

12 Turning conventional theatre inside out: democratising the audience relationship

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The digital revolution has not only changed our methods of communication, it has changed our vision of what kinds of communication are desirable. Mass production, the great success story of the industrial era, has been superseded in the post-industrial era by niche marketing and boutique shopping. The wonder of the digital world is the ability to create in bulk but to customise that product to make it appear individual, personal and original. Quite a lot of attention has been paid to the new kinds of performance that new technologies allow, however, I am more interested in the impact of new technologies on traditional theatre practices. If theatre is to continue to act as a mirror to society it must engage with the changing means of communication which new technologies have brought about. Digital technology offers the institutional theatres a real opportunity to reinvigorate and re-legitimise themselves as centres of public debate. I suggest, however, that real responsibility accompanies the expanded remit which an increasingly democratic communication entails.

Creating a new audience relationship: a new opportunity

The advent of the Internet provides an opportunity for the large institutional theatres in Britain to redefine their relationship with their audiences. In this chapter I would like to address the contrasting approaches taken by the National Theatre, The Royal Shakespeare Company and Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in terms of making their work more public and more accessible through new technologies. In each case these theatres are taking on a more expansive role moving into areas of education and archiving, contextualising their current working practices and creating their own histories. I would argue that the results are of varying quality. The web presence of these theatres, in particular, exposes the strengths, the weaknesses but perhaps most importantly the biases and priorities of each approach.

The objective of this chapter is to assess the potential developments in this area and to offer possible models for future development. The economic pressures placed on these theatres have forced them, in the first instance, to follow business

models for online audience development. I would argue that it is essential to separate the use of new technologies from business practices during this embryonic period in order to be able to discover the full range of new forms of creativity and communication that are possible through digital processes. Research and development in this area are increasingly out of the reach of individual institution. However, I suggest that through collaboration the institutional theatres can participate in an experimental approach to new technologies which will provide the public with a range of options for the future. I also suggest that if the theatres move on their own into the domains that have formerly been the preserve of the libraries and the educational establishments they will open themselves to the criticisms that have been levelled at the BBC which has taken on an ever expanding role in public life through digital technology. The choices made by the institutional theatres in this area may well have a large impact on how theatre is taught and how it is perceived in the popular imagination. I put forward the suggestion that by working collaboratively the institutional theatres and educational establishments could help to create new models for the study of theatre. Used creatively, new technologies could offer real lines of communication between audience members and publicly funded institutions in the UK. The question which remains is, will the publicly funded theatres take seriously both the opportunities and the responsibilities offered to them through this technology?

The evolving influence of new technology in the theatre

Theatre is primarily about a momentary relationship between an audience and the actors on stage. The large institutional theatres have an ongoing responsibility to not only please current audiences but to develop new ones. This tension, particularly in a rapidly changing world, puts great pressure on the artistic staff of institutional theatres. Technology has increased this tension. The theatre has been struggling for some time to find the most appropriate role for technology in the live ephemeral event. By looking briefly at the response of the theatre to new technology over the past decade it is possible to illustrate the awkward nature of this relationship and to understand about the current challenges that face these theatres.

While digital technology has made its presence felt backstage for some time it was not until the 1990s that this technology began making an appearance on stage as well as behind the scenes. The use of mobile phones and computers on stage as a reflection of our contemporary society was an inevitable step in the integration of new technologies in the theatre world. Interestingly, the creative presentation of computers on stage raised new technical hurdles which caused all sorts of problems which had to be solved by the technicians. An example of this is Patrick Marber's play *Closer*, which was performed at the National Theatre and involves a scene in which two characters correspond through the computer. This scene brings together the two uses of digital technology in the theatre, as a technical tool and as a creative tool, in an interesting way. The two actors are silent throughout the scene but it is essential that the audience can see what they are typing. The dramatic irony of the scene lies in the fact that both characters are male

but one is pretending through the computer chat room environment to be female.

