

#FE365

30 TEXTS FOR 30 YEARS

FE 365

30 TEXTS FOR 30 YEARS

1604 - Hard year and deficient in crops.
1605 - Flood everywhere.
1607 - Nothing written down
1616 - Air strikes and 15 mile exclusion zone

From *Hidden J* (1993)

Through 2014 Forced Entertainment made an open call for people to submit texts describing, thinking around, considering, marking or in any way remembering the company's work in the three decades from its beginning in 1984 to the thirtieth year of its' endeavours in 2014.

The only rule for these texts was that they be exactly 365 words long, the final objective being to make a selection of texts totaling 10,950 words, one word for each day of the group's collective work in the field of contemporary performance.

We invited Deborah Chadbourn (founder member of Forced Entertainment and now Executive Director of Music in the Round) to make the selection, collaborating with the writer/performance maker Deborah Pearson and artist/director Hester Chillingworth (GETINTHEBACKOFTHEVAN). The selection of texts they picked out, with an introduction from Deborah Chadbourn, can be found here. At the back of the book you can also find a fragmentary afterword by Tim Etchells.

Our thanks are to everyone that contributed to this project (whether selected here or not) – the responses we had were amazing, touching, surprising and a great, intimate tribute to the strength and impact of the company's work and the lines of connection that are drawn through it. Our thanks are also due to everyone - UK and far further afield - that has made the last thirty years possible for us, so worthwhile and so inspiring.

We don't know what the fourth decade of our work will bring but we do know that it will take place in a difficult political and economic climate – global resource scarcity, European austerity, the turn to the right and rising xenophobia are not the same bleak landscape that we started in, but those converging forces do have more than a ring of familiarity. It's tough times like these that need challenging art, questions, new forms and new answers – we hope that our work, however it shifts and changes, will play a part in that process, and that the dialogues we've established will long continue to grow.

FORCED ENTERTAINMENT

— INTRO

Fuck it. People have written some very clever, personal things in response to the invitation to comment on 30 years of Forced Entertainment. Informed, intelligent observations on the work, responses to shows and theories about them take their place alongside tales of individual journeys from then (whenever it was) to now, and accounts of how the work, the company, or individuals from it, have featured in, influenced or otherwise disrupted people's lives.

Each of the texts says something particular about its contributor; some are anecdotal, referring to cities, landscapes, boyfriends and girlfriends, some are academic, theorising about performance or theatre, some are poetic, creative texts inspired by the work. There's the sound of rain, references to politics, to place, to language, to the world of theatre, to being there – or not.

Some words inevitably make repeated appearances: failure, flawed, messy, broken, crap, death, history, funny, beautiful, love and audience; a lot of contributors say 'thank you.'

The decision to mark thirty years is perhaps arbitrary, the rule to limit the texts to 365 words and to pick thirty of them follows as an arbitrary rule, I wonder what exactly are we marking here? But I don't think pinning it down is really the point. Each of the texts celebrates something slightly different; enduring creativity, complexity, simplicity, a set of lives unfolding over time, a commitment to making work but not making life or theatre easy.

For Deborah Pearson, Hester Chillngworth and I, making this selection was a challenge; each text was subjective, our perspectives were different, and achieving a coherent selection was always a matter of balancing different kinds of responses.

Taken together, the texts show us how people have made and continue to make a visceral, intellectual and emotional connection with Forced Entertainment, and the difference that connection has made to them. It also shows us that the creative work of a group of people like this does not exist in, or emerge from a vacuum. It exists as part of a conversation, as part of a shared need to respond to, map, and change the times we live in, a need collectively expressed by promoters, supporters, academics, other artists and, most importantly, by audiences.

DEBORAH CHADBURN

Co-founder of Forced Entertainment, Executive Director, Music in the Round

...shouting, berating, destroyed by the absolute *Quizoola!* & signage of the universe, blundering as a gorilla across some space in Sheffield or Clapham—stunned into momentary silence by the accusation “Are you acting?” exhausted from asking these infinite questions of the real but in a dead boring voice —disheartened by waves spooks ladders two dimensional trees—dismayed by prospects of costume or the piano or twins or the sheer number of functions of the disaster—but then immediately caught in a moment of ineradicable “beauty” you could neither have predicted before nor retrodicted an instant later (in that you might ask yourself Did that really happen? & in all honesty only answer yourself that it both did & didn’t, or might have, might really just have)— & anyway by now something new is always already happening—it is a angel made transiently out of the howling woman dragged across the shiny left hand corner of things--or blood ribbons--or the man in the imaginary box by the garment rail puzzledly electrocuting or hanging himself--while his friend struggles out of a pair of trousers whose utter urban anonymity suggests they could only belong to Death—to the simple haunting of Death by itself, the Trousers of Death, Death’s curiously diffident voice & cautious musing about the failure of things & their falling-away— & someone else is tearing paper & then everyone changes their costumes & starts talking about shit-- & the audience are walking out or laughing really loud-- & you don’t know how many ironies are involved here but everything is as perfect & as fast as it could be & there is this rich smile on your face thereafter & you are less afraid in your life than you were before-- or more afraid--here in this civic centre near Mars or Doncaster-- with its abandoned chest freezer, its industrial spaces, shiny brick, revealed ventilation systems & portholed institutional blue fire doors marked KEEP SHUT, where they clear the bar before 9:30 with the rhetorical question, “Will anyone else want a drink?” leaving only the Christine Keeler chairs of a forgotten future to pock & dimple a poured resin floor...

MIKE HARRISON

I should like theatre, but no way don’t. Nevertheless, attraction lingers: the dolling up and acting out, the spooky scalloped curtains, make-up and make-believe, the twinkling lights that can (just occasionally) reflect some memory of that momentary gleam in the eye of a lost loved one. All that.
But no.

Artists close to my heart have struggled with theatre. Artaud, Genet, Lorca had as good a go as was imaginable. It is hard to avoid the conclusion they were, respectively, incarcerated, imprisoned, assassinated by their posh and proper audience. In

retrospect, and perhaps sadly, they were each more personally fitted to the more solitary medium of poetry.

I can think of few congregations I would rather not find myself marooned amongst than the straight-laced, stuck-up, supposedly sophisticated theatre lot. Also, the breakaway potentially liberating form of fine art performance, a theatre medium jealous of fine art's waywardness, has more often than not thrown away the narrative profundity with the facepaint façade.

So, Forced Entertainment?

It's a mix-up attempting to counter a fix-up. It's a crackpot collage, an assemblage, a mode of mess around. Thank God they're pretentious, and who they pretend to be is just maybe, might be (hopefully) who they are, or one day will be.

Their larking about transformed into high art is Beckett gone bonkers. Over the years they have made their erratic mark. What? Audacious and daft. Up to no good. Equally capable of aggravating and enervating. Their costumes can be crap, their acting embarrassingly self-conscious, their sets cardboard cutouts. Of course they mean it that way. Disbelief is stressed rather than suspended. Then a twist will leave us hanging about in something like the real thing. With lifted spirits, for a bit not alone in feeling alone.

At a time in which absurdist futility has become commonplace and surrealist fright and frisson a whacky indulgence, they encourage us to publically share in common fallibilities and private sensitivities as well as lament the social banalities and downright wastages of our messed up world. Forced Entertainment are something or other. Long may they continue to ride the shallows, piss in the deeps and rock the fucking boat.

Next stop? The Twilight Zone.

