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“PERFORMING AGAINST THE CATASTROPHE” FORUM

edited by Branislav Jakovljević and Matthew Wilson Smith

Stanford University Consortium Issue: Part II

plus articles by

Rowland Chukwuemeka Amaefula

Annelies Van Assche & Kareth Schaffer

Sarah Balkin

Rebecca Chaleff

Melissa Melpignano

TDR

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TDR

the journal of performance studies

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Above: Gloria Oloruntobi, known as Maraji, in her video “How African Mothers Prepare to Talk to Their Husbands” (2021). See “No Longer a Laughing Matter: Women Comics and the Social Media Space in Nigeria” by Rowland Chukwuemeka Amaefula. (Screenshot by TDR)

Front Cover: A walk across the tundra around dusk. Iqaluit, Nunavut, September 2021. See “Infrastructural Performativity and Necrogeologies: Changing Climates at an Intermediate Scale” by Clara Wilch. (Photo by Clara Wilch)

Back Cover: Marlene Monteiro Freitas as Prince in (M)IMOSA/Twenty Looks or Paris Is Burning at the Judson Church (M) by Cecilia Bengolea, François Chaignaud, Trajal Harrell, and Marlene Monteiro Freitas, 2011. See “Flexible Performativity: What Contemporary Dancers Do When They Do What They Do” by Annelies Van Assche and Kareth Schaffer. (Photo by Laurent Paillier)

TDR

PROVOCATION

36.5 / New York Estuary 2

Sarah Cameron Sunde

36.5 / *A Durational Performance with the Sea* (2013–2022) is a series of nine site-specific performances and video artworks that activate the public on personal, local, and global scales in conversations about deep time, embodied experience, and sea-level rise. Sunde stands in a tidal plane for the full tidal cycle (12–13 hours) as water engulfs her body and then reveals it again. The public is invited to participate in all aspects of making this *work*. Photographer Geoff Green captures a 30-second slice of time taken during Sarah Cameron Sunde’s 12-hour, 39-minute durational performance with the sea, on 14 September 2022. www.36pt5.org

Sarah Cameron Sunde is an interdisciplinary environmental artist working at the intersection of performance, video, and public art, investigating scale and duration, deep time, and the human relationship to ecological change. Exhibiting internationally, her practice is part of an emerging field of art made on/in/with bodies of water. She received a 2021 Guggenheim Fellowship to complete *36.5 / A Durational Performance with the Sea*. www.sarahcameronsunde.com

TDR STANFORD CONSORTIUM ISSUE: PART II

Performing Against the Catastrophe 10

Edited by Branislav Jakovljević and Matthew Wilson Smith

Tragedy, Catastrophe, Ecology: Introduction to “Performing Against the Catastrophe” 10

Matthew Wilson Smith

The term “catastrophe” has a complex history that has become deeply embedded in Western, and increasingly global, cultures. So it is natural enough, when confronted by a phenomenon as harrowing as climate change, to employ the concept and its attendant connotations. But the lens of catastrophe often distorts more than it reveals.

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Genevieve Guenther

Traditional performance genres are inadequate to represent the climate crisis, whose proper narrative form is the epic. Using epic genres instrumentally can help create the cultural imaginaries that will move people to call for the revolution of our planet-destroying economic system, although at the same time it will be necessary to isolate and neutralize the ways that epic modes in popular entertainment entrench the power of fossil-fuel interests and normalize incipient ecofacism.

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Branislav Jakovljević

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Gloria Benedikt

The human species has the ability to understand complex systems such as planetary boundaries. But then it does not take action and destroys its existential basis, its global habitat. Whether the story ends here is up to us. A new relationship between science, art, and activism suggests a new paradigm to support a more sustainable existence.

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Wendy Arons

The term “Anthropocene” is obfuscatory, and as an analytic framework it has a serious blind spot: the conflicts stemming from the uneven distribution of the costs and benefits of the “Age of Man,” which are the very eco-conflicts on which artists in our field should focus. We should be talking about the “Capitalocene,” a term that locates climate change within the history of capitalism and colonialism, and suggests stories that deserve time on our stages.

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Using “climate change” to name a recent, unnatural, and rapid process of warming that is the result of pollution conceals the causal order of events. Those who generate this semantic confusion are in the service of those who produce the global warming at the root of accelerated climate change. Theatre can pass judgment on them, as a virtual, possible, and probable Areopagus of our age.

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Climate change was the defining issue in the 2022 Australian federal election. As a new administration takes power, all sectors, including the performing arts, need to keep up the pressure. An iconic moment of “coal theatrics” in Parliament House, so labeled by the Australian media, stands in contrast to artistic performances that continue to put pressure on the framers of political and cultural policy.

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Since 2019, the lecture and discussion series Burning Futures: On Ecologies of Existence at Berlin's HAU Hebbel am Ufer has been exploring the significance of environmental and climate destruction in the context of contemporary theatre. Combining positions of eco-Marxism and -feminism, black studies, and new materialism, panels examine political and cultural dimensions of the apocalyptic discourses that accompany current ecocatastrophes as well as possible ways out of the socioecological mess.

