

ALAN READ

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 *Emmanuelle 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, Professor of Theatre at King's College London

ANDY FIELD

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
or friends
or hostages
or simply performers
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

SARA JANE BAILES

It's dancing stars and kings with half-crooked crowns. It's clowns, crowns, unbearable grins, whispers into microphones, a balloon dance. It's things you wished you'd said and done. It's stuff you think you've seen, heard or dreamt.

It's bad fortune-telling and lines of performers or an alphabet-letters dance spelling MYSTERY and ILLUSSION (they can't spell, or now I doubt my ability to spell).

Or it's Terry's list, the one about things to forget in the world outside I wish would never end, and Claire lying in the arms of four dodgy-looking suited men, screaming "I should have been in that castle! Someone should have written something in the sand..." and Rob zipped into a laundry bag with a manic, sheepish grin, while nearby someone blindfolded brandishes a large saw.

It's magic.

It's been decades of bad magic.

It's problem-making (a bomb) and problem-solving (a fake gun, a note) and yelling trees, talcum powder, taped-up mouths and making it up as they go along or making us believe they are making it up as they go along even if we know better.

They've been carrying on like this.

For years and years.

It's making trouble.

It's Sheffield, Lisbon, Sarajevo, A-M-E-R-I-C-A, Beirut, Ukraine, Japan, Siberia, it's Vienna, Rotterdam, Sydney, Brussels, Crewe, Paris, it's London, it's nighttime, twenty-four hours of questions, ten past seven in the morning and it's STILL – GOING - ON.

It's jumbled-up bits of everything they could drag into the picture and thought we should take a look at, as if through the eyes of a drunk, rambling friend at 3am. Up together seeing the new day in.

It's romantic.

It loves desperation.

It's a kind of love.

It's making you hear poetry in lists of ordinariness (again), or in wishes, answers, crap TV, song lyrics, fairy tales and confessions you wish you could lay claim to.

It's looking for the difficult way out, for alliances, the backhander, the cheating win, the cancellation half way through a beginning, the bluff, the clash and the recovery, pretending to cope, or not pretending, coping, caring or wanting to care.

It's the We've Had Enough But We're Still Here.

It's beginning without end.

It's Forced Entertainment, 1984, and counting.

Sara Jane Bailes, Reader in Theatre & Performance Studies at the University of Sussex

EMMA COCKER

There is a room, stripped back, bare. Stage illumination picks out two figures - a man and a woman - from the surrounding dark. The two figures exchange visions of the future as an unfolding litany of prediction, projection, prospection and prophecy: "in the future; *or ... in the future ... or ... or ... or*".

What strikes me about Forced Entertainment's *Tomorrow's Parties* is not so much the tension between the utopian/dystopian, nor between the possible/impossible, nor even between the prosaic and fantastical future visions conjured up by the two performers, but rather that within this work, the future is imagined from two quite different temporal perspectives. Firstly, the performance speaks of the future as 'foreseen' ('not yet' but still imaginable, projectable *there* in the distance regarded from the perspective of 'here-and-now'). Secondly, its 'live-ness' attests to a near-and-ever-emergent future, endlessly seized and inhabited through the improvisatory *act* of imagining ('what now, what next'). To distinguish: one mode of future-oriented imagining emerges within the *content* of the words spoken ("in the future ...") where a 'future-possible' world is seemingly given shape (even scripted) *in advance* of its occurrence, whilst another is enacted in relation to *how* (through improvisation) the content *was/is* arrived at, where an unfolding future emerges *simultaneously* to the imagining.

Whilst the phrase "... in the future" signals an activity of looking *forward* to the future (*as if* imagining it to already exist), the interjection 'or' (as in "*or ... in the future*") serves as a rupturing *and* affirmative force, breaking one flow of imagining whilst initiating another. *Or* — the imperative to stop, begin again. Contraction of the word 'other', 'or' does not simply present an alternative to the existing situation (according to the binary logic of 'either/*or*', 'this *or* that') but instead becomes a site of repeated and continual intervention and invention (*or ... or ... or*). Turning attention away from the *product* (what is imagined) towards the *process* of imagining, *Tomorrow's Parties* explores how the creative production of the future (as different or otherwise) is not only one of proposing future-possible worlds, but rather emerges through a restless capacity to interrupt what already exists with an interventionist, insurgent 'or'.

Emma Cocker, Writer and Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University

TIM MOSS

I hate Forced Entertainment

I hate Forced Entertainment. I know this because I've had to run away from them. Three times. First time, I was living in Sheffield in the mid-80s, rehearsing next to them in a dilapidated old building in the Wicker. All I can hear from the adjacent room is 'This is shit city, this is fuck city, this is cunt city...' over and over again. Wasn't room for both of us. I had to leave. Moved to Amsterdam in the hope that it wasn't 'shit city'.

Next time, still in the Netherlands, at the Leidseplein, saw six of them jump off a tram. They looked like they knew what they were doing. I was worried they were following me. I'd witnessed *The Set Up*, *Nighthawks* and *(Let the Water Run its Course)*...and I'd seen enough. Too much. Had to run again. Ducking behind another tram, hoping they hadn't seen me. A close shave.

Then, eleven years of freedom. The nearest they got to me was rumours. Until one night, minding my own business in the Green Room, Manchester: *Speak Bitterness*. Truth and reconciliation? More like monsters from the id trying to cathect me. Ran all the way to Victoria to get the last train out of there. Adopt a new disguise; academic. Go to the *Live Culture* conference at the Tate Modern. In a break from proceedings I wander into a gallery. I freeze. Two of them are sitting there, smudged clowns with hangovers in a circle of naked light bulbs. But what's this? They're practically friendly. It's like an unnerving pub quiz; okay, they're the ones getting most of the answers right, but it's almost like we're all getting on. Have they changed or is it me? So, I drop my guard. Even tell other people there's nothing to be too scared of, if you're careful.

One night, I talk to them. They're almost human. Maybe too human. Makes you question your own humanity. Slight wobble when one of them says I'm going to die quite early of cancer. But then, like cancer, they get under your skin. Think I can live with it. Don't think I'll be running away anymore. I love Forced Entertainment.

Tim Moss, Course Leader, MA Writing for Performance at University of Huddersfield

SOPHIA NEW

i first encountered you in 1997 in bristol at the arnolfini where you showed **pleasure** but your name should have warned me of what was to come. drunken horses and a late night feeling that left me unable to say how long i'd been in there with you. i exited kinda stunned like a dumb animal. later in london in **disco relax** i wondered whether cathy was really very drunk and would fall off the toynbee stage. again something was at stake here - a kind of care or concern from an audience that would often be ridiculed or abused by you but still we come back for more and you give it to us: **the world in pictures, all tomorrows parties, the coming storm, the thrill of it all, void story, exquisite pain, spectacular, bloody mess, marathon lexicon, the voices, the travels, emmanuelle enchanted, and the last adventures.**

what i admire so much looking back at these shows I have seen is a seemingly curious mixture of being able to rely on how strong you all are as performers and a radical re-questioning of it all with every piece. there is no resting on your laurels: you often say before a show in utter despair 'we have nothing' as an audience we're thinking – you'll pull it off again because you are rigorous enough to make a show planned for 10 suddenly be a two-hander, or to re-visit a show from another decade which means abandoning the comfort of sitting down and running around like loons. we enjoy that - watching you be fools, but soon you will show us the folly of our desire to just consume you as images or words, in your excess you refuse to merely entertain us. instead you test time.

lastly i owe you – for the structures you built in **quizoola!** and **on a thousand night** which have allowed me over the years to demonstrate so clearly to students, who have never dared to enter the world of experimental theatre or performance, how the place between fiction/ reality, truth/ lies, acting/ non-acting is so utterly compelling that we as an audience are often too invested to leave.

Sophia New, Artist, Performer and Co-Founder of Plan B

CHRIS THORPE

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, Founder member of Unlimited Theatre

ADAM DE VILLE

I'm trying to think about Bristol and when you spoke about bitterness and being enchanted. I'm trying to think about discos and cheating on first nights and about the fridge between us. I'm trying to think about Bristol and the long hair and the bangles and the old sewing factory where you spoke bitterness across the table. I'm trying to think about what was said next to the fridge. I'm trying to think about the very highs and the very lows and needing a wee. I'm trying to think about what was said in the foyers, in secret behind cut out smiles. I'm trying to not think about you for fear I shall be forced to make an insignificant copy of it all. I'm trying not to think about special guests and latecomers and early departures. I'm trying to think about the moment we first found each other in the same room and how you spoke bitterness about beautiful losers. I'm trying to think about brief encounters, happy accidents and the party that didn't happen and the one that happened too much to say. But that's ok. I'm trying to think about London and that wee. Your shirts and your clowns and how they spoke bitterness under a sad disco light. I'm trying to think of the bloody mess they made and how we all laughed until we couldn't start again. How you were lost for words. And how I wiped my eyes. I'm trying to think about how your makeup always ran away into those hopeless dreams of the night before someone brought it all back again. You were barefaced liars and cheats and pimps and lovers and serial killers. I'm trying to think about the gun going off and the lives you saved whilst caught in the act. And I'm trying to think about the time we spent in the library with only one word on our minds. Spectacular. Or something else. I'm thinking about trying to get to the end but I can't see it coming. I'm trying to think about our last adventure together and the thrill of it all. I'm trying to think about making these last ten words.

Adam De Ville, Artistic Director of Framework

JASNA ŽMAK

Once upon a time there was an art that no one cared much about, but those who did, cared a lot, and in this time there was a city, and in it six young men and women, and they said to themselves: Why don't we do something about this art that no one cares about? And so they sat down, took out their pencils...

STOP

Once upon a time there was a pencil that didn't work, and many important things never got written down because of this, and among them...

STOP

There was once a stage that was empty because no one would fill it, and it was very sad, because what's the use of an empty stage, and one day it read somewhere that there are some people that go around, travel the world in order to fill stages, and that made it extremely happy, because it had thought: Well, maybe one day...

STOP

There was once an audience that was looking at a stage that was not empty but it felt like it, and this audience was thinking: Well, maybe one day...

STOP

Once upon a time there was a man who claimed stages can't be happy or sad or anything at all, because stages are not human and only humans can have emotions, but this man was also not human, but a robot disguised as a human...

STOP

Once upon a time there was a theater performance that seemed to last forever, it lasted so long that, once it was finished, no one could recall when it had actually started, no one was sure whether it was really a performance or not, and afterwards, the people in the audience were confused, and among them a robot that finally learned how to...

STOP

Once upon a time there was a crown made of paper and...

STOP

There was once a story about a group of people which did theater that didn't have an end, or maybe it did, but it couldn't get to it, and it tried and it tried but it just wouldn't happen, and all the other stories mocked it because of this, until one day, this never-ending story realized that...

Jasna Žmak

DAN BELASCO

Flash Bulbs in the Night

I never lived in Sheffield. The closest I came was Nottingham but it wasn't until I moved back to London when I have my first memory of you all. I staggered out from the ICA some winter night in the early-mid 90s onto the sodium-lit royal stage set of the Mall and the back of Horse Guard's Parade, exhilarated by the beauty of Club of No Regrets (thanks, Lois).

I guess we will all remember our first show of yours with something approaching religious fervour: that never-to-be-repeated first clapping eyes on something so fucked up, so sad, so (sorry) beautiful. Like a Christmas party in a crack den, you were speaking a strange riddle-walker, way-post-apocalyptic argot, pointing out the iniquities, the laughs, the absurdity. I fell.

In my memories, you appear in flashes down the decades, almost always at night, waiting by some greasy puddle, lit by the coach's headlights as we pull into the car park in Sheffield; looking at me from the stage under a swinging bare bulb as if to say 'You still here?'

There was a too-well-lit episode in the Royal Festival Hall much later when news of you had even washed onto the hallowed, brutalist shores of the South Bank. I don't even know what you did but in my recollection the mass audience exodus from those comfy seats was—again—exhilarating and left a much much smaller group of people smiling at each other, signalling our relief that the tutting masses had left us among friends.

Later, when we used to appear in festivals together, there were the long, cigarette-sharing discussions about love, lights, the government, sets, art, pop music. Friends were involved. Whisked away to Top of the Pops. Surreal.

And now we still meet from time to time. Flashbulbs illuminating a night. A festival. A gig in Berlin. The kids are growing up. They wonder what we're still talking about. Still making, still trying to make. For me, I'm amazed that I still feel so strongly about a way of expressing things. This theatre, I never thought it would last.