ROBERT CASSELTON CLARK

Artist and, under the name Robert Clark, an Arts Writer

03

AUDIENCE

This thing, let's call it a show, has started and we, audience, are watching and listening and thinking about what is happening in this room and also about other things.

Some things in the show happen that are funny, things people say and do. We, audience, change. We are happy, at ease.

It has got boring now. Audience feels this. Some kids in the second row get up and leave. We, audience, watch them. One does a funny walk on the way out. We notice this and because the show is a bit boring now we think about the kid. Some of us think he is funny, others that he has spoiled things for a bit, but most of audience, for a minute at

least, are thinking about him.

Almost immediately more people quietly leave audience. We don't think about them but we do think about ourselves. We, audience, think that maybe the show isn't going very well. That maybe it's a bit shit and that this is becoming our opinion.

Now there is a woman on the stage and she is trying to get our attention and we see that it is a failed attempt at something beautiful. This is getting good now. Audience is silent. We think this is beautiful.

My girlfriend who is sitting next to me, sighs loudly. I thought we, audience, were beginning to like this thing again. But maybe she is not and so maybe I, maybe we, are not too.

We, audience, thought it was ending, but it's still going on. We're not sure how we feel. We begin to shift in our seats. And now there is a funny thing again. And it seems to be coming together, if not in front of us then maybe in our heads. And now it has finished. And we, audience, begin to realise we love it. Just at the moment when we, audience, begin to split apart, after the clapping, when it is still fresh, this thing, this sense of being part of something, we are breaking up now, but we know now for just a little while longer, that this thing, this show, that we, audience, are transformed.

DAVID MICKLEM

Independent Producer, Consultant and Writer

04

In Company

Continuing work is what matters. Not just to keep on keeping on. To say what one means? Maybe. But more to the point: to show, to tell, however that is possible from day to day. In company.

The same sun that rose that day outside Athens, above the cavernous ground, safely distanced from the sea with its wayward sailors, rose above *The World in Pictures*. Plato would have approved of the name at least.

Forced Entertainment, more a condition than personnel, more a state of play than an ensemble, more an excuse for a ride to Sheffield in a carriage where the tea came scalding, or not at all.

The same moon that rose that night above the Connecticut parking lot on the first night of the Laurel Players' Petrified Forest, rose above *The Coming Storm*. Richard Yates would have enjoyed the song that ended it all.

Home on the Range is what they have always been, and where you could always find them. Somewhere between, outside and in. The Green Room might have been named for them, the place they kept the runner that acted as a field.

The same stars that Dante lyricised in his *Inferno*? No, not quite the ones that twinkle down from the canopy of *Emanuelle Enchanted*. These are cheaper ones. Dante would have upgraded them.

Along with the flats, always turned to show their flatness. Veneer. Saturated thin. Surface surfing. Animal skins, that tell us more about the animal than the one inside.

Under the same sky that Walser walked under. But better. Bigger, because it is the sky of *Void Story*, and that goes on forever. Or, until a woman, looking on, faints, and the story stops. For the first time. I think.

In thirty years I had seen it all, except the stopping. There had been ends a plenty, that is the point of 'it all', it starts, it ends, it engages and releases us. But, in all that continuing, until then, I had never seen it stop.

And when it did, outside, in the Soho street, Robert walks by and recognizes the sky, the incomplete story, the company, his company, in company, company, any.

ALAN READ

Writer, Professor of Theatre, King's College London

05

Seventeen years ago you said: 'We loved a piece of time too small to give a name', and it seemed as good a moment as any to start something.

I was here, in the audience. You were there, on stage at the Royal Festival Hall and I was astonished.

The astonishment never faded. There were times when it felt so urgent, so essential that I should shout out that astonishment but instead I'd whisper: 'me too'.

Falling for you has sometimes been hard going. I dragged reluctant friends along who never became converts. Sometimes I wanted to leap to your defence in difficult after-show sessions but you were always able to take care of yourself.

Once I watched you perform over twenty-four hours, and walking home at dawn for a break, I realised that the city itself had shifted, rewritten itself for me, that my body was rippling with shoals of ideas but you and I, we hadn't moved.

You were there, and I was here and I wasn't ready.

One day you turned up to look at our spare room. I thought you looked familiar but I couldn't quite place you. I said 'What do you do'. You said, 'I'm in a theatre company you won't have heard of'. You said 'I'm in a theatre company called Forced Entertainment'. I laughed. I said, 'I didn't recognise you with your clothes on'.

You didn't get the room because I couldn't get domestic with Forced Entertainment.

Later I regretted it.

I used a mini-disc hidden in my bag to record your post-performance talks so I could listen without trying to notate in the dark. Subsequent quotations were illicitly exact.

I long for the shows I've never seen but equally I'm not sure what I have seen, what I've watched on video and what I've only read about.

Three days ago I watched *Speak Bitterness* again and you hurled different confessions at me. You were there: Berlin. I was here: Hackney Wick.

When we finished the online tweeting performance that ran parallel to yours, I was bereft, in the distance between here and there.

Let's stop this foolishness. You can move in if you still want to.

SARAH WISHART
Artist, Writer and Researcher

06

In the kitchen, trying to explain to Colin (who did not see it) the impact *200% and Bloody Thirsty* had on me when I saw it in 1989, I drew a comparison to Kenneth Tynan's famous response to *Look Back in Anger* misquoting his declaration that 'he could not love anybody who did not like this play'.

I want to underline that a) I'm not a fan of *Look Back in Anger* b) Tynan actually said 'did not want to see'- not 'like' and c) I had drunk two glasses of wine.

But I'm not dismissing this comparison. For Tynan and many of his peers in the 1950's, formally and thematically, Osborne's play articulated something vital not just about the times but their generation's experience of this time. Similarly, *200% and Bloody Thirsty* seemed to speak with an absolute raw immediacy to the world in which I found myself, and more importantly, to how I *felt* about that world. It might be hard for anybody who was not 'there' to grasp but this messy, chaotic, repetitive, daft, poetic, comic vision peopled by mournful television angels and desperate drunks dressed in jumble sales clothes and bad wigs, endlessly performing a nativity play under an apparently meaningless neon sign- was in its own way.....*realism*.

Well it was if you grew up in Britain of the cold war, with the certainty of nuclear holocaust and the 'rise' of television, was the first of your family to escape to university and spent the 1980s in Manchester, Salford and Liverpool- cities reeling under the effects of Thatcherism; savage recession, high unemployment, the decimation of heavy industry and anti- racism riots.

In my remembering, somewhere in *200% and Bloody Thirsty* there was a deep political anger but it also expressed the feeling many of us had of being overwhelmed in a time so out of joint.

We did not know how to make it right.

But because we were still young and yearning for romance, despite everything we could not help but find this harsh world a little bit beautiful too, could not help but be a little in love with our own postures of despair. That was in there too.

GERALDINE (GERRY) HARRIS

Professor of Theatre Studies, LICA, Lancaster University.

07

Years ago, someone once sent me a rather poor photocopy of a photo of my friend Claire Marshall - in *Hidden J*, I think, it was a show I never actually saw. In the photo, she's wearing a black dress and a cardboard sign tied with string around her neck, with the word LIAR written in big capital letters. Claire looks vulnerable and isolated adorned by this material textual object, 'othered' as if the sign has been coercively imposed. In some photos of her in this show, a slightly blurred Richard Lowdon is lurking in the background, his eyes directed towards Claire's back, and his presence seems to confirm this coercion. Yet the nomination LIAR remains ambiguous, and any stable reading skids and unravels. Claire seems to be located as A liar, if not THE singular liar. At the same time the word and her gaze also point outwards to any readers of the sign, and the term can attach itself to anyone who witnesses, perhaps to be freely accepted and shared in complicity: aren't we all liars anyway? Or it can be received as accusation. Who? Me? Oh...

