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## Architecture and New Play Development at the National Theatre, 1907–2010

In recent criticism a perceived dichotomy has emerged between ‘new writing’ and ‘new work’ for the theatre. In this article Rosalind Haslett contends that this dichotomy is often reflected in the infrastructure of theatre organizations and theatre spaces themselves. Thus ‘new writing’ is seen to refer to a literary process which takes place in a conventional theatre building, while ‘new work’ tends to occur in non-traditional forms and spaces. The relationship between non-conventional spaces and the performance work that might take place in them has received some critical attention, but there has been less exploration of the ways in which theatre architecture can inform the processes which surround new writing for the theatre. Tracing the history of the National Theatre in London back to its origins, long before it occupied a building of its own, Rosalind Haslett explores the relationship between the policies and processes taking place within the organization and the physical and architectural development of actualizing its building. She suggests that, if the layout of a theatre building has the power to influence the kind of work and the modes of production which take place within it, the activities of the individuals and organizations residing within such structures can also drive architectural change. Rosalind Haslett is Lecturer in Dramatic Literature at Newcastle University. Her research interests include dramaturgy and literature management, theatre architecture, and theatre history.

THEATRE BUILDINGS are an important marker in the landscape of Western cities – indeed, Marvin Carlson notes that they are one of the most ‘persistent’ parts of the ‘repertory of architectural objects’, which characterize the modern urban environment.<sup>1</sup> Yet the ‘spatial turn’ of recent criticism has led to a displacement of the theatre building as an essential element of the production and reception of theatre. In Britain this is apparent in some of the more recent Arts Council literature, which has aimed to concentrate funding on ‘people and art’ rather than ‘buildings and institutions’, and which celebrates ‘new ways of working’, particularly ‘the work that happens outside of traditional theatre spaces and infrastructures’.<sup>2</sup>

If the ‘new ways of working’ commended by the Arts Council are seen to be taking place outside the theatre building, however, it also follows that more traditional models of text-based theatre – including ‘new writing’ – remain the preserve of building-based companies. As a result, the division which has emerged in attitudes towards theatre

spaces might be viewed as the physical marker of a perceived dichotomy between modes of production: those supporting ‘new work’ as opposed to those supporting ‘new writing’.<sup>3</sup> The influence of performance space on the dramaturgy of non-conventional modes of production has received critical attention, but there has been less exploration of the ways in which theatre buildings might influence the processes surrounding new writing for the theatre. In this article, therefore, I will consider the ways in which the architecture might inform processes of new play development by considering the work of an institution which is housed in one of the most iconic (and contentious) theatre buildings in the United Kingdom: the National Theatre, London.

The National Theatre was the first place in the United Kingdom to employ an officially titled literary manager, so when we address its play development processes we must necessarily also consider changing attitudes to literary management, and the somewhat broader and contested concept of dramaturgy in the British theatre.

When the National Theatre building on London's South Bank was formally opened in 1976, Richard Findlater argued that 'the real history of the National Theatre [could] be said to have begun'<sup>4</sup> – this in spite of the fact that the National Theatre company, as distinct from the building which now houses it, had been fully operational since 1963 in the Old Vic. Indeed, in the thirteen years between the company's inauguration and the completion of the theatre building, the National Theatre had established itself in what *The Observer* described as 'the meteoric rise of [an] amazingly varied company'.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in emphasizing the organization's physical home, Findlater chose to locate the essence of the National Theatre in the building, rather than the artists who inhabited it.

### Housing the Arts: the National Theatre

The creation of a dedicated building had been central to the National Theatre campaign from the very start: Effingham Wilson's 1878 pamphlets were both titled *A House for Shakespeare*. Nor did the campaign's fixation upon the theatre building end here. Indeed, the long, fraught prehistory of the National Theatre can largely be traced in the battle to secure for it a suitable site.<sup>6</sup> Yet, even at the point of the building's completion (which Findlater identified as the true beginning of the institution's history), doubts were being raised about the desirability of a building-based theatre. Only a few years after Findlater's grand claim, Benedict Nightingale was arguing that by the time the National had become 'concrete . . . many of the cognoscenti had decided it was precisely what they didn't want', because the inflexible building was incompatible with the increasing emphasis upon experimental, multicultural, and site-specific performance within emerging theatre practice.<sup>7</sup>

