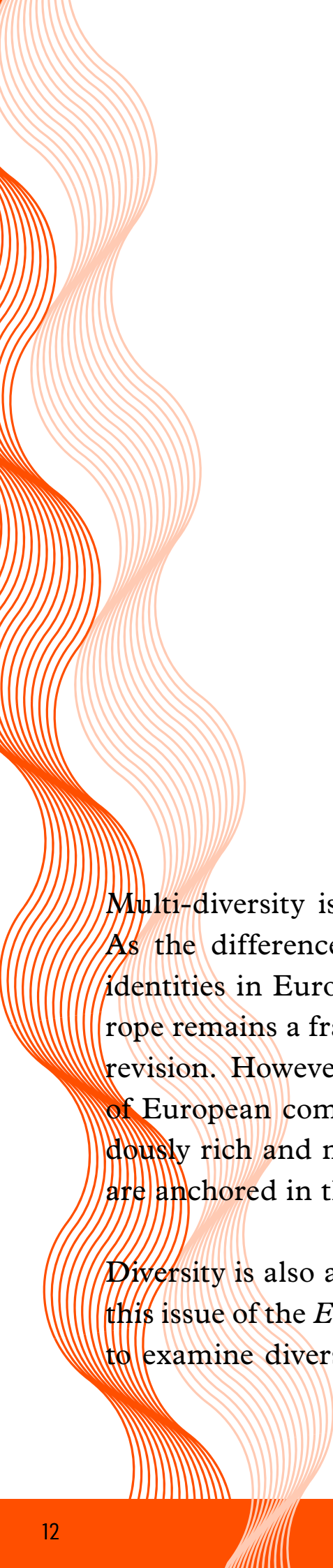


Introduction to the Essays Section

SOPHIE LUCET
LORENZO MANGO
LUK VAN DEN DRIES



Multi-diversity is undoubtedly one of Europe's main characteristics. As the differences between cultural, political, economic, and social identities in Europe are often stronger than the forces that unite, Europe remains a fragile construction that is constantly in need of critical revision. However complex and challenging the diversity at the core of European commonality may be, it is also an expression of tremendously rich and multi-layered cultural traditions that, even when they are anchored in the past, continue to be in dialogue with the present.

Diversity is also a common characteristic of European theatre, but, for this issue of the *European Journal of Theatre and Performance*, we attempt to examine diversity from a methodological, rather than an aesthetic,

point of view. Europe has been, and continues to be, the laboratory of many innovative forces in theatre history, which time and again challenge aspects of dominant theatre systems, be it actor-training, playwriting, technological innovation, rehearsal methods, the rise of the director, collaborative working methods, the distribution of performances via festivals, etcetera. 'Every production forms its own method of work', the dramaturg Marianne Van Kerkhoven once wrote.¹ As such, the diversity of the European theatre stage is intimately linked to its variety of working methodologies, and it is precisely these varieties that guarantee the flexibility and mobility of European theatre for the future.

This second issue of the *European Journal of Theatre and Performance* focuses on the 'genetics', or creative processes, of theatre, or on what Marco De Marinis calls 'seeing-making theatre'.² Since its inception in the early eighties, genetic research in the performing arts has taken off and, as a methodology, quickly became highly differentiated. You can approach a creative process in very different ways: you can zoom in on different aspects of that creative work, focus on very many kinds of traces of the creative process, follow very different actors who were involved in that same process, and take different positions as a researcher with regard to all that genetic material and its documentation. In the expansion that research on creative processes has experienced in recent years, a striking motif is now characteristic: that which Almuth Grésillon and Jean-Marie Thomassau have described as a 'continuous becoming',³ the continuous mobility of something that is actually never finished. If you persevere with this thought, you will become more aware of the instability of a work, of the transformations that are inherent in playing a performance.

1. Marianne Van Kerkhoven, 'Looking Without Pencil in the Hand', *Theaterschrift*, 5-6 (1994), 140-149 (p.140).

2. Marco De Marinis, 'New Theatrology and Performance Studies: Starting Points Towards a Dialogue', *TDR/The Drama Review*, 55.4 (2011), 64-74 (p. 69).

3. Almuth Grésillon and Jean-Marie Thomasseau, 'Scènes de genèses théâtrales', *Genesis (Manuscripts-Recherche-Invention)*, 26 (2005), 19-35 (p.19).