The photograph came to me at a time when I lived in Australia, and petty criminals were being publicly shamed in some states there. A boy who had been caught shoplifting in a glossy new mall in Canberra was punished in the children's court by being obliged to stand every Saturday outside the 'scene-of-the-crime' in the shopping centre wearing a T-shirt with the word THIEF printed on it. Within days of his sentencing, this civic stigmatisation had been co-opted and dispersed as thousands of identical T-shirts were printed, distributed and worn around the shopping malls of Canberra.

Whenever I've seen this image of Claire, and it has often been reproduced since then, I have wanted to undo her isolation, and have tried to imagine (it's not so hard) a proliferation of liars on street corners and in courts of law, in shopping centres and front gardens, in railway stations and pubs and theatres and universities and online. A community of liars, with no clear way of ever knowing if any of us were telling the truth.

DAVID WILLIAMS

It was a night in New York; it was a room down the corridor of the building I worked in; it was an English theatre company pretending to be experimental – what the fuck – what did they know? After nine years of Wooster Grouping and Mabou Ontologicaling my Mama, what could I get from them? It was an empty stage; it was a bunch of performers, not actors; it was the voices - honest, ironic, flat, vulnerable. I can't remember what show it was - I saw so many afterwards. It was after Ron Vawter. It was the only performance by people who surely didn't know Ron Vawter that really, really understood Ron Vawter. How did that happen? It was a walk back down the corridor. It was a reconsideration of the place that I came from. It was a consideration of the place they came from. Sheffield? Who the fuck comes from Sheffield? It was a walk down 10th street many months later with too much on my mind, and a plane ticket purchased soon after that. It was a chance, much later still, to welcome the same voices – flat, vulnerable, ironic – to our place in Manchester. Who the fuck comes to Manchester? It's a poster on my bedroom wall given by them when I left Manchester for a smaller city – an even smaller city. A poster on the wall in a smaller place, a red unicorn, an unexpected beast, at the end of a corridor, lying in a daze, lying in blood, vomit, beer. It's the memory of a few beers shared and many more learned of. It's lines that stick in the mind – 'I discovered the cure for cancer.' It's a bar to leap at, crashing. It's a body of work. It's a bloody brilliant body of work. It's a call to arms, and lists, and pantomime trees. It's a test of endurance. It's over before you noticed. It's bodies witnessed over time. It's entertaining. Sometimes it's entertaining. It's a reason to travel. It's a surprise to see them here. It's my generation at it's best. It's more popular abroad you know. It's all a blur now. It's personal. It's always been personal.

JOHN McGRATH
Artistic Director, National Theatre Wales

It went like this: I went from Manchester to Sheffield, by train, in February cold, and then by bus to a rehearsal studio, the idea being to record the story, start to finish of a whole new Forced Entertainment production, *The Coming Storm*, that's all they had to start with, the title, that and some props, a cardboard robot costume, for one, so imagine: they're standing in the space, the six of them, and this thing starts, they're improvising, taking a stab in the dark, and I'm recording and recording, and after a long while they stop, tired-looking and complaining of cold, and there's a rest and some chat, blah blah blah, ha ha ha, and then back they go, another try at the same story, plot, or structure, whatever you want to call it, and more cold, more talk, and, eventually, goodbye. And I think, what am I going to do with all this stuff I've recorded? How can I make a documentary out of this? The only answer being, record another day, in another room, central Sheffield, and there are musical instruments this time, and amplifiers, and the props have changed, bye-bye robot, and off we go, another launch into outer space, but the structure's changed, it's

more complicated, and when we stop, and something has not worked, the difficulty causes deeper pause for thought, or tiredness, and so the process continues, accumulating in my recording machine, hour after hour, week by week. And this evolving thing went, person by person, bit by bit, after a time, to Germany, in warmer weather, for a last beginning, where the result of all this going off into invented spontaneous realms under the limited control of an agreed but evolving background structure that sometimes extends but sometimes gets cut off or scrapped, is to find its focus, be right for public consideration, but no, even now, some segment, the ending, is not right, but something in the weather helps because the skies open, it thunders, the storm comes, and pressure dissipates, and the night comes, and the production is happening, and I record, in the audience, and we react, we are all involved, applauding finally.

BOB DICKINSON
Producer, BBC

10

*“The whole object makes no sound,
has no voice; it only moves.
But here the apparatus,
the play of parts, has given way,
a piece breaks off,
declares itself.
Inside, something dances.”*
Valerio Magrelli, from *I Love Uncertain Gestures*

Failing.
Failing to really fail.
So failing again, and failing.
Failing at falling, but failing fully to get up.
Failing harder, more aggressively, more needily.

Failing to prevent yourself from going for the cheap laugh, failing somehow to get the laugh, so failing even in this, the cheapest of all failures. But failing to give up on it, in the hope that pushing through might reveal a greater kind of failure, a failure that might dignify what has gone before. But sort of giving up half-way through.

Failing to fuck it up.
Failing to get it up.
Failing at fucking, dry humping the floor.
Failing to enjoy it, and so failing to dance, slowly, slowly, for a long time.

Failing to play the guitar, failing to play the drums, failing to head-bang, failing to remember the punch-line, failing to asphyxiate oneself, failing to hang oneself. Failing to plug in the mic.
Trying to fix something, as it was, just for us, right here, right now. But failing somehow.
Going over it all again, one more time, but failing to repeat it properly, so just creating

more failure, nuanced only in its minutely failed specifics.

Failing half-arsedly.

Failing half-heartedly.

Failing heroically, but sort of wimping out towards the end.

Failing sexily, but drinking too much and failing to hold it together.

Failing in a foreign country. Failing in a foreign language. Failing for foreigners.

Failing to sit, and also failing not to sit.

Squatting for a very long time, until it becomes the failure to get up.

Failing at staying the same. Getting older, but failing fully to age.

Failing to hold one's nerve, to hold one's own, to keep one's end up, to keep one's side of the bargain, to put a good spin on it, to put a brave face on it.

Tripping, but failing somehow to actually land. Half pulling out of it, half-standing and looking back at some failed half-stumble.

The wig slips.

MATT FENTON

Artistic Director of Contact, Manchester

11

Two memories from many:

1. *Speak Bitterness* at the ICA. My first Forced Entertainment show. The brilliant and stubborn simplicity of the premise. A game with one rule and one rule only. Every speech is a single sentence beginning with "We...". Not everyone's cup of tea: one woman fought her way out on crutches. It could have been incredibly boring. But to me it was entirely the opposite. The performers could – and did – say almost anything. Opening up one world after another without denying any of them. It made a lot of plays I'd seen seem very small by comparison. However much I tried to pin down or categorize the performance intellectually, it managed to slip away. It was always that bit bigger. Though done with some self-deprecation. The biggest laugh of the night was for: "We never knew when to stop."

