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NEW STAGES

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Khalid Salimi

NEW STAGES?

New Stages are new only if we choose to look at them as such. New Stages raise profound, but not necessarily new questions. The newness is not due to the nature of the questions, but often to do with the surroundings in which they occur. This explains why there has been need to call a conference New Stages to debate an old issue, namely cultural diversity.

Talking about the situation of diversity in the field of the performing arts: It is not against the intentions, or even the acts of the art institutions that the criticism is raised, but rather to the context. And the context of the issues raised can be simply existential, or institutional.

Seeking diversity in art in itself is neither new, nor should it be astonishing. But since “diversity” has happened to be synonymized with ethnicity and colour, the discussion, unfortunately, has become racialized. However, refusing, or rather neglecting, to work for artistic diversity just because of the context in which it is debated, would be suicidal for art institutions. The fact is that this dilemma is dramatized in many fields of art, but nowhere as visually as in the field of the performing arts.

Norsk kulturråd, as the national arts council, is left with no choice. The conference New Stages was held precisely to make us acquainted with the facts, faces, the voices and the questions - to be seen, to be heard and to be asked, in order to make ourselves accountable towards artistic diversity.

As the chair of the conference, I noticed that we, the participants, learned a lot about the development in Britain for the last couple of decades. We also raised questions and debated about our situation in Norway, and not least, what the consequences and the responsibilities resulting from the conference should amount to. This is to make sure that we do not betray the energy, compassion and the enthusiasm which was at the heart of the conference. This would not have been possible without a generous contribution from The British Council, The Arts Council of

Great Britain, all the extremely valuable input from the speakers and the tireless efforts from Shanti Brahmachari of The British Council and Halvor Voldstad from Norsk kulturråd.

New Stages are new because we hope to see them so, and we hope that they will bring about new initiatives. The programme Mosaikk has taught us one lesson: First and foremost our loyalty should be resting with the art and the artist, and thence the institutions we represent – not the other way around.

Shanti Brahmachari

INTRODUCTION

New Stages was a conference presented by the British Council in collaboration with Norsk kulturråd, (Mosaikk Programme) and the Arts Council of England. The conference aimed to explore the role of cultural diversity in the performing arts in the UK today. Through an examination of strategy, artistic policy, infrastructure, and historical perspective, the conference looked at current practice in the UK, and the relationships between institutions, grant-funded groups and the individual artist.

The Mosaikk programme was initiated in 1989 as a new programme at Kulturrådet, following the background reports (17 & 42) made to parliament in 1996-7.

The remit was “to promote multicultural expression under previously established schemes in art and culture, and to enhance opportunities for minorities to develop and participate in artistic and cultural life, on their own terms.”

This conference, New Stages, was a joint initiative to address the need to revise and re-visit policy and practice within a strategic and long-term framework. Recent attention has focused on cultural diversity and the performing arts scene in Norway, as several major projects have now come to an end or are in the process of being evaluated. Kulturrådet together with the British Council wanted to provide a stimulus to the area and respond to those who have been pressing for change as to ways in which work is funded, developed and produced. This conference grew out of a need to look towards the future challenges of developing a more integrated strategic policy, and establishing new long-term collaborations.

The conference was held at Norsk kulturråd’s auditorium, Grev Wedels Plass 1, Oslo. The language of the conference was English. New Stages brought together 120 invited delegates from the performing arts sector. Artists, directors, managers, theatre makers and those working with policies within arts and culture.

This report includes a transcription of the speakers from the UK and a brief introduction and summary to the various issues raised from the panel contributions and

the open debate which followed. The invited speakers from Britain were:

Jatinder Verma, Artistic Director of Tara Arts Theatre Company; Isobel Hawson, Senior Drama Officer, The Arts Council of England; Jenny Harris, Head of Education, The Royal National Theatre; and Felix Cross, Artistic Director of Nitro Music /Theatre company. A debate with the conference delegates was initiated by short introductions from the following panel: Hannah Kvam, Queendom; Halldis Hoas, Norsk kulturråd; and Shanti Brahmachari, The British Council; with concluding remarks and summary by Ola E. Bø, Norsk Kulturråd and Det Norske Teater.

Cultural diversity in the theatre

‘Cultural diversity’ is used as a broad concept which indicates that modern societies consist of a range of sub-cultures. Cultural diversity therefore refers to the multiple components that make up today’s diverse society. These are of course many - gender, age, geographical, regional, ability, and so on. Ethnicity is one of these components, and it was this aspect of cultural diversity, which was the main focus of the conference. Ethnicity must also be seen within the framework of a broader policy of cultural diversity. Examining policies of “access” and “inclusion” demonstrate that the relationship between these can be crucial; for example the relationship between ethnic diversity and age- young people/children.

In the UK we see that policies relating to cultural diversity, are very much rooted in commitments to “access”, “outreach/ in-reach”, (within institutions) “audience development” and “education and training.” A shared understanding of this language and terminology and an understanding the implication of this practice is important in this debate.

The aim of the conference was to look at key strands within theatre today and to trace the history and issues particularly of Black and Asian cultural development in Britain in relation to the experiences of touring groups and national institutions. In short, to both inform and explore more fully the ways artists and organisations have aimed to develop policies relating to cultural diversity, and to examine to what extent this has been successful in creating positive change.

In the UK, this long term, national strategy and range of policies has been in place, for some years. It has a longer history, and it is a journey, which is continuing, within a landscape, which is constantly changing. The impact of these policies has

led to a significant change and enable us to consider:

How we move towards developing cohesive long term national strategies in cultural diversity and the performing arts.

- How to support a range of artistic and cultural expression in society.
- How successful are current policies and strategies in addressing this?
- How can we change the narrow focus in Norway to a wider focus that goes beyond skin colour and exclusion and engages with the social, cultural and artistic implications of cultural diversity?
- What are the specific challenges raised today and how should we meet them?

Experience and models from the UK

The four invited speakers from the UK represent a range of experiences and perspectives within the theatre over the last 40 years. In their presentations they covered in breadth and diversity: touring theatres, (small and large scale touring), co-operatives, music theatre, Black and Asian theatre groups, from policies, casting and training, to accessing arts and education and exploring the impact of the Arts Council and regional arts policy of cultural diversity.

Jatinder Verma's tightly woven and eloquently delivered key note speech created a wonderful tapestry of a personal story, the growth and change of a theatre company, entwined with the effect of almost 40 years of history and cultural politics, policies and influencing factors. His emphasis was on aesthetics, the importance of story, its re-interpretation, its cultural context and a journey of recovering England's own heritage. Both Verma and Cross demonstrate the real impact of these policies on smaller scale theatre companies and emphasise "the importance of sitting and eating at the main funding table".

Felix Cross described the journey of the Black Theatre Co-operative and the political reasons for changing the direction and the name of the company. The challenges in particular for a smaller touring company were highlighted, and the tensions in the relationship between the funding organisations, the audience, institutional racism and the wider society. Whilst the aesthetic is clearly fundamental, it cannot be separated out in isolation. These policies in tandem have a multi-layered impact on both a political and social level as well as impacting on an artistic and cultural level of development. In this way we can chart change and site turning points for development in the UK, in relation to cultural diversity and the arts.

The Arts Council's presentation by Isobel Hawson, presented the funding structu-

res in England and very specifically the shorter and longer-term impact of policies, in relation to diversity within theatre. The Arts Council first set the agenda of “The Policy in Arts” in 1965, with a policy for participation, access and community provision. Policies and practical implications as well as changes in thinking were traced. Small landmarks of impact made by “The Glory of the Garden” report to “The Art that Britain Ignores”, by Naseem Khan, (Policy Director the Arts Council, England); from the Cultural Diversity Action Plan of 1998 to the current Black Regional Initiatives in Theatre (BRIT); training schemes, and the newer documents and strategies relating to policy: “The Next Stage” and “The National Policy For Theatre”.

Jenny Harris introduced the impact of policy on the National Theatre and the will and desire to change the theatre from within. She discussed the role of a national institution in relation to policies of access, participation, training and cultural diversity. The devised theatre programmes, the commitment to integrated casting, and new writing, show how the aim is to integrate this work as an important part of the National Theatre’s remit. Education and training within the arts at all levels are also crucial to this work, both relationships within the education system/school curriculum and within training organisations for artists. The key is breaking down the traditional barriers to theatre, through a range of initiated programmes with a network of professional artists, linked to the National Theatre. These involve new and younger audiences and communities in not only enjoying theatre as critical audiences, but in making their own work at The National Theatre. After many years, this has begun to change the diversity of and increase the falling audiences.