Dan Belasco, Artist, Performer and co-founder of Plan B

SOPHIE CALLE

Dear Sophie, I hope this finds you well; I'm writing to invite you to be an early contributor to our birthday celebrations, the details are below. I'm sure that you are very busy but it would be lovely if you could write something for us, With very best wishes. Claire. My dear Claire, it is not that I don't want, it is that I can't. I can write for my own projects, stories that are part of a ritual. I can write if an accident of some kind happens. I can write about something missing, about loss, about death. I can write about something deeply personal. I can interview people and then use their answers. But to write about a smooth experience where everything went well, it is impossible. Not enough distance and too much at the time. Our collaboration was positively too easy. I remember that, when, for the first time, I feel in love with a man that loved me, and that we started a relation, all my friends were afraid by what they called this new « pink period » in my life. What was I going to tell ? And indeed, I never wrote about this man and our relation. I tried once to make a project about money and I failed, accumulating during sixteen years all kind of ideas but not satisfied by any. While telling this to a close friend he asked me what I would answer to the word « money » and I said "I have some". That's why you can't talk about it, he answered, you can only talk about lack. With Forced Entertainment, it is the same: I liked your work before we met. When you contacted me to use « exquisite pain », I said yes. I only showed up at the premiere. No betrayal. No drama. Excellent acting. I wasn't even bored by my own words, as I thought I would be. May be just a little surprised, because, given your precedent play « bloody mess » I had imagined something more messy. Dear Forced, our relation was too natural, I only have good memories, that's why I can't talk about you. Sophie

Sophie Calle

SARAH GORMAN

I am where I am today partly because of the last economic recession experienced by the UK and partly because of Forced Entertainment. I did the MA in Contemporary Theatre Making at Lancaster University in 1992 because I had not been able to get a decent job after graduation in 1991. Our first module was an introduction to post-structuralism and the first show of the season at The Nuffield Theatre (the campus venue) was Forced Entertainment's *Emmanuelle Enchanted: Or a Description of the World as if it were a Beautiful Place*. I ended up staying in Lancaster for seven years (as the *Pendle Witches* foretold) and committed myself to the almost single-minded pursuit of post-structuralism and experimental theatre from then on.

I saw this piece many times but my lasting impression of that first time is of watching with my mouth open. I was captivated by what I saw to be a radically new aesthetic: the appropriation of an understated kitsch beauty, the jumble-sale clothes and faux-naïve delivery on the part of the protagonists. I found myself transported as I experienced first boredom and then a renewed fascination with the repeated lists of the newsroom hijack scene. The phrase, 'Builders on the roof at 7am. Builders on the roof at 7pm' still intermittently drifts through from my unconscious years later when I am least expecting it. My theatre diet as a BA student had relied largely upon kitchen-sink realism and *Emmanuelle Enchanted* provided a very welcome paradigm-shift transporting me away from bleak images of class oppression to a playful celebration of uncertainty.

The company's work has inevitably changed a great deal over the past thirty years and as a theatre academic I no longer have the luxury of being able to be uncritically enthusiastic. Writing an article recently about the early to middle-years of Forced Entertainment's history I found myself frustrated that the word count could not accommodate all I wanted to say or detail the complexity of the range of critical responses. Any 'history' is inevitably partial but what is clear is that the company have galvanized theatre-making in an unprecedented way and their influence will be felt for many, many years to come.

Sarah Gorman, Reader in Drama, Theatre & Performance & Research Student Convenor at Roehampton University

NATHAN BIRKINSHAW

I sent this story. That I wrote in Costa. In Wakefield, West Yorkshire on my break from work on a smart phone:

“Spectacular ruined my life. I came with two friends. One was a friend off my course at university. I don't know where he is anymore. The other friend was a girl I was in love with. I was sat in the middle of them when I fell asleep. They fell in love as I dreamed. I don't know where she is anymore. Spectacular saved my life. I don't know where I am anymore. It's quite nice.”

This is what Claire wrote back to me:

“Thanks Nathan, that's a neat little story-the only trouble is it needs to be exactly 365 words long before we can include it in the project. Any chance you could fill it out a bit?
With very best wishes Claire”

I don't actually know who Claire is. I might have seen her in the show I'm talking about above; I don't know if I did. I might not have done. So I didn't know if the use of *neat* was in fact sarcastic or patronizing in a way to say “I've been doing this for thirty years now, you weren't even born then”. What if I had poured my heart out in that story? What might actually happen if I have to repeat myself? My heart explode? So instead of rewriting it, below I just copied and pasted myself.

Spectacular ruined my life. I came with two friends. One was a friend off my course at university. I don't know where he is anymore. The other friend was a girl I was in love with. I was sat in the middle of them when I fell asleep. They fell in love as I dreamed. I don't know where she is anymore. Spectacular saved my life. I don't know where I am anymore. It's quite nice.

But it's still not long enough; it still makes me feel like a failure. That I would never achieve what they have. I guess the only way is to tell Claire I thank her for getting back to me and try. Here. Goes. Nothing.

Nathan Birkinshaw

ANONYMOUS

So,

I really, really want to write about this.

I don't really know about what, really. And my English is poor.

But I need to tell you how much they meant to me – all those words about the future. Or, about the present, really. And about the past. (Because there is no present, right? The present is me, typing and going back and forward with the cursor on the computer screen).

I somehow wrote a few words that spread to a virtual... cloud – as they say, nowadays – that said something like having felt undressed with “Tomorrow’s Parties” in Lisbon, yesterday. This could mean that I’m embarrassed to be as everyone else is but it is not just that; the point is that I *feel*. And it is embarrassing to *feel*.

This is really awkward to me, being Portuguese, especially when it is triggered by British people. (I suppose I might have been wrong about us being more “opened” and in touch with our feelings).

This is not a complement, at all. (I’m sorry). It is very easy to picture one’s life when he or she is open to see himself or herself in the mirror.

But let’s talk about mirrors.

Mirrors make us crazy!

(Oh, shit, 214 words...)

Ok, so, here’s the story:

There was once a girl.

She lived.

She was no longer a girl but she felt like one.

Authority, submission, morals

Beauty, aesthetics, art

Ugliness, loneliness, poverty

Bad poems, waste of time, self-consciousness

Dreaming, resources, going away

Love, gender, falling in love with the wrong people at the wrong time

God, confidence, sexual drive

Cloning, unconsciousness, mind, ego, identity

Depression, suicide, happiness

Children, marriage, death

Disease, dancing, thinking and thinking for an hour

All of this she carried around until one day she met someone online. Actually, she didn’t meet someone since she never met the person but *something* with whom she started what one might call a conversation. Actually – again – she forced... “it” to have a conversation with her because she was so lonely. So there was something growing under deep water and, at some point, it imploded and she died.

But she didn’t really die – as “it” didn’t really die...

Anonymous

TIM CROUCH

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 auditions 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

ANNIE LLOYD

I was perplexed the first time. There's no getting away from it. 'Club of No Regrets' at The Leadmill. I didn't know what I was watching. It looked muddled, I felt muddled. Fragmented and dysfunctional, no through narrative, no resolution. It bothered me. I stayed bothered. But then I had been bored by much touring work for some time and it took me some time to recognise this perplexity was a gift: a response to my boredom; a chance to look again, reconsider. And I did.

You made 'Ground Plans for Paradise' in the Gallery. I started to see.

You showed 'Speak Bitterness' in the Studio Theatre. Things were never the same.

You showed me it was possible to be assured, incisive, funny, profound and political.

You showed me how acting could look.

You showed me performance did not have to rely on cliché.

You showed me the longed for connection between head and heart.

You showed me there is an audience for this work.

I was nervous meeting you all and found you warm, appreciative and a joy to work with.

I've seen you triumph abroad and struggle at home, although at my home you were always welcome.

You were threatened with cuts and rose above. You kept your nerve with integrity and passion for the work. You travelled from strength to strength.

And you grow individually and collectively: looking ahead, searching, asking questions.

So thank you all: Tim, Terry, Claire, Richard, Cathy and Robin, Eileen, Verity and Deb.

I forgive you. At the Lyceum in First Night, Cathy predicting our deaths pointed straight at me and said "car crash". A week later I crashed my car. You have a spooky hold over me.

What you have achieved, how you have defined contemporary theatre, it's massive, not just here but all over. For a while there everybody wanted to be you, without always knowing what that meant. I think we're passed that now, thank goodness. There are many wonderful artists today making work who owe you loads and haven't needed to imitate. They found their voice in large part because you remained true to yours.

Your staying power is amazing. Stay a while longer.

Annie Lloyd, Programmer, Producer

STEFI HUSEL

365 times playing and watching: Playing the clown. Playing a dog. Playing trees. Playing for each other. Watching them playing clowns. Watching them playing dogs and trees. 365 times watching them: How they do stuff again and again. Failing. Trying it again. The clown, the dog the tree, maybe a gorilla. Or a person, carrying a star, a saw, a piece of fabric, tinsel curtains. Carrying things. Playing with things. Things that glitter and shimmer in the light. Things that are dirty. Things which leave dirty spots on the floor. Or wet spots, shiny wet spots. Playing with water, powder, with light and dust. Falling down. Watching, how they play, how they slip and fall. Laughing. Laughing together. Watching together, playing together, failing together. Yawning and exhaustion, crying and anger. And then all over, again.

365 times watching and playing: Watching videos, over and over, again and again. Showing each other what happened. Or what didn't. 365 endless days of discussions and filming video sequences. Fingers on screens, eyes on sheets. Trying to make sense. Destroying sense. Playing video sequences forwards and backwards. Playing with the watched, playing what had never happened, again. Playing to make sense. Playing other spectators, watching stuff. Playful discussions, putting words on paper, playing with sense and nonsense. Coming to a complete halt. Then starting again. 365 times oscillating, between watching and playing, backwards and forwards. A dog, watched on video. Playing for each other what didn't happen. 365 times of discussing clowns and dogs and trees and maybe a gorilla. Fingers on a person on a screen, carrying a star, trying to make sense. Dirty fingers. Destroying sense, with a saw and a piece of fabric. Video sequences like water and dust and powder in the light. Watching what cannot happen again. Playing to be someone else, falling down. Slipping sense, falling nonsense. Watching spectators failing. Watching spectators yawning in exhaustion, crying in anger. Discussing it all over and again.

365 times of watching and playing, playing and watching. The dog, the clown, the tree. The person with a saw, a star, a sheet of paper with words. Laughing spectators, exhaustion, dust, water, sense. Again and again, no halt.

Stefi Husel

ROBERT PACITTI

Once upon a time there was a blood red room

Which harboured a hidden 'J'.

A tissue of lie-good plywood
This scarlet thing stood fully erect - though god knows how -
In the very public holding
Of an otherwise private collective.

Once I heard they spent their entire budget
On making a man fall over
Wearing only his best gor-blimey-trousers
And an enigmatic smirk.

Then once a woman was made to laugh until she nearly choked.
Of course she didn't actually choke
Which would have spoiled the joke, by
Going
Too
Far.
But all of us knew we would have secretly loved it
If she'd died right there, for real
For we are - as accused - always and ever
That word,
And that word is
Audience.

Once upon a time this assembly also
Set off
Indoor
Fireworks
Without any due diligence it must be said,
To the full protocols surrounding all requisite health and safety procedures

Or indeed even the expected
Arms
Length
Approach
To the potential repercussions such rashly impetuous actions could incite.
Or indeed, spill.

Dirt and dust and spit and glitter,
And Robin going on,
A new one pretending they could out-dance Richard,
And Robin still going on.
Cathy as Sophie and Terry in tears
And Robin on and on
Whilst Claire imagining something somewhere
Kept it close to her chest whilst trying to tell us
Another one,
Divert our attention,
And
Robin on and on some more
And on and on and on.

Did you hear the one
About the rails of discarded
Second-hand clothes and piles of cardboard

Signed in felt-tip?
'Exit'
'My life...'
'My other car -
Is a hearse'

Durational / mutational / anything could happen
Chance it.
But I've seen you pull that trick before
And knew it was up your sleeve all along.
That this was
Certainly
Most definitely
Unequivocally
Real.

That this right royal
Cheap-bit
Two-faced
Bloody mess
Was all we might have
Come the end of the world
If we were lucky enough
To be there.

Microphones thrown down
And words lost with them,
Forever.

Happy birthday
You total kunst.
You had me all along
At the club
Of no Regrets

Robert Pacitti, Artistic Director of Pacitti Company

DUNCAN FEWINS

I Teach Forced Entertainment

I teach Forced Entertainment. How do you do that? At least with Lorca, there's a play text and some characters.

