CHALLENGING LANGUAGE

Challenging Language was a one day laboratory held 23 January '99 at the Jerwood Space, in response to a call from theatre writers to explore new processes of writing theatre.

It was an initiative of **writernet** (formerly New Playwrights Trust - npt) and funded by the Arts Council of England and London Arts Board.

The form of the lab' concentrated on enabling practice to be explored through method led sessions on four different processes.

A series of provocateurs had previously been identified, representing disciplines from performance writing through text projection to dance and film. These were invited to make three minute contributions, called upon by the chair at appropriate points.

Following the sessions, and provocations, participants split into eight groups to focus concerns important to their practice in the light of the day's activity.

These concerns were reported back to a plenary. Finally a number of participants were asked to share a reflection on their personal experience of the day.

This document chronicles the main activity and arguments of the day. It has been compiled by London Arts Board, Theatre Writing Associate, Tony Craze.

Note on definitions

Challenging Language questioned implicit definitions of often used words in the theatrical vocabulary - and the understandings/perceptions associated with those definitions. In the recording of the discussions which followed each presentation where the words below are used with the definitions given, they are printed Roman where the definition is different, broader, they are printed *Italic*. Context should indicate to the reader more specific understanding of the definition intended.

language

- the words, their pronunciation, and the methods of combining them, used and understood by a considerable majority
- form or manner of verbal expression writer
- one that writes (language) especially as a business or occupation writing
- to form characters, letters or words on a surface (as paper) (as with a pen) story
- narrative account; report; anecdote; fib narrative
- something that is narrated narrate
- to recite, relate, tell the details of (as a story) (Merriam Webster)

Introduction 1

writernet director, Jonathan Meth outlined the needs expressed
by writers for a demystification of processes adopted when
making theatre work which did not conform to 'a traditional
play'.
At successive events (Developing Theatre Language RNT'96,
Commissioning the Future, npt @ Young Vic '97J concern had
been voiced to develop work outside traditional structures, yet
there existed little infrastructural provision for practitioners to do
so
The growing interest of writers to work and engage with
current interdisciplinary practice was further evidenced by the
increasing HE/FE courses offering writing for performance
elements.
Promotion of a more inclusive approach to writing for theatre
performance would ultimately serve to revitalise performance
and attract new audiences.

Introduction 2

Ruth Ben-Tovim, chairing, expressed her hope that the day
would be one of challenges; of inspiration; and of shared
ownership.
She asked, if writing 'steeps the times', might not old (text
based) language inhibit new (writing) forms reflective of times-
new; and might this call for a reassessment of 'writing', and possible repositioning of
the 'the writer' ... a re-evaluation of the dynamic between author and audience: where
context (of presentation) is all important, and where relationships in that context are
constantly in a process of re-permutation ...

She hoped the work to be presented might be regarded as outline maps of journeys
already taken in such a process, each pointing up landmarks, to assist others
negotiating similar terrain.

Now.here

background

Since '93, Director Orit Azaz has worked in mixed media, site specific collaborations. In '97 she directed a show, *Prophecy*. with **NoFit State Circus**, a large scale mixed media circus theatre performance in a Cardiff warehouse as the first phase of the larger *SteppingStones to the Millennium* project.

Now.here, the second phase, was then developed with many of the community groups which had taken part in the first show.

Prophecy, 'written' with Andy Rashleigh, while successful as an interdisciplinary spectatcle was 'somewhat conventional' in its narrative structuring, with solid, separate, 'talking areas', linking visual spectacle scenes, rather than an integration of spectacle /multi-media with narrative structure. This then became part of the brief for the new show, *Now.here*.

presentation
(video)

Now.here takes place in an 18.000 sq ft warehouse transformed for this promenade, total theatre event: audiences arrive and are immediately immersed in visual and audio visual works, interactive installations, and with live characters exploring the themes of the show (of nowness and living in the moment)...this evolves into the world of the performance … the action taking place at various levels through a large scale, sci-fi hospital set … in which a man, not wanting to live, sees his life flashing past him … the opportunities he turned down because of fear ... here played out through a multi-disciplinary design which includes circus elements, large screen film & video club-like music, singing (live and simultaneously filmed), dance and digital imagery ...