This scene provides both a series of challenges technically and a series of very real acting and staging challenges. How can the actors be linked with the words they are typing since it is essential to the scene that this link is maintained? On a more practical level how it is possible to generate an accurately typed series of lines that appear to be spontaneous night after night? The solution to these problems was in fact linked in performance. The correspondence between the two characters was displayed on a screen at the back of the stage. This shared video screen was also seen by the actors on their respective computers. The actor, at the beginning of each line pressed a function key on his keyboard which set off the command for the video projection to type the pre-recorded line. This line was visible to both actors as well as to the audience so that the typing that the actor continued to do on his keyboard could stop at the appropriate moment. So the seemingly real time exchange of rapid typing was, in fact, an elaborate pre-recorded technical trick. It is interesting to see how in the theatre the attempt to illustrate the spontaneous nature of digital communication caused so many difficulties in execution in the same way night after night. In a way this example points out very nicely the advantages and disadvantages of digital technology in the theatre. Digital technology is entirely consistent and repeatable, human action is not.

The large stage productions of the Disney corporation offer another useful example in that they show an interesting learning curve in the relationship between digital technology and its use on stage. With *Beauty and the Beast*, the corporation's first foray into live theatre, no expense was spared to create an automated performance that could be replicated the world over. Not only was the show built for franchise, it was also built to mimic almost entirely the animated version of the story. Disney audiences, it was assumed, would come to the theatre expecting to see what they saw on their television and movie screens. In this case digital technology was used to power the onstage action and to keep the actors in line with the roller coaster ride of the performance. While successful with many children this production unnerved an adult audience. Richard Green writes of the touring version of the show:

It's all aimed at extending the mythology of Disney into our own lives, but as with most bus-and-truck productions, the artistic latitude in this reincarnation is so limited that I began to feel once again that corporate contrived sentiment is rather a blunt instrument indeed.

(Green 2003)

It is interesting that in their second experiment in live theatre a different approach was taken. *The Lion King*, which has had a much longer run than its predecessor, did not try to replicate the animated version of the story. Instead Disney, quite surprisingly, hired an experimental theatre director and gave her a fairly free hand in her interpretation of the story. As a result, the actor's bodies and individuality were emphasised rather than hidden beneath automated costume pieces. The use of masks, that extended the actor's bodies but did not hide them, proved much more successful on stage in the long run. Therefore it can be seen that there has continued to be a natural resistance in the theatre to the imposition of digital technology as part of the creative process in a way which is restrictive and which tries to hide the visceral human elements of liveness. The fallible nature of

the live event has continued to dominate over the rigors of the technical program. Experiments like those mentioned above proved that while technical processes can be automated and on stage action can be enhanced by creative use of technology, both in content and in form, it cannot be replaced by that technology. The fundamental advantages and disadvantages of the different ways of working have, then, become increasingly apparent in the theatre. Digital technology encourages spontaneity and experimentation yet it is infinitely repeatable without loss of quality. Traditional theatre practices require planning and rehearsal yet they are unpredictable and impossible to duplicate but therein lies the attraction.

Current shifts in working practice in the theatre

I suggest that we are starting to see a shift in the nature of the ongoing relationship between the National and the Royal Shakespeare Company and their publics. In the first instance it was marketing departments and development departments that were responsible for the outward face of these theatre companies. It was these departments that made contact with the audience outside the theatre and they determined the nature of that relationship. The exchange, ticket revenue or donations in return for the theatrical experience, prestige and perhaps even a lifestyle, was based primarily on commercial principles. The shift that seems to be taking place in the new century is a move towards an audience-driven relationship which is shifting the responsibility of the content of that interaction from marketing to education and to an interaction with the theatre artists themselves. Through web-based archives, projects and interactions the institutional theatres are moving towards creating an ongoing relationship with their audiences which is based on an interest in and an engagement with the theatrical process. These new forms of interaction are allowing for a discussion with audiences that can begin long before the audience arrives at the theatre and can carry on long after the experience of the live event is over.