Every year's the same. A new eager set of A Level Drama students enter the room. Their experience of theatre to date - maybe some Godber. The number one can't fail choice for GCSE Drama in provincial comprehensive schools. 'The Crucible' if you're lucky.

I tell them how good Forced Entertainment are. How 'different'. I show them a few clips from the company website. But they just don't get it...

A live show must be the answer. Most years they play the Warwick Arts Centre, so in the coach we get.

I do warn them, "There won't be a story, there won't be characters, there won't be a plot." "What will there be then", they say to me with quizzical looks.

"Just some...umm...images and sort of theatrical sequences, maybe some fragmented dialogue." Now they're really confused.

The show starts. Either a convoluted messy one or a paired down conceptual one. This year the latter. It's called 'Tomorrow's Parties'. Robin and Terry tell us what they think might happen in the future... repeatedly. A very happy hour passes quickly in my head. But I know what's coming. Some angry and confused teenagers will demand their money back like bitter Daily Mail readers. How come they're so reactionary? Isn't it 2013...

"Well, that wasn't theatre", one says to me on the coach back to Stratford. "What was it then", I say. "I don't know, but it wasn't theatre. There were no characters." "Does theatre have to have characters?". "Definitely." "Well... I think that was theatre and there were no characters. And if it wasn't theatre, I'd like you to tell me tomorrow what it was."

In tomorrow's lesson, they will all start by saying they hated it. All except one. She will say that she found some of the ideas interesting. Some of the images disturbing. Some of the dialogue funny. Another will admit that he quite liked it... grudgingly.

Then a few days later another will come out of the woodwork. She "realised it was quite clever" when she thought about it. "Quite clever really." And I think so too!

Duncan Fewins, Head of Teaching and Learning at Stratford upon Avon College

ASHLEY HICKMAN

I was an undergraduate student in Canada, in my third year of drama training, when I first discovered Forced Entertainment. (*Let the Water Run its Course*) to the Sea that Made the Promise. I'd be lying if I said I hadn't become absolutely fascinated, almost transfixed by the work.

I moved to the UK two years later, this time to complete a Master's degree in Devised Theatre – clearly inspired by the company I now refer to as my favourite. I was part of projects that were heavily influenced by Forced Entertainment; that tried to use the company's performance structure for our own work. We were terribly unoriginal and unsuccessful. But that didn't stop us from enjoying it.

I have been lucky enough to see Forced Entertainment every time they have performed in London in the past seven years that I have lived here. *Bloody Mess, Quizoola!, Dirty Work, First Night, Exquisite Pain, And on the Thousandth Night, The World in Pictures, Spectacular, Void Story, The Thrill of it All*. I can't remember what order I saw them in. I just remember thinking to myself, 'this is why I do what I do; why I want to be in the theatre'.

I do not work in theatre. I work in marketing. But I still love going to the theatre. I love going to see the work of Forced Entertainment. It renews my passion every time. It reminds me why I set out to study theatre. It reminds me how much I wanted to produce devised theatre. It reminds me why pushing the boundaries is a good thing to do. It reminds me how wonderfully creative people can be. It reminds me that I can still be creative. It still inspires me. And every time I return home from a show, I write. I write about nothing and everything at the same time. But I love it.

"Part two was also their heartache for the city outside." The words that had me hooked, that enthralled me, that I still swirl around in my head sometimes, even to this day.

Thank you, Forced Entertainment. I look forward to seeing you perform again when you are next in London.

Ashley Hickman

DAVID WILLIAMS

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, Professor of Performance Practices, Royal Holloway, University of London

MAAIKE NEUVILLE

It sometimes happens to me that I wake up with a sentence. In that short period of time in which my mind doesn't know yet that he is what I think he is, the sentences come. Like that. "Life is a party with endless possibilities and a few doors". I can't help it, it's one of them. It makes me think of the title for either a very good or a very bad movie. And it makes me think of your performances of which I've seen only three. When you were 25 years old, I had the same age and I saw 'Spectacular'. It started when I was 25: thinking about my own thoughts. Not only acting anymore, but acting and observing, acting and observing. I saw 'Spectacular' and looked into my own eyes. It's possible! It's allowed! It exists! Looking at one-self and at the same time being one-self. Something got connected that night. I saw the eternal doubts of a performer and a human being and a skeleton and I saw his insatiable will to act. I went home and fell asleep, happily confused. Then there was 'Sight Is The Sense That Dying People Tend To Lose First.' "A factory is a place in China". Seven words that point to the (im)possibilities they're containing. Realizing how beautifully absurd it is to give names. Two things can happen then. One: Becoming silent in a house made of wood, looking outside, being content, without the need to comprehend. A cow. A cloud. A storm. A war. A girl. A girl going away. A girl coming back. The smell of soup. Water in the basement. Damn. O how I wish I could! Or two: Actively seeking the contradictions. The contemplation and the experience. The costumes and the nudity. The words and the pauses in between. The applause and the people leaving the show. The encounters and the driving-home-alone. The dreams growing older and the children growing up. Embracing all of them, the oppositions, the fears for what's unknown. Time and again. Without falling back on certainties, on achievements, on your name. Because in that name, you have included the eternal possibility to re-invent yourself.

Maaïke Neuville

LOIS KEIDAN

Happy birthday.

On your 20th birthday in 2004 I wrote:

they're still as original, as urgent and as fresh as the first time I saw them.

- still true

There are artists working in performance today who weren't born when Forced Entertainment started out, and for many of them the company stands out as a pre-eminent influence.

- still true

Wherever we look in contemporary performance we find the stamp of Forced Entertainment.

- still true

For many of us they have remained a constant and valuable point of reference.

- still true

(they) have never compromised their integrity, and have never been afraid to take risks with projects that take them into new territory or which test new relationships with their audience.

- still true

And maybe that's why they have never been invited to the National Theatre, profiled by Michael Billington or nominated for an Olivier Award.

- still true

In 2004 the 'new' still remains suspect to the mainstream and many of the more traditional theatre commentators I despaired of are still setting the agenda.

- no longer true!

OK, none of those three things have happened, but here, in 2014, the mainstream is no longer 'the agenda'. Your 'stamp' is felt by those who matter much more in shaping culture – those online cultural commentators, those producers testing adventurous relationships with art and audiences, those educators introducing students to different ideas, and those audiences who get younger and keener every year – audiences most mainstream theatres would sell their souls for.

In an after performance discussion for *Tomorrow's Parties* last year I conducted a poll of how many Forced Entertainment shows the audience had seen. It led David Williams and I to this correspondence:

DW: (it) set me wondering (and made me feel part of some ancient weathered geological time structure in that youthful audience mix): so I've had a look and bewilderingly it seems I've seen 19.

LK: it looks like I've seen 28 'live' works. Strangely watching FE over many years and seeing them with a younger audience doesn't make me feel as ancient as I am (and usually feel) but I find it kind of rejuvenating!

- still very true

Lois Keidan, co-founder and Director of the Live Art Development Agency

TIM STRICKLAND

EVENTFUL: A clown kicking a clown, an incurable disease, an absence and return, a long silence and tedium and more tedium. It's just a story with a lost narrative, an emotional release with a sense

of humour, was that really funny? The clown wasn't so sure, he wasn't real. He might have been an actor, but they don't do that acting stuff in that company. They dance, some of them, not very well, they sit around and break chairs. They shift chairs on the Titanic. They talk a lot and tell more stories, but still no narrative and they talk about acting. They have been doing it for years, long enough to have may be got better at whatever it is they do. They should have done, but they still don't act. Girls and boys not quite grown up, a lot older now. Wiser? Only they know. Lifelong friends, well, may be acquaintances, desperate not to act, united in a spotlight with hardly any scenery and no narrative. They like to dress up, they like props. They embrace multimedia, they did a slide show and talked over some pictures. They like tinsel and shiny things. They can definitely see the future, I am not sure how reliably. It's bleak. One was a gangster and they might have tried to sing. They definitely tried to make music, that wasn't very good either. I know that when they dress up they sometimes forget to put their clothes on with hilarious consequences; well it's not very funny, but I like a good cliché. They can go on a bit and I don't just mean for thirty years. They promise insight and provocation and then talk a lot, sometimes together and sometimes in monologues. They occasionally get hysterical and throw things around; water, confectionery, fake snow. It's a mess. I am not quite sure what the point is, they don't act, some say they can't, they can't even talk properly, they have to use microphones and OMG did I mention the wigs, you can see the bad fit and everything. I am told people around the world like them. I quite liked the clowns, but they weren't very

Tim Strickland

JULE GARTZKE

When asked what my relationship is to FORCED ENTERTAINMENT, a lot of pictures and scenarios come immediately into my head. Pictures that are stuck there, still with me and still making me think.

Yes, I can describe the work, the performers, the settings, the people behind the scenes but on more thought I realize that all the performances I've seen were actually real life experiences. Not a simple plot, not a story easily told but situations or proposals in which we are – all together.

Watching FORCED ENTERTAINMENT has always been for me like time agreed to spend together. Time in this place called theatre, confronted with a system, a framework of rules, sometimes obvious, sometimes hidden.

Time where unknown things could unfold, sometimes expected, sometimes unexpected.

Time where I could start to know the people on stage, on this platform where they give themselves over to a challenge, to a request or to questions. Confronting themselves with states of being, with diving deeper into the hidden places where creation is born.

Time for the joy of being with them as they are doing it.

Their work is about the expression of states of being rather than characters or roles in a play. An exploration in what theatre or performing could mean and how it could be connected to contemporary life.

It is not just entertaining or exciting or confusing but always deeply inspiring.

They reach me as a spectator but also as a performer:

How would I react in this situation?

Would I be able to stay in touch, in contact with myself and take the time to answer questions?

Would I allow - as they do – the audience to watch me thinking, just being, allowing the nothing in myself?

FORCED ENTERTAINMENT offers possibilities for finding new perspectives both in life and in performance.

What I enjoy most is that it is never about an end, about the result of a performance but always about the means whereby they get somewhere. Always risking the not-succeeding is what makes FORCED ENTERTAINMENT so alive, so present, so playful, so relevant for life.

Thank you for all the time spent together asking and answering the questions of life.

Jule Gartzke, Actress and Teacher of the Alexander Technique

CAROLINE BOTTOMLEY

The first time I met Forced Entertainments was meeting with Debs and maybe Tim too in the bar at the Leadmill. They were not long out of university and massively self confident but not in an awful way, they just knew they were very good. Debs was a really, really nice ambassador. I booked them into the next theatre season.

Other theatre, dance, performance companies I was booking around that time were:

Scarlet Harlets
Gay Sweatshop
Moving Picture Mime Company
Dogs in Honey
Neil Barlett/Gloria
Annie Griffin
Station House Opera (maybe wishful thinking)
La La La Human Steps
Bobby Baker
Spare Tyre
Monstrous Regiment
The People Show
Laughing Stock
Impact (booked by Sara Unwin)
Raving Beauties
Theatre de Complicite
Graeae
Forkbeard Fantasy
Impossible Theatre
Grand Theatre of Lemmings
Tara Arts
Hull Truck
Lip Service
DV8
Trestle Theatre
Lumiere & Son
The Cholmondeleys
The Featherstonehaughs
Richard Layzell
Temba
Bow Gamelan (Paul Burwell, Anne Bean, Richard Wilson)
Black Mime Theatre Group
Compass Theatre Company

Forced Entertainment were part of a flourishing of physical theatre, live art, time based art, performance art which was happening around the middle 80s. It was a very exciting time to be involved in that world, when performance promised the unexpected. I knew I'd be challenged, thrilled, enthralled, bored, confused, delighted and often all in equal measure.

I promoted 3 seasons per year of touring theatre on Monday nights and 2 seasons of more alternative events as part of the 4D strand on Thursday nights. Designers Republic designed the very beautiful black, gold and white leaflets. Wish I'd kept them.

Other exciting places were Third Eye Nottingham, Manchester c/o Stella Hall, ICA London, Leicester.

200% and Bloody Thirsty was my favourite show.

Beautiful sets, naked performers, technology, comedy, poetry. Is that the one where they were angels and it snowed feathers? It was lovely.

Apparently I had a heavy discussion with Claire and Terry in the toilets on the politics of nudity. I vaguely remember. I mainly remember trying to sound intelligent about articulating what I like about Forced Ents.

One of the things I like now is I saw they are headlining Latitude Festival this year.

Which means they are National Treasures.