 ... the viewer (as audience member) acts as a camera focusing individual continuities from amidst the wealth of action which includes the swell of this vast, constantly moving audience ... On his death bed, the man may still have time to save the day - to live again if he can find the courage to walk the tightrope ... as the clocks tick on, and the entire community becomes caught in the action of fire eaters and wild dancers, and the dangers of anarchy and unpredictability . . .

process

August 98. Azaz is approached as a freelance director by NoFit
State Circus, following the latter's successful A4E bid. Building
on the previous show, she is asked to direct another large scale
community show with the following aims:

- to create a new language for large scale circus theatre,
integrating mixed media elements with narrative structures

- to create a populist show of high quality for a non theatre
public

- to involve local groups in initiating ideas, and in the devising of content for the show
(thus offering them 'training')

- to create and devise the show in collaboration with design and technology disciplines

- to perform the show with a core of professionals, and 250 community members

- to present first performance within three months of conception

Late August. Azaz and No Fit Circus conceive abstract themes as a starting point

- nowness

- living in the moment
'Live each day as if it were your last. You may be living for the
last time '

Azaz next takes a decision to commission a writer. The writer's brief is to integrate
performance(s) and circus disciplines to a simple story.

September. director and writer agree a research & development brief, to be sent to all
community workshop leaders, and design teams. This outlines the themes, and possible
exploration of them.

For example, nowness might be explored through pleasure/pain; living in the moment
through instinctual/logical conflicts.

October. Community groups, usually meeting once weekly, spend two weeks arriving at ideas from which to start a devising process.

Azaz and Rashleigh are presented with the selected themes, and a partly determined structural input from the jigsaw of different community groups up for collaboration. The writer would later speak of working with 'a crossword puzzle of inputs'

Azaz and Rashleigh create a five page story structure and story-board

'We were structuring the ideas of the story - not character, not endings; things like which sections would advance through dance, which through video.'

Environmental, set, and overall spatial design of the 18.000 sq ft space is planned.

November. Community groups now spend two weeks devising from the agreed starting points.

Director and writer next recce their way around these 20 as yet ill-fitting jigsaw pieces. Both are committed to an integral reflection of each workshop; direction is nonetheless given: exploration of how to be a corpse, for example, is overlaid with a notion of 'lost loved ones' ... This enables some elements to be anticipated, and accommodated together when envisaging a whole.

Azaz and Rashleigh spend a weekend evolving the jigsaw pieces into a coherent storyboard. Writer spends the following week completing a first draft from London.

'The script was 15-16 pages ... trying to find a working language, knowing the simple works (in the context). I'd seen the previous - year's show. I knew the problem was how to use words in a large space, in a space where text really does become the least exciting of all elements'.

The script also contained spaces ... 'I don't know what happens here ... Sherman Youth Theatre do something here ... '

The director meantime spends a week working with the core professional team of designers, technicians and workshop leaders

Just three weeks before opening, the script is faxed to Cardiff, and a week is then spent in casting.

There follows a two-week, on-site rehearsal period, with a core performing team of 20 professional and semi-professional circus and theatre artists around the first draft endeavouring to find an ensemble style. The main cast is blocked during the day; the

community groups work in the evening.

The writer returns to London after three days of rehearsal (due to limited budget). From London he will write more and fax this to Cardiff.

Technicals are conducted over two days with the full media and technical team, gathered together with the 250 cast for the first time.

A week of performances follow the first night

discussion

Given that the brief had been to create a new language for large scale circus theatre, integrating mixed media elements with narrative structures, the suggestion initially came that the principal writing was not of text, nor even performance, but had taken place in the design of the space.

Azaz agreed that the audience experience came principally through their reception of the environment, which had been conceived with the environment director and theatre designer. Conception was concerned equally with aesthetics and logistics of circus rigging. It was a process fundamental to the story the audience received, designed before the story was written, and one in which the writer had had no involvement.

The implicit suggestion was that the story with which audience members were really engaged was predominant over any unfolding narrative penned by the writer.

It was asked, 'Where had the writing actually taken place?'

