Editorial

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We live in strange times and it is rare for any of us involved in scholarly endeavor somehow not to make reference to this fact, as we generate research that seeks to engage with the temper of the times. Europe finds itself constantly referring to its past when talking of politics and the rise of the Right. The US similarly is drawn to recapitulating memories of past presidents who re-shaped the rules of political operation and notions of truth in unfathomable ways. The world stands aghast as the balance of power shifts precariously between one regime and another.

These are times when making art is a real and tenable struggle for many, with the withdrawal or re-shaping of funding and other resources to fulfill social agendas that have less and less to do with art, and more and more to do with ideological assumptions about the rightful place and function of art in a neoliberal political economy. In the UK, too, the implications of a government-ratified schools’ curriculum that views the creative arts as ‘non-foundational’ subjects are already making an impact. Together with the impact of university fees that far surpass those of our European neighbours, these concerns are shifting approaches to pedagogy and practice in the academy and beyond.

Such times may produce interesting and challenging theatre and performance however, not least where we see collaborative work coming more into focus. For example, these shifts have seen academic and practitioner working in collaboration, and a new urgency in mapping our relationship to the past and those who have shaped the work currently being made across national and transnational contexts. We hope that the range and breadth of such work is reflected in this issue of Contemporary Theatre Review.

In this issue, Backpages includes memories of the late Edward Albee from those who worked or studied with him. Here we see a cross-generational appreciation of an artist who celebrated ‘being difficult’ in both his work and his life. Thinking about legacy is also central to Liang Peilin’s article: here the influence of Grotowski’s work on Taiwanese performance practice is explored through an analysis of the work of a new generation of body-based and training-centred practitioners. Peilin sees the legacy of Grotowski’s influence as not only central in the negotiation of the seeming chasm between western and eastern approaches to performance, but also as the root of new praxis which moves away from his formal ideas.
A number of the articles in this issue apply close exploration of theory to the analysis of practice: thus David Barnett’s article examines dialectics in relation to specific performances which focus on the rise of the Right in Germany. Moving away from text and performance, Ben Spatz uses the application of theory to the development of practice to provide a reading of his own performance process, in creating embodied performance research. Similarly, Adrian Curtin provides a detailed documentation-oriented analysis of a collaborative performance project developing work based on Jean Genet’s play *The Maids*.

The intricacies of the collaborative process as a working practice features in a number of the articles in this edition of the journal: often this is an ideological choice in terms of determining ways of working and the kinds of work that is made. Thus, Nicola Hyland writes of a Māori performance project that sought to challenge representations of participation in World War One, questioning the impact of the colonialist coercion of young Maori men into an army which represented their own forces of oppression. Here there is a question about how artists can turn around the frameworks for funding and continue to make art that challenges and push at boundaries of social and historical understanding. Kirsty Sedgman turns to the audience as the centre of her inquiry when writing of the early work of the National Theatre of Wales. Her assessments of audience disgruntlement at the realities of the offerings made in immersive practice are witty and enlightening. Here she interrogates the extension of collaborative processes to embrace audiences, many of whom have horizons of expectations that do not chime with the those of the makers of the performances in which they are invited to immerse themselves.

Many of the articles and shorter pieces in this open issue pay witness to the changing landscapes of our social and political culture, but all offer an optimistic outlook that celebrates the vast range of possibilities performance offers for human interaction and live creative processes in an age where for many, digital contact has taken over as the norm.

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