If anything, this suspicion of the 'fixed, irreducible costs' associated with running a theatre building has become more pronounced in recent years – a suspicion which is perhaps best demonstrated by the 'innovative model' of the institutionally itinerant

National Theatre of Scotland (NTS).<sup>8</sup> Unlike the National Theatre, the NTS has no fixed building but rather operates as an umbrella organization or a 'dynamic enabler' which draws together the existing Scottish theatre system and leaves room for range and variety within this.<sup>9</sup> Nor is this concept an anomaly. Rather, the organization of the NTS is emblematic of a general shift in UK funding patterns, with a greater focus on supporting companies and individuals as opposed to buildings and institutions. Accordingly, it is currently *de rigueur* for the National Theatre building in London to be viewed as 'inaccessible and impermeable', a drain on the institution's resources, and a barrier to potential 'new audiences'.<sup>10</sup> While it was once thought a shining beacon for British drama, the National Theatre building is now widely seen as an obstacle which the institution is constantly striving to overcome.

Whether it is perceived as a benefit or a drawback, however, the National Theatre building remains a fact of the institution's existence. Furthermore, the physical reality of the National Theatre building has undoubtedly influenced the workings of the organization – often in ways unforeseen by its architects and artistic directors. Not only has it dictated the kind of work that is performed there, and informed who has access to this work, it has also had an enormous impact upon the shape of the company's organizational structure, as well as the roles and functions of individuals working within it.

This is particularly true of the institution's literary department, which is responsible for managing the National Theatre's commissioning and new play development processes. Finding a suitable site to lay foundations for the building may have been the first concern of many National Theatre campaigners, but creating a forum in which to develop and present a national repertory has always been the *raison d'être*. As a result, these two elements of the institution can be seen to have developed in tandem, and the association between the National Theatre's physical structure and its commissioning processes has percolated through the institution's history. Often the correlation is understood

and acknowledged by the individuals concerned, in other cases the points of connection remain unrevealed.

Although in the early years of the National Theatre movement it was concern for the institution's repertory which dictated the design of the building, since the National Theatre has been made 'concrete' it is the building itself which has arguably shaped the organization's new writing policies. This can be seen by close examination of three distinct periods of the National Theatre's development: first, William Archer and Granville Barker's 1907 plans for the building and its repertory; second, the period between 1963 when the National Theatre was inaugurated and 1977 when the building was completed; and finally, from that time to the present day, with the close relationship between the architectural restrictions of the National Theatre and its attitude towards 'new writing' and/or 'new play development' made evident by the refurbishment of the National Theatre Studio and the literary department's relationship with this new 'powerhouse' of play development.

### Archer and Barker's National Theatre Plans

In the early years of the twentieth century, William Archer and Granville Barker took up the campaign for a National Theatre, and their 1907 publication, *A National Theatre: Scheme and Estimates* (first circulated as the 'Blue Book' in 1904) outlined a clear proposal for the running of such an institution.<sup>11</sup> As had been the case for Effingham Wilson two decades earlier, the erection of a dedicated theatre building, or 'house', was an essential aspect of Archer and Barker's plans.<sup>12</sup> Yet they were also concerned with the internal workings of the organization and laid out detailed schemes for staffing and finances, casting, and, crucially, the selection of plays.

Archer and Barker's plans were heavily influenced by existing European models in which repertoire selection and the production of new writing were central concerns. They therefore designed the new role of 'literary manager', an individual who would take responsibility for designing the reper-

toire of plays, 'as an official answering to the German *Dramaturg*'.<sup>13</sup> In this way, their proposal introduced the novel concept of a dedicated literary official to the English theatre. The idea in itself was not, of course, a new one: in Germany the role had been established following Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's appointment as dramaturg of the Hamburger Nationaltheater in 1767, and it was also common in the theatre cultures of Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and the Netherlands. In fact literary management and the related concept of dramaturgy have always been closely connected with the drive to create a 'national' theatre, and Mary Luckhurst has argued that:

The first official appointments of dramaturgs or literary managers in any country, East or West, have always come about in the context of a campaign for a national theatre or desire to identify the characteristics of a distinctively home-grown dramatic literature.<sup>14</sup>

But if Archer and Barker's inclusion of this role in their *Scheme* indicates that repertoire selection – including the development of new British drama – was central to their plan for a National Theatre, this was also reflected in their vision of the theatre building itself.

