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Book of Abstracts

(in alphabetical order, forename surname)

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Alejandro Postigo

London College of Music, UK

Performing the In-Between: Language, Queer Migration, and the Reimagining of Copla in the UK

Copla: A Spanish Cabaret is a solo performance that reimagines the traditional Spanish music genre of Copla through a queer, migrant lens. Historically censored under Franco's dictatorship (1939–75) and later reclaimed by Spanish drag artists as an act of subversion, Copla's journey exemplifies the resilience of cultural expression at the margins. This performance introduces Copla to UK audiences for the first time in English, bridging linguistic and cultural divides while interrogating the challenges faced by migrant performers working in an Anglo-centric theatre landscape.

As an artist who speaks English as an Additional Language (EAL), I navigate the complexities of performing across linguistic boundaries, where translation becomes both an artistic and cultural negotiation. Developed through practice-research and informed by my PhD in Intercultural Adaptation of Copla, the show blends live music, personal storytelling, and audience engagement to explore bilingualism, hybrid identities, and mid-level theatre production. By positioning Copla within the UK's performance ecology, the work challenges industry frameworks that often sideline LGBTQ+ migrant voices. This paper examines how multilingual performers navigate linguistic, cultural, and institutional barriers, turning perceived limitations into artistic agency.

Reflecting on the 2025 run at The Other Palace and public engagement with UK-based organisations, this paper contributes to discussions on linguistic hybridity, the politics of cultural adaptation, and the role of the "in-between" in shaping theatre practice today.

Alex Feldman

University of Haifa, Israel

Hearing Impairment: Auditory Injustice in Gillian Slovo's *Grenfell* and the TRC

On June 14th, 2017, a fire ignited by an electrical fault in London's Grenfell Tower, tore through the building, killing seventy-two people, making this the deadliest residential fire in Britain since the Blitz. Soon after the flames were extinguished, a government enquiry was launched to determine the causes of the catastrophe but though the enquiry's report has recently been published, and the culpable parties identified, no criminal charges have yet been filed. Gillian Slovo's *Grenfell: In the Words of the Survivors* (2023) provides an alternative, arguably, a *corrective*, to the official enquiry, in the medium of verbatim theatre, amplifying the scope of the investigation's hearings to encompass the voices of victims, providing another kind of *hearing* and of *listening* altogether. Seeking thus to redress the *hearing failures* characteristic of the Grenfell disaster—the residents' miscommunications with responsible parties prior to, during and after the night of the fire—Slovo's play is reparative, with respect to the impairments of hearing and of justice characterizing the disaster, linking this work to the author's personal experience of restorative, quasi-legal procedures. The daughter of two legendary anti-Apartheid activists, Joe Slovo and Ruth First (the later assassinated by the South African police), Slovo attended numerous sessions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's hearings. These experiences, which she has recorded both in fiction (*Red Dust* (2000)) and memoir (*Every Secret Thing: My Family, My Country* (1997)), have exerted considerable influence, I argue, upon the verbatim works she has composed for the London theatre: *Guantanamo* (2004), *The Riots* (2011) and *Grenfell* itself.

Amy D. Insley

Christopher Newport University, USA

The Impact of Theatre Education on Youth Development

This paper explores the significant impact of theatre education on the social, emotional, and cognitive development of youth, with a focus on how drama and theatre programs foster critical life skills and personal growth. Theatre education, which emphasizes creativity, collaboration, and self-expression, plays a vital role in nurturing the development of young people, equipping them with tools to navigate both their academic and personal lives. By examining various educational systems and their approaches to integrating drama into curricula, the paper highlights the differences in how theatre is used to promote cognitive skills, emotional intelligence, and social competencies.

Through a comparative analysis of theatre education models in different countries and cultures, the paper investigates how drama education influences youth development in diverse contexts. Key areas of focus include the enhancement of creativity, the promotion of empathy through character exploration, and the development of critical thinking through problem-solving in performance. Additionally, the paper examines the role of theatre in fostering communication skills, self-confidence, and teamwork, which are essential attributes for personal and academic success.

The paper draws on scholarly literature, case studies, and educational theories to support the argument that theatre education is a powerful tool for holistic development, particularly in addressing the emotional and social challenges faced by young people in contemporary society. By exploring the effectiveness of theatre programs in different educational settings, this paper aims to provide insights into how integrating drama into youth education can help cultivate well-rounded individuals who are equipped for success both in the classroom and beyond. The paper concludes with recommendations for educators and policymakers to prioritize the inclusion of theatre in educational curricula to support the development of the next generation of creative, empathetic, and critical thinkers.

Amy Muse

University of St. Thomas, USA

Annie Baker and Thomas Mann on Time

Annie Baker has often remarked that her favourite book is Thomas Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain*. She is fascinated with his fascination with time: how we experience it in life and how the artist can present and represent it. Mann, she says, gave her permission to "play with time" onstage. Moved by Mann's statement in the foreword to *The Magic Mountain* that one must be "unafraid of the odium of appearing too meticulous" because "only thoroughness can be truly entertaining," Baker embodies it in her patient attention to the precise details in the unfolding of life. This paper is a conversation between these two writers, looking at Mann's influence on the body of Baker's work, from *Body Awareness* (2008) to her film *Janet Planet* (2024). Most attention is given to Baker's dialogue with Mann in her most recent play, *Infinite Life* (2023), which takes place in a *Magic Mountain*-esque setting. In *Infinite Life*'s clinic (like *The Magic Mountain*'s sanatorium) time both stands still and races by. Baker's art in *Infinite Life* practices a kind of "hermetic magic" on its audience, pulling us into its web of time, listening closely as minutes stretch and then hours and weeks fly by. The play, like the novel, is both about time and an experimentation with time, exploring how the experience of being ill, and dwelling with others who are ill, creates the sense of—and desire for—a substitute world outside of time. A situation not unlike the theatre itself.

Amy Stebbins

Guildhall School of Music and Drama, UK

Make Opera New Again...? Notes from the field on new opera creation in Germany and the U.S.

Despite Germany's robust infrastructure of over 100 publicly funded opera houses and a reputation for artistic excellence, contemporary opera struggles to gain traction. Only 15% of operas produced annually were composed after 1945, with world premieres accounting for a mere 5%. New works are often relegated to smaller stages, limiting their impact and visibility. In contrast, the United States is experiencing a "golden age" of opera, where approximately 30% of operas programmed each year are by composers active after 1970. Works like *Dead Man Walking* and *Silent Night* exemplify the success of accessible, story-focused productions supported by a product-oriented, industry-driven approach. This talk explores differences in the development processes and aesthetic values of new operas in the U.S. and Germany. I begin with an overview of the German and American new opera landscapes, how they are financed, developed, and received. The talk then shifts into a description of the striking differences in dramaturgy, music, and design between new works in these two countries, and the reasons for these differences. My analysis draws on my experience as an American opera maker working in Germany, as well as theoretical texts by Bertolt Brecht, Theodor Adorno, and Hans-Thies Lehmann.

Ana Fernández-Caparrós

Universitat de València, Spain

On lightness, possibility and transformation in the theatre of Sarah Ruhl

Sarah Ruhl must be regarded as one of the most influential US playwrights of the twenty-first century. Her unique style in the theatre might be to a great extent related to her development of a mesmerizing theatrical poetics of lightness. Ruhl summons worlds on stage that, for all their material actuality and consistency, create meaning through images, gestures and an economy of verbal fabric that feel both contemplative and weightless. In them, the characters' pursuit of momentary lack of gravity, far from being an escape from the serious business of engaging with the world generally associated with lightness, is intimately related, I will argue, with a very serious engagement with what defines us as human beings: our own mortality. Drawing from the analysis of key scenes of her dramatic plays, in my paper I will explore how the playwright's embrace of a thoughtful lightness inspired by Italo Calvino's writings is visually, spatially, linguistically, aurally and kinetically displayed on the stage. Then, contextualizing Ruhl's work within the contemporary American tradition, my endeavour will be to connect her aesthetics of lightness with the creation of a flexible poetic frame that allows for the pursuit of possibility and transformation, key issues in post-millennial American drama.

Andrei Terian

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania

Peripheral Tragedy and Apocryphal Mythologies: Petko Todorov, Niko Kazantzakis,
Lucian Blaga

Is tragedy possible in peripheral cultures? Given that these cultures have developed a dramatic literature only over the past two centuries, the question above might seem like a reduced version of “Is modern tragedy possible?”. But not quite—because peripheral cultures have carried into modernity various remnants of the supernatural that disappeared from Western Europe with Max Weber’s “disenchantment of the world.” These are apocryphal mythologies that parasitize and undermine not only the canonical religious discourse but also scientific discourses that propose a rationalized representation of the world. However, paradoxically, it is precisely these mythologies that create a fertile background for tragedy, allowing us to reopen the debate on the “death” of this genre from a new perspective—one that George Steiner’s classical demonstration has overlooked, with a few Russian exceptions, due to the neglect of the metamorphoses of the tragic form in Eastern Europe.

In concrete terms, my paper provides a comparative analysis of three tragedies written in three geographically adjacent but typologically distinct languages (Bulgarian, Greek, and Romanian), all of which address the Balkan myth of “creation through sacrifice”: Petko Todorov’s *Zidari* (The Masons, 1902), Nikos Kazantzakis’ *O Protomastoras* (The Master Builder, 1910), and Lucian Blaga’s *Meșterul Manole* (Master Manole, 1927). Although none of these three authors were aware of each other’s works, they all write about a similar theme—the sacrifice of a beloved woman by a mason to complete a grand construction—from a perspective that corrupts Christianity with Folkloric (Todorov), Olympian (Kazantzakis), or Bogomilist elements (Blaga). In this sense, the most interesting question is not why the plots of these three plays are similar (as they all stem from the same myth), but rather why three authors from different cultures, with no direct influence between them, chose to explore this myth within less than three decades. My answer is twofold: on the one hand, it confirms Steiner’s axiom that the tragic form requires a mythology to serve as its foundation; on the other hand, it contradicts the very thesis of tragedy’s death in the modern age—if not actually proving the rule that the only tragedy possible in modernity is *peripheral* tragedy.

Andrew James Mowatt

Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore

Restaging In Singapore Theatre: The Past Performed for those Present

This paper discusses a method of investigating Singapore's theatre history that uses restaging as a conceptual frame for practice-based research. The author has made a study of restaging in Singapore, and preliminary findings from this study suggest that restaging's in are of valuable cultural significance.

The author defines restaging as the process in which a theatre company revisits an already staged production with the intention of public performance, often adding, modifying or adapting, and often responding to current political and social conditions.

The research is premised on an article written in 1999 by historian Janadas Devan¹ who claimed that "forgetting is the condition of Singapore," which alludes to the complex relationship Singaporeans have to their pasts and how in a city state that is constantly renewing and rebranding itself in the global context, collective memories are woven into what has been termed "The Singapore Story". In this paper the restaging of significant Singaporean theatre productions is seen as a one way to investigate its theatre histories. These histories are seen as having a key role to play in negating the effects of the "condition of forgetting."

The study draws on the seminal work of Paul Ricoeur whose work has inspired the author's historical research in Singapore and specifically how its social, political and cultural history is often articulated through its theatre productions.

¹Janadas Devan. 1999. 'Forgetting to Remember.' *In Our Place in Time: Exploring Heritage and Memory in Singapore*, edited by Kwok Kian-Woon, Kwa Chong Guan, Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh, 21-33. Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society.

Anja Hartl

University of Innsbruck, Austria

Shame and Shaming in Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's *Behzti* (*Dishonour*)

In my project “Dramaturgies of Shame and Shamelessness in Contemporary British Theatre,” I argue that shame functions as a key dramaturgical device in 21st-century-British theatre. Functioning as a mechanism that affects the relations both on stage and with the audience, the project explores the political and ethical implications of being exposed to and feeling shame as well as the dynamics of deploying shame and imposing it on others. The paper I propose for the 2025 Comparative Drama Conference analyses the forms and functions of shame in Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's 2004 play *Behzti* (*Dishonour*), which depicts abuse in a Gurdwara and interrogates notions of honour, truth, and patriarchal power. The play was cancelled due to protests from members of the Sikh community, who took offense at the play's portrayal of rape and violence. Shame, shamelessness, and shaming represent powerful emotional experiences and strategies that affect the characters and that are deployed by the play itself. Arguing that shame is key to the play's political thrust, I will explore 1) how shame is used as a dramaturgical device in *Behzti*; 2) how it functions as an important mechanism between stage and audience as well as between theatre and the socio-political context to which it responds; and 3) how it serves as an insightful analytical lens through which to study contemporary political drama.

Ann M. Shanahan

University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Political and performative dimensions of a stage adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

his paper examines the political and performative dimensions of a stage adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, produced at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in November 2024, with particular attention to the timing of the project during the US presidential election, with dress rehearsal on election night. The production, which engaged over 50 students and ran for two weeks to sold out audiences, sparked an unexpectedly profound engagement between the cast and the material, as well as audiences. Co-adapted with Aly Amidei using a Chicago-based Chamber Theatre method, our adaptation emphasized the embodied narrative voice in combination with the physical enactment of the story and dialogic scenes. Drawing from Bertolt Brecht's theories of performative commentary, we cast a chorus of women who not only narrated but also performed key roles, foregrounding a meta-theatrical layer in Austen's novels, and its resonance today.

The rehearsal period, unfolding in the midst of a politically polarized America, created a palpable energy in the room as students responded to Austen's exploration of gender, class, and the dynamics of power. The characters' struggles with societal expectations, particularly around marriage and propriety, mirrored, for many of the actors, the divisive issues shaping the current cultural landscape. The production thus became more than an adaptation—it was a conversation about identity, power, gender and agency in a binarized America.

By comparing the narrative techniques of the novel with the live performance, this paper explores how staging *Pride and Prejudice* amplifies Austen's critique of societal structures, particularly in relation to the roles women are expected to perform. In a country where political divisions persist, the project revealed how Austen's story offers not only a critique of past societal binaries but also a potential path to understanding and reconciliation. This paper reflects on the creative process and the powerful resonance of Austen's work in today's political climate, suggesting that live theatre's immediacy allows for the kind of engagement and reflection that can lead to new forms of connection across divides.

Anna Andes

Susquehanna University, USA

A self-proclaimed spinster playwright's troubled spinster character: Cathy of Cicely
Hamilton's *Phyl*

Hamilton was an avowed and proud spinster. In her feminist manifesto *Marriage as a Trade* (1909) Hamilton declared of spinsterhood, "By sheer force of self-assertion we have lifted ourselves from the dust where we once crawled as worms and not women; we no longer wither on the virgin thorn—we flourish on it."

Curiously, however, she never wrote a play with a central, self-proclaimed, proud spinster character. Her central woman characters are generally young women facing conflict within the labour or marriage markets, or both. Her spinster characters are secondarily positioned within each larger narrative, serving as thematic foils to the protagonist woman. Despite Hamilton's best efforts in *Marriage as a Trade* to claim respect for spinsters—indeed she demands it—she never affords her spinster characters full thematic valorisation, allowing her protagonist women instead to achieve hopeful marriage futures, claiming the preferred social construct. Indeed, two of her spinster characters—found in *Diana of Dobsons* and *Phyl*—veer on the edge of the worst societal and dramatic literary stereotypes of spinsters. In the years before the start of WWI and before British women had achieved the vote, the spinster was an increasingly fraught social embodiment of several converging societal forces. Hamilton's was a key voice as an activist and writer at the centre of these societal frictions. The purpose of this paper is not to scold Hamilton for not always "playwriting the manifesto talk" but rather to investigate why, to what thematic purpose she holds her spinster women back from full thematic celebration and validation. This paper will focus upon Hamilton's most fully developed spinster character—*Cathy of Phyl* (1911, unpublished)—a woman portrayed as much to be admired yet also much to be pitied and whose sister seizes the play's happily ever after marriage conclusion.

Anna Braithwaite

Independent Scholar at Large, UK

Create a space and they will come: the creation of Free Women

Free Women are free to perform in any way they please, free to talk about the issues that affect them and free to express themselves with the support of a community of other female-identifying performers. In this presentation, I elaborate on how I and the other Free Women have created a space in which we can express ourselves, alchemise and challenge our practices, take risks and be heard.

I will discuss my own journey from performer of scores and scripts to free improviser via the highs and lows of my time with the (male-dominated) improvisation group, the Free Range Orchestra. I also cover the role of doyennes of the free improvisation world, Maggie Nicols and Sylvia Hallett, in helping me understand the special experience of improvising with other women, and my collaboration with other women artists in the community which has led to the formation of Free Women. I will talk about the positive effects Free Women has had on the gender balance both on stage and in the audience with their performances at weekly experimental performance night, Free Range, in Canterbury, Kent, UK.

I conclude that promoters and curators of experimental performance should create more spaces for women improvisors to thrive as this has a profound impact on audiences and on the establishment of sustainable and diverse creative communities.

Anna Corbould

University of Georgia, USA

“TV people don't know a thing about theatre” - The theatre of 1927 and creating the
Théâtre des Vampires from AMC's *Interview with the Vampire*

1927 are a London and Margate based theatre group known for their very distinct animated aesthetic, which informs the material, visual style and acting style of their productions. After winning several awards at the Edinburgh Fringe festival in 2007 with their production of *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, they have gone on to create and direct numerous projects, including *The Magic Flute* for the Komische Oper Berlin, *Golem*, *Petrushka* & *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*, and the music video for “One of Those Days” by Ozzy Osbourne.

After pivoting through radio, installation art, music video and other mediums during the 2020 Covid19 Pandemic, the 1927 theatre company were asked to create the vignettes we see in the Théâtre des Vampires for the critically and commercially successful TV adaptation of Anne Rice's novel *Interview with the Vampire*.

This paper will examine the challenge of creating a working theatre within the world of *Interview with the Vampire*, and how show runner Rolin Jones and the 1927 theatre company negotiated the balance between the requirements and conventions of theatre and television.

Anthoullis Demosthenous

Ionian University, Greece

The concept of God in Tennessee Williams and Marguerite Duras

This essay explores the textual affinities between two playwrights of the previous century, Tennessee Williams (1911-1983) and Marguerite Duras (1914-1996), while examining the respective performances of their plays. Specifically, through the prism of apophatic theology and the theatre of absurd, Williams and Duras venture to approach the essence and context of God as conceptualized in the lesser-known plays "The Chalky White Substance" and "L'Amante anglaise". The search for God permeates the entire work of Tennessee Williams. In *Suddenly Last Summer*, it is symbolized by ominous black predatory birds that swoop down to attack and devour newborn turtles in their titanic struggle to reach the sea, a metaphor for life. Similarly, in *Small Craft Warnings*, God appears as "a black man with no light on his face," moving "in the dark like a Negro miner" who "hear[s] the banalities of a preacher." God seems ominous and repulsive yet omnipotent. A pessimistic but philosophical contemplation of God. Hannah Jelks's hopeful message in *The Night of the Iguana* portrays God as a symbol of selfless communication, bridging of souls, and unwavering trust: "Broken gates between people so they can reach each other, even if it's just for one night only." This aspect of Williamsian theology intersects with the Durasian universe, where God is love and His loss equates to His non-existence.

Antonia Tsamouris

Deree, The American College of Greece, Greece

Aging in Marriage: Edward Albee's *Marriage Play* (1987)

Since the beginning of the new century, there has been a growing interest in the field of age studies focusing on the subtle nuances and shifting cultural attitudes towards age. According to Phyllis W. Berman et al., “in modern America it is a misfortune to lose one's youth” (87)¹. Berman et al. further stress the inequalities between men and women in aging, highlighting that “power and prestige accorded to middle-aged men is not usually available to women in midlife”, since, as Kathleen Woodward argues, ageism proves to be a “feminist issue”(181)². It is the aim of this paper to explore how contemporary American theatre investigates aging and the cultural practices that define it.

As ageism became the fastest growing ableism in the 21st century Western societies, aging women “have been relatively less visible in gender theory” (Ross-Sheriff, 310).

Edward Albee targeted marriage as the cornerstone of the nuclear American family, that severely attacked in his writing. In *Marriage Play* (1987), Albee discusses the “gender roles that were enforced by social [sic] norms” (Clum et al., 2)³, in a long-term, middle-class American married couple, highlighting the cultural perspective that brings women to an inferior state, due to their aging.

This paper will examine ageism within the framework of marriage and how it is gender related, focusing on Edward Albee's *Marriage Play*, in relation to the play's social context, as well as to the present-day cultural dynamics.