Azaz pointed out that standard working practices, where a director may be hired for six weeks, and a writer for three, must mitigate against a shared authorship of a work. If a director was also following a storyboard process, together with working alongside other disciplines, then the theatre created must become textual: composed of mood, imagery and tone, elements which will all determine the story being told. The written narrative will form but one strand of this story.

'Yes, I understood my role as writer,' commented Rashleigh, yet expressed desire for more control on what community groups came up. 'Occasionally their work could not be dramatically justified. It wasn't an issue of the writer as control freak.'

Where community groups didn't like the work (Rashleigh's words) they were free to 'fiddle' with them. 'Yet if the work was spoken, the assumption was made it was mine.'

Within the issues then raised of the writer seeking a high quality to his work, set against the director's acceptance of a rough theatre; and shared ownership (through which writing had actually taken place) - lay the real challenges to definitions of both writing and writer.

provocation (1)

Louise Warren (constantly moving around the studio) presented a (traveling) image of a writer writing for promenade theatre ... of narratives that travel, where nothing stops still, where the audience has to move with the action; where the narrative is never fixed; yet where the journey is always interesting ... and all in an exterior environment, where danger may lurk; where anarchy might rein; where there is no code of audience conduct; where there can be little that is precious; little that will not be disrupted by rain or dogs or squirrels ... to consider writing a narrative which allows for reflection, yet is not episodic; which also contains possibilities of non linear structures; in which even an audience may be fragmented before being reunited again ... to consider a narrative in which the structure reflects the exterior site; a narrative to be told with the light going down, in the dark, outside

Theatre composed of such elements she suggested must inevitably raise questions of overall authorship, and thus of the position of the writer ...

K3 Kinder Kunst Korporation Workshop

background

Roney Fraser-Munro is an artist engaged with text, theatre, music, photography, video and digital interface. **K3 Kinder Kunst Korporation** is a group of individuals who combine art forms to produce contemporary multi media art. Their concerns are a re-appraisal of creativity, individual expression and politic(s).
Participants/collaborators in the K3 Digital Theatre ™ workshop with Fraser-Munro were Nuriko Aida, Delroy Williams and Duwayne.
Munro outlined the objective of the 3-day workshop the Company had undergone prior to this presentation: to develop three different ideas for digital theatre performance - all in the knowledge that a showing of the process and presentation of work thus far done, would take place at the end of the period

**presentation 1.
(live/slide/film)**

The audience sits end-on in the studio facing a wall on which there's a large slide projection of billboards In front of this sits a man. A digitised image fragmented into tiny squares which vibrate continually of the same man, but seated now on a park bench, is seen on a screen, to the right of the projected slide(s) There is music track over. In live action the man speaks: a monologue giving mood and information (contextualising, and contextualised by the screen images). He is a 'business man', perhaps crushed by the markets, perhaps homeless now; yet who still has a dream of flying …

presentation 2.

The slides projected are of bleached urban images; film runs on the screen: Piccadilly at night, views of London from an outsider position. Seated between film screen and slide projections is a woman. In sound-over a question is asked of her. The dialogue is between a daughter (on screen and live) and a mother on audio. She responds live, her text giving a sense of her socio-economic predicament, serving as introduction to this homeless, beaten character …

presentation 3.

A younger (Black) man is seated foreground of projected slides, while on the screen, pre-recorded computer generated imagery is shown depicting an image of a little, (White) boy in different contexts (in a bedroom, in a bathroom). The man is conducting an interview with this on screen character adding another dimension to our understanding of the live information given. At other times, the screen gives factual information which contextualises the live text of the man, questioning, challenging notions and perceptions of Black fatherhood ... Music-over (*Money Can't BUY Me Love*)finally ends the presentation.

process:

Day one. The Company played with ideas, composing statements on where they were in their lives, how they saw aspects of the world ... Statements were next selected as starting point for a text - but with the statement set down from an opposite view point, thus suggesting an inherent dialectic.

Munro then introduced the technique of the alter ego: one of commenting on and questioning the statement. Improvising the statements in the voice of a character other than the performer, for example, instantly involves changes of wording, and the process thus enables performers to pull away from the personal. The spirit of the original statement falls away, and the foundation of a new character is laid, ready for development.

Next the statement is extended into an exploratory text (such as had been presented). The Company emphasise the process is one of giving birth to characters, from which theatre might emerge ...