In the Introduction of their *Scheme*, Archer and Barker outlined the kind of theatre they envisaged, which was to be 'large, elastic, and independent'.<sup>15</sup> Size, therefore, was a crucial aspect of the design. The theatre they proposed was to operate on a repertory basis and needed a large backstage area to accommodate scenery. Moreover, they felt the building itself might serve as an advertisement for the institution and that it 'must impose itself on public notice, not by poster and column advertisements in the newspapers, but by the very fact of its ample, dignified, and liberal existence'.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, they believed it was of the utmost importance that the organization be housed in its own premises so that it might operate on a rent- and tax-free basis, and therefore be given every opportunity to succeed financially. However, in spite of their unequivocal call for the theatre building to be 'large', the auditorium they proposed was considerably



smaller than those of most theatres of their time. And their plans for the theatre's architecture were led by the repertoire they had in mind.

It was Archer and Barker's aim that the institution be 'visibly and unmistakably popular' and their proposed repertoire therefore included a great deal of Shakespeare and classical drama.<sup>17</sup> Yet both men were also champions of the more avant-garde 'new drama' which included the work of playwrights such as Ibsen, Shaw, and, indeed, Barker himself. Therefore, although Archer and Barker did not request that the National Theatre act as a 'pioneer', neither did they wish to create a theatre auditorium that would prohibit the presentation of this kind of work.<sup>18</sup> A more modestly sized auditorium was ideal, because not only would it ensure 'full' houses on a regular basis, but an intimate environment would better accommodate the increasingly naturalistic style of the new drama and support the work of emerging playwrights.

Archer and Barker's plans did not come to fruition during their own lifetimes (it took more than fifty years before a realization of the National Theatre in London), but they continued to campaign tirelessly well beyond the publication of the *Scheme*. Furthermore, as their work continued, the connection they had observed between auditorium size and repertoire design became more prominent. Thus, when they were approached to take on the positions of literary manager and artistic director of the New Theatre, New York (an American institution, loosely based upon their *Scheme*), they turned the opportunity down because 'the theatre . . . [was] too big and the proscenium [arch] too wide'.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, by the time that Barker published a revised version of the *Scheme* in 1930, this idea had evolved to the point that he now advocated the design of a building with two separate auditoria: one which would support productions with a larger cast, the other accommodating small-scale productions. This was an idea that held credence well into the 1970s, with John Elsom and Nicholas Tomalin noting that this design had the virtue of enabling 'a director to schedule a "difficult"

or potentially unpopular play with a popular one, thus providing a greater flexibility in the choice of plays'.<sup>20</sup> In actuality, Barker's revised design served as the basis for the existing National Theatre building, which has not two but three auditoria of varying sizes and design.

### Literary Management, 1963–1973

Archer and Barker's dream of a National Theatre was not realized until 1963, when the 'new drama' they did not dare to impose on the British public had become established and had even been overtaken in terms of its 'newness'. In spite of this, the National Theatre that came to fruition was not dissimilar to the imagined theatre of Archer and Barker's *Scheme* – including the appointment of Kenneth Tynan to the role of literary manager.

Tynan, like Archer and Barker, was greatly influenced by European theatre, and he had spent some time in Germany prior to his appointment to the National, observing the work processes of the Berliner Ensemble. Having spent most of his working life as a theatre critic, he was particularly excited by the possibilities of the role of dramaturg, which he viewed as 'a natural progression from observer to active participant'.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, when he was appointed to the National he requested the job title 'dramaturg' which he hoped would confirm his role as similar to the 'play-chooser[s]' and 'semi-director[s]' he had observed while in Germany.<sup>22</sup>

The National Theatre Board's understanding of his role was somewhat different, however, and Tynan was ultimately required to drop the title 'dramaturg' because it was felt to be incompatible with the additional 'public relations' duties that had been tacked on to his job description.<sup>23</sup> Indeed it soon became clear that Tynan's hopes of functioning as a 'semi-director' were at odds with the administrative implications of his preferred title, which was understood to focus on the activity of 'generally supervising the literary side of the theatre's activities' rather than being involved in the

directorial process of making theatre.<sup>24</sup> For this reason Tynan settled upon the job title of 'literary manager', as had first been proposed by Archer and Barker over half a century earlier.

