industry. Even though a replacement would cause some inconvenience or difficulty, all workers need to not be pressured to work through injury or illness, regardless of the artistic consequences.

Megan's statement is a starting point towards the major recommendation to increase physical and mental health support, as well as parental support for designers: the ability, and, especially, the support to take time off from work when needed. What that support looks like would differ circumstantially but creating a work culture within theatre that

fosters health rather than sacrifice is an integral first step. The Covid-19 crisis has shed new light on this situation, with the likelihood of new restrictions being created that prevent workers from coming to work when exhibiting potential symptoms of the virus. At the time of writing, the federal policy of “10 days of paid sick leave for all” is in initial stages of formation, as Meyer (2020) wrote in the Toronto Star: “The federal government is offering a “temporary income support program” that will provide workers 10 days of paid sick leave related to COVID-19, if they don’t already have access to this benefit.” However, there is no sense of how that would apply specifically to freelance, contract workers, as opposed to workers within the standard employment relationship.

Opening the door to fostering a culture of health within theatre workspaces raises additional questions and issues. Many designers talked about the physical or mental toll that working out of town takes on a designer. Most designers work out of town somewhat regularly, and some spend upwards of 4 to 6 months a year away from their home base. In her interview, Erin bluntly asked the question “How do I eat when I’m out of town?” (October 6, 2019). She elaborated by saying that often theatre companies do not provide information about where designers can buy groceries or find healthy meals. In the smartphone era, designers can search for pretty much any information, but if a designer has just gotten into town and immediately has to head to the theatre to start working or is working a long, compressed schedule, eating properly while away from home can be a significant challenge. Some theatres very helpfully provide information sheets, and this is a small thing that can help foster a culture of health and assuredly there are many similar small but helpful things that could support out of town designers.

Similarly, accommodations themselves can be very challenging. Smaller companies often own or rent apartments for designers to stay in which can be of varying quality. Justin<sup>13</sup> had the honest suggestion that whoever arranges accommodations for a theatre company should spend at least one night in each potential location to ensure that it will be suitable. This suggestion was inspired after he was housed in an apartment that was so cold that he physically could not get enough sleep to be productive and alert during the next working day. This sounds like an extreme example, but almost every designer has a similar story of some disastrous accommodation situation. Some of these issues seem to pale in comparison to larger issues like fees and working hours, but

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<sup>13</sup> Justin is a pseudonym

there are countless ways for a healthier theatre working culture to be fostered and created. Identifying some of them will hopefully spark the initiative to be taken by the entire theatre community to find ways to lessen external stress on designers and creative workers.

Regarding better support for designers who are parents, thankfully there are some models and examples that exist that can hopefully be used to improve conditions. In his interview, Justin also outlined the following positive situation that occurred:

{the theatre company} Had a room cleared out for one of the actors to have as a nursing room and for her nanny, so she could go on. "She'd be like I just need to go nurse" and we'd take a break. We'd take five, come back, and the play was still amazing. Imagine that, she was able to be a mother and do the play because the company accommodated. (October 16, 2019)

Having the option of full paid parental leave is certainly one of the strongest supports available, but, in the absence of that, there are creative ways for theatre companies to effectively support parents. Several parent designers mentioned in their interviews that this issue still feels largely invisible and they have to push for this support rather than it being offered, which is an additional source of stress and emotional labour. Hopefully, as instances like the one mentioned above become more common and visible, support becomes more freely offered. Multiple designers mentioned being afraid to have kids because they did not think they could properly care for children given the structure of theatre working hours and the expense of childcare, and as long as that fear exists, there is no question that far more needs to be done to support parents. Parental support is an issue that should be addressed collectively by the community and not be solely the responsibility of individual parents to raise with theatre companies on a show-by-show basis. Addressing enhanced parental support through the collective bargaining that APASQ, USA 829, and ADC undertake with producers would help ease that burden from parents and also ensure that the entire community is advocating for that support.

## **5.8. How do recommendations affect future organizing efforts?**

The common thread to all of these recommendations to improve working conditions is that they involve some level of collective action, beyond individual advocacy. ADC Members and non-members alike talked about what could be done as a

community to improve working conditions for Canadian designers. Collective bargaining with PACT is seen primarily as a method for increasing minimum fees for designers. Most of the recommendations mentioned by designers in this section could be addressed through bargaining, including issues of harassment and racial equality. Currently, the ADC contract with PACT does not contain language regarding many of those issues but addressing them through collective bargaining would shift the burden from individual to collective advocacy. Given how prevalent many of these non-fee issues are for the design community, they should be centred within bargaining conversations and strategies. Increasing the scope of what can be addressed through bargaining necessitates more organizational capacity and leverage for ADC in order to achieve these collective solutions.

In order to implement many of these improvements to working conditions, Canadian designers would have to increase their negotiation leverage. When considering how to increase leverage, looking at the similarities and differences between ADC, APASQ, and USA 829 is paramount. Interestingly, there is a fair amount of similarity between the structures of the contracts of these three organizations, in that none of them legislate how or when the designer performs their work. However, the main difference between the three organizations -- and what gives ADC the least amount of leverage -- is the lack of affiliation with a larger organization. The bargaining strength and position of APASQ is increased by their affiliation with CSN, as is the position of USA 829 through their certification with IATSE. Thus, for Canadian designers to seriously be able to consider implementing many of these recommendations, examining how APASQ and USA 829 have achieved their relatively stronger bargaining positions is an essential portion of the conversation.

## **Chapter 6. Models of designer organization**

### **6.1. ADC- Independent professional organization**

ADC, as an independent professional organization, is the organizational model that I am most familiar with, as I am one of its eleven board members. Additionally, I interviewed Gail Packwood, who at the time of the interview was the Executive Director of the organization (she is currently on administrative leave.) ADC is the sole organization with the legal status to represent designers in Canada, except for Quebec, where APASQ has sole jurisdiction.