Policy implications

The creation and establishment of a long-term policy for cultural diversity is a ‘young’ and recent development in Norway. Formal governmental policies started in the mid 1990’s with Kulturrådet as the main implementing agency within the arts and culture sector. As part of Kulturrådet’s Mosaikk programme, and through the Ministry of Culture and other funding channels, projects have been initiated. Comments from the floor identified the lack of an integrated national arts strategy for cultural diversity; and that the current initiatives were marginal and segregated. There is an obvious need for such an integrated policy - at the Ministry, at Kulturråd and within a range of institutions.

As part of the process in shaping a national policy for the area we can look at experiences from other societies which have tried to implement policies over lon-

ger periods of time. Clearly there are a number of differences between the UK and Norway, but there are some fundamental points which can be highlighted.

One of the points raised at the conference was how we can tackle the real issues of cultural diversity within institutions and internal structures of management. A change in attitude formed an important part of the debate. In the UK the desire to support cultural diversity has largely been expressed through policies of equal opportunity.

The real significance lies in the ability of equal opportunities to generate genuine change within arts organisations and institutions rather than to be viewed as bureaucratic hurdles and constraints. This forms a parallel to Norway's success and commitment to politicising the importance of women's representation in politics and other sectors, and we are all familiar with the importance and development of regional representation, yet for many this equality principle still seems difficult to translate to cultural diversity.

'Accountability' in arts institutions and theatres introduced a means of measuring the practice of equal opportunities. Accountability was a requirement linked to the allocation of grants and fixed revenue funded theatres, and this included institutional/ regional theatres. Funding could technically be reduced or removed if certain criteria in relation to access, education and new audiences were not fulfilled. Ring fenced (ear -marked) funding did change the way theatre groups became more integrated and secure within the funding system.

This raises specific challenges for the kind of theatre we make, the kind of audiences we reach, the new programmes of work, the playwrights, the artists we train; and, not least, in the depth of integration and collaboration between theatre, arts training organisations, schools, and educational and cultural institutions, at all levels.

Another aspect of introducing access policies in art institutions has been to establish an Education Department. In the last 15 years these have become common place in institutional theatres, and an integral part of the programmes of small and medium scale theatre groups. Training programmes for professional artists, commitments to quota systems in drama schools and integrated casting/colour blind casting, are also important initiatives.

Accessing the arts as widely as possible, new audience development and active commitments to cultural diversity are multi-layered programmes which provide the opportunity for greater pluralism and diversity. Cultural diversity is not a distraction to issues like quality but an enrichment, a measure and a standard of quality in the performing arts.

Cultural diversity is one of our most significant and valuable resources. Changes will occur as we develop and meet the challenges that cultural diversity in the performing arts hold up for Norwegian institutions, artists and policy makers. The success of this impact can be measured in the effectiveness of integration into the mainstream national strategy for all arts policy.

Jatinder Verma

THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY ON THE PERFORMING ARTS IN THE UK TODAY

As has been said, I run Tara Arts, the theatre group which I founded with some friends in 1976. I came to England in 1968 from East Africa. These are two facts about myself, which I will expand on, as I try to offer a personal odyssey through theatre in England, and try to locate that within the odyssey of Britain towards cultural diversity.

Why did three young men decide to produce a play in 1979? That year was literally the hottest summer on record in Britain. Reservoirs dried up, a Minister for Water was appointed, and racial tensions spread throughout the nation's cities. Specifically in London, a number of young Asians, students were killed, culminating in the racial murder of a young Indian boy in West London in July 1976.

This murder, perhaps because it was of a young boy – a boy who was studying aircraft engineering – ignited the community across the nation with the feeling: “There, but for the grace of God, go I.” We were angry of course, we were hurt, but more importantly, we could not understand why this was happening. We quickly realised that none of us was capable of making a film, which was what we first thought of doing, so we decided to produce a play.

But there was another reason for choosing the theatre, and that was that we wanted to involve a lot of young people – people like ourselves – in the act of creating a piece of work, we wanted to engage live with an audience with the work that we were doing. We chose to adapt a play by Rabindranath Tagore who won the Nobel prize for literature in 1913.

The choice of this play, the decision to adapt it and the reasoning behind that adaptation set the tone for the company over its next 24 years and in hindsight saved it from becoming a victim of its time.

Why choose this play? It was an Indian play written in English. We wanted to recover for England its own heritage in supporting and championing this writer in the early part of The Twentieth Century. Also it was set in Fourteenth Century Bengal, and yet was dealing with the immorality of dogma. Tagore was a confirmed pacifist, and this was the play he wrote in opposition to The First World War. What he showed us was that metaphor was a fantastically resonant tool for looking at our reality. Our reasoning behind the adaptation, and the reason to do it in English, was that it was our statement that this is our language, but a language that we claim, and into which we infuse other sensibilities, other stories.

But there was another reason behind the adaptation, and that was that we would use the play, in the way which we would adapt it, to critique both white relations with non-white, and non-white relations with each other. In other words, without knowing it at the time, what we had set ourselves on the path of is our duty for being in the theatre, which is to hold a mirror up to society.

That came from some very simple reasoning. Firstly: that racism is not our problem, and secondly, that to focus just on racism would be to deny our own humanity, and our own vulnerability, and the fact that we also have lots of faults, and that racism is simply on one end of a spectrum of injustice.

So we staged this play in a local arts centre financing it through our own funds, which mainly consisted of student grants and involving actors from our local community.

After our inaugural production in August 1977, we knew this was a lifetime's task, and that we were not good enough. We began to look around for people who could help us in both developing our craft in the theatre and our company, and so it was that we met Naseem Khan.

Unknown to us, in 1976 The Arts Council of Great Britain (as it was then called), in conjunction with The Callouse Gulbenkian Foundation, published a report by Naseem Khan called "The Arts Britain Ignores." The report surveyed the cultural productions of metropolitan Britain's ethnic populations bringing carnival, classical Indian dance, music, theatre and the visual arts to the consciousness of a political, cultural structure; which had become aware of the fringe and community arts, but still saw the world from very determinedly European eyes. Eyes that could not see art as a street celebration, that could not see earth based movement as

a valid form of dance, nor could its ears hear that the strumming-up a sitar was classical music. This report in short began Britain's long journey into the light of a diverse world of art, and pushed us on our journey to becoming a state-subsidised company.

We must remember that this publication coincided with that summer that I was talking of. In the early 1980's the most startling theatre company to emerge on the national scene was The Black Theatre Co-operative, and the most startling new voice was that of Hanif Kureishi. The Black Theatre Co-operative was a collection of extraordinary performers: Victor Romero Evans, Jeanette Cave, Chris Tummings. They produced the work of playwrights as diverse as Mustapha Matura and Sam Shepherd, establishing a dramaturgy that combined music with the most vivid theatre. The performers exuded in energy that was here and now, emerging from the club and the dance scenes of London.

Like the Co-operative's inaugural production "Welcome Home Jako" dramatically introduced Londoners not only to vibrant new talents, but also to that hitherto unknown commodity of an enthusiastic, participatory and young Afro-Caribbean or black audience. The show went on to tour nationally, before spawning a television series introducing the entire nation then to a different image of young black men and women, very different to the one that was being constantly shown on television news reports; that of young people rioting in the inner cities.

Hanif Kureishi, by contrast, was a playwright without a company, introduced to London audiences first by David Goddard at Riverside Studios. His most significant work in this early period was "Borderline", produced by the then Joint Stock Company and The Royal Court Theatre. The play echoed the achievement of The Black Theatre Co-operative with one exception, the lack of a distinctly Asian audience. Developed out of research in Southall and other parts of British cities, where Asians were predominant, "Borderline" caught with vigour and verve the transgression, the sort of border crossings, along which Asians lived in contemporary Britain; immigrant and native, traditional and modern, male and female, radical and conservative.

By 1985, sufficient culturally diverse work had begun to emerge for The Arts Council, in its report "Glory of the Garden", to not only make ethnic arts as it was still called, a strategic priority for funding, but also to propose a target for descent of all public funding. While this target, even in the early eighties, fell short of the total

population of ethnic minorities in the country, it represented an important shift in thinking. Needless to say that target was never achieved of course, because stories can never be that good... Even according to the 1994/95 figures published by The Arts Council, ethnic minority arts received a total of three percent of the overall part from budgets.

