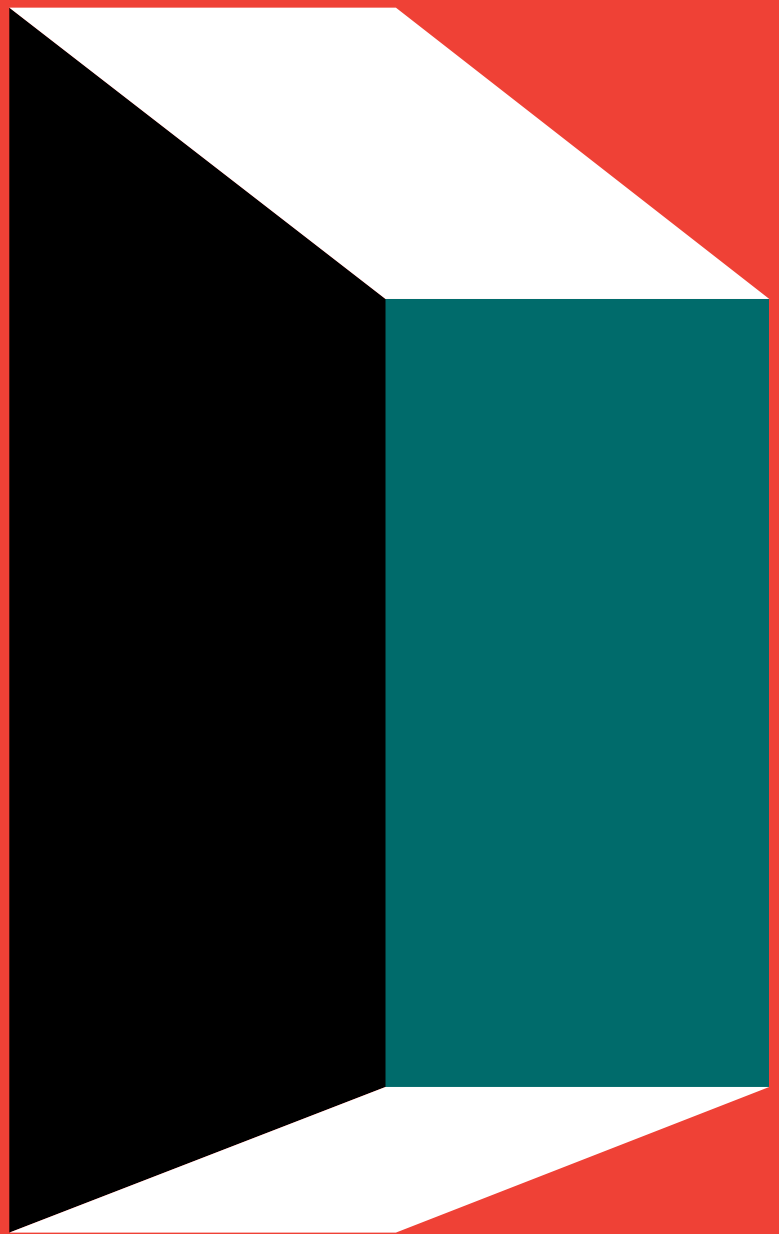
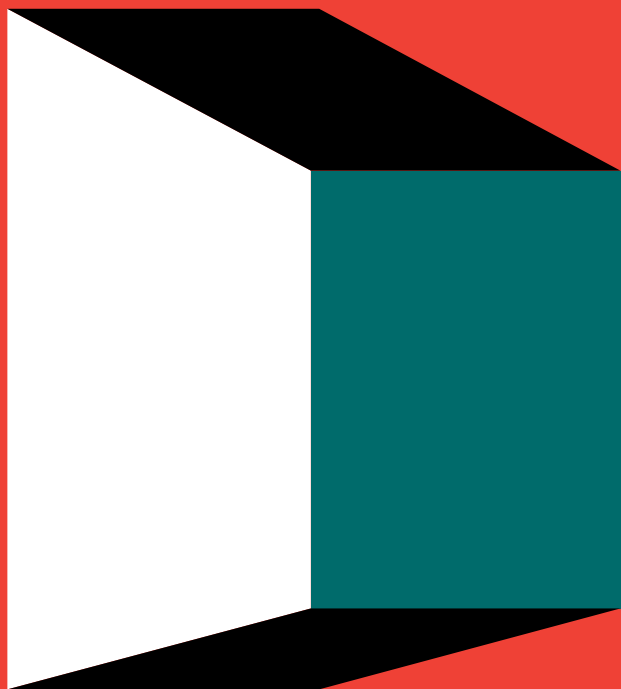
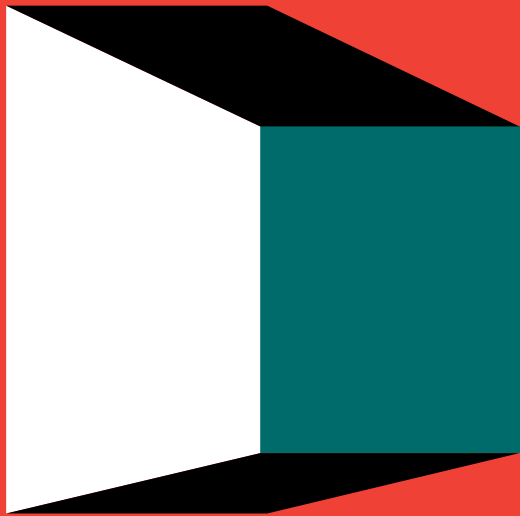