¹ Bernan, Phyllis W. et al. “The Double Standard of Aging and the Social Situation: Judgments of Attractiveness of the Middle-Aged Woman”, *Sex Roles*. Vol.7, No.2, 1981:87-96.2

² Woodward, Kathleen. “Performing Age, Performing Gender”. *NWSA Journal*. Spring 2006: Vol.18, no. 1:162-189.3

³ Clum, John M. and Cormac O'Brien (eds). *Sex Gender, and Sexualities in Edward Albee's Plays*

Arleigh Rodgers

Stony Brook University, USA

'But since I may choose further, I will look further': Spectacles and Staring in Lord Byron's *The Deformed Transformed*

Lord Byron commences his unfinished play *The Deformed Transformed* with the violent words of a mother, whose disabled son, Arnold, suffers under her gaze of disgust. In this confrontational introduction, Byron forces his audience to observe the play's dynamics between an able-bodied critic and the object of her displeasure, are fraction of the prejudices that existed during Byron's lifetime as a disabled man. When Arnold meets the Stranger in the woods outside his house, he encounters a trickster whose magic permits Arnold to transform into a super-able-bodied individual, which grants him a new selfhood through physical embodiment and autonomous affect. I argue that through the play, Byron resisted poor historical renderings of other disabled characters and, by way of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's theoretical framework of *staring*, analyse how disabled bodies on stage both enforces and undermines the starrer-staree relationship between audience and actor, among actors' performances of disability, and between a disabled actor and his audience. I specifically apply Garland-Thomson's concepts of *Baroque staring*, *starees*, and *staring back* so I may assess Arnold's and the Stranger/Caesar's transformed roles as objects of ocular pleasure and provocation. I also analyse the role that the disabled actor who plays Arnold wields—from his inception as scorned son, or derided staree; to empowered Baroque starrer upon the form of Achilles, whom he transforms into; and lastly, in the voice of the Stranger/Caesar, who inhabits Arnold's body after he discards it for Achilles, and becomes the Romantic hero who stares back.

Beth Roberts

University of Surrey, UK

Memorialising the Siddonses: Mapping Sarah and Mary's Disparate Places in Cultural Memory

Late-eighteenth-century actress Sarah Siddons is famous for being among the first 'celebrities.' Sarah's great-granddaughter, Mary Frances Scott-Siddons, followed in her lofty footsteps, becoming an actress against her parents' wishes during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In this paper, I trace the disparities between Sarah and Mary's relative fame and how this has influenced their impact on contemporary cultural memory. In particular, I discuss two recent developments from 2024 which demonstrate the difference between their memorialisation's: the play, *The Divine Mrs S*, and the discovery of Mary's gravestone at Brookwood Cemetery. Whilst Sarah is celebrated as a star—and in some cases, a proto-feminist symbol—Mary is relatively forgotten, with her gravestone lost (with current employees at the cemetery unaware as to whether she even had a stone) until its discovery in the past year. I pose three reasons for the disparity in cultural memory relating to both women. Firstly, they had vastly different approaches to acting: Sarah's physical performances were lauded, whereas Mary was a brilliant orator, but not a proficient physical actor. Secondly, the times in which they lived and performed shaped the standard of celebrity: Sarah was an early star in a time when celebrity was a new concept, whereas Mary performed at a time when there were a vast number of celebrities, especially on the stage. Finally, Mary's specialities were her intellectual readings, rather than any physical and technical talent, suggesting that her particular skills clashed with the expectations of actresses on the late-nineteenth-century stage.

Bethany McShepherd

Newcastle University, UK

A Comparison of Legal Frameworks for Micro Applied Theatre Companies in England

To formally establish a theatre company in England as an enterprise that intends to raise funds and/or generate income, the company founders must choose a legal framework. This task requires a depth of knowledge and understanding of taxation frameworks, fiscal responsibility, liability, governance, and the UK Companies Act—expertise that is not typically a natural part of a theatre-maker's skill set. As a result, emerging micro companies often find that they are not fully informed of the parameters of their legal framework decisions, that they may not be giving themselves the best opportunity for efficiency and sustainability of their business, and the path to discovery can be costly. This paper compares each of the existing legal frameworks available to England-based micro applied theatre companies (theatre companies working with marginalised communities), and shares insights on the decision-making process of a range of small female-led companies interviewed as part of my PhD thesis. Through an autoethnographic approach, I will draw parallels to my own decision-making process as co-founder of the micro applied theatre company Blank Cheque, which currently operates unregistered as an Unincorporated Association. I will also make use of the recent report from the National Theatre, *Scene Change: Optimising Business Model Innovation in the Performing Arts*, which extracts findings from 140 theatre companies across the UK. Through this comparative analysis, I intend to highlight, in plain terms, the pros and cons of existing business frameworks as a way of providing a resource for England-based applied theatre-makers seeking to establish companies.

Bode Ojoniyi

University of Abuja, Nigeria

Of the Omoluabi Performance Aesthetics Theatre of Intentionality and the Future of Nigeria Cultural Policy Development

Base on the Yoruba Omoluabi character philosophy, I have proposed the Omoluabi performance aesthetics for the future of Yoruba, by extension, the Nigerian theatre cultural performances (Ojoniyi, 2024). I have argued its historical place as being at the centre of the Yoruba essence character formation for socio-cultural mediation, engineering and remediation for progressive systemic socio-cultural development. The argument is further anchored on the premise that the present socio-cultural and political dysfunctionality of the Yoruba Nation is not unconnected with the people's uncritical embrace of Euro-American cultural ethos and performance tropes, such negative legacies of colonialism, neocolonialism and globalisation, at the expense of their time-tested cultural essence philosophy. However, at the risk of falling into some sort of uncritical counterreactions as probably being witnessed in certain arguments around post/decolonial discourses, I try to employ the same principles of the Omoluabi essence tropes to argue against what I consider as representing ahistorical fallacy of/in the said post/decolonial discourses. Thus, leveraging on what I have termed the Omoluabi character essence intentionality as encapsulated in the argument of my dialectical-text-consciousness theory, I again posit that it is essentially of an Omoluabi's internalised consciousness to identify, admit and synthesise productive legacies of colonial cultural memories with progressive indigenous cultural memories to create a new future out of the present cultural influx. I thus project an Omoluabi persona as a cultural deconstructionist and reconstructionist who promote the place of progressive and cumulative cultural memory against cultural memory intransitivity for meaning generation and transformational development.

Brian Bell

Independent Scholar at Large, Germany

Making the Germans Laugh: An Exercise in Utility

Whether on stage, on screen or in person, the Germans are not known for their comedy. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, and their subsequent crisis of identity, the Germans themselves often looked outside their own borders for comedic entertainment. But the German cultural elite's turn away from the genre of comedy pre-dates the stigma and fallout of the Second World War. Their state-funded theatre system has always treated comedy as a reluctant necessity, rather than an art form in and of itself. In this paper I will investigate the questions: What were the cultural currents and events that led to such a massive undervaluing of comedy as a genre? Why are comedies looked down upon by the German cultural elite? What led to the schism of German comic taste in high/low forms and why was there a ritualized "banning of low comedy from the theatre" in 1737? In my work as a theatre director in the German state theatre system, the majority of the actors I work with have rarely, if ever, been formally introduced to comedic technique. After conducting research with all of the acting schools in Berlin, I found out to my dismay that none of them were teaching comedic technique at all. As an immigrant in Europe with an American sensibility, I am particularly interested in universal comedic techniques that function across cultures and languages. Integrating practical and theoretical research the paper will focus on the importance of comedy as a means of social cohesion.

Bridget Anderson

University of Wisconsin, USA

A Bastard to the Time: Little Arthur, Casting Children, and Adjusting Age in *King John*

Shakespeare, never one to strictly observe historical chronology, plays particularly fast and loose with time in *King John*. The events depicted in Act IV alone actually spanned sixteen years during the reign of the real King John. One particularly shifting element of the play is the character of young Arthur. The anonymous contemporary *The Troublesome Raigne of John King of England* casts Arthur as an athletic teenager trained in combat. Shakespeare ages Arthur down about seven years so that Arthur's interactions with the adults in his life and his eventual demise elicit amore pathetic audience response than TR's Arthur. Shakespeare's temporal decision introduces casting and staging questions, like who was the boy player talented enough to inspire Shakespeare to write such a voluble and vulnerable role? I suspect the boy was a tumbler and used his talent to effectively jump in Act IV Scene 3 and land safely while feigning death for the audience.

This paper explores the malleability of time from two directions: Shakespeare's play with time by manipulating Arthur's age, and the slipperiness of time in human age. The early modern concept of childhood was subjective and inconsistent, and temporal delineations of age were in continual flux until at least the mid-seventeenth century. Furthermore, the actor playing Arthur would not stay the age of the character for long and would quickly age himself. This paper contributes to the history of Shakespeare in performance and children onstage.

Brittney S. Harris

Virginia Tech, USA

Solo Voices, Collective Change: Black Feminist Storytelling Through Solo Works

his presentation examines the development of my original solo work, *The Intersection* (*The Sandra Bland Project*), in conversation with Anna Deavere Smith's *Fires in the Mirror* and the anthology *solo/black/woman: scripts, interviews, and essays*, through the lenses of Black feminist and LatCrit theories. The *Intersection* explores Sandra Bland's life and death within the broader framework of racial and social injustice, grounding itself in Black feminist theory's commitment to honouring the lived experiences of marginalized individuals as transformative knowledge. The performance blends factual accounts with emotional and psychological explorations, paralleling Smith's examination of identity and race in *Fires in the Mirror*. Utilizing counter-storytelling, a key concept in LatCrit theory, *The Intersection* challenges dominant narratives and engages audiences in social justice discourse.

Inspired by Smith's verbatim theatre technique and the diverse voices in *solo/black/woman*, my work aligns with a tradition of Black feminist performance that highlights the complexities of Black womanhood, mental health, and societal expectations. This comparative study underscores the pedagogical potential of solo performance and devised theatre to disrupt the status quo, offering new ways to frame resilience, resistance, and redemption while fostering critical engagement with racial and gender inequalities.

By amplifying the authentic voices of community members and using their terms of engagement, this presentation explores practical strategies for theatre practitioners to deepen the connections between art, activism, and community, bridging the gap between headlines and human stories.

Carlos Gontijo Rosa

Federal University of Acre, Brazil

“Dancing and singing to suspend the sky”: Indigenous symbology on stage

In *O silêncio do mundo* [*The Silence of the World*], Ailton Krenak and Andreia Duarte present the dramaturgy of a theatrical experiment performed at a major theatre festival in Brazil in 2020. Amidst the pandemic, both the artists and the festival itself were compelled to find ways to reinvent themselves—this is reflected in the text of the play, which was published in the anthology *Indigenous Dramaturgies* in 2022. Expanding the boundaries of more conventional dramatic forms, *The Silence of the World* more closely resembles a conference speech than a play. Duarte, a non-Indigenous performer, and Ailton, a multidisciplinary artist from the Krenak people, explore themes deeply connected to the traditions and culture of the forest, seeking to access it through elements recognisable within “our” culture—this Westernised complex that characterises Brazil's mainstream culture. In this way, Duarte and Krenak appropriate an erudite foreign artform—the theatre—in order to discuss aspects of marginalised segments of Brazilian society. From this, we highlight aspects related to myth and humankind’s relationship with the surrounding world, placing in tension the very Western concept of myth and this “other” form of relating to the world that surrounds the indigenous peoples of Brazil.

Carly Shaw

University of California, USA

Braving the Storm: Reframing the Self through Collaborative Creation and Therapeutic Performance

Influenced by the historical engagement in masking, this paper concentrates on the construction and representation of adolescent identity in the wake of traumatic experiences. The development of selfhood in childhood is marked, more often than not, by the introduction of new experiential knowledge that is then integrated into the child's perception of the self. The fissures generated by an act of traumatic shattering not only undermine the sense of security that is so essential to the self-actualization of a child or an adolescent but also leave space for exploration of potential facets of identity that may have broken off from the core self. The collaborative creation of a theatrical piece, I argue, generates a space of play in which the destructive, compulsive behaviour evoked by trauma can be transformed into a far more productive creative drive through which these participants might rehearse the reconstruction of identity. By exploring the correlation between process and product, this paper investigates Company3's Brainstorm and the process through which the performance was created in order to elucidate the therapeutic potential in employing theatre as vessels for the negotiation of self through proxies as they embody disparate aspects of their identity and situate them in conversation with one another in an active process of becoming.

Chris Mead

Victorian College of the Arts, Australia

Re-staging Australian law and cultural memory: *Prima Facie* and *Counting and Cracking*
on international stages

In 2022, two Australian plays opened in the United Kingdom, Suzie Miller's *Prima Facie* and S. Shakthidharan's *Counting and Cracking*. Both productions then went on to play New York City, in 2023 and 2024 respectively. New Australian plays rarely see more than a short season in Australia, not multiple, extended Australian and international seasons. Australia's biggest performing arts exports, Circa (Circus) and Back to Back Theatre, do not create new play texts.

Indeed, Australia's biggest cultural exports are fashion, actors, visual art, a cartoon dog and rockstars. And, as for Australian exports more generally, its natural resources (iron, ore, coal, natural gas) all the way. A recent Federal parliamentary report noted that for every dollar that Australia exports in creative goods, Australia imports \$8; for every dollar of creative services exported, Australia imports \$2. That's one of the biggest creative trade deficits in the world.

What then makes these two plays so remarkable? What is it in their dramaturgy? Their subject matter—the failure of the law with respect to victims of sexual assault (Miller), and a diaspora Tamil coming of age discovering his family's connection to recent Sri Lankan history (Shakthidharan)—could not be more disparate. Similarly, their narrative ambition, formally interrogative qualities and in even just cast their cast sizes (one is a monodrama, the other requires 20 actors), they are antithetical. Yet they spoke eloquently to the world about Australia.

This paper will examine these plays from their first drafts, through development and into production.

Christina Dokou

The National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

Picturing Performance, Performing Paternosters: The case of Grant Morrison's and Jon J. Muth's *The Mystery Play*

Acclaimed comics auteur Grant Morrison's graphic novel *The Mystery Play* (DC-Vertigo, 1994), with art by Jon J. Muth, though highly praised, has not received as much popular or scholarly attention as Morrison's other works, yet deserves a closer look due to the manifold and transgenre complexity of both its form and content. In unfolding the proceedings of a mystery play revival in some obscure Northern England town mired by civic problems, the plot raises seminal questions about the nature of drama itself both as an immersive experience (for actors and audiences alike) and as an activity originating in the perennial human effort to reach God. When the actor playing God is found dead, and the main suspect is the actor playing Satan, drama and metadrama meld together in a mystery case that ends in real-life, as well as allegorical, tragedy. Although the text chosen is not theatrical per se, the present paper seeks to compare literary genre devices to showcase the theatricality of the graphic novel's form and content, seeing, first, how graphic sequential art portrays the event of theatrical performance and the "suspension of disbelief" that is at the marrow of dramatic art; and second, how its evocation of meta theatricality (in a similar way that, for example, occurs in the play-within-a-play *Noises Off* by Michael Frayn, or in Nikos Kazantzakis's allegorical recasting of a Passion play ritual in his 1948 novel *Christ Recrucified*) offers a treatise on the nature of drama as simultaneously both playful trickery and sacred theophany.

Christina Fulcher & Ruth Phillips

London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art (LAMDA), UK

Moving Inclusion: A Collaborative Approach to Neurodiversity and Size Inclusivity

Inclusion within drama conservatoire training is often framed as a fixed goal or set of principles rather than an ongoing, evolving process. This presentation critically examines the complexities of inclusive practice by interrogating the intersections of neurodiversity and size inclusivity in movement pedagogy. How do our own lived experiences and biases shape our teaching? How can we ensure all access while addressing our needs as practitioners?

Drawing on their respective specialisms, Christina Fulcher (neurodiversity) and Ruth Phillips (size inclusivity) explore the practical and theoretical challenges of inclusive training. Through comparative case studies and practice as research, they analyse and share visible and invisible barriers to participation and propose adaptive methodologies that prioritise agency, equity, and accessibility. By engaging with the social model of disability and questioning embedded biases within movement training, this research seeks to move beyond performative inclusion towards a more dynamic and responsive pedagogical framework.

Fulcher and Phillips' collaboration began during their MA/MFA Movement Training at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, and this collaboration has since developed through co-teaching, independent research, and their work as co-founders of [The Inclusion Collective](#). The facilitation of practitioner discussions and creative workshops informs their approach, alongside teaching engagements at The BRIT School, Leeds Conservatoire, and various freelance projects. Their research has been recognised through the IVOR Guest Research Grant, ReCreate Wandsworth, and conference talks at Leeds Conservatoire. This presentation contributes to ongoing discourse on inclusive movement training, advocating for a reflective, intersectional approach that critically examines access, bias, and pedagogical responsibility.

Colleen Conroy

University of Wisconsin, USA

Verbatim Performance: Actor Benefits and Insights

This paper explores the process and experiences of actors in creating verbatim performances and their implications for training and professional practice. Verbatim theatre, also known as documentary theatre, utilizes the actual words and events of people to shape the text and inform the actors' characterizations. This technique centres on amplifying individual voices and stories, as exemplified in the works and varied approaches of Anna Deavere Smith, David Hare, Max Stafford-Clark, and Alecky Blythe's headphone verbatim.

This research employs a practice-based methodology and a phenomenological approach, emphasizing the actors' reflections on the process of creating verbatim performances. Performers acted as "ethno-actors," creating a series of filmed verbatim monologues based on edited interviews. By examining published verbatim works, reflecting on practitioner experiences, and considering their capacities for empathy and understanding, actors interrogated their typical approaches to performance versus verbatim performance. They explored how to balance authenticity, mimicry, and representation, and made discoveries about their acting processes.

Through a series of workshops, interviews, qualitative data collection, and analysis, this research provides insights into potential teaching methods and highlights the value of incorporating verbatim theatre techniques in voice and acting training and professional practice.

Courtney Elkin Mohler

Boston College, USA

Dramaturgy for the (Spirit) World of the Play: Indigenous Storying and Embodied Liminality

A theatrically compelling element frequently found in contemporary plays by Indigenous North American playwrights is the active presence of spirits, whose interactions and mechanizations with those characters in the earthly sphere heighten dramatic tension, offer spiritual guidance, and catalyse change within the world of the play. Conquistador-inflicted sexual violence and forced conversion continues to haunt the *genizaro* people of New Mexico; in Lily Rushing's 2022 play *Desert Songs for Lost Girls*, a young woman and her fading grandmother are visited by the spirits of both victims and abusers in their family line who demand to be faced and seen. Vickie Ramirez (Tuscarora) draws on the Haudenosaunee spirit of Bad Mind to assist Maya in her quest to locate her missing sister in her play *Yu-Che-Wah-Kehn*; as a Trickster he needles, frustrates, taunts and focus her quest.

This brief essay seeks to shed some light on how a play development dramaturg can support the playwright to clarify the story and characters to diverse (BIPOC and settler colonizer) audiences when navigating spirits and ghosts register differently within these cultural communities. Drawing on the author's experience as development dramaturg for the two aforementioned contemporary Native plays, this essay shares: 1.) explanations of key dramaturgical functions of spirits on stage; 2.) challenges that may arise with artists who are less familiar with the presence of spirits in the daily lives of Native people; 3.) strategies for working with playwrights to make their vision of their play world including non-human and spirit characters legible to the cast, artistic and production team, and audiences.

Daniel Knapper

Grand Valley State University, USA

Cursing Tyrants in Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *The Winter Tale*

This talk will explore the connections between biblical prophecy and cursing in Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *The Winter's Tale*, focusing on the curses of two female characters in the plays, Queen Margaret and the court matron/counsellor Paulina. Scholars have noted how the forceful and lengthy curses of Margaret and Paulina empower the otherwise disenfranchised and abused communities of courtly women in the plays even while foreshadowing, and perhaps even shaping, the fates of villainous kings, but they have not recognized the rhetorical connections between the curses and the curse of Hebrew prophets such as Elijah, David, and Isaiah, nor have they considered the implications of these connections for Shakespeare's treatment of political resistance theory in the plays, particularly resistance to unjust and tyrannical rulers. I will argue that Shakespeare imitates the rhetoric of biblical prophecy to compose Margaret and Paulina's curses because of his interest in the rhetoric and theology of biblical cursing: he adapts the curses of the biblical prophets to new dramatic contexts to highlight a legitimate form of resistance to tyrants, even as he questions cursing as an effective form of resistance, particularly when practiced by women (who can be dismissed as witches) and set alongside other and more dubious kinds of prophecy (which calls into question its integrity and supernatural efficacy).

Daphne Orlandi

University of Catania, Italy

To Be a Pain in the Ass is a Noble Enterprise: Naomi Wallace's Politically Engaged Theatre

When asked about her creative ethos, American playwright Naomi Wallace often explains that all her plays ultimately stem from a desire to blend politics, history, and imagination. She remarks that politics is inherently tied to history and, as such, is not distinct from the imaginative realm of possibility. However, in her view, theatre should not be a mere aesthetic exercise, it should not function as mere entertainment, but it is instead meant to address questions of power. Critics have, indeed, not failed to note how Wallace's characters try to disrupt the status quo and negotiate an existence outside the limits imposed by social and cultural constructs such as race, class and gender.