Membership in ADC is completely voluntarily, and membership is not required to work anywhere in Canada, other than a unique exclusivity agreement through the Status of the Artist Act (SAA) with the National Arts Centre (NAC). This agreement is binding because the NAC is a federal arts venue. However, this exclusivity only covers certain work at the NAC. Non-members are required to pay a permit fee for that specifically covered work. PACT companies are required to use ADC contracts with ADC members, if requested by the member, and ADC negotiates a collectively bargained contract with PACT that includes minimum fees and provisions concerning some working conditions, but few stipulations regarding how and when work is performed.

ADC also has status as a National Arts Service Organization (NASO), which allows it to offer tax receipts for any donations that it receives. NASO status is, in part, a recognition of the work that ADC does that is not purely labour relations. For example, ADC curates the English Canada portion of the Prague Quadrennial<sup>14</sup>, in conjunction with APASQ who curates the Quebec portion.

ADC is not affiliated with any larger unions or organizations. This independence ensures that the ADC Board and/or staff make all decisions for the organization, on behalf of the membership. However, that independence also limits the capacity and influence of the organization, due to its relatively small size (approximately 300 members). ADC receives no permanent operational funding, so its main income stream is member dues and filing fees from ADC contracts. The budget of the organization can

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<sup>14</sup> The Prague Quadrennial is the foremost international exhibition of live performance design.

support two part-time employees, but revenue does not currently exist for any more staff salaries. Additionally, any programs that ADC wants to undertake, such as mentorship for young designers, has to be essentially revenue neutral, which is a significant obstacle to expanding the service capacity of the organization. Finally, enforcement of the PACT contract and working conditions falls to PACT when a theatre company fails to fully honour the contract. If PACT is unable or unwilling to ensure its members follow the contract, ADC lacks the resources for comprehensive legal action. Thus, there is almost sole reliance on the employer organization as the final arbiter in any contract disputes, an obvious disadvantage to the organization.

In comparison to CAEA and IATSE, ADC is often lauded for its flexibility, responsiveness, and ability to support its members. ADC being -- beyond two part-time staff members -- a member-driven organization certainly contributes to that praise, as designers with questions for the organization are often in contact with board representatives, who are also working designers. However, scale is also obviously a factor. ADC has a membership that is far smaller than either CAEA or IATSE. So, although this allows the organization to be quite adept at responding quickly to members, it often lacks the ability or the capacity to independently undertake larger actions on a legal or advocacy level.

Overall, ADC's structure has allowed it to grow, even fairly rapidly in the last couple of years while remaining responsive to the daily needs of its membership. But, the limits of an independent professional organization are difficult to overcome if the goals are to increase legal capacity, advocacy influence, and bargaining strength as future goals for the membership and the organization.

## **6.2. APASQ- Professional organization with union affiliation**

Designers in Quebec are represented by APASQ. The jurisdiction between ADC and APASQ is strictly geographical: APASQ represents Quebec and ADC represents the rest of Canada. Thus, Francophone theatre outside Quebec (for example in Ottawa and New Brunswick) falls under ADC jurisdiction and Anglophone theatre within Quebec (for example in Montreal) falls under APASQ jurisdiction. Notwithstanding, APASQ functions primarily in the French language, as does the majority of the theatre work in Quebec. However, they do have members who are solely English speakers. I had the

opportunity to interview several members of APASQ during this research, as well as their Executive Director, Viviane Morin.

There is a tremendous amount of similarity between APASQ and ADC. Both function as professional organizations, rather than certified unions and their contracts are remarkably similar. One of the key differences is that APASQ is affiliated with Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux (CSN). Affiliation with CSN gives APASQ several key advantages that ADC does not have. Most notably, CSN gives support to APASQ in their negotiation of collective agreements and in any legal actions that the organization undertakes. These two key pillars -- negotiation and legal action -- are two of the weakest areas for any small arts advocacy organization. As an example, ADC designers receive a 3 percent RRSP contribution from a contract with a PACT theatre company, while APASQ designers receive a 12 percent contribution from a PACT company. That, in itself, demonstrates the significant negotiation advantage of APASQ. Support from CSN is tremendously valuable in building the strength that APASQ exercises.

The other key difference between APASQ and ADC is that APASQ has an exclusive contract with the various organizations that represent producers in Quebec (additionally, there are more organizations that represent producers, including at the independent level). So, even designers who are not members file contracts through APASQ and pay a permit fee to the organization. This ensures that theatre companies are not able to undercut APASQ fees and standards. Their terms and conditions are universal for theatre design work that occurs in the province. Additionally, this exclusivity increases the leverage that APASQ has during negotiations, as producer organizations are compelled to negotiate in good faith with the organization.

Beyond these key differences, the experiences of APASQ and ADC designers are remarkably similar. Designers in these organizations commonly experience low fees and long, unregulated working hours. Similar to ADC, APASQ does not have guidelines or restrictions on the weekly or daily working hours of designers. Minimum fees are higher for APASQ designers, but are still inadequate to ensure a full-time, living wage for many of their members. APASQ has achieved more for its membership than ADC, primarily due to the advantages of their affiliation with CSN and their exclusive collective

agreements with producer organizations within Quebec. However, the major issues for the membership of both organizations remain common.

### **6.3. USA 829- Certified union local**

Theatre designers in the United States are represented by United Scenic Artists (USA) local 829. USA 829 has existed since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was initially an IATSE local, then chose to affiliate with International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT). However, it re-affiliated with IATSE in 1999. Through a connection with Patrick Rizzotti, a member of the PAR designer advisory committee for this thesis who previously lived and worked as a designer in New York City, I was able to interview several staff members of USA 829 as well as several designers who are USA 829 members.