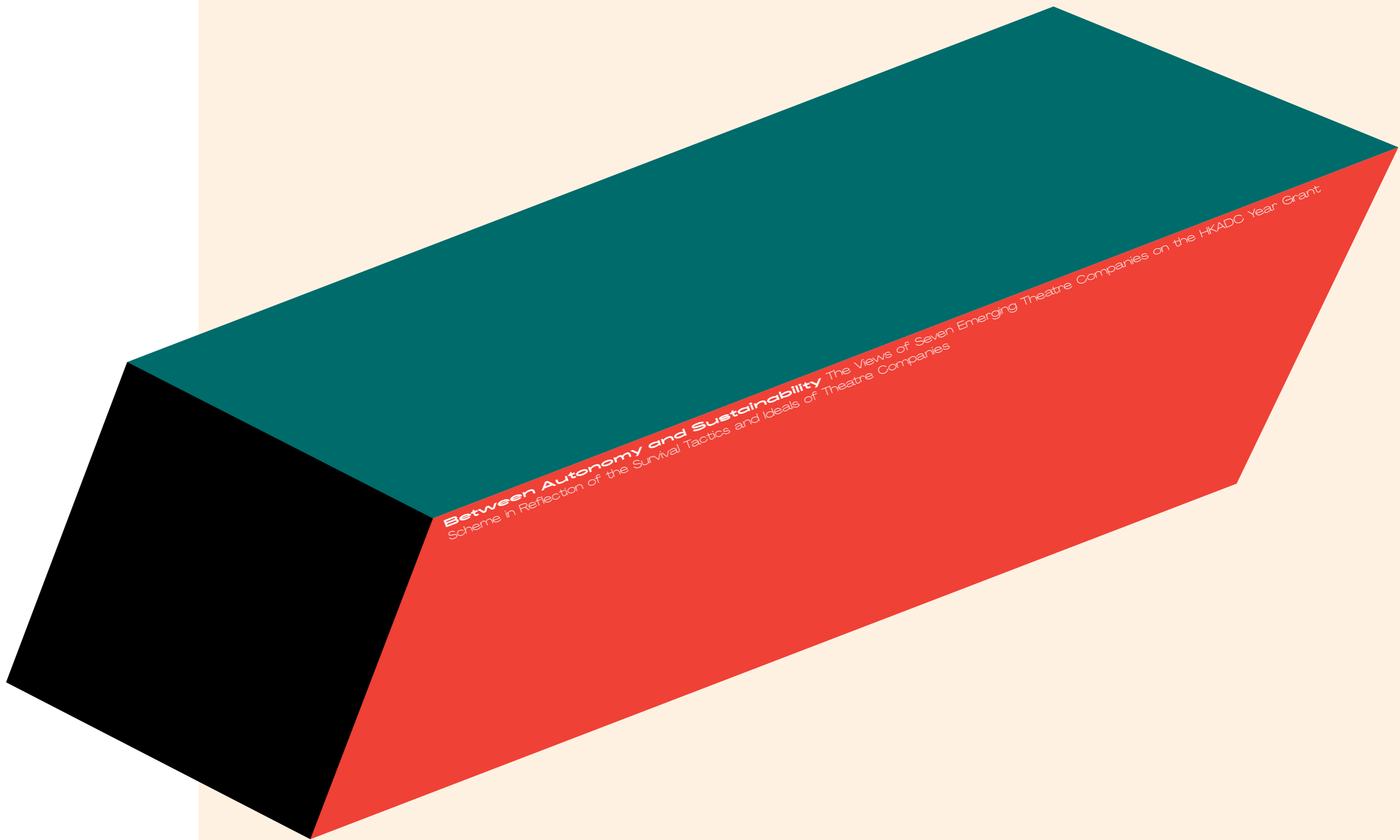
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Between Autonomy and Sustainability The Views of Seven Emerging Theatre Companies on the HKADC Year Grant
Scheme in Reflection of the Survival Tactics and Ideals of Theatre Companies

Between Autonomy and Sustainability

The Views of Seven Emerging Theatre Companies on the HKADC Year Grant Scheme in Reflection of the Survival Tactics and Ideals of Theatre Companies

Text
Liang Yan

From January to April in 2020, I interviewed seven emerging local theatre companies: Littlebreath Creative Workshop, Poor Guy Diary, Théâtre de la Feuille, Artocrite Theater, Rooftop Productions, Fiesta Space, and Heteroglossia. (Please refer to Appendix I for company profiles and information about the members) These theatre companies have been active for six to ten years. They can be regarded as a promising generation of theatre artists in Hong Kong, as they have produced acclaimed works on a consistent basis over the past four to five years. While they attempt to build on their accomplishments and establish themselves further in the theatre scene, they have to find ways to keep their companies running. One of the options is to acquire long-term funding from funding bodies. For small-sized theatre companies, the most apparent option would be applying for the Year Grant Scheme run by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC).¹