As an established theatre critic, Tynan's position within the theatre system was understood to be, necessarily, outside the theatre-making process. In 1970, for example, the editors of *Theatre Quarterly* asked:

Surely the critic is speaking for an audience that is not thus in touch [with the writers, the directors, and the actors]. Mustn't both judge theatre by its end product, the play as staged, which has nothing to do with the personalities of directors or actors or authors?<sup>25</sup>

Yet Tynan contended that it was impossible for the critic to know 'what ought to be happening in the theatre' without this kind of privileged knowledge. He also pointed to other participant-critics, such as Shaw.<sup>26</sup>

### The Limits to 'Literary Management'

Other National Theatre executives were suspicious of the artistic contributions Tynan volunteered, however, and several members of the directing staff regarded him as an 'intruder' in the rehearsal room.<sup>27</sup> William Gaskell, for example, recalls a disagreement he had with Olivier, in which he argued:

I can understand that you have to rely on Ken [Tynan]'s advice about the choice of plays. But I don't think in any circumstances he should be allowed to dictate the choice of actors. That's not his business as literary manager.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, George Devine was unhappy with Tynan's interventions during his production of Samuel Beckett's *Play* and consequently wanted him 'removed from the theatre'.<sup>29</sup> Episodes such as these indicate that Tynan's attempts at engaging with elements of the theatre-making process beyond play selection were not always successful or welcome. They also suggest a resistance to theories of and reflection on the theatre-making process, since directors such as Gaskell and Devine, following their work at the Royal Court, did not want to admit a critic into the rehearsal

room because they felt that directing is 'not a theoretical thing, but . . . [a] commitment to writers'.<sup>30</sup> Tynan posed a problem because he not only critiqued the process as well as the product of theatre-making, he was also a vocal critic of the structure underpinning the National Theatre – including matters relating to the Board.

Tynan first publicly questioned the position of the Board during a dispute over Rolf Hochhuth's *Soldiers*, which suggested that Winston Churchill had ordered the assassination of the Polish wartime leader General Sikorski. Luckhurst has described Tynan's promotion of the play as 'a deliberate attempt to force a political showdown with the Board', and the language he used in a memorandum of 1967 implied that he believed the Board's attempts to prevent its performance was akin to the actions of a 'totalitarian' regime.<sup>31</sup>

This critical analysis of the theatre-making structures and systems within the National was, perhaps not surprisingly, unwelcome. After a brief sabbatical in 1969, Tynan returned to the theatre to discover that he had been demoted from the role of literary manager to that of 'literary consultant', and that he was to share this new position with Derek Granger.<sup>32</sup> In 1973, when the Board appointed Peter Hall as Laurence Olivier's successor without consulting any member of the National's executive, Tynan once again spoke out against the Board, arguing that 'a theatrical organization is an organic thing, and must develop by evolution rather than imposition'.<sup>33</sup> In doing so, Elsom argued, 'Tynan was questioning the status and function of the Board, and, by implication, the way in which state organized and financed theatres should be run'.<sup>34</sup> His call to arms was fruitless, however, since Hall had made artistic autonomy a condition of his appointment and this led to Tynan's replacement.<sup>35</sup>

As the first officially appointed literary manager in the UK theatre, Tynan's term at the National must still be considered a landmark – particularly given the rapid increase in the appointment of literary managers and/or dramaturgs in the last few decades. And his contribution to the profession is all the more important because, through his

disputes with members of the Board and the associate directors, he tested the parameters of his role within the context of a building-based repertory theatre. Indeed, Tynan's grand ambitions to seek 'excellence' and 'a theatre of intelligent audiences' revealed the inherent possibility of the literary manager to challenge and expand theatre practice.<sup>36</sup>

That said, his problematic position within the National Theatre executive not only demonstrated the revolutionary potential of such a role, but also the limited capacity of this particular kind of theatre structure to accommodate it. As Rachel Shteir has argued, in seeking 'excellence' the dramaturg or literary manager must, by necessity, 'be oppositional . . . and it is difficult to institutionalize the oppositional'.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, Tynan's location 'betwixt and between' revealed the 'liminality' of his position both metaphorically and physically.<sup>38</sup> While he hoped for complete artistic freedom, the organizational structure of the theatre limited this. While he wanted to enter the rehearsal room, the directors wished to keep him out.