In this paper, I argue that in *And I and Silence*, through the story of two young women (Jamie, an African-American, and Dee, white working-class) who meet in the 1950s while serving prison sentences, Wallace explores the political and social implications of what historian Robin D.G. Kelley defined as the "most revolutionary ideas available to us", Freedom and Love. These two concepts are at the centre of Wallace's narrative which, with her usual lyrical intensity, shows the brutal reality of those who do not adhere to social constructions. Even outside of the prison, Jamie and Dee cannot be free because their identities, their friendship, and their love do not serve the dominant ideology. Their politics of subversion, and their ultimate act of defiance are powerful narrative tools that Wallace employs so that her audience can critically see their society, and as she herself notes, "possibly act on those new visions."

David A. Hatch

Southern Utah University, USA

Perpetual Pending: Samuel Beckett's s Negotiation Between the Theory and Practice of
Time

Beckett's interest in time manifests itself overtly in his critical writing, in the subject matter and imagery of his poetry, and in the dialogue of his plays. At the same time, the acting and directing style he established in these dramatic works, which has developed into tradition over the years, plays with elements of pace and gesture that illustrate or challenge these overt statements obliquely. For this presentation, I want to consider the perception of time in *Waiting for Godot* and *That Time* and how this negotiates with his statements and ideas about time. I am interested in the liminal conceptual space created by statements suggesting our time-space reality is unknowable while many of his dramatic works demand a pace that is measured, precise, and repetitive within the time constraints of a dramatic performance.

Deirdre Osborne

Goldsmiths, University of London, UK

Looking For Love in All the Wrong Places': The Unloved and their Consequences in
Patricia Cornelius's *SHIT* and *runt*

So-called Australia's leading feminist playwright, Patricia Cornelius (author of over 40 plays) has fashioned a unique poetic-dramatic signature in work that foregrounds taboo topics and offers searing dramatizations of lives 'seen and not heard' in culture and society. Cornelius's trialogic play *SHIT* (2015) and monodrama *runt* (2021) wilfully disturb complacent verities about class and opportunity, who is valuable, who is disposable, and who is not recognised as possessing any viable social status at all. What happens if those people deemed undeserving, or social misfits do not internalise these projections of inferiority, but tenaciously assert their right to exist, stridently declare their wants, and take action to show the surrounding world—which tells them they are worthless, or negligible—who they are, and what they are capable of? Cornelius takes readers and audiences across an exacting and exhilarating dramatic arc, to deliver two epics of the dispossessed, in which obsession and revenge, anger and shame, form a potent cocktail in contexts of unquenchable neediness, with often detestable characters. I explore how form is crucial to her aesthetics. Monodrama provides a persuasive conduit for (disingenuous and unintentional) revelation of character, as infused with dramatic irony. In *SHIT*'s three-woman triad, the constant presence of a third speaker engenders possibility of interaction (or not) that interrupts the balance of two sides—protagonist-antagonist, speaker-respondent. Above all, in live performance (distinct from the 'safety' of reading) is the challenge to not look away, but to be swept into the character's abjection and beyond, through the authority Cornelius embodies in the woman performer.

Diana Nechit & Paula Olga Nagy

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania

Chekhov Reloaded: Design Thinking, Societal Challenges, and the Post-Pandemic World

One of the oldest theatrical clichés is that the work of a great playwright is subject to new interpretations depending on the directors, actors, readers, and spectators who perform and/or interpret the text. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has recontextualized this practice by increasing awareness of the societal and planetary challenges that humanity faces in our time. On one hand, without restricting the creative freedom of the artist, the question arises: what are the issues that contemporary theatre should address, and to what extent can art provide answers to them—if not technical or social, at least emotional? On the other hand, beyond our subjective impulses, what tools can we use to measure the severity of these issues and the effectiveness of the responses to them?

Our study aims to address these questions by analysing two recent productions of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* through the lens of design thinking methods. We examine, first, the production by Moldovan director Dumitru Acriș, whose 2023 staging at Theatre Satiricus in Chișinău reveals the latent violence within Chekhov's text—ranging from gender and class-based violence to cultural and imperial violence. In contrast, in a 2024 production for the Radu Stanca National Theatre in Sibiu, American director Neil LaBute moves beyond his traditional misanthropy towards a post humanist perspective advocating for a new ecoplanetary balance. Our study will comparatively explore the visions of these two directors from the perspective of the design thinking model, which reconstructs and tests how a product functions based on user needs and existing solutions. By working with a focus group of 12 students who created their own immersive scenarios inspired by Chekhov's text, we assess the degree of success of the two productions mentioned above.

Dirk Visser

Radboud University, Netherlands

Memories Foretold: Redressing an Imbalance in the Theatrical Memory of the AIDS
Crisis

Within the cultural memory of the AIDS crisis there seems to be a consensus that where the American theatrical response to the epidemic was prolific, British playwrights hardly engaged with this health crisis. In *Out on Stage* (1999), Alan Sinfield laments the paucity of British AIDS drama, and Emily Garside, in her study of the National Theatre productions of *Angels in America* (2023) claims that only two British plays were written about AIDS.

Both Sinfield and Garside (and others) overlook that it was in fact a British theatre company that produced the most voluminous oeuvre about AIDS. Over the years, AIDS Positive Underground Theatre, founded in 1989 by playwright John Roman Baker, produced no fewer than a dozen of plays engaging specifically with AIDS.

In order to examine how admitting AIDS Positive Underground Theatre's productions to the canon of AIDS drama might affect the cultural memory of AIDS, my paper focuses on two plays which, though both written and produced in the early 1990s, deal explicitly with the question of remembrance. Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1993), in an instance of what memory scholars have labelled "prospective/prescriptive memory," closes with a vision of a utopistic future in which "we will be citizens." My paper will juxtapose this well-known vision with the one presented in John Roman Baker's *Freedom to Party* (1991), a British play that never made the headlines, arguing that the way in which it envisions a post-AIDS future provides necessary corrective to Tony Kushner's progress narrative.

Dorothy Chansky & Magdalena Szuster

Texas Tech, USA & University of Łódź, Poland

American Musicals/Polish Theatres

Musical theatre is arguably the premier American contribution to the world stage. When Broadway musicals are produced in Poland, a country with a robust network of professional music theatres, more than language changes. Contracts, production schedules, running times, casting requirements, obligatory use of performers who are officially government employees, and rehearsal practices differ in many ways between the two countries. With few exceptions, Poland's theatres do not offer long runs. Rotating repertory necessitates, among other things, storage space for sets that may be used fewer than two dozen times in a season but may be on tap for five, ten, twenty, or more seasons. While most musical theatres have a stable of company members, Poland has a small number of young "triple threats" who are in demand for the types of leading roles being written today. These sought-after stars have calendars more akin to those of internationally opera singers than they are akin to those of emerging Broadway powerhouses. Is the sort of government support American artists often envy actually a European advantage? A Broadway producer can close a musical that is losing money. What happens in Poland?

Elena Dotsenko

Ural State Pedagogical University, Russia

Russian Reception of the later plays by Tom Stoppard

Tom Stoppard's plays have been known in Russia for the decades. Even in Soviet times there were a few translations of his dramas into Russian (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead), and the scholars of British drama (Yu. Friedshtein, N. Solovieva, V. Ryapolova) included Stoppard in the list of the most prominent authors of the 1960s and 70s. The acquaintance of the wider Russian audience with Stoppard has been intensified since 1990s when many plays were translated and performed in this country: Artist Descending a Staircase, Arcadia, Travesties, e.g., became the theatrical and literary events. But the turning point in Stoppard's perception in the Russian cultural space is connected with his "Russian trilogy" *The Coast of Utopia* (2002).

The trilogy was issued fairly quickly (translated by A. and S. Ostrovskii) and staged (2007, directed by Aleksey Borodin) in Moscow. The production of the play at the Russian Academic Youth Theatre (RAMT) was preceded by a long-term project, related to the return of such almost forgotten names of the 19th century intellectuals as Mikhail Bakunin and his family. "The educational program 'Walking along the Coast of Utopia' was conducted by RAMT in collaboration with leading Moscow universities: discussions, roundtables, and conferences were held with the participation of Tom Stoppard, as well as many historians, political scientists, philosophers, and artists" [The Coast of Utopia at RAMT. URL: <https://ramt.ru/projects/arkhiv-proektov/bereg-utopii-proekt/>].

Then, Tom Stoppard's plays *Rock 'n' Roll* (2006), *The Hard Problem* (2015) and *Leopoldstadt* (2020) have been also premiered at RAMT for Russia. As a result, Stoppard's later plays are better known to the Russian theatre audience and even to drama scholars than his earlier most famous works. In this paper, it is supposed to present and compare some aspects of current Tom Stoppard scholarship in Russia.

Eleni Kafetzi

ithakArts, USA

Ancient Narratives, Contemporary Voices: Interdisciplinary Performance as Collective Ritual Both On and Beyond the Stage

This paper examines the evolving creative process of *The Return*, an international interdisciplinary production inspired by the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, reframed through the lived experiences of marginalized voices. Rooted in themes of displacement, identity, resilience, and belonging, the production integrates community workshops as a vital element in shaping its development. These workshops, conducted with diverse populations, emphasize the power of storytelling, music, and movement as tools for processing trauma, fostering resilience, and building communal understanding. At the heart of the workshops is the chorus, a symbol of shared emotions and healing, guiding participants in exploring how personal stories intersect with collective experiences. The production recontextualizes the Orphic myth to address contemporary issues such as the refugee crisis, femicide, and social injustice, with the chorus embodying the strength and longing of marginalized communities, transcending boundaries of time and space. Blending performing and visual arts, the production functions as a modern Orphic ritual that reflects universal human needs for connection, and transformation. While the story is explored through multiple mediums, audio-visual and dramatic elements are interwoven, creating immersive visual soundscapes that stimulate the senses. This paper examines how the ancient myth is used to reflect contemporary social movements, invite community engagement, and how these workshops have shaped the performance, the writing, and its staging. Additionally, we explore how the workshops have contributed to creating a space of healing and connection for participants, examining the role of music, movement, and ritual storytelling in creating a shared emotional language.

Elica Miwa

Meiji University, Japan

Teaching Intercultural Communication through Shakespeare

Japanese people are rather introverted and generally feel uncomfortable being exposed in front of people of different cultures. As a theatre director and actor having made many Japanese English bilingual creative works, I use drama when I face students studying intercultural communication for business majors at universities in Tokyo. It is important to start by letting their mental barrier fall, then let them find playfulness in themselves, and have confidence in what they do. Actor-training and Shakespeare scene studies are very useful for this process. In this presentation, I focus on the importance of being a theatre professional to teach Shakespeare for intercultural communication.

I am going to show what kind of actor-training exercises I apply in each step, and how they work, with some videos of my classroom. First, to free the mental barrier, body is important. We do many physical exercises to tone the individual mind-set and the whole classroom's atmosphere. Through this, students learn about their own body. In the second step, students learn the basic law of human interaction by understanding status exchange. Then, we apply what we have learned so far to scenes of Shakespeare plays.

The course ends with the final stage where each student puts on a larger, fuller soliloquy from Shakespeare. Why Shakespeare? Why not a contemporary, more daily, casual conversation of a TV drama or something? I answer these questions by introducing the voices from students. I give notes for them as a theatre director, not as a teacher of intercultural communication.

Elisa Furhken

Northeastern University, USA

Towards a Digital Gestural Drama: Recovering Zora Neale Hurston's Black Cultural
Expression for a 21st Century Audience

I propose a digital method that visually re-constructs the character's gestures in Zora Neale Hurston's play, *Meet the Mamma* (1925). This project is informed by Hurston's definition of African American drama as "gesture in the place of words" (116), which Elin Diamond reads as "fold[ing] meaning into another semantic register" (116). I take this as an intellectual point of departure and ask: how can our digital efforts recover performances from the past, specifically for one of Hurston's plays that wasn't performed during her time? In reading plays, what is often lost, or registered less impactfully, are the gestures of the characters, especially in the way that Hurston imagined them. In this paper, I will argue that a text deformation of *Meet the Mamma*, an overlooked play, reveals an angular and asymmetrical Black expression that critiques Primitivism and the "Back to Africa" movement. My process entails developing a RelaxNGSchema that encodes the play script beyond its more conventional features. Instead, I encode any reference to gestures, emotions, and staging of the characters' embodiment. I then use the encoded play script to create the text deformation, an erasure of the script that makes visible only the body's gestures. Through the digital method of "text deformation," I argue that we can transform a playscript to centre performance rather than its text-based elements, which in this case, allows Hurston's imagined Black cultural expression to register for a twentieth-first-century audience.

Ellen Schaffert

University of Nottingham, UK

I, that am rudely stamped: Modern Richard IIIs (RSC, 2022 and Shakespeare's Globe 2024) from a Disability Perspective

In 2022, the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of Richard III made the news as it marked the first time the company had cast a disabled actor, Arthur Hughes, in the role of the titular 'bunch-backed' king. Subsequently, in 2024, Shakespeare's Globe made headlines for the opposite: casting its able-bodied artistic director, Michelle Terry, in the role, and claiming to have removed any mention of Richard's disability from the play. This paper will explore the importance of these two recent productions in the context of the UK Shakespeare industry, a space in which what 'disability' looks like onstage is continuously in flux. Who plays disabled characters? Where are disabled bodies allowed to take up space? And what does 'disability' look like and signify on the contemporary Shakespearean stage? It will also consider the history of the play, the character and his disability, how they relate to each other and their specific institutions, and what they mean for disability on the Shakespearean stage going forward. This paper is part of a wider PhD thesis that explores the place of disabled actors, audiences and characters within contemporary Shakespeare industry.

Emma Kristjanson-Gural

Independent Scholar at Large, USA

Refusing to Walk the Straight Line: Subverting Heteronormative Ableism in *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*

The 1607 anonymously published city comedy *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* combines queer and crip theories to reveal, and perhaps challenge, entrenched patterns of heteronormative able-bodiedness. In this paper, I examine how the disabled pattern maker of the marketplace, named Cripple, critiques the reproduction of straightness through able-bodiedness in his orchestration of the love plots. *Fair Maid* follows Phyllis Flower as she falls in love with Cripple and refuses the affections of able-bodied Frank Golding. Cripple suggests to Frank that he disguise himself as Cripple to win Phyllis' hand in marriage. This paper examines the consequences of Frank's embodiment of Cripple's disability in revealing the intertwined nature of compulsory heterosexuality with Robert McRuer's "compulsory able-bodiedness" (2006), or the obscured ways in which able-bodiedness is continually (re)inscribed as the norm. Frank's problematic appropriation of Cripple's physicality with his crutches reveals that movement in alignment with straightness—whether that refers to copying the gestures of heterosexuality or literally standing upright—guides the societal expectations of marriage. The difference between hetero-ableism's expectations and the ability for anyone to truly live up to those expectations is inscribed into Cripple's crutches: the crutches make visible the straight lines that are working to pattern both able-bodiedness and heterosexuality. Revealing Cripple's character as critiquing the invisibility of compulsory hetero-ableism opens possibilities for exploring in performance what societal factors keep people "in-line" with compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness, and how, perhaps, to think outside those lines.

Emmanuel Ekere Thompson

Northeastern University, USA

Beyond the Binary: Probing Internal Struggles in Nigerian Theatre and Historical Memory

Literary and historical narratives of Anglo-African encounters provide intricate viewpoints frequently neglected in discussions about colonialism. This study illustrates the importance of acknowledging internal dynamics inside African communities by analysing the influence of Africans on British perceptions before the development of modern racial ideologies. This study examines how indigenous power structures and rituals contest colonial narratives by analysing literary works and historical records, considering them as interpretative rather than documentary sources. The investigation identifies three distinct interpretative frameworks for comprehending Anglo-African cultural interactions: the dynamic tension between colonial and Indigenous practices in contemporary Nigerian theatre; the novel insights into British society presented by post-Windrush writers of African and Asian descent, as analysed in Catherine Innes's work; and the evolving British self-perception through colonial administration, illustrated in Rudyard Kipling's *The English Flag*. This analysis illustrates how African political decisions, and social behaviours persistently influence historical comprehension while recognising the impact of colonialism. This research aids modern Nigerian theatre artists in producing genuine works that reflect their cultural background, deepening our comprehension of the intricate historical interplay between colonial and indigenous cultures.

Esme Paul

University of Glasgow, Scotland

Infantilizing autism on stage: Disabled futures and autistic theatrical representation

Representations of autistic characters in theatre have largely focused on autistic children, even in contemporary theatrical performances. Referring to contemporary UK performances such as *What I (Don't) Know about Autism and Hindsight*, this paper will analyse the infantilisation of autism and autistic characters, and question whether theatrical narratives have fallen behind other forms of disability and neurodiversity studies.

Particularly, how theatrical performances that focus on autistic children often do not follow the inside-out approach to studying autism that has gained popularity in the field of psychology. Furthermore, exploring how theatrical representations of autistic children often focus on familial relationships and act as a narrative device to explore the impact autistic children have on non-disabled characters. Through the lens of Alison Kafer's concept of 'crip futurity', in which she challenges the dominant narratives that seek a future free from disability, this paper will analyse how these representations further linear, ableist concepts of time and cure.

By comparing theatrical representations of autistic children to the field of critical autism studies, I will analyse the bias toward the medical model of autism in which autistic children are studied far more often than autistic adults. These representations raise questions about the temporality of autism and how attitudes toward autistic children change when they grow up. I will argue that changing these representations can present a futurity which both rejects this infantilisation and reimagines the relationship between disability and temporality on stage.

Esther Marinho Santana

University of São Paulo, Brazil

The Crossroads Inn Across Continents and the Performance of an Ancient, Novel China

Based on the 11th/12th-century collection of novels, folklore, and plays *The Generals of the Yang Family* (北宋金鎗全傳), *The Crossroads Inn* (三岔口) emerged as one of the most popular works in the Peking Opera repertoire. Following its rise to prominence in the 1910s during the early Republic of China, the play gained even greater significance in the People's Republic of China after formal and thematic modifications in 1951. Amid the ideological polarization of the Cold War era and the turbulent 1950s, when the Guomindang in Taiwan and the Communists on the mainland contested for international recognition, theatre became a strategic battlefield. While Nationalist China relied on performing arts to portray itself as the sole legitimate Chinese state, Maoist China utilized theatre to travel across the globe and present itself as both a millenary civilization, and a novel, revolutionary nation. In the intercontinental tours led by each side, *The Crossroads Inn* was staged in highly contrasting ways. This paper examines how the People's Republic of China adapted and used this traditional play to construct and promote both domestically and internationally a new national identity, analysing the aspects emphasized, obscured, and negotiated in this process. Through the examples of the 1956 and 2024 performances of *The Crossroads Inn* in Brazil, it investigates how theatre has functioned as a mediating force in Chinese cultural diplomacy.

Eunha Na

Seoul National University, South Korea

From Barrier-free to Barrier-conscious: Performing Disability in Korean Adaptations of Shakespeare

More than any other parts of the world, contemporary Korean theatre has been keen on creating barrier-free environments for the disabled artists and audiences, where efforts to increase accessibility has been on the sharp rise in recent years. In public theatres, a minimum number of performances should be designated as barrier-free; more leaflets are made in Braille, and signers would appear on stage and ‘translate’ the performance for deaf members in the audience. In addition to these institutional endeavours, the primary concern for many Korean theatre artists has been to incorporate various elements of barrier-free performance into the aesthetics of a production, thus marrying the aesthetic with the political. A new coinage ‘barrier-conscious’ reflects such concern, which focuses on disrupting non-disabled audience members’ normative gaze and provoke renewed perception of their place in theatre and in the world. This paper analyses two recent Korean productions that reinterpret Shakespeare through the lens of barrier-conscious—*Teenage Dick* (2022) and *Macbeth* (2024), both presented at the National Theatre of Korea. I will focus on the affective and cognitive labour that these productions impose on the audience in an attempt to create a space where disability, or inability, becomes the language of performance. Their strategies of evoking discomfort and promoting misunderstanding allow us to reimagine the aesthetic and political dimensions of barrier-free beyond our usual understanding of barrier-free.

Farah Hasan Ali

Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan

Acts of Remembrance: Facets of Fear and Violence in Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and Evelyne Trouillot's *The Blue of the Island*

This paper examines the portrayal of violence in *The Blue of the Island* by Trouillot and *Blasted* by Sarah Kane, highlighting how both plays expose the dehumanizing effects of brutality. Trouillot's play explores the historical and political roots of violence through the plight of Haitian migrants, while Kane presents an immediate, visceral confrontation with war and oppression. Both works depict domestic spaces as sites of unexpected rupture, where personal and structural violence intertwine. By comparing these texts, this paper argues that violence—whether historical or contemporary—continues to shape human experiences, revealing its lingering psychological and societal consequences.

Felicia Hardison Londré

University of Missouri-Kansas City, USA

American vs. French Theatre Practices at the Front during World War I

Both the United States and France used theatre to entertain their troops on the battlefields of Europe during the Great War. The most closely comparable of those efforts involved gatherings of soldiers facing an outdoor platform or impromptu performance space where a tiny cohort of professional actors performed playlets, skits, and musical numbers. In France, Emile Fabre of the Comédie-Française organized the Théâtre aux Armées and began sending volunteer performers to the front in 1916; by 1917 this project evolved into the more official Théâtre au Front. Once the United States cast off its neutrality in April 1917, theatre people launched various projects, including the Overseas Theatre League that sent dozens of units of five performers, the number that could fit in a flivver, to tour the camps. More informally, there were soldier theatricals--often tending to comedic horseplay and cross-dressing--that popped up among both French *poilus* and American doughboys.