2. *Instructions for Forgetting*. An evening that was cheerfully up front about being thrown together with the help of friends. It was the premiere and the first time Tim was performing by himself (Richard was on stage lending moral support but it was basically a solo). In common – I suspect – with quite a few of the audience, I found myself enjoying the show without having a clue how it might reach any kind of satisfactory conclusion. "George, where did it all go wrong?" And then Tim read out a letter from a friend who had recently lost a loved one in an act of violence. Her lucidity and intelligence in trying to deal with her profound loss was extremely poignant and sad, but what really got me was her utterly candid statement that "there is no such thing as closure." There is no such thing as closure.

And you've never known when to stop.

And as a true company, each of you has been able to use the first person plural with absolute confidence and complete authority. Your tenacity and the force of your artistic desire has brought you to a point where your evolving body of work is now too complex and too diverse for any one person to have seen it all, never mind put it into words.

That's some achievement.

DAVID TUSHINGHAM

12

In his book *The Postmodern Animal* (2000), Steve Baker explores a variety of contemporary art practices involving animal representations, where 'things appear to have *gone wrong* with the animal, as it were, but where it still *holds together*'. He describes strategies of imitation where disguises are tawdry, compromised, incongruous conjunctions coming apart at the seams, active reminders of difference and perhaps of a certain shame. With reference to Deleuze and Guattari's word *rater* (to spoil, ruin), he coins the term 'botched taxidermy' for such makeshift, imperfect practices. Related to assemblage and *bricolage*, and the knowingly open display of 'faulty' or 'inexpert' technique, Baker suggests that such creative procedures in the generation of the provisional, the informal and the recycled are 'questioning entities' (Derrida).

'Botched taxidermy' seems useful in relation to Forced Entertainment's work, not only for thinking into all those dodgy animal disguises and uncertain animal/human hybrids in the performances: the panto horse in *Pleasure*, gulping whisky through an eye socket and cans of lager through the joint between the two halves of the costume, before dancing in its own beery piss; the recurrent gorilla suit with or without head; or Cathy's tatty, amateurish 'dog' costume in *Showtime*, on all fours with only the dog's head and an old overcoat - a hilarious irritant messing with the show's already troubled coherence, as well as a bittersweet failure of cynocephalic transformation. 'Botched taxidermy' also informs the structures and tonalities that characterise so many of these shows. Irreverently playing with received, overly-familiar or overlooked representational forms, displacing and defamiliarising them, turning them inside out and on their heads. Messing with their anatomies, abusing them, taking them apart, 'stitching them up' and reanimating them as comic, pathetic, psychotic, narcoleptic, drunk, incompetent, conspiratorial or inventive revenants in a different context here-now.

In Forced Entertainment's shows, things often stagger on the lip of falling apart, yet somehow it still holds together. This core ambiguity and complexity in the work might be called a 'fucked-up-and-yetness'. The 'and-yetness', which is political in its invitation to possibility and connectivity, takes many forms aesthetically and affectively, from the melancholic, the poignant and the corrosively comic, to the most astonishing micro-events of a flaring into appearance.

DAVID WILLIAMS

There is something rather disappointing about Forced Entertainment's invitation to submit texts to celebrate their 30 years of work. It seems that inevitably, whether they know they are tacitly requesting this or not, the responses will be praise and celebration in various forms. Reading through the texts it looks like that is exactly what they've been getting, along with some extra bits of nostalgia and selfconscious pontification. I feel slightly disinclined to contribute now, as I am less than eager to fall in with this coterie of adherents and devotees, but I do want an opportunity to express why I think Forced Entertainment are important, even if what I write must be homogenised and limited by a vaguely conceptual word count. It is my view that the reason they are so singular, and make me return to see them live, re-watch documentation, re-read scripts, is that they are flawed. In every show, every video, every text there is something that doesn't work – bits are too long, too casual, too smug or appeal too desperately for laughter. Even the complete projects are up and down, sometimes feeling insubstantial, solipsistic, even selfcongratulatory. This can prove exhausting, but I also find it extraordinary. I can think of no other artists with a working process that allows these wayward, infuriating, tiresome and fundamentally risky moments into their finished output. Equally, I know of no one who can let these moments sit persuasively against others of brilliance, mystery and beauty in a confounding, irresolvable whole, generously offered up for audiences to make their own interpretive paths through. There is nothing I would like to see less than art which is orderly and conclusive, that patronises me and leaves me with nothing to do.

The adherents and devotees will accuse me of missing the point, reminding me that the company have long been preoccupied with notions of amateurism, failure and things being done badly, that it's all very self-conscious. Of course I'm aware of this, but these flaws that interest me slip beyond all that into genuine crapness – crapness that I have to work with and negotiate against my own criteria for merit. It keeps me working and excited for more.

GILES BAILEY

Thirty years is a good, meaty chunk of time to have been doing something.

You can cause a lot of trouble in thirty years.

I've just realised that, like some kind of dark performance-art daemon, Forced Entertainment has always been there, for as long as I've been trying to cause trouble myself.

It started in Glasgow, 1992, watching *Emanuelle Enchanted* at the CCA (or was it the Third Eye Centre then?). I came along hesitantly, coerced by a girlfriend who was studying drama at Glasgow Uni. Cheap student tickets meant we saw a lot of strange and often frustrating stuff. I later read Tim describe his own formula when entering performance theatre - count the props, and the actors, then use them to calculate the longest time you'd possibly have to endure.

But this was something different. It looked made up, but purposeful. There was a dark story trying to emerge, but despite an abundance of props, cameras, cardboard and costumes, it couldn't quite get there. Everything kept breaking down.

Then in 1994, still in Glasgow, watching *Speak Bitterness* at the National Review of Live Art. Under the railway arches, something that looks like a press conference. Tables full of papers, and six people dressed soberly, reading statements that sound like confessions.

Everything kept breaking down. The actors giggled, or cut across each other, or accuse each other of lying. This went on for hours. We left, out into a city that seemed more fragile and made-up than before. And then returned for the end, the room packed and the actors looking worn, edgy, beyond breaking point. I thought there was a big ending, but I can't remember. I think it just kind of stopped.

Then in Yorkshire, seeing *Ground Plans for Paradise, Nighthawks* - works that took the utopian promise of early digital networks and made them dirty, more human. Everything still kept breaking down.

And now watching them again, on a stream in Toronto Airport, at home in Hove, retweeting comments about *Speak Bitterness*, remembering what it felt like to be in the Arches in Glasgow in 1994. Everything still keeps breaking down.

You can cause a lot of trouble in thirty years.

MATT LOCKE
Director, Storythings

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I can't remember the woman's name. It was mentioned but I can't remember it. When I need to refer to the woman's name, if I need to, later in this, I'll call her Alison. For two reasons. One, I'm pretty sure the name I'm trying to remember, of the woman who was referred to, was definitely not Alison, and two, I know none of the performers on stage that night were called Alison. Alison removes confusion, and also the chance of getting the name right by accident. It seems more fitting to attempt the act of remembering, and then get it wrong on purpose. So I don't remember Alison's name, but I do remember what the person speaking claimed to have done to her. I think I remember who was speaking. But I'm not telling you.

One of them - there were seven of them - and one of them, one of the seven, picked up a piece of paper from the long table they were sitting behind, on the small stage

in a black room in Leeds. One of them picked up a small strip of paper and looked at the audience and said “We convinced Alison life wasn’t worth living. For a laugh.” A fake confession. Or maybe the truth disguised as a fake confession. 1997. Or 1998. And instead of “life wasn’t worth living” I guess it could have been “life is pointless” but it definitely wasn’t “to kill herself”. Unless it was. But I don’t think it was.