The HKADC was officially founded in 1995. Formerly the Council for the Performing Arts, the HKADC took up its predecessor's role as an arts funder in as early as 1994, when it awarded the "General Support Grant" to the first cohort of six performing arts organisations. It marked the start of public funding for the operational expenditure of theatre companies. At the end of 1997, the HKADC reviewed the General Support Grant; the council decided to introduce the One-Year and Three-Year Grants in place of the original grant scheme.² In 1999, the first cohort of nine theatre companies received the One-Year Grant. In 2009, the HKADC launched the Two-Year Grant, which created a so-called progressive funding ladder.³ This set the path for most of the established theatre companies in Hong Kong today that have been running for more than a decade: Actors

¹ Another option is the Arts Capacity Development Funding Scheme run by the Home Affairs Bureau. Successful applicants receive a substantial amount of funding (up to a few million Hong Kong dollars).

² The HKADC. 2016. "Milestones", *20th Anniversary Souvenir Book*, pp.11-19. Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Arts Development Council: https://www.hkadc.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/ResourceCentre_ADCCPublications/Anniversary/2015/20th_Souvenir_Book_part2.pdf

³ In 2019, the HKADC cancelled the Two-Year Grant. Theatre companies may apply for either the One-Year Grant or Three-Year Grant according to their needs.

Family (1991), Theatre du Pif (1992), On & On Theatre Workshop (1998), Alice Theatre Laboratory (2003), We Draman Group (2005, formerly Wedraman Workshop), and Theatre Horizon (2006). Since the launch of the scheme, 24 theatre companies have received the One-Year Grant.⁴

For small-sized professional theatre companies, becoming a One-Year Grant recipient means gaining a place in the system of public funding for the arts. It is one way for them to survive in Hong Kong's performing arts market, which is not yet fully commercialised. When faced with these questions—Should they apply for the One-Year Grant? Do they want to climb up the funding ladder like their predecessors did?—the theatre companies that I interviewed gave me various kinds of answers. The answers fall on a wide spectrum or even outside of it. With the eclectic styles of their works and the diverse backgrounds of their principal creators, my interviewees should be somewhat representative of the new generation of theatre companies—not only in how they see arts funding and survival, but also in their mindsets, temperaments and concerns.

Littlebreath Creative Workshop: Let's Give It a Shot

Littlebreath is the only group among my interviewees that was applying for the One-Year Grant at the time of the interview. Its founder and sole creator, Chan Kwun-fee, graduated from the School of Creative Media of the City University of Hong Kong in 2009. A theatre director, writer and actor, she explores topics such as border, identity, environment, while creating experimental multimedia works employing installation and spatial experiences.

"The year 2018 was Littlebreath's most prolific year. I directed five plays in one year. It was a crazy time. After *Only When You Sleep, It Works*, I fell sick for half a year. It is not sustainable, since the income is so meagre. You get burnt out from working this kind of project-based productions."

The form of production that Chan describes as "project-based" is a popular model among small-sized theatre companies: Each project period revolves around the creation of the work, which also coincides with the funding period. For most small-sized theatre companies, the HKADC's "Grant for Emerging Artists" marks their first step into the system of public funding for the arts. The grant amount ranges from HK\$30,000 to HK\$60,000. Most of the interviewees received this grant in support of their early works. As soon as they realised that the grant would be insufficient

⁴ See the Annual Reports of the Hong Kong Arts Development Council: <http://www.hkadc.org.hk/?p=5989&lang=en>

for larger projects, they applied for the “Project Grant” for more funding. The “Project Grant” is their second step into the system. It calls for proposals twice a year, and the results are announced six months after application closes. According to my interviewees, the grant amount ranges from several dozen dollars to \$400,000, while most of them received around \$100,000 to \$200,000. However, the “Grant for Emerging Artists” and “Project Grant” are far from enough for the small-sized companies, who struggle to make ends meet:

“...I realised I am not someone who makes work just out of passion, but someone who wants a career. I realised I need at least three to four months to write or direct a new work, during which I only earn a salary of HK\$8,000. There is no way I can survive on that in Hong Kong.” (Chan Kwun-fee, Littlebreath)

Jacky Chan Yik-kei of Fiesta Space intentionally applied for three “Emerging Artists” projects at the same time, which he considered the only way to gather enough resources to plan the theatre’s programmes. It turned out to be unsustainable. There was limited room to share resources among the different projects, as each had to be carried out independently. The funding for each project was also insufficient. It was demanding on the creative team to churn out three productions within a short period of time.