In Britain, we do have a tendency to keep one eye to developments in the United States, and certainly with regard to matters of race. Our race relations legislation followed the civil rights legislation in America. In matters of cultural policy America paved the way with positive discrimination legislation, and while we fell short of legislating this practice, we certainly took on the spirit as was evidenced in the “Glory of the Garden” report. The brave nature of this proposal should not be underestimated. I argued against it, and I was critical of it at the time. In hindsight it is an incredibly brave expression, because Britain at the time was being governed by an extraordinary individual, Mrs Thatcher. She presided over, what was almost certainly, the most philistine government in recent memory. She herself came to power on the back of fears, which she expressed as the native population feeling “swamped by alien cultures in their midst” along with a very clear programme, to take publicly subsidised arts, kicking and screaming, into the market place. Fortunately for the arts in Britain there was sufficient resistance to this myopic view.

So, what were we doing in the midst of all this? By 1985 Tara Arts had become, what was now termed, a “professional company”. In other words, we were being paid for our work and we were being subsidised regularly by The Arts Council and various other funding agencies.

The dead hand of realism

One very important thing occurred in 1985, and that was that we said to ourselves: “Our dramaturgy is not good enough!” We asked ourselves the question: “What is Asian about our theatre?” If it is the colour of our skin, then that is a political or a social exercise, and it deserves to die, which it probably will within an hour or so. It has got to be about the aesthetic, in other words the manner in which we produce our plays- the dramaturgy itself.

Now, saying that to ourselves, we were faced with one very obvious thing, which is that we simply did not know enough, we were still not good enough. So we asked ourselves: “How do we get better?”

And we looked at two things: 1) dialogue with the masters – with the greats of theatre – wherever they came from, 2) looked elsewhere, for inspiration behind the dramaturgy. And so it was that we in our case, who are of Indian descent, discovered – in quotes – “Indian dramaturgy”, and opened our eyes to an incredible world of the theatre, and to the paradoxes of theatre. While we studied Indian dramaturgy – (and this goes back 2500 years in terms of the principles of it, and in terms of how the art is to be executed) – we found a paradox that in fact the avánt garde of modern European theatre had precisely been inspired by that. Artaud, Brecht, Peter Brook, Ariáne Mnouchkine, the great Polish director Tzadeuz Kantor.

What did these people see in that dramaturgy? What they saw was that it had not made a concession to the dead hand of realism. In its dramaturgy, the purpose of the theatre is not to reflect reality, not to be reality, but to suggest it. Drama is like a dream, it is not real, but it is really felt. An extraordinary revelation for us, and so we poured these dramaturgs through a succession of texts. The first was “Little Clay Cart”, a play written in The Eighth Century AD, and again deliberately chosen. In 1985, what was happening around us, was the greatest strike that ever took place in our time. The miner’s strike was the only resistance really, the working class resistance, to Mrs Thatcher’s government. Here was a play, which in fact, in a fabled form, told the story of revolution. Perfect for us to once again use metaphor as a way of describing our reality today.

We went on to explore Gogol and particularly “The Government Inspector”, our thinking behind “The Government Inspector” was to explore that one area which is one of the inevitable consequences not only of migration, but also in our particular case, of empire, which is the colonisation of the mind. So in our version of Gogol’s Government Inspector, there was this little mythical village in India, which did not realise that independence had come and gone, it was completely full of the values of England and so real status was still to come to Blighty, to England. They completely glorified the fact: “My god, independence has happened, you can be free now!” And this fantastic line of Gogol’s at the end: “Laugh not, for you laugh at yourselves”, was devastating in what it was actually saying about ourselves.

We also produced “Danton’s Death”, and while this was about the French Revolution, its key-story was this contest between doubt – the kind of humanity of doubting – and certainty. We produced this in 1989, when precisely that seam was absolutely in our faces, and this had to do with Salman Rushdie’s “Satanic Verses.” What was going on here, was a contest between doubt on the one hand and certain-

ty on the other.

By 1990 the Thatcher revolution was coming to an end, and I was invited to direct at The Royal National Theatre. I chose to produce my own adaptation of Molière's "Tartuffe" with my own company, and once again using a play, which had an extraordinary history. We do not know what its original version is, we only know the third version, which Molière had to rewrite, or had to produce, because the king had censored it. But in our research, one of the extraordinary things that we found, was that there was a man called Francois Bernièr, who was a compatriot of Molière's at the middle of The Eighteenth Century. He happened to be in India while an Emperor called Aurangzeb was actually enforcing the same kinds of policies as Louis IVXth was in Molière's France. Francois Bernièr at one stage in his observations of Indians made one very acute one, where he talks about faquirs (these are religious beggars, who go around from house to house). In one of his descriptions he says:

These faquirs are all very beautiful to look at and everything else, and some of them are actually quite ugly, but heaven help the family that does not give them good food and hospitality. Even though everyone in the family knows that those faquirs have eyes only for the women in the family.

That is exactly Tartuffe, set in the court of Aurangzeb!

A new world of art

The 1990s, in hindsight, signalled a decade of diversity beginning with Anish Kapoor winning The Turner Prize, and being chosen to represent Britain at the Viennese Biennale, with his awe-inspiring sculptural work. The decade proceeded with other Asian and black directors being invited to stage productions at The Royal National Theatre, and an increasing visibility of black and Asian performers on the full range of theatre stages in the country. Ayub Khan Dinn produced a play-script "East is East" that became a hit-film as a new century dawned. The emergence of playwrights such as Winsome Pinnock, Biye Bandele and Ravi Kapoor, added fresh voices to a burgeoning black and Asian theatre scene.

By 1997, after three productions with The National Theatre, after producing "Oedipus Rex", "The Tempest", "Troilus and Cressida" and "Midsummer-Night's Dream", I decided to initiate another dialogue. This would be a dialogue with the history and transformation of Britain in the Twentieth Century, creating a modern epic of migration. This is "The Journey to the West" Project. The project looks at

British history – at the change in Britain – through the lens of a very particular community, which is me. East African Asians, people who went from India, or were taken from India, at the beginning of the twentieth Century to build a six hundred-mile long railway in East Africa. Whose descendants then fled East Africa in 1968 to arrive in England, and whose descendants form the news-readers, the performers, the politicians, the businessmen and women of Britain in 2001.

The process of this production has been a really crucial one for us. There were two sources; the great epics of migration, of journey, with *The Odyssey* on the one hand and *The Ramayana* in India on the other. The second crucial source was the people themselves. We systematically interviewed three different generations living in Britain. We interviewed them and recorded those interviews on digital video, and the purpose is a very simple one, namely that those stories, which are absolutely unknown in public life in Britain, need to be preserved. These are histories not just of those particular people; these are the histories of our country.

In a sense I suppose what we initiated was the idea of not an audience, but of partners. Some partners become partners simply because they offer their heart to us in terms of their stories. Some, who went further, and who would produce their own presentation of their story, which would start off our own play. This process went on for three years and we have now come to the end of the three parts. The trilogy will tour in February 2002, and all three parts will be shown in one day.

This is admittedly very sketchy, but history may suggest that Britain has followed a very neat linear progress over the past three decades; from the darkness of cultural diversity to the light of a new world of art. But we must remember that all modern stories carry a little sting in the tail, and this one no less so.

In November last year, the BBC transmitted a major six-part television series on British theatre in *The Twentieth Century*. It made not a single reference visually or orally to the culturally diverse theatre or its practitioners. We were rubbed out of history. Why? We can all speculate... But one compelling reason is implicit in the facts that make up England. We form only six percent of the total population of Britain. From this perspective one can choose to ignore that over one third of the capital city of Britain is non-white. Where over 22 different languages are spoken.

Every five years or so, a new writer and a new actor become the talk of the town only to die away until the next ride up, and each one has built a landmark, a break-

through. Why this roller coaster? A simple answer, I think, is the history of our pasts, and even more so of our presents. Why and how Britain so dramatically changed its colour post war is not the stuff of education in our schools. In specialist academies, such as drama schools, theatre West of the Urals and north of Mexico is a subject of intensive study. In other words: Russian, European and of course English and American.

Africa, Asia, Latin America are together confined at best to guest lectures by peripatetic teachers. Shakespeare is God of course, but his most voracious consumers today are Japanese and South Asians. Yet their voices, their interpretations are scarcely worth a study.

Increasingly we live in a paradox. At the very same time as there is an increasing visibility of other Britons, there is an ever increasing poverty of imagination. Another apparent disparity is the decline over the past thirty years in the total number of ethnic led companies. This needs to be seen in a wider context of what has happened to the radical fringe, particularly in the theatre.

The 1970's and the '80s saw the emergence of gay, women and disability led companies as well as, of course, black led companies. Through the 1990s we have witnessed the emasculation of the fringe, or to use a less potent word, its incorporation into the mainstream. The Edinburgh Festival provides a very good example. The fringe-festival that grew up around it, in direct opposition to the more mainstream events staged by the festival proper, is now just as highly commercialised.