Yet there were significant differences in practice between French and American morale-boosting entertainment in the field. French performers came from theatre companies and, usually travelling by train, were more formally scheduled. Thus, they tended to play to larger outdoor audiences of soldiers, with the officers seated in the front rows (as we can see in photographs). American entertainments were far more varied, and their visits to the front were facilitated by military officers as well as leaders of organizations like the YMCA, Red Cross, and Knights of Columbus. A unit of the Over There Theatre League--or individual troupers like Elsie Janis--traveling by car, might play to smaller groups of soldiers at four or five different locales in one day. Besides such organizational matters, I will look comparatively at the kinds of material presented for both armies. At this point, it is difficult to generalize about differences in reception, although some observations and recollections can be cited.

Gabriela Ramis

Olympic College, USA

Exilic Theatre in Arístides Vargas' *Our Lady of the Clouds*

After twenty-five years of political exile in Ecuador, Argentinian author and director, Arístides Vargas, wrote *Our Lady of the Clouds* (2000), a play that has been widely performed in Latin America and Spain. It is the second play in a trilogy on the theme of exile. The first piece was *Flowers Plucked from the Mist* (1995) and the third one, *Where the Wind Blows Fritters* (2004). In search of a balance between self-expression and appeal to the spectator, the exilic artist needs to develop a multilayered discourse and turn into a “detached observer” of the world in Yana Meerzon’s terms. This detachment is actualized through what Svetlana Boym determines as “estrangement and human solidarity,” creating the specific ethics of exile. The two exiles in *Our Lady of the Clouds* meet and configure a community for remembrance and recreation of their homeland. Although they acknowledge the hostile reception of their host country, their energy is completely invested in the past. Remembering and forgetting the country of departure unites them, and instead of a nostalgic approach, they employ irony and humour looking back at the corruption of the homeland that expelled them. This paper will look into the process that led Vargas to write about the experience of exile with detachment, focusing on human solidarity, and employing the artistic device of estrangement.

Gemma Craig-Sharples

Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

‘Tired of the disability politics’: Rupture and Reform in O’Reilly, Thorne, and Trigg

This paper argues that playwrights Kaite O’Reilly, Jack Thorne and Amy Trigg deploy an aesthetics of rupture to challenge the disability politics both in and of theatre. Their respective works—*peeling* (2002), *The Solid Life of Sugar Water* (2015) and *Reasons You Should(n’t) Love Me* (2020)—engage in distinct but related ways with the disability politics of theatre itself, in terms of theatres’ approaches to accessibility and the presentation of Deaf and disabled characters onstage. They also consider disability politics in theatre, specifically the idea that Deaf-and disabled-led theatre is always about the political status of Deaf and disabled people (cf. Kuppers 2004; Siebers 2016; Lipkin 2018). Explicit references to rupture in the plays include discussions of abortion, stillbirth, and suicide, which this paper takes as a starting point for exploring the use of rupture as a broader aesthetic technique in the plays and their productions. The analysis builds on Louise Fryer and Amelia Cavallo’s notion that incorporating access into performance can be an enriching source of ‘artistic disruption’ (2022) to show that this disruption can also be political. Taken together, Trigg’s engagement with the significance of the disabled body, O’Reilly’s confrontation of the nondisabled gaze, and Thorne’s rejection of prescribed narratives reconfigure the relationship between disability and theatre to suggest new ways of engaging with disability on stage.

**Graham Saunders¹, Roaa Ali², Chris Megson³, Anne Etienne⁴, Mark
O'Thomas⁵**

University of Birmingham, UK¹, University of Manchester, UK², Royal Holloway,
University of London, UK³, University College Cork, Ireland⁴, London Academy of Music
& Dramatic Art (LAMDA) UK⁵

Roundtable: Taboos today: still sex, religion, and politics?

If the term taboo is used to refer to what the religious systems stringently forbade – objects and narratives deemed sacrilegious or impure – the term has evolved to signal that which is silenced and removed from public discourse. Taboos motivate forms of (self-)censorship out of fear (of punishment) or from a sense of decency that is redefined by contemporaneous mores.

The round table aims to discuss how such taboos have evolved and intersected with censorship practices in the last hundred years. Have former taboos been replaced by new ones? What are the effects of such taboos on artistic practices such as conscious and unconscious self-censorship and how might the insidious effects such taboos within culture be actively resisted by both artists and theatre scholars?

Harry Derbyshire

University of Greenwich, UK

The Anglo-American Relationship in British Playwriting 2006-2022

The relationship between the UK and the US is often characterised as a 'special' one, albeit more often by the former than the latter. At the same time, British playwrights have not been hesitant to subject their transatlantic allies to critical scrutiny. One of Harold Pinter's last pieces of dramatic writing, first performed in 2018, was a sketch satirising George W. Bush that seemed presciently applicable to President Trump, then in his first term; in 2022 Mike Bartlett *The 47th* used the form of a Shakespearean history play to speculate on who would succeed Joe Biden, in the process making his scheming version of Trump a successor to Richard III. Perhaps more probingly, Caryl Churchill's 2006 play *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?* explored the relationship between the US and the UK by imagining a romantic relationship between an ordinary Briton and a personification of the US, and Debbie Tucker Green's *Ear for Eye* (2018) presented a series of parallels and contrasts between the two countries in relation to racial injustice, in scenes that were to resonate strongly with the Black Lives Matters protests that would be seen in both countries in 2020. In this paper I will consider these British representations of the US and its relationship with the UK in order to identify recurring themes and ideas and to consider what it might say about the British theatre, and by extension Britain, that it has represented the United States as it has.

Hideya Hayashi

Kansai University, Japan

The performativity of labelling. The social construction of disability in Georg Büchner's
Woyzeck

Georg Büchner's play *Woyzeck* (1835) is widely regarded as one of the most significant plays in German literature. The protagonist, Woyzeck, a soldier, is subjected to human experimentation by a doctor, who labels him as mentally deranged, which actually causes him to go insane and kill his mistress. Thus, his mental disorder is interpreted as constructed by the imposed label. This observation draws parallels with contemporary disability studies, particularly the cultural model of disability, which emphasises the social construction of disability. The doctor's acts, in framing Woyzeck as mentally deranged, appear to reflect his own derangement, stemming from his excessive human experimentation and labelling. Moreover, Woyzeck himself, in his delirium, labels his mistress as a prostitute. Therefore, it can be posited that these constructions function interactively and reproductively, and that these constructions are carried out through the verbal and physical acts of the characters, where performativity can be seen. This paper will provide a text-based analysis of the relationship between the social construction by labelling and performativity in the characters' verbal and physical acts. The expressive potential of the performativity of labelling in performances will then be examined on the basis of Werner Herzog's film version (1979). In this film, for instance, in order to express Woyzeck's delirium, the scene in which he hears an auditory hallucination is set in an opium poppy field. This staging is indicative of the fact that the setting imbues the characters' verbal and physical acts with specific meanings.

Holly Koons, Kathleen Cahill & Cora Barr

Christopher Newport University, USA

Roundtable: Museum Theatre: Dramatizing the Life of Anna Hyatt Huntington within an
Exhibition of her Sculpture

The creative team of producer, director, playwright and actress will share their two-year collaborative process of creating *Anna: A Theatrical Monologue*, a 30-minute play written to perform within the Mary M. Torggler Fine Arts Center award-winning exhibition, *A Grand Menagerie: The Sculpture of Anna Hyatt Huntington (1876-1973)*.

Hongliang Zhou

Changsha University of Science & Technology, China

Silent Roman and Chinese Women in two Comedies by Terence of Carthage and Jinzhi Kang of Shandong

The portrayal of women in literature and drama has long been a subject of scholarly interest, particularly in how these representations reflect societal values and norms. This research proposal aims to explore the depiction of silent or marginalized women in comparative dramas from ancient Rome and medieval China, focusing on the female characters in Terence's *"The Brothers"* (220 BCE) and Jinzhi Kang's *"Li Kuei Carries Thorns"* (1271-1368). By examining these works, the study seeks to uncover the ways in which silence and marginalization are used as narrative devices to convey complex messages about gender, power, and social expectations across different cultural and temporal contexts.

The primary objectives of this research are: 1. Explore the symbolic significance of silence and marginalization in both works, and how these elements contribute to the overall themes and messages of the plays. 2. Examine the similarities and differences in the treatment of female characters in Roman and medieval Chinese dramas, and what these reveal about the respective societies' attitudes toward women. 3. Identify and analyse the portrayal of female characters, their dialogue (or lack thereof), and their roles within the plot. This will involve examining how silence is used as a narrative device and what it reveals about the characters' inner lives and social positions.

Terence's *"The Brothers"* is a Roman comedy that explores themes of family morality, and social responsibility. The play features two sets of brothers, one pair being strict and the other more lenient, and their contrasting approaches to life. While the male characters dominate the narrative, the female characters, such as Adranus and Pamphila, are often relegated to the background, speaking little but playing crucial roles in the plot's development. Their silence can be seen as a reflection of the limited agency afforded to women in Roman society, where they were often expected to conform to traditional roles and remain subservient to men. Jinzhi Kang's *"Li Kuei Carries Thorns"* is a medieval Chinese drama that tells the story of Li Kuei, a filial son who carries thorns on his back to atone for his sins. The play introduces several female characters, who despite their silence or limited dialogue, play pivotal roles in shaping the narrative. These characters embody traditional virtues such as filial piety and loyalty, but their silence also underscores the constraints placed upon women in medieval Chinese society, where Confucian ideals emphasized obedience and modesty.

This research is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the portrayal of silent or marginalized women in comparative dramas from ancient Rome and medieval China. By highlighting the roles of female characters, it will shed light on the ways in

which silence and marginalization are used as narrative devices to convey complex messages about gender, power, and social expectations. It will also provide valuable insights into the cultural and historical contexts that shape these portrayals, revealing the similarities and differences in the treatment of women in Roman and medieval Chinese societies. Last but not least, the exploration of silent Roman and medieval Chinese women in comparative dramas offers a unique opportunity to examine the intersection of gender, power, and culture in ancient and medieval literature. This research will highlight the transformative potential of silence and marginalization in shaping the narrative and thematic depth of dramatic texts. Through this study, I hope to inspire a more inclusive and diverse approach to the study of women in literature and theatre, recognizing the richness and complexity of their voices, even when they remain unspoken.

Hongwei Bao

University of Nottingham, UK

Intermediality and Transculturality in *About My Parents and Their Child*

About My Parents and Their Child 关于我父母和他们的孩子 is a stage play commissioned by Ibsen International, directed by Matthias Jochmann and performed in Beijing and Shanghai in 2016 and 2017. It was one of the first times that documentary theatre as a theatrical form was explicitly used in China. This chapter uses the play as an example to demonstrate how a transnational crew of creative professionals use intermediality and transmedia storytelling to explore critical social issues such as LGBTQ+ rights, historical trauma, as well as inter-generational and cross-cultural communication. Assembling photos, videos and writings surrounding the play, in tandem with interviews with the creative team, this chapter argues for the positive role that documentary theatre plays in bringing up taboo social issues and constructing a public sphere in urban China.

Hu Qiang

Beijing Film Academy, China

What is Chinese Cinema?

In 1895, the Lumière brothers (Auguste Lumière and Louis Lumière) publicly screened the films they produced in a café in Paris, France, marking the beginning of the era of cinema. Shortly afterwards, cinema made its way to China. It first reached Hong Kong, then Shanghai, and gradually spread to various regions all over China. In 1905, the first Chinese film was born. Nowadays, after 120 years, in an environment where world cinema has experienced technological changes, media impacts, and humanistic transformations, Chinese filmmakers firmly uphold the belief of maintaining integrity and pursuing innovation. With a presentation style that is characteristic of China, they continuously showcase the various vicissitudes of life to the world. Despite the passage of time, they are in the prime of their creative lives. Just as the ultimate question of humanity points to "Who am I?", when André Bazin once put forward the question "Qu'est-ce que le Cinéma?" (What is Cinema?), it was an inquiry into the nature of cinema. So, what exactly is Chinese cinema? The paper and keynote speech topic for the Comparative Drama Conference will take this issue as the core, expound on the visible cultural connotations and artistic extensions of Chinese cinema, and reveal the invisible humanistic spirit and philosophical reflections of Chinese cinema.

Huiyue Wen & Li Zeng

Goldsmiths, University of London, UK & Sichuan International Studies University, China

Queer Representations in Contemporary Adaptations of *Twelfth Night*: Comparing The Globe's All-Male Cast and the National Theatre's Gender-Swapped Version

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* intricately explores themes of gender identity and romantic entanglement through Viola's disguise as Cesario, a male servant to Duke Orsino and the love triangle. This narrative's inherent ambiguity has provided a profound space for contemporary directors to explore queer representation. This paper examines two compelling productions of *Twelfth Night* that highlight the representation of queer elements with contemporary adaptations: the 2002/2013 Shakespeare's Globe's all-male cast and the National Theatre's 2017 gender-swapped version.

The Shakespeare's Globe's revival, directed by Tim Carroll, emulates Elizabethan tradition with male actors in all roles, enhancing the gendered misalignments in the play. It amplifies homoerotic undertones with the male disguise in both narrative and staging. A few years later, the National Theatre's adaptation, directed by Simon Godwin, transforms Malvolio into Malvolia, a female steward tricked to fall in love with Olivia. Both productions employ gender-bending adaptation with queer dynamics to challenge entrenched perceptions of gender and sexuality, illustrating the fluidity of sexual identity and the social conventions suppressing genuine self-expression, as well as utilizing audience empathy and resonance to achieve decriminalization and anti-discrimination of queer identities. The all-male version brings a strong sense of homosexuality to every storyline, and Godwin's adaptation adds the agenda of transgender through "Malvolia" to the story of lesbian, gay and bisexual love interests. By exploring the intersections of performance, identity, and societal norms, this study reveals the transformative potential of revivals/adaptations of classic plays in reshaping contemporary cultural narratives around queerness.

Ibrahim Shehu

Kaduna State University, Nigeria

Playwriting as a Social Commentary: A Critical Analysis of the Playwrights in Function in Hausa Society

Playwriting has always been a powerful tool for social commentary, as it allows playwrights to delve into pressing issues and explore complex themes in a thought-provoking manner. In Hausa society, the playwright's function is particularly important, as theatre has long been a crucial form of cultural expression and entertainment in the region. Hausa playwrights, like in other cultures, have a unique set of mandates that guide and inform their work. These mandates are shaped by the rich cultural heritage of the Hausa people. This article aimed to survey the vital role of playwrights in Hausa society in spheres of cultural preservation, social commentary, and entertainment. The research will take into cognisance what the playwright is writing, why is he writing, how is he writing, his immediate and larger audience, and the expected quality of his work. As an approach, the research has employed the method of conducting field study, and analysis of some select Hausa texts and films being produced. It has also employed functional theory in a drive to establish whether playwrights are imparting their needful functions as expected by the audience and the critics.

Ilka Saal

University of Erfurt, Germany

Political Theater in the Age of Neoliberalism?

“They know things are bad, but more than that, they know they can’t do anything about it” – cultural critic Mark Fisher observed in 2009 with regard to the apparent political apathy of university students in the current phase of neoliberalism. This example, along with several others, lead him to diagnose a general state of “reflexive impotence” when it comes to imagining viable alternatives to the dominant economic-political system of neoliberalism. Fisher’s, along with other critics’ assessment of the comprehensive reach of neoliberalism, attests to the difficulty of asserting political agency in an economic-ideological system so adept at incorporating difference and opposition that it has basically become immune to political critique. What does that mean for the praxis of political theatre, which has classically presented itself as an oppositional representational politics? This contribution attempts to address the urgent question of the feasibility of political theatre in the neoliberal age. I will begin by tracing the trajectory of 20th and 21st century critiques of capitalism in US American office dramas from Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* (1949) to David Mamet’s *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1983) to Branden Jacobs-Jenkins’s *Gloria* (2015) to demonstrate playwrights’ astute awareness of the increasing cooptation of the political by the economic. In a second step, I will discuss Jacobs-Jenkins’s play in light of Mitchum Huehl’s suggestion for rethinking the political as an ontological refiguration (rather than counter-representation) to assess in what ways contemporary drama might be able to re-envision political theatre in the age of neoliberalism.

Jaclynn Jutting

Northern Arizona University, USA

Who Can Afford to be Cast in our Mainstage Productions?

How do we responsibly cast to ensure inclusive and culturally appropriate representation on our stages? We See You White American Theatre, a national collective of BIPOC theatre artists demands “culturally appropriate casting for all student productions” in the American academy. (BIPOC Demands 29) Yet how do we train and retain diverse actors while acknowledging the resource constraint of who can afford to be cast in our mainstage productions? This is a question currently echoing through the halls of theatre programs throughout America, especially in the wake of post-pandemic increased inflation and cost of living. This paper will investigate and report on innovative casting practices—contrasting both volunteer and subsidized pilots—to secure cohorts of Performance Assistants to perform in Directing I scenes, a core class required in most American theatre programs. This paper will report on two semesters’ approach to casting: volunteer and funded Course-based Undergraduate Research Experience in Directing, both which piloted innovative approaches to small-scaled, job-training opportunities for actors and the directors with whom they worked with over a semester. These small-scale performance opportunities offer “hands on experience” that connect academic study to performance. Results from these innovative and replicable pilots will explore opportunities for performance in Directing scenes to provide critical opportunities to champion inclusive casting practices in the classroom to meet the needs of our burgeoning actors, department, and community.

Jacqueline Long

Loyola University Chicago, USA

What is Euripides' Problem? Criticizing Women in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*

Fissioning tragedy let Athenian Old Comedy set off explosive laughter (Farmer, *Tragedy on the Comic Stage*, 2017). Aristophanes in *Thesmophoriazusae* takes on four tragic plays, one already refracted through his own *Acharnians*, the messiness of representation across gender (Solomon, *Re-Dressing the Canon*, 1997, crediting debt to Zeitlin, "Travesties of Gender and Genre," in Foley, *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, 1981), and, as this paper will argue, bad drama-criticism. The Old Relative's pleasure in Euripidean intellectualism he does not understand (20) marks him as a foolishly uncritical fan. The sexualized and equally ignorant pleasure he feels at Agathon's work (35,130-33) measures real power of dramatic poetry over him. His unsuccessful imposture of womanhood ludicrously demonstrates that Agathon's recipe for creating female voices by cross-dressing confers no knowledge (649-50), yet his experience of feminized victimization ultimately delivers him through successive Euripidean scenarios. While first he is in disguise, the Thesmophoria-worshippers indict Euripides but under cut their complaints with their own actions (418-28,446-58). As Palamedes' writing (769-70), Menelaos's costume (910), and Echo's intercession (1060-61) implicate Euripides' creativity more closely, the two *parabaseis* present the comedy's Chorus as Athenian women, first rejecting unfair suspicions against them allegedly roused by Euripides, then guaranteeing their civic worship at the real Thesmophoria: on mutual ground of creative truth they and Euripides make peace (1170). Euripides has already instructed the dancer Elaphion how she should seduce the barbarian guard (1172): at Euripides' word the Scythian is just as enchanted as the Old Relative had been.

Jalylah Burrell

Loyola Marymount University, USA

Canon Fodder: Humour and Divination in the work of Zora Howard and Alice Childress

This presentation examines humour in one-act plays by Zora Howard and Alice Childress that take inspiration from canonical texts. An illustrative pair, both playwrights were formed by Harlem's rich cultural landscape, experienced success in other literary genres as well as entertainment fields, and exercised humour's full range of expressive possibilities in their works. *String* (1969), by Childress, employs Guy de Maupassant's short story "A Piece of String" (1883) as its raw material while Howard's *The Master's Tools* (2022) revisits the execution of Tituba, an enslaved woman accused of witchcraft during the Salem Witch Trials and famously appears as a character in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953).

Expanding on my 2022 introduction to *The Master's Tools for Theatre*, I contemplate how Howard, a 2021 Pulitzer Prize finalist, employs humour to retool loss in service of more fulsome retelling of Tituba's life. Moreover, I discuss how that approach aligns with that of Childress who described her work as a prolific playwright, novelist, actor, and screenwriter as an investigation of "the intricate and magnificent patterns of a loser's life" in her 1984 essay, "A Candle in the Gale Wind." Employing a Black feminist humour studies approach I brush their work up and against relevant texts by Black women playwrights including Winsome Pinnock and Suzan-Lori Parks. Remembering Parks 1995 essay "Possession," I argue that Howard and Childress deft uses of humour facilitate their engagement of rewritings that "creat[e] history where it is and always was but has not yet been divined."

