quential losses of radio, television and film work which is more readily available if you are already working in the Home Counties.

The other problem of touring is the fact that with the demise of so many touring theatres the ancillary industries have also disappeared – the theatrical digs, the electricians, carpenters, managers, front-ofhouse and back-stage staff which made the touring venues friendly, lively and wellrun. In Manchester there was not only the Opera House and Palace; but Hulme Hippodrome, Queen's Park Hippodrome, Manchester Hippodrome and many smaller venues ensured there was an "avenue of promotion" for such talents.

There can be no overall plans for the creative arts...it is impossible to plan what is going to be fashionable tomorrow.

In the United States the very same consequences of a reduction in touring venues led to the few remaining houses not only being devoid of technical talent but often devoid of properly equipped facilities. This led to the "bus & truck" phenomenon whereby a producer would not only tour the artists, sets and costumes but the entire lighting & sound rigs so that a complete production of a show like "Cats" could hit town and occupy any large barn of a building (or even a tent) without having to rely on there being local equipment and experienced labour. The needs of the British regions remain difficult to assess and can vary from one region to another. Certainly one can accept the advantages of there being a local drama company as much as a local orchestra, a local opera and a local dance company. Audiences like to become associated with local talent and the fact that creative and performing artists live in a region helps to enrich the whole quality of education in that region - not only with orchestral musicians, for example, providing the teaching of music locally but the whole raising of standards by artists becoming part of a community.

The Arts Council once attempted a grid system for repertory theatres since it seemed a woeful waste for every repertory company to be producing last year's westend Ayckbourn success with 35 lots of scenery, 35 lots of costumes, 35 periods of rehearsal each for a two or three week run. However, one could not persuade the Bristol audiences to go to the Birmingham Repertory Theatre Company any more than Birmingham audiences would want to see the Bristol Old Vic Company. Hence Prospect Productions, the Actors Company, Compass and the Renaissance Players have titles which are not associated with a particular town.

However, the other side of the coin is the local demand to see touring product. So that even with Manchester's present rich diet of the superb Royal Exchange Company and Hallé Orchestra, the Contact Company and the Northern Dance Company, there has still been proved a need not only to re-open the Palace but also the Opera House. Let us hope that this example is now followed by the Lyceum Theatre in Sheffield re-opening

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Kenneth Branagh's highly-acclaimed Renaissance Theatre Company has proved the demand, once again, for first-rate touring theatre – without much help from the arts council, however. Tom Hoskins and James Larkin in the Renaissance production of As you like it, at the Phoenix Theatre. Costumes by Jenny Tiramani. Photograph, Sophie Yanner.

to complement the excellent work being done by Clare Venables at the Crucible.

So what of the future? One of the few theories the Arts Council has proved in nearly fifty years is that there can be no overall plans for the creative arts . . . it is impossible to plan what is going to be fashionable tomorrow. Who would ever have expected the Opera House to be revitalised in Manchester as well as the Palace just when it seemed that the Empire in Liverpool was likely to follow the Royal Court's closure? Who would expect a second (Everyman) drama company in Liverpool to come into being as well as the Playhouse, whilst Carlisle remains without any theatre at all? Who would expect the amazing creativity of Alan Ayckbourn to be centred on Scarborough or Benjamin Britten to have fostered those buildings in Aldeburgh any more than one would have decided to create an artists' colony in St. Ives?

These things happen and unfortunately the Arts Council can but follow. Although it follows so slowly that it is almost too late when the funds finally arrive. For the creativity has often moved on. The sadness is that the Arts Council should be planning for 2001 now but no longer has the talent (on the Council, the panels or staff) to do so.

Anthony Field, CBE, is a chartered accountant, theatre producer and Director of Theatre Projects Consultants Ltd. He spent 27 years as Finance Director of the Arts Council of Great Britain, which he left in 1984.