The 1990s have been characterised by mass consumption of the arts. The cultural products of artists are now remembered for their quality as "selling images". Such commodification of the arts has resulted in making those radical arts safe. In this context ethnic art has culled the greatest pressure of the market place. Its radicalism is no longer sufficient reason for its existence, and the key question increasingly is: "Is it sexy enough to sell?"

That is the key-message being churned out by multinational corporations today. Today in Britain, we are on the crest of a wave of musicals inspired by the Bollywood cinema of India. An industry decried by artists in its own home country is said to become the toast of the town. Why? Because The West has woken up to the economic potential of this vast and educated Indian market for sales! What is happening in India is now said to occur in Britain. The Royal Opera House, not to be

undone by Andrew Lloyd Webber's plans, is said to produce one of its operas in the style of Bollywood. Wow, great artistic development! On the face of it, this of course should be a cause for celebration, rather than whining, by someone like me. That, which in former decades was merely ethnic, is now mainstream. Wow! Bearing the stamp of "the best of British"!

The landscape of fact

I will reiterate here my point about history: Without a context, we become the playthings of fashion. We are not accorded the right to hold a mirror up to society to inform and entertain through provocation in the best tradition of theatre anywhere in the world. What then has been the impact of culturally diverse arts?

There is a fantastic little comment by an Irish playwright called Brian Friel:

It can happen that a civilisation can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour, which no longer matches the landscape of fact.

What is a landscape of fact? I have mentioned already the six percent that make up 'New Britain'. 38 percent of this 6 percent of ethnic minorities live in Greater London, and a further 12 percent in Birmingham. That means that over half the ethnic population in Britain lives in these two cities. It is these two cities that have engineered so many of the projects that we are talking about.

A way of understanding this distorted picture is to imagine an audio-CD lasting 64 minutes. 60 minutes of the track consist of one song being endlessly repeated – say a song by Abba. The remaining four minutes are packed tightly with songs from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, The Caribbean, Africa, China, Vietnam and that, which William Blake in another context calls, "The World in a grain of sand". For the delectation of all, so we, the CD-people of Britain, are in reality the four-minute people.

There is another more dangerous contour. Mrs Thatcher demonised 'the other' in Britain by describing ethnic minorities as 'alien cultures'. Our current government and Prime Minister have made a virtue of championing Britain as a multi-cultural society, yet no major politician has unequivocally denounced the earlier pronouncements. In so doing, the idea of the 'demon other' remains very much alive, as our current response to asylum seekers makes clear. No politician in the country has so far sought to disentangle asylum from immigration. They slide into each other, so in fact when one is talking about asylum seekers, one might as well be talking about immigrants, which is another code word for non-whites. Today's pronoun-

cements are uncomfortably reminiscent of the language used in the 1960's and '70s, when these other mass-migrations occurred. The imprisonment that Brian Friel speaks of is a two-way stream. It affects not just white relations with non-white, but in equal measure the other way around. So we all conspire to create a cultural landscape, where our non-white origins define our artwork, our audience, our saleability, our relevance.

In the second city of Britain, Birmingham, a major complex of cinemas opened up last year. 36 cinemas showing English and mainly American films, and the other half showing Bollywood films. Of course the owner had a really good nose for money. Sure enough the cinemas are absolutely full. The Asians flock to the Bollywood movies as much as to the Anglo-American ones. But the whites they flock of course only to the Anglo-American movies and not to the Bollywood. This little example of non-sharing audiences reveals much, and again it has to do with this sort of poverty of imagination: "Do I really know and understand the other stories and therefore want to participate in that?"

After nearly three decades of investment in the project of cultural diversity, what can we show? Who are the artists of Britain's new reality? The current colossi of British artistic imagination are undoubtedly the writers, the visual artists and the musicians. From Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi to Ben Okri and Carol Phillips and Zadie Smith to Anish Kapoor, Benjamin Zephaniah and Corner Shop. While it could rightly be argued that none directly benefited from state subsidy, nevertheless, state subsidy created a climate in which these singular talents could blaze.

But what about the performing arts? I have omitted that from my list. No extraordinary performer, director or playwright has emerged to sustained public gaze. A harsh judgement, which I am sure my colleagues will disagree with, but I believe it to be true of today. We have had waves of course. Highs when a new talent is pronounced followed by long periods of lows, when they are forgotten and we all wait for the next new phenomenon.

This ebb and flow is a direct symptom of our non-imaginative existence in the country. Other histories, other stories, languages, religions, artefacts are not the subject of study other than the most specialist one – by which time it is literally too late. To eat the other's food, to wear the other's clothes is not ever equivalent to imbibing the others stories.

Cultural diversity must fundamentally be a project of artistic and not social engineering. It is to allow each citizen the freedom to come to the realisation that leaning into each other is the only understanding, the only joy. Only that Odysseus and Penelope can offer each other after their long years of separation. That for me is what this migration is. That we were long lost cousins, relatives, who have come home. That you, the natives, you had long forgotten that you yourselves are foreigners in your own land, and that this is a homecoming. And in this homecoming we have to accept that we leaked into each other because of the sea, because we sailed into each other's homes, into each other's minds.

Not to do so is quite literally to die. That is the fate of all of us, but the greatest death is the death of stories.

Isobel Hawson

CHANGES AND CHALLENGES – WHAT DOES THE BAROMETER READ?

Strategy and Policy Challenges that The Council has faced in Relation to Theatre, Dance and Cultural Diversity.

Firstly, really on behalf of the people that have come from England, our sincere thanks to The British Council and The Norwegian Council for Cultural Affairs. It is actually very, very exciting to come to a new country. I have never been to Norway before, and I do not think that any of my other colleagues have been, so thank you! And I sincerely hope that today is just literally a point, when we can start to talk, and we can actually sort of start to look towards the future.

When I read something that says “strategy and policy changes that The Council has faced in relation theatre/dance and cultural diversity”, I sort of cringe slightly. So I hope this morning in my fifteen minutes that I have got, I will try very hard to romp through. I can actually just paint a picture. I am going to start off with where Jatinder came from, just a brief history of funding, which to some might be interesting, to some might be slightly dull.

The theatre is one of the most expressive and useful instruments for building up a country. It is the barometer of its greatness or its decline:

An intelligent theatre – well orientated in all its branches – can change the sensibility of people within a few years. A disintegrated theatre with clumsy hooves instead of wings can cheapen and lull into sleep an entire nation.

That is a quote from Federico García Lorca. The question is, is this actually true in England? There is always a perception that theatre in England is regarded by many as the best in the world. It has certainly been a living force in England and remains so. But is it well orientated in all its branches? I am going to try and just quickly put theatre into some sort of historical context.

History and policy

In England theatre has historically been delivered through the English regional repertory theatres. They are the buildings. Originally receiving funds from what was The Arts Council of Great Britain, and the theatre's own local authority, i.e. the local authority that is responsible for its own little council. During the 1950's and '60s there was a network of over 50 regional theatres often having been built up in response to local civic pride and a perceived need. These buildings were based on the English tradition of producing classic and contemporary drama playing a repertoire, mainly for three or four week runs. The core audience was predominantly middle class, traditional and very resistant to change.

The 1960's and '70s saw a rise in fringe, in political theatre, and also in theatre and education companies and participatory work. Much of this work was created by emerging alternative artists and was a reaction to the known traditional work. The artists themselves wished their voices to be heard.

At the same time in the English system, the theatre and education companies were growing up. These were organisations that were often attached to regional theatres, but they were taking their work out of the traditional environment into schools, into local communities and were actually working with and for young people.

In 1965 the policy for the arts set the agenda for participation, access and community provision. The policy opened up new ways for increased revenue support from local authorities, who looked in turn for their theatres to reflect these wider aspirations. The theatres themselves began to feel the influence of the fringe culture and theatre and education, and began to respond to change, but the core funding for the theatre buildings was lagging behind. The costs and the complexity of the mixed responsibilities of the theatres increased, and many of the buildings were falling into disrepair.

The Arts Council delegated the responsibilities for funding of the regional theatres, together with the core funds, to the regional funding bodies. In England we have The Arts Council of England, and we have ten Regional Arts Boards. The years of the Conservative Government had created the expectation that theatres would perform at the box office. There were increasing ticket prices, people were supposed to attract sponsors, there was an increase in the ratio of earned income against subsidy. A picture emerged of chronic artistic and financial problems. The theatre was literally falling apart. The buildings were falling apart, there was no

capital money, funding was lagging behind, expectations that you get sponsorship, increased box office ticket prices, the audiences were declining, the funding bodies were falling behind, there was very little new innovative work, and almost no new writing. It really was pretty disastrous. Audiences were falling behind, let alone new audiences coming.