Day two. While text was still being worked on, each artist began to add in visuals, background sound, locations ... projection was conceived as a virtual set, with sound over enhancing the dimension of the world of performance.

The entire filming, photography, and computerisation was executed by the artists (with only assistance being brought in only on editing). Each artist emerged from the process with a (separate) blueprint for individual development.

discussion:

A digital theatre inevitably implies a (different) language, and a
writing process that is not traditional - both determining
alternative structures for content.

Initial discussion however was raised as to how the process had
served story - on the identification of the story being told . . .
was it the psychological dilemma of (especially Fraser-Munro's)
character?

It was suggested that story was (always) needed to provide
coherent experience; and further it gave the dramatic shape
which effectively formed the vehicle for any theatrical
collaboration. Fraser-Munro challenged this 'white, Western
take' on story rationale, as one which - taken as the

predominant element- was likely to restrict creation.

It was then suggested the 'story received', had been relayed
(in addition to the narrative told) by the montage of fragmentary
elements of text, audio and visual mediums, and indeed the 3
separate manifestations seen one following another; by the
fusion, within each audience member of all elements together.

In which case it was asked, 'When is the writing happening?' raising questions both of
technician as author, and of technical restrictions impacting on structure.

It was acknowledged that the process of technical collaboration could often be
technology led, rather than technology serving a theatre process. This was because of
limited dialogue between technicians and artists.

'How can writers work in digital theatre if their knowledge of digital technology is
limited?'

Given the same starting points, Fraser-Munro suggested between artists and
technicians, the structure of any work will be informed by all disciplines, leading to a
'multi-lingual' work coming together.

provocation (2)

Michael Atavar (known for his work on the internet) read from a text which envisaged a
world where there was no theatre; thank God; just the artist, and (net) server; no
middle man; no curators, no National; no RSC, no producers. Where there was sound and
light, and movement and text; an integrated language without boundaries. Where there
was no Mozart, no monoliths; no page, no pencil, no ink . . .

Atavar's presentation of an (envisaged) world was one in which a global culture was
ever changing, never static. In conclusion, he signed off: www.atavar.com/atavar/

provocation (3)

Maxine Doyle spoke of language as 'an articulated and codified system which provokes
response and presents artistic intention ... that is dance.' Indeed one critic had recently
acknowledged her as writer/choreographer. The body becomes her tool of expression
as she works with bodies (dancers) to compose an appropriate language ... yet if
movement artists also choose to include a non-physical language in their work, she
asked, what is the role of that writer: will that writer move beyond the traditional
assumptions of their role? She outlined a workshop in which writing tasks had been set
in order to generate text to be used as a stimulus to create dance. Results were

unremarkable When the process was reversed, with words set down in response to dance improvisation. the (text) results were remarkable. She asked where had the primary writing taken place (and in which language)?

Like Candyfloss

background

Jade was set up by Victoria Worsley in'92, in an endeavour to work with processes which resolved advantages and disadvantages experienced in both performance/ devising, and new writing/script processes.

Devising process advantages included visual/plastic awareness in making work for the stage; ability of improvisation to throw up spatial and visceral 'texts'; the collaborative nature of inputs. Disadvantages included overall lack of time, lack of gestation and redrafting; lack of ownership.

New writing process advantages included longer time periods; supplied story; clear ownership. The disadvantages included work written for the page; limitation on use of different elements of theatre language.

Jade then makes an ongoing commitment to working with a writer in development of any work, bringing others into the very process of writing.

Like Candyfloss, had begun with informal discussions in the summer of 97 (following the writer's observation of a performer warming up - in fact crooning - on a previous Jade show; an observation a writer may rarely come by with another company); together with inspiration drawn from the film *South Pacific.*

The team involved in those early discussions was that which had worked on the previous show (*Grace*) - Worsley, writer Sarah Woods, and director Theresa Heskins.

**presentation
(video)**

The video presented a montage of a week long workshop process developing scenes and songs, examining theatre techniques, developing skills and expertise of different practitioners in relation to the project.

The company is seen being led in a Feldenkrais movement session, a paper tearing session; projectionist Friess examines projections into water, water droplets, smoke, through two-way mirrors; designer Prabhavalkar explores ways of controlling focus, using revolving pieces, viewing scenes through frames lighting designer Balfour looks at colour washes; composer Sodergren leads the company in playing stylistically with song, as torch song, as melodrama, as conversation.