Similar to ADC/APASQ members, USA 829 members have remarkably analogous concerns about the length of working hours and the inadequate compensation of most design fees, especially outside of Broadway contracts. However, USA 829 has the strongest structure of the three organizations. As a certified local of IATSE, they have similar negotiating and legal supports as APASQ, while also having access to the overall resources of IATSE. Granted, USA 829 has many more members than either ADC or APASQ, as the local covers the entire United States, and also has jurisdiction within some aspects of film and television production. So, its membership generates more revenue than the membership of ADC or APASQ. By way of comparison, the ADC/APASQ offices each have two or three staff members, a mixture of part and full-time. The USA 829 New York office alone has a staff several times larger, in addition to several other regional offices in the United States.

One of the key questions I asked of USA 829 staff members regarded the level of independence the local has from the IATSE International. Although there are certain IATSE constitutional bylaws to which USA 829 must abide, the local, as a whole, is able to independently handle its own finances and affairs. This is necessary, especially for USA 829, because their local is markedly different from all of the other IATSE locals, who focus primarily on technicians, not designers. USA 829 members are classified as fee-based employees, while other IATSE members are classified as employees.

Therefore, the contracts and structure of 829 are necessarily different from the majority of IATSE locals.

However, once again, even with the negotiating and financial strength of IATSE behind them, USA 829 does not have any hourly or weekly restrictions or limits on the number of hours their members can work. The traditional 10/12 working day was the number one working condition challenge mentioned by every USA 829 designer that I interviewed. So, although the relative strength of ADC/APASQ/USA 829 varies tremendously, all of their members are facing essentially the same struggles. The difference is that the union affiliation of APASQ and union certification of USA 829 give each organization more tools with which to advocate and negotiate for their memberships.

#### **6.4. Designer opinions regarding joining CAEA/IATSE**

There are a variety of opinions regarding whether there is value in designers exploring an association with either CAEA or IATSE. Many designers have had experiences with members of each organization that have affected their overall impressions. Additionally, each organization has noticeable impact on the working conditions of designers, through the influence their contracts have on structuring hourly and weekly working days. As mentioned previously, the 10/12 working day is a provision in the CTA that provides the basis for scheduling the length of working days, including technical rehearsals. Also, the contract that an IATSE local has with a venue shapes the working day through its individual stipulations regarding overtime, meal penalty, rest penalty, etc. This can cause animosity or negative feelings between designers and members of CAEA and IATSE, but it has also created a familiarity for designers with the structures of those organizations, which does create the opportunity for solidarity between the organizations that represent creative workers in theatre.

There were two main concerns that designers raised in the interviews about potentially allying with CAEA: the size of the organization (relative to ADC) and the strictness of some of their rules about the work that CAEA members can undertake. CAEA has approximately 6,000 members. Were ADC and its 300 members to seek a closer affiliation with the organization, it could be difficult for the concerns of designers to be heard and acted upon. Additionally, CAEA members are not allowed to take non-

CAEA contracts, as a means of ensuring that producers cannot undercut them by offering non-CAEA contracts and wages. However, almost unanimously, the designers interviewed indicated that they would not be willing to accept restrictions on what work they could accept. The positives that designers mentioned about allying with CAEA included that they are able to set quite strong regulations about the working conditions for their members, and that their membership includes directors, and those are the workers with the most commonality to designers in terms of being paid flat fees and general working practices.

The main concerns designers raised about allying or certifying with IATSE included the seniority system that many locals utilize and that hourly working limits could impact the ability of designers to properly execute their designs, as well as the instances where designers have received harassment from IATSE technicians. The concerns about the seniority system and hourly working limitations are, I believe, primarily due to a misunderstanding about how a designers' local like USA 829 operates, as opposed to the technicians' locals. Should ADC decide to affiliate with IATSE, it would maintain the independence to determine issues such as seniority and hourly working limits, both provisions that would not be adopted unless designers desired them. The harassment that designers have received from IATSE members is by far the most significant concern and one that would require serious discussion between ADC and IATSE to create systems that ensure IATSE more aggressively pursues policies to prevent all instances of workplace harassment. The positives about allying with IATSE that designers mentioned included that IATSE is a certified union, giving them more structural power than CAEA as well as the belief that their primary focus on wages and working conditions leads to their members having better overall wages and conditions than ADC/CAEA members.

It is difficult to accurately summarize the overall spectrum of opinions regarding whether or not designers should explore joining CAEA or IATSE. Additionally, not every interview covered this question directly. I think the best representation of the overall opinions is that designers are cautiously interested in exploring how a larger organization could provide more negotiating strength and overall resources. Of the designers who spoke directly about this, most designers favoured further explorations with IATSE, markedly fewer favoured CAEA. However, very few indicated that they would object to exploring a stronger alliance with one of these organizations. A common

response could be paraphrased as “We should join whichever organization is interested in having us.” That said, every respondent had at least some reservations about joining a larger organization. I believe there was some misinformation about what joining a larger organization, especially IATSE, would look like. The concerns about the seniority system and limits on hours worked are all valid concerns. USA 829 provides a clear model for how designers can be unionized with IATSE while still maintaining the independence to decide such matters on their own. Finally, in order to avoid prejudicing the opinions of the designers being interviewed, I made a point of trying not to discuss what these models would look like, as I thought it was important to gather as many diverse opinions as possible. I think that if designers were presented with a concrete model of what affiliation with IATSE or CAEA could look like, their answers would likely have been somewhat different.