Although both personal and professional relationships frustrated Tynan's vision of what the National Theatre might become, the physical structure and working realities of the organization during this period was of benefit to him in certain respects. He worked at the National Theatre before the dedicated theatre building on the South Bank had been completed, while the National Theatre was using the Old Vic as a temporary base. This meant that Tynan worked from a makeshift Portakabin rather than an office. Conditions were cramped, but Simon Callow has argued that 'these constrictions were part of the spirit of the enterprise: the Battle of Britain feeling', and he describes the atmosphere of camaraderie in the canteen as underpinning the entire venture:

The whole company piled into that tiny space, and technicians and ushers and actors and designers and directors rubbed shoulders and shanks, squeezing together round the little tables, feeling that they were all part of the same enterprise.<sup>39</sup>

While there were obvious inadequacies to the facilities, every member of the organiza-

tion was similarly inconvenienced, and they were compelled to work as a unit in order to be effective. What Callow notes here, then, is the levelling effect of the space.

And so, while at times his borderline position left Tynan vulnerable and ineffective, the democratic arrangement of the space may have made it easier for him to agitate and interfere in all aspects of the organization's workings. In sharp contrast, the current literary department operates within a purpose-built building in which specific creative territories are delineated architecturally. This not only influences its relationship with departments whose offices are located either nearby or at a distance, it also has an impact upon their involvement in the development of new work – much of which takes place in a separate building, known as the National Theatre Studio.

### The National Theatre Takes Shape

When Denys Lasdun was selected to design a permanent home for the newly inaugurated National Theatre in 1963, his brief was to design a flexible theatre which could serve as both a proscenium and an 'open theatre' in the style of an amphitheatre. Such a design, it was thought, would enable the National to present a rich and varied repertoire since the theatre could accommodate plays requiring different styles of staging.

However, after a two-year consultation process with the 'Building Committee' (which included notable theatre-makers such as Peter Hall and Peter Brook, as well as key personnel of the National Theatre), these plans had changed substantially. Lasdun ultimately drew up plans for three stages: the Olivier, a fan-shaped 'open theatre' seating 1,150; the Lyttelton, which is a proscenium theatre with a capacity of 890; and the Cottesloe, the smallest of the three auditoria, which is a flexible space and seats up to 300. There was some disagreement as to whether a small, flexible space – in the form of the Cottesloe – was really necessary, but Lasdun settled the matter by making it indispensable architecturally. In his diaries, Hall noted:



The joke is that the South Bank Board cannot avoid having the Studio. Denys Lasdun has built it as the cornerstone of the building. The space has been created by the structure that actually holds up the two other theatres. Even if we can do nothing except put a wooden floor in this space and paint the brickwork of the walls white, it is there.<sup>40</sup>

Even at this time, the 'small' Cottesloe-to-be lay at the heart of the institution's new writing policy, for a number of reasons. First, it was thought that programming new plays, possibly by unknown writers, in such a small space would minimize the financial risk. Indeed, John Russell Brown, who replaced Tynan as literary manager in 1973, argued that: 'in the Cottesloe [the company] ought to be able to put plays on much more cheaply'.<sup>41</sup> Second, Hall, who had taken over as artistic director of the National Theatre when it moved into the new building, argued that staging new plays in larger auditoria puts 'unreasonable pressure' on the work and is 'unfair' to the playwright.<sup>42</sup>

Over the course of the National Theatre's history, this preference for staging new writing in the smallest of the three stages has become more pronounced and the Cottesloe is often viewed as a 'new writing' space. Arguably, therefore, Lasdun's design has located the Cottesloe, and 'new writing' alongside it, as both the literal and metaphorical foundation of the National's work. However, he has also ensured that new plays are often tucked away in a small corner at the very bottom of the theatre building.