The writer, Woods, noticeably moves through action, instigating, suggesting, notating - seeking a language to combine the different styles.

process

December '97. Sarah Woods is commissioned and develops a treatment with Jade's artistic directorate.

January '98. A three day workshop involving writer, director, performers and movement director explores the three characters around whom the story will revolve.

'I was interested in looking at the physicality of age, and how different individuals inhabit different ages at different points (in their lives). I was also interested in change - of age, of style, changes from text into song and out again, set changes, all forms of transformation'.

February-October'98. The play is developed through meetings with director and Victoria Worsley, with movement director Dawson, and with composer Sodergren. A musical begins to formulate.

October '98. A week long (LAB funded workshop) is held (subject of the video shown). Woods goes into the workshop with 'bits of scenes, a song, a strong sense of the characters

I had a shopping list of areas - I wanted to check on those
elements I didn't know about - music - movement. Other things
arose, things I hadn't planned for, which I used.'

December '98. Woods delivers the first draft.

(A 2nd and 3rd draft will be produced and the score will be
developed alongside. Rehearsals begin at the end of June)

discussion:

Like Candyfloss, it was suggested, would clearly be received and experienced through
spoken text, design, performance, movement and mood ... all combining to a language
which had determined the form of the work itself.

The writing process was perhaps one of an initial creation period, followed by an
inscription or encoding period (fused with a writer's traditional skills - not least of
creative story telling & structuring) followed by decoding/rehearsal period.

On day one of rehearsal there is a text, a script, and a traditional rehearsal period
begins. But that shouldn't disguise the fact that all the production potential is held
within the script. It is not tacked on ...

Identification of the different elements held within the script was sought. Was the
collaboration truly evolutionary, or had it served a prescriptive vision? If the former,
how much of the workshop had fed into the draft, and indeed was Woods still the
authorial voice (or writer)?

Woods spoke of her process as a far harder one than a relationship with only the page;
it was a constant process of taking from everyone; of traveling, and of being
challenged.

The director, Theresa Heskins, stated Woods was (in rehearsal) entirely flexible on
production aspects of a script (elements she had taken on from the development
period); but far less so with regard to her scripted, spoken text - suggesting perhaps
that traditional credit such as 'Written by ... ' or 'New play by ... ', would if used imply
greater responsibility for the work than accurately reflected the process.

provocation (4)

Marc Von Henning, observing he had been blessed with a slow and limited imagination,
together with an obsessive nature, outlined (one of) his obsessions: writing on two
levels

- the physical
- the page

As a director he considered language on a page dead matter, if it had no life outside the theatre. His interest, rather than using theatre to interpret language (text), was to collide text (often written with a non theatre function) and (physical) theatre. 'The impact is where the collisions are - literature and theatre make for a good fighting battle. I necessarily serve that battle.'

provocation (5)

Jyll Bradley (reflecting perhaps on the ever-changing context between audience and performer) declared that she had jettisoned a carefully planned presentation in the course of the morning, in favour of a different idea; and then over lunch, in co-authorship with David Tse, devised still another. This was to lead the assembled participants in a rendering of the song, 'In An English Country Garden '.

Hearing Things

background

Aaron Williamson is a performance artist, choreographer and writer. Profoundly deaf, over the last 10 years he has evolved a physical approach to realising texts and live events.

Hearing Things is a performance and installation, produced in collaboration with Shinkansen, drawing from the idea of the Greek Oracle - where oracles in the form of non-verbal, and incoherent gibberish were received. These would be verbally interpreted to give guidance on matters of the day.