Therefore, although there is not a definitive answer on this question, I think that the summary opinion of the designers interviewed is that there is value in exploring a closer affiliation with a larger organization. The details of what that affiliation would actually look like are the key factor in determining overall support from the design community. Also, with IATSE in particular, it is imperative to recognize and acknowledge the very real harassment that designers have experienced from IATSE technicians. Where possible, I asked designers if they felt harassment and conditions that fostered harassment were decreasing, and the answers generally were positive, that harassment is in fact decreasing over time. And, it should be noted that several designers indicated that non-IATSE technicians were just as much of a problem as IATSE technicians. However, IATSE has a responsibility as an organization to ensure that all of its members treat other workers respectfully, without exception. Should a closer relationship with IATSE be explored, discussions about harassment need to be prioritized, to ensure that all measures are taken to ensure a safe and healthy workplace for all workers.

## **6.5. Canadian labour law – What is possible for ADC?**

The unique structure of ADC requires further examination in order to determine the possible future options for Canadian designers as to the viability of joining a larger organization. Two key factors are the Status of the Artist Act (SAA), and ADC's NASO status. During the course of this research, I made inquiries with several labour lawyers and law professors. They were all willing to provide cursory opinions, but nothing that

could or should be taken as definitive. Additionally, addressing this specific question of legality or providing a detailed legal opinion is beyond the scope of this thesis. Should ADC decide to fully explore affiliation or certification with a larger organization, it would be necessary for these legal issues to be properly addressed. However, the opinions of those I was able to contact is that neither the SAA nor ADC's NASO status would preclude it from joining either IATSE or CAEA, should the membership decide to move in that direction.

## **6.6. Classification of designers as independent contractors**

Despite the differences between various provincial Employment Standards Acts (ESA), in all cases designers are classified as independent contractors. The recent decision by the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) that Foodora couriers are classified as dependent contractors, rather than independent contracts may be applicable to designers as well. In her analysis of the OLRB decision, Hastie (2020) states:

The Ontario Labour Relations Board decision reviewed numerous factors at length in its analysis, though it drew particularly insightful conclusions regarding the issue of tools, a chance of profit, and the level of control exerted by the enterprise.

For designers, one of the key factors in this decision is the level of control exerted by producers over scheduling working hours in the theatre during technical rehearsals. In short, the working practices of designers consist of two primary phases: the conceptualization and drafting/creating of the design and the implementation of the design in the theatre. During the first part of the process, designers function primarily as independent contractors, whereas during the second part of the process, the working process is controlled in a manner similar to employees, as theatre companies directly schedule the hours that designers are required to be in the theatre. This discrepancy between the different portions of designers' working practice suggests that independent contractor status may be a misclassification of designers, and that dependent contractor is perhaps a more appropriate classification. However, in an analysis of SAA, Vosko (2005) states:

Since the introduction of the SAA, most decisions pertinent to certification reflect either the finding that artists are employees or independent

contractors rather than dependent contractors, because the act does not require artists selling products or performing services to be dependent contractors or to have only one predominant employer. (p. 144)

This rigid definition of dependent contractors based on SAA, especially in terms of having one predominate employer, likely makes it more difficult for designers to be re-classified as dependent contractors. That narrow definition is problematic for designers, as our work does not occur independently throughout our employment process. With the legal definition of “dependent contractor” continuing to be re-interpreted through ongoing court cases, that definition could get broader, to the benefit of designers. Should ADC explore certification with IATSE more fully, the classification of independent versus dependent contractor may need to be revisited if a labour board denies IATSE the ability to represent independent contractors.

## **Chapter 7. Conclusions, recommendations, and further questions**

### **7.1. Explore affiliation or certification with IATSE**

Designers interviewed for this thesis clearly expressed a common desire for collective solutions to challenging and precarious working conditions. The models of APASQ, CAEA, and USA 829 demonstrate organizational structures that designers could use to achieve stronger collective solutions. While APASQ does provide an example of what a stronger professional organization looks like, their success is also tied to their affiliation with CSN. While affiliation with CAEA is also an option for ADC, their lack of unionized status and limited structure within the organization for ensuring that the smaller groups they represent have their voices heard makes a closer relationship with CAEA unlikely to be in the best interests of ADC and Canadian designers. The consensus from the interview data was that Canadian designers need enhanced collective action in order to improve their working conditions. ADC has provided a foundation for collective action, but more legal and organizational resources and formalized solidarity from other workers would increase the potential to improve working conditions. Maintaining ADC's independence while also improving the resources at its disposal to advocate on behalf of its members, and the Canadian design community as a whole, would speak to the concerns and recommendations raised by designers within the interviews. Therefore, based on the concerns and suggestions of designers, the example of the USA 829 model, and the strength of IATSE as an established union, I think the strongest option is for ADC to explore either affiliation or certification as a national local with IATSE.

One of the strongest arguments to be made about a closer relationship with IATSE is the model and success of USA 829's relationship with IATSE. The interviews I conducted with both USA 829 staff and member designers were instrumental in better understanding how effective their structure is at representing designers. Obviously, USA 829 designers still have concerns about working conditions. However, what is especially notable is that the concerns of the membership are primarily with producers, not with USA 829 itself. The members of USA 829 who I interviewed expressed appreciation for the freedom USA 829 contracts give to creatively approach design work while the

organization still advocates for better working conditions that will benefit the membership. There are factors that require further exploration in terms of using the IATSE/USA 829 relationship to model a potential IATSE/ADC relationship in Canada. While beyond the scope of this thesis to parse the differences in labour law between the two countries, they do exist, and would require a more fulsome legal examination. Another key factor is that USA 829 also represents some film and television designers. This gives the local both an increased membership and, importantly, increased dues revenue. Because ADC solely represents theatre designers, ADC forming a national local of IATSE would have a fundamentally different relationship than USA 829 has with IATSE, simply due to ADC's smaller membership and lower revenues. I do think that ADC membership, and revenue, would likely increase if ADC affiliated or certified with IATSE, but not to the point where the local could be as self-sustaining as USA 829. Differences are apparent between USA 829 and ADC, but the existence of USA 829 provides a useful model for how a national designers' IATSE local in Canada could operate.