And, with the same focus on agility, the caesura fall away between different productions; you see the full expansion of the creative process itself, again and again, in different forms, with different expressions, for different purposes. In this way, attention shifts from a work (performance, production) to working,⁴ and from labour back to laboratory. And all this not in a genealogical process from beginning to an end, but in a continuous maelstrom of circles, spirals, dying ends, and new offshoots.

This versatility also characterises the various contributions that we as editors have collected for this essay section. Annelies Van Assche will start things off with her article ‘Chasing Your Own Tail: The Inclusive Artist’s Process in Project-Based Contemporary Dance’, in which she exposes the economic reality of contemporary young dance makers: on average, they spend more time looking for subsidies and maintaining networks than creating a performance. Today, more than ever, Europe offers a field of possibilities: national borders have opened up, and residencies in various art houses all over Europe offer attractive opportunities; but, in order to be able to exploit all these opportunities, a maker needs to deploy a range of communication talents, often motionless behind his or her computer. The neoliberal regime in which art also operates demands flexibility and mobility, but these liberal values also have a downside: ‘This causes a very dispersed focus: the artist’s process is fragmented in time (an accumulation of rehearsal periods), in place (an accumulation of rehearsal locations), and in its content (an accumulation of non- and para-artistic work).’ She uses the work of the Serbian dance maker Igor Koruga as an example of an artist who also incorporates

this economic reality as a theme in his creations. Whether he thereby gives a critical reflection on the working conditions of project-based artists, or whether he collaborates voluntarily with the capitalist regime, remains an open question.

4. Annemarie Matzke, *Arbeit am Theater. Eine Diskursgeschichte der Probe* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012).

Martin Givors followed the creative process of *Fractus V* (Cie Eastman/Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui), and he too talks about discontinuous time (the production was made and played over a period of four years) and dispersed space (residencies in Barcelona, Antwerp, Oslo, Bern...). However, he zooms in on how, in spite of this fragmentation, a cohesion can arise, and a sense of team spirit can be created. It is, above all, this internal coherence between all the different participants in this temporary community during a creative process that guarantees its uniqueness. In Givors’ words, it is a question of ‘revealing and tightening something like a common interest, a relational envelope linking (always singularly) the various members of a team in a spirit of partnership’. Specific to Givors’ focus is an emphasis on the importance of embodied, common time and space: it is in the sharing of embodied knowledge and the exchange of specific physical expertise that a collective archive emerges, from which not only a performance, but also the community, grows. The production *Fractus* is thus created on the basis of the transmission of movement material generated by the different dancers, but just as well on the basis of the warm-up sessions, in which each dancer is doing their own thing, something that fits his own history and background as a dancer; even in this preparation phase, exchange and mutual fertilisation quickly arise: ‘A relational ecology animated by the desires of sharing and learning which *a priori* exceeds the choreographic creation itself.’ This transmission of embodied knowledge lies at the basis of the anthropological view with which Martin Givors follows the ins and outs of this creative process, even beyond the premiere date, during the eighty one performances played over an extensive international tour. This shared transmission of embodied knowledge also calls into question the notion of authorship; although Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui also clearly places his signature, that signature is intimately related to how the material is generated, in other words to the specific working method.

Leila Vidal-Sepiha, as assistant director and documentalist, followed seven productions by the German director Nicolas Stemmann and tries,

in her turn, to record a ‘working method’. The method she describes is clearly linked to a typically German practice that starts with a ‘*Konzeptionsprobe*’, supported by a ‘*Materialmappe*’ by the dramaturge, lectures around the table, a long trial and error process in the rehearsal room, the ‘*Endproben*’ on stage and in the final set, try-outs in the presence of the audience, and finally the premiere. But, within that relative stability of the German system, Stemann is also looking for agility — by entering into unexpected confrontations, giving a lot of freedom, letting musicians and actors try out the craziest things from the start in long jam sessions, throwing open the doors of the rehearsal room for other opinions and expert stories, etc. The text is also a construction site that has many versions; Leila Vidal-Sephia adds, as an illustration to her article, some examples of the trajectory the text takes. Rehearsing for Stemann is playing with possibilities, with voices, and with material from different media — mixing and tinkering with it, feeling which energy that generates. It is a sensory, more than a rational, story. But, in order to keep it on the right track and to write it down, a whole army of assistants is needed, who record it all in their digital notebooks.