The work uses equipment (the electronic Oracle) which is primed with intentionally ill-set 'probability models' of linguistic recognition in order to mis-recognise and re-present the audible sounds in the space as a continuous stream of speech. The text of this accidental creative mis-hearing is conveyed through a scrolling light projection. An audience is thus confronted with a total distortion - a digital recast of sounds. While they generate text through their sounds (overheard by a microphone), they can interpret the results, as an Oracular response to their interventions.

presentation
(live/computer   generated)

In the studio a microphone stands on a long, hanging scroll
of paper which stretches down the studio-centre. Overhead
a scrolling light projector beams down words, phases in a
square on the scroll of paper.

that the near
attend is this
and to have no
than rich and
than than than

The microphone is pointed to the audience; as they make sounds, so the text, in
response, blinks, and new lines of words are generated and scrolled up.

attend is this
than rich and
than than than
than this and

Williamson appears from behind the hanging scroll, moving toward the audience,
dressed entirely in white, on his back carries a model of a huge 'hearing ear'. The
projected text scrolls up in response to the sounds he makes as he struggles to walk
under the weight of the 'hearing ear'.

Williamson in turn interprets, distils and incorporates this text into his performance,
thus generating further text.

His voice sounds in response to this further text as he frees himself from the weight of
his load, and then begins briefly, 'a dialogue' through the microphone with the
projector.

He lifts 'the hearing ear'. Ink seeps from the centre. The projected text scrolls up again
in response to his sounds/cries, to his tearing of the paper scroll ... he fuels, toys with,
and strains the equipment's capacity for Hearing Things through his intensely physical,
body urged performance.

The audience is invited to begin a dialogue with the projected text.
'The rain in Spain ... ' says someone and the text square replies

than than than

process/discussion

Williamson 'listened' to the discussion via a keyboard operator, who would transcribe questions by way of encoding them onto a syllable keyboard, through to software which then decoded the syllables back into words, and so scrolled up the conversation on the laptop screen.

Williamson outlined how he moved through a process which often began with a written exploration in words (if not a prompt script); he nonetheless regarded the physical performance as 'one-with writing ... '

Williamson's real process, he suggested, was one with his performance. There was no separation. The writing was in the performance.

'The performance marks a re-possession of language through the body'.

It was asked then whether the language of performance was a concise enough one to tell its story; and whether an audience must understand that *story*?

Williamson stated that he performs his work, and an audience impacts against it - rarely without some rationale drawn from known contextualisation - but still communication of story in performance is primarily on the immediate, physical level.

While there is rehearsal, much of the performance is live [improvised), allowing it to retain that primary spark which allows 'spaces for a language to arise' through which an audience can be in dialogue with the performer.

This dialogue also constitutes the writing, as effective upon any audience member, as performance working from a rehearsed script.

'In unscripted work, the script is there, awaiting inscription. . . '

Williamson accepts he is not the exclusive writer. In a system primed with intentionally ill-set probability models of linguistic recognition, so that it offers phrases in (deliberate) mis-response to actions or utterances, themselves an interpretation of a previous text (mis)-response, the question must arise: who is *writing* this work?

In Williamson's work, it was suggested, the very *language* is written live in the moment of performance.

provocation (6)

Alaric Sumner read from a construction of spliced up texts
(a piece he will further develop for an actor). The framework
was a letter: '*Dear Augustine . . .*' which commented on the text
being developed, yet denied the value of a theatre of

association ... in favour of 'the voice of measured time ... ' - a measure well exemplified
in the associated splice-ups which formed the text of the letter itself. Questions on the
identification of 'the author' of the work were implicit ...

provocation (7)

the address (David Ellis & Richard Kilgour) performed a
multi media essay (*Ezekiel's Tongue*) exploring the nature of
language and words, and their relationship to boundaries of
perception. The vehicle for this was a four minute collage of
sound and music, stills, and live text (edited on site) commenting
on, and in response to, the Dec 98 bombing of Iraq.

Christmas lights over Bagdad.
Tracer-fire, airburn, striations blue.
RED SKY IN THE MORNING SHEPHERDS WARNING
TRAFFIC LIGHTS TURN FROM AMBER TO GREEN

(CNN describes as stoical Bagdadians who observe the
international highway code, who do not express ROAD RAGE)

Subtitled 'Pentagon Poetics' (THE DEAD RHYTHMS OF
CRIMINAL, DEVIANT SYNTAX), the essay commented on the
inherent contextualisation of certain) language use, and thus its
power to frame perception(s).

report backs

Report backs followed small-group discussion which took place
after the presentation sessions and provocations.

group C

Questioned the text as a starting point: was this an irritation to work against, to move beyond the form? The group proposed a script in different formats: as description of ideas to be explored with others - with the writer involved with the process as facilitator to other disciplines.

group A

Explored the necessity to explore a language which reflected experience of the world now; and whether working collaboratively or alone, of the importance of allowing the influence of the audience to challenge the artist's aesthetic.

group D

Focused on the idea (as distinct from the form) as starting point - especially in work with new technologies. It argued for work driven by content; work which pulled in, rather than pushed out. It believed it was vital to focus what was to be said, before deciding on the form of how to say it.