Heteroglossia also had similar experiences in their early years. Leung Po-wing recalls:

“I remember during our first two years, we knew we had to keep producing shows and apply for the ADC Project Grant for every grant period. Each time, one of us would receive the grant, so we were able to keep making shows. Every year, we managed to create one or even two shows. Being a new group, we thought we had to generate exposure for ourselves by creating works. We were exhausted after a while. From script writing, rehearsals to performances, we had to complete a new work every nine months or so. That is not enough time for us to create something of quality, or to experiment with something new. We also have to take up other jobs, since we cannot sustain ourselves solely with funding. Every time we create a work, we may stop making money for one month before and after the show. The workload is heavy, both economically and artistically.”

To an extent, there is a consensus about low incomes among theatre workers. Birdy Wong Ching-yan of Artocrite Theater says: “You are aware of it when you join the profession. If you want to make

a lot of money, do not take up this career.” For Chan Kwun-fee who is determined to apply for the One-Year Grant, she foresees the need for stable resources becoming more pressing as she continues to pursue her path as a creative artist. Apart from low income and exhaustion, it has to do with her going through different stages in life:

“After five to six shows, you have proved yourself as an artist, and you have built an audience base. Even if you carry on along this path, you become more realistic about things when you are in your 30s. Many artists quit at around this age for practical reasons: They have to support their parents, or they want to start a family, or they simply wonder if it is time to change their career path so that they will not go broke after they retire. Maybe I want to set up my own studio, rather than rehearse at the rooms at the CCDC (City Contemporary Dance Company) like I used to do. We want to strive for something better, and we cannot achieve it by rehearsing at different places. There is no room for us to store our sets and props, or do video projections. The resources we have do not match up with our pursuit of better quality. We lack both money and space.”

As Chan runs her theatre group on her own, her personal development is closely linked to the development of Littlebreath. If she does not apply for the One-Year Grant, she sees three other options for herself: becoming a theatre educator, turning to commercial theatre, or securing financial backing for herself. As she says:

“I want to be a professional or a dedicated artist. I do not think I would be good at teaching. Also, there are funding schemes here in Hong Kong, and we can apply for the One-Year Grant. But is there room for us, the new generation?... We have no idea about how the ADC operates its funding scheme. They claim to have a review mechanism, but things have barely changed over all these years. It has been the same groups getting funded.... People are also worried whether the ADC has the resources. Each theatre company needs one million dollars per year. Does the ADC have enough money for us? Will some of the groups be ousted?”

According to the HKADC’s annual report, there were one to three new groups on average in every one to two years that were awarded the One-Year Grant between 2007 and 2015. In 2015, POP Theatre, which was established in 2002, was given the One-Year Grant. There has been no newcomer since.

Rooftop Productions, Heteroglossia, Poor Guy Diary, Fiesta Space: Not for Now

As they are struggling in this funding ecology, the other theatre companies I talked to have also considered applying for the Year Grant. Four of these groups say: "Not for now". In their view, receiving the One-Year Grant will entangle them in the system of public funding. It will require them to make substantial efforts and sacrifices, and impose considerable limitations on their work.

"I think other groups are trying to plan ahead so as to sustain their 'operation'.... They probably really care about whether they can express themselves, and if there is space for them to present their works. That is why they need to carry on with this plan.... But when I witness other groups' struggle, the way they do a great deal of planning and thinking around how to fulfill certain requirements, just so that they can say what they want to say, I see it is not a sacrifice I want to make. They devote a lot of energy to negotiating with the funding body, trying to live up to what the funding body asks of them. That is not something I am willing to give.... Instead, I sacrifice my own salary. I have to do what I want to do on a very limited budget." (Henry Chan Ting-hin, Poor Guy Diary)

Henry Chan Ting-hin, who graduated from the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA) in 2014, is one of the founding members of Poor Guy Diary. Most of the time, he works as a freelance actor. Among the members of the theatre companies that I interviewed, most of them work as freelancers rather than employees at large-sized companies. While this mode of employment is "precarious" and "unstable", Chan is willing to accept instability and a low income, in exchange for freedom from dealing with the funding body.

"I have not heard of any new company applying for the Year Grant. Perhaps we share the same view. You have to give a lot of yourself. Don't ever think it is a good bargain." (Jacky Chan, Fiesta Space)

"When you receive the One-Year Grant, you are obliged to produce a certain number of works in order to maintain your recipient status. I guess none of us want to do that...." (Oliver Shing, Heteroglossia)

"We want to use this platform to experiment with different things. We are fully aware that we do not want to run a company on a full-time basis. We want to make good use of the platform, rather than become corroded by its system—to keep making things against our will for the sake of getting money and keeping the company running." (Mousey Tse, Heteroglossia)

The above sharing reflects why they set up their own theatre companies in the first place. The word "platform" is frequently mentioned; the company is a platform for them to "create opportunities", and "give voices" to and "experiment" with different things.

"It is common for theatre companies to adopt a commercial mode of operation. They think about what products they want to produce in the long run, how to run the business, and how to generate turnover and profit. In the end, you make a living out of this business. Our company (Poor Guy Diary) is different. It is a platform for us to tell stories of our choice. If we can make money out of it, that is great. If not, you can see it as something like Instagram or Facebook, where you can have voice heard." (Lam Sheung-tak, Poor Guy Diary)

To them, becoming a Year Grant recipient or a full-time theatre company means limiting their artistic development and creative possibilities.

