

## Editorials

# *New Theatre Quarterly*: One Hundred Issues and After

The co-editors of *New Theatre Quarterly* take time out here to reflect on the milestone of the journal reaching its hundredth consecutive issue, in succession to the forty of the original *Theatre Quarterly*. Simon Trussler was one of the founding editors of the 'old' *Theatre Quarterly* in 1971. He is the author of numerous books on drama and theatre, including *New Theatre Voices of the Seventies* (1981), *Shakespearean Concepts* (1989), the award-winning *Cambridge Illustrated History of British Theatre* (1993), *The Faber Guide to Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama* (2006), and *Will's Will* (2007). Formerly Reader in Drama in the University of London, he is now Professor and Senior Research Fellow at Rose Bruford College. Maria Shevtsova, who has been co-editor of *New Theatre Quarterly* since 2003, is Professor of Drama and Theatre Arts and Director of Graduate Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London. The author of more than one hundred articles and chapters in collected volumes, her books include *Dodin and the Maly Drama Theatre: Process to Performance* (2004), *Fifty Key Theatre Directors* (co-edited with Shomit Mitter, 2005), *Robert Wilson* (2007), *Directors/Directing: Conversations on Theatre* (with Christopher Innes, 2009), and *Sociology of Theatre and Performance* (2009).

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Simon Trussler

## Friendships, Journals, and Jigsaw Puzzles

IT IS a commonplace that time goes faster with increasing years. The original *TQ* survived for forty issues over ten years, and its struggle through the seventies seemed to go on for ever. Now, it seems scarcely believable that a decade has gone by since *NTQ* reached its sixtieth issue, when we cheekily celebrated the hundredth combined issue of the two journals. And that means it is a whole quarter of a century since I was last properly drunk – not actually during the launch party for *NTQ* given by Cambridge University Press in the bar of the Duke of York's Theatre, but a little later, after unwisely mixing their generous provision of champagne with too much Draught Bass in the pub, to quench the thirst that champagne always gives me.

Now *NTQ* has reached its 'standalone' centenary issue, and it is indeed ten years that

have slid by since the editorials Clive Barker and I wrote for our sixtieth, in which we sketched out the prehistory and history of the journal and its importance in our lives. The intervening decade has been marked by the arrival of Maria Shevtsova as co-editor in 2003 and Clive's death in 2005. It was at his suggestion that we should form what was briefly a troika, as he was intending to retire after a transition period; but in the event he died in harness, as he would almost certainly have wished.

To lose Clive, a friend of forty years, well before our association on this journal, was painful, but thanks to his foresight the continuity of editorship had been ensured, and Maria's presence and inspiration have been vital forces since his death. By the time she joined us, Clive and I had both bowed out (in my own case not very gracefully) from full-time academic life, so Maria's continuing professorship at Goldsmiths has valuably re-engaged us with its actualities (a word carefully chosen for sounding neutral), and I am grateful for the association with Rose Bruford College which has restored my own links, with the agreeably semi-detached view from the sidelines of a Senior Research Fellow.

The past ten years have lost us too many old friends and colleagues to list without giving a funereal air to a celebratory occasion; but if Clive was a mentor before he became a friend, so too was Jan Kott, who died in 2001. Later in this issue Stanley Kauffmann remarks of rereading Eric Bentley's *The Playwright as Thinker*, 'I saw things that I thought I had said, he had said thirty years earlier.' I too owe a debt to Eric's book, but it is Jan's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* that I have absorbed to a similar degree – having constantly to remind myself that its insights, absorbed by osmosis, are not my own.

I wrote memoirs of Clive and Jan for the special issues we published to commemorate their lives, so will say no more here; but it would be an impoverished record of the past decade that neglected the marks on me left by those two lives, and those two deaths.

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Forty issues ago I wrote with some awe of the technological changes wrought by the impact of computer technology. Wonderful it was that a whole issue of *NTQ* could be fitted onto a Zip disk! (Hands up those who remember Zip disks?) And I wrote of swapping submissions with Clive through the post, or when we met in the Lyttelton foyer. Today of course it is rare to receive articles as 'hard copy'; not only do they now almost invariably arrive as email attachments, but can be instantly shared in the same way between editors and with our reviewers. And while ten years ago illustrations usually came in the form of glossy prints, now they also arrive through the ether as digital files (even if too many contributors remain unaware that low-resolution images that look fine on a website appear pathetic in print).