Caroline Bottomley, Managing Director, Radar Music Videos

STEVE HEWITT

The story I told myself for at least the last ten years was that we saw 'Emmanuelle Enchanted' in our first term at college and it Changed Everything. The signs, the noise, the costumes. We saw it and spent the next three years ripping it off. We built our own worlds to mirror those we'd seen that night. We went to Prema in the middle of nowhere and saw 'Club of No Regrets' and 'Hidden J', to the ICA in the heart of London to see 'A Decade of Forced Entertainment', but all because of that first show in Cheltenham, in our theatre that would, soon enough, be knocked down to build luxury flats.

Except it never happened.

I was so convinced that, even when it wasn't on the tour map on the website, I argued I had definitely seen the show, it would be in my diary. Six months ago I found the diary. We saw Blast Theory turn the theatre into a massive rave. We saw Index where two people in bear suits simulated sex over a table. Twelve forgotten names doing odd/ unsettling/ boring things at a NRLA platform. But there was no Forced Ents. Then it struck me. We'd seen a video of 'Emmanuelle Enchanted', a dodgy bootleg smuggled through the live art underground, a single camera that could barely have captured even a quarter of the whole thing.

And yet, and yet, I still think 'Emmanuelle Enchanted' changed everything. It's why I sat in the Barbican in April for 16 hours, cursing my lack of stamina for missing the first 8 hours. It's why I find myself looking at the crowd at BAC realising I'm now older than the lecturers, never mind the students making up, as always, most of the audience. Students who now have Forced Ents on their curriculum, amazingly. Students who still think it's all improvised around rules (as we did), rather than honed and worked so every word is meant, yet looks effortless. A mock-exasperated Richard afterwards pretend upset that people didn't think they could Act.

Whatever comes next, more shouty shows or more talky shows (my personal Forced Ents taxonomy), I want to be there.

Steve Hewitt

CLAIRE HULATT

Richard Lowdon saved my life. Literally.

I became aware of Forced Entertainment Theatre Co-operative in 1985. I met Richard in The Hallamshire in Sheffield on my 20th birthday; I was armed with a bottle of Port which I was freely administering to anyone present. My birthday celebration continued on in The Leadmill and Richard turned up. I had imagined that 'Performance Art' was people acting in an 'attention seeking' way. Doing daft things and professing a deeper meaning behind it.

I have to thank Richard for his encouragement to apply for a job at the Arts Council in London. I hadn't even studied art but as it turned out they employed me.

The first time I saw Forced Entertainment perform was in London. (Let the Water Run its Course) to the Sea that Made the Promise. I was accompanied by both Sheffield and Arts Council friends. The Sheffield contingency, including a Chef and a Civil Engineer (brother) made fun of the performance. Myself, I found it moving and intriguing. At that age I dare not speak my views and awaited the verdict of my Arts Council friends. As they raved about it and couldn't wait to talk direct to Richard, I knew this was a beginning and I was happy but felt a little left behind.

I have only seen them perform once more at The Lyceum in Sheffield 'The Coming Storm'. I found it hilariously funny, yet so cleverly flowing from laughter to pathos and leaving lasting words and visual imagery. The unashamed rawness of the props, the dialogue and movement, although may have been rehearsed, lots, draws you in and you feel part of what is happening before you.

Although I only knew one member of the group for a very short time in Sheffield, I have followed their work and still remember why as one very shy 20 year old woman, I wouldn't join them, at Richard's invitation, for a communal meal in their house in City Road. I was in awe of their creativity, ideas and felt that they somehow had formed a language/understanding which was unique to them.

After being together for 28 years, maybe my initial assumption was right.

Claire Hulatt

BOB DICKINSON

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 at the BBC

CATHY TURNER

Strange that a company that had me on edge for the duration of *Pleasure* as they held a pistol - which as Chekhov said, must go off at some point - now seems to me characterised by generosity.

'Shut the curtain', they say in 1997. Provoked and baffled, I want them to shut the curtain, but Richard said it for me.

We argue loudly all the way home.

Spaciousness. 1998. The roominess of a performance where nothing much happens, excitingly.

Claire stands up in *Dirty Work* and all the co-ordinates change. My imagination is welcomed into an impossible text on a minimal stage. That performance text can be like this. It's like falling in love. Or simply, that is what it is.

Quizoola!, the same year. Dust and concrete. The performers pushing each other. Answer better. Ask better. I had expected to take a break. I don't want to leave. I listen as if all the questions and answers in my life would be shaped by this.

Disco Relax in 1999. Cathy declaring vehemently, 'I will have no language in my courtroom!' A language that tumbles over its own knots, that entangles itself, like a kitten playing with wool or a bird caught in a net.

2001 is when I first meet any of you (off stage). You are then, and always afterwards, extraordinarily kind.

And On The Thousandth Night, Brussels, 2002. The one performance I experienced from inside, terrified and honoured. Realising finally, unable to equal it, the energy, daring and generosity required to keep taking risks, spinning yarns hour after hour for ten thousand nights, for thirty years;

Scheherazade's strength.

My own imagination would be different without you now.

2013. *All Tomorrow's Parties*. The persistent questioning in my own head is given form, resolved into a pattern. I'm not sure whether all possibilities for the future are levelled here; in the endless lists, are all things equal, or are they weighed against each other? Neither, perhaps, but language forced between the rules of the entertainment, a rock and a hard place, gains pressure, bursts the banks of possibility.

You smile, we drink and talk. When I leave, possible is capacious, the night sky full of...

Cathy Turner, Exeter University; Wrights & Sites.

JAMES STENHOUSE

In Wakefield, cooking turkey mince, I walked from the kitchen into the lounge. Opposite the brown striped corner sofa and the dog-sized fungus, my housemate Holly sat beside the tele in her pyjamas. An unmarked VHS case lay beside her and on the tele were some people talking beneath a neon sign that said '200% and Bloody Thirsty'. Holly told me they were called "Forced Entertainment" and they were friends who had met at university and one of their friends had died and this was a show about that. I watched for a minute. One of the people on the tele was lying with their head on the lap of another and saying some words. There were clothes everywhere on the floor. There were some angels on TV screens. I returned to my turkey mince. From the kitchen I could hear the rhythm of the sentences and some occasional words over the sound of the frying offal. Holly called through to me, she was excited about this video, she was excited about these friends who had met at university and done this together. I wasn't sure what to think. I loved those angels and the way they talked though and I still remember walking from the kitchen into the lounge

and I still remember that 1 or 2 minutes of video I saw
and I still remember Holly's face as she told me about them.

I still remember the brown striped sofa,
the dog-sized fungus,
the pyjamas,
the VHS tapes,
the turkey mince,
the broken arm,
the cap that didn't fit,
the smell of bed and hair,
the carpet,
the neon sign that said 200%,
the Angels,
Holly's face.

In that same living room we used to play guitar
but I only knew three chords so we'd play the same song over and over,
the kind of song you get in a teach yourself guitar book
but we swapped the words to 'cock' and 'bum'.

We'd drink from a box of spirits Pete's dad gave us because he couldn't sell them. Cheap cocktail spirits and no mixers.

One night, Pete burned the palm of his hand with a glass of Sambuca that was on fire.

James Stenhouse

JAN SUK

I am on the train. I am writing to share with you my life next to you within the last decades.

There is something utterly gravitating in the crux of your oeuvre - your commitment to enjoy life in/and theatre. I like to see your aesthetics as ingenious mixture of personal, fragile, sympathy-provoking humanism with meticulously careless approach to make things happen. Magic. I love the way you both care as well as ignore the ones like me – the people who watch you, write about you, learn from you, teach about you, coexist with you - no matter be we spectators, audiences, or wit(h)nesses. Yet I would like to see beyond just your aesthetics. I would like to see your theatre as the way to change lives.

Your performances have taken me across Europe to see new, meet new, remember new. Hungover, discussing emptiness and silence after the 'Spectacular' in Dresden. Interviewing Richard after 'Void Story' in Prague, remembering nothing. Falling in love a stranger sitting next to me during 'The Coming Storm' in Braunschweig. Forgotten apologies. Unexpressed loves. And much more.

Similarly, as a teacher, I have taken your projects across three continents – I remember bursts of laughter at Stanford, nodding heads in Nepal, raised eyebrows in the Czech Republic, Turkish poker faces, curiosity in Cyprus, clenched teeth of disagreement in Sri Lanka and anger in Germany. Inspiration. Fatigue. Disappointment. And again, much more.

Eventually your projects and aesthetics have somehow inhabited my life far, inevitably. Looking back I see that both your efforts and mine share certain durational, process-based failure to grasp the truth. Such perfect, life-like imperfectness. Like in life, I remember the good things. I am convinced that you are truly good at making the good (in) theatre appear, and again, slowly slip away.

I am still on the train. Lives, people, stories are passing behind the window and I wonder what next adventures shall bring us together? Maybe tonight at the 30th anniversary party after 'The Last Adventures'? The last adventure? With your performances no one ever knows. Hope and love. Let us see then.

Good luck to you. Keep going.
Love, Live, and much more.

Jan Suk, Teacher at the University of Hradec Králové, Czech Republic

EMMA GEE

Lists
Tim

Soap flakes
And angels

It's Christmas!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Cardboard stars with tin foil on repeat: big and little, lost and found, hiding nothing

Dicks and tits
Jerry and Terry

Gaffa gansta's with guns

The ubiquitous mic

The agony of boredom

GoGo carpet

Pants

Trees wooden and inflatable and arguing

Gorilla's that chuck their nuts and plays dead dreaming of attention
Claire (the voice)

Wendy cheerleading – go girl go – yeah!

The poetry of the city – (I almost get it)
Newscaster/portent Terry

Cartoon slapstick
Flats agogo

Graphic graphics

Clowns – so many clowns
And chairs

Lamé
Spandex
Fun fur
Wigs

“Radical amateurism”

Roadies who railroad
Robin and Richard

Unfinished

things

Not said

Or done

All the rude words
(Nice girl) Cathy

Nonsense turned sense

Tales told, retold, untold
Crowns and crisps
More chairs
Coming and going
Still going

Night (after night)
Its always night

Booze

And secrets.

That stare that sees us head on

Sheffield
Rotterdam
Delhi
Leeds
Manchester
Wherever
Whatever

Why the trees?

Desks

Mics

Rails

Clubs and parties
Glitter balls and slash curtains

Edges and exposure

Blindfolded and determined

To get it said
And done

Because

A story needs:

Manifestos

Facts

Regrets

A princess

An assassin

And Lost Lisa

Cardboard and markers

Laughs and sads
(Both at the same time)

To tell the history of the world (or nothing)

Silence (that one)

thwarting

and a dog

Pieces of paper

Attempts at

Order and dance

With loud rock music

And rock chic divas

With skeletons let out the closet

Dying

Questioning

Tarnished and torn, messy and broken, glittery and struggling, twinkly and tatty and wrong so, so
wrong
It's right

Mess

Mess making
Chaos embracing
Rule breaking
Plenty of faking but
No messing

Tim being nice
To the woman with the red satin bra
Who screwed up his workshop
In Nottingham
For Now 92, 93, 94?

Her "You don't think that"
Tim "I do"

He did
He does

He still does

I was a bit late to the party
(I don't like parties)
I came to yours

Couldn't leave

I liked the anger
Yours

And theirs
As they walked out

I would have stayed all night
Then I did

I've grown old with you.

Happy Fucking Birthday!

Emma Gee

STEPHEN HODGE

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 bit40 of cardboard and hit-or-miss costume changes and tomato ketchup chucking and catheters.

Stephen Hodge, Head of Drama at the University of Exeter

DAVID MICKLEM

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

BEN SLATER

One summer evening in the year 2000, not long after I moved to Sheffield, I took a bus from the city centre out along Ecclesall Road, got off and followed instructions to a terraced house on a side street. Waiting upstairs were some people I'd never met before. But I'd known them for years. I'd stood next to them at parties. I'd done their workshops, attended talks. I'd almost certainly tried to be like them. But mostly I'd watched them in black box theatres up and down the country. And there I'd seen them turn failure and embarrassed silence into something else entirely. They figured out how to make movies with no plot and only the ache and joy of the bits in-between. With costumes nicked from second-hand shops and scripts pieced together from lists of graffiti, confessions and cryptic phone messages. A world so strongly defined that even to describe it was to create another (poor) imitation. Because of this they'd been our idols. We learned their first names like rock stars (and damn Tim Crouch for writing that before me!).

