

Editorial: Looking Ahead

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This is my first issue as Senior Editor of *Theatre Research International*. As I have worked I have been conscious of the editors who have preceded me, first and foremost Elaine Aston. Her wit, insight and generosity have been models for me over the three years we worked together. Now, as she has ended her term and I have begun mine, I am more aware than ever of the precedent she has established. I will have to work very hard to match her editorial discernment, wisdom and creativity. But I am also aware of a legacy from previous editors – Freddie Rokem (with whom Elaine was privileged to work as Associate Editor), Christopher Balme (currently President of the International Federation for Theatre Research) and Brian Singleton (also a past IFTR President). What this means to me is that I am privileged to inherit a journal that has long been recognized as a leader across the globe for the best in original content and methodology. Joining me is the new Associate Editor, Paul Rae from the National University of Singapore. He has already proven to be an invaluable colleague, and I am happily anticipating our work together on *TRI* over the next three years.

As I work closely with authors who have submitted articles, I have returned many times to the journal's mission statement: '*Theatre Research International* publishes articles on theatre practices in their social, cultural, and historical contexts, their relation to other media of representation, and to other fields of inquiry. The journal seeks to reflect evolving diversity of critical idioms in the scholarship of differing world contexts.' Since 1959, when the journal began under the title *Theatre Research/Recherches théâtrales*, it has been a key place to encounter 'the evolving diversity of critical idioms in the scholarship of differing world contexts', but what that means now is not what it has meant previously. *TRI* and its parent organization, IFTR, have struggled and continue to struggle to meet this ever-moving target, but *TRI* is predicated on the assumption that ideas and conversations can and must cross geopolitical borders. For fifty-four years the editors of *TRI* have served as one set of curators of these conversations, allowing our journal to be a force in supporting global engagement.

The four articles in this issue demonstrate exactly this larger mission. In all of them we see how theatre, as well as the idea of theatre, moves across a range of boundaries – material, political, social, electronic and theoretical. In 'The Possibility of Darkness: Blackout and Shadow in Chris Goode's *Who You Are*', Martin Welton examines how light and its absence have been fundamental to the definition of spectator and performer in Western theatre for centuries. Welton's primary focus is a recent production at the

Tate Modern in London that offered an alternative way to perceive theatre and its typical insistence on illumination. Darkness, in Welton's view, is a 'medium for seeing and being differently'. Being in the dark, as both a material and a metaphysical state, is something audiences rarely experience for very long. When they do, however, a rare opportunity emerges for them to redefine their own identities – political, social, emotional, agonistic – something even the British Parliament dared not risk. Theatre can travel to places of which politicians can only dream.

A place politicians have dreamed about, or perhaps more accurately dreamed up, is a neo-liberal Europe that has 'unity in diversity', a label, as Katrin Sieg points out in 'Wii Are Family: Performing Race in Neo-liberal Europe', that was supposed to be illustrated in the flashmob dance *Glow* by the Afro-Norwegian duo Madcon at the 2010 Eurovision Song Contest. Sieg adroitly positions such performances in terms of gaming systems like Nintendo's Wii that encourage us to identify ourselves through onscreen avatars. This juxtaposition, she suggests, masks the ways in which Europe continues to struggle with immigrant and guest-working populations, a struggle exacerbated since the 2008 economic crisis. In this instance theatre obscures the inequitable exchange of, in Sieg's words, 'cosmopolitan diversity for economic and social equality' and deflects struggle onto a simulation of 'kinaesthetic communion'. The stakes here are high – what happens in Europe will affect us all no matter where we live, linked as we are economically and politically.

Sandra D'Urso's article 'On the Theology of Romeo Castellucci's Theatre and the Politics of the Christian "occupation" of His Stage' also takes up questions posed within the European context but with implications beyond it. It is not simply Castellucci's daring and controversial production, or the protests that the production provoked, that D'Urso seizes upon as the focus of her argument. Instead, D'Urso widens her lens to ask how those events intersected to constitute public space, particularly in light of the fact that many audience members, D'Urso herself included, were spectators not at a live performance, but online, after the fact. Through her work we can look at what live performance 'means' when it is no longer live. Like Sieg, she notes that theatre is no longer constituted through the physical boundaries of the live. Instead, it can be tweeted, texted, posted on YouTube, simulcast and delivered through a host of other electronic means. Local spectators can be transformed into a global audience with a few strokes of the keyboard or swipes on a tablet.

Finally, Marcus Cheng Chye Tan offers an examination of what some of the limitations of global conversations have been in practice. In 'Between Sound and Sight: Framing the Exotic in Roysten Abel's *The Manganiyar Seduction*' he reminds us that while performance has always travelled, meaning is not so easily transported. Roysten Abel's *The Manganiyar Seduction* has been enthusiastically received on the global festival circuit. Enchanting audiences from Australia to the US, from Ireland to Singapore and beyond, this performance has exoticized and reframed a specific set of artistic practices to be legible to global audiences. What is denied when the work of the Manganiyar culture is refracted through the lens of Western constructs of theatre, however, is the contexts and practices that make the work possible. Tan's article offers alternative ideas for global translation that do not rely on enduring and troubling traditions of exoticism and seduction.

I understand *TRI* as more than simply a place for articles and reviews. It is rare for even a majority of members to attend the conference of any scholarly organization. This means that what members hold in common is rarely the annual conference; instead the primary bond is the journal. *TRI* is one the strongest forces to 'federate' members of the IFTR. Going back to its Latin roots, the word 'federation' implies a covenant, and a faith in that bond. But it also implies that the fellowship it creates does not demand that those within it surrender their differences. Where better to find the strengths and dividends of our federation's commonalities and differences, including connections with readers who are not members, than in its journal? This issue demonstrates that *TRI* remains committed to just such bonds and intends to live up to the promises of its mission for members and non-members alike.

A personal note: As I moved into the editorial role this summer, my mother, Joan Hill Canning, died unexpectedly. She had enjoyed a long and rewarding professional career as a librarian. Thus I can think of no better way to honour her than to dedicate my work on this issue to her memory. I do this both because the journal is destined to live in libraries around the world and because she understood thoughtful work as a powerful part of a life well lived.