It is precisely that crucial instrument in the documentation of a creative process that Edith Cassiers elaborates on. She describes the director’s notebook as ‘a crucial window on the creative process’, and as ‘an entry to the poetics of the director’. In her contribution, she gives a historical sketch of the evolution of the director’s book and its many predecessors in antiquity, the Middle Ages and Renaissance, zooming in on the heyday of the director’s book, which naturally coincides with the rise of the director at the end of the nineteenth century. The notion of the director’s book as a creation platform and documentation tool quickly becomes firmly established, and you immediately see an enormous variety in how those director’s books are created, how they look, and what they are used for. Since the drama text lost its central place in theatre making, this diversification has of course only grown. But more than this almost unique

individuality, Cassiers places the emphasis on the agency of the director’s book — the authority that it reflects, for instance, or the creation of memory, which are always ideologically coloured processes. Interesting is the question why certain director’s books were kept in the archive and others not: director’s books are in fact far from neutral documents, they are an important tool in the canonisation of (some) directors.

Mimma Valentino takes the reader along to a special Italian period, in which new forms were experimented with in the theatre, with labels such as ‘Image Theatre’, ‘Analytical-existential Theatre’, ‘Post avant-garde’, and ‘*Spettacolarità metropolitana*’, which she summarises in her title as ‘Italian Conceptual Theatre’. Influenced by what happens in the visual arts, companies such as Gaia Scienza and Il Carrozzone, and makers such as Simone Carella and Federico Tiezzi, will concentrate on the decomposition of theatre, on the grammar of space and time, on linguistic processes themselves, without any concern for meaning, reference, or story. She calls this a ‘disassembly’ that affects all components of theatre. Instead of working towards a production, these Italian theatre makers, who have been operating from the mid-1970s to the 1980s, return to the pure process of making itself, which is conceived primordially as a mental and conceptual process. What appears on stage are merely traces of that conceptual trajectory, of a way of thinking in which the theatre is stripped of all functionality. A distant echo of Duchamp reverberates in this. Mimma Valentino concludes, ‘the show, having lost its mythical aura, proposes itself as a “non-object”, as a “non-show”’.

The influence of the visual arts on theatre and its genetics is also at the heart of the article by Flutura Preka and Besnik Haxhillari, also known as the Albanian-Canadian artist duo The Two Gullivers. Their own performances are, at the same time, the object of their creative, and research, processes: ‘In our own field, during the process of creating and performing, we are the participants, the creators and the performers.’

Central to their genetic research is the *'disegno'*, a concept that dates back to the Renaissance, with traces that lead to Da Vinci and Michelangelo, and that you can translate as a drawing project, a drawing as a kind of first mindset, a sketch, a trial. The practice of The Two Gullivers circles around the *disegno* that serves not only as a source of inspiration for a performance, but also as a means of communication between the two artists—it has even replaced all rehearsals. The working drawing acquires a status of scenario or script, it can also become an autonomous artistic object or even be used for the re-enactment of a particular performance. The drawing as an initial draft in the creation of a performance has a long history, of course, which is sketched out in this article (Marina Abramović, Jan Fabre, Günter Brus, Carolee Schneemann, and many others) and further explored with one example: namely in the very limited series of drawings designed by Allan Kaprow for the key work *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959). These drawings are part of an assemblage of all kinds of ideas, words, and texts with which Kaprow conceptually and physically shapes his happening. The genetic research of The Two Gullivers thus extends far into the twentieth century, in order to always come back again and again in their own work, in their own inspiration, in their own *disegno*.

The genetic researcher can take many positions: he or she can hold a function in the creative process, such as director or dramaturgy assistant, or documentalist; he or she can even investigate his or her own artistic practice, as is the case in the work of The Two Gullivers. The European project ARGOS decided to analyse the very place from which you observe a creative process. It is not without reason that the title of the project refers to the mythical monster Argos, with the hundred eyes. In each of the five creative processes that are central to this research project, subsidised by Creative Europe, the core group of European researchers is supplemented by other researchers who look with different eyes, from a different background. Through interviews and

surveys, their individual views on a creative process are documented, such that different accents are revealed each time. The five experiments have also been chosen in such a way that the observer him/herself must adapt their position over and over again. For their contribution to this issue, Maria João Brillante, Brigitte Prost, Sophie Proust, and Ana Clara Santos focus in on the integrated observer in the creative process of *Purgatório* by Portuguese collective Teatro O Bando, led by João Brites. The authors note that this first experiment contributed to 'a shift away from a personal point of view to another level of perception of artistic practice which itself derives from this shared community experience'. The project still has stages in Societas (Cesena, participative observation), Théâtre National de Bretagne (Rennes, immersive observation), Hammana Artist House (Beirut, intercultural observation), and Au bout du Plongeur (Rennes, creation- observation).