Jan Ziętara

University of Warsaw, Poland

Atomisation on stage: Pointillistic threats in Bartlett and Churchill

This paper compares Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes* in London and Caryl Churchill's *Escaped Alone* through the lens of what Michał Lachman has termed a "pointillistic" form (*Dialog* 1/2021). Rather than adhering to a single, coherent narrative, both plays employ bursts of fragmentary dialogue and sudden shifts in setting, creating a mosaic of perspectives that illuminate interpersonal tensions. In *Earthquakes* in London, this fragmented structure is not only evident in the characters' interactions but is also explicitly recognised by them: Peter's reference to "atomisation" underlines the sense of isolation that pervades contemporary society, echoing broader anxieties about climate change and political upheaval. Meanwhile, in *Escaped Alone*, Churchill's deceptively casual backyard conversations conceal deep-seated terrors, as each character's scattered remarks point to collective unease.

By exploring how Bartlett and Churchill deploy these "scrappy" dramaturgical techniques, the paper argues that impending threats in both plays—whether environmental or existential—are significantly shaped by the characters' inner worlds. The discontinuous nature of each text prompts us to consider how individual perceptions and lived experiences construct, and potentially warp, a shared sense of crisis. Ultimately, this study contends that the pointillistic dramaturgy in *Earthquakes* in London and *Escaped Alone* underscores a crucial insight: threats can emerge not only from global or external forces but also from within the psychological and emotional landscapes of those who confront them, reflecting a world increasingly defined by fragmentation and uncertainty.

Jirye Lee

Baekseok Arts University, South Korea

Crossing the Pacific: Cultural Translation and Adaptation of *The Vagina Monologues*

Cultural exchange is an intricate process shaped by language, historical context, and sociopolitical structures. Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*, originally conceived as a radical act of feminist discourse, has been translated and performed globally, yet its transformation in diverse cultural contexts raises critical questions regarding the limitations and possibilities of intercultural adaptation. This study examines the Korean staging of *The Vagina Monologues* and its sociopolitical reception within South Korea, a society marked by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms.

Through a comparative analysis of the original US production and its Korean adaptation, this research explores how shifts in linguistic translation, performance conventions, and audience engagement influence the play's feminist messaging. Specifically, I analyse the adaptation through three key lenses: scenographic and directorial choices, shifts in textual and performative emphasis, and the production's reach beyond the theatrical space into public discourse and activism. Drawing on interviews with directors, translators, and performers, I reveal the negotiation process between cultural fidelity and local adaptation, illustrating how feminist narratives are reinterpreted and sometimes constrained within a different sociocultural framework. By interrogating the ways in which *The Vagina Monologues* has been recontextualized in South Korea, I wish to contribute to broader discussions on globalized theatre, cultural translation, and the politics of feminist performance across linguistic and national boundaries.

João Victor Silva

University of São Paulo, Brazil

Transgressive (re)presentations of race in early musical theater: Black identity in American and Brazilian Black revues in the 1920s

The *revue*, a precursor of modern American musicals in the early twentieth century, incorporated popular entertainment forms such as vaudeville and burlesque. During the Harlem Renaissance—an African American cultural movement of the 1920s that fostered plays, musicals, and performances aimed at reconceptualizing Black identity beyond white stereotypes—*revues* like Lew Leslie's *Blackbirds of 1928* celebrated Black identity and heritage through music and dance, launching figures such as Adelaide Hall to stardom. In Brazil, where musical theatre in the early twentieth century was deeply influenced by French and American traditions, the success of Josephine Baker's *La Revue Nègre* in Paris and Florence Mills's original *Blackbirds* in London in 1926 inspired Brazilian producer De Chocolat to establish the Companhia Negra de Revistas (Black Revue Company), a theatre group composed entirely of Black and mixed-race artists that became a major attraction in Rio de Janeiro during the 1920s. Their debut production, *Tudo Preto (All Black)*, which marked a pivotal moment in the emergence of Black theatre in Brazil, premiered in 1926 and explicitly referenced American and French recent experiments with Black musical theatre. This paper explores the transatlantic dialogue between American and Brazilian *revues* by examining the(re)presentation of race in *Blackbirds of 1928* and *Tudo Preto*. It highlights how vaudeville, burlesque, and popular music—as shared performance practices—enabled transgressive theatrical portrayals of Black identity in two post-colonial societies marked by profound racial inequality and histories of slavery, revealing both similarities and key cultural divergences.

Jodi Van Der Horn-Gibson

CUNY & Queensborough Community College, USA

The Marvelous & the Mystery: Speculations on Contemporary Afrosurrealism

From its inception, surrealism rejected structures of oppression and power through the liberation of the imagination, scorning the pious bourgeois as soundly from within the ranks of white supremacy, colonialism, and intolerance. Afro-Caribbean writer Suzanne Césaire describes it as art in moving confrontation, and in 1943 described surrealism as young, ardent, and revolutionary. This paper will consider the transhistoric artistic nature of Afrosurrealism, as contemporary artists remain tethered to origin legacies of the 20th Century. Spanning performative mediums over roughly a century, texts within the genre constitute social experience as psychic spectacle, materializing for the audience the wonderful, symbolic, frightening, and marvellous in present day plenitude.

For example, Marita Bonner's 1927 surrealistic masterpiece *The Purple Flower* carries with it a similarly intrusive, cheeky demand as does Jeremy O. Harris' *2022 Slave Play*; Adrienne Kennedy's 1964 *Funnyhouse of a Negro* highlights the psychic dismemberment of deep-seated racial paradigms, as does Jackie Sibbles Drury's *Fairview* (2018). Césaire called the genre a blue flame capable of cutting through and purifying colonial stupidity with the result of restoring lost communities and voices. This research centres on contemporary artists' responses as tethered to those 20th Century legacies; for as Maya Phillips wrote in 2018, "The best way to depict Black people's reality is it to depart from it...It's a strange time to be Black in America—surreal really. The art tells us no different."

Jon Dietrick

Babson College, USA

Realism, Expressionism, and Lucy Prebble's *Enron*

I'm proposing a paper looking at the intersection of realism and expressionism in Lucy Prebble's 2009 play *Enron*. Specifically, the paper will consider the play's treatment of money and business, and how that treatment is influenced by the British and American theatrical traditions, as well as the way German expressionism was refracted through those two traditions. American "business" plays like Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* made use of both the realist and expressionist traditions to examine money and business's effects on the way we think about epistemological and ontological issues—specifically the way money creates a sort of monstrous and uncanny second nature. British productions of German expressionist plays took a similar tack—and here I'll consider the 2013 National Theatre production of Georg Kaiser's 1912 play *From Morning to Midnight* as well as the National's 1995 production of Ernst Toller's 1922 *The Machine Wreckers*. Prebble's play about the Enron scandal will be analysed through this British-American-German (and realist-expressionist) lens.

John Barlow

Southampton Solent University, UK

Know Thyself: A Psychodynamic workshop for the holistic development of young performers

"When you know yourself you are empowered. When you accept yourself you are invincible."—Tina Lifford

In creating a BA (Hons) degree at Southampton Solent University, I wanted to ensure a first step into training was discovering the spark of inspiration that comes from within the soul of the actor.

Releasing this core creativity rather than trying to direct it, opens a world of professional possibilities. It can also lead to interrogating ideas about audience and a performance's desired outcomes. It particularly helps young performers grappling with confused thoughts, disturbed feelings to begin to find and express themselves, helping build their self-esteem.

The result was a first year module entitled Self & Text in which novice performers—thrown together for the first time, were offered the opportunity to explore their own biographies in a shared activity, collaboratively turning those landmark memories into dramatic material. Paralleling this exploration of individual experience and voices, was work on creating monologues (Walking in Others Shoes) and text based duologues leading to a collaborative adaptation from fiction, in a style agreed within the working group.

Significant outcomes of this work were students facing up to new, sometimes uncomfortable challenges in creating content and their creative methodology but also anew found empowerment and understanding of their potential place in the wider community.

Jordi Marrugat

University of Barcelona, Spain

Making the Catalan West End and Broadway with *Mar i cel* and *Flor de Nit*

After staging the first Catalan versions of *The Mikado* (1985) and *Little Shop of Horrors* (1987), director Joan Lluís Bozzo and his theatrical company Dagoll Dagom created the first Catalan big musical by adapting Àngel Guimerà's romantic tragedy *Mar i cel* (*Sea and Sky*). It opened in October 1988, and it is the most successful Catalan musical of all time. Following its immediate success, Dagoll Dagom decided to create another big musical, with an original script: *Flor de Nit* (*Night Flower*) (1992). The reviews of these two musicals immediately identified the intention of producing a West End (*Mar i cel*) and a Broadway (*Flor de Nit*) show for the Catalan audience. This paper will develop a comparative study between *Mar i cel* and the West End shows that inspired it are intentionally quoted in its script, score and staging. The same comparative study will be applied to *Flor de Nit* and some Broadway shows. Thus, on the one hand, the paper will provide evidences that *Mar i cel* is inspired, among others, by *The Phantom of The Opera* and, specially, *Les Misérables* (both are adaptations of romantic literary works, are focused on excentric and marginal identities, stage mobs in a similar way and some aspects of the score of *Mar i cel* are clearly inspired by Schönberg's). On the other hand, it will also be given evidence that *Flor de Nit* is inspired by the film adaptation of *Cabaret* (1972) and Sondheim's *Follies* (1971), besides containing more references to *Les Misérables* and *The Phantom*.

Joseph Couch

Montgomery College, USA

“I Remember You Dead”: Absurdist Character as Speech Act in Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and Harold Pinter’s *Old Times*

In the seminal work that defines the Theatre of the Absurd, Martin Esslin argues that it “tends toward a radical devaluation of language” in that “what happens on the stage transcends, and often contradicts, the words spoken by the character” (26).

Consequently, the critical discourse in the ensuing decades largely devalues the language in these plays, including the role of language in character construction. By contrast, this paper employs speech act theory to examine Absurdist characterization with special attention to the role of dialogue in Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and Harold Pinter’s *Old Times* to examine the information and action of character through performative, illocutionary, and indirect speech acts. When viewed from this critical perspective, Absurdist characters are acutely aware of the rules of language in terms of both speakers and receivers of speech acts in manipulative and relative constructions of character and characterhood. In Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, George’s speech act and its reception by Martha murder George and Martha’s son, who only exists in dialogue. Likewise, Kate and Deeley’s combative speech acts tussle to define their Anna’s role in their relationship in Pinter’s *Old Times* constructs the three’s characterizations. Ultimately, this paper’s theoretical framework reveals previously undervalued dimensions of Absurdist characters that are often read as passive players in a world devoid of meaning and sheds new light on the rarely acknowledged role of language as a highly valuable element in the Theatre of the Absurd.

Joseph Dunne-Howrie

Rose Bruford College, UK

Staging Cultural Decline: The War on Woke at the Battle of Ideas

The Battle of Ideas is an annual political festival organised by the libertarian think tank the Academy of Ideas. It has become a key event for the radical right to build and disseminate a reactionary discourse through political performativity. Despite its outward commitment to political pluralism, all participants are united in their contempt for 'woke.' The dramaturgy stages a concerted resistance against woke culture to an audience who are invited to perform as dissidents living in a left-wing dystopia. The extremist performatively at the festival purposefully portrays discursive forms that do not conform to the 'patriarchal aesthetics of truth' (Scrimmer 2023, 129) within logocentricism as a threat to conservative morality. The war on woke seeks to illicit fears in the population that the West's 'true' culture is being contaminated by decadent ideologies (Alston 2023)—particularly trans identity, decolonisation, and environmental activism—which destabilise naturalised expressions and experiences of identity, family, work, and leisure. Drawing on my experiences of attending the Battle of Ideas in 2022 and 2023, I analyse how the war on woke is performed in the 'populist style' (Aiolfi 2023, 43) through a choreography of scripted debates. I also consider how the threat of identity politics and leftwing censorship is reiteratively performed to excessive degrees by figures like the comedian Graham Linehan and journalists from GBNews to dramaturgically reverse the cultural decline of western liberal democracies.

Josephine Lee

University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, USA

Spotlighting Blackness in Asian American Theatre

Most scholarship focusing on Asian American drama, including my own,¹ has considered Asian American theatre as its own distinctive category. Elsewhere² I have suggested the need to look beyond this classification towards a more comparative study of racial representation. In his 1992 lecture, “Is Yellow Black or White?”³ historian Gary Okihiro eloquently described the entanglement of Black and Asian American racial formations. I follow his lead in examining two foundational works of Asian American theatre: Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II, and Joseph Field’s 1958 Broadway musical *Flower Drum Song* and Frank Chin’s 1972 play *Chickencoop Chinaman*. While these two works couldn’t be more different in approach, they both presented characters that were substantively different from earlier “Oriental” stereotypes and instead responded to representations of Asian Americans as the “model minority.” *Flower Drum Song* stages hard-working and compliant Asian immigrant characters as contrasted with the conspicuous absence of Black characters, even while it copies Black-inspired music and dance. Chin’s cool and rebellious Chinese American protagonist Tam Lum challenges the stereotypes in *Flower Drum Song* but also harbours its own anxious appropriations of Black speech and identity. My presentation emphasizes the multiple and sometime contradictory ways in which conceptions of Blackness informed these new Asian American visibilities onstage and how theatrical productions express or suppress tensions related to “acting white” or “acting Black” and thus defy easy racial binaries.

¹ Josephine Lee, *Performing Asian America* (1997) and *Milestones in Asian American Theatre* (2022).

² Josephine Lee, *Race in American Musical Theater* (2023) and *Oriental, Black, and White: The Formation of Racial Habits in American Theater* (2022).

³ Gary Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*

Josh Sobel & Rebecca McNamara

Independent Scholars at Large, USA

Sustainability and (Im)Possibility: Commercial Theatre in the US and UK

There is emerging an ever growing and ever more visible gap in production costs-and as such, production viability and sustainability-between the United States and the United Kingdom. On November 18th, 2024, The Economist article “The New York-London arbitrage for musicals” pointed out the astronomical-and growing-gap in expense, such as with the recent hit production of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *Sunset Boulevard*. Inclusive of the fees demanded by pop-star lead Nicole Scherzinger for both the London and New York iterations, the show required an upfront investment of \$3 million for its West End run, a figure that quickly jumped to \$13.5 million for its current New York transfer, a staggering difference-and the weekly running costs for the show in New York are nearly three times those of London. This is a common cost gap in today’s industry. And while it is readily known that government subsidy for the arts is much different in the UK than in the US, these figures speak differently given the commercial nature of such productions, operating outside of not-for-profit resources. We seek to examine the root causes of such discrepancy and how it is currently impacting the development and sustainability potential for new American theatre. We will also examine a noted difference in producer expectations with regard to the financial goals of commercial production between the US and the UK, how those expectations may point to differences in priorities and cultural psychology within the capitalist-creative tension paradigm, and how those differences then likewise impact creative and commercial decision-making in distinct ways.

Joshua Polster

Emerson College, USA

Friendly and Unfriendly Witnesses: The Theatre Critics of Arthur Miller

In 1991, *The New York Times* London theatre correspondent Matt Wolf observed an interesting phenomenon with the reception of Arthur Miller's plays: "Almost play for play, one can contrast a failed New York production with its successful British counterpart. *The American Clock* closed quickly on Broadway in 1980, then ran a season at the National six years later, picking up an Olivier Award nomination for best play. *A View from the Bridge* flopped on Broadway despite praise for its star, Tony Lo Bianco, in the 1983 [revival], whereas Alan Ayckbourn's 1987 London production did so well at the National that it transferred for six months to the West End". Indeed, Arthur Miller's reception within the United States and the United Kingdom have often been at odds. While initially lionized by US theatre critics such as Brooks Atkinson, Miller began to be severely critiqued by others such as Robert Brustein. The increasingly cold reception to Miller in the US, especially by the mid-1960s, led many Americans to believe that Miller had vanished from the theatre scene even while his work was having great success abroad, especially in the United Kingdom. This presentation will compare the reception of Miller's work in the Us with his reception in the UK, assess possible reasons for the divergence, and illuminate some important differences between these very different artistic, economic and political climates.

Judith Saunders

Contra Costa College, USA

The Surreal as Real in 21st Century American Drama: Rajiv Joseph's *Benghal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* and Anne Washburn's *Shipwreck*

Critic Martin Esslin described absurdism as a means of expressing "the senselessness of the human condition," and thus the inadequacy of rational, discursive drama to convey what is essentially irrational. Traditionally, it has not been common in American theatre, so it is worth noting it when it appears. Two recent offerings are Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (2011) and Anne Washburn's *Shipwreck* (2019), both of which convey the irrationality inherent in the political situations dramatized.

Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo comprises of a sequence of episodes that mirror in microcosm the disaster inflicted by the American military on Iraq during in 2003. The play is riddled with bizarre situations giving rise to senseless killings that result from avarice, debilitating fear, confusion and disastrous communication failures. The situations are grounded in actual history, highlighting the absurdity of the reality experienced by both invaders and natives.

Shipwreck is a conversation piece set in early 2017 in a snowbound farmhouse in upstate New York, where a group of liberals argue about how Donald Trump got to be president. The play also includes two fantasy Trump interludes that on one level convey the absurdity of a self-aggrandizing egoist and on another, offer a vision of Trump the strongman who can carry out a populist agenda. The salutary message Washburn delivers in her absurdist rendition of Trump is that allowing self-mythologizing political leaders to go unchallenged results in dangerously unstable leadership that imperils a country.

These plays show theatre's ability to critique persons and events in an absurdist manner and shed light on situations that demand rational thought.

Julia Moriarty

Missouri State University, USA

Of Monsters, Mothers, and Moorhens: How Jen Silverman's *The Moors* finds power in its own monstrosity

Jen Silverman is a playwright who delights in opportunities to subvert tropes and literary traditions. Their play *The Moors* provides a delightful and tragic romp through the gothic, as murder, mayhem, and monstrosity each take centre stage, highlighting a collective need for validation and love. And yet, the text should be read for how it liberates its character from the tropes its genre demands. This paper will consider the complicated and subversive depictions of femininity, motherhood, social ostracization, and sublimation within the play by engaging an array of feminist, cultural, and decolonial theories. For example: Agatha, the play's central spectre, is remote and domineering, and yet desirous of a child; her reluctant softening throughout the play demonstrates the vulnerability at the heart of every monster, and that motherhood can be attained through radical means. Emilie, the potential mother-to-be, is a naive governess enlisted under false pretences who seeks stability and validation, and yet her growing self-possession belies the purity of her surface. Cast against such plotlines is the manic-pixie Moorhen, who fails to find liberation as her uncomplicated paradigm is mined for its utility when she is enmeshed in a toxically codependent relationship. Utilizing Jess Zimmerman's model for reclaiming monstrosity, among other feminist theories engaging the monstrous, this paper will consider how the characters of *The Moors* break out of their confinements, and how they remain trapped in an unforgiving landscape.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir

Sorbonne Université, France

Sarah Ruhl and the poetics of resilience

In her memoir *Smile. The Story of a Face* (2022), Sarah Ruhl chronicles her personal journey through motherhood, playwriting and a partial paralysis of the face due to Bell's palsy. Professional anecdotes and aesthetic considerations find themselves inextricably woven in with intimate family stories and painful accounts of medical therapies, in a fluid approach that mirrors the all-encompassing nature of experience and the essential reciprocity between life and art. The un-theatricality of paralysis—an absence of movement or expressivity—thus encourages the playwright to turn her own body into a site and narrative of resilience, through mechanisms of human and artistic interconnection. This paper will seek to place such adynamic within the current cultural context, where the concept of resilience has become both central and controversial (Sarah Bracke, Serge Tisseron), and more specifically within the context of contemporary theatre, where performing resilience has become a matter of urgency, from Young Jean Lee's *We're Gonna Die* to Aleshea Harris's *What to Send Up When It Goes Down* or to Annie Baker's *Infinite Life*. The paper will further argue that the poetics of resilience palpable in *Smile* is in keeping with Ruhl's playwriting from the first, by pointing to her handling of theatre as a place for grieving (*Eurydice*; *For Peter Pan on Her 70th Birthday*) or for finding joy amid physical or mental ailments (*The Clean House*; *Melancholy Play*; *Dear Elizabeth*). Rather than analyse the plays in depth, the paper will aim to draw connections across Ruhl's oeuvre around notions of composition and rhythm, as well as the representation of female bodies and friendships.

Karen Tomlin

London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art (LAMDA), UK

Why Shakespeare?

In this practical workshop and seminar, LAMDA's Dr Karen Tomlin seeks to consider the relevance and accessibility to Shakespeare's language and texts. Who does it speak to and for? And how can we enable participants to fully connect with the text and the characters they are seeking to authentically inhabit? Debunking myths of ownership of the language and acknowledging and challenging the relationship between ideas of intelligence and knowing, and the bodies that are seen as the primarily the holders of those features, this experiential workshop will journey towards engaging with Shakespeare's language through guided discovery, performing in front of each other without knowing it, and the presence of a supportive audience.