They said that, or something like it, and they just left it there. What they’d said. They just left it there for a bit, and then moved on. And in the gap between the leaving it there and the moving on, there was silence, and laughter. The kind that bursts out of you when you realise how ridiculous, how utterly ridiculous this situation is. To be in a room with other people while they confess. Not even that. Just to be in a room, in this world, with other people.

I had no idea you could do that.

I feel sorry for Alison. For what they did to her. But it changed me.

CHRIS THORPE

16

And at the Central School of Speech and Drama, from time to time, we had classes with Dr Susan Melrose. She arrived from Kent on her bicycle. She had an asymmetrical hairstyle. She was charged with trying to teach the actors performance theory. And after her classes we, the actors, went to Stage Combat or Voice or bitched on the steps about what relevance was any of that philosophy to anything. Dr Melrose tried to teach us hermeneutics but I never got it. Then she organised a trip for us to see *Club of No Regrets*. It was 1993. I watched that work like I was a house cat, its nose pressed against the double-glazing, watching its wild brother playing in the jungle. Fuck, I thought. Fuck. Those people smashed things up and got messy and lost their poise and read lists and played really seriously and used microphones in small spaces and talked about love and identity and fragmentation. And I went back to drama school and worked on my audition pieces. Fuck. I was on the wrong side of the paradigm shift. Should I send them a photo and CV? These people were a collective; they understood hermeneutics; they lived in Sheffield. You didn’t ask people like that for a job. You learnt their names like you learnt the names of the Ramones - Tim, Robin, Cathy, Claire, Richard, Terry - Johnny, Joey, Dee Dee, good times. *Disco Relax* and *First Night* at the Toynbee Studios. *Quizoola!* at the basement of the Gardner Centre in Brighton. *Exquisite Pain* in Lisbon. *Spectacular* at the Tron. And so on. I organized a Crouch family outing to see *Bloody Mess* at the QEH. And then a works outing to see it again at Riverside. I bought *Certain Fragments* and remember those cardboard signs by heart – A Narcoleptic Rent Boy, A Bloody Fool, Death Himself. These were new forms that felt as old as the hills. At some point during this fandom I started to make my own work – and Forced Entertainment are in no small way responsible. They had been calling to me since 1993 – through the double-glazing. And thank you, Dr Susan Melrose.

TIM CROUCH Theatre Maker

I've always regretted not being able to say, "I was there at the beginning". I can only now admit to myself I wasn't. Sometime around 1983 maybe, I'd heard about the beginning – or what might now pass for the beginning - *The Set Up*, performed at the late lamented Midland Group Nottingham, and spoken about with awe. Those blessed few were, like the pilgrims gathered in the Lesser Free Trade Hall for the Sex Pistols, in at the start of something epochal. Damn them!

Jessica in the Room of Lights toured, not to Manchester, but word reached me, sitting in our attic office, over the airwaves. I booked 'em, sight unseen, with *Nighthawks*, and I was sunk. Fully immersed. Not knee deep. Right in. Soaked through to the skin with them, steeped eventually, and so were our audiences. A collective brining.

I read *Cardboard Signs* at the ICA, journeyed on *Nights in this City* through Sheffield where I walked through *Ground Plans For Paradise*, presented shows in Manchester's varied Green Room spaces and in London's Royal Court for Barclays New Stages, tried and failed to house forlorn skeletons on the empty floor of an abandoned Manchester hotel, knowing that each time Forced Entertainment would avoid facts in search of a different truth. Then I commissioned *Dreams' Winter* for Manchester Central Library's glorious circular reading room. Leaning our heads against the wall, the whispered messages in that treasure house of words washed over us and returned to shore.

From that first presenting, there was no return. Forced Entertainment communicated to me in a way no other company has done since. Touching all the senses, invading the cerebellum. Change tense. Communicate to me. Still.

Even after a pause, when I wondered if the old magic was still there and went, anxiously, to see *The Notebook* this year, there it was again... I was drowning in it. The precision. The spareness. The simple complexity. The imaginative leaps and flourishes. The drive to connect with an audience. The rigour. The joy of liveness. The ease that comes from thirty years of working together.

Now I hope I will never be able to say "I was there at the ending".

STELLA HALL

Co-founder greenroom, Manchester, currently independent festival producer.

I first saw Forced Entertainment perform about two decades ago. I was in my early twenties. They were already ten years old. Six of them sat at a table reading lines off a number of pages that were scattered about.

It was a couple of years before I managed to see them again. I went with a couple of mates. The auditorium was full, probably about a hundred and fifty people. There were three of them on the stage but only two of them spoke. At various moments the silent one played an old seventy-eight and we all sat and listened. I still occasionally think about that evening today.

A year or two later I paid a few quid to climb some stairs to a cold and long and windowless room. About twenty chairs were out. Just after midday someone began to ask one of two thousand questions, and someone else offer the first of several answers. After about ninety minutes of watching this I left but over the next twelve hours, intrigued, I returned several times. At about five o'clock a fireworks display went off outside.

In my thirties I kept coming back for more. I watched as one too many drinks were poured. I listened intently to a number of stories of many travels along many streets. I was there on the first night and on the thousandth night. When they reached twenty I sat on the front row with two of my friends and saw a bloody and glorious mess unfold. At some point in the evening we all tried to observe sixty seconds of silence.

I am now forty-two. In recent years I have sat and been delighted as several people danced around a few palm trees, and one of them (in a high-pitched voice) welcomed me to the show. I have felt my pulse quicken as the coming storm came to an end. I have contemplated what might happen in the future. Through all this time, on many occasions I have returned to a book of certain fragments. I have a particular fondness for pages forty-eight and forty-nine. I just want to say thank you. I've had some good times.

ANDY SMITH
Theatre Maker

19

Forced Entertainment started 30 years ago, which I missed because I was leaving school, moving city and doing science.

Maybe ten years ago, they came to do a show at Contact in Manchester, where I live. Going in I had no real idea what to expect, so there's this empty stage, then two clowns come on and seem to be trying to make some kind of sense of it, only what makes sense to one doesn't to the other. There's a woman dripping sexy gorilla sweat, ball-gowns, ladders and lights. Two roadies are holding up a microphone to silence, timed with digital accuracy, and then there's the silence: agonizing, apologetic, hopeful and still silence (that's beautiful). There's stars and smoke and water sprays, red-lips, drumsticks and disco lights. There's climate science before its time and then it's time.

Two and a half hours gone in no time at all. Right bloody mess.

In the future there will be Halloween death and weary rock & roll. A show that's described in intricate detail but never quite happens. A science fiction static/graphic, filled with

calm tones and questions. Spectacular, thrilled and looking at tomorrow. And the pain, so much pain, in fact, that when it stops everyone exhales all at once, like we've achieved something. Just by listening and being there. Really something.

I'm in love with language. That meaty stuff that's well wrought, an iron bridge across wide water or some kind of Kingdom Brunel, power riveted ocean crawler.

There's something special about a word or phrase said just right, just at the right time. You wait them out because they're unusual, the peak of the mountain, the little death. Keep them close and show them to your friends over a pint and a giggle or a sigh.

Some of these shows are full of them. Bursting. A story in each sentence, a road movie in every question, a world in a cardboard sign. And, thirty years in, technology ups the ante and we get to play along, a distributed audience, eyes glued to screens, re-writing language in twitter streams.

But there aren't enough words to describe everything, we'll have to make do with just two.