Not only are shifts apparent in the audience relationship outside the theatre but both the National and the RSC have started to make changes to their repertoire which facilitate a more personalised experience. The size and complex bureaucratic nature of large theatres work against major shifts in working practice, yet the need to develop new audiences means that changes are inevitable if these institutions are to survive. In the institutional theatres attracting the practitioners and copying the methods of smaller experimental theatre has been seen as one solution to attracting new audiences. The most recent and most compelling evidence of the reversal of the traditional order of things was the National Theatre's *Transformations* season. Over the summer of 2002 the National Theatre reduced its audience capacity in the Lyttleton Theatre and created a new theatre space in the Circle Lobby entitled The Studio. These new, experimental, spaces were accompanied by a series of works that were put under tight restrictions both in terms of budget and in terms of time for rehearsal. This complete reversal of the working practices of the National Theatre, to emulate the workings of the experimental theatre, seems to be an indication of a change at the heart of theatre making.

This shift in practices seems to have been combined with by a more sophisticated understanding of the importance of new technology as a communication tool. As a result, the 21st century is starting to see some much more

interesting negotiated relationships between the large institutional theatres and their audiences using digital technology. The theatres are responding to a perceived desire for smaller more tailored programmes. The two most striking examples of this trend were the National Theatre's *Transformations* season, already mentioned, and the Royal Shakespeare Company's season of little know plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries. In both of these cases these large institutional theatres created an experimental season that was designed to attract new audiences into smaller spaces to create a sense of a more individualised experience. Both of these seasons struck a chord with audiences as they were quickly sold out. A sense of excitement was created about the new work which brought people back to these theatres or brought them for the first time because they seemed to be offering something quite new and different. The programmes offered challenged audience expectations and perceptions (see Figure 1). It can be seen, therefore, that significant shifts in working practice are beginning to take place that try to balance audience demand with a desire to challenge and inspire.



Figure 1.
The Island Princess
 (Fletcher).
 l-r: Shelley Conn
 (Panura),
 Sasha Behar
 (Quisara - The
 Island Princess).
 RSC/Swan
 Theatre,
 Stratford-upon-
 Avon. 02/07/02.
 ©Donald Cooper.

By contrast, mainstream commercial London theatre continues along very conservative customer-driven lines. Commercial theatres in the West End have for some time looked to film and television stars to prolong their current working practices, however, this is a short term answer to the fundamental problem of an aging audience for conventional approaches to theatre and audiences. The commercial theatre, it appears, is travelling in the direction of the commercial film industry, towards increasingly formalised saleable products for a transient disloyal audience. The work of the Disney Corporation, and in fact the involvement of this conglomerate in live theatre, is the most obvious example of this cross-media marketing strategy.

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre: a new model for the future?

The significant exception to this trend is Shakespeare's Globe Theatre at Bankside which offers a productive new way of working. While Shakespeare's Globe functions entirely without subsidy it has one of the country's healthiest records at the box office and one of the most innovative artistic programme, as well as an extensive education and outreach programme. The theatrical programme concentrates on combining contemporary ideas about performance with a spirit of enquiry into theatrical practices in Shakespeare's day (see Figure 2). Mark Rylance, the Globe's Artistic Director says of the theatre:

...here you are aware of how much Shakespeare kept the audience in mind and what a difference there is when an actor is able to do that too... It looks like a heritage site on the outside, while inside it is the most experimental space in British Theatre.

(Rylance in Shenton 2002 55)

The audience for this programme is extended considerably by the educational practices of this theatre. The education programme relies heavily on commercial sponsorship for funding and on digital technology for delivery and communication with audience members around the world. Patrick Spottiswoode, Director of Education at the Globe, says:

At our playhouse, students and teachers meet and work with people who revive words and help them play. Actors, directors, musicians, voice and movement coaches, designers and fight directors, who rouse words into lively action, share their craft and passion with over 50,000 students and teachers every year.