Katharine Peddie

University of Kent, UK

(In)disciplinarity: devising performance in a multidisciplinary collective feminist performance group

Free Women is a space where devised theatre, movement, improvised music, playwrighting, cabaret, art school, sound, performance poetry and poet's theatre-our background disciplines-co-habit, producing new tensions and possibilities. How and where can these things meet, and what can their meeting produce?

The shape of production in our work is currently long shows of segmented pieces, each piece usually instigated/led by one practitioner. Other members develop the performance idea: moving from a textual, musical or theatrical idea into a multidisciplinary piece. 'Drone Piece', in A Women's History of Happenings, took multidisciplinary shape from an origin point of spoken text.

However, we have increasingly been devising collaboratively from an initial idea: in our latest piece we spent a rehearsal talking about homeostasis and its relation to feminist and improvisatory practice. We then each drew/scored it: half of us drew it like a musical score and half as a stage or movement set up. So, as we moved into initial embodied and material playing, we found ourselves working with several scores and developing enmeshed movement, text and music from a much earlier conceptual stage.

My pressing questions are always what our different disciplines can bring to each other and how they can and have expand(ed) our ideas of performance practice and (in)discipline—each bringing things from our discipline but also being moved beyond discipline. I reflect on this idea as a feminist and writer, and how my experience with this group has expanded how I write and conceive of writing for performance, increasingly seeing myself as (in)discipline.

Kathryn Walat

University at Albany/State University of New York (SUNY), USA)

I LIKE IT LIKE THAT: Adapting Elizabethan & Restoration Sexual Politics for the American Stage

For some works of classical theatre to be viable for production in today's American theatre, adaptation is the key for unlocking the desire of audiences. Even plays featuring empowered sexual women, such as Elizabethan true-crime drama ***Arden of Faversham*** and Aphra Behn's ***The Rover*** benefit from seamless updates. But how much should we cater to the wants of shrinking audiences and budget-conscious theatres, before these classical texts lose their bite or their unique place within theatrical history?

How do we present these complicated women, within the patriarchal worlds they must navigate, while also creating a show that theatre goers—particularly female ones—want to **buy a ticket** for? Does one try to explain Alice Arden's brutal murder of her husband (a total bore when compared to her new lover)? Can we applaud the wedding of our heroine Hellena to a Rover who has, among other bad behaviour, tried to rape her sister (*twice*)?

These are questions I navigated first while adapting (with playwright Jeffrey Hatcher) *Arden of Faversham*, produced Off-Broadway in New York by Red Bull Theatre in 2023, earning a Drama Desk Award nomination for Outstanding Adaptation; and with my current commissioned version of Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, a play that has not been professionally produced in New York for over 50 years. In my work, I draw on my knowledge of the **playwriting craft** after 20 years in the theatre industry. But my secret weapon in **revitalizing these plays** is **listening to my students**, wrestling with sexual and relationship politics, and issues of rape and violence, in new and profound ways in today's world.

Kelly I. Aliano

La Guardia Community College, USA

The Immersive Worlds of the Mainstream Musical in the UK and the US

Over the past few years, we have seen mainstream commercial musicals incorporate techniques often reserved for the experimental theatre, like technological mediation, interactivity, and other methods of audience immersion. Productions such as *Cabaret* at the Kit Kat Club and *Sunset Boulevard* used such elements to attempt to breathe new life into these regularly produced works and were successful in London yet were received differently in the US. A similarly immersive staging of *Guys and Dolls* has just wrapped up its run in the UK: Would such a production be able to capture success across the Atlantic?

I explore how the concept of “immersive theatre” is considered in both the US and UK contexts, analysing how and why it might be received differently by audiences in each market. I focus on critical and audience reception of these techniques when applied to commercial productions of musicals, but my grounding discussion looks at the popularity of Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More* in both locations to establish the interest in immersive theatre for each. It then explores the differing reactions to *Cabaret* at the Kit Kat Club and *Sunset Boulevard* as a way to hypothesize reactions to other future immersive experiments for the Broadway musical. I argue that US audiences are either resistant to seeing major changes made to works in the musical theatre canon or, contradictorily, they no longer see immersion as innovative. This means that the success of such a production in the UK does not guarantee similar acceptance in the US.

Keränen Jaana

University of Oulu, Finland

Toddlers invite the puppet into play and drama to experience compassion

This article focuses on how a puppet, play and playfulness of the drama support the development of compassion with toddlers in early childhood education and care (ECEC).

In this research drama is understood through playfulness (Heikkinen, 2002) and the puppet is seen as a child's friend and supporter (Gobec, 2012; Korošec, 2012; Winnicott, 1971). The toddlers can express themselves through play, drama and the puppet even when they are not talking. (Heikkinen, 2002; Majaron, 2012; Vygotsky, 1933, 2002). Toddlers create and participate in their own ways (Hultgren & Johansson, 2019). Through stories, play and drama, human can learn to interpret and show compassion for others (Nussbaum, 2014; Rajala et al, 2017).

The research is ethnographic (Kananen, 2014). As a researcher, I was part of a group of Northern Finnish toddlers for four months once a week. I sat with the fox-puppet on the floor with the toddlers and participated in their everyday life and play, and together we created narrative play worlds (Brèdikytè, 2022). The research material consists of diary entries and video material recorded in the daycare centre.

Preliminary research results show that the use of play, drama and the puppet supports a child in developing compassion and strengthens toddler interaction, learning and well-being (Vygotsky, 1933, 2002; Brèdikytè, 2022).

Children are involved in the research, their opinions and gestures matter (Estola & Puroila, 2013; Viljamaa, 2012). The research follows the GDPR and ethical guidelines (EECERA, 2015; TENK, 2019); permits from guardians and the willingness of toddlers were observed.

Keren Cohen

The David Yellin College of Education, USA

Gender Performance in Robert Wilson's *Shakespeares Sonette*

Robert Wilson's *Shakespeares Sonette* premiered at the Berliner Ensemble in 2009. With a text comprising 25 of the bard's 154 sonnets, the performance transports the spectators into a dreamworld of phantastic images, in which the sonnets are reflected in the American director's poetic visual aesthetics. The stage images draw inspiration not only from the sonnets (with characters like the Dark Lady or the Poet), but also from Shakespeare's dramatic work, including the character of the Fool or the comic tone reminiscent of Shakespearean comedy. Most significantly, gender—a recurring theme in both the sonnets and the comedies—is placed at the heart of the production. Dominated by cross-casting and a thematic preoccupation with gender, *Shakespeares Sonette* alludes to both Elizabethan theatrical practices and the gender disguises characteristic of the plots of Shakespearean comedies. Drawing on Judith Butler's conception of gender as constituted by repeated performative acts, as well as her observation regarding the subversive potential of drag to expose gender's imitative and contingent nature, the paper explores gender performance in the production. The examination focuses on the meeting created in performance between cross-casting and the stylized Wilsonian stage, which does not attempt to imitate external reality and where everyone is overtly and artificially performing. This complex performative process of becoming, which combines cross-casting with the stylized Wilsonian performativity, raises questions about how gender is produced and perceived on and off stage, providing a fresh perspective on the practice of cross-casting which has become ubiquitous in Shakespearean performances in recent decades.

Konstantinos Tsoumpos

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

“The author was just trying to save us from his own sad story”: Embodied Metaphors
and Narrative Prosthesis in Samuel D. Hunter’s *The Whale*

This paper examines Samuel D. Hunter’s *The Whale* (2012) through the lens of the politics of fatness, interrogating the use and representation of the morbidly obese protagonist, Charlie. Central to this exploration is an analysis of how obesity functions within the narrative: is it appropriated as a metaphorical construct that reinforces prevailing mythologies of obesity, pity, and stigma, or does the play contribute to an inclusive and destigmatizing portrayal of fatness? The title itself, laden with metaphorical resonance, raises questions about the symbolic weight of “the whale” and its implications within the narrative. Hunter’s play engages in a complex dialogue with Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851), particularly in how both works grapple with the notion of the whale as an unknowable entity—something vast, incomprehensible, and beyond human perception. In Melville’s novel, the whale is not merely a hunted creature but an enigmatic force of nature, resistant to categorization and imbued with a sense of the divine. Similarly, *The Whale* presents fatness not simply as bodily excess but as something that defies simplistic narratives of morality, punishment, or redemption. This reimagining of fatness aligns with Melville’s depiction of whale oil—not just as a commodity but as a substance rich with symbolic and existential weight. Engaging with David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder’s concept of “narrative prosthesis” (2000)—which theorizes how deviations or disabilities in texts often serve as narrative tools—this paper evaluates the role of Charlie’s body in shaping his interactions with other characters and the plot as a whole. Does his physicality merely serve as a vessel for broader metaphorical or moral discourse, or is his personhood given full narrative agency? By interrogating these dynamics, the analysis seeks to uncover whether *The Whale* perpetuates or challenges dominant cultural narratives surrounding obesity and the politics of representation. Ultimately, this paper sheds light on the interplay between corporeality, narrative function, and social perception, offering a critical reading of how *The Whale* navigates the intersections of obesity, disability, storytelling, and the ethics of representation.

Kristin Fredricksson

London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art (LAMDA), UK

Feminist intradisciplinary improvisation as non-binary machine play

Mycelium, the wood-wide-web, and slime moulds have attracted the attention of artists and thinkers in recent times as examples of brainless intelligent systems. They have been compared to biocomputers or non-binary computer systems by artist, writer and technologist, James Bridle.

Using the experience of working with intradisciplinary improvisation group, Free Women, I consider how our enmeshment of processes from theatre, musical composition, writing and art-making sheds light on the experience of participating in a dispersed intelligence system.

Our improvisations lead us to some unexpected places. We have generated a sort of human AI, where we bring ideas, strategies and practices together and see what emerges. Because improvisation is at the heart of our work, when we perform a piece we have made together, we are uncertain what will happen. So, rather than a binary system where the input dictates the outcome, here the input interacts in a complex enmeshed way that leads towards unexpected new worlds. I discuss our improvisatory and non-binary use of Beckett's *Quad* as a provocation in the first stages of making a new piece. *Quad* is a strict score which nevertheless requires interpretation. We created our own score mingling spatial, physical and musical instructions with a more open-weave texture than *Quad*.

I observe how our works are woven together in the emergent manner of a tapestry or quilt, artworks which were made collectively, typically by women and conclude that Free Women's practice provides an insight into how to weave non-binary machines in the social fabric through intradisciplinary improvisation.

Laura Milburn

University of Birmingham, UK

Brief Encounter and the Multimedia Film Adaptation: Bringing a Classic Film to Life on Stage

In 2008, a multimedia film adaptation was debuted at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre – *Brief Encounter*. Directed and adapted by Emma Rice, the show is based on Noel Coward’s classic 1945 film of the same name (as well as Coward’s one-act play, *Still Life* that the film was inspired by). The reception was mixed, although it earned four Olivier nominations and two Tony nominations and, since 2008, it has been performed around the world before making its most recent turn to the UK and the West End in 2018.

The original play and film both focus on the relationship between the two main middle-class characters, Laura and Alec, but Rice has chosen to broaden the scope of the show by including other minor characters and using them to carry the show musically; they often perform the additional verse and lyrics by Coward which Rice has incorporated into her “musical”. Interestingly, these additional musical additions are songs from Coward’s own musicals. This paper proposes to examine how *Brief Encounter* has become a cultural keystone of contemporary theatre and the relationship between theatre and cinema.

Leigh E. Rich

Georgia Southern University, USA

“He wakes me up, but not himself”: Pinter’s *Alaska* as a Not-So-Funny “No-Memory Play”

In 1982, Harold Pinter’s *A Kind of Alaska* premiered in London. Though typically letting a work speak for itself, Pinter acknowledged the impetus for this one-act play: the decade-long epidemic of *encephalitis lethargica* that began in 1916. Pinter became transfixed by this “medical mystery” after reading neurologist Oliver Sacks’ 1973 book *Awakenings* about those still suffering a half-century later in coma-like states. The experiences of these patients, their families, and physicians fit nicely in Pinter’s oeuvre—linking his (so-called) “comedies of menace” and “memory plays” (or, in this case, a “no-memory play”). Examining recurring Pinteresque themes (even if he and Sacks misconstrued some of the medical details), the three-character *Alaska* explores memory, consciousness, and the self within the messiness of illness, institutionalization, and intimacy. Deborah, now a middle-aged woman whose brother-in-law doctor awakens her with L-DOPA, confronts a bewilderingly changed self, family, and world and so many lost years. Having been neither awake nor asleep, a girl or a woman, alive or dead, she hesitantly concludes: “I think I have the matter in proportion.” Today, post-COVID, Pinter’s play could be read as a Platonic allegory of pandemic policymaking: Deborah, a sleeping public briefly aroused to the dangers of infectious disease; Dr. Hornby, a devoted but impotent public health system caught between patients and policymakers; and sister Pauline, a “witty” and “greedy” political system still wondering: “Shall I tell her lies or the truth?” Pinter’s *Alaska* serves as an object lesson for our persistently pathetic pandemic preparedness and all parties involved.

Lesley Broder

Kingsborough Community College-The City University of New York, USA

Jane Chambers' *A Late Snow*: Offering A Lesbian Reflection Where There Was None

In the first act of *A Late Snow* (1974), Ellie cautions her younger partner against coming out, explaining that the word “lesbian” was used as a scare tactic when she was growing up, a “dictionary” word to frighten families. She warns, “A lesbian was like a vampire: she looked in the mirror and there was no reflection.”¹ The play, which presents the stories of five lesbians stranded in a cabin and their overlapping relationships, was an Off-Broadway success but faced great production difficulties. Though gay characters increased steadily throughout the 1960s, these new openings were open for men. Women did not find the same opportunities and fears surrounded *A Late Snow*, from actors who fled rehearsals or quit, afraid of being blacklisted, to producers who worried that lesbian characters would alienate audiences². Such fears were not unfounded as Chambers lost her own job as a screenwriter after the play opened. In the decade after *A Late Snow* premiered, biases remained as Chambers told a reporter that Hollywood studios had rejected another one of her popular plays with the explanation that audiences “want us to be unhappy and shoot ourselves.”³ This essay contextualizes *A Late Snow* within gay theatre history and 1970s feminist movement. The play took the revolutionary move to anchor gay women’s relationships with each other, not with men, and was thus a landmark production that allowed lesbian artists to see their reflections and create their own onstage.

¹ Jane Chambers. *A Late Snow*. In *Gay Plays: The First Collection*. Ed. William Hoffman. Avon, 1979, 308.

² William Hoffman. “Introduction.” In *Gay Plays: The First Collection*. Ed. William Hoffman. Avon, 1979, X-XI.

³ Alvin Klein. “Play’s Theme: Lesbians without Apology.” *New York Times* (1923-), Feb 08, 1981, p. 1. ProQuest. Web. 10 Jan. 2025

Lindsay Adams Kennedy

Benedictine College, USA

Raping the (Attempted) Rapist: The Bed-Trick as Penance or Perversion?

In this paper, I argue the bed tricks that occur in Middleton's *The Witch* and Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* should be read as rape and require a major re-interpretation to fully engage with the complexities of the fact that both Almachildes and Bertram not only attempt, but are also survivors of, sexual assault. I argue that the cycle of coercion and rape are key to making sense of these works; moments of governmentally sanctioned sexual coercion set into motion these bed trick assaults. Through more deeply considering the physical stage reality of these plays, it becomes clear that critics arguing Early Modern bed tricks against men were read as purely comedic are missing important cultural anxieties and the potential of boy players performing as a woman in the bed-trick to create a kind of "homoerotic frisson" (to borrow Valerie Traub's term). These unique examples of the bed-trick, where men who have attempted to rape women are stripped of their own ability to consent through a bed-trick, are important in part because of how challenging they are for us today—to read, to watch, and to perform. I argue that right now, Angelo and Bertram can speak to problems we still have today with justifying sexual violence used as punishment (as exemplified by jokes about prison rape). Bertram and Almachildes' rapes are not a joke, and they are not justice; it is high time we stop engaging with them as if they are.

Lizzie Conrad Hughes

Shakespeare Institute, UK

Repeated Cues: Comparing Early Modern/Restoration Performance with Modern

This paper will argue that repeated cues are an intentional texture of performance, that needs to be rehabilitated into modern performance.

Repeated cues are what they say they are: a cue that is given more than once during a scene. Repeated cues create a unique texture of performance, with stutters, jars, and a risky yet truly human experience of discontinuity.

Invisible in all environments except the cue-based parts that were the expected study medium for Early Modern and Restoration players, repeated cues are both deliberately written in, and a necessary dynamic of performance. It will break with the smoothness of current performance, but why not?

My research confirms that repeated cues are intentional and were deliberately preserved by Early Modern and Restoration players, even after rehearsal and repeated performances.

My experience with cue-based performance confirms that, provided players are familiar with the quality of repeated cues in performance, and are prepared to say lines more than once, or not at all, repeated cue sequences always play out successfully.

Yet they are not part of modern performance, as modern theatre works on a whole-text basis, and this fascinating and infuriating element has been lost.

Evidence will be taken from Merchant of Venice, Romeo and Juliet, Henry 4th Part 1, and Winter's Tale, supported by evidence parts preserved in the Macklin/Medbourne Part Book (Harvard Library) & the Orlando Furioso part (Dulwich College Archive), as well as professional experience of cue-based performance.

Luciana da Costa Dias

Universidade de Brasília, Brazil

From the Metaphor of *Theatrum Mundi* to Artaud's *Theatre and Its Double*: the Crisis of Representation and the Western Drama Tradition

In modern times, the metaphor of a *Theatrum Mundi* (“Theatre of the World”), which fables reality by comparing it to the stage—or a dream—is well-known, as seen in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1603) and Calderón de la Barca's *The Great Theatre of the World* (1634). René on *First Philosophy* (1641) consolidates doubt as a cornerstone of modernity, even questioning the existence of the world, through a distinctly theatrical—albeit philosophical—narrative. Thus, this metaphor acquires deeper implications, particularly when considered alongside the ‘crisis of representation’ that permeates contemporary philosophy and literary critique. This paper investigates the intersections of this crisis with theatre—or with Western Drama Tradition. At the end of modernity’s historical arc, we encounter the 20th-century avantgarde movements (such as Surrealism and abstract art in general), which amplify this crisis by rejecting referentiality. Derrida, in *The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation* (1978), frames Artaud as a key diagnostician of the West’s crisis: *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938) seems to reverse the *Theatrum Mundi* metaphor, exposing how theatre replicates modernity's logocentric, metaphysical worldview. Artaud suggests the modern stage mirrors the metaphysical structure of the world, becoming its “double,” as reality—like a dream or like a hall of mirrors—already reflects theatre. Through a comparative analysis of these philosophical and theatrical contexts, this paper explores how the crisis of representation destabilises theatre’s historical role and offers a radical rethinking of its purpose in contemporary contexts.

Mads Golding

Loyola University, USA

The Ghost of Christmas Past: An Analysis of Anglo-American Adaptation in Blake Montgomery's revival of Charles Dickens's Live Christmas Readings

For Charles Dickens, theatre was an emotional lifeline, a financial necessity, and the cause of his untimely death. In the final decade of his life, Dickens famously performed a variety of live readings, which he toured in America. These readings included excerpts from *A Christmas Carol* and an infamous excerpt from *Oliver Twist* entitled *Sikes and Nancy*, which were performed in sold out theatres. More than 200 years later, *A Christmas Carol* remains a theatrical holiday classic, whereas the live reading of *Sikes and Nancy* is now a source of academic fascination and biographical drama but is by no means commercially ubiquitous. The violence of the latter show ultimately drove Dickens into a lethal stroke. In his one man show; *Charles Dickens begrudgingly Performs 'A Christmas Carol! Again'*, Blake Montgomery referred to a variety of titles used in Dickens's performances. However, he refrained from delving into the dire financial straits that necessitated the tour in the first place and did not refer at all to the famously grizzly murder scene that caused women to faint in the aisles. Through a comparative analysis of Dickens's re-published prompt scripts, reviews from American journalists, and Montgomery's 2024 production, this paper will interrogate how cultural difference, time, and the sheen of celebrity have changed Dickens's work in the eyes of the contemporary American public. Further, it will reflect on the changes that arise from the process of cultural translation that are invariably present in adaptation.

Mahana Narimani

Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, UK

Censorship and Contemporary Iranian Theatre

In this practice research, I investigate the mechanisms of censorship in Iranian theatre following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the impact of censorship on theatre practitioners, particularly women, and the strategies they employ to navigate and challenge various forms of censorship imposed by different institutions at different times. By analysing performances through the combination of Hannah Arendt's account of the origins of totalitarianism and Václav Havel's concept of a post-totalitarian regime, I can explore the artists' reactions and personal responsibilities, the consequences of their artistic choices, and how they both reflect and resist manipulation, which extends beyond Iran's borders. Reflecting on my experiences with censorship during my career in Iran from 2009 to 2023 and witnessing the ongoing struggles of ordinary women and female artists against the fundamentalist rules imposed after 1979, highlights the necessity of an auto-ethnographical approach. This approach is essential for understanding the impact of censorship on artists and the suppression of women in a male-dominated environment, both in Iran and the UK.