Oh, and I can now archive a whole year's issues on a CD, with plenty of room to spare for the original files and the emailed lists of corrections which, as hard copies, still filled a good-sized cardboard box for each issue ten years ago, when an email address was still a slightly geeky possession.

More important for readers, the magazine itself now has an online edition, and its back

issues are available and articles downloadable from the CUP website, where the search facility is much more flexible than the hard-copy index I painstakingly put together for *NTQ* 60 (though I find it a pleasant irony that that index is the most often downloaded item from our back issues).

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I can't quite claim to be the longest-serving editor of a theatre journal in the world – the redoubtable Richard Schechner first shook up the *Tulane Drama Review*, as it then was, in 1962, even if he did take a break somewhat longer than the mere four years between the old *Theatre Quarterly* and the new before returning to the chair. (Richard published some of my earliest writing on theatre, and being London correspondent of *TDR* gave me access to free tickets at a time when I could ill afford even seats in the upper circle. Thank you, Richard.)

But I can now lay reasonable claim to having seen more plays through to publication than anybody else in history. Ever. Although this is not directly connected to *NTQ*, it was the confidence shown by CUP in agreeing that the journal should be produced in house that made my early dabbling in desktop publishing more than a sideline. It led to 'Country Setting', the typesetting imprint for *NTQ* since 1991, taking on first the plays published by Nick Hern Books, and later those of Faber and Methuen Drama. I'm not even going to try to count them, but my file copies of the plays I have copy-edited for these and other publishers, mostly fairly slim paperback volumes, now fill twelve three-foot bookshelves – and that's not counting the ones the publishers forgot to send or those that have been 'borrowed' over the years.

This self-aggrandisement has a purpose, not unconnected with all those articles which no longer arrive as hard copy. Because all those plays for publication also now arrive as digital files (except from one or two authors of an older generation who cling to their typewriters, maybe as security blankets of creativity). And while we (well, the Folger or Texas) would give untold millions to possess

foul papers of Shakespeare's (or those of lesser Elizabethans for that matter), nobody much seems to be bothering about the 'foul files' trashed or overwritten by the playwrights of today.

It is great that the British Library was able to purchase Harold Pinter's papers – a hundred and fifty boxes less for Harry Ransom – and, less newsworthy but maybe of wider significance for theatre historians, that Peggy Ramsay's archive is also being catalogued there. And wonderful that Alan Bennett has donated his archive to the Bodleian. But who among younger writers keeps such a thing as an archive? While a few dramatists number or date their files, suggesting they might have kept copies of earlier drafts, many stick with a single file which they overwrite as they revise (just as I am overwriting first thoughts and typos in this). And what would once have been said in letters to friends, directors, actors, will have been sent via email – to be either deleted from a distant server or stored on a hard drive, destined sooner or later to turn ugly and expire.

It is strange that when the old *TQ* was campaigning for a British Theatre Institute, it was in part with the purpose of conserving the theatre's present. Nowadays that is easy enough, whether through the cheap-and-cheerful process of finding the best perch for a camcorder, or in the more elaborate ways through which the RSC and the National are looking to share and preserve their productions. And what back then seemed the easiest history to conserve – provided nobody threw it away – was paper-based. Now, when many emails quite properly beg us not to print them out, we are losing the paper trail through which the process of a production might once have been retraced.

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Another archive slipping through our fingers is people. Susan Croft's 'Oral Histories of Theatre' project is valiantly (and with the usual problems of under-funding) doing its best to capture the voices and memories of those who reshaped British theatre history in the sixties and seventies. But the movers and

shakers of those years are, alas, already thinning out – as I write, Troy Kennedy Martin the most recent loss – and younger scholars are beginning to discuss an era still vivid in living memories as if it were history needing scholarly retrieval.