(Spottiswoode 2003 1)

The Globelink site, a private site which an individual can gain access to for a small fee, offers a range of specialised services and resources for audiences at a distance. Perhaps the most innovative of these is the *Adopt an actor* scheme, a programme that allows international students to follow an "actor's experience as they create a role from the first day of the rehearsal to the final performance in the Globe" (Globe 2003 20). The communication which is set up between actor and student is not one way. The students are invited to offer suggestions to the actor which the actor may use in rehearsal. For example, in one case an actor asked the students to put forward ideas about a hobby her character could have. The suggestion, collecting stamps, was incorporated into the rehearsal process but was



Figure 2. *Antony and Cleopatra* (Shakespeare). Paul Shelley (Antony), Mark Rylance (Cleopatra). Shakespeare's Globe, Bankside, London SE1. 29/07/99. ©Donald Cooper.

eventually dropped when the performance moved on stage because the stamps became invisible to the audience. The result of this exchange engaged the students in the very real process of change that takes place in rehearsal where often ideas, even very good ideas, have to be jettisoned for practical reasons.

The Globe's webpage (<http://www.shakespeares-globe.org>) and private Globelink space connect absolutely with the theatre's live performances, workshops, lectures and theatre tours. The notion of "practice-led resources for the study of Shakespeare" (Globe 2003 20) is combined with an audience driven interactive experience. The model of offering a range of choices for purchase creates a very democratic interaction with the audience which reflects both the theatre's ethos and the strengths of digital technology. The fact that a commercial consumer model has been implemented in a creative way shows that the technology in no way determines the nature of the exchange between the audience and the theatre. Shakespeare's Globe has shown an innovative approach both to its theatrical practices and to its audience interaction before, during and after the performance. This innovative model, which offers a real alternative to the commercial West End, is worthy of emulation.

The National Theatre and the RSC on the web

It is perhaps the strength of identity and purpose that Shakespeare's Globe possesses which makes its strategy so successful. The National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company have both begun to develop increasingly extensive web presences but they show the tension of trying to follow the leads of both the commercial world and the educational world simultaneously. I suggest that the

nature of the materials available shows a great deal about the self-images of these theatres. The National Theatre has a quite extensive Education section on their webpage (<http://www.nt-online.org/>). It is, however, directed almost entirely at schools and particularly at teachers in the UK. There is a very extensive list of INSET training days for teachers and a wide range of downloadable teachers work packs. The *Shell Connections* ongoing project which encourages the writing and performance of work by and for students further indicates the emphasis of the Education programme. The National Theatre quite clearly sees itself in the role of national centre of excellence in both theatre performance and theatre education. The thrust of the education programme is geared towards supporting teachers working within the National Curriculum in the UK.

The Royal Shakespeare Company, by contrast, have a very limited amount of Education material on their website and seems to be struggling rather more with their own identity (<http://www.rsc.org.uk>). The webpage includes a relatively new exhibition space which has been funded by the National Lottery's *New Opportunity Fund*. The audience for this resource, which includes play specific and thematic approaches to the repertoire, seems very general. As a result, the resources seem unfocused and slightly out of place on a site which is otherwise almost entirely commercial in its aims. The Royal Shakespeare Company's position is made rather more complex by its already existing relationships with both an educational establishment, the Shakespeare Institute, and an archive that holds its materials, the Shakespeare Centre Library. The RSC must therefore be more careful when expanding into these areas not to offend existing partners.

New Artistic Directors have recently taken up their posts in both of these large institutional theatres and it is possible that significant changes may soon be seen in this area. What is clear is that a diffuse and uneven approach to audience relationships through an unfocused web presence can harm as much as help these large institutional theatres. The Globe Theatre model of an education and outreach programme that is fully integrated with the theatrical season provides an example of what is possible when form and content online are successfully united.