A closer relationship between ADC and IATSE is the most likely method to improve working conditions for Canadian designers. Increased legal and negotiating strength would be a significant benefit to ADC as an organization, as well as the organizational stability that IATSE could provide during the uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic. The challenges are likely to be, in my opinion, largely philosophical. There are designers who expressed uncertainty about whether unions are effective and appropriate for representing artists. The USA 829 model demonstrates that designers do not lose any creative or personal freedom in relation to unaffiliated designers. Even so, I think some designers would balk at being affiliated with IATSE, due to the feeling that unions in general stifle creative work. Additionally, designers who have had negative experiences with IATSE or IATSE members in the past could oppose joining the union. Both among the ADC board and the ADC membership, it would be a lively, if not contentious, discussion to have. When honestly looking at the options that designers have to improve our working conditions, affiliating or certifying with IATSE represents the strongest path available to Canadian designers.

Beyond the larger organizational issues of negotiating strength and legal representation, many of the individual working conditions that designers wished to see improved are, in my opinion, most likely to be addressed through certification with

IATSE. Fees are an obvious example, as the increased bargaining strength that would be gained through negotiating as part of a much larger organization could be instrumental in pushing the ADC minimum fees higher. On an individual level, member benefits like a more robust RRSP plan and an extended health/dental plan could make a positive impact on designers who have difficulty affording such benefits currently. IATSE could provide the path to improve working conditions by giving designers increased negotiating leverage with producers while also ensuring that designers retain the independence that is essential for conducting their work as artists.

## **7.2. Other methods for improving working conditions**

If it is decided by either IATSE or the ADC membership that seeking a closer relationship is not advantageous, the question becomes: how else can the design community continue to improve the working conditions of designers? The options of trying to unionize without joining a larger organization or trying to join CAEA both seem like unfeasible alternatives. I think the strongest secondary option would be for ADC to continue the work it has been doing in the last several years, hopefully building upon the most recent negotiation with PACT as well as continuing to develop their arts service programs, in addition to labour relations.

One potential avenue would be for ADC and APASQ to forge a stronger connection, as the two organizations that represent designers within Canada. In interviewing the Executive Directors for each organization, they are both aware of each other and collaborate a little bit on PQ every four years. Beyond this, there are limited connections between the organizations. There would be value in creating a mutually beneficial agreement wherein ADC designers could utilize APASQ contracts in Quebec and APASQ designers could utilize ADC contracts outside of Quebec. Additionally, there are Francophone designers living outside of Quebec and Anglophone designers living inside of Quebec that are both potentially underserved by the organizations to which they are geographically bound. Also, since both APASQ and ADC bargain with PACT, coordinating those negotiations would likely be in the best interest of each organization. APASQ's contract with PACT is much stronger, given their stronger negotiating position, but, hopefully, ADC's position as the sole negotiating voice for designers outside of Quebec would also be beneficial to APASQ.

One of the most important things that ADC could undertake to improve its strength is to continue to grow the membership. During her interview Gail Packwood, ADC ED, outlined how ADC can increase its leverage with PACT, either by bargaining a closed-shop agreement with them, or by increasing the membership enough so that there is de-facto closed shop (Oct 15, 2019). While the bargained closed-shop remains the stronger position, the de-facto closed shop through membership is likely much easier, and probably leads towards a bargained closed shop. Many designers spoke of the need for ADC to continue to increase its membership because of the strength in numbers that it gives to the membership. In this instance, the recent ADC Executive has done an excellent job of stabilizing and growing the organization. For the membership to increase to the critical mass necessary to achieve a closed shop, it is the members themselves who need to convince non-member designers to join. The Board can, and has, run membership drives that mostly target students and recent graduates. However, the voices of peers are the strongest voices to move non-designers towards membership with the organization. This is similar to the concepts described by Jane McAlevey (2020) in reference to the success of United Teachers Los Angeles, “Work-site structure means there are highly respected teacher leaders in every school who can facilitate meaningful dialogue between teachers, parents, and organizers, and much more important, lead supermajority direction actions” (p. 218). Designers need to build that work-site structure while in the working spaces of theatre productions, without it necessarily being motivated or initiated by the board itself.

Finally, although there is not the space in this section to delve into the Covid-19 crisis and the substantive effect it has had on the theatre industry (although a subsequent section will cover this in some depth), one of the interesting outcomes has been the formation of what is informally known as The Coalition, a combined advocacy effort from ADC, CAEA, IATSE, and Canadian Federation of Musicians (CFM). These organizations, primarily using the advocacy infrastructure of IATSE, joined together to ensure that the concerns of all creative workers in the live performance industry are being properly heard in the discussions with governmental agencies regarding support for workers during the Covid-19 pandemic. The fact that The Coalition did not exist prior to the Covid-19 pandemic is telling, as it seems like a rational choice for all of these organizations to be in continual contact with one another regarding both common issues and the overall health of the live performance industry. Regardless of the outcomes of

this current Covid-19 advocacy, continued existence of the Coalition will strengthen the solidarity between all theatre workers.