Now, perhaps, there is a glimmer of hope, a little flowering bud appearing on that branch. New Labour has a commitment to quality, access, education and the creative industries, and there has been a significant change in funding, some of which has become available through lottery funds. Both for capital projects, and touring and regional development for artists. This in turn has freed up some of the revenue funds, and the Government has allocated new funds towards new audiences, social inclusion and education.

Changes in the funding system

Within the funding system itself there have been some major changes. A restructuring of The Arts Council of England has meant that there is hopefully a clearer national strategic role and overview. There has followed a major devolving of decision making and delegation of funds to the ten Regional Arts Boards, and they have direct responsibility for organisations and the artists in their own regions. The over-arching priority of The Arts Council informs the decision-making across the whole of the funding system.

The priorities are:

- new work, experimentation and the individual artist
- new art forms and collaborative ways of working
- diversity and inclusion
- children and young people
- touring

In the drama department where I work, we are responsible for delivering the national overview of drama. There are new writing initiatives and schemes, we look after carnivals and circus, and The drama department has a range of training bursaries. We are also responsible for the development of cultural diversity through The Black Regional Initiative in Theatre, or what we call BRIT.

We have responsibility of supporting approximately 30 national touring companies. These companies are of importance in the whole theatre ecology. These compa-

nies have an agreement with The Arts Council through a fixed term funding.

The Fixed Term Funding Agreement is actually a very important document. It reflects the plans and the growth of the organisations. It contains equal opportunity statements, it contains budgets, and it looks at the growth of the company over three years. The Fixed Term Funding Agreement is renewable on application after the three years. The funding agreement outlines the company's areas of responsibility in agreement with The Arts Council, and as a national touring company its agreed touring remit. There are dedicated companies, companies for young people, new writing companies and of course the culturally diverse national touring companies: Tara Arts, Nitro, Tamasha and Yellow Earth.

On top of this, through lottery funds, through The National Touring Programme, the drama department supports a whole range of smaller national touring companies.

The Arts Council is ready to take on the challenge and recognises the need for the right climate for artists and audiences to thrive. However, the historic map of the theatre in England can only be changed to truly reflect our diversity with the funders being pro-active, interventionist, identifying the gaps and creating a stable ladder of opportunity. If we do not grasp this challenge and the opportunity of integrating artists and audiences that truly reflect our culture, and who have not previously been part of the picture, we shall pay a dear price.

The Government recently put on the table a further 25 million pounds for extra funds for theatre for the year 2003. The Arts Council last year published a New National Policy for Theatre, which is being part of a close consultation process between The Arts Council, The Regional Arts Boards and artists in each of the regions. There are eight priorities within the document, of which The Regional Arts Boards, within their plans, have had to address at least two of the priorities.

Part of the policy states:

Theatre must engage with audiences and artists from a broader, more diverse, range of backgrounds. It must connect with people, who have been excluded, including those living in rural communities. We expect the theatre community to develop work that speaks to the diverse audiences, who make up this country today. This work is a priority for us. We want to see an increase in the work force from the non-white population. A greater percentage of the audience for all theatre coming from a wider range of backgrounds and a much diverse artistic programme across England.

BRIT: The Black Regional Initiative in Theatre

I am now going to focus on The Black Regional Initiative in Theatre – or BRIT. The aim of BRIT is to support schemes that aim at a more equitable black and Asian theatre in England. BRIT is by no means the magical answer to everything. BRIT is not really a specific thing, it is a philosophy, it is a will to change. Yes, there are a small amount of funds attached to BRIT, but it is more a way of working.

We generally do not know that it is the right answer, but at the moment it is the path we are taking, and it is the path which is growing evolving and connecting. Hopefully in a newer climate of expectation and willingness, we can move towards a picture that reflects our society and creates opportunities for quality culturally diverse work and artists to be nurtured in England.

BRIT is about connecting: connecting across the funding system, connecting across the regions, connecting companies and buildings together. I work with my colleague Naseem Khan, who is the officer in the policy department of The Arts Council with responsibility for cultural diversity. She made possible “The Cultural Diversity Action Plan” published in 1998, and our work with The New Audiences Department.

With the injection of funding from government into new audiences, cultural diversity is a main priority, and there have been a number of quite exciting developments. There have been partnerships growing up between community based and mainstream organisations to attract new audiences. New marketing agencies have sprung up developing audiences from African Caribbean and South Asian communities testing new audience developments, which are all-encompassing, rather than solely marketing focused. One of these is the Asian Ambassador Schemes, which are springing up around the country. Connections are made across the regions; particularly it would be true to say in London, where there are a lot of new young, culturally diverse work and artists developing. Obviously partly to do with the range of theatre in London, the population, and where London has ring-fenced specific funds for the development of theatre and cultural diversity.

At the root of BRIT is to identify gaps that exist, and to strategically invest funds that will kick-start projects and opportunities. It is no longer good enough for funders or venues to say: “We do not know where to start, that cultural diversity does not really affect us”, or that: “We are based in a rural area, and we do not have any

black or Asian communities". This is a time to break down barriers that have existed, to grasp opportunities, and to share quality art, good practice, and to learn from each other's cultures.

Approximately six years ago a small fund was allocated, and The BRIT Initiative was created by the desire of The Advisory Panel on Drama to address lack of opportunities that existed for black and Asian artists, and the obvious fact that little funding was going into companies that produced black or Asian work. The small fund is 180,000 pounds.

BRIT is not open to application, since it is a managed fund, which is ring-fenced. Funds are initially injected into three of the large regional repertory theatre buildings. These theatres were chosen, as they had a track record of programming and developing black or Asian work, and because obviously of the cultural mix of the region in which they were based. They were Leeds, Leicester and Nottingham. Initially BRIT placed an individual at each of these theatres. In Leicester an Asian producer to work on what was finally to become NATAK focussing on the development of Asian work. In Leeds and Nottingham an Afro-Caribbean producer focusing on black work. At each of these organisations it was agreed the theatre's policy should embrace the creation of theatre inspired by African/ Caribbean/Asian heritage. The initiative should be led by an artist-practitioner whose own, or whose family's origins, were African-Caribbean or Asian. The initiative would provide employment for African/Caribbean or Asian artists and practitioners in key creative and managerial roles. It would provide focused training opportunities with the aim of developing directors, writers, performers and administrators. The BRIT-funds were originally placed for three years. It was a time-scale that was completely underestimated. It could hardly scratch the surface of what was an ingrained English theatre history.

BRIT is an initiative that brings together a range of people: The artists and their individual needs, it looks at professional development and training, the venues connecting main-house theatre with the black arts venue in the same town. Touring has created a safe network where black and Asian artists can be secure, and where audiences, through New Audiences money, can be developed. Programming the placement of key-personnel in influencing programmes connecting with Black and Asian artists and communities. And connecting funds that are available across the funding system: Lottery funds, development funds, touring funds.

There are 11 venues across the country that are now involved in this project, and it is growing. I am going to give you three quick examples:

In Bristol, through the initial injection of 5000 pounds into a youth project, a relationship was built between a small black arts organisation, connects with Bristol Old Vic, the main repertory theatre in the region. The development of a youth project – an Asian Ambassadors scheme – marketing work to local communities, and the development of new writing groups, are all growing. At the same time small-scale Black and Asian national touring companies, funded through The National Touring Programme, are finding new openings for their work.

Leicester is a success-story. NATAK, the Asian theatre initiative, which started some years ago, is now fully integrated into The Leicester Haymarket Theatre. The work has made significant inroads and relationships with the Asian community. New Asian work is commissioned for the studio, and it is starting to tour out of Leicester onto the national circuit, where work can be seen on the main-stage. The Peacock Youth Theatre and The New Writing Group flourish, whilst again national touring companies are finding a home in Leicester. The work is reflected through the theatre as a whole. In a recent review of The Leicester Haymarket Theatre, it is seen as becoming a figurehead for organisations for Asian talent – regionally and nationally – enabling artists to create new work, and to become a training centre.

In Huddersfield The Hadawi Centre, a small black arts centre, and The Lawrence Bailey Theatre, again the larger regional theatre, first came together through a small amount of BRIT-funds. The programming and marketing are now a collaborative process. Positive relationships are being established, and some of the national touring companies again are touring there. A joint box office is being established with a marked increase in audiences from the black and Asian communities. The most recent project was with Tamasha Theatre Company and the production of ‘The Balti Kings’, and what was known as ‘The Balti Bus’.