Three experiments in collaboration between education and theatre practice

While the Globe Theatre has managed to develop an innovative approach with the support of corporate and individual donations I suggest that innovation is also possible through collaboration between theatre practitioners and educational and other publicly funded establishments. It is my hope that in the future agreements can be reached between the large institutional theatres and the universities, libraries and archives to facilitate publicly oriented, rather than commercial, approaches to the development of long term projects for the study of theatrical production. The commercial world has produced a range of materials in this field of varying quality and longevity. While there are a great many people who might be interested in theatrical history creating materials for this market has not proven to be a viable business venture. I would argue that the preservation of British theatrical history should not be left to market forces and can only be seriously addressed through the collaborative efforts of existing publicly funded institutions in the UK. I offer up three examples of collaborative experiments in this field that follow this model.

King's College/Globe Theatre MA Programme

The Globe Theatre again leads the way in terms of the collaborative relationship they have set up with King's College London to offer a unique MA programme in Shakespeare Studies entitled *Text and Playhouse*. For this programme the Globe theatre have hired a fulltime academic member of staff. The aim of this programme is to combine the performance resources of the Globe theatre with the academic resources of King's College. Students take half of their course work at the Globe and half of it at King's College where they are taught by two Arden editors.

The programme is designed to take advantage of the resources available both intellectual and physical as well as the close proximity of the two institutions. During the one year course students are introduced to the practices of scholarly editing and to original printing practices. They are also encouraged to test their theories about the text in practical ways on the Globe stage. This programme marries together the academic practice of scholarly editing with practical experimentation in a way that has, on a number of occasions, had an impact on the editions published by the course conveners. This example shows the way in which the creative combination of expertise in education and theatre practice can create a unique educational experience for post graduate students.

CalArts Center for New Theatre, California Institute for the Arts. The work at the Globe brings together academic editorial practices with theatre practices. The second example I would like to look at brings together theatrical experimentation with theatre training at the university level. This example comes from the United States. The newly created Center for New Theater is the professional production wing of the California Institute for the Arts. Susan Solt, the Dean of the School of Theater at CalArts and the Producer/Artistic Director of the Center for New Theater explains the new company's mission in the following way:

The CalArts Center for New Theater (CNT) is the professional producing arm of the California Institute for the Arts School of Theater. Its mission is to provide a framework for the development of theatrical performance work of top caliber with an emphasis on alternative theater and cross-disciplinary work, embracing the diversity of viewpoints that exemplifies the forward-thinking aesthetic of the Institute.

(Solt 2002)

The first project mounted by this company in June 2002 was an all female production of *King Lear*. This production involved a promenade performance of the play staged in a disused brewery next to a Los Angeles freeway. The production used film and television conventions and employed a wide range of technologies which confronted the audience's expectations.

The use of live feed video and complex sound and lighting innovations resulted in a performance that filled the senses. The all female cast of faculty members from CalArts were ably supported by a thematic and rhythmic chorus made up of student actors. Played against a background of industrial waste and modern technology this production made its audience profoundly uncomfortable on a number of levels. Performed just a few miles from Hollywood the production played on the media driven expectations of its audience (Figure 3).

As a piece of avant-garde theatre this production had a startling and resonant

impact on its audience. The power and personality of the actor in the central role combined with the powerfully and uncompromisingly cold interpretation of the director resulted in a production of the play that used a range of technologies to discuss with its audience their own relationship with new technology. The fact that this production was invited to the Dijon Theatre Festival in May 2003 shows how experiments of this kind, stemming from an educational environment, can have an impact on the wider theatre community both nationally and internationally.