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Christel Stalpaert

The complexity of current ecological crises, such as climate change, calls for new modes of knowledge production. *Common Dreams—Flotation School* (2017) by the Portuguese, Brussels-based artist Maria Lucia Cruz Correia is a construction site and a pedagogical prototype that challenges the linear transfer of knowledge in scientific research.

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Chantal Bilodeau

Inspired by Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, the short play *Homo Sapiens* humorously explores whether *Homo sapiens* caused their own demise or managed to evolve into a new, more enlightened species.

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Clara Wilch

Now that decades-long efforts to convince diverse publics that anthropogenic climate change is real have largely succeeded, but efforts to avoid extreme climate change have not, what comes next? By understanding the performative nature of infrastructure, communities can bring critical and creative attention to physical structures and daily practices that compose normative ecological relations and cocreate more just and livable climates.

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Kathleen M. Millar

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Kwai-Cheung Lo

Any planet-wide solutions to climate change have to be enforced by nation-states. China and the United States, currently producing the most carbon dioxide, are competing with growing hostility. The interstate hostility, even in a new Cold War era, may push competing nations to implement climate-friendly actions for the sake of national security.

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Ho Chak Law

Discussion on environmental sustainability in the past two decades has often engendered more controversy than agreement. The Beijing Olympics in 2008 and 2022 are examples of state bureaucrats and international media outlets upholding polarized viewpoints on achieving carbon neutrality. The “original ecology” folk song of 21st-century China further demonstrates how anthropocentric interests could easily divert people’s attention away from issues critical to planetary wellness.

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Sariel Golomb

Whether scientist, politician, or theatre-maker, the challenge one faces in representing climate change is an accompanying epistemic crisis; it is contingent upon and resistant to legibility, and we cannot apprehend it in its totality. Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* poses a potential aesthetic and dramaturgical model for this challenge.

“Dead as a Dodo”: Anthropocene Extinction in the Early Modern World 126

Sugata Ray

Among the species that went extinct in the last 500 plus years under colonial regimes, the ill-fated dodo became an early icon of the Anthropocene Extinction. While much has been written on the biotechnological apparatuses that expedited the extinction of the dodo, it was the complicity of Western European imperialism and early modern aesthetic regimes that were responsible for the ecocide of the Anthropocene (read Eurocene) Extinction.

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No Longer a Laughing Matter: Women Comics and the Social Media Space in Nigeria 136

Rowland Chukwuemeka Amaefula

Maraji, a Nigerian humorist, performatively questions the lingering dominance of men in comedy as she brings humor to the everyday lives of Nigerians. Her work on social media draws audience attention to women's role in society, shaping the future of comedic presentations in the African digital space.

On Quitting: Dave Chappelle's *The Closer* and Hannah Gadsby's *Nanette* 149

Sarah Balkin

Like Hannah Gadsby, Dave Chappelle understands the art of quitting. At the end of his 2021 Netflix special *The Closer*, a show full of jokes about LGBTQ people, Chappelle announces that he is "done" making such jokes "until we are both sure that we are laughing together." Chappelle's performance of quitting inverts the politics and structure of Gadsby's *Nanette* (2017), in which she infamously quit comedy because it reinforced her marginalization as a gender-nonconforming lesbian.

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As the very first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic ebbed in the United States, a new production of Pina Bausch's *The Rite of Spring* (1975) appeared online. Performed on Senegal's shoreline, *Dancing at Dusk* resituates Bausch's choreography within the beach's formative histories of racialized violence, colonialism, and white supremacy. In this context, the performance also prompts considerations of the relationships between the enduring histories of racial capitalism and the futures of choreographic economies.

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Melissa Melpignano

Israeli soldiers dancing to global pop hits in the Occupied Palestinian Territories look like they are having fun, and there is always something entertainingly contradictory in watching army bodies circumventing the military codes. But the choreographic analysis of three viral videos from the 2010s reveals how dancing serves the Israel Defense Forces' territorializing and necropower strategy.

Flexible Performativity: What Contemporary Dancers Do When They Do What They Do 203

Annelies Van Assche and Kareth Schaffer

Scholarly work rarely examines the labor of the contemporary dance artist as a performer. *Flexible performativity* describes the discrete skill set dancers today must be able to deploy in performance. Flexible performativity and its characteristics of negotiating proximity, autodramaturgy, hyperindividualism, and hyperreferentialism mold the dancer prototypical of the movement logics of the early 21st century.

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Branislav Jakovljević

A key lesson of the Wooster Group’s production of Bertolt Brecht’s learning play *The Mother* concerns the meaning of ownership in capitalism. Unlike other businesses that moved into SoHo during the wave of deindustrialization that began in the late 1960s, the group of actors that owns a former metal stamping factory at 33 Wooster Street shows that their relationship towards their means of production is not only economic, but also ethical. This is at the foundation of their distinct theatrical aesthetics.



The caption for this Facebook post from Tonga translates as “we are still alive.” The homes and fishing boats of Mango Island’s 62 residents were destroyed by a wave of up to 15 meters. See “Relational Entanglements in the Anthropocene Islands: Tonga Tsunami” by Teena Brown Pulu and Richard Pamatatau. (Photo by Piokalafi Faka’osi; “Mango Island,” Facebook, 23 January 2022)