### Small Stages for New Writing?

Small stages have been associated with new writing since the early decades of the twentieth century – when Archer and Barker, among others, began making the connection between the naturalistic style of the 'new drama' and a more intimate auditorium. Over the course of the twentieth century, many UK theatres have become so small that Peter Ansorge argues this has dictated the kind of new writing that is being produced:

Since the late 1970s new plays in this country have been premiered almost exclusively in small auditoria or pub theatres. . . . This has meant that

the majority of the work has been written for small spaces with tiny casts. . . . The artistic confinement has, in my view, affected the nature of the plays. The central vision has become small-scale.<sup>43</sup>

Ansorge is not alone in arguing that small stages have encouraged new writing for the theatre to become narrow, provincial, or domestic. In 2001, a group of playwrights established an organization called The Monsterists in order to challenge this assumption. Collectively, the Monsterists applied for the artistic directorships of some of the larger London theatres in order to agitate for their cause, which was to challenge the fact that new writing was being kept 'under house arrest in small black box spaces'.<sup>44</sup> The group's aim was 'to encourage theatres to encourage playwrights to explore the theatrical potential of all stages', thus implying that it was the theatre organizations (in particular literary managers and commissioning directors) who were preventing playwrights from being more ambitious.<sup>45</sup>

It may be significant that the Monsterists gathered in the National Theatre Studio, since in comparison to Ansorge's 'pub theatres' (such as the Bush, which has a capacity of 80) even the 300-seater Cottesloe can no longer be considered a 'small space'.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Sebastian Born, who has been Associate Director (Literary) of the National Theatre since 2007, argues that plays performed in the Olivier, the Lyttelton, and even the Cottesloe need big, substantial themes to sustain them in such large theatres.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Christopher Campbell, who acted as Associate Literary Manager until 2009, has argued that the National 'doesn't really have a small space . . . so it's an unusual new writer who can produce something we can do'.<sup>48</sup>

Yet the signs are that this is beginning to change. Four of the playwrights involved in the Monsterists have since had plays produced in the Olivier Theatre, and one of them, Rebecca Lenkiewicz, became the first living female playwright to have her work staged there in 2008 with *Her Naked Skin*.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, Arts Council England's report of 2009, *Writ Large: New Writing on the English Stage*, notes that between 2003 and 2009 'new



play productions [were] evenly divided between auditoria of under and over 200 seats' in the English theatre.<sup>50</sup> While the same does not apply to Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, these figures suggest that attitudes to the production of new writing are slowly changing.

Even so, the success of the Monsterists notwithstanding, there is still an important distinction here between 'new writing' and the 'new writers' Campbell refers to, and it remains unusual for the National Theatre to produce a play by an inexperienced 'new' writer in any of its spaces. Rather, the work of young and emerging writers who are still developing their craft is in an entirely separate space, known as the National Theatre Studio, which is located a short distance from the main building.

### 'New Writing' and 'New Work'

When the Old Vic was sold in 1984 (after the National moved to its dedicated building on the South Bank), the 'Annexe', which is now known as the Studio, was offered to the National on a 'peppercorn rent'.<sup>51</sup> Peter Gill, then Associate Director, began using it as a space where 'running repairs' could be done on actors who were in the repertory company, and where directors were able to experiment with plays they would like to tackle.<sup>52</sup>

According to former literary manager Jack Bradley, this space continued to evolve until it became somewhere that work could be developed before being programmed at the National. Indeed, following the Studio's refurbishment in 2007, its function as a space for development has not only been cemented, it has also been expanded to include 'physical theatre and everything . . .', as evident in recent productions including *War Horse* (2007) and *The Cat in the Hat* (2009).<sup>53</sup>

But while there is space for 'new writing' within the workings of the building, it is by no means considered to be the 'heartbeat' of the Studio.<sup>54</sup> This is evident in the distribution of space within the Studio. The building comprises two large workshop spaces which are reserved for 'set-heavy, large cast', 'digital', or 'physical exploration' develop-

ment work. While there is a smaller space for readings or short periods of rehearsal on a new script, it is not necessarily a given that writers will be provided with access to this kind of workshop – in fact, they are only guaranteed 'a desk and a computer'.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, while part of the purpose of the renovation has been 'to house under the same roof our research and development together with Archive and Education', it is significant that the literary department remains in the main building and therefore at a remove from these activities.<sup>56</sup>

Accordingly, the dichotomy between 'new writing' and 'new work' for the theatre is in-built: the National Theatre's dedicated 'workshop' space is associated with an exploratory approach to theatre-making; but the work of playwrights – and indeed of the literary department – remains predominantly office- and desk-based. Yet the very fact that playwrights are being brought in to this space and given the opportunity to 'rub shoulders and shanks' with the other artists on attachment there (which might include directors, designers, or composers) represents a degree of integration not usually possible in a theatre institution of this kind.