The Centre of Multimedia Performance History, Royal Holloway University of London

The final example I put forward is my own research work which has involved the creation of large digital databases of material to contextualise Shakespearean performance history. While the first two examples marry university teaching with theatre practice, my own work draws on the work of theatre professionals to create new kinds of theatrical archives. The *Cambridge King Lear CD-ROM: Text and Performance Archive*, for which I was co-editor, and the *Designing Shakespeare* audio visual archive, for which I was the principle investigator, each have taken a different approach to the use of digital technology for the support of performance history. The *Cambridge Lear CD* replicates many of the strategies of book publication and is fixed in form. The *Designing Shakespeare* project, by contrast, develops a body of information to facilitate a visual approach to the study of Shakespeare in performance and is presented in a flexible way on the web. Through both of these projects it has been my aim to raise questions about the use of new technology for research in this field.

The *Lear CD* attempts to give general access to textual and performance materials which have formerly been available only to private scholars working in restricted reading rooms which are geographically spread across North America, Australia and the United Kingdom. By, on the one hand, drawing together the primary materials of concern for two related, but largely unconnected disciplines and on the other hand opening those materials to a wider range of people through digital technology, an opportunity for new kinds of teaching and research to develop has been created.

The aim of the second project, *Designing Shakespeare: an audio-visual archive 1960-2000*, has been to create and collect performance-based materials which have not formerly been available and which are focused on the temporal and spatial aspects of theatre production. The archive is made up of four databases that include: production credits for all productions of Shakespeare in London and Stratford from 1960-2000; pictures of these productions in performance; interviews with designers and 3D models of the theatre spaces where Shakespeare is most often performed. This collection of four databases is housed by the Performing Arts Data Service at the University of Glasgow and is freely accessible on the web anywhere in the world (<http://www.pads.ahds.ac.uk>). The objective of this project has been to open a collaborative approach to theatre research at the university level to a public audience. The National Theatre and the RSC, I would argue, would be well served by allowing their archival work to be seen within a wider context of Shakespearean performance history. My own publicly available research work has tried to give the work of the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company that kind of historical and artistic context.

Figure 3.
Fran Bennett as
Lear in the 2002
Center for New
Theater
production of
King Lear
directed by
Travis Preston.
Photo by Steven
A. Gunther.



These three examples of new working practices show, then, that digital technology creates the possibility of new kinds of audience relationship both in the theatre and between the theatre, education and the general public. The Institutional theatres face a real challenge in defining themselves within this new realm. New programming initiatives, like the *Transformations* season at the National and the *Shakespeare's Contemporaries* season at the RSC are indications of change. However, it will be the work of the new Artistic Directors in both of these theatres that will potentially begin the shift in working practices in the theatre that the cultural movements of the digital age demand. The Globe Theatre, I suggest, leads the way in terms of creating an egalitarian and engaging experience for audiences at home and abroad which is commercially funded but not only commercial in its aims. My own archival research work and the performance work of the Center for New Theater at CalArts and the King's/Globe MA show ways in which collaboration between theatre artists and educational establishments can support experimentation with new technologies and new working practices.

The future and publicly funded theatres

The National Theatre is already beginning to develop its policy in interesting ways. Nicholas Hytner, the new Artistic Director, announced at the beginning of his tenure a six month season of plays in the Olivier Theatre where two thirds of the tickets were just ten pounds. This, he says, took a significant accommodation in working practice by the directors:

I've been working with my team over the last months not only on our choice of repertoire, but also on new ways of presenting it. In particular, we're determined to make the National available to new audiences and to make it possible for our devotees to come more often... I've asked a group of the English-speaking world's leading actors, directors and designers to collaborate on a bold new way of producing these plays which has made it possible to rethink our ticket prices. The result will be to reveal the Olivier's bare bones and to establish it as one of the most exhilarating theatre spaces in the world.

