

AL SE AWSE OF CRISIS

Editorial Introduction

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In the volume *Staging 21st Century Tragedies: Theatre, Politics, and Global Crisis*, edited by Avra Sidiropoulou (2022), various performance artists and scholars explore how theatrical practices have responded to the sense of crisis that, in a surprisingly rapid and often unsettling sense, has become the arguably most defining hallmark of the new millennium across the globe. In times marked by a seemingly unrelenting range of disconcerting and devastating events — violent military invasions and conflicts strongly opposed by anti-war protests, the palpable impact of climate change through wildfires or floodings, continuing racial injustices pitched against demands for decolonization, fake news and international electoral interferences, economic inflation, or restrictions imposed by a global pandemic — it becomes hard, if not impossible, for the performing arts to shy away from the world that surrounds us and to question instead what imaginative alternatives artists might have to offer. Within this context, Sidiropoulou proposes the term ‘theatre of crisis’ to designate ‘a recent practice of politically engaged art that could arguably stand as our century’s equivalent to the genre of classical tragedy in both scope and affect’ (2022: 2).

A similar sense of urgency and crisis permeates this seventh issue of EJTP, even when it is not explicitly linked to the tragic conditions of ancient Greek theatre nor bound to only contemporary practices. Various contributions testify to the potential of theatre — and the performing arts in general — to critically address the sometimes dreadful realities outside the aesthetic realm and to foster new and often embodied modes of personal or collective commitment to the consecutive crises that spread throughout history as well as our own contemporaneity. In this sense, one could argue that our current moment is increasingly demanding to take a stance and to look either back or forward in order to deliver critique, look for hope, or even encourage repair. The articulation of how artists develop other perspectives and approaches than what news feeds, social media, or the blogosphere have to offer is indeed at stake in many of the texts featuring in this issue.

The **Essays** section brings together three contributions that from a variety of angles dive deep into the either explicit or implicit ways in which theatre and performance artists have dealt, or are still dealing, with the distinct political realities making up their world. Yana Meerzon takes as her starting point Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, now already more than two years ago, to map how Russian artists have responded to Putin’s totalitarian regime that censors or convicts openly oppositional stances. As this response often results in fleeing from their home country, Meerzon approaches these artists as ‘political exiles’, who through their work attempt to build new communities and networks outside of Russia enabling them to critically condemn the atrocious war while also finding solidarity abroad and across borders. Drawing on Svetlana Boym’s concept of ‘diasporic intimacy’ (1998), the essay demonstrates how the exiled condition can furnish a ground for the emergence of new collectives through the shared feelings of being dislocated, destabilized, and often traumatized. At the same time, Meerzon examines what might be characteristic of the 2022

immigration wave from Russia when compared to earlier waves and how this is leading to the emergence of new types of Russian exilic theatre. To account for the complexity of these recent practices, the essay offers a detailed interpretative framework that identifies seven strategies showing how Russian exiled artists are grappling with their diasporic reality as well as with the connection to their home country within and through theatre. What results from this journey through practice is a highly insightful and nuanced image of Russian exilic theatre as a deeply transnational phenomenon that is unfolding now in Europe and other continents against the background of Russian repression and a war that continues to rage in Ukraine. As such, the various cases presented throughout this essay offer a vivid account of how theatre artists attempt to critically address a disastrous crisis while beginning to look, carefully, for potential germs of repair.

War is also a central theme in the contribution by Yanna Kor, although she takes an entirely different approach by focusing on how war was represented in French popular puppet theatre during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The central case study in this essay is L' Théât' Louis in Roubaix, founded by the French textile worker Louis Richard in 1884. Based on extensive and detailed archival research uncovering this exceptionally rich military repertoire for puppets and marionettes, Kor demonstrates how this body of work distinguished itself from other representations of war in puppet theatre by proposing a completely new way of picturing the tropes of the soldier and the battle on stage. Rather than being a comic type, the soldier was sculpted more as a figure at once literary and dramatic, while the battle was no longer treated as an end point but as a driving force behind the plot. Through a close reading of the so-called 'Thursday plays' (*pièces de jeudi*), a new genre introduced by Louis's son Maurice Richard in 1904, Kor is able to identify important differences between the plays dealing with the national Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) and those revolving around the international Second

Boer War (1899–1901). Whereas the former functioned as vehicles to espouse the values of patriotism and nationalism introduced under the French Third Republic, the latter rather offered a view on war as a struggle for individual freedom infused with regional sentiments that could be read as resisting the French nationalist domination over local minorities. In this respect, the military repertoire at L' Théât' Louis is another case of a theatrical practice that developed in close dialogue with the hardship of violent conflicts happening outside the theatre. Again, we see how the stage seems to offer a space to both collectives and individuals to negotiate their position within a destabilized world.