BRIT allows a sharing of ideas. The producers of the venues come together. We share information, while companies are touring, and we move forward on ideas. There are more black and Asian companies being funded through development funds in the regions, that are now applying to The Arts Council for national touring. There are more companies touring on a secure circuit. Training and professional development are very much at the core of the black regional initiative in theatre. Funding has been put into short training courses and short-term bursaries.

Some years ago a two-week course for young Black and Asian directors, working with professional actors at Birmingham Repertory Theatre, resulted in the first season of black and Asian work at The Rep Theatre, employing three of the young Black and Asian directors.

The drama department runs annual bursaries for directors. We currently have six black and Asian directors on bursaries with professional theatre companies. We have training bursaries for administrators, and also some for technicians. However, in England, although we have the dedicated Black and Asian touring companies, there is still no Black or Asian artistic director of any of the regional theatres.

Each of the organisations involved in BRIT is like a satellite in their own region, developing their own work, marketing to audiences and connecting across the country. This in turn develops a national touring circuit for companies either on fixed term funding or the smaller black or Asian companies funded through national touring. One of the next steps that we are looking towards addressing, is the lack of new Black and Asian work in the larger venues on the middle scale circuit, and training at senior level positions. BRIT is only part of the picture at The Arts Council.

In dance there is The Arts Council's South Asian Dance Consortium made up of three South Asian developmental organisations providing a host of initiatives and programmes to develop this sector. The activities of the consortium are financially assisted by The Arts Council, and training, creation, information and presentation are all keys to its development. Highlights this year included "The Coming of Age Performance", with 85 performers and approximately 10,000 people attending the event at The South Bank in London.

The Black Choreographic Initiative has developed a number of talented choreographers over the last three years of the programme. Most recently an exploratory projects at The Royal Opera House brought together artists from both African, South Asian and English descent.

The Year of Diversity

In Capital Lottery, The Arts Council has ring-fenced a minimum of 20 million pounds of a budget of 80 million pounds for culturally diverse capital projects. 2002 is designated The Year of Diversity, where the focus will be on quality arts for and by culturally diverse audiences, practitioners and artists. This of course is

an opportunity for advocacy across government, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. New work will undoubtedly be created, and will contribute further to the creation of a distinctive form of contemporary cultural expression.

However, The Year of Diversity must be more than just creating work or promoting cultural diversity. The initiative must knit together ongoing Arts Council policies, resulting in sustainable developments and improve the basic and fundamental needs of black arts for the future. We all need to look towards the future. We must look for opportunities of exchange between artists. The possibility of learning from each other, of exchange and process between our own countries. We must reach down into the roots and make sure that cultural diversity is embedded throughout the arts, sustained and nurtured for future years. We need to make sure that the branches blossom, and that the infrastructure in place, draws upon different contemporary cultures, as we move towards sustaining the arts that truly reflect the society of which we are a part.

Jenny Harris

ARTISTIC POLICY, AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT, TRAINING AND ACCESS: THE ROLE OF AN INSTITUTION.

I have basically spent about 30 years producing theatre in a wide range of situations, and in a wide range of institutions. For my sins, I am now at The Royal National Theatre in London, as one of the producers, producing the work that we do in the building for new and young audiences. By young audiences we mean anything from children of four years to young people, about 28 years. It is our aim that of most of the work we produce is for that age-range, and of course their families, so it is quite a wide brief.

But I just want to start on a completely different note. We have just had a new art gallery opening in London called The Tate Modern, and it is a fantastic gallery that has been created out of an old power station. The man who really had the vision for it, and how it should be developed and curate, said to me:

The fact with galleries, is that they are really warehouses, until the eye of the visitor hits upon the painting or the sculpture... and what we think is that, it is that eye that is the most important thing.

That has completely reversed how museums and galleries were normally developed. In Britain, the most important person – the person, who decided what was “put” – in the museum or the gallery up to that point, was the curator. The people who came to look, the visitors, were not the point, but beside it. The old view was simply “warehousing” art, this newer view, puts the audience/participant/viewer at the centre; “the eye” and the interaction are the important points. This has reversed this old power structure. They made the people, who were interpreting the exhibitions, almost, the most important people.

The Education Department works with a new breed of interpreters, who were not like the museum curators, but who were people in a way designed to be the ambas-

sadors, to go out and work closely with the people who would come in and view. It has been a huge success.

Literally millions of people are going to this new gallery, because it has such a different feel. The minute you walk in, you know that this is different on hundreds of levels. I read an article on the plane coming over about their new exhibition, and I thought that this is a real case of something, which is ‘cognitively sweaty’. The visual arts critic from “The Times” was basically going through a notable thought process: The exhibition was about cities, not just about Paris and Vienna and New York, but also about Bombay and Accra in Nigeria. And this critic says: “Oh! Are these major cities for major art? I can see Vienna, I can see London, I can see New York...” You could just tell that he was really struggling with this, and forgetting that India has 3000 years of fantastic visual arts history, which contributed to making for instance that city. By the end of the article he just about got there, because obviously the exhibition was so compelling that he did understand the significance of why these other cities had been included. The artwork from those cities obviously stood up well to Vienna and New York and London and other cities. So I thought: “This is great, The Tate is really living up to, what they said they were going to do, and it is just very exciting how they are doing it”.

Access to the theatre

So I work at The Royal National Theatre, which is, I suppose the central state institution for theatre. It was a dream for many, many years of major UK artists to have a National Theatre. I do not know whether now those artists would think what was happening at the National Theatre was what they dreamed of, but I think it was a positive dream in those far off days. However, today one could say that what we have is this huge institution. It has three theatres inside it: An 1100-seat theatre, a 900-seat theatre and a 400-seat theatre. Also there are three or four restaurants, bars, and exhibition and outdoor spaces. Of course it eats up a lot of money, and in some ways, in your terms, it is the sort of stereotype of “the institution of theatre”.

Nevertheless, I think that it some time ago took a look at itself and thought: “We have got to think about how we don’t get set in concrete”. I think they did begin to realise, because the building is literally made of concrete, and it is a very brutalist structure, that the theatre should not be set in stone, but really needed to develop.

So they set up a studio, which was for training professional artists, and gave them an opportunity to experiment in private outside of anybody’s gaze. I think, looking

back on it, this was an extremely good thing. The second thing that the first Director, Peter Hall, did about 15 years ago now, was that he appointed a so-called Education Director and said to him:

Look, there is a lot of space in this institution, there is a lot of bits of money, and spare time that actors and directors and writers have, and I want you to work in the cracks to do things that will begin to generate a new audience.

So it started just literally in the cracks, but it has developed into the department that I am now a part of. There was a feeling even back then that we had to somehow begin to think about how we could involve younger people and more diverse communities in this institution, or what could be an institution.

In a way all we have been doing for the last 15 years is endlessly experimenting with how you do that, how you prevent that institution getting set in concrete, and how you do pull in diverse streams of artists and audiences and collaborators and partners. I think that what has happened in the last two or three years, is that that vision, that The Tate has now, has been sort of flowing gradually into places like The National Theatre, and also into other institutional theatres, so that we are sort of turning things upside down...

Of course, the artistic directors are still extremely important, and extremely powerful, but when people like us are saying that we need to be looking at how change can take place in this very fast moving world, where the acceleration of the rate of change is speeding up all the time, and where we are in a global village, there is a genuine change. When I was a student, we talked about “the global village”, but I think we are all really in it now.

It is interesting that our current director, really does understand what you are talking about, and also understands when really quite shocking statistics come out. We made a survey of our normal sort of evening and matinee audiences in house, and the average age was something like 58, so the question is whether we are in a dying industry, where we are not renewing our audiences or customers, to put it very brutally and even materialistically.

Our boss at the moment has really begun to realise that his children are not interested in the theatre. When he asks them to come and see something, they go: “Oh no, boring!” And a lot of our audience, when they invite their children or their grand-children or their nieces and nephews to come and see something at The National Theatre, it is the last place the kids or the teenagers want to go. I don't

know if that is similar to Norway?

So even” the establishment” are beginning to realise that actually things have got to change, and they do not want to be left in this dying industry, they do not want to be left on this little sort of art island. They somehow do realise that they want to be part of the mainstream of this new fast-moving world and culture. They want to be part of the market place, and not just some little heritage museum up on the hill. So they are realising that, and they know that they do not quite know how to do it. So they are looking to a lot of people like me, who have been trying to do all sorts of things like this in theatre for a long time, and they are taking on aspects of it, and developing these kinds of long term programmes.

Opening up the institution

What we are working on is actually opening up the institution. One of our main aims in our department is just inventing as many ways as we can of enabling and engaging young diverse audiences. The new generation growing up in particular in London is I think very diverse, similar to Oslo. We have a large Afro-Caribbean, South-Asian and Vietnamese population and more recently a lot of people from Bosnia, Kososva and Herzegovina. So we have got this really fantastically exciting rich mix. All the work we do acknowledges this diversity and partners with it, collaborates with it, and is informed by it.