JASON J CROUCH

20

"The person performing in front of you is dying in front of your eyes, as I am dying now. That's literally true, invisibly so. But if you are sufficiently patient, you will see it..."
Herbert Blau

I'm going to struggle to play the hagiographer here. I can't compete in this pantheon of early adopters and multiple viewers – I tend to arrive late to most parties (including Tomorrow's). And aptly maybe, I have a confession to make – there's stuff I really haven't liked. For the first of their three decades I saw less than a handful of shows. Then *Dirty Work* bored me silly. At the time, I certainly didn't appreciate the intent. *Showtime* was – and remains – a favourite, some kind of overstuffed miniature, bursting with lovely imperfection. It was a moment when I felt that they were having a quiet word with me, as well as for me.

I'm pretty much the same age as the artists who are Forced Entertainment - chronologically we share some senescence. Over time, as I've watched them on stages and in rooms and bumped into them here and there in bars after shows, something's shifted in my relationship with these people. They don't know about this. It's the kind of stalking certain artists invite. Sometimes I've imagined living their lives, wished I could be so clever, committed.

What's become precious for me in my long-term relationship with Forced Entertainment is unique in my theatre-going life. I'm watching people my age grow old on stage. I've seen the lines arrive, the hair loss, the expanding waistlines, the change in how they move. Them as a mirror for me. I've heard them talk about death, enact their own, predict mine, turn the lights out clunk clunk clunk.

But as always, it's not the talking about something that gets me, it's the doing. The inexorable act of dying in front of my eyes. I've allowed myself to think about what happens when they start to leave, one by one I guess, wondering which performer will be there in the penultimate Forced Entertainment show, the one before some people – perhaps by then, not me - turn up and stare at another empty stage.

RICHARD GREGORY
Artistic Director, Quarantine

21

That was the year he said What was that? after Impact's The Price of Meat in the Last Days of the Mechanical Age. Google and Wikipedia don't remember it, and it's probable that the Co-operative (which imploded during its making) would rather not either.

That was the year he left Hometown for Timepiece City. A boy hoping that he'll live.

That was the year he said What was that? for the second time after Forced Entertainment's (*Let the Water Run its Course*) to the Sea that Made the Promise. The only reference point he could summon was... But this was punkier? Messier (more tomato ketchup)? Even bleaker, perhaps?

We don't want to talk about it said his new friends. But, the next day, the ketchup people came to talk to him and his friends anyway. He remembered that they seemed sad, gazed at the floor and bit their fingernails to the quick. He looked back at his notebook, and saw that he'd written Will we be like that in 5 years?

As time passed he came across these people more frequently. He'd pop in to see what was going on in Forced Entertainment World™, like calling in on relatives to check that they were getting along OK. He remembered remembering that he found their messed-up world sort of comforting somehow. Unlike most other stage fucks they used their real names in front of the lights, and always stared out at him like they knew him or needed his approval or something. And, usually, quietly, from the dark, he gave it.

And lately it seemed that all he needed to do was switch on his computer or TV, and there they'd be. Relentlessly at it, and with no ad breaks either. A deranged beta BBC5.

In the future, he bet, he'd be able to buy a plug-in for his brain. He'd eat, shit, live, dream Forced Entertainment World™.

Or, in the future, in another 30 years, he'd watch them open the Piss City Olympics. There they'd be with their care assistants prompting them from the sidelines and helping them with their guns and bits of cardboard and hit-or-miss costume changes and tomato ketchup chucking and catheters.

STEPHEN HODGE
Artist and Head of Drama, University of Exeter

English is a forced language to me. Forced Entertainment's language is my natural one. Anyway I hope you can read my English. I learned it seeing *And On The Thousandth Night...* in Lisbon. Long time ago. I saw it again last March. I'm here to thank you for two things. Your existence and the existence of two monks crossing a river. *And On The Thousandth Night...* inspired me that long text, very reduced here to not exceed 365 words:

two monks cross a river
where they can bathe twice

two monks cross a river
where they can swim a thousand and one times

two monks cross a river
one of them lives, the other plays

two monks cross a river
thus theater was born

two monks cross a river
between theater and its double

two monks cross a river
between being and nothingness

two monks cross a river
between lessness and hermann hesse

two monks cross a river
between hesse and siddhartha

two monks cross a river
one is the echo of the other

two monks cross a river
the other is the eco of the name of the rose

two monks cross a river
a rose is a a rose is a rose is a river

two monks cross a river
between the tiber and the tigris

two monks cross a river
tiber tigris burning bright

two monks cross a river
between the pain and nothing

two monks cross a river
between the old man river and the wild palms

two monks cross a river
between a walking shadow and a poor player

two monks cross a river
between sound and fury

two monks cross a river
between the heart and darkness

two monks cross a river
between tigris and euphrates

two monks cross a river
between two drone raids

two monks cross a river
between night and fog

two monks cross a river
between cries and whispers

two monks cross a river
stop! enough is enough

no! two monks cross a river
now it's your turn

RAMIRO S. OSÓRIO
(Author in search of 6 Forced Entertainment Artists!)

2004.

I sat through *Bloody Mess*, numbared, uncomprehending, lost. It was shown as part of a symposium at Lancaster University, in celebration of the company's twenty-year history. I thought - at the time - that most of the papers and presentations were complimentary, congratulatory, dulled by their agreement with one another. Toward the end of the symposium an old man stood up to disagree. He told the delegates that he'd once been ejected from a celebration of the composer Luciano Berio. He'd said that Berio had lost it and wasn't experimental anymore. Then he said that Forced Entertainment had lost it and weren't experimental anymore, and then he sat down again.

Just before the old man stood up, Tim gave a talk naming a long list of artists and clicking through a sequence of images of the company's work, soundtracked by a piece of music by Kid Koala. When the music stopped he kept on clicking. I thought about how little the images showed me, and how hard-won they must have been. The talk concluded: "we do what we can, with inadequate means."

2014.

As the company mark ten more years I'm thinking about what that old man said - how dismissive it was, and how little it seems to matter now. When I think about the kind of performance culture I want to be a part of, it has as much to do with tradition and heritage as experiment and innovation - not out of reverence, but out of respect. Out of respect, much contemporary theatre acknowledges a debt to Forced Entertainment; some imitates form, but the best of it applies values. What interests me so much about the company now is the sense of eldership I observe whenever I see them engage with younger artists - the generosity, hospitality, care taken. The way I have come to view them reflects that generosity, leading to deeper and broader expectations. To 'do what we can with inadequate means' seems like a fair description of all that any of us do in the labour to keep on. As we do keep on, we can look back across a history of unlikely moments where things were done which couldn't be.

SIMON BOWES

Founder, Kings of England. Currently point-five Lecturer in Drama, University of Greenwich.

Tim invited me to Leeds to be in a conversation. They were performing *Bloody Mess* that night afterwards. It was the first time I had ever seen a piece with the company. (Why do they never play New York City?)

I found it astounding. The daring of the performers. Storytelling so mythic and banal.

Their bodies in the theatre space. They're adult and they have hair and teeth and character and presence and voices, they don't need to have a mask. They have real character that comes in with them through the door. They walk in with it. Each one feels like the original article of something that could be a type in the future. I don't know how to say it. I feel like Liz is after that kind of presence but she wants a system—it's not that none of us can do it, I just don't think we have—what is it about those Forced Entertainment people. I don't see them being the kind of performers that go to blank and then build a character. They're not American, they're British. They have faces and bodies. Important in any pursuit of theatre but at The Wooster Group we address it differently. Copying visual and audio tapes so that we're always re-creating something. If the spirit moves in and takes over, then transcendence is possible. But Forced Entertainment says - god dammit, I'm here. Now. In front of you in this room. With blood coursing through my veins. And I'm sweating and breathing hard and desperate to tell you this story that may get interrupted. Aren't they laying bare their lives right there in front of you?