A personal example: recently a reviewer of the stage version of *Prick Up Your Ears* in the *TLS* criticized the actor playing Joe Orton for having 'no trace of a Leicester accent'. Quite correctly, my colleague Aleks Sierz pointed out in the following issue that, 'If you listen to the available recordings of Orton's voice, what you hear is a RADA-trained actor' with 'actorly enunciation'.

Well, yes, Aleks. Good point. Actually, you could have asked me. I cut my journalistic teeth interviewing writers for *Plays and Players*, and twice talked to Joe Orton in the tiny Noel Road flat he shared with his murderer (who served me tea on both occasions). And yes, he spoke with what I think used to be described as 'received' pronunciation. (But when, from the top deck of a 24 bus, I saw an *Evening Standard* placard outside Leicester Square station proclaiming 'Famous Playwright Murdered', I knew it had to be Joe Orton.)

It doesn't really matter that Peggy Ramsay wasn't the dead spit of Vanessa Redgrave, but if a more mimetic performance by Gary Oldman can persuade a respectable *TLS* critic that Joe Orton retained a Leicester accent, what hope have we that the urban myths now so freely accessible on the web will not swamp mere truths, rather as popular perceptions of the history of Christianity now derive from *The Da Vinci Code*?

Oh dear. What started as a reflection on archiving the recent past has drifted into anecdote (something else that tells you you are getting on in years). But it is a reminder too that a scholarly journal, relatively small though its audience may be, has a duty to tell truths about what remains fully verifiable, as well as trying to reconstruct an elusive past.

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Most articles that appear in this journal I will have read four times before they reach print.

First on arrival; then to discuss with my co-editor and in the light of readers' reports; a third time when copy-editing; then in the final proofing. That last reading, if the earlier stages have been efficient, should have left only a few residual typos to mark, so probably comes closest to the reading you, dear readers, are giving to the articles in this issue.

But I have to confess that on my fourth reading I have sometimes got a little tired of the piece. It has already told me what at first impressed me as fresh and interesting. I have taken the point. There is little more to be said. Or read. Another time, though, an article which had at first seemed perhaps of more marginal interest has accreted substance on each reading, and only on closer acquaintance has it revealed its full richness. The author in both cases will have read the article through even more frequently, as she or he considers each nuance, how connections have been made, whether this or that might have been better or more cogently expressed; but as the piece fights for attention on the average overloaded desk, it will be read, if at all, with nothing like the same devotion.

My point? That, author and editor apart, very few of us will have time or inclination to read anything in a journal more than once (unless of course it has stood on one of our more sensitive toes and we are picking it to bits to launch a counterblast). So we – and of course I am among the 'we' in relation to all journals but my own – may be missing the riches awaiting an attentive second or third reading. We just don't have time for that – not least because in the decade that has passed since I last wrote a meta-article of this sort, new journals on theatre and performance have been proliferating, not to mention all the opinions (and the 'facts' that may or may not be verifiable) available on the web and in the blogosphere. There's an awful lot of 'literature' out there to be kept up with.

I am not diminishing the article that offers an instant fix. It will bounce off and make connections with other pieces, maybe form a link in a chain, be a useful contribution to a wider discussion. But I am bemoaning our incapacity – given all the other demands on our time, all the other bits of information that

overload us daily – to return to a piece of writing that would truly reward a second visit.

Because of all the fuss of booking and travelling, we will be even less inclined to revisit a play, despite recollecting those from the modern repertoire alone – from Ibsen to Pinter to Sarah Kane – that have been trashed first time round. Of course it's different if it has become canonical. I don't think it is just from professional interest that I have lost count of the times I have seen *Hamlet*; but I also know, to my shame, that I have read *Middlemarch*, er, just once. But then that's a novel, and with all those plays I don't get much time for novels . . .

Lucky the Renaissance man (as he almost invariably was) who could have a reasonable knowledge of all the arts and sciences busily being reborn. Today we are all specialists, not just in a single art or science, but probably in a single aspect of that art. The expansion of the study of 'drama' into first 'theatre studies' and then 'performance studies' was pioneered, so to say, vertically by *TQ* and *NTQ*, just as it was horizontally by *TDR*. Yet ironically the sheer breadth of the field has encouraged many scholars to clutch hopefully at the nearest tuft of grass – and ultra-specialist journals have encouraged the tunnel vision that can so easily result.