"We are getting more opportunities to work with different directors, designers, and playwrights. It is very valuable to our artistic growth. When you run a full-time company and make three shows with the same group of people every year, it is a very restrictive practice. It is not what we need at this point." (Fong Ki-tuen, Heteroglossia)

"When you witness your predecessors being trapped in something, you do not want to go through the same thing. It may be the genre you work in, the way you run your group, or a sequence you work with when making a theatre work.... As you can see, it is tough even for the Year Grant recipients and the more established medium-sized companies. It results in certain working models.... We do not want to fall into models."

(Why is it so important not to fall into certain models?)

"Because there will be more room for you to think things through, to be more diverse, to not limit yourself to doing certain things, to open up yourself and engage in different collaborations and ideas. You feel more free and relax, like you can try out whatever you are interested in." (Michelle Li Yuen-jing, Rooftop Productions)

As a Year Grant recipient is required to produce a certain number of shows each year, many companies see it as a burden.

"On this principle, you are obliged to create three shows. You are not making them because you have three ideas. The order of things is crucial. In this case, you are pressured into creating work, rather than creating work out of original ideas. You may pull it off the first year, and you get burnt out eventually. Being a Year Grant recipient is supposed to turn into a long-term prospect. Are we willing to sacrifice one year to give it a try? A lot of things have to fall into place for us to do that."⁵ (Jacky Chan, Fiesta Space)

"We did think about whether we want to enter the system, or if we are able to run our company in a different way every year.... It might be feasible.... But we believe we need one to one-and-a-half years to work on each production. We need a longer cycle, or we will become overloaded. In some cases, we had only eight months to work on a production. It was exhausting for us. This is the cycle I have developed for myself. If you do not [have a cycle for yourself], you will not be able to think things through. For now, I think our working model is okay. It is something we feel comfortable with." (Michelle Li, Rooftop Productions)

Most of Rooftop Productions' titles are devising theatre. The works are grounded in a large amount of research, and they emphasise diversity over a single objective viewpoint. The company works with actors from different backgrounds over a long creative process, during which they inspire one another and make art together. Since its founding six years ago, the company has produced six productions, and it has developed a creative cycle of its own. Similarly, Leung Po-wing of Heteroglossia notes that after an enthusiastic start, the company has developed its own creative cycle, despite having to deal with certain trade-offs.

"After some time, we asked ourselves which is more important: to maintain creative exposure, or to maintain the quality of our work. We started to focus on one production each year. Sometimes we took longer than that. We make work only when we feel like it. No more churning out. There is no reason for us to consider the Year Grant."

It is fair to say that these theatre companies take the quality of their work seriously, and they have been trying hard to maintain their creative autonomy. The Year Grant Scheme requires its recipients

⁵ According to Jacky Chan, he obtained this information from a conversation he had with the HKADC staff. The editor made an inquiry with Lee Chun-leung, current Chairman of the Drama Art Form Group, regarding this issue. As Lee remarks, the HKADC expects the Year Grant recipients to be actively engaged in production, but there is not a set quota about the number of productions that they have to make each year.

to produce works within a short period of time, and to maintain a certain level of output over time. After working in this production ecology for a while, these companies have chosen to stay put, and work on a "project-based" basis.

Apart from the questions of creative autonomy and freedom, these companies also see other issues with the Year Grant Scheme. The grant covers only administrative cost but not production cost. "It gets really risky for us when we have to apply for other sources of funding." (Jacky Chan, Fiesta Space)

"To me, a Year Grant does not guarantee a stable life. There is a price to pay. I think you should not put all your eggs in one basket, so that you can be free from the pressure. It is impossible to make a living out of art in Hong Kong. That is why I do not even think about how to make it work. There is no way we can live on running a company. We may as well put this idea aside when we are making our shows." (Oliver Shing, Heteroglossia)

As Shing cannot see one can live on running an independent theatre company in Hong Kong, he considers the idea of making a profit or a living to be irrelevant in his artistic practice. The gloomy prospect is shaped by the lack of mass market and audience base for the theatre in Hong Kong. As Andy Chan Kong-hung of Fiesta Space puts it, he sees "no future in running a theatre company".

"In short, it seems impossible for us not to rely on funding. It is very difficult for our companies to become self-financed. Even if there are art lovers, there is no art market. There is no market for film, not to mention for the theatre.... When you cannot see your future, you change your tactics. I believe that is what many of us are doing. If you get the Year Grant, you have to rent a studio, you pay a high rent for a place just to produce things that you do not want to produce. Is that what we want to do in the arts? I do not think so. In that case, why not take part in other people's projects that I am also interested in?"