### **7.3. More local level designer organization**

Regardless of the overall choices that designers make at a national level, increasing the local level of designer organization seems essential to ensuring that all designers are supported and protected. Toronto, by being home to the majority of Canadian designers and the ADC office, and Vancouver, due to recent local organizing efforts, especially among young designers, are likely the two cities with the strongest local communities. Montreal has two distinct communities between Anglophone and Francophone designers. Although there are strong elements within each community, the language and cultural differences do form some barriers. However, outside of those three cities, which form the three primary urban theatre centres in Canada (excluding Shaw Festival and Stratford Festival, which are essentially connected to Toronto, especially in terms of designers who typically work there), there is a strong appetite for stronger local communities. Designers in Victoria, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Hamilton, and Ottawa all spoke about the desire for stronger connections among the designers in their cities. I unfortunately was unable to interview anyone from the Atlantic provinces-- though I have anecdotally heard similar thoughts expressed from designers who live there.

Strengthening ADC nationally, either on its own or through a closer relationship with IATSE, would benefit all Canadian designers, but there is always space and need for local communities to be stronger. Also, stronger local communities can build the base for stronger national organizing and action. Several years ago, ADC began the program "Drinks with Designers" (DwD), which involves designers in a city meeting at a local bar on the last Monday of every month to casually hang out. All designers are welcome, both ADC members and non-members. It has proven to be quite a popular event, and they occur every month in Toronto and Vancouver. All of the cities mentioned above have occasionally held DwD and, in fact, there have been months in which six or seven Canadian cities have held simultaneous DwD. However, there are often months when it is only Toronto and Vancouver holding DwD. Supporting and fostering more regular DwD events in cities outside of Toronto and Vancouver would be a way to begin to build upon the community connections that already exist in those

cities. In Vancouver alone, DwD has created and enhanced connections between designers and helped strengthen the Vancouver community to the point that it is now more prominent within the national community.

Another popular community solution that designers in several different cities mentioned involved the desire for common working spaces. Many designers talked about the isolation that they face, working long hours at home or in-home studios while rarely seeing other designers until the beginning of rehearsals and technical rehearsals. Similarly, several designers mentioned how much they enjoyed having a common studio space while studying design at university because it allowed for multiple designers to be working in the same room on their individual projects. They would have the opportunity to discuss ideas with one another or to have the companionship of other people doing similar projects while they worked. Renting or securing common working space in a city is not an easy venture to undertake. However, given the desire for common working space, this could be a strong building block for local theatre communities if it were possible for designers to work together on it.

#### **7.4. Further study regarding worker and artistic identities**

While the major recommendation from this thesis is for ADC to explore a closer relationship with IATSE, the major future research question involves the tension between artistic identity and worker identity among theatre designers. This issue was raised organically in a few of the interviews. I did not aggressively push the issue in any interviews where it did not feel natural. The designers who raised the issue themselves tended to do it from the perspective of emphasizing their identity as a worker. There were some designers who, when discussing the idea of unionization or IATSE, expressed that they believed “unions aren’t for us”, despite considering themselves pro-labour or pro-union. This is not exactly the same as the artistic/worker tension that exists in other industries, but I think it is worth mentioning here. Especially within the Canadian theatre industry, producers or theatre staff often disparage labour organizations such as CAEA and IATSE because of the “limitations” they place on the conditions in which art is created. This idea can also be internalized by designers who do not want to be seen as part of those “problematic” institutions, and instead be viewed by producers as part of solutions. But, these “limitations” are protections, often desperately needed, for creative workers, regardless of their inconvenience for producers. There is a common solidarity

to be found among designers, technicians, and performers, and especially among the institutions that have been developed by creative workers for the primary purpose of preventing exploitation by producers. Further study is required to delve more deeply into the relations between ADC/CAEA/IATSE themselves, as well as their history with PACT and producers who employ their members. However, it is fairly evident that a divide and conquer strategy has been implemented by producers against creative workers and the institutions that represent them.

Within the design community, designers exist at an interesting intersection between workers, creators, and supervisors. At various times throughout a design contract, a designer may be working completely unsupervised and on their own or required by a theatre to be at technical rehearsals at a certain time or supervising a large crew in the implementation of their design. Designers are often in the position of getting feedback from directors, CAEA members, and then directing IATSE members to implement certain changes. Because designers occupy different statuses within a production team at different points in the theatre production process, there can be tensions between artistic and worker identities. Furthermore, as many designers come from a Fine Arts, rather than a technical, background, there is a natural inclination towards identity as an artist rather than as a creative worker. This is one aspect where the Covid-19 pandemic is perhaps having a significant, unintended effect. It is more evident than ever that designers have little control over the opportunity to create work. That power lies almost solely with producers. Furthermore, while designers are completely unemployed from their theatre work during the pandemic, many producers and their staff are still working, furthering the divide between employees and designers. This is another area that deserves further study, especially in a post-Covid-19 landscape. We would benefit by knowing whether or not designers now identify more strongly as workers as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Finally, there is no doubt that the labour movement's larger connection to and influence within society is a significant factor towards the identity of artists and creative workers. As mentioned previously, there was a much stronger relationship between artists and workers during the 1930s in the United States (and to a lesser extent, Canada), when the labour movement was much stronger. Especially with the neoliberal erosion of the welfare state and the overall labour movement, there is no doubt that artists and creative workers are further isolated from the solidarity and community of the

labour movement. The examples of worker and artist collaboration in 1930s show that there is nothing inherent about creative workers that alienates them from a strong identity as a worker. However, contemporary economic and societal factors introduce tension into that relationship. With the prevalence of the “gig economy” and the breakdown of the standard employment relationship, more workers now experience the precarious conditions that have always affected creative workers. Now more than ever, creative workers need the labour movement just as much as the labour movement needs creative workers. What the organizations and entities within the labour movement can learn from creative workers who experience precarious working conditions is deserving of future study.