Hence the eclecticism in which *NTQ* has always taken pride. Even our rare special issues have not been devoted to 'special subjects', but to celebrating scholars, such as Clive Barker and Jan Kott, whose interests ranged widely across many fields – as did the contents of those issues. There is, perhaps, a danger that eclecticism can give an impression of bittiness – so does a jigsaw puzzle, which builds into a perfect picture. The difference is that the picture you make from reading a random issue of *NTQ* is of your own devising. Even if you need to read a few of the articles over again to make the pieces fit.

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While I have remained consistently, maybe obstinately, on the editorial masthead of *TQ* and *NTQ*, mine has never been a solo voice.

The increasing tendency for editorships of academic journals to rotate every few years seems to me mistaken. Far wiser, I think, to pursue the policy which *NTQ* follows, albeit by happenstance, of finding two or three distinct personalities who can mould a journal not by taking turns, as if tactfully chairing a department, but by a process of synthesis, even symbiosis.

It occurs to me that maybe nobody in their right minds would have come up with the combination of Maria Shevtsova and myself as likely to be able to work in that way – except, that is, for Maria Shevtsova and myself. Somehow we produce a journal which, we believe, speaks with its own distinctive voice. What we could not have done is to write an editorial with a single voice, for our individual voices are different. Also, where I have largely been speaking of the past and events leading up to the present, it is appropriate that Maria, in her own voice, puts the emphasis on the future. Over to you, Maria.

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Maria Shevtsova

## An Editor's Wish List

WHEN Simon Trussler suggested that we should take the opportunity in these editorials to give a personal view, at first I balked, since I reserve what I consider to be personal for my family and friends. However, my personal commitments and viewpoints are embedded in my research writing, teaching, supervision of research, and mentoring, which also occurs in my editing (and even copy-editing) work on *New Theatre Quarterly*. They underlie, and are sometimes explicit, in my publicist activities – programme notes, public talks, public interviews, occasions when I am interviewed – and in related professional engagements, at home and abroad. The personal in all these instances is, of course, indirect. It is mediated by my choice of subjects, materials, methods, and contexts, and also by the

purposes of the work undertaken; and it is mediated though the particular demands of the working process in hand.

My 'personal' as regards my co-editorship of *New Theatre Quarterly* will here be expressed as a wish list of areas that are important to theatre and performance studies and could fill the journal's pages in the future. The 'list' is by no means exhaustive, nor does it attempt to identify the variety of questions within the areas that I name; nor, for that matter, does it try and second-guess what might come into being as practitioners and scholars develop their research. It is the journal's contributors who help to make and define the field overall, and their role in the journal's project is thus crucial.

*New Theatre Quarterly* has always been an eclectic journal, drawing from a wide range of interests, favouring none, but welcoming all to whom the living practice of theatre is a vital concern. This was so for its preceding incarnation as *Theatre Quarterly*, which is why I chose it before other journals to submit my earliest articles. Indeed, *Theatre Quarterly* gave me a voice in much the same way as *New Theatre Quarterly*, from 1985, set out to give voice to early-career scholars, new as well as prominent practitioners, and those who are under-heard or barely heard at all. I noted this trend during the years I was on the journal's Editorial Board, refereeing articles as part of my responsibilities.

When I became Simon's co-editor – now for seven years – we consolidated *New Theatre Quarterly's* unwritten policy of casting its net wide, but with its eye on the performance work of individuals, groups, or companies, whether contemporary or of the near or distant past: we include, as any reader can see, historical perspectives and documentation. The collaboration between directors and actors/performers – one of my own research emphases – is integral to the idea of 'performance work', as I see it, as is analytical discussion of their productions or devised constructions. What we do not do are textual studies and pure theory as such (regardless of my personal taste for theory), although we do publish articles that significantly draw on theories, and certainly publish articles on