And there they were now. Up the staircase, calling me to join them in a tiny living room. There was beer and snacks. There was Hugo Glendinning with a camera. Of course there was (he was part of the gang). It was a photo shoot and I'd been asked to participate. Tim (Etchells, notably absent) had sent me there (on a whim I'm sure), and now I was in the thing. The scenario was a party, 360-degree tableaux designed to increase in melancholy and debauchery each time around. There were a few other people there, mates and partners, but they fell away as the evening wore on, and by the end it was just them and me, shirt unbuttoned on a sofa, someone (Cathy?) pouring lager on my chest. Beneath whatever vacant look I affected for the camera, there was a smile. I was in the black box now. Even if only for a couple of hours, I was part of the entertainment...

The story ends with me walking (dazed) back into town, getting lost. And of course the photos were never used.

Ben Slater, Writer

HARUN MORRISON

Numbers 0 to 365 excluding the number 30 in honour of Forced Entertainment's 30th anniversary

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29
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Harun Morrison

DIANA DAMIAN MARTIN

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 different 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

PAUL ALLENDER

In 1997, I went to see *Pleasure* at a theatre in London. I lived there at the time and went to see them because they were based in my hometown, Sheffield, and because the short blurb about the show in *Time Out* sounded interesting.

I was totally blown away! I had never seen theatre like this. I was so excited and inspired. Highlights were Richard Lowdon's weird and dangerous D.J. playing records at a sluggishly slow speed, Robin Arthur's naked body with a dumb horse's head drinking vodka (?), Cathy Naden's sexually provocative statements on a blackboard and Terry O'Connor's hesitant and stumbling monologue in front of a stage curtain. A gun was involved. And the line I remember from the show likened capitalism to a tangle of wire.

I was hooked and for the next 10-15 years saw everything that they did, both in London and then later in Coventry, at Warwick Arts Centre. I loved everything. A great highlight was *Speak Bitterness* which I think is probably the best show the company has ever done.

In 2003, I was lucky to get the opportunity to perform with the company in *The Voices* at Sheffield's Lyceum Theatre, for 2 nights. I was on the stage with Richard, Cathy, Terry, Robin and Claire! Tim Etchells directed me! It was a dream come true. And the experience led me to think about, and then do, performance and direction. I moved to Coventry at the end of that year and started a performance group and also ran weekly open performance sessions. Over the next 5 years I directed and performed a lot, in Coventry, Sheffield and Oxford.

In 2009 I moved back to Sheffield and began my own performance group *Other Things*. Ironically, the period since then has been one where I have seen the company's shows less than ever. They perform less in Sheffield than elsewhere. In recent times, there have been opportunities to critically analyse their work a little and I have enjoyed this.

I guess though, for me, they will always be *the* company that broke huge barriers. The one that I watched in awe back in 1997. Indeed, it has been a pleasure.

Paul Allender

MARK DANIEL NORTH

Forced Entertainment- 365 Words. What Is the Coming Storm?

Forced Entertainment describe themselves as a 'company that explores what theatre can mean to a contemporary audience. Lionel Abel theorised this style of theatre as '*Metatheatre*', aiming to explore strategies that are in place to create a performance and the impact it has on the viewer.

'*Metatheatre*' nuances are established during the first spoken text. To analyse Terry O'Connor's opening monologue I will scrutinise it as a single entity and not the relationship to other components in the theatrical hierarchy. Debatably the purpose of this monologue is to acquaint the audience with the rules that appear throughout the performance. The rules link seemingly contrasting moments on stage and are acknowledged by the performers throughout and have comedic inclinations due to their contradictory requirements.

O'Connor deliberates what is needed in a "good performance"? "A performance needs a clear beginning...something strong... something dynamic". Asserting the function of the text without disguising it in a fictitious narrative. Clarification of time is given to the audience reminding them of the shared experience between themselves and the performers. Any presumptions audiences may have about *The Coming Storm* are abolished in the introductory monologue due to O'Connor expressing what the performance is about during this inaugural speech.

What does *The Coming Storm* mean? A story is repeatedly being told through a microphone in a melancholic style that has become associated with the company. Other performers are shifting a piano around the stage. Forcing the audience to choose what action they wish to engage with is possibly the embellishment of interdisciplinary theatre. I'm witnessing singing, piano playing, suicide attempts, a story that doesn't have a "killer", despite being asked frequently "is there a killer in this story... is there a killer in this story", performers interrogating each other. Theatrical disciplines are reaching a climax racing towards a collision, sadistically I'm choosing to peel my eyes towards the attempted suicide, forgive me I'm intrigued. The tempo is similar to a punk rock album, all my senses are being attacked not by Johnny Rotten instead it's the brilliance of Forced Entertainment! The storm has truly arrived and the crescendo is near. Now I know exactly what *The Coming Storm* means, feels and sounds like.

Mark Daniel North

MARK ETHELLS

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

KRISSI MUSIOL

The sound of Terry's voice captured us.
The way *Love Lane* rolled off her tongue into the microphone like red wine.
For many years after, when doing a sound check into the microphone, we would recount half-remembered-part-made-up street names and locations, imitating her seductive drawl.

When I saw *The Travels*, I wasn't sure whether their journeys had actually taken place or whether the performers had just imagined that they had.
I was 19 and had not yet been on any of my own real adventures, only the imagined.
It was 2002 and my world was very small.
In Lancaster, Forced Entertainment unfolded their maps onto Over Head Projectors –the days before maps on our iPhones guided us when we were lost.

From The Nuffield Theatre, we travelled with them to the locations they presented, places we had never been – but every now and again, someone in the audience would turn around in the seating bank and confirm that “yes, there was a Knife Alley in Hull” or that “everyone from Liverpool knew Mundane Street”.

And then we're travelling North to Edinburgh. Unfolding maps. It's 2004.
We're driving round in circles, lost.
We recalled their voices, their tones, Terry's voice pours back into the microphone, reading out the street names as we pass
Falcon Road, Eden Lane, Pilrig Glebe...
And then later when our travels took us South, to Bracknell, to Flour Avenue and Bakewell Street, to new stories and new adventures. J unable to sleep through the night, W dreaming about... We were travelling together through the present, unsure of the future.

All those places we hadn't yet been.
Places we never knew existed.
Places tinged with too much memory.
Places where we'd gotten our hearts broken.
Or secret places we didn't tell anyone about, places which only we could visit.
Places written in tiny letters on post-it notes and secretly passed to each other.
Places scrawled onto postcards, pushed into empty glass bottles and thrown into the sea.
Places which we thought meant something.
Places we only visited in our imagination.
Places written down in languages we had never learnt.
Places we went to try to make ourselves feel better.
Places we tried to forget.

Krissi Musiol, Artist & Lecturer in Contemporary Theatre & Performance at UCLan.

MATT TRUEMAN

It's starting again. She's starting again. That story. The same one. About that fucking break-up. How many times? Four. Five. Six. Again? Seven. Eight. Alright, each is slightly different. Details drop out. Others appear. But it's still the same, really. He's talking again. Thank god. Something new. Then: Again? And again? And again?

My arm reaches for the remote. I squeeze the button. The woman falls silent. Her mouth moves double-speed. She twitches. Quadruple-speed. She fits. Him too. 8x. 10x. 30x. End.

Have you ever tried to watch Exquisite Pain on DVD? You won't make it through, I promise you. It's like the cinnamon challenge. It just can't be done. You had to be there. Trapped and entranced. Out of time and in agony. It's like Barney's theme on a loop. It's Chinese water torture. Drip. Drip. Drip. Fuck it: fast-forward. End.

I'm one of what Andy Field called "the late arrivers." I was 22 when we met. You were 23. I had to catch up. I was down to interview Tim. It's 2008, you're 25 and I've still never seen you live. Despite all those essays about you. Despite shows in your slipstream. Despite our own games, our own lists, our own failures. I've read Certain Fragments. I'm writing like Tim. (We all are. Still.) It's another year before I'll see you live: Spectacular. But, right now, I'm sat in the British library, in a wood-panelled room, with an old chunky television and a small stack of DVDs.

Over two days, I whizz through your work between cigarettes. I speed through First Night. I blink up 12am: Awake and Look Down. I watch grainy grey figures, blurred into indistinction, in an unrestored VHS of The Set Up. (How old were you then? Were you still students?) I get through Who Will Sing a Song To Unfrighten Me in an hour and a half. I give up on Exquisite Pain. I love Bloody Mess. All of it. Every last second.

I think I love the titles as much as anything else. Speak Bitterness. Emmanuelle Enchanted. Club of No Regrets. Nightwalks. Showtime. They sound fucking great. Whatever they were.

Guess you just had to be there.

Matt Trueman

PENNY MCCARTHY

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

SEAN PATTEN

LOOK NO FURTHER – THIS IS IT! That neon sign at the back of the set – its words so bold, so thrilling, so exhilaratingly cocksure and immodest, so bloody clever – that sign was the beginning of my infatuation with Forced Entertainment.

It was 1991, I was a student at Nottingham, and going to see *Marina and Lee* was part of our course. We probably had to write an essay on it. In fact I think we had to write an essay comparing and contrasting the work of Forced Entertainment and the Wooster Group who we had seen the previous week. I entered the theatre with no expectations of what was about to happen. The best way to experience art, I think. The best way to approach anything in life for that matter.

I was totally unprepared for such an intense experience of sadness and joy. And all the time that sign, framing and commenting on the events unfolding onstage. But what actually did happen onstage? I don't remember many details. Some dancing on rostra, some masks, some TVs on stage showing 'Trotsky's Home Videos' of the performers running around a sports hall, some plastic flowers strewn around the floor (or was that another piece?) and a tragically beautiful conversation between Marina (live) and Lee (on video): a declaration of love which ends with the words "I can't. I'm dead, Marina". That is the sum total of what I can recall. And I'm not even sure these memories are reliable. Yet the core of my emotional response to watching it has remained despite the lack of detail, like a pebble whose sharp edges have worn away over time. I don't know how many pieces I've seen since then, let's call it "a lot", but I am still in thrall to the strangely woven magic of a Forced Entertainment show. Each one is an alchemy of performance, text, music, dark humour and a touching warmth which entices every member of the audience into its world.

LOOK NO FURTHER – THIS IS IT! Since 1991, I have looked further, but this still very much feels like "it". Is that 365 words? Being cut off mid-sentence would be a very unsatisfying

Sean Patten, Gob Squad

ERIK POLD

It is like you are old friends of mine, even though I don't really know you and you don't know me.

Luckily you always seem to expose yourselves quite happily.

You confessed so many things to me, without me having to ask for it or to give anything in return.

The first time we met, you confessed things to me for 6 hours in "Speak Bitterness" at the Triple X festival in Amsterdam in 1997.

And you looked directly into my eyes, I am sure you noticed I was there, but then there were other people there as well. An audience, this is most often what we are, sitting there as a group in a theatre, but then again. I always have this feeling that we are never just an audience at a Forced Entertainment show.

We are there to help you get through the show.

We are like a bunch of friends with whom you need to have this conversation, slightly painful, yet entertaining and meaningful, somehow.

I admit to the fact that I have been stalking you for 17 years now, ever since those 6 hours in Amsterdam.

I admit that I don't even remember all the shows I watched with you, but I remember bits and pieces.

Like the records being played slower than they should and the curtain almost falling down in "Pleasure" or that speech about how you enter a new city from the Central Train station in "The World In Pictures", or kids shouting at me telling me how I address them in weird ways with weird logics all the time in "The Night Follows Day".

I admit to having tried to copy your work on several occasions, but always failing at it, luckily, I guess, it feels like we are a whole generation of performance artist who will never quite escape your influence.

We are your friends and we'll never be alone again.

In the future you will do this show where you reveal the secret on how you go on being Forced Entertainment for another 30 years.

And in the future a lot more people will recognize how brilliant that is!

Thank you and congratulations to you!

Erik Pold, Freelance director, choreographer and performer from Copenhagen.

TOMOYUKI ARAI

My partner Hiromi and I saw *Instructions for Forgetting* in New York and although we did not know anything about the company she immediately decided to bring it to Tokyo and told so to Tim right after the show. Later I saw the video recording of *Quizoola!* in which Tim was asked what language he wanted to learn and which country he wanted to visit and said Flemish and Japan. I do not know about the former but the latter came true and since then nine works by or involving Forced Entertainment and Tim have been shown in Japan. I translated five of them and at the time I worked on *Instructions* I was only about to get out of obsessions with the politics of representation and aesthetic/ethical consistency so it was still slightly difficult for me to accept the red shirt with a strange logo on the chest that Tim would always wear in the show although apparently it did not involve any reasoning or justification in relation to the content of the piece. If it involved conspicuous randomness or an explicit attitude against aesthetics I would have been more relieved but it seemed that they just did not give even the tiniest piece of shit to those things. It was the strict repetition of something arbitrary, at least apparently, that slightly scared me but I felt it was important to learn how to accept it and that was not only about the costume. It was very important for me to be able to accept or even celebrate what seemed to be a kind of groundlessness to me at that time to get the potential meanings of what would emerge from the apparently loose but strongly immanent association of fragmentary writings, i.e., the “short reports on things that have happened in the world” that were collected from his friends. I personally named the quality of the performance “readability” and years later — when I saw Tim wearing a Spider-Man T-shirt in *Over the Table*, which was absolutely irrelevant to the show, I was not confused anymore — said to him, “Your works are readable.” I think he responded, “I think I know what you mean.”