I will also employ a combination of critical and creative methodologies to investigate the relationship between censorship and theatre. By utilising the analysis of theoretical frameworks, historical contexts, and existing discourses around the subject, in combination with performances, I will reflect on the outcomes of the critical methods and interpret the aspects of research that are difficult to articulate through words. The study will examine how institutions of power and religion influence the artists' perspectives on women, their issues, and their stories.

Marc Palma

University of Arizona, USA

The Devil's Disciple & The Rider - Waite Taro

In George Bernard Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple*, Dick Dudgeon is sentenced to death by a military court of English officers during the American War of Independence. The third act of the melodrama is marked by the approach of Death (gradually as in the 14th-century medieval morality *Everyman*, or suddenly as in Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*) to Shaw's Diabolonian hero. Death takes the form of the gibbet in which the British army plans to hang Dick Dudgeon.

This essay will analyse the dramatic movement of oncoming Death in Shaw's melodrama in the light of the imagery of the Rider-Waite tarot deck. As designed and painted by Pamela Colman Smith, the XIII Death Arcana reflects a specific manifestation of the Jungian archetype of Death for late Victorian England. Both Colman Smith and Shaw portray Death not only as a physical fact but also as a metaphorical event. For both visionaries, Death acts as a revealer of hidden truths. The application of Rider-Waite XIII to Shaw's play reveals the archetype of Death as the spiritual force that animates the action of *The Devil's Disciple*.

This essay will further analyse Shaw's application of the Devil in relation to Smith's, with both interpretations of the Devil being depicted as the symbol that the system creates to justify its own petrification. Through the lens of Smith, it becomes evident that the Devil that Dick and the townspeople of Websterbridge subscribe to is nothing more than smoke and mirrors.

This panel will present essays that will identify and compare the tarot imagery of Colman Smith's major arcana with main characters in Shaw's plays by considering them both to be parallel manifestations of Jungian archetypes that flourished in late Victorian England.

Maria Moreno Domènech

Universitat de Barcelona

Variations on the theme of transgression: a comparison of *Design for Living* and *Els somnàmbuls*

Noël Coward's *Design for Living* was published in the United Kingdom and the United States in 1933. The play was premiered at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in New York on 24 January of the same year, winning praise from critics and theatregoers alike (Jackson 2025). It was not until 25 January 1939, however, that it was performed at the Haymarket Theatre in London. Divided into three acts and set in the present day, the play is set in a studio in Paris, a flat in London, and a penthouse in New York.

Inspired by *Design for Living*, the play *Els Somnàmbuls* by the Catalan playwright Llàtzer Garcia was first performed at the Sala Planeta in Girona on 11 October 2019. The plot follows the broad lines of Coward's love story and its background of artistic success. The play has fewer characters and is set in present-day Girona, Barcelona, and Madrid. The aim of this paper is to compare the two works, focusing in particular on three areas: Garcia's explicit treatment of the distance in time between the two plays; his adaptation of the story to a different geographical context; and his more open handling of certain aspects, such as bi- or homosexuality, which are only alluded to in Coward's work. In short, the comparison aims to highlight the different mechanisms at play in the works and to understand how the nature of transgression has evolved over time.

Marie Fiévé

Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

Narrative We-Voice, Reliability and Moral Agency: Forced Entertainment's Stage Adaptation of Ágota Kristóf's Novel *The Notebook*

This research examines the role of we-narration and collective storytelling in theatre, focusing on Forced Entertainment's non-mimetic stage adaptation of Ágota Kristóf's *The Notebook*. In Kristóf's novel, the continuous use of the "performative we", as defined by Natalya Bekhta, establishes a collective narrator who speaks, thinks, and feels as one. Through the lens of postclassical and transmedial narratology, this study investigates how this impersonal collective voice is transposed from text to performance and the ethical implications that arise in the process.

The analysis explores the reliability, accountability, and moral agency of the we-voice in both the novel and its stage adaptation. Forced Entertainment's postdramatic staging employs non-mimetic techniques, with the actors reading the text aloud in ways that highlight the artificiality and unreliability of collective speech. Thus, just like Kristóf's novel, the adaptation underscores how the we-voice can serve to justify collective crimes and evade personal responsibility.

However, while Kristóf's novel examines the psychological mechanisms behind collective justification of violence, Forced Entertainment's stage adaptation takes a confrontational approach, directly implicating the audience as complicit witnesses. Their performance foregrounds the unsettling power of collective storytelling and critiques groupthink. By exposing the moral ambiguities inherent in the staging of a we-voice, this paper contributes to broader discussions on narratology, adaptation, and the ethics of performance.

Marissa Kennedy

University of Maryland, USA

Cutting the Yellow Ribbon: Race, Legacy, and Resistance in Ijames's *Exploration of Martha Washington*

James Ijames' play, *The Most Spectacularly Lamentable Trial of Miz Martha Washington*, is strikingly relevant to contemporary American politics and the nation's nostalgia for historical figures. Among these figures is Martha Washington, the first "First Lady," whose role as the wife and confidant of George Washington has established her as a symbol of strength and perseverance. As 21st-century Americans engage in debates over educational content, monument removals, and the true intentions of the Founding Fathers, we are also seeing a rise in book bans related to race, sexuality, and LGBTQ representation. These pressing issues open discussions about America's successes, its ties to slavery, and the individuals who played pivotal roles in shaping its foundation. Ijames' play probes these complexities by placing "the Mother of America" on trial. This paper examines specifically Ijames's use of anachronism and juxtaposition and argues that Ijames' irreverent and humorous retelling of American History not only builds from the rich traditions of Black American Theatre but also disrupts conventional views of identity and historical figures. By placing Martha Washington on trial, the significance of her character challenges our understanding of American history. It compels us to confront what we know against what we want to believe. Through this insightful narrative, Ijames not only provokes critical thought but also invites audiences to question the very foundations of their historical understanding while sparking dialogue about race, power, and representation.

Mark Scott

University of Arkansas, USA

“Extreme laughter”: *Titus Andronicus*, Trauma, and Early Modern Theatre

From vomiting and fainting to cardiac arrest, modern productions of Shakespeare tragedy *Titus Andronicus* invariably provoke extreme physiological responses from theatregoers, phenomenon described by Lucy Bailey, a recent director of the play, as “rather wonderful”: “That people can connect so much to the characters and emotion that they have such a visceral effect.” While the play’s potential to traumatize spectators is welcomed, even celebrated, by directors, its capacity to amuse has proved more troubling. Adhering to Philip Sidney’s proscription of the mixing of “horne Pipes and Funeralls”, productions of *Titus* often cut the text to prevent unwanted laughter erupting in the auditorium. If such policing of audience response in pursuit of generic purity is misguided, it nevertheless raises questions similar to those asked by the play itself: how were early modern theatregoers affected by their experiences at the playhouse, and why did they return to see plays like *Titus* again and again? I argue that *Titus* is best understood as both a document of and vehicle for the cultural working through of the collective trauma experienced by English early moderners in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. I explain spectators’ intense demand for this play specifically, and commercial theatre more broadly, by turning to Dominick LaCapra’s theorization of “acting out” and “working through” as overlapping post-traumatic coping mechanisms and suggesting that *Titus* provided a potentially therapeutic–yet potentially dangerous–theatrical experience. I explore how spectators’ responses–registered via laughter or applause–might both simulate post-traumatic experience and offer a way to move through trauma.

Martha Johnson

CEA CAPA Education Abroad, UK

About Face: A Comparative Exploration of the Evolution of David Henry Hwang's play
Yellow Face from 2007 to 2024

David Henry Hwang's 2007 play *Yellow Face* represents his humorous foray into the complexities of race and his most overt exploration of the topic. It was also the first time he chose to write himself as character, a plot device he would return to in later works. The play was a critical success, winning an Obie and getting a Pulitzer Prize nomination, but never moved to Broadway and was not necessarily a commercial success. The play's Broadway revival in the fall of 2024 marked an important moment in theatre history as a critical and commercial success as well as a "star vehicle" for Asian American actor Daniel Dae Kim. Both productions were directed by Leigh Silverman. In an interview in 9/24, she shared her reflections and discussed the societal changes that informed her approach to the revival. In this paper, the changes to the script and casting as explained by both Silverman and Hwang will be examined as a reflection of the state of race discussions in the US at the time it was written and today and the differences in its success and reception will be considered.

Mary Christian

Middle Georgia State University, USA

Medical Mummery: Shaw, Molière, and the Doctors

In his last play, *The Imaginary Invalid* (1673), Molière makes Béralde, the play's genial *raisonneur*, declare: "I don't know of a more absurd piece of mummery, of anything more ridiculous, than a man who takes upon himself to cure another man."¹ More than two hundred years later, Bernard Shaw pointed out the grim side of this ridicule: "Molière saw through the doctors; but he had to call them in just the same."² In *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), his own satire on the medical profession, Shaw included several references to Molière's comedy and aimed his critiques at many of the same targets, especially patients' credulity, doctors' tendency toward jargon-laden debate, and the vastly unequal standards of care for rich and poor. In making the physician his protagonist, however, Shaw shifted the argument regarding medical reform. He presented doctors not only as exploiters of patients' ignorance and desperation, but also as victims of an economic system that penalizes honesty and a culture that will not allow them to admit error. Where Molière's play holds up individual scepticism as the only antidote to media manipulation, Shaw calls for systemic economic reform as a means of promoting health for sceptics and believers alike.

¹ Molière, *The Imaginary Invalid*, trans. Charles Heron Wall (The Floating Press, 2009), 92.

² Bernard Shaw, Preface to *The Doctor's Dilemma*, in *Collected Plays with their Prefaces*, ed. Dan H. Laurence, vol. 3 (London, Bodley Head, 1971), 230

Mary Lutze

University of Arkansas, USA

Experiencing Impairment as Spiritual Gain: John Milton's Portrayal of Blindness in *Samson Agonistes*

The seventeenth century influx of varying religious interpretations of scripture impacted every aspect of life and society, including introducing the conceptual depiction of what we now term "Disability Gain." Various depictions of disability in seventeenth-century poetry, prose, and drama humanize the experience of living with impairments and offer a counterargument to pejorative interpretations of disability. Rather than describing sensory deprivation in negative terms, many seventeenth-century works began to offer radical counterarguments that bristled against sixteenth-century uniformity of thinking in the following ways: by expressing a desire to experience sensory impairment, by often rejecting the interpretation of sensory disability as divine punishment or mandate after contemplating on the religious benefits of debility, and by affirming the residual agency in the blind and deaf. In this paper, I highlight just one of these works: John Milton's closet drama *Samson Agonistes*. This play, following the titular character, demonstrates a changing ideological framework that allowed for the countercultural contemplation of debility as a potential spiritual benefit. In *Samson Agonistes*, Samson's blindness is not associated with a state of universal fallenness; furthermore, his blindness is not described in terms of God's wrath. Contrary to popular religious thought in the early modern era, Samson's blindness is situated primarily as a consequence of free will rather than a consequence of a postlapsarian state. Even more striking-and more countercultural-Samson's blindness becomes an asset in the downfall of his Philistine captors. Furthermore, Samson's blindness becomes a spiritual asset because it allows for his gaining new recognition of the truth; it was through sight that he was tempted and most misled by Dalila's beauty, and it is in his blindness that he gains newfound wisdom and direction. What *Samson Agonistes*-and other works like it-suggest by their heterodox depictions of sensory impairment is that there was a subsection of early modern society that "imagine[d] an alternative understanding of early modern bodies and minds that both welcome[d] and need[ed] disability" (Hobgood and Wood 40) and-roughly three hundred years before sustained academic dialogue in disability studies was first raised-began to explore the compassionate, bioethical themes that have become the foundation of contemporary disability studies.

Mary Mazzilli

University of Essex, UK

Martin Crimp in the company of European Nobel Laureates, Jon Fosse and Elfriede Jelinek: A comparison

Martin Crimp has long been associated with European Continental theatre (Inan and Ayse 100) but no study has ever attempted to compare his work with the European greats and recent Nobel Laureate dramatists, such as Jon Fosse and Elfriede Jelinek. This presentation will attempt such a comparison and by doing so it will assess Crimp's links with European theatre a granular level by focusing on specific case studies. The comparison between Crimp's *The Country* and Fosse's *Someone is Coming Home* is possible because both plays deal with a twisted love triangle, set in the backdrop of a rural location. Despite the major differences, the comparison between Crimp's *Fewer Emergencies* and Jelinek's *Charges (the Supplicants)* will present important similarities between their work. This chapter will argue that the main commonality among the three can be found in the role that the text plays in the work of these playwrights, by contending against the idea suggested by David Barnett that Crimp has accepted "the European institutional gauntlet" whereby his work is "only one element of the theatrical process" (125). By focusing on language, the written word, the play text as the centre of the theatre of all three dramatists, I will not only re-evaluate Crimp's theatre but also change the understanding of Continental European writers, within the context of a director-centred theatre, and that of Hans-Thies Lehmann's Postdramatic Theatre.

Mateusz Godlewski

University of Warsaw, Poland

Andrei Tarkovsky as a Theatre Director: Filmmaker's Approach to Hamlet

Andrei Tarkovsky, one of the most celebrated film directors of the 20th century, had only a brief episode of working in theatre. With an exception of an opera, he directed one stage production-*Hamlet* in 1977. It has never gained much critical attention: Tarkovski an scholars tend to mention it as a rather unremarkable episode in juxtaposition with his cinematic works, and in the history of Russian reception of Shakespeare it is overshadowed by its more impactful predecessors. It is, I argue, a regrettable oversight. In this paper I juxtapose Tarkovsky's work in theatre with his approach to filmmaking and art in general. Cinema has always been the primary medium for him, and Tarkovsky wrote extensively about his understanding of the cinematic art in his book *Sculpting in Time* as well as in his diaries. He emphasised the ideas of "time within time" and the supremacy of nature, which in his understanding are possible only in film. That is why, as Maya Turovskaya observed (1995), theatre seems to be in contradiction with his artistic *credo*. Tarkovsky's writings, however, disclose not only his profound respect for the possibilities of theatre, but also his personal desire to direct Shakespeare's tragedy. Tarkovsky had to find new means of artistic expression while at the same time staying faithful to his principles. In this paper, I explore the artistic decisions and techniques Tarkovsky-an artist committed to the cinematic language of cinema-made in his production of *Hamlet* and which made it a unique event in the history of Soviet theatre.

Matthew Franks

University of Warwick, UK

Life in the UK and the performance of citizenship

When, in 2005, the UK Government introduced *Life in the United Kingdom*, its 45-minute, 24-multiple-choice-question computerized naturalization test and accompanying study materials, it continued a tradition of using media to instruct migrants on the proper conduct of British citizens going back to at least the 1940s. Drawing over half a dozen plays, this paper asks: why have playwrights featured the *Life in the UK* handbook and other study materials as props and even characters on stage? Why have theatre companies staged taking the test as though migrants were performing in a clown act, queuing for a fairground attraction, or competing on a gameshow? More fundamentally, why has theatre—rather than visual art, poetry, novels, films, or television dramas—been the artform to grapple with the *Life in the UK*?

In one strand of dramas, migrant characters use the *Life in the UK* handbook to pass the test. Yet a different strand of dramas—all devised, written, and performed by companies of migrants—represent the test as impassable. Comparing David Edgar's *Testing the Echo* (2008), an example of the former, with Legal Aliens Theatre's *Ali in Wonder (Eng)Land* (2023), an example of the latter, this paper proposes that these contrasting outcomes reflect different responses to a testing regime that asks migrants to perform the role of "good citizen." Beyond representing immigrants' mediatized experiences, these plays challenge the lack of the migrant perspective in the wider mass media. Ultimately, this paper situates these plays within a longer history of theatrical responses to state messaging.

Maureen Wolloshin

University for the Creative Arts, UK

Feministing free improvisation using invitation scores

This presentation argues for the use of invitation scores in multidisciplinary improvising formations. They are feministing tools which flatten social and performative restrictive hierarchies and inspire improvised responses while offering a helpful frame from which to begin.

Invitation scores are intended to facilitate rather than direct a performance which has an element of free improvisation. The amount of improvisation may vary. They do not require technical prowess on the part of the performer when conventional instruments are utilised. The contemporary idea of an invitation score is a direct descendant of the inclusive and liberating approach intended by Yoko Ono, Pauline Oliveros (*Sonic Meditations*, 1974) and free improviser John Stevens (*Search and Reflect*, 1985). These scores have an anti-virtuoso intention at their heart. In this way, the invitation score is a way to initiate free improvisation from a multidisciplinary formation who may wish for the articulation of a shared starting point rather than an open beginning to their soundings and happenings. As such they act against the unspoken masculine triumvirate power structure in the ontology of performer, listener, composer and facilitate a feminist levelling of the hierarchy within this.

I briefly examine their use by Free Women, a multidisciplinary improvising collective I belong to, and by me and Kurdish cellist Khabat Abas in Canterbury, UK, and Iraq.

Meenakshi Ponnuswami

Bucknell University, USA

Pan African Turns in Contemporary African American Drama

How do contemporary African American playwrights view Africa? Drawing upon historical analyses of the shifting contours of Pan Africanism and Black internationalism, my essay will explore how two recent American plays approach modern African sexual politics: Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* (2007) and Danai Gurira's *Eclipsed* (2009). In the tradition of verbatim and testimonial theatre, these powerful feminist plays illuminate sexual violence in war-torn regions, affirming solidarity with disempowered African women.

At first sight, Nottage and Gurira part ways with Black women's theatre of the Civil Rights and Black Arts Movements, in which the idea of Africa offers political and cultural refuge and inspiration. Plays such as Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, and Alice Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness* explore the idealism of African anti-colonial movements and the motivating power of Pan Africanism.

However, women playwrights of that era do not address the role of African women in African struggles and seem doubtful that Pan Africanism offers inspiration for Black American women. Interestingly, no African women characters are depicted in the play mentioned above, suggesting that African women have no voice, or none that American women can hear.

Is such scepticism echoed in contemporary American plays that tackle African sexual violence?¹ My paper will explore how Nottage and Gurira navigate their own complex subject positions as first-world writers attuned to the politics of historiography (who tells the story and how) and controversies concerning human rights, cultural relativism and neo-imperialism. In plays by African American women, can African women speak and act for themselves? And who hear and see them?

¹ My essay will also reference, in passing, contemporary plays which suggest a different approach, such as Suzan-Lori Parks's *Venus*, Katori Hall's *Our Lady of Kibeho*, and Jocelyn Bioh's *School Girls*; or, the *African Mean Girls Play*.

Meg Nelson

Florida State University, USA

Dancing Through Life: Elphaba and G(a)linda's Liminal Dance of Vulnerability in *Wicked*, Part 1

The highly anticipated film *Wicked, Part 1*, directed by Jon M. Chu, has taken the world by storm. The friendship between characters Elphaba and G(a)linda has been remarked upon quite incessantly since the original Broadway musical's inception, but what I found to be one of the most intimate scenes of the new film was the "Ozdust Duet" portion of the song "Dancing through Life", in which Galinda (prior to the name change to 'Glinda') and Elphaba begin to dance together in the middle of the Ozdust Ballroom.

The intimacy between the two women throughout this choreography is undeniable, as tears stream down Elphaba's face and she nearly stops her movements until Galinda tenderly touches the side of her face and gives her a shy smile. What follows is the rest of the Shiz University students and other Ozdust attendees joining in on what was first laughable interpretative dance steps. While this moment is essential to the story of Galinda and Elphaba's friendship, and it is triumphantly cheesy in the redemption arc of these two characters who used to loathe each other, what I am more interested in is how this sequence of choreography creates a liminal space for both of the women to exist in, particularly Elphaba.

The examination of the choreography of the "Ozdust Duet" lies in the emotional "middle" of the characters' journey. They don't have the advantage of their voices or words to articulate how they feel, nor do they have any of their friends' support to help them decide what their next move is, literally or figuratively speaking. What Elphaba does here is vulnerable she places her body on display (and it could be argued that leading up to this point in the story, her body has never NOT been on extreme display in her differing green skin colour) in front of her peers as an avatar through which she can express the deeper parts of herself-her shyness, her weirdness, and the multiplicity of feelings that she hides so deeply inside of her. She uses her body as a site of performance to communicate a façade of vulnerability because she can no longer keep her feelings inside. Building upon Uri McMillan's work *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* I plan to explore further the "middle" of Elphaba's journey and her specific use of her body as a site of performance, spectacle, and connection.

Melinda Marks

University of California, USA

Into Thin Air - The Tempest, Ariel, and the Absent/Present Body

Devising the means to make magic “real” onstage is a great process by which to do a few things. One of these is to trust your audience-rely on their suspensions of disbelief; enlist their imaginations to nurture the seeds sown by a play’s suggestion of the impossible becoming manifest. Another is to devise the means by which the audience does not need to imagine at all and showing them exactly the kind of magic you want them to see. And, of course, as ever, there is the vast and murky realm of the performative, suggestive, imaginative, subjective *in-between*.

Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* presents some core challenges related to the in-between. This paper will address a few of the possible intersections between the play’s subjects, objects, and enactors of power (magic and otherwise) by examining two different interpretations of the magical character (and body) of Ariel. One of these was played by Mark Quartley in Gregory Doran’s 2016 production at the Royal Shakespeare Company. The other was played by Asha Kelley in a 2021 production directed by the writer of this paper at the hundred-seat Pear Theatre in Mountain View, California. While very different in scale and scope, both productions prioritized Ariel’s magicality through technically intermediated reorientations of the actor’s bodies during live performance. This paper examines these two distinct interpretations of Ariel, and how the character’s corporeality might (or might not) confront both the power/s of the magical and the powerlessness of the abject[ed] or non-visible body.

Michael N. Robinson

Claremont Graduate University, USA

Adapting August: Looking at the Transfer of *The Piano Lesson* from Stage to Film

Just before the theatrical release of the film adaptation of August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, Dr. Kimberly Ellis, Wilson's niece and executive director of Pittsburgh's Historic Hill Institute (made famous by Wilson), presented the keynote address at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASAALH). There, she praised writer Virgil Williams and director/co-writer Malcolm Washington for crafting a cinematic work from the original play that "engaged both the next generation and elders." Washington would remark in a later interview that he and Williams approached the play "some days with a pickaxe, others with the soft bristles of a small brush delicately unearthing precious gems." The idea was clear: transforming the in-person vitality of a play to the very different dynamics of both the big and little screen—Netflix was the money behind the creatives; streaming the work was a given—required both cutting into the deep tissue of the play and a deft hand to preserve and bring out *The Piano Lesson*'s subtle and brilliantly nuanced notes. This presentation analyses the results—what was gained, what was lost—in the reshaping of the nearly forty-year-old *The Piano Lesson* for new media (film and streaming) and new audiences. In addition to comparing the theatrical script against the original play, the presentation will be informed by the two previous film adaptations of *Fences* (2010) and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (2020) as well as Hallmark television's adaptation of *The Piano Lesson* (1995).

Michael Punter, Martha Johnson, Esther Baker & Neil Grutchfield

University of Minnesota, USA

True Synergy: Staging the Prisoner's Experience

For the last 5 years, the UK's Synergy Theatre Project has teamed up with the University of Minnesota's third-year cohort of BFA actors to create three short works on criminal justice at CEA CAPA's London studio theatre.

UMN students work with a mentor—a former prisoner—to tell their story in three short acts. The process takes place over a semester in London, culminating in the sharing of stories with an invited audience, and a reflection upon the former prisoner's journey into, and out of, the criminal justice system.

This paper will document the process and how it has evolved over time, beginning initially with a forum-theatre inspired approach to one that encourages a more abstract sense of reflection on the core themes of theatre and criminal justice.

The process and performance serve to highlight differences not just in British and American philosophies to criminal justice, but also in the production of new works of theatre. The result is an ongoing synergy of ideas and a celebration of theatre as a subject of study abroad.

Michael Yawney

Florida International University, USA

Silent Women: Wordless Response to Assault in Shakespearean Drama

Three characters in Shakespearean drama who experience near or actual sexual assault, are later silent at key points in their story. Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, does not respond when offered marriage. Marina in *Pericles* is silent when engaged by her father to marry a man she talked out of assaulting her. Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* cannot speak at all because her assailants have cut out her tongue.

The contrasts between how Shakespeare uses silence to dramatize the outrage of these women, illustrates his evolving understanding of assault and presentation of female characters.

The silence also provides an opportunity for modern theatre artists to reconsider and revise Shakespeare's presentation of sexual trauma. Their reinterpretations provide a frame to consider our contemporary attitudes toward assault.

Michel Büch & Lydia Preusch

University of Hamburg, Germany

Myth as Riverbed: Tracing the Performativity of Adaptation, Absence, Universalist
Enclosures in Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*

Transposing central themes and motifs from the Orpheus myth into the present, Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* (2003)—adapted into an opera in 2020—operates on the premise that mythological material retains a timeless, universal resonance, enabling a postmodern yet humanist engagement with themes of love, family, and death on the contemporary stage. In a 'feminist twist,' *Eurydice*—traditionally a mere cipher within Orpheus's quest—is reimagined and endowed with a flexible kind of subjectivity in the postmodern vein. This shift in focus reorients the play's dramatic emphasis from Orpheus's journey to *Eurydice*'s perspective. Viewing adaptation with Linda Hutcheon as a genre in its own right, this paper considers the adaptation of myth specifically, addressing the genre-specific implications and complications. Drawing on Sylvia Wynter and Jaye A. Williams, it interrogates the aesthetic consequences, ideological stakes, and performative dimensions of an assumed *conditio humana* on the theatre stage, which ignores the historical contingencies and structural givens that determine who is recognized as a subject within this humanity. The focus is specifically on the antiblack undercurrents of modernity. Through a symptomatic close reading of select motifs in *Eurydice*, this paper critically engages with Ruhl's poetic dramaturgy, recognizing its artistic depth while highlighting the cultural specificity of ideas about love, family, and death—ideas often overlooked, obscured, and obliterated by the universalizing force of any mythical adaptation and its implied claim to universality.

Mike Punter, Aaron Parson, Kris Overend & Vic Cholmondeley

CEACAPA, UK

A Special Relationship: Working in Partnership with the Royal Shakespeare Company
and the University of Minnesota/CEACAPA

Hear from the RSC and study abroad organisation, CEACAPA two years into a five-year collaboration. How they have kicked off, curated and co-developed the partnership to give students access to the engine room of the RSC, and an industry & skills focussed programme. In addition to the discussion, this session will also feature a practical workshop demonstrating the RSC rehearsal room pedagogy with Associate Learning Practitioner & Director Aaron Parsons, who has led the programme in these first two years.

Miranda Zent

University of Montana West, USA

Svengali's Resurrection: Mesmerism, Myth, and Performance

Svengali originated in George Du Maurier's 1894 novel, *Trilby*, framed as nefarious mesmerist. He has appeared on stage and screen for over a century, performed by icons including Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, John Barrymore, and Peter O'Toole. Although the novel faded into relative obscurity for modern readers, Svengali has assumed his own mythos. He is part of our lexicon, invoked to describe a shadowy puppet master who hijacks minds—but modern audiences know little about his origins or his character. Our myopic understanding of Svengali as a sinister puppet master is hackneyed and empty; it neglects his miraculous healing ability, his sage talents as a teacher, and the soulful obsession that is the source of his magic, his orphic music.

In his review of a performance of *Trilby* at the Haymarket Theatre, Bernard Shaw said, "Svengali is not a villain," noting that *Trilby*'s melodramatic staging omits Svengali's masterful abilities as a healer and teacher. Our modern misunderstanding of Svengali results in part from a century of performances that revel in Svengali's villainy, along with Du Maurier's abhorrent caricature of him as a villainous Jew. This presentation will penetrate these obfuscations to challenge Svengali's mythology and reclaim his authentic magic. Svengali's mesmerist practice and character arc are reconsidered through lenses of shamanic performance, the wounded healer archetype, Jerzy Grotowski's work with the Polish Laboratory Theatre, and Federico García Lorca's *Duende: Play and Theory*, to unveil this enduring character's rhapsodic motivations born in ancient magic, sublime sacrifice, chthonic sound, and artistic legacy.

Miriam Chirico

Eastern Connecticut State University, USA

Internal Musical Landscapes: A Strange Loop

Theatre is not typically associated with headspace—i.e. the internal landscape of the self. Interiority is difficult to stage and even more challenging for an audience to follow; consider the performative difficulty of Eugene O'Neill's 1928 fraught masterpiece *Strange Interlude*. Enter Michael R. Jackson's Pulitzer-and-Tony-Award winning work, *A Strange Loop* (2020), a meta-musical that dramatizes the internal experience of his leading figure, named "Usher" after his job, as a playwright who is writing a musical, also called *A Strange Loop*. Usher's character is divided into contradictory selves and these selves are characterized in various ways: at times intersectional, reflecting Usher's multiple identities as Black, gay, artistic, and feminist; at other times relational, particularly in conversation with his parents; and finally, as *co-opted*, when Usher borrows identities from pop-cultural artists as diverse as Tyler Perry and Liz Phair. The musical score amplifies the plot in two ways: first, it unifies the multiple selves through the ensemble numbers and secondly, it underscores the recursive nature of Usher's self. Rather than move the plot progressively forward as in most musicals, the musical scenes are thematic, allusive and repetitive. The strength of Jackson's play lies in its powerful and unique dramaturgical ability to depict from a first-person perspective the loop-like, endlessly referential quality of the self. This paper will examine Jackson's dramaturgy as well as how he draws upon Douglas Hofstadter's cognitive construction of the self in his book *I Am A Strange Loop* (2007).

Nancy C. Jones

University of Kentucky, USA

Subverting through Soliloquy: How Molière Anticipated Stand-Up Comedy

This paper examines Molière's use of monologues and direct engagement with his audience as a critical technique that positioned his comic methods as a precursor to modern stand-up comedy. Beginning with *L'Étourdi* and *Mascarille*, the character he portrayed whose monologues dominate the play, Molière showcased his ability to blend improvisational energy with structured humour. These early speeches establish a rapport with his audience that he capitalized on in *La Critique de l'École des Femmes*, a performed riposte to those who hoped to suppress his earlier play *L'École de Femmes*. Molière's staged conversations echo modern stand-up comedians' use of crowd work to engage and provoke the audience. In the opening scene of *Le Festin de Pierre* (more commonly known as *Dom Juan*) Molière took these comic techniques further with a monologue that sets the stage for the critique of libertinage launched by his censors. By using onstage characters as stand-ins for both comic and spectator, Molière anticipates the dialogic nature of stand-up, where performers craft humour around the immediacy of the moment. I argue that Molière provides an early blueprint for the interactive and topical humour that defines stand-up comedy. His performances and texts reflect a theatrical form where comic artistry and subversive critique merge in ways that parallel modern stand-up comics.

Nancy Mỹ Nghi La

Queen's University, Canada

Crippling Up' to the Role: Casting and Disability Aesthetics in Theatrical Productions

When Shakespeare's Globe announced that Michelle Terry will play Richard in the company's 2024 *Richard III* production, the announcement triggered a wave of criticism against the production company and Terry. Terry's *Richard III* broke the recent precedent of having a disabled actor play Richard, set by recent *Richard III* productions that cast Mat Fraser, Kate Mulvaney, and Arthur Hughes—all actors with visible disabilities—as Shakespeare's most well-known disabled/disfigured tyrant. The reactions that audiences, production companies, and activist groups had toward the announcement pointed to the theatre industry and the public's grapple with the ethics of casting, especially casting for roles that fall outside of abled-bodied norms. Informed by this wave of reactions, I propose an alternative approach that involves a departure from viewing disability as a "narrative prosthesis", where disabled bodies are used "as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power" (Mitchell and Snyder, 224). Instead, I argue for an embrace of Tobin Siebers' "disability aesthetics," where disabled characters are intentionally represented by disabled performance artists as desirable artistic subjects, and this intentionality transforms what the audience perceive as disability on stage (149). My paper proposes that production companies must go beyond the disabled/abled binary we often find on stage and towards a theatre practice where disability is pursued as something with aesthetic values, and performance theatres are transformed into spaces where audiences witness how "fragility trumps strength, sickness outlasts health, loss overwhelms wholeness, and disability defines the human condition" (Siebers, 151).

Nate Ferguson

University Wisconsin-Madison, USA

A Modern Stone Age: Friedrich Wolf and the Weimar Post-Apocalyptic

In 1921, Friedrich Wolf —medical doctor, activist, and also incidentally playwright— premiered his first comedy, entitled *The Black Sun*. Though a comedy, it is one well-suited to the bleak times in which it was played; it concerns a respectable middle-class man who sleeps through the apocalypse, like Rip van Winkle, and is surprised to find himself worshipped as an idol by the new humanity when he wakes up in a world bombed back to prehistory. The post-apocalypse is a common setting in media today, but in 1921 it has few precedents, and many of those are tales of the world's destruction, and not what happens after. At the same time, the anxieties that might lead one to speculate about the apocalypse today were just as present in Weimar Germany. Runaway capitalism, environmental damage, and extremist politics were just as much concerns in the Atlantic world a hundred years ago as they are today. In my paper, I will examine and interrogate the social impulses that lead authors to speculate on the end of the world and look at just why Wolf's vision of apocalypse ended in farce rather than tragedy. After all, he knew the political stakes as well as any. In comparing the ideas at work in *The Black Sun* to the tropes and themes of 21st-century post-apocalyptic fiction, I will uncover a novel—and perhaps useful—way of looking at societies in crisis.

Natsuko Perera

University of London, UK

Between Drama Education and Language Education

Language teaching has long been using some elements of drama education, such as role plays, skits, and choral reading. However, considering its very limited adaptation, it is a far cry from the real drama conventions/techniques. This paper discusses how Japanese language teachers are trying to learn real techniques from theatre practitioners and drama educators to shape theory behind the drama-based approach. I would like to introduce our community of practice, explain why and how we are organised, and present some examples of our classroom application and practice. In our practice, the focus is not on performance but on the process of learning and how drama can support and enhance language learning. As the theory and practice of language learning are experiencing “social and creative turns,” the drama-based approach widens the possibilities of how language can be learned by bringing back the body to language and replacing the conventional ways of the “knowledge banking model.” Our favourite choices of drama conventions include hot seating, the mantle of the expert, freeze frame, status work, and forum theatre. Some voices from the teachers and learners will be presented with an analysis of their sense of body and place, which tends to be lacking in textbook-oriented language classrooms. I will also discuss the importance of teacher agency and learning community building in exploring innovative and creative approaches to language learning, as well as the issues related to teacher anxiety in adapting the drama-based approach.

Núria Santamaria Roig

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain

Josephine Baker in Barcelona

As is well known, the premiere of the *Revue Nègre* in Paris on 2 October 1925, with the surprising and unspeakable emergence of a dancer like Josephine Baker, became the beginning of a phenomenon that would transcend the French theatre scene and set the tone for a wide range of products related to leisure and the entertainment industry in Europe, including Barcelona. On the other hand, the progressive incorporation and visualisation of African-American culture in the commercial entertainment circuits also ended up becoming a fashion that Europeans did not allow themselves to miss as part, among other things, of the construction of a taste (and, therefore, of a market) prone to snobbery that could make the love of blackness pass as an exponent of sophistication. The communication aims to focus on the reception of Baker's figure in Barcelona before the Spanish Civil War: from her initial infiltration through records and cinema, the popularisation afforded her by the plethora of imitators and competitors who worked in Barcelona's theatres, to her performance in March 1930 at the Principal Palace with *Demon's Jazz* and the subsequent media coverage.

Oana Marin

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania

Perceptions of Disability Theatre in Romania: Exploring the Necessity and Impact of Disability Representation in Performance

This study examines the perceived necessity and impact of disability theatre in Romania, where disability representation in dramatic texts and theatre remains minimal, and an institutional framework for disability studies is largely absent. Focusing on four groups—people with disabilities, care workers, regular audience members, and theatre professionals—this research explores responses to Perform Access, a pioneering university-led project that integrates professional actors and deaf non-actors. The study draws on interviews and surveys conducted after Perform Access performances, offering insight into how disability theatre challenges social norms and perceptions of inclusion.

Grounded in performative theory and disability studies, this research highlights the lack of structured discourse around disability in Romanian arts and education. By capturing perspectives from each group, the study investigates how Perform Access can influence audience views, examining disability theatre's role in fostering visibility, empowerment, and empathy. For theatre professionals, the findings reveal both the perceived artistic value and logistical challenges in bringing disability narratives to Romanian stages.

The study identifies support and ambivalence toward disability theatre, influenced by cultural and regional norms that often medicalize or marginalize disability. By presenting comparative analyses across the four groups, this research proposes recommendations for expanding disability theatre's reach and impact in Romania, addressing social, institutional, and educational changes necessary for a more inclusive performance culture. The findings contribute to broader discussions on disability representation, suggesting that disability theatre in Romania holds transformative potential for societal attitudes and artistic diversity.

Onyeka Iwuchukwu

National Open University of Nigeria, Nigeria

Focu-Feminism in Selected Plays by a Nigerian Female Playwrights

Focu-Feminism is a feminist postulation that faults earlier feminists' ideals that blame men and patriarchy for women's woes as well as their claims to female bonding and global sisterhood. It also disapproves of the herd mentality posture in addressing issues of women marginalisation and oppression in a given society. Two plays, *The Reign of Wazobia* and *Tell it to Women* by Tess Onwueme are used as representative samples in the exploration and explication of these views. The selected plays have both traditional and modern settings. They also deal with women and their interpersonal relationships which aided a balanced presentation of the discussion. Most feminists' theories overlook or underplay the role of women in their oppression, a gap that necessitated this study. The methodology is purely analytical with materials drawn from the plays as well as secondary texts on the plays and the playwrights. In addition, there was a brief review of some feminist theories by Nigerian scholars to highlight their views on the oppression of women in the society. Interestingly, majority of the theorists are women and from the same region with the same cultural backgrounds. Findings indicate that in this culture, women suffer oppression emanated from men or patriarchal society but that women also oppress fellow women either innately or as willing channels in the guise of societal norms. The recommendation is that each woman, in line with the tenets of Focu-feminism, should focus on herself, her peculiar situation and background to devise survival, self-assertion strategies for her empowerment.

Oscar Giner

University of Arizona, USA

Bernard Shaw and the Old West: *The Common Ancestry of The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet* (1909) and the Hispanic folk play *The Four Apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe* (1600)

The setting of Blanco, inhabited by “pioneers of civilization in a territory of the United States of America,” has been derided by Holroyd as merely a “respectable provenance for a piece of moral propaganda,” and has been disregarded by Henderson in harsh terms: “To an American...the superficial pseudo-realism of the play is grotesque in its unreality.”¹

Las cuatro apariciones de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe was written in 1600 by José de la Peña and tells the story of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe to Indian Juan Diego at Tepeyac in 1531. According to Aurora Lucero-White Lea, the play is an example, preserved in great “purity and entirety,” of the folk drama of the Hispanic Southwest in North America during the Spanish Golden Age (17th century).²

Shaw considered Blanco Posneta “sermon in crude melodrama,” written during an early formulation of his religion of Creative Evolution; the Guadalupe play was a vehicle for the propagation of the Catholic faith in the Americas. Across four centuries of dramatic history, these two texts reveal a parallel development of artists/philosophers who explore the symbolic phenomenon of divine apparitions, and who arrive at the same dramatic formula of “two trestles, four boards, and a passion” for the purposes of religious conversion.

¹ Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: Volume II–1898-1918, The Pursuit of Power* (New York: Random House, 1989), 228; Archibald Henderson, *George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1956), 589.

² Aurora Lucero-White Lea, *Literary Folklore of the Hispanic Southwest* (San Antonio, TX: The Naylor Company, 1953), 16-20.

Ovio Olaru

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania

Disillusioned and principled in the European Semiperiphery. Comparative perspectives
on Ibsen and Caragiale

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) and Ion Luca Caragiale (1852-1912) seem to have nothing in common but that each is considered the “national playwright” of Norway and Romania, respectively. The present contribution seeks to draw a parallel between the two(semi)peripheral authors from the late 19thand early 20thcenturywhile focusing on two canonical plays, Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1879) and Caragiale’s *A Stormy Night* (1879). My paper aims to discuss the ideological positions each of them occupies in the literary fields of their countries, as well as to shed light on what I, reframing Laura Doyle’s concept of “interimperiality,” formulate as “interperipherality,” designating the “structural homologies” (Alex Goldiș) present in the dramatic outputs of the two playwrights.

Drawing on Peter Brooks, I then analyse their common preoccupation for “legalising” the world—either through bureaucracy or finance—and how this preoccupation finds its most suitable expression. Finally, I discuss how form plays a crucial role in officialising content and how Ibsen’s “seriousness” reflects the more prosperous, more established Norwegian bourgeoisie, whereas Caragiale’s mockery, satire, and absurdism lays bare the “frivolousness” of the new Romanian middleclass. Because the Norwegian bourgeoisie emerged organically, as the result of real socio-economic development, throughout most of his plays Ibsen is disillusioned with the rhetoric of social progress by way of bourgeois morals. His characters want to reach uncompromising and absolute truth, having exhausted that in-betweenness of the Romanian bourgeoisie, with one foot still in the feudal conditions of the prior generation (early19thcentury) and one in the dream of Western standards of living. In the Romanian semi-periphery, the bourgeoisie is still in the process of forming and religiously respects the mechanisms it has imported from the West—it is, in a sense, more virtuous, more principled than Ibsen’s agents of chaos—Nora, Stockmann, Solness, Werle—challenging the status quo.

Phillip M Church

Florida International University, USA

Critical Thinking: an audience experience

A recently observed bumper sticker on a neighbourhood car read “Critical thinking–the nation