The next piece I saw was *The Coming Storm*. Most of all I loved how the narratives of the performers themselves were writ large in this piece - you could feel this group of people who'd spent their whole lives together. You can't buy that with money, only with time. A group of people whose lives are so intertwined and where there's not a separation between what we are and what we do. No separation between who Forced Entertainment is, and the presence in front of you.

KATE VALK

25

This is for the late arrivers. Those of you, like me, who arrived at the party after the window was smashed and the firework was set off in the kitchen and quite unexpectedly everyone started dancing. It's for those of you who arrived after the party had spilled into the garden and out into the street beyond it; after the cameras were set up and the police started dusting for fingerprints.

This is something for you. Your own history of Forced Entertainment made of bodies (yours) and memories (mine) to be performed in a space (or spaces) of your choosing. A sort of fleshy anthology, small enough to fit in the palm of your hand or the corner of your eye.

SPECTACULAR

1 Male (skeletal)
1 Female (on the floor).
To be performed in a room
that could be a theatre
but is presently empty.
The man begins
He asks you to imagine
how things could have been
but aren't.
Eventually the woman
starts to cry.

VOID STORY

6 performers
2 of whom must remain
at all times
contained by the monochrome photographs
projected on the back wall.
The other four will speak for them.
At some point in the middle
an audience member must collapse
unexpectedly
but the show must go on
regardless.

NIGHTS IN THIS CITY

This show must exist
only as a series of
subtle attempts to recreate it
executed by an audience
who never saw the original.

QUIZOOLA

In which the performers
might be clowns
or police interrogators
or chat show hosts
or game show contestants
or teachers
carrying out a simple task for a set duration
or maybe all of these things.
The audience must remain
similarly ambiguous.

THE COMING STORM

You will need an alligator
and a piano
and your words will need to
unfurl
like a disintegrating parachute
like the end of time
performed as the punch line
to a joke we're all
too old
to remember.

TOMORROW'S PARTIES

All of which is not to say
that the party is over
and you have missed it.
In actual fact
they are all still dancing
and the fridge is
surprisingly well stocked.

ANDY FIELD

Artist and Co-Director Forest Fringe

look no further this is it

What difference does it make to say you were there at the time? Faced with this task of reflection on thirty years of Forced Entertainment, I would say it makes all the difference. I met them at the beginning. We are friends whose imaginative and real lives have intersected for all of these years. Any pretense to be detached or objective dissolves in the face of this, yet I cannot resist the transgressive frisson of this invitation to add to the record.

I thought they were crazy, not just funny crazy but crazy insane. I mistook their collective shyness for arrogance and thought their drinking would end things quite fast. I did not understand their physical recklessness or their long jokes, their haircuts or obsession with the aesthetics of the forlorn. I saw an early rehearsal of *Let the Water...* and I changed my mind. I think of *Let the Water...* with its gauche assembly of language, its unnerving, startling brutality and its delicious playful absurdities, like a riotous, careening night, full of noise and lights and the potential for violence. For me, it is this work that anticipates so much that happens later, this possibility of transforming something very dense into something weightless.

How are we to understand these works? What is achieved is comic and heartbreaking in equal measure. Any suggestion of reality crumbles as fragments of story flicker as voiced from these ragged narrators that have barely left madness behind them. In the materiality of this precarious world is a poetics of the broken: rails of costumes, inspection lights, cable, buckets, a constellation of things long fallen into disuse to build constructions of a future as if imagined from the Cold War. There are piles of notes but no script and no proper ending. All the time the sound of rain, endless and dreary: this must be England.

Even after all these years it is the rain in the form of a soundtrack by John Avery that seems to define the work's atmosphere, its cultural moment. From time to time, late at night in the studio, I'll put on a CD of an old soundtrack and it takes me back in an instant.

PENNY McCARTHY

Artist and Course Leader MA Fine Art, Sheffield Hallam University

This performance, it begins with an act of removal; then speculation sinks in. It demands an odd mode of listening, of being with; my attention is present, mirrored. Meaning drifts in and out. This performance is a process - a regime of identification, held together by narrative splinters and formal scaffolding. Language is material; it's hanging loose, dropping to the floor. There are shards and splinters everywhere. This performance, it's one of frontiers: the social and theatrical, imagined and real, public

and private; it doesn't pronounce the death of each, but navigates straight through.

Something about the work of Forced Entertainment manages to diagnose the present, change the symptoms in the past and construct a piercing future speculation. It is medicinal for theatre, this attitude to structuring and presenting thought and action as interlinked, conflicted, poetic, never representational. A work that demands seclusion; meaning discloses itself in a complex net of speculation and structure.

It's 1984, Thatcher has been in power for five years and Indira Gandhi has just been assassinated. It's 2014 and the Conservatives are in power and education is on splints and there are skeletons everywhere. What happens in this extension of thirty years? The stage keeps redrawing itself. It's beaten and shaped then thrown back in, and we're surprised when our political imagination is so full of Forced Entertainment fragments.

I breathe out these words through bloated sentences. History isn't made like this, I think. It's found in vestiges actualised in a public aesthetic; in durational quizzes, in meditations on death and the stage, in storms that refuse to arrive, in voids that suck us in, futures that recur; it's all a bloody mess, I think.

This examination of the history of stories, of the relativity of questions and meaning, punctures my memories with fierce dynamism. The bare stage is filled with the graphic, coloured marks of words and actions, and I can't tell the difference between the enacted and the occurred.

The blank pages of those who seek to make tangible that which the company have made a craft to obscure, they dissolve, and I take so much pleasure from that disappearance.

There is something irrevocably nostalgic about all this.

DIANA DAMIAN MARTIN
Writer and Lecturer

28

Ok, Amanda, I am going to quote Pete Brooks too. The point of theatre is to entertain people in order that they entertain your ideas. He also said that the only pleasure in making theatre is the first five minutes in the bar afterwards, but that's another story. In 1982/3 we watched Forced Ents watching us, intensely, after all, I think they had booked us, and then we all went out for a curry. They were students and we were old, old, old before our time — already jaded by years of crap touring with huge sets filled with sand and leaves and water and ideas beyond our means. Then Impact split up, though I guess we never really have, and it wasn't until around 1987, I think when they did (*Let the Water Run its Course*) to the Sea that Made the Promise, that I realised just how bloody brilliant they were, and would be, and still are. They've talked about us and how important we were to their getting going, and I've thought about that a lot. Privately, I think we betrayed them, what else could we do? We were always into binning our gifts, that was what we did, we believed entirely in the waste, the

ephemeral, the lack of future, the back of the van, the experience. No matter. I think what called them to us, what called us to one another, was a belief that we could make ordinary magic, that we could make the ordinary turn into something else, and that the materials we could use were just what we had to hand. We weren't pretending to be ordinary, we just did what we could. Pete once told me a story, when we were about 21 and he had just come back from France, that he had met a couple of kids from Essex — where he was from too — who had just left England with some tins of beans and were hitching and sleeping rough. Those are the people we made theatre for, people with dreams and no means. I still believe in that, I really do, and I love you all, even when I don't see you for years.