Artocrite Theater: A Changed Mentality

While Andy Chan expresses his pessimistic view on running a theatre company, Artocrite Theater proposes a different perspective—they believe a theatre company can make a bigger impact than an individual artist. From this standpoint, Raymond Wan shares his views on the issue, after expressing his discontent about the tedious and arduous aspects of the funding system:



Interview with members of Fiesta Space, Andy Chan Kong-hung (left) and Jacky Chan Yik-kei — Photo: Bernice Chan



Interview with members of Artocrite Theater, Birdy Wong Ching-yan (left) and Raymond Wan Wai-ching — Photo: Liang Yan

“Back then we thought it was not for us, when we were working on *Sins*.... Now I would say: “It is a possibility.” At the time I said: “No, we don’t want to play that game.” At this point, it is something I would consider. I think my mentality has changed.”

Artocrite Theater was founded in 2010 by six HKAPA graduates, who initially wanted to teach drama at school. They presented their debut, *End Time Monsters*, in 2012. *Sins*, which was staged in 2016, is the first instalment in their “Awakening Trilogy”. Looking back at the development of Artocrite and their early experiences in the theatre, both Wan and Birdy Wong review the position of their company in the field.

“It has been more than ten years since we graduated in 2009. I think we have done what we set out to do, and we have been working towards a clearer goal. If we stay where we are on the funding ladder, what will happen to the newcomers? There is a limited amount of funding available. Would other competitors be left with nothing if we get the funding? We have sustained ourselves for eight years. Are we able to move on to the next stage not only for ourselves, but also for the younger generation? We have built something, and we should make room for the younger ones. It is only then that everyone can move on.” (Birdy Wong, Artocrite Theater)

They also believe that a company has greater capacity than individual arts practitioners:

“It is fun to work for someone else, because we can stay carefree. But when you do that, it limits your capacity to help the younger artists.... It puts you in a similar position as the young ones who have recently graduated. When you want to fight for their rights, or make a difference in the scene, you can only do it in your role as an individual arts practitioner.... When you run a theatre company and you are an employer, you can do more to change the unhealthy ecology. It gives us a lot more power. As leaders of a theatre company, we can make a difference together with other companies.” (Birdy Wong, Artocrite Theater)

While the other theatre companies claim that “it is barely possible to survive on a One-Year Grant”, Raymond Wan says:

“Either you do not take it, or you sweep the board and take all of the grants. Make your resources complete. How can we run our company with only bits of money? You have to have your finger in every pie. Take everything (grants) they offer. The Year Grant, and the

Venue Partnership and any other grants.... Get as much money as you can to achieve what you want to do."

Apart from funding, audience building is another focal point. In most cases, Artocrite fights for a longer theatre run for their productions, if circumstances allow:

"The chicken or the egg? Without proper funding, how can I make a good show? If I cannot make a good show, how can I get more money? It is fair enough that we are supposed to make good work after receiving public funding. Still, we have to make good work even without funding.

How can we do that? It is difficult.... I think audience building is one of the important aspects. Most of the time, we create our shows with a long theatre run in mind. Why is that? In many cases of productions presented by the government, the presenter takes care of the ticket sales. They receive all the box office revenue and pay the theatre company a production fee. By and by, it is easy for a theatre company to stop caring about the audience, since they are getting paid the same amount of money even if no one turns up.... I think it is an unhealthy mindset. Even when we have secured our production budget, we have to consider ticket sales, despite not getting a share of the box office revenue. It would be great if we have a full house, although it is not a must. You need to take it serious and push it. The audience supports us when they think our shows are good. It is important to connect with them. It is not about a single show, but our long-term development." (Raymond Wan, Artocrite Theater)

Théâtre de la Feuille: A Flat "No"

Théâtre de la Feuille comes across as an exception to me. It shares similar views as the other theatre companies, but to a larger extent it is different from them. Talking about the One-Year Grant, Ata Wong Chun-tat, founder of Théâtre de la Feuille says:

"The most important thing is that this company is my passion. It is where I explore, discover, and create with my partners. I am fully aware that we cannot make money from the theatre; sometimes we cannot even support ourselves. Perhaps it has to do with me having somewhat unconventional values. I take things in stride, rather than sweat over them. We do not want to be limited or overloaded, since we want to explore an operational model and



Interview with the founder of Théâtre de la Feuille, Ata Wong Chun-tat (right)
— Photo: Bernice Chan

a creative model that work for us. That is why we are not keen on applying for the One-Year, Three-Year, or Five-Year Grant."

At this stage, Théâtre de la Feuille adopts an operational model that is rather different from the existing funding system. After graduating from the School of Dance of the HKAPA in 2005, Wong pursued further studies in École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in 2008. He founded Théâtre de la Feuille in 2010. In 2015, *L'Orphelin 2.0* received critical acclaim in Wuzhen Theatre Festival, which saw the group embarking on tours across mainland China and around the world. Touring has become the "pillar" of Théâtre de la Feuille—it is a way for the company to generate incomes, and for the performers to build on their experiences. This practice has helped the company to sustain its operation.

To an extent, Théâtre de la Feuille is also a one-man band like Littlebreath. Shortly after Wong set up the company, he met producer Lee Yuen-hung (Yuen), who has become his long-time working partner and manager of the company's finances.