Attending rehearsals remains one of the most delicate aspects of genetic theatre research. Not every company is eager to allow observers into that fragile trial and error process, and certainly not if it involves such large viewing communities as is the case in the ARGOS project. This is one of the reasons why Julie Valero and Rémi Ronfard have developed a digital instrument, entitled Kino AI, which makes edits of filmed rehearsals. A camera is, in fact, less intrusive than the presence of one or more observers in the rehearsal room, and cameras have long been used as a form of memory aid during rehearsals. For this project, the authors assembled an interdisciplinary team of computer scientists, theatre researchers, and theatre and video artists; based on the software program Scénoptique, which is capable of recognising people in a room and recording them on different shots, they developed a system to make montages of those automated recordings. The uniqueness of this system is that a filmed sequence immediately generates a lot of frames, both panoramic shots of the whole scene and highly zoomed in expressions of, for example, hands or faces. For researchers who cannot, or may

not be, present at a rehearsal process, this provides a wealth of material — if the theatre maker is, of course, willing to give an insight into the rushes. As an experiment, the leading team of this project has chosen to offer the same sample of rushes, from one particular improvisation moment of a performance directed by Jean-Francois Peyret, to three video directors, in order to turn it into a kind of documentary video work that gave an insight into, and an image of, the rehearsals. It is not surprising that this resulted in three completely different narratives, three ways of looking at the same moment. For if there is one constant that genetic theatre research has taught us over the past decades, it is that observation is always highly subjective.

In her contribution ‘Towards a Model of Digital Narration of the Creative Process of Performance’, Eleni Papalexidou follows the same path. With the research project Genesis, which has only just been launched, her ambition is to document all phases of a creative process — including the selection of performers, any trainings or workshops that precede the start of a rehearsal period, rehearsals themselves, and all kind of archival documents — and to turn them into digital narratives. This project also brings together digital humanities with archival research and the study of creative processes. Papalexidou’s new research project thus builds on her many years of expertise with the immense theatre archive of the Societas Raffello Sanzio, which has been made fully digitally disclosed by her research group, with the support of European and Greek funds. Genesis continues to focus on the oeuvre of Romeo Castellucci, next to that of the Greek director Dimitris Papaioannou. In this contribution, she outlines all the objectives, difficulties, and technical conditions that are needed to successfully complete her project of digital stories of theatre creations by two important European directors.

The last contribution approaches Europe from a completely different angle: Ruba Totah investigates how Syrian and Palestinian theatre

makers who have fled their homeland are trying to find a new (theatre) place in Europe. More specifically, she searches for ‘how creative processes impact the life trajectories of artists seeking asylum or stable social and economic ties.’ Diversity and integration in a postmigrant context are high on the (verbal) agenda of many theatre companies, but looking to the concrete practice of creative processes in which these themes are addressed reveals there is still a long way to go: there are many mutual prejudices, communication problems are omnipresent, and artist-migrants are mainly approached from their migration context. Ruba Totah witnessed some of these creations and describes how a concept such as ‘home’ acquires completely different layers of meaning for someone who no longer has a home and has to navigate between feelings of loss, nostalgia, desire, and everything that comes with it, to make a new home elsewhere.

Diversity is an important asset of Europe, as we said at the start of this introduction, and this is also apparent from the essays we have collected for this issue: they bear witness to creative processes in very different places in Europe, with their own theatre traditions and cultural backgrounds. We have very deliberately set out the palette to be able to highlight not only theatre but also contemporary dance and performance. By immersing ourselves in the chaos of creation, we learn something about methodologies to force that chaos into form and expression. With genetic research in the performance arts, we are close to the skin of the artist and that is also one of the objectives of EASTAP: to stimulate dialogue, to exchange knowledge. By going to the studio or laboratory to see how theatre is made, we learn a lot about what theatre means today and what it means to make theatre.