(Discussion ensued from the first three report backs).
  - was a redefinition of the role of writer being called for? would any definition of role lead to a restrictive compartment-alisation, or was 'a collaboration of specialists being called for'?
  - can form not be content? The way in which you want to speak, is what you want to say. The argument was likened to the architectural conundrum: does form follow function or vice versa?
  - it was suggested writers writing 'the play' were actually putting form first; yet it was a form which increasingly did not serve the ideas (content) to which audiences responded. If what is to be said expresses contemporary experience, is it not better said in contemporary forms and structures? …

group B

Focused on the idea of co-authorship and the degree to which audiences were a part of any production ... it suggested there was a fear surrounding the definition of writer. Writers writing with a 'new tool box', enabling them to converse with all elements of

theatre language were less likely to be feared.

group E

Also focused on authorship and the process of collaboration;
on the wide range of opportunities for the writer within such a
process- with those opportunities dependent only on the
definition of writer, from editor of words to overall structuralist.
The group explored ideas of writing beyond text; through the
body; in the spatial; of text belonging behind the work, rather than wrapping it up ... in
new theatre work it was suggested creation will come from across a broad spectrum of
inputs.

reflections

The chair did not seek to sum up the day's activity. She asked a number of participants
to simply reflect back on their experience of the day.

reflection (1)

(Steve Gilroy): 'There's been so much energy here - looking for definition; people
wanting to articulate - and yet a lack of cohesion - which may be a good thing: if we all
agreed would there be such rich diversity?'

reflection (2)

(Cath Kilcoyne): 'As a writer I do rather than write. I'm involved with the processes of
others. I enjoy meeting others and being challenged by ideas. And from today I shall
take away strength - I may be struggling with the issues but I'm not in isolation.'

reflection (3)

(Peader Kirk): 'What's been questioned is what writing is. We've seen the different
spaces in which writing occurs. Where does writing reside? In the 'writing', or in the
making, or in a cross-over?'

reflection (4)

(Delroy Williams): 'I've been surprised by the lack of real 'diversity' I see - and by the
resistance to changing the traditional role of the writer. I thought the process was
about challenging language.'

reflection (5)

(Louise Warren): 'I feel I've had enough of words. I want to release language. I want to let everything settle and compost. I don't want any more language.'

Ruth Ben Tovim concluded, taking a cue from Peter Brook, speaking of ideas as having 'a quality of thisness'; and of the importance of being open to the thisness of each idea

- of individual roles
- of others
- of the different ways thisness can express itself
- of the thisness of this meeting
- of language ... challenged.

credits

Challenging Language was originally stimulated by the book Writing Live and thanks go to its contributors: Ruth Ben Tovim, Ben Payne and editor John Deeney.

Thanks also go to advisors on the project:

Tony Craze at London Arts Board, also for documentation Andrea Phillips at the Arts Council of England Lois Keidan at Keidan/Ugwu

to Roney Fraser-Munro for images

to Richard Lee and all at the Jerwood Space

to all the process presentation teams, artist provocateurs, facilitators and especially to Chair, Ruth Ben Tovim

to Goldsmiths College for their patience and encouragement

to the New Writing Working Group of London Arts Board and the Combined Arts Department at the Arts Council of England who funded the event.

For Shinkansen:
Performance and installation conceived & devised by Aaron Williamson
Process Direction by Ghislaine Boddington
Production Management by Estelle Neveux Marketing and Touring by Debbi Lander
Digital Applications by Andrew Ward
Executive Production by shinkansen

For New Playwrights Trust/writernet:
Challenging Language was conceived and produced by
Jonathan Meth
Technical Management by Adam Crosthwaite
Administrative Support from Kate Hall and Emma Reeves.