In times of post-truth, fake news, international election interference, or increasingly state-regulated media, it is an enormous challenge for independent radio, television, and newspaper networks to hold up their fact-checking coverage against other parties using the exact same media to opposite ends. This context, which political theorist Peter Lee aptly terms the 'truth wars' (2015), gives particular significance to the work of the Japanese radio artist Tetsua Kogawa, which is discussed in the essay by Ferdinand Klüsener. In his most recent radio art performance, *Airwaves-art* (2023), which is also the essay's central case study, Kogawa develops a reflective and experimental reimagination of radio technologies to open up alternative phenomenological, temporal, and political dimensions not commonly associated with radio. Klüsener elucidates these dimensions through the concept of what he calls 'schizodramaturgy', which he derives from Kogawa's close affinity with the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari along with those of Franz Kafka and Edmund Husserl. Foregrounding the role of theatre in Deleuze's philosophy as well as Guattari's own interest in therapeutic theatre, Klüsener sketches the larger intellectual histories required to grasp the complexity of Kogawa's work. Tellingly, an important reference within this network of thinkers is Husserl's influential study *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*

([1935] 1970). In this book, Husserl's observation of a crisis in science also triggers a reconsideration of the position of the phenomenological subject and consciousness, which — as Klüsener explains — relates to how Husserl would come to place the subject in a larger temporal horizon oriented towards the future. As a sense of crisis often provokes questions about the future, it is perhaps not surprising that the temporal dimension of the future serves as a connecting thread weaving together the different voices foregrounded in this contribution. Moreover, this concern with temporality equally underlies Kogawa's ingenious artistic response to the hacking of his own SoundCloud page and the ways in which he strategically overturns the principles of conspiracy theories. To provide further insight into Kogawa's artistic universe, this EJTP issue also features, in tandem with Klüsener's contribution, the first English translation of Tetsua Kogawa's 2022 essay, 'Encountering Rabelais During a Midnight Walk'. This performative and poetic text sheds light on Kogawa's relation to free radio within pandemic times as well as its place within our current societal context.

The manifold ways in which theatre and performance artists have responded through their practice to political realities rife with crises quite meaningfully extend to this issue's **Scholar in Focus** section. This section, which was newly introduced in EJTP issue 5, alternates with our Artist in Focus section and wants to both honour and give visibility to the work of an esteemed scholar from the fields of theatre, dance, or performance studies. This part of the journal reflects most closely its relationship with EASTAP, the European Association for the Study of Theatre and Performance, which invites for its yearly conferences an associated scholar and artist, whose work is then represented within EJTP. Therefore, following on the 2023 EASTAP Conference in Aarhus, this issue's Scholar in Focus section provides a curated sample of the writings of Lola Proaño Gómez, who as an expert in Latin American theatre has worked in Ecuador, Argentina, and California,

contributing significantly to the visibility of theatrical practices that in Anglophone-oriented academia often remain in the periphery. Gómez's writings included in this section are first-time English translations aimed at disseminating her scholarly work amongst a broader audience. These essays testify to a genuine and intimate commitment to articulating the stakes and strategies that Latin American performing artists have developed to denounce the unequal conditions of labour within neoliberal capitalism or the discriminative gender divisions within patriarchal cultural systems. In the opening and closing text of this section, Gómez provides a generous inside look into the intimacy of her own research processes as well as her personal life, which appears to confirm the activist and feminist adagio that the personal is always already political.

A similar personal tone is continued in this issue's **From the Archives** section, which focuses on the work that archivist Sigríður Jónsdóttir has been doing at the Theatre Museum of Iceland. Appointed in January 2021 as a single staff member to build a new performing arts division within the National and University Library of Iceland, Jónsdóttir offers a candid and highly insightful account of all the challenges that come with the daunting expectation to archive the remnants of Icelandic theatre histories. Singling out a few of the most significant projects she has been working on since her appointment, Jónsdóttir gives insight into the concrete reality of how archival structures might want to accommodate the performing arts, while stumbling upon the difficulties and limitations that current modes of archiving pose when it comes to preserving embodied practices like theatre, performance, or dance, which in the end only materialise through the enactment — or reenactment — of the work. Nonetheless, by combining a descriptive account with a series of images that give a flavour of the rich materials housed in this archive, the section shows how archival documents can act as portals for entering into histories long deemed to be forgotten with the hope

of sparking future revisitations of these historical legacies. This is important, Jónsdóttir explains, because in Iceland the performing arts are generally regarded as belonging to the so-called *þjóðarsálin*, or the soul of the nation. Again, we see how neither personal accounts nor archival efforts can be separated from a political dimension that transcends the presumed singularity of particular works, people, or local contexts.

The issue concludes with the **Book Reviews** section, featuring five reviews of recent publications within the fields of theatre and performance studies. Interestingly, several of these books connect to major topics also addressed throughout this issue, such as the relationship between theatre and politics, the role of technology in the performing arts, or the documentation of live performance. In this regard, these works could provide entrances for deepening ongoing discussions even further.

Moving from Russia to France to Japan, then crossing the Atlantic to Latin America, and having a final stop in Iceland, this seventh issue travels across various geographical regions in a way that reflects the scope and aims of EJTP. For even while this journal is called the *European Journal of Theatre and Performance*, it is acutely aware of the fact that Europe does not exist in isolation from other parts of the world. On the contrary, especially in times marked by a sense of crisis, it is important to acknowledge that building a better future will require concerted efforts both locally and across national and geographical boundaries in order to go beyond what Bruno Latour in *Down to Earth* calls ‘the backlash of globalisation’ (2018: 103). Ever since the world has grown smaller, global problems seem to have accumulated. As this issue shows, the performing arts and particularly the so-called ‘theatre of crisis’ might ignite new ways of looking at the world that either raise critique or garner hope — or both at once.



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