Tomoyuki Arai

ANNA LEWIS

It was a college trip, to Sheffield, in 2001. As Theatre Studies students we'd been encouraged to go, and had duly paid our £20, but were told very little about the show *First Night*, and even less about the company.

The actors came onstage in overdone makeup, glittery dresses and frightening fake smiles. They stood and stared at the audience for an eternity. One of them deliberately lopped her boob out. All the rules had broken, and it felt very, very uncomfortable.

A thought from a monologue about dying drifted into a section where Cathy Naden would point to members of the audience and tell them how they were going to die. *Point to the back of the stalls* "Pancreatic Cancer". *Point to the left of the dress circle* "Bus Crash". *Points in my direction* "Drowned at sea". I could hear crying. The audience were leaving in droves, offended by the strange prophecies being casually dealt at random. The pointing seemed to go on for hours, till nobody was left with their fate untold, the air in the auditorium had evaporated and the silence was deadly. I have no recollection of how that scene ended, but will never forget how briefly traumatising that experience was.

For the duration of the show I squirmed in my seat, cringed with embarrassment, got lost in rambling monologues and howled with laughter at a man leaping around the stage in a laundry bag. As the bad cabaret came to an end, and everyone applauded, the realisation hit me: never before had I experienced such a range of conflicting emotions from watching a show, especially one that I didn't fully understand or particularly enjoy. And that was the whole point. The words "Forced Entertainment" took on a brilliant new meaning and I walked out of that auditorium with a huge grin on my face.

Nobody on the bus got it. They didn't like it, didn't understand it, felt like the trip was a waste of time. Why, if we were studying Ibsen and Chekov, was it relevant? I was alone in my revelation, and basked in it in silence, mentally deconstructing its clever devices all the way back to York.

Anna Lewis, @ThisMayBeFatal

GILES BAILEY

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 self-conscious 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 self-congratulatory. 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

NIC FRYER

1990. I'm 19, in my first year at university. I'm trying to work out who I am and what sort of theatre I like. I think it might be Caryl Churchill's play *Cloud Nine*, a play on at the students' union. I've heard it's political and moving. But I can't go and see it as I'd planned, because my tutor group are being taken to see Forced Entertainment's *Some Confusions in the Law About Love*. The performance frustrates me. I don't understand what it's trying to do. But if I'd seen *Cloud Nine*, I think, it might have made me think about things and help me work out who I am.

1993. I'm doing an MA in Leeds. A fellow student says Forced Entertainment are on locally and we should go and see them. Reluctantly I agree: even if I feel frustrated again, at least it might help me work out who I am and what sort of theatre I like. At the show, *Club of No Regrets*, I watch scenes being replayed again and again in different ways, with different music and props, different intensities, and I am utterly immersed in it. I feel like crying, but I laugh a lot. I watch performers trying to work something out, and I am trying to work something out too as I watch. The piece doesn't seem to be saying anything, and the performers don't seem to know who they are. But I can relate to that now I'm 23. I've spent the last four years studying theatre, and trying to find myself, but I can't say I know who I am or what theatre I'm into. I feel like I'm a mixture of lots of different things. And so did the show. It created a space for me to find moods and feelings I didn't know I had.

2014. I like *Cloud Nine*. But, 21 years on, and having missed only one show since, I adore Forced Entertainment. There's always space in their shows for me to think about who I am and what I think about theatre. And I still don't know.

Thanks for creating a space to share your ongoing explorations with us.

Nic Fryer, New University in High Wycombe

DUŠKA RADOSAVLJEVIĆ

A memory: Driving through wet leaves into the grounds of a Wakefield park one night in December and finding this show there, all black and white, glinting. I was in my first term of my first year at uni and this was the final performance of the term on the syllabus. Like most freshers, I thought I knew how I liked my theatre - the kind of acting that moves you to tears, etc... This was nothing like it. But the revelation of the stunning simplicity of this show set off a slow revolution to my idea of theatre. At the time, I wrote some notes about it and filed them away.

For the next eighteen years, I carted these taped up boxes with my uni files wherever I moved - from a YWCA via several addresses in Leeds and Newcastle, a wet garage in Stratford-upon-Avon, to a third floor attic in Bristol, until, finally, they took up residence in a wardrobe in London – and I decided it was time to let them go. I mean, they were reaching the age of a young adult, the age of my own freshers... So I opened the boxes one last time.

What did my student self learn from watching her first Forced Entertainment show? What can I now learn from my student self?

- *'Speak Bitterness seemed to me like a verbal version of Grotowski's Poor Theatre'.*
[A bit nerdy, I know, but true...].
- *'The audience was lit and the actors kept the eye contact with the audience throughout'.*
[I found this an unusually intimate experience].
- *'You can make theatre without characters. An interesting aspect of simplicity was reflected in the lack of casting hierarchy: no leading or supporting roles, but sharing – and a different sharing of material in each performance'.*
[This was quite a revelation!].
- *'What sticks in my mind? - The humour'.*
[‘...By being both thought-provoking and entertaining, this was political theatre’, I concluded.]
- *'Language can replace the scenery'.*
[I didn't know then that Shakespeare used to do that too. The best revolutionaries never throw the baby out with the bathwater].

Your teacher always makes the right choices. Thank you, Steve.

Duška Radosavljević

DR ANDREW WILFORD

“NOSTALGIA IS AN ISLAND THAT IS BEST VIEWED FROM THE BOAT”

LOOK NO FURTHER THIS IS IT - MY FIRST QUANTUM PHYSICS LECTURE ON THE JFK ASSASSINATION. [Marina and Lee]*

CURTAINS FOR POETS AND NEWSREADERS FAILING TO GET TO GRIPS WITH LIFE AFTER A SUSTAINED DOWNPOUR OF RAIN [Emmanuelle Enchanted or pictures of this world as if it were a beautiful place]*

REAL TEARS® & REAL PAIN™ [Club Of No Regrets]*

“THERE WAS ONCE AN ISLAND FULL OF CUNTS”/ THERE WAS ONCE A PIECE OF THEATRE FULL OF LIARS. [Hidden J]*

THE SHAMELESS BUSINESS OF BEING HUMAN PRESENTED THROUGH CONFESSION. [Speak Bitterness]*

CONFESSIONS ON MURDER STREET. [Paradise]

RICHARD VAMPING, ROBIN WITH SPAGHETTI FOR INTESTINES, SEDUCTIVE SUICIDE STORY-TELLING FROM A DOG-HEADED CATHY AND A PISSED-OFF TERRY AS SHOUTING STAGEHAND TREE#2. [Showtime]*

PISSED-UP PANTOMIME HORSES GET NAKED -LIVE- [Pleasure]

GLITCHY VIDEOS FROM AN ANALOGUE WORLD. [Disco Relax]*

3AM AND DOG-HEADED PERFORMERS ARE LEARNING RUSSIAN FROM SUGGESTIVE VINYL WITH ‘CIVILISATION’ ENACTED BY TREES DURING A ROUND OF GOLF. [Who Will Sing A Song To Unfrighten Me?]

BIG SMILES ALL ROUND, ALL NIGHT [First Night]*

CATHY GETS MIXED MESSAGES IN ORACLE SQUARE WHILST TERRY TAKES A TRIP TO RAPE LANE. ENDLAND MAPPED. [The Travels]*

A COSMIC PERSPECTIVE. GORILLAS & CHAOS THEORY. [Bloody Mess]*

KARAOKE, CHOREOGRAPHY & CHARM! [The Thrill Of It All]

#STORM PORN. [The Coming Storm]

NO SOLUTIONS. IS THIS IT? [24hr Quizoola!]

Made in Sheffield you first spoke to my half-lit world of the Wicker and haunted steel-factories of Firth Park. My time with you has been vivid, long, images burned into memory like Terry once spoke of in relation to Michael Herr’s ‘Dispatches’. Our time during ‘Certain Adventures’ were two weeks of my life that carried me into new paradigms of practice, new visions of possibility and play. You have been the temper of my times and in turn your work continues to inspire new generations of theatre-makers through my everyday practice.

These were performances in theatres that are, for one reason or another, no longer in existence as professional venues – The North Riding College Studio Theatre, Portsmouth College Studio Theatre, The Gantry, The Gardner Arts. I thought you might like these for this memory.

Dr Andrew Wilford, Senior Lecturer, Theatre Department, University Of Chichester

PHELIM MCDERMOTT

Around 1984 I read a short story in a new writing anthology. I have since lost the book but in my memory the story's protagonist was a feral character marching through urban landscapes tuning into distant worlds via the ghetto blaster he carried on his shoulder. The language of the piece was fractured and broken.

I wrote to the author Tim Etchells to talk about adapting the piece for theatre or perhaps he would consider writing something else for the stage? A year later I was pleased to receive a reply saying he was sorry he hadn't written back sooner but had been busy making his own theatre and setting up a new company.

It was to be a few years before I saw Forced Entertainment actually perform. By then their reputation preceded them. I saw the show and was in awe of the mythos that the company had created and steeped themselves in. It was as powerfully present onstage as it had been in that piece of writing. Years later I took my then girlfriend to see Force Entertainment in Sheffield when they were playing the big Lyceum stage. It was her first time seeing them.

The piece was "First Night" a challenging show which has a section in it where a mind reader starts telling the audience their inner thoughts. Starting from the comic revelation of deceased relatives and pets before slowly transitioning into a catalogue of the terminal illnesses people in the audience were suffering from. It was deeply uncomfortable and I have never been in a show where the percussive sounds of vacating seats tipping up has been quite so dramatic. My girlfriend told me that watching the show had made her want to throw herself over the balcony into the stalls below.

Forced entertainment occupy a unique place in the UK theatrical landscape inventing a theatre language that is truly their own. It's authentic because long before other companies were deconstructing what happens onstage they had already trashed what could and should be done and were thrashing a new syntax and grammar for performance into being. A unique language excavated from the dreams, popular culture and technology of our time.

Phelim McDermott, Improbable Theatre

CHARLIE COOK

They are a theatre company. It shouldn't be too difficult. Apart from the arbitrary restriction on the word count, that is. The problem is... the problem I just keep running into is... the problem is that everything I try to write just ends up sounding like I'm trying to be part of a Forced Entertainment play-production-event thing.

Not exactly something I'm qualified for.

It started in the nineties. Moved to Manchester. Found stuff like opera, theatres, restaurants selling food from obscure countries, art galleries, films from Iran, needles in the gutter, policemen with guns and other things missing from everyday life in SmallTown.

In the Green Room, just down the road from the Cornerhouse. Before the curse of the Lottery funding which seemed to shut the place down until I left. I must have a look to see if it's still there - I hope the metro trains running across still punctuate the performances, but perhaps the smell of damp has gone.

Anyway, I went to see a lot of theatre at the Green Room, and elsewhere. But there was this particular bunch, with an unusual name.

"Latecomers will be refused admittance" it said on the flyer.

I obediently made sure to arrive before time, and then...

It's knowing about the friend that haunts me. Like when you know that someone has cheated on their partner, and you have to keep the knowledge for yourself. Or not, as the case may be. That part where you know that someone doesn't know something that maybe they ought to.

Perhaps you know the story – a treasured possession accidentally broken, replaced with a facsimile. The gradual exchange of every valued object with an identical but ultimately fake replacement.

It got right inside my head, that.

I know it's only make-believe. It's theatre; words and language sharpened up to get into your mind and under your skin. Trying to shift and turn your view on the world. But I just keep wondering who that friend was. Did they ever find out?

It's getting on for twenty years later, and it still gives a nagging guilty feeling.

I wish I'd never been told.

I think the latecomers got off lightly.

Charlie Cook

ALEXANDER KELLY

In the autumn of 1989 I went to university to be an actor, without really having noticed that what I'd been doing up to that point was *making* theatre.

*

Lancaster University's Nuffield Theatre hosted an amazing programme of visiting work, and was to become a major part of the life-changing experience that my degree course was. In my first term there, several experimental theatre (that's what we called it then) performances came to the Nuffield. And whilst I could appreciate them aesthetically and intellectually, none of them moved me (I told a friend at the time) the way a good story did.