(Hytner 2003)

Hytner's commitment to make the National "the most public of all London's theatres" (Hytner 2003) is admirable. This idea is supported by the fact that during the recent conflict with Iraq the National hosted a series of early evening gatherings entitled *Collateral Damage* in which actors, writers, comedians and activists took to the stage to share their views about the war in Iraq. This forum combined with Hytner's production of *Henry V*, which featured an overt critique of the embedded journalism of the war, show a real sense of direction and purpose (Figure 4). Hytner's vision of the National as a gathering place and a place of public debate I think very much reflects our current view of the role of the theatre as social discursive space, a view which has been influenced by the democratising medium of the web. The Royal Shakespeare Company has yet to make a significant change of policy or direction of this kind. The plans of the former Artistic Director, which were aimed at popularising the work of the Company in a very commercial way, were universally unpopular. It remains to be seen what position the new Artistic Director will take but it appears that a shying away from this commercialising trend is on the cards.

It seems unlikely that a move away from increased interaction with the audience for any of these theatres is possible. The audience increasingly demand an openness they have come to expect through digital technology. We expect to arrive at the theatre prepared in every sense. At first that expectation was satisfied by the ability to buy tickets online and find information about routes to the theatre and parking availability. Increasingly, however, audiences are keen to learn more about the theatrical process and the current debates raging in theatre criticism and research. Increasingly both the institutional theatres and the universities are being asked to be transparent about their working practices and to engage directly with the public that funds them. The depth and breadth of information required to facilitate this level of transparency, plus the technology needed to create it in digital form may well force the large institutional theatres to enter partnerships either with commercial companies or with educational establishments. Similarly experiments with new technologies in terms of creative practices might productively be developed in or with educational institutions that are not primarily driven by a profit motive.

Figure 4.
Henry V
(Shakespeare.
Director:
Nicholas Hytner).
Adrian Lester
(Henry V).
Olivier Theatre /
National Theatre,
London SE1.
13/05/03.
©Donald Cooper.



Conclusions

When creative thinking and new technologies are combined they offer up all sorts of possibilities for change. Some power structures in the theatre are already shifting and I suggest that many more changes will come in the future. Creative collaboration, I argue, could bring about a rich and complex future for the theatre and for society. In many ways Shakespeare's Globe Theatre has laid down the gauntlet to the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. When it was established the Globe was created as a working theatre, as an educational establishment and as an exhibition space. As a result, specialised staff has been hired and the space has been custom built to accommodate all of these activities. The seasonal nature of the theatre season provides an opportunity for the education programme to have equal status and audience reach. The result is a space that is active every hour of every day throughout the year. The remit of the National and

the RSC also seem to be expanding with new public forums and an ever increasing web presence as new aims. The National has focused its developments in education at the schools level and has made a concerted effort to make the theatre more accessible to a wider public through its debates and pricing policies. The RSC has ventured into the area of archival work through its online exhibition, however, I would suggest that this move seems less well integrated into an articulated new direction than the initiatives seen at the National. The RSC may well be hindered in its progress in this area by complex longstanding relationships which exist with educational establishments and its own archive but also by the expectations of its longstanding audiences.

New technologies offer these theatres the opportunity to define more fully their ongoing relationship with their audiences, but the strength of online communication, and the expectations that stem from it, is the two-way nature of the communication developed. The National and the RSC it would appear are attempting to be more open in their approach to audiences. What remains to be seen is whether these theatres will listen and heed what is said by their publics. Can a new more democratic relationship be established between these theatres and an increasingly educated and demanding public? I think it can and it must if the theatre is to remain a vital part of our society. I suggest that these theatres would do well to look to education for models of collaboration that might help them to offer additional services and support for their audiences. The coming together of the rigors of professional practice and of academic research, I suggest, would provide the richest possible experience for future audiences. Shakespeare's Globe Theatre indicates how successful the marrying of these two approaches can be. The answer to the initial question posed must be a tentative yes. It would appear that the National and the RSC are beginning to take the opportunity of reinventing themselves through the use of digital technology quite seriously indeed. If they succeed it will be a success we might all participate in as well as benefit from.

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