performers sitting in front of microphones creating a live 'radio drama' is very distinct, in formal terms, from much of the company's other work, which ranges from organized, often highly physical chaos (*Bloody Mess*, 2004) to lengthy intellectual meandering and (at least, seeming) improvisation (*And on the Thousandth Night*, 2000).

Well received in Varna, *Void Story* added to the sense of the festival as a very serious, professional, internationally outward-looking programme. Combined with an excellent series of symposia and seminars, the Varna Summer International Theatre Festival deserves to be considered as an important opening event of the European summer festival season.

References

1. Eric Bentley, *The Brecht Commentaries* (New York: Grove Press, 1987), p. 60.

2. Forced Entertainment's official website: <www.forcedentertainment.com/page/3020/Tour-Dates>, accessed 5 January 2014.

3. I have been based in Glasgow throughout my twenty years as a professional theatre critic. Due to venues such as Tramway, the Arches and the Centre for Contemporary Arts, and the now defunct festival the National Review of Live Art, the city has been a regular destination for Forced Entertainment. Consequently, I have had many opportunities to experience their work, and numerous opportunities to interview members of the company.

doi:10.1017/S0266464X14000128

John Bull, Graham Saunders, and Jacqueline Bolton

Turning the Page

Report on the conference 'Turning the Page: Creating New Writing (1945–2013)', held at the University of Reading, 13–14 September 2013.

This was the last in a series of symposia and conferences for the five-year funded AHRC project 'Giving Voice to the Nation: The Arts Council of Great Britain and the Development of Theatre and Performance in Britain 1945–1995', a collaboration between the University of Reading and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. One of its three principal strands was to look at the work that the Arts Council undertook in promoting new writing for performance. In this two-day event academics and practitioners gathered both to look at the history of new writing and to examine its current place in the ecology of the British theatre.

Translator and dramaturg Michael Raab together with playwright Simon Stephens opened the conference with a discussion about the relationship between the new writing cultures of Britain and Germany, with Stephens bringing his perspective of having worked in both countries. The first day also saw other specialist panels that included Jenny Stephens, Artistic Director of Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, John Bashford, Vice-Principal and Head of Acting at LAMDA, and Anna Farthing, Research Associate at the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama, who spoke collectively about the approach of their respective institutions as regards bringing writers and their drama students together in collaborative projects. Playwright Fin Kennedy, Jonathan Petherbridge, Creative Director of London Bubble Theatre Company, and Steven Atkinson, Artistic Director of the HighTide Festival, later discussed new writing initiatives, how these initiatives were being threatened by cuts to arts funding, and how these cuts were being resisted.

The second day opened with playwrights Timberlake Wertenbaker and Roy Williams in conversation, followed later by playwright and academic Dan Rebellato and theatre maker Andy Smith, who discussed aspects of his own work as well as his experience of producing new work with his long-term collaborator, Tim Crouch.

Throughout the conference, more than twenty papers were presented by academics. Given the nature of the project, the work and influence of the Arts Council loomed large. Its past was explored in papers by Trevor Griffiths ('Feeding the Dumb Waiter: Aspects of the Funding Regime in the Eighties') and Taryn Storey ('How Many Plays Would Have Remained Unwritten . . .') that both looked at the Arts Council during what has generally been seen as crisis years for drama in the 1980s, when both 'alternative' new writing touring companies including 7:84 England, Joint Stock, Foco Novo, and the Royal Court either lost funding or faced the very real threat of closure.

A number of papers also looked at current arts policy and new writing. These included Vicky Angelaki's 'New Writing, New Provocation: a State of Shared Authorship'; Steve Waters, 'Border Crossings: Some Heretical Thoughts on Plays and Writing'; Joe Mcloughlin's 'Reading the Writing of Arts Council England'; and Jane Woddis's 'Influencing New Writing Policy: Networks of Policy and Practice'. Jacqueline Bolton's 'The Collectively Spent and Used Up Lifetime in the Collectively Breathed Air of That Space' was a critical examination of the British Theatre Consortium's report *Writ Large: New Writing on the English Stage 2003–9*, commissioned for the Arts Council in 2009. For Bolton, the report subscribes to and upholds an ingrained division of 'playwriting' versus 'devising' within English theatre cultures, prioritizing and promoting the tradi-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X14000128 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tional figure of the playwright at the expense of devising and other forms of practice in creating texts for performance.

Later that day elements from Bolton's paper became incorporated into a provocation by the playwright David Edgar, where he not only defended the role of British Theatre Consortium and its *Writ Large* report, but criticized the practice of many British drama departments for deliberately neglecting the teaching of both the history and craft of playwriting, giving themselves over instead to deconstructive methodologies, often informed by Hans-Thies Lehmann's ideas about postdramatic theatre. This area was returned to at the end of the first day when John Bull in conversation with Liz Tomlin from the University of Birmingham discussed her recently published book, *Acts and Apparitions: Discourses on the Real in Performance Practice and Theory, 1990–2010*, that looks, among other things, at the oppositional culture that has grown up around texts as theatre and texts for performance.

Education and the opportunities new writing can provide for young people formed the basis of a number of papers during the conference. These included Tony Coult's 'A Ghost at the Feast: the Arts Council, Education, and the Death of Theatre-in-Education'; Catherine Love's 'A Culture of Development: the Royal Court and the Young Writers' Programme'; and Les Wade's 'New Models for New Theatre: London's At-Risk Youth in Play.'

Methodologies of combining new writing strategies with acting practice were tackled in papers that included Gary Cassidy's 'The Role of the Actor in Anthony Neilson's *Process*'; David Lane and Hannah Silva's 'Progressive Dramaturgy: Learning a Play's Language'; Jonathan Lloyd's 'In New Writing, Can the Playwright Write the "Experiential" or Is This a Term Which Will Always Be Grounded in "Performance" and the "Postdramatic"?'; Mary Oliver's '"If You Can't Think of a Better Idea – Shut Up!" Ensemble Approaches to Writing Contemporary UK Theatre 1983–2013'; and Duška Radosavljevic's 'The Ensemble Way of Working and Playwriting'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X14000128 Published online by Cambridge University Press