## **7.5. Theatre recovery post-Covid-19 and conversations about white supremacy**

Because I conducted the initial interviews for the thesis before both the Covid-19 crisis and the murder of George Floyd by members of the Minneapolis Police Department, there is a gap in the relevance of the interview data to current circumstances for Canadian theatre designers. I believe it is necessary to include some thoughts and opinions from designers regarding how the theatre sector can and should move forward both in terms of working conditions in the Covid-19 era, and how we can contribute meaningfully to the eradication of white supremacy within Canadian theatre institutions. On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, I conducted one final interview, with the three designers who formed the designer advisory committee for this project: Mishelle Cuttler, Jennifer Stewart, and Patrick Rizzotti. Our interview focused specifically on the questions of what we predict the Covid-19 impact to be on designer working conditions and what actions designers could or should undertake to combat racism and white supremacy. As all three designers are white, our interview focused on the participation of white designers in anti-racism conversations and actions. I include this section both to give a sense of what the current conversations regarding these issues are, and to pose questions that can be built upon for future research.

It is difficult at the time of this writing to predict how and when the theatre sector will begin the recovery process post-Covid-19. However, there seems to be unfortunately unanimous consensus that it will be an incredibly difficult process, especially due to the loss of revenue that theatre producers have experienced. Short of

an extreme influx of local, provincial, and federal funding, there is little hope for the theatre sector to return with anything close to the scope and scale of pre-Covid-19 production. As Mishelle predicted in the interview: “There's no money right now, so I think the financial challenges will be exacerbated significantly...and will probably continue for the next couple of years” (July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020). The financial challenges are likely to lead to fewer jobs and reduced fees for designers, but also to increased expectations on designers by producers in terms of providing additional labour that is typically performed by technical staff in order to cut costs. To this point, Jenn stated in the interview: “I think there'll also be a greater push to have designers do things that aren't actually design jobs in terms of work that would more align with the skillset of a technician” (July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020). Expanding on this point, Mishelle further outlined the potential divide between producers and designers during individual contractual negotiations post-Covid-19:

I think the big barrier is going to be that producers are going to be feeling very financially stressed and are going to expect a lot of forgiveness on things because of that and ask for a lot of leeway because of the losses that they've experienced and try to pass this on to individual art workers. (July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020)

All of these reflections and predictions are quite consistent with conversations that are currently occurring within the design community. Designers are going to face significant economic challenges during the post-Covid-19 recovery period due to the lack of financial resources for theatre producers and the increased expectations of providing quasi-design labour. Given the circumstances, producers are likely to employ pressure tactics during individual negotiations with designers.

In addition to the economic challenges, there will also be tests to the physical health and emotional well-being of designers during the recovery period. If the recovery period begins -- as is looking increasingly likely -- with an attempt to hold live theatre productions with limited audiences before there is a vaccine or treatment for Covid-19, the risks to arts workers are abundant. In the interview, Jenn outlined the potential thought-process behind this rush to recovery, “There's a drive for normalcy, that people make really, really rash decisions about things, because they are clinging to this idea that they can get back to normal and the speed at which you can recover some sense of control over your life is really, really appealing” (July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020). Furthermore, the recovery process is not likely to occur quickly or easily in any way. Mishelle outlined

some of the potential difficulties of the recovery process: “I think that there'll probably be a very awkward in-between time where there's small shows happening in a very annoying way with a lot of distancing rules and a lot of people actually go into spaces, but it being weird and separated” (July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020). Some of these thoughts are certainly informed by a few of the recovery plans that theatre companies have already, publicly or privately, outlined. It is apparent that there is pressure for producers to push the limits of the recovery process for financial reasons, and also to try to retain the normalcy of pre-Covid-19 life. However, Mishelle anticipates that this recovery push will be problematic in terms of designer health: “Then also just the additional physical and emotional labour of going into a space where you're not totally sure about safety, where you're having to take extra precautions. It's just exhausting for every person involved in that and it's more time and it's just energy” (July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020). While there is desire within the community for designers to return to work, this interview accurately represents the very real mental and physical health concerns held by many designers.

While there are significant concerns about the recovery period, there is also optimism in the design community that this “forced pause” can provide an opportunity to have in-depth conversations with producers about improving working conditions once work resumes. One of the reasons for this optimism is that the Covid-19 pandemic has led to increased solidarity within the design community because of the nearly universal conditions of unemployment. The design community has come together more strongly and more solidly than ever before, primarily for self-preservation, which has led to more frequent and vibrant conversations about improving future working conditions. Jenn spoke about this unique solidarity:

I think that there's the chance that the solidarity that this pandemic has created remains and does lead to people continuing to push the changes. As Mishelle said, people are really more open than they've ever been to hear about the structural changes that people want to see. (July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020)

Furthermore, some theatre companies are taking advantage of the forced pause to re-evaluate their own working practices, a process that has only been exacerbated by the conversations about the depths to which white supremacy affects the entire sector. As a result, there is optimism that producers may be more receptive to these conversations with designers. As Mishelle outlined:

I'd like to think that there's an opportunity, at least with some companies to talk about this. I feel like it's almost too soon to tell, although we're getting closer, but I feel like everyone's getting shaken up in a lot of ways. At least people's voices are kind of being heard on a lot of levels, I think more than before because they have to be heard. (July 1st, 2020)

Although there is significant pessimism about how the recovery process will occur, there is optimism that it could provide the opportunity for more significant structural change than has been previously seen in the sector. There is no better description of the conversations currently occurring in the design community than seemingly converse pessimistic and optimistic opinions about what the post-Covid-19 future could hold.