"It is rather irresponsible for me to not get involved in the money matter. But I know that if the financial aspect relates too closely with the artistic one, I will lose my creative drive and flexibility.... Yuen is experienced in operation and management. I have complete trust in her, and things have worked really well. We complement one another, which is one of the reasons why we have managed to keep our company running."

Apart from Wong, there are 12 core members in Théâtre de la Feuille. All of them are creative actors. Wong says he separates his personal income from that of the company. In fact, his active involvement in areas such as film, commercial production and collaboration with large-scale cultural institutions has created many work opportunities for members of his company. These work engagements offer better remunerations than the usual freelance theatre acting jobs. Wong says when he is in charge of the performance of a commercial event, the Théâtre de la Feuille members are not offered the same rates as other performers who have been hired for the show. Their remunerations are determined by their levels of experience. This is what he calls the "experience scale" in his company:

"For our touring performances, after our creative actors have taken part in a certain number of performances, their remunerations will increase by point. The more times they perform in a work, the higher the remunerations. When I started the company, I discussed this method with Yuen. We agreed that it is a good way to enhance the drive and commitment of our performers."

Apart from remuneration, Wong also hosts training workshops for his company members, and invites his friends who work in different disciplines to conduct the classes:

"Two days a week, we have free classes for our core team; one by Yuri Ng, and one by me. I want to have more (workshops). I am thinking about inviting my friends from the film industry to run them. It does not always involve money. We ask people to come and teach us something valuable."

Wong also mentions that he is approaching private sponsors, as he is seeking financial support from those who have worked with Théâtre de la Feuille in the past and understand their artistic direction. Rather than sponsorships for individual productions, he hopes that his patrons will pledge long-term sponsorships, if they are supportive of the company's long-term vision and planning (five to ten years).

It appears that Wong has identified ways to sustain the development of his company. The core of his "operational philosophy" is nevertheless a simple one—the company should thrive to make good work:

"Why did we get so many touring opportunities (for *L'Orphelin 2.0*)? The work captures something of our time. The audience gave us a standing ovation, and we had seven curtain calls. It is very rare to have seven curtain calls, at least for touring performances to mainland China. After that, we started touring around mainland China. It was beyond our expectations. It is not something you would have anticipated. I have thought about nothing else but making an artwork. We have never thought about how to operate the company. Never."

In considering ways to achieve sustainability, Wong focuses on people—how to gather a group of like-minded, passionate people and to keep working together. For him, it is "the group of people", instead of a company that he wants to maintain.

"What makes us stand out is not the money we manage to make, but the people we have. The money goes back to the people who work with us, so that the company can continue to grow. The company can disband anytime, and it is still thriving because of the group of people we have on board. We run our company in a different way than others. Most people think about how to make their theatre companies sustainable. For us, the most important thing is to make the group sustainable."

It is fine if you do not have the skills. You can develop them over time. But it would be sad if you lose your passion, and you turn into someone who is simply working a job. I started off as an amateur who wanted to explore further, and it has brought me to where I am today. I can totally understand what the amateurs are thinking. When someone turns professional, they tend to stop thriving.... The person is still there, but their heart is not. The work they make is not sustainable."

Discussion

How can theatre companies strike a balance between creative autonomy and sustainability? The tension between the two has long been an issue of discussion, and it is reflected in the comments from the theatre companies that I spoke to. There appears to be an implicit consensus among

my interviewees: One cannot enjoy creative freedom and enter the system of public funding at the same time. There is also a resistance towards the expectations on how to “operate” a theatre company.

For the one-person companies of Chan Kwun-fee and Ata Wong, the development of the groups is closely related to the artists' personal development. For the other groups like Poor Guy Diary and Heteroglossia, which consist of a few members, they see the company as a platform. For Artocrite Theater, they want to explore ways to exert greater influence on the theatre scene as a group. With their different positioning and understanding of running a theatre company, the young artists have different priorities, as well as levels of commitment and urgency in developing their artistic ventures. Becoming a Year Grant recipient is not a preferred option, since these artists deem the funder's bureaucratic demands to be unfavourable to art making. The funding itself does not guarantee stability, considering that Hong Kong's theatre market lacks the maturity and audience base that it needs. For the theatre companies, their priority lies in making quality work within limited resources and conditions, which is far more important than keeping the company running. As the artists seesaw between autonomy and sustainability, are quality and operation mutually exclusive?

Drawing on the comments of my interviewees, this article offers a brief reflection on the reality that these emerging theatre companies live in, rather than a broader picture of their practices and experiments, and the twist and turns on their artistic journeys. The voices of arts administrators and funders are not included in this article. Further field research would compensate the limitations of these interviews, and to generate a deeper analysis about the future development of these companies and how they would interact with the ecology.⁶

(Translated by Vee Leong)

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⁶ I am indebted to Bernice Chan and Joanna Lee for their insights that have helped shaped my reflection in this article.