And then Forced Entertainment rocked up with *200% And Bloody Thirsty*. Three performers playing Glasgow drunks attempting to enact the Nativity story, looked down upon by two video angels. A floor covered in charity shop clothes. A neon sign of the title. Real lager.

The Glasgow drunks spoke in a charming, mixed up syntax and the whole thing was weird but addictive. At the end of each telling of the Nativity, one of the drunks would die, the angels would appear, have a chat, and the drunks would try and magic their friend back to life: "Big it up, stupid dead man!"

In a quiet *coup de théâtre* that I didn't appreciate until I saw *200%* again years later, at one point late in the show the angels appeared, chatted, then looked down from their video monitors and watched the stage, in real-time single-takes. Fifteen minutes of on-stage bedlam, and then, with perfect timing, still in those single-takes, the angels began to speak.

All very clever, very funny. Then, for their last retelling of the Nativity story, they put bags on their heads...

I'm aware at this remove, how reductive that statement is. The sort of lazy experimental-theatre-is-just-dicking-about generalisations people sometimes make without understanding how thoughtfully, carefully constructed nonsense and chaos can be.

...they put bags on their heads, and tried again. The added uncertainty this gave the performers, as they staggered tentatively around trying to re-enact the story made it surprisingly moving. And I sat in the audience thinking, "Why am I crying? It doesn't even make sense!"

*

Thank you, Forced Ents.

Alexander Kelly, Co-Artistic Director, Third Angel

JOHN MCGRATH

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 Ontologizing 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

CHARLOTTE VINCENT

You entered the space with a fake bomb strapped to your chest and you blew up my pretty little heart.

Feigning. Fabricating. Borrowing. Stealing. Playing at acting. Playing at pretending. Maybe just pretending. Maybe just lying. Playing with fire.

You women, stepping into the light, with your flirty, jumble sale chic and your self-consciously seductive, pause-peppered sentences. You are playing too. Stringing us along in your too-sexy bras and your cheap nylon knickers. You know you look good and you're playing with us. Playing at acting. Playing at pretending. Trying hard not to act. Or maybe just pretending. Or maybe just lying. Feigning. Fabricating. Borrowing. Stealing. Always aware of the effect you are having. Sliding between what is real and what is fake and paying little attention to the difference.

You men, stepping into the light, with your searching blue eyes and your fake, iridescent charm. Looking hung over and handsome with your bad teeth and your second hand clothes. You know you look good and you're playing with us. Playing at acting. Playing with fire. Feigning. Fabricating. Borrowing. Stealing. Lying. And always aware of the effect you are having. Sliding between what is real and what is fake and paying little attention to the difference.

Words like shots of adrenalin. Words like shat upon dreams. Words like a potent elixir. Sheffield. London. Brussels. Paris. Swansea. Everywhere. Nowhere. Play. Repeat. Play. Repeat. Play. Repeat. Fake it. Fake it harder. Fuck me. Fuck me harder. Words failing us. Sex and death. Sex and death. Sex. Death.

It's a dangerous business this show business.

You fuckers, you. You clever, beautiful, beguiling, badly choreographed fuckers. You messed with my mind and you challenged all I thought I knew and you chewed up my heart. I watched you in the Leadmill and the ICA and the Kai and the Pompidou and the Lyceum. Everywhere and Nowhere. No where.

Panic attack. Adrenalin. Pacemaker. Breathe. Panic. Pace it. Pace it. Breathe. Rip it up. Rip it out. Start again. Repeat. Play. Repeat. Play. Breathe. Brutal truths. Brutal truths. Breathe.

You entered the space with a bomb strapped to your chest and you blew up my pretty little heart. Just like that.

Charlotte Vincent, Artistic Director, Vincent Dance Theatre.

ANGELICA BURRILL

I like when all three women are in the shows.

My favourite thing so far has been the gorilla in Bloody Mess. It really made me laugh pushing the buggy around and bumping into things.

When I first saw Forced Entertainment I sat next to a girl I didn't know who laughed loads like I did. That's a big part of why I so enjoyed the show. I can't remember what she looked like exactly and wouldn't recognize her, but I can picture her.

I took someone I did know to see A World in Pictures. She laughed throughout it and a lot. Afterwards, she said she didn't like it so much. This confused me. We saw Forced Entertainment several times afterwards and though I hadn't forgotten this I never brought it up. It appeared to me later that she seemed influenced by Forced Entertainment in her work. And now she is dead. Maybe it was the anxiety of influence that Harold Bloom talked about. Probably, inevitably, not.

In 2007 I watched videos of performances in a TV room at Goldsmiths library, because I was writing an essay exploring Forced Entertainment's work in relation to Baudrillard's claim that 'Our whole culture is just one huge effort to dissociate life and death, to ward off the ambivalence of death in the interests of life as value, and time as the general equivalent.' I referred a lot to Barthes' 'The Pleasure of the Text' and Baudrillard's 'Seduction'.

I wonder at how Forced Entertainment do angst so well.

I took someone else to see Forced Entertainment and I questioned, was it betrayal? We saw The Thrill of it All. I enjoyed all of the other shows more than this one.

They are nice writers. This isn't talked about much, but it is crucial.

Bloody Mess is still my favourite, but Exquisite Pain is beautiful.

I once either took a bag off or assisted Tim Etchells when I was working in the Hayward Gallery cloakroom. He had a directing book with him and I knew who he was! I never usually spotted anyone. I wouldn't have dared say anything, and I doubt he would have been interested in this.

Angelica Burrill

DAN REBELLATO

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

LAURA BISSELL

Forced Entertainment in three parts

PART ONE (FE rule)

False Expectations
Funny Entropy
Faded Elegance
Fuck Ewe
Frigid Emptiness
Fluid Endings
Funhouse Envy
Fakeries Everywhere
Faltered Encore
Fancy Entrapment
Failed Endurance
Fearless Exits
Fetishised Enfolding
Finishing Edits
Frightening Eyes
Flaneurs Enclosed
Flappy Ears
Fakery Enchanted
Fudging Everything
Fledgling Exodus
Flimsy Enclosure
Famished Earth
Filthy Edge
Floozy Eyelid
Futility Endless
Fluently Exhaling
Flushing Emptiness
Fallout Envable
Flickering Eyelash
Fatal Expressions
Fake Equine
Fantasy Eunuch
Friction Encouraged
Fancy Enriched
Frugal Ennui
Future Exhumed
Furthest Empire
Facially Emotes
Failures Enhaloed
Fucking Energy
Faithless Enrapture
Fallibility Enticing
Fizzling Enjoyment
Flourishing Eyebrows
Fraying Entity
Fading Ensued
Faithfully Edited
Faltering Elegy
Faulty Echoes
Farcical Extract
Forceful Evangelical
Filtered Effigy

Finally Exotic
 Firing Eerily
 Fixity Entombed
 Fun Excised
 Flirty Eyeful
 Foreboding Energy
 Forensic Evoked
 Frankly Erotic
 Friendly Enemy
 Foggy Expanse
 French Exquisite
 Fraudulent Evidence
 Fiction Eruption
 Fossilised Encoding
 Finale Expended
 Finito Elations
 Flaunting Evasions
 Fictionalised England
 Fruity Ecstasy
 Forest Enacted
 First-year Essay
 Fumbling Exeunt
 Faces Erased
 Fatal Elixir
 Faked Expirations
 Failure Exhaling
 Fractured Errands
 Fetid Enticement
 Fucking Exciting
 Festival Events
 Flouting Excesses
 Fluked Extensions
 Film Edits
 Frosty Enactments
 Fury Evicted
 From Endtime
 Flawed Excuses
 Fraught Essence
 Feuds Engulfed
 Fear Enfolding
 Fag End

PART TWO (missing letters rule x 30)

Forced Entertainment
 Forced Ent
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AMANDA HADINGUE

In about 1987 Pete said 'Forced Entertainment are so far ahead of us, we can't understand them yet'. They'd just made 'Let the water run its course' for which they'd intentionally given each other appalling haircuts. This seemed extremely advanced. We were doing shows in print dresses, suits and Damart underwear in which we hoped we looked cool. Having not seen their shows yet, I was a bit scared of them. Like reading about the Slits in the Daily Express in the 70s. (It's good to feel scared by art, it suggests that you know it will change you.)

We all tried to do work like theirs to start with, to speak in their voices. Pete said this was kind of ok, as FE began by doing impressions of Impact. Once, we turned up at a venue in Weymouth and Ray confused everyone including himself by announcing 'Hello, we're Forced Entertainment.' We weren't, we were Stan's Cafe, but I suppose they were on our minds.

We tried to make our shows longer, like theirs, but we only ever managed an hour and ten.

We fancied them a bit to be honest.

Their tours reached the ICA around December, and we all went. Festive boozing and arguing in the bar afterwards.

In the early 90s the Arts Council tried to cut their funding, I think because they refused to relinquish their co-operative to more easily saleable theatrical hierarchies. But they're all still there. As if the Velvet Underground had kept making good records and hadn't... er... died.

They used star cloths and fairy lights on stage. They invented that, and we all kicked ourselves. They understood the need for beauty. They did stuff about angels that wasn't about the death of faith, stuff about popular culture that wasn't just about crapness, and stuff about working class people that had nothing to do with the kitchen sink. They were and are political in the way art should be, by dreaming another world that doesn't only ask questions of this one, but exhilarates and clears the mind for some possible answers. And they're hilarious. This cannot be underestimated.

Have I remembered this right? Doesn't matter. They're life-changers. Fact.

Amanda Hadingue

RICHARD GREGORY

"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

MARY PATERSON

The way I remember it is like this: I was sitting in my seat and then I was suddenly not sitting in my seat anymore. One of them said something – one of the two people on stage, clothed in glamorous evening dress, a tux I think and a ballgown, standing or sitting on beaten up wooden chairs, the dark mouth of the stage behind them like a cold cave, a cold but inviting cave, draped in red velvet like a giant tongue... One of them said something or, more likely, it was something between them, something between the words he was saying with a bored, off-hand delivery as if this was all so pedestrian, this great acrobatics of the mind; and between the words she was saying, with an air of quiet frustration, as if this was all going somewhere but not quite fast enough, as if there was more to come, bubbling inside, if only he and by extension we – the audience, to whom she peered, blindly – could keep up. That is to say, it was something between them and us and the words they were saying and the images that were rolling and spinning and leaping from their mouths or from the mouth of the stage behind them, and I felt myself lifted from my seat and swung high like a trapeze artist, back and forth, to and fro, round and round, watching the room spin beneath me – a man and a woman onstage, a collection of heads in the audience, an orchestra of musicians, animals: an elephant, I'm sure... I don't remember the details but certainly an elephant and perhaps a seal or two and a lion tamer, a group of children with firecrackers and Anonymous masks... (this might all be retrospective addition now – there were no Anonymous masks back then, but when I remember it I really feel it, I mean I feel like I am lifted from my seat right now and I am swinging above the world which is filled with everything I can imagine and this is what I mean when people say, have you seen that show? And I say: I'm still seeing it.)

Mary Paterson

MATTHEW LOCKE

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 Emmanuelle 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.

Matthew Locke, Storythings

FLAVIA MALIM

Forced - artificial. Entertainment - dissipation.

Riverside Studios 2006 was my first encounter. I was a mature student at Roehampton University and wrote a review of *The World in Pictures* for a module on Theatre Criticism. The show appeared chaotic as Fred Flintstone style cave men armed with clubs galloped across the stage pursuing the female performers. Finally exhausted they collapsed into armchairs to watch TV. There was an anarchic, hedonistic air; they were having a ball. I had no idea what was going on. A great spirit of party but was it a tad self-indulgent I wondered. I had seen nothing like it.

Back at Roehampton University I watched all the company's performance videos available in the library, and the CD of their working methods. I warmed to the team still together after many years and their therapeutic way of working with play and openness. I read *Certain Fragments*, admired the writing, and often referred to it and quoted from it in my academic essays.

2010 and still studying because I was part-time. The module was *Performing Failure* as I returned to the Riverside Studios for *The Thrill of it All*. After four years study including reading Sara Jane Bailes I had changed. Now I was aware of how Forced Entertainment challenged theatrical conventions such as narrative by almost ditching it. I saw how they cut through the suspension of disbelief and exposed the machinery to the audience. The partying and chaos were rehearsed and polished. The angst beneath the trash aesthetic was clearly visible peeking through the palm trees. And this still challenges audiences as I witnessed some leaving noisily after a mere ten minutes.