One of the things we do is to break down the traditional barriers in going to the theatre, which for many do exist, and breaking down the threshold. One example, which might describe this, is a bit like my own experience of going into a betting shop. I would like to put a bet on... but I am actually too scared to go into, because I know that when I do, I will not understand the language, I will not understand what they do behind the counters, and there will be all these men probably looking at me thinking: “Who is she?” In short, I will not understand the rules, the protocol, and the rituals. I think that for many people opening the doors of the theatre, or a gallery it is the same. A lot of what we do is enabling people to cross the threshold and to feel comfortable.

But we also do another thing, which is trying to create many, many ways for young people to be involved in making theatre. Not just being spectators, not just being consumers, not just buying a ticket, but actually making it. There is a whole cohort of young people right across the country, who are actually actively engaged in making theatre and who have links to the National Theatre.

We are very lucky that about 25 years ago, a lot of our artists got together and really put pressure on the education system, and said that they thought the arts must be taught in the schools as part of the curriculum. So it started with visual arts, and then music and then at a later stage continued with drama and dance. Now we have a really good system of quite good public examinations in drama and theatre at the age of 16 and 18. So many young people are involved in actually making theatre and studying it both as an academic and an occupational pursuit.

A lot of what we are doing is having professional artists passing on skills working with young people and their teachers, or their youth workers, or their youth arts-workers. These are professional artists, who are working in partnership with teachers and young people, passing on skills and we do a lot of training of the artists. Not training them in their art form, because they know that already, and they are already excellent – otherwise we would not be working with them – but training them in how to pass on skills, and how to work in partnership with teachers. We also train teachers, and again not in their profession, but in how to use professional artists in education.

Of course, not all professional artists want to work in this way. Lots of them say that they hated school and do not want to go near young people, But there are about 20 to 30 percent of each company that we work with, who have a real passion, dedication and skill to do this work. That can be anybody from the very well known and experienced from Anthony Hopkins, right down to a young new talent. Whenever Anthony Hopkins comes back, to work at the National he phones immediately and asks: “What do you want me to do?” And he just comes and works with the group of young people. It is not just young actors, or new ones, or people who are not any good at anything else! We have a fantastic range of artists working with young people.

We also take from the National Theatre plays out on tour – three or four productions each year – and these are plays made by The National Theatre, hopefully in quite radical, innovative ways, for young people. At the moment we have “Midsummer Night’s Dream” on tour, and we are just in the middle of rehearsals for “The Good Woman of Setzuan”. The latter is in a new translation by a young Asian playwright, Tanika Gupta, with a completely multi-racial cast that involves a whole range of exciting young performers. We think it is exactly what Brecht would have loved, but we shall see what people think, when they see it...

We work a lot with new writers, because we think that the way to get to diverse audiences, the way to talk to different audiences, the way to bring audiences together, the way to bring communities together, is actually to find their voice. And you can only find the voice, if you find the new writers. So yes, we are doing “Midsummer Night’s Dream” and plays by Brecht, but equally we are commissioning new writers, and a lot of the writers that we commission are writing specifically for young people to perform. We have commissioned Alan Ayckbourn and Dario Fo to write for young people, as well as newer, younger writers like Winsome Pinnock.

To be honest, we are always trying to raise the game and raise the status of the work, and we are always trying to show people that this is important work. When you get a writer for instance Dario Fo, who gave a major play to us, people really feel that it is very important, so I think it is changing the institution. Just as when Jatinder Verma’s company came to do “Tartuffe”, it made a big ripple. I mean, sometimes you get very depressed and think it is going nowhere, and at other times you can really see the changes that have slowly but have nevertheless taken place.

An artistic imperative

Our current Artistic Director is Trevor Nunn, and on one level he is an international figure, and when he came to The National Theatre, people like me endlessly said to him: “Ok, look you are here, and what are you doing about our agenda of diversity?” And he thought about it very hard, and said: “But can I do “The Cherry Orchard” with a multi-racial company? When of course we said: “Yes of course you can...” He did set up an ensemble, which we had for 18 months, where he did a whole range of plays with a completely multi-racial company. He proved to himself, that he could do it. He could do “Some are Folk”, he could do “Troilus and Cressida”, and of course he loved it. He loved the company, and the young actors, and the fact that he felt a bit avant garde, and that he was not a soldier from the established heritage with his days done. When I asked him the other day about what to do about new ensembles, he said that that battle was won.

Whereas three years ago if he had seen our cast for “The Good Person from Setzu-an”, which is Chinese, Albanian and Afro-Caribbean, he would have said: “What on earth are you doing?”

He understands it is changing, and I think the crucial thing is that it does come from an artistic imperative, and from the top of the institution. Of course we are

political people, we are social people, but essentially it has to come from an artistic imperative, and for me it is the most exciting challenge in the world. We do not want to be doing simply heritage.

It is great, but we do not want to be doing it; our remit is broader and more inclusive. We want to be creating more challenging theatre, with our new audiences and participants. They want us to do more contemporary and much more challenging theatre. Their own work is much more radical than the theatre we make; they come and make that work on The National Theatre stages. On the big stages, the 1100-seater. Their work breaks all parameters, and informs and energised our work.

So I just want to say to the institutions and the innovators that this combination and integration is the only way forward. It takes long term investment, which reaps real benefits.

Felix Cross

ARTISTIC POLICY, AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT, TRAINING AND ACCESS: THE ROLE OF AN ARTIST

I am the Artistic Director of a company called 'Nitro', which I suppose could be short for nitro-glycerine or nitrogen anything. It is 'Nitro', and it is explosive entertainment. That is the kind of idea... We were formed in 1979, as Jatinder Verma said and we were called 'The Black Theatre Co-operative'. It was formed by a group of black actors and directors, who were frustrated by the lack of work opportunities in all sorts of areas. It was an incredibly exciting and very dynamic organisation.

In 1979 to set up a company and call yourself, in that very bold way, 'Black Theatre Co-operative', and, to be a co-operative, was in theatre terms a very radical thing to do. They had a mission statement which I will read:

We are committed to encouraging, commissioning, devising and producing new writing by black British writers. We aim to produce and tour dynamic, innovative and high quality work that expresses the aspirations, cultures and issues that concern black people today.

But that today, to misquote a Paul McCartney song – that today was 'Yesterday' and a lot of things changed and developed.

I came to England as a baby (with my parents!)... If you take a snapshot of Britain in the 1960s, you could say that by and large, excepting towns like Liverpool and Bristol, a large majority of black people were recent immigrants, who had come from one of about half a dozen islands in the Caribbean. The mass immigration or vast majority of black people came to England. Therefore the experience, which they had, and which was expressed through work that artists amongst them were producing, was essentially a Caribbean experience. The concept in those late 1960s and early '70s of "mixed race", usually meant the child/progeny of a black male from one of those islands and a white English woman.

That was fairly straightforward and again millions of exceptions, but by and large that was the idea.

That has obviously changed to the point where the concept of “mixed race” generation after generation of being a black and white mix is completely inadequate. Indeed my own case; for my wife is half-Indian and half-Australian, so our children are?... - and this is now not unusual.

But what is important here, is that for The Black Theatre Co-operative, which was formed in 1979, the same year that Margaret Thatcher was elected, the wider society changed, and I think when people hear that I run a company called that, they say: “Ah yes, Black Theatre Co-operative, those great days!” And they always mean in fact those first three or four years, and then there was a sort of a fallow period, a less dynamic and public period, as they say.

The reason why they look at that in this way, and they are right, – is because at the time up to the mid 1980s, there was a real, dynamic, meaningful two-way connection. There was a communion in the auditoriums, in the theatres, in the art-centres, in the places where the performances were made. If you went along, you could just about tell who was the audience, and who were the performers, because most of the performers were on the stage. There was a fantastic dynamic between the two.

We began to see that slipping away over the years, and this happened with a number of other black theatre companies as well, during the mid- till late-1980’s. As the wider society was evolving into being much more racially complex in lots and lots of ways, as I described. For example in politics, it has always been held that black people would always vote Labour. Of course the vast majority will still do, but that is changing. Lots and lots of areas are evolving as integration takes place and mixing happens.

When I took over The Black Theatre Co-operative in 1996, there were a number of issues, and they were really to do with the question of why does the company still exist? We had to ask ourselves very seriously some important bottom line questions. We have a company that is named and which seems to wish to be known on purely socio-racial political terms: “The Black Theatre Co-operative”. Even in those days, after 17 years of existence, it was impossible to say what type of work it produced. It was difficult to see what its real constituency now was, because it had a series of agendas, which were not so much artistically led agendas, and increasingly they were not contemporary agendas.