Appendix I: Profiles of theatre companies and company members interviewed (in chronological order of the companies' founding)

Theatre company	Year of founding	Company profile	Interviewee	Educational background	Role(s)
Fiesta Space	2008*	Exploring social issues in original works and theatre forms, we set out to open up the space between the theatre and reality, inviting the audience to reflect on our society and our lives.	Jacky Chan Yik-kei	Bachelor of Arts in Drama and Theatre Arts (2014), and Master of Arts in Arts Administration and Cultural Policy (2015), Goldsmiths, University of London	Director, actor
			Andy Chan Kong-hung	Bachelor of Arts, Department of Theatre Arts, Taipei National University of the Arts (2015, major in acting)	Actor
Artocrite Theater	2009	We aim at reconstructing truth by means of grotesque, wielding traditions with a twist in logic. Physical expressions, humour, multimedia, visual and stage effects are ways to expose things that we evade. By studying the alienated “outcast”, we attempt to look at the contradictions in human nature from multiple perspectives.	Birdy Wong Ching-yan	Bachelor of Fine Arts in Drama, Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (2009, major in acting)	Actor, playwright, director
			Raymond Wan Wai-ching	Bachelor of Fine Arts in Drama, Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (2009, major in acting)	Actor, director, producer
Littlebreath Creative Workshop	2009	A Hong Kong based trans-disciplinary creative group, which has been creating projects and works including theatre works, performances, installations, zines and videos. Drifting around the edges of dance, theatre and performances, it refuses to stay in familiar zones. The body has remained the core of its explorations— as the subject, the tool, the discourse or the field. Previous works have earned acclaim for their strong poetic texts, expressive physical performances and spatial arrangements.	Chan Kwun-fee	Bachelor of Arts in Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong (2009)	Director, writer, actor

Theatre company	Year of founding	Company profile	Interviewee	Educational background	Role(s)
Théâtre de la Feuille	2010	A physical theatre group that is deeply influenced by the method of Jacques Lecoq, it interweaves the Western methodology with Eastern artistic traditions in its creative approach. The company sets out to accumulate as many touring experiences as possible. It currently consists of a group of creative actors from different cultures and backgrounds. Its actors receive personalised and ongoing training in the Jacques Lecoq method and traditional Chinese martial arts. Together they emerge as a strong and unique ensemble of Hong Kong.	Ata Wong Chun-tat	Diploma in Modern Dance, School of Dance, Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (2005); École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq (2012, completed a two-year programme)	Director
Heteroglossia	2013	Striving to build a unique approach to theatre aesthetics, we celebrate freedom, while connecting with the times and society. Based in Hong Kong, we are dedicated in fostering the development of theatre and culture that are unique to our city.	Fong Ki-tuen	Bachelor of Arts, Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Chinese University of Hong Kong (2009); Master of Performing Arts, Department of Theatre Arts, National Taiwan University of Arts (2012)	Director, writer
			Leung Po-wing	Associate Degree in Music Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University (2007); Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre and Entertainment Arts, Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (2011, major in sound design)	Sound designer
			Oliver Shing	Bachelor of Social Sciences in Journalism and Communication, Chinese University of Hong Kong	Multimedia designer
			Mousey Tse	Bachelor of Arts in Humanities, Hong Kong Baptist University (2007); Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre and Entertainment Arts, Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (2011, major in lighting design)	Light designer

Theatre company	Year of founding	Company profile	Interviewee	Educational background	Role(s)
Rooftop Productions	2014	We make original theatre works which are influenced by pressing social and cultural issues in Hong Kong. Our shows are devised; they start without a script, and they work intertextually with elements such as interview transcripts, fragments of historical text or plays, philosophy or original material generated with our performers. We work in a multidisciplinary way, as we attempt to integrate all the different aspects of theatre in our creative process, from live music to live video and even live interaction with mobile apps.	Michelle Li Yuen-jing	Bachelor of Arts in English Studies, University of Hong Kong (2008); Master of Arts in Performance Making, Goldsmiths, University of London (2013)	Director, actor
			Ivor Houlker	Bachelor of Arts in European Theatre Arts, Rose Bruford College (2011); Master of Arts in Performance Making, Goldsmiths, University of London (2013)	Director, actor
Poor Guy Diary	2016	The group started off as a project for young theatre artists to hone their skills on a regular basis. We later renamed the company Poor Guy Diary to express our passion for the theatre, where we seek to foster the imagination of the stage. People ("Guy") are at the heart of theatre; the idea of being "Poor" represents a state of lack; and "Diary" is a tool for documentation.	Donald Chung Siu-hei	Bachelor of Fine Arts in Drama, Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (2014, major in directing)	Director
			Boing Yuen Hau-wing	Bachelor of Fine Arts in Drama, Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (2014, major in acting)	Actor
			Henry Chan Ting-hin	Bachelor of Fine Arts in Drama, Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (2014, major in acting)	Actor
			Lam Sheung-tak	Bachelor of Arts in Chinese (2010) and Master of Arts in Chinese (2014), Lingnan University	Producer

* It was a registered group founded by the members during their secondary school years. After university graduation, the members reactivated the group as a theatre company in 2015.