the executive committee charged with realizing the university's arts aims.

Stanford's plan obviously reflects circumstances different from Harvard's situation: it has existing degree programs and a significant nucleus of creative-arts faculty members; its initiative proceeds with more central direction than is the norm in Cambridge; even its suburban location, well removed from cultural facilities in San Francisco, means that its needs are different.

But the plan raises many of the issues Harvard's task force will need to address. The University has already made scattered investments in facilities such as the New College Theatre (see page 52) and is about to embark on an enormous, complex, and costly renovation of the Fogg Art Museum (see page 62). The College residential houses are nearing a potentially extensive and expensive renovation of their own; knowing what kinds of creative (and other) spaces they should have must be

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**Theatrical Software**

For a while, all seemed to go well at the ribbon-cutting ceremonies for the New College Theatre on October 17. As a jazz trio played in the balcony, a full house settled into the comfortable, red-upholstered seats in the steeply raked auditorium.

President Drew Faust made a few remarks, noting, for example, that five U.S. presidents and a justice of the Supreme Court had performed in the building in its previous incarnation: “Perhaps they discovered that politics is mostly theater,” she put in, drawing one of the first laughs from the new stage. And then, along with Faculty of Arts and Sciences dean Michael D. Smith and dean of Harvard College David Pilbeam, she approached the wide ribbon that stretched across the proscenium, scissors in hand.

Suddenly a large blonde in a red-sequined dress and red-feather headdress charged down the aisle, yelling, “Wait! Stop! Don’t cut the ribbon!” The obstreperous interloper quickly declared Faust’s scissors utterly inadequate and another, suspiciously tall, woman instantly appeared with a giant three-foot-long pair. The blonde called for better lighting, and the theater’s high-tech system showed off some of its textures and gels. She next critiqued the administrators’ clothes, finding Smith’s so hopelessly bland that sheplanted her headdress on him. Finally, she called for music, and bugs appeared at the sides of the stage to play a fanfare, after which Faust was finally permitted to carry on.

The interloper—in drag, of course—was David Andersson ’09, cast vice president of the Hasty Pudding Theatricals, and his spectacular intrusion (Faust had been warned to expect an interruption) added both a theatrical note and a nod to the long history of the newly renovated building. That accomplished, Robert Brustein, founding director and creative consultant of Harvard's American Repertory Theatre (ART) hailed Faust: “Anyone who has the name of a great English play by Marlowe and a great German play by Goethe surely will look favorably on the theater.” He then moderated the discussion as distinguished playwrights John Guare, Melinda Lopez, Adam Rapp, and Paula Vogel addressed the query, “Does Playwriting Have a Future?”

Guare, author of *Six Degrees of Separation* and many other stage works, who teaches at Yale, raised a point that the panelists seemed to agree on. “The future of American playwriting takes care of itself,” he said. “But what’s the future of American producing?” Brustein observed that readings, meetings, and workshops were fine, but “What the playwright really needs is help getting his play produced. In America right now we have 35 or 40 major playwrights. We don’t have the audiences, but we do have the plays.” Rapp, author of *Nocturne* and *Animals and Plants*, worried that “there’s an atrophy to the audience—the audience for plays is getting older.”

The playwrights pointed to the rise of the multimedia entertainment industry as a major factor affecting live theater. “We are going further and further toward entertainment and toward plays that look more like TV,” Rapp said. “I saw a play with 52 scene changes—and I disconnected 52 times.” Vogel, who won the 1997 Pulitzer Prize for *How I Learned to Drive*, declared, “It feels very much like the entertainment industry is producing entertainment for a gladiatorial empire.” Lopez, whose *Sonia Flew* won the Eliot Norton Award for best new play and who teaches theater and performance (she is also an actress) at Wellesley, suggested that commercial entertainment spares audiences the risks and uncertainties of fresh drama: “With [the Broadway show] *Little Mermaid*, it’s a relief to know what you’re getting when you spend your money.”

In that context, Rapp said, “Maybe the next five or 10 years of exciting things to happen in theater will happen in universities.” Lopez might have voiced the evening’s most reassuring conviction. “You tell stories that you have to tell,” she said. “At our core, we are animals. And we need something from each other that we can’t get from a screen.”