To sit and eat at the ‘main table’

The wider cultural diversity and the wider mix of English society were beginning to change geometrically. The simple linear change was sprouting roots and branches everywhere, and it was becoming a much more complex dynamic with great exciting potential, and we were not taking advantage of it. I felt that we, as an organisation, and I personally as a composer and playwright, were demanding the same thing. We wanted to be allowed to sit and eat at the ‘main table’.

This ‘main’ table is a very important one, and at that time it was shrinking. Some are talking about the new opportunities, with the new government being much more favourably disposed towards funding the arts. However, do not forget that we have had 20 years of it shrinking. So, this new increase is really springing back to levels where it ought to have been in the first place.

That shrinking table is a very frightening one, if you happen to be one of the marginalised groups. Do not forget that in the middle of that table are The Royal National Theatre, The Royal Shakespeare Company, The Royal Ballet (- perhaps you are seeing a pattern here?), The Royal Opera House – and close to the edge, you have got the regional repertory theatres, their buildings, and the major touring companies. And then all around the edge, you have got all the groups that are marginalised.

The arts do not exist in a vacuum, and the groups that are marginalised tend to be groups that represent marginalised constituencies in wider society. When that table shrinks, by the laws of physics, it does not shrink from the centre, which is a shame. So we had to really start saying that we wanted to sit and eat at this ‘main table’.

But we had the responsibility ourselves, because if we wanted to do that, we would have to acknowledge that first and foremost we were artists, and perhaps our company had begun to lose the focus a little bit. Perhaps we lost it for many reasons. We were artists, we are artists, but we were denied being allowed to be artists for racist reasons. So we found ourselves arguing and standing on platforms instead of standing on stages, and that became a major problem for us. So the first thing I had to do, when I went to the job-interview in 1996, was to demand that: “If you take me on, I want to turn this company into a music theatre company”, and they took me on, and that is what we gradually have been trying to do.

Why music theatre?

Now that demand of mine has had all sorts of implications: Why a music theatre company? Well, two reasons of which one is very personal, and one is very pragmatic. The personal one is because I am a composer and a playwright, and I have always produced music theatre. The more pragmatic one, however, is that I believe that the disenfranchisement for black people in the theatre is obviously not only as practitioners, but also as members of audiences.

I will give you a little example: Just before I got this job, I was attending a play in Brixton, an area in London with a very high black population, by another black Theatre Company. It was not a very good play, and it was attended by just about as many people in the audience as there were on stage. It was one of those sorts of evenings.

Now, the journey back in the evening after the play to where I lived, involved me going past a club just opposite of the theatre called The Fridge. There, people were queuing around the corner waiting for The Fridge to open. About a hundred yards up the road is another very large music venue, called The Brixton Academy, and people were in fact just coming out of that in thousands. About a mile up the road on the way back is a club called The Ministry of Sound, and it seemed like they were cueing half the way through London for that. Finally, some hundred yards from my flat, was another club called Bagley's, and again they were cueing up for that. By the time I had got home, I was being taught very graphically a salutary lesson. Not so much that we must be market led at all, but it was the power of music. The power which is the key that we can put into the lock to open the door for those that we know are our main audience.

So music theatre is what we do, and what does this mean in reality? We essentially do three things: We make productions. We have an annual festival, called Nitro Beat, which I will come to later and we run a singing group called Nitro Vox.

The productions; the term 'music theatre' can mean anything from musicals to anything, anything in which music is an integral part, and it need not necessarily be singing. We are in the middle of rehearsals now for a show called 'Passports to the Promised Land'. It is a fairly straightforward musical. It has got a script, it has got a narrative, and it has got songs, it has a band and actors. Next year we are doing a play called 'Catwalk', which is about race aesthetics and the fashion industry. It has been written by a well-known poet, and the collaborator is a DJ, the

music will be sourced from already found music. It is a sort of sound collage. There will not be any singing in it as such, but the music is there right from the beginning as part of the creative process. We are also working on a piece called 'Slamdunk', which is a basketball term. The idea is to produce a piece of work, which is about all sorts of relationships amongst black males, using basketball as the metaphor. Basketball is a game in which the relationship between players, and the rhythm of the game, is absolutely crucial. The key to this one is that the world of hip-hop, and the music of hip-hop; the world of basketball actually work together very well. We are hopefully only going to be touring the play to basketball stadiums. So for a year we will just ignore theatres; a large section of our target audience seems to feel happier walking into a sports-centre than it does into a theatre. But we will find out. .

Nitro Beat is a festival, and I began quickly to discover, when I became artistic director that the most exciting, creative, innovative black artists in England choose not, or do not work in the theatre. They work in film, in music, they work in dance, they work in visual arts, they work in live art and performance art. They do not work in the theatre. It is not that I want to bring them into this rigid shape that the theatre is, but I would like that rigid shape to be flexible enough, so that we, by a process of osmosis, can start to redefine and have a look at what this term "theatre" really is, in order to make it more dynamic. I want them to write for us, I want them to produce work for us. So The Nitro Beat Festival is centred on three commissioned pieces of new work. Last year we did three pieces that were written by a rapper, who also happened to be a choreographer and a garage song-producer. They wrote one piece. The second piece was a collaboration between a poet and a classical composer. The third piece was a collaboration between a DJ, a storyteller and a jazz flutist. Each piece was 15 minutes long, and we also brought into the festival two or three other new pieces, about 15 minutes long, that already existed. The festival was in a building with a number of spaces, and every piece was performed twice throughout the day.

There was also a conference, where we cut out everything in the middle, and went straight to the bar. (After years of conference experience we had noticed that the real communication took place in between and after the event, rather than during the conference itself. So we had an all-day bar with lots of tables and chairs, where we arranged the conference. There were kind of three rolling debates. The first one was called 'The Making of Music Theatre'. The second one was called 'The Possibilities of Music Theatre'. The third one was called 'Black Artists, and the Politics of Music Theatre'.

The important thing was that here we were talking about making and exploring music theatre. We wanted to be seen, and we wanted to be seen leading the discussion on an art form, and on one level, the fact that we happened to be a black theatre company was irrelevant.

Finally, Nitro Vox is a singing group that we have had in various forms for about three or four years now. They are singers from the community, who we have nurtured and trained, and they now, even though they have regular jobs, go out and do lots of performances for us.

One thing I find very important, is that a theatre company is a very inflexible thing – even a touring theatre company. We get phone calls from people asking us to do shows here, there and everywhere, and if we did not actually happen to have a show at the time, we could not do anything. Therefore I felt it was important to have some performance group under the umbrella of the company that could be a sort of rapid reaction force. Currently they are doing a show called “Voices of Protest and Struggle”. They are singing a set of songs, which are protest songs from all over the world. So you have a black singing group singing protest songs from Northern Ireland, from Scotland as well as from the more obvious South Africa, The United States, The Caribbean, the songs from 1930s Germany, and the Spanish Civil War. The connecting factor is that there is no one single ownership of protest and struggle.

So that is the company, and I would say that we have moved an incredible long way. There were many voices of dissent, when I took it over and started to change the name and the direction. But I think that I could very easily, very clearly and confidently say that we are still committed to our original mission statement. It is just that the company has had to recognise that the developing complexities in wider society have to be mirrored and addressed in the way we approach our work.

THE CONTRIBUTORS

Felix Cross

Artistic Director, NITRO. He took over NITRO in 1996. NITRO is a black theatre cooperative. There is a long list with music work which Felix Cross has produced, – for plays, radio, music and lyrics, for television and so on.

Isobel Hawson

Senior Drama Officer, The Arts Council of England: and currently responsible for Black Regional Initiative in Theatre, who started in the seventies to work with a variety of theatre companies. During her many years stay in Australia she has worked with quite a number of productions, and among other, with the State Theatre Company of South Australia. She has been active in The international Association of Theatre for Children and Young People.

Jatinder Verma

Artistic director for Tara Arts. This is the first asian pioneering theatre company evolved as a community theatre group in Britain. Most of its productions are written and directed by its co-founder, Jatinder Verma. Verma has been widely lecturing, has a great number of interventions behind him and quite a few challenging publications.

Jenny Harris

Head of education and training at the Royal National Theatre in London. She'll be exploring education, audience development and cultural diversity in her own way, and how The Royal National Theatre is working on these issues.

Khalid Salimi

Editor of the periodical «Samora» and Deputy Chairman of Norwegian Council for Cultural Affairs.

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