The murder of George Floyd on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and the subsequent mobilization and activism led, predominately, by the Black Lives Matter movement has sparked much needed conversations about the power and role of racism and white supremacy within Canadian theatre. Like the Canadian theatre community, the Canadian design community is overwhelming white, evidenced by several of the designers interviewed earlier in the process speaking to the fact that they are often the only BIPOC person in theatre spaces, and the discomfort that this can cause. The second half of the interview with Mishelle, Patrick, and Jenn focused on the exploration of white supremacy in our theatre community and what actions white designers could and should take to eradicate and dismantle those systems.

The interview participants began this discussion by outlining how white supremacy exists and operates in Canadian theatre as an intersectional force among other social and economic factors. As Mishelle described, "You can't really disentangle white supremacy from money and funding and the way people are treated and the hierarchies that exist within these companies" (July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020). Expanding on this, Patrick noted how deeply rooted the colonialist, white supremacist perspective is within theatre in Canada and the United States, "We're all very used to the way we've built theater from a very colonialist, white perspective and to tell different people's stories will take different processes. We can't build it the same way we have been building it for the past, for my entire life" (July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020). Specific to theatre designers, the centrality of negotiations in terms of our interactions with producers and the associated power dynamics was discussed. Mishelle outlined the responsibility that designers with privilege have in terms of challenging those power dynamics:

When you're shitty to me and my negotiation that's not just about me. That's about all BIPOC people and all the people who...don't have class privilege or people with disabilities. There all these reasons why low-balling someone and bullying them during contract negotiation is a systematic exclusionary tactic. (July 1st, 2020)

There are certainly many other ways in which racism and white supremacy inform and affect the institutions of Canadian theatre but focusing on both the historical legacy of colonialism and the economic entanglements certainly lays the groundwork for examining the actions that designers can take to combat these systems.

In addition to exploring how white supremacy operates within Canadian theatre structures, the participants also outlined some of the ways in which designers can actively contribute to anti-racist actions within the sector. Bullying and harassment are constantly key issues for discussion within the design community, and Patrick elaborated on how our conceptions of those behaviours have to evolve:

It's got to change. I hear far too many stories of-- or I've even witnessed far too many events where people don't even understand that something is actually a microaggression or is bullying or is racist. They don't even...We have to change it. We have to hold each other accountable. (July 1st, 2020)

As some of the earlier interviews indicate, many designers are invested in combatting workplace bullying and harassment. Designers -- especially white designers -- holding one another accountable for language and behaviours that may have, incorrectly, been previously seen as acceptable but are actually deeply hurtful and problematic is an essential step towards making theatre workplaces safer for BIPOC workers. Another action that designers can and must undertake is working more respectfully and appropriately with BIPOC casts and performers. For example, Canadian designers often struggle with how to light different skin tones or how to work with different hair textures. As Jenn outlined:

I think in terms of purely as a design aspect, having the training and skillset in particularly in lighting and wardrobe, it's not a special skill to be able to...Lighting people of color is part of your job and it's not a special thing that you need to be trained to do. It should be part of your basic toolkit. Understanding Black people's hair is part of being able to design a hair or wig look for a costume. (July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020)

Designers need to have the skills and the abilities to work with all performers, and it is not the responsibility of BIPOC performers to do the work of teaching designers how to

work with them; designers must do this work themselves. Finally, in a broader sense, and connected to Mishelle's earlier comments about how intersected the forces of class and race are, designers need to advocate for everyone as strongly as they advocate for themselves. Jenn spoke to this need for enhanced solidarity when she said, "Then all of those things that you push for yourself, you need to be pushing for everybody that you are hiring, for all the other artists being hired, and for people that are engaging in labor on behalf of your design" (July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020). It is key that Jenn identifies advocating not just for other designers but also for other artists, for technicians, as well as for support staff who are hired to realize the design itself. Widening the scope of advocacy gives designers the opportunity to take on the labour of improving the working and economic conditions for other theatrical workers, especially BIPOC workers. These are also issues to bring within the scope of collective action and collective bargaining. It is important for individual designers to advocate for others, wherever possible. Increasing the ability of designers to collectively improve working conditions for all designers, and even other workers, is a strong contribution that can be made to address issues of racial inequity. There are certainly other actions that designers can undertake to combat racism and white supremacy, and no matter what actions designers have the capacity to perform, the key is to be taking some sort of action. It is the responsibility of white theatre artists, designers, and creative workers to eradicate white supremacy from Canadian theatre institutions.

Overall, this final interview was quite helpful towards synthesizing some of the prevalent conversations that are occurring in the Canadian design community during this very specific time of Covid-19 and discussions about racism and white supremacy. As the bulk of the thesis examines the design community's specific working conditions, and the barriers and opportunities that exist towards becoming more densely organized, this interview provided important context regarding how the design community fits into the larger theatre community. Both Covid-19 and conversations about white supremacy reinforce the opportunity and the capacity that the design community has to affect positive change. If the community is willing, undertaking the labour to fight to improve working conditions post-Covid-19 and fighting to dispel racism from our larger theatre institutions are powerful contributions. Increasing our community capacity and organizational strength could be accomplished by joining IATSE and the events of the

last few months make that choice even more important. The stronger we are as a community, the more positive change we can accomplish.

Creative workers have historically existed on the fringes of the labour movement and have lacked the support and outreach given to workers within the standard employment relationship. The action of organizing more densely is difficult, but by no means impossible, and is essential towards forging the solidarity and capacity to achieve collective improvements. Viewing working condition challenges, and solutions, as common issues for the entire community rather than solely for individuals is an important step towards developing the momentum to address them collectively. Designers currently exist at the intersection of creative labour and precarious working conditions. That intersection is circumstantial, not inherent and can be resolved through solidarity and collective action to improve working conditions for all designers.

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