Last year I watched the streaming of *Quizoola!* from the Barbican Theatre as an ordinary punter, having seen a video years ago. It raised interesting questions for me. Was it a revival? I assumed the questions were different? I found it poignant watching it repeated by the now middle aged performers. I am still fascinated by a company together after all these years and wonder what new challenges they will bring to live theatre in future.

Forced - produced through effort. Entertainment - something diverting, amusing,

Flavia Malim

RAMIRO S. OSÓRIO

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 sartoris and satori

two monks cross a river
between buddha and buddha

two monks cross a river

between hamlet and hamlet

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

JASON CROUCH

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 Crouch

JOANNA LALLY

Nearly a year ago today, I met Forced Entertainment for the first time. It was at a party, one of three, in fact: *Tomorrow's Parties* at Project Arts Centre in Dublin, on a chilly Thursday night in November, and I was running a little late. They were still 29 at the time, just on the cusp of their thirtieth, and thinking, quite naturally I suppose, about the future. Upstairs, in the quirky blue building of "The Project," a man and woman stood motionless on a wooden crate and recounted various predictions on what might happen in an unspecified time from the present. Even though the two performers remained standing still, their future-projections span out into the space around them, colliding and colluding with one another; keeping the ball rolling, so to speak. They ranged from the normal and the boring to the funny to deranged, or distressing. I felt as if, somehow, I'd already heard these stories and knew their tellers, as if we shared mutual friends – despite the slight age difference. I'd seen pictures of their theatre that wasn't just plays, read about actions that led nowhere necessarily, and now found myself listening to words that were new and familiar.

Before the party started I didn't know what to expect, but then I wasn't surprised either, by the strange absorption that I experienced. An easy introduction; there was nothing really forced in the encounter. Afterwards for college I wrote about production and 'entertainment value,' trying to tie it all back to Marx and cultural materialism; theatre reflects the consciousness of the present, and guarantees its own future through reproduction: the ability to reinvent itself. But that wasn't really my main concern...I thought, instead, about the recent past, and wondered how had we not met sooner?

To think about the future is always to reflect on the present, past. I remember one reflection from that night: 'in the future, things will be pretty much the same as they are now.' If that means a future with more from Forced Entertainment, then it's surely worth celebrating. I may have been late to the party, but with any luck it is far from over yet. Happy 30th.

Joanna Lally

MATTHEW GOULISH

In 1990 I met Tim Etchells, in Leicester at the school then called the Polytechnic, where Lin and I were teaching, as was Tim. Our mutual sponsor introduced us. He has started a company, she said, called Forced Entertainment. It seemed an odd but good name. The next day we saw him standing on the other side of an intersection, waiting to cross in our direction. "That's the guy we met. What was his name again? Tim." I remember he looked a little disheveled. Not long after that we saw *Speak Bitterness* in Glasgow. It was my first encounter with their particular first person plural. (*We never laughed and we never found the time...*) My most recent encounter was *The Notebook*. There is in this voice something of the unstable individual, the speech that renders any facile distinction between singular and multiple untrustworthy. It's unsettling, and I was and am drawn to it and the other subtle ways they seem to repel the audience (*their* audience?). I was struck by each performer's personality, rhythm, face, voice and ordinary intensity. I felt I could befriend all of them. Now I would say I have. That is to say, years pass as always. Chart a course to intersect when possible: other performances, cities, theaters. I never tire of, when I am among its audience, the work's way of pressuring, of daring me to give up on it. Tim and I have collaborated from time to time. Recently he had me read the part of his brother in a rare true story about being chased by a donkey in a broken-down farmyard. Rare because Tim's stories usually trade in untruthfulness, like fables or fairy tales, but set in contemporary Britain with all its decomposition. In the story they were kids. The brother stood on the safe side of a fence watching Tim run from the donkey. Why do we remember some moments, forget others? Memories loop. Words reflect. I asked is the brother younger or older. Tim said younger. I am a younger brother, although older (a little) than Tim, and the story reminded me of a childhood separation from my actual brother, across a road, also true.

Matthew Goulish

MIKE HARRISON

...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

RUPERT THOMSON

Thirty years
And more than forty shows
All thanks to six
Extraordinary people
These shows are not like anything you've seen before
They startle
They provoke
They mix confusion and euphoria
Anxiety
And big ideas
One moment it's a tragedy
Then there's a joke
A song
An actor tries to hang himself
He gets it wrong
Someone's playing the piano
Badly
Someone else is starting to undress
They like to put a spanner
In the work
It's stand-up, sitcom, agitprop, a musical
It's topical
Political
A Bloody Mess
It's like a circus, but with the strangest animals
(There was a crocodile once)
It's theatre of the absurd
Unpredictable as love
It's random as a book pulled from a shelf
They recognise no genre
Don't know the meaning of the word
It's none of the above
That's the thing about originality
It defies comparisons
It's not like anything
Except itself
Then there's the telepathy
The timing
Of actors who know each other backwards
It makes me think of poems that manage to rhyme
Internally
They've learned how to anticipate each other
And protect each other
Upstage each other, show each other off
They resonate
The wires in their brains connect
How do they stitch it all together though
Tim and Richard
Robin
Claire and Cathy
Terry
Sometimes it's him
Suggesting something
Sometimes her
It can be arduous and slow and very
Tense
And sometimes there's the sense of taking on too much

So much that they're beside themselves
The jewels are ground out of the dirt
And grit
But suddenly the whole thing flows
With all the ease
And logic of a dream
At least, that's how I imagine it
Up there in Sheffield
Home to one decathlon star
Two million trees
A troubled football team
But in the end what means the most to me
Is how hysterical they are
I laugh so much my stomach hurts
So do my cheeks
I'm rolling in the aisles
I ache for weeks
But it's the kiss of life
A weight is somehow lifted from your shoulders
So my advice
Is this
If there's a new
Forced Entertainment show
(Or even one that's old)
Don't hesitate
Just go

Rupert Thomson

JAMES YARKER

So it was great, exciting and a blast in the night. And we met and we spoke and you were friendly and real so I contrived to bump into you again and again 'til you invited me in. You cooked for me, were warm and generous, put me up and put up with me. I think once I may have been married to one of you. We laughed (I think) and you helped and even let me think occasionally I was helping you. But you were so capable, in need of so little it seemed. You were kind and brilliant and I was in your thrall. And then the circle widened and widened and others came in and if it was ever a secret the secret was out. And then suddenly we were all growing up and you most of all. And we were all growing busy a different, complicated kind of busy. And somewhere in there you lost interest in me. And yes, maybe I stopped caring so much about you. Maybe you stopped listening to me and my attention wandered as you talked too much. As everyone else laughed I knew I'd heard those jokes too many times and those tics, once comforting, started to grate. Maybe if you live with anyone so long these passions twist. Looking back I think there was this jealous time when no one could see beyond you. So we stopped seeing each other. Christmas Cards little more. It was easy to do, you were never around - I was always away. And I kept hearing stories of you; who you were with and what you were doing; whether you were brilliant, terrible or both.

You were way out there but occasionally our paths crossed out there and when they did I don't think it was ever awkward – was it? I don't think so. I think it was good. I think it was nice. And slowly I started to miss you. And now I realise that I can forgive you most things and often don't have to and sometimes I'm proud of you. Writing this I realise that I've never not loved you. It's just sometimes been hard.

James Yarker

ANDY SMITH

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

ANT HAMPTON

They're speaking very. Slowly, and as the hour hand breaks, the needle skips and a chair creaks as one of us watching falls asleep and onto the floor. He rolls down the aisle, plop, plop, plop, before being subsumed by the stage of the ICA black box, disappearing into the memory of *Pleasure*, 1999

He's asleep now with his eyes closed but they're still focused on him with those strange glances – mistrusting or hurt - and what he dreams under that gaze was definitely included in the price of the ticket. He wakes up inside the show to the tune of Hawaiian music played at 16rpm, and as he rubs his eyes Richard the bare-chested DJ just about manages to put together a sentence, squeezed from a deep voice into a vintage microphone

I THINK

IT'S ABOUT TIME

WE HAD A CHANGE

OF RHYTHM.

CATHY.

CAN YOU BRING THE GUN

For the next day or two nothing really happens except for a slow rise in tension as the other parts of the audience awake to find one of the ladies fixing them with her eyes as she points a gun sideways at the other bare-chested man who has been standing over there (for some weeks already) wearing a pantomime horse head and doing nothing but taking an occasional swig of beer, stuffing the Stella bottle into the eyehole, where his mouth must be. The gesture goes down in history. In fact, this is how the century finishes.

The gun never fires and the show never ends. The Hawaiian music has morphed into a drone storm of howling voices. For the last 15 years, to these strains, that man has been trying to close the red curtains, but they insist on parting, on staying open. He's crucified by this predicament – centre stage, he has one in each fist as they threaten to tear him in two. He's naked, except for the horse head, and his body is limp but he doesn't let go: his only hope is that one day the curtains finally close, covering him and the shame of what has occurred over this broken time. We're still here, watching - from our seats, or sleep.

Ant Hampton

CJ MITCHELL

The company take their place on stage, and they're ready. To speak.

It was few years back, watching "The Thrill of It All" (at Riverside Studios, London), which reached a moment of poignancy that seemed to imply or felt like the end of something. And for me, that meant the end of Forced Entertainment. The end of the company, signalling that this would be the last piece you'd make together. This was less about what was happening at that moment, or else I'm just forgetting those details, but the feeling which I'm remembering experiencing had been reached through the steady development of the show. And this feeling was probably not just a result of that performance, but also the legacy of seeing many earlier Forced Entertainment performances, and knowing each of you, even if only a little. The importance of your work had already felt significant when you presented "A Decade of Forced Entertainment", around which time I wrote my first ever letter (of complaint or concern, I'm not recalling how I pitched it) to the Arts Council about them pulling the company's funding. There's pieces that resonate clearly and will probably continue to do so, both the performances and the spaces they occupied (my first encounter with the company, "Emmanuelle Enchanted" at CCA, Glasgow; "Speak Bitterness" at NRLA, The Arches, Glasgow, across its long duration (six hours?); "Dirty Work", in rehearsal in Sheffield), others where the details are hazy, and those pieces I've missed, but whose titles still have a place in a chronology, all of which added to or just plain confused the impact of "The Thrill of It All", and which continues to accumulate, and which is all somehow mine.

It was a few days back, watching "The Notebook" (at BAC, London), which felt both new and oddly familiar, harking back to the imagined narratives of "Dirty Work" but also providing an unexpected narrative arc; resonating with a political directness and urgency that jolted me the way the company's best work jolts me; which made me think at the start, this is so simple, what they're doing, reading from their notebooks, while at the end I was left with richness, complexity, provocation.

CJ Mitchell, Co-Director, the Live Art Development Agency

GERALDINE (GERRY) HARRIS

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 and 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, spent the 1980s in Manchester, Salford and Liverpool - cities reeling under the effects of Thatcherism; savage recession, high unemployment, the decimation of heavy industry, 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 there as well.

Geraldine (Gerry) Harris, Lancaster.ac.uk

KATIE DUNSTAN

I think it is the way they just allow themselves to **be** and remind us that *being* is of course the most precious thing of all. These words and thoughts and feelings that we have exist only because we are in a state of being, together, all together. And yet it is often in this state when we doubt ourselves the most, questioning constantly, why it is we are moving in a particular way, when we will reach the other side, or in fact if we will at all. And yet they remind us that this is okay. And that in fact this is all just a complete mess but actually that is okay too. We panic when things go wrong – we stress, we moan, we complain and yet it is amidst this mess of party poppers and lost thoughts and missed trains that true creativity grows. We go in search of the missing and yet when we open our minds we find that something that we had missed. Contemporary performance is this raw, unrefined process. It is the performance that showcases humankind in all its messy, unpredictable glory. We remember people, we keep secrets, we fall in love, we lie to our parents, we play out after dark, we run away, we do all these things and more. Do you remember when? Will you still love me if I? Can you tell me the truth? Perhaps. But then again, perhaps not.

Can we start over?

I don't think so.

Sorry.

In fact, I know we can't. Better to create a new path than to start over because what we have done may be future material. Later we may laugh in the depths of despair or cry over a terrible joke that I told. What would you rather be or a...?

I'm not a comedian but I try to make people laugh. I can't promise you the world because it's not mine to give but I can try and create my own for you to share. Thank you for allowing me to create, and to dream. I am a contemporary performer trying to make sense of it all. Maybe I'll see you along the way.

Katie Dunstan