CLAIRE MACDONALD

Founding member of Impact Theatre Co-operative 1978 – 85

29

Yesterday's Parties

In the future, there won't be Forced Entertainment, and people will miss them.

Or, there won't be Forced Entertainment and people will be pleased.

Or, there won't be Forced Entertainment and people won't have a view.

Or, in the future, there won't be a Forced Entertainment because they were wiped out when they lost control of their transit van after a lorry shed its load on the A5063 Albion Way in Salford between the A6 Crescent junction and the M602 junction.

Or, there won't be a Forced Entertainment because each one of them died, mostly of natural causes, between 2024 and 2057.

Or, there will be a Forced Entertainment because as each one died, mostly of natural causes, they were replaced until there was no one from the original line-up but they're still going, like The Sugababes.

Or, there won't be a Forced Entertainment because an angry audience were so annoyed that they were like the Sugababes they stormed the stage to demand they change their name.

Or, there will be six Forced Entertainments because they'll split up and all claim the right to the name, like The Bay City Rollers.

Or, there won't be six Forced Entertainments, there will only be one.

Or, there will only be one and the hardcore fans will take to singing 'There's Only One Forced Entertainment' before the shows partly as an ironic football chant and partly as an acknowledgement of the multiverse.

Or, there won't be a Forced Entertainment because somehow their work was done.

Or, there will be a Forced Entertainment but it will be a mannequin exhibit in the Volkstheatermuseum in Mannheim where animatronic Robin, Richard, Terry and Cathy perform *Void Story* six times daily, including Sundays.

Or, there won't be a mannequin Forced Entertainment, they'll be very much alive thank you very much because science will be able to do that then.

Or, there won't be a Forced Entertainment because they called it a day after the incident at the Arnolfini in 2019.

Or, there will be a Forced Entertainment because they became national treasures.

Or, there won't be a Forced Entertainment because they were everywhere anyway and we forgot where it all came from.

DAN REBELLATO

**Playwright and Professor of Contemporary Theatre,
Royal Holloway University of London**

30

A1984 Armageddon of clothes and stars and shaven heads Ketchup and soap powder sets bolted together and carried in and carried out cables and tape and vans and get ins and get outs M1 M5 M6 A38 Sheffield cold so cold and damp people crying people laughing and drinking and more drinking confused friends explanations but there is not just one story did it make you happy and sad at the same time I liked that bit when she went that way I like the bit when they were together the stars the texts the crying the neon signs it made me feel the hair on the back of my neck stood up the stories the references the day that Edward died the music the people the new people the old people the changing people the new show the old shows the ICA the leadmill some place in Zurich a road trip a set a late night ferry customs man 3am standing on neon signs wearing a wig soap powder through his fingers a mick jagger impression where are the drugs Vienna biennale triennial texts and questions masks and trees and make up walk outs and returnees tap dancing gorillas four hours eight hours to go twelve hours to go hungry thirsty hallucinating twenty four hours to go airless naked half naked all naked eyes closing a violin the music lifts and carries the soundtrack the voices and angels talking and burning and bloody thirsty and hidden and questions and questions an unsettling inquisition silence awkward and laughter and more laughter please stop that smiling it must end soon it has to end soon the suits the running and more running sweating falling glamorous broken ladies drunk and weeping beautiful ladies texts and signs lighting crews and sound engineers dressing rooms and hotels bars and air flights and airports new people old people bars and german spoke bars and slovenian spoken Japanese and dutch and flemish late late nights re-runs and rehearsals lights showing the dust running breathing sweating burning something new this is new this is new always something more work new and more new exhausting exhausted burning still 2014 new new new

MARK ETCHELLS

— AFTERWORD

After Words 550 (and breaking a rule)

To say this
To the end
To the hours
To the time
To take time
To make time

To absent friends
To the strength of the weak
To the A1 and M1

To the now
To the then

To you, to you, to you
To you that travelled
To you that stayed

To those that connected
To those that wrote
To those that noted to those that observed
To those that felt
To those who drew breath
To draw breath, to draw breath

To those that thought
To those that picked
To those that unpicked, criticized, summarized
To those that were bored
To those that said later years later, the work was still there, burned on their eyes
To those that wrote to those that talked and those that only nodded on the stairs

To those that said it was not acting or only acting
To those that said too loud too long
To those that said to me that is theatre
Or that to me that's a glimpse of what's possible
Or that to me that's like salt in a wound
Like salt in wounds
To salt in wounds

To the dead
To the dead eyed indifferent
To the sarcastic mutterers and the restless fidgeters,
To those that stretched a hand out slowly
to touch the hand of another sat beside them
To those that dreamed
To those that borrowed

To those that stole
To those that whispered
To those that remembered

To the time, to make time
To make time flow
To make time slow
To go on
To slow down
To break time
To break down

To be here, to be here
To the here
To the here and the now
To the push and shove
To the push and the shove

To the sweat and the breathing, drink and sex, love and the politics

To the time
To the motion
To the trick
To the truth
To the twist
To the edge
To the moment
To the moments
In the moment
At the moment
In the moment
In the centre
At the edges

To the words
To the letters
To the letter
To the stage
At this stage
At this time

To those that sighed when the curtain rose
To those that laughed
To those that sang
To those that shivered as the lights went down
To coldness, clarity, sweat and dreams
To the bare boards and bare bones
To the no shows
To the endlessly distracted
To the centre and periphery
To the centre of periphery

To time
To take time
To taking time
To take time
We were taking our time, we were taking your time
you were taking our time, you were making your time

we were making time, you were making time
to the time
to take time

To the light
to the dark
To the shadows
To the kids at the back

To the watching eyes
To the beating hearts
To the beaten hearts
To the broken hearts
To the listening ears
To thinking brains
To the guts with butterflies
To the waiting tongues
To the searching eyes
To the spit in mouths
To the drunken yells from the street outside

For now, for now, for now, for then
For now and then

For you
For you

For now
For now

TIM ETCHELLS
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Read the full collection of texts at forcedentertainment.com

— ABOUT US

We are a group of six artists who began working together in 1984. In the many projects we've created since that time we've tried to explore the unique ways that theatre and performance can articulate and engage with the contemporary world. In doing so we've made shows from the highly minimal to the brashly theatrical – one, two, six and twenty-four hours long – pushing at the limits of the form.

Lists and games. Gibberish and silence. Dressing up and stripping down. Confession and lies. Jokes and deaths. All these and many other things have played their part in the development of what we do. The work we make is always a kind of conversation or negotiation. We're interested in making performances that excite, challenge, question and entertain – courting confusion as well as laughter. We create our work from our home in Sheffield, and the results – theatre shows and durational performances – are presented all over the world.

Forced Entertainment Artistic Team: Robin Arthur, Tim Etchells (Artistic Director), Richard Lowdon (Designer), Claire Marshall, Cathy Naden and Terry O'Connor.

Forced Entertainment Management Team: Eileen Evans (Executive Director), Jim Harrison (Production Manager), Sophie Nurse (Project Assistant), Natalie Simpson (Office Manager), Sam Stockdale (Marketing Manager).

www.forcedentertainment.com

Find us on Facebook or talk to us on Twitter @ForcedEnts

Forced Entertainment
502 The Workstation
15 Paternoster Row
Sheffield
S1 2BX

T +44 (0) 114 279 8977

fe@forcedentertainment.com

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