The inherent challenge presented by the National Theatre building, once described by its critics as 'a cumbersome Dreadnought, dubiously relevant to the twentieth century', and a 'great grey mausoleum', is its forbidding exterior and perceived inaccessibility.<sup>57</sup> This is true for audiences and prospective playwrights alike. Moreover, the literary department is deeply embedded in the organizational workings of this producing theatre – not least because of its location within the building.

Therefore, while part of the department's purpose is to act as the first point of contact for writers, it can do little more than offer playwrights it is interested in a 'cup of tea' or a 'chat'. In part, this is because there is no space to engage in anything more involved in the small, book-lined office within which it is housed; but it is also because the department must attend to its other function, which is selecting the theatre's repertoire. Consequently, the physical division between the

work of the literary department and the Studio seems to demonstrate a division that Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt have also noted in their discussion of literary management and/or dramaturgy in UK theatre.

If the literary department, as in Turner and Behrndt's definition of the literary manager, acts 'primarily [as a] literary critic and advisor', then the Studio, like the role of dramaturg, is an organization 'more likely to be oriented towards the *practical* work of production' (their italics).<sup>58</sup> And so, while Tynan effectively conflated the roles when selecting his job title in 1963, the emerging profile of the Studio creates both a physical and conceptual cleavage between the functions of literary management and dramaturgy within the institution.

But this is not necessarily a bad thing, since it has permitted the National Theatre to support and present a multiplicity of work – much of which might not otherwise have been seen on these stages. Indeed it was Archer and Barker's original intention that – eventually – the National Theatre might be capable of producing the 'new drama', and as the definition of what is 'new' shifts, it is appropriate that the institution should change in order to accommodate it. The creation of a separate space for developmental work, then, represents the institution's ability to overcome the limitations imposed on it by the original design of the building in which it is housed.

So while traditional theatre buildings are understood to support text-based theatre and non-traditional theatre spaces are seen to promote new ways of working, the National Theatre demonstrates that such distinctions cannot – need not – always be upheld. Indeed, if the building has informed the work processes and product that occur within it, the activity of individuals working within the theatre has, in turn, altered the landscape of the building.

## Notes and References

1. Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: the Semiotics of Theater Architecture* (London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 6. Carlson borrows the term 'repertory of architectural objects' from Martin Krampen, *Meaning in the Urban Environment* (London, 1979), p. 69.

2. Arts Council England, *The Next Stage: Towards a National Policy for Theatre in England* (London: Arts Council England, 2000), p. 3; Arts Council England, *Theatre Assessment 2009* (London: Arts Council England, 2009), p. 7 and 11.
3. Arts Council England, *The Next Stage*, p. 7.
4. Richard Findlater, 'The Winding Road to King's Reach' (1977), in Simon Callow, *The National: the Theatre and Its Work, 1963–1997* (London: Nick Hern, 1997).
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6. Five different sites were acquired between 1913 and 1962, when the National Theatre's position on the South Bank was finally secured.
7. Benedict Nightingale, 'In London, the National Theatre Marks a Stormy Decade', *New York Times*, 12 October 1981.
8. *The Scotsman*, 20 December 2006.
9. Scottish National Theatre Independent Working Group, *Scottish National Theatre: Final Report* (Edinburgh: Scottish Arts Council, 2001), p. 9.
10. *NT Annual Report 2005–2006* (London: Royal National Theatre, 2006), p. 10.
11. Geoffrey Whitworth, *The Making of a National Theatre* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 50–7.
12. Effingham Wilson, *A House for Shakespeare; a Proposition for the Consideration of the Nation* (London: Hurst, 1878; London: Mitchell, 1878).
13. William Archer and Harley Granville Barker, *A National Theatre: Scheme and Estimates* (London: Duckworth, 1907), p. 13.
14. Mary Luckhurst, *Dramaturgy: a Revolution in Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 40–1.
15. Archer and Barker, op. cit., p. xvii–xviii.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., p. xviii.
18. Ibid.
19. 'Granville Barker on Stage Prospects', *New York Times*, 30 March 1908.
20. John Elsom and Nicholas Tomalin, *The History of the National Theatre* (London: Cape, 1978), p. 34.
21. Dominic Shellard, *Kenneth Tynan: a Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 241.
22. Tynan, quoted in ibid.
23. Tynan was also given the function of Public Relations Officer. See Luckhurst, op. cit., p. 160.
24. 'Literary Manager for National Theatre', *The Times*, 18 March 1963.
25. Editors of *Theatre Quarterly*, 'The Critic Comes Full Circle', *Theatre Quarterly*, I, No. 2 (April 1971), p. 37–48; reprinted in Simon Trussler, ed., *New Theatre Voices of the Seventies* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 12–22, and in Bert Cardullo, *What is Dramaturgy?* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), p. 198.
26. Ibid.
27. Elsom and Tomalin, op. cit., p. 150.
28. Gaskill, quoted in ibid., p. 194.
29. Ibid., p. 195.
30. William Gaskill quoted in Gredna A. Doty and Billy J. Harbin, *Inside the Royal Court Theatre, 1956–1981: Artists Talk* (Baton Rouge; London: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), p. 74.
31. Luckhurst, *Dramaturgy: a Revolution*, p. 181; Kathleen Tynan, ed., *Kenneth Tynan: Letters* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1994).
32. Editors of *Theatre Quarterly*, op. cit., p. 201.

33. Elsom and Tomalin, op. cit., p. 235.
34. Ibid., p. 236.
35. John Goodwin, ed., *Peter Hall's Diary: the Story of a Dramatic Battle* (London: Oberon Books, 2000), p. 23. Hall recounts that he 'categorically' refused to work with Tynan.
36. Editors of *Theatre Quarterly*, op. cit., p. 200; Tynan quoted in Luckhurst, op. cit., p. 179.
37. Rachel Shteir, 'The Dramaturg's Progress', *Theatre Topics*, XIII, No. 1 (March 2003), p. 166.
38. Tynan quoted in Luckhurst, op. cit., p. 188; Victor Turner, 'Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual and Drama?', in Richard Schechner, ed., *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
39. Callow, op. cit., p. 14.
40. John Goodwin, ed., *Peter Hall's Diary: The Story of a Dramatic Battle*, p. 36.
41. Judith Cook, *The National Theatre* (London: Harrap, 1976), p. 71.
42. Ibid., p. 45.
43. Peter Anson, quoted in David Edgar, ed., *State of Play: Playwrights on Playwriting* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 39.
44. Colin Teevan, 'Monsterism: a Manifesto', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, XVI, No. 2 (2006), p. 241.
45. Ibid., p. 240.
46. The capacity of the theatre is to be increased as part of the planned renovations following Lloyd Dorfman's £10 million endowment. The theatre will be renamed the Dorfman Theatre in 2014.
47. Sebastian Born, interviewed for National Theatre, 'Literary Department: Overview', *Discover: Online*. Available from <<http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/38382/literary/literary-department-overview.html>> accessed 29 April 2010.
48. Christopher Campbell, interview with the author, 6 March 2007.
49. The plays were: David Eldridge, *Market Boy* (2006); Rebecca Lenkiewicz, *Her Naked Skin* (2008); Richard Bean, *England People Very Nice* (2009); and Moira Buffini, *Welcome to Thebes* (2010). Roy Williams and Ryan Craig, also of the Monsterists, have had work staged in the Cottesloe.
50. Arts Council England, *Writ Large: New Writing on the English Stage* (London: Arts Council England, 2009), p. 6.
51. Nicholas Wright, 'The Studio: the Gift of Renewal', available from <[www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/11240/departamental-profiles/the-studio.html](http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/11240/departamental-profiles/the-studio.html)> accessed 21 November 2008.
52. Jack Bradley, interview with the author, 7 March 2007.
53. Wright, op. cit.
54. Ibid.
55. Purni Morrell, interviewed for National Theatre, 'The Studio Building', *Discover: Online*. Available from <[www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/40638/studio/thestudio-building.html](http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/40638/studio/thestudio-building.html)> accessed 2 November 2010; Natasha Buchnor, interview with the author, 8 March 2007. Buchnor was Studio Manager at this time.
56. National Theatre, *NT Annual Report 2005–2006*, (London: National Theatre, 2006) p. 9.
57. *The New Statesman*, quoted in Peter Lewis, *The National: a Dream Made Concrete* (London: Methuen, 1990), p. 92; Simon Callow, op. cit., p. 34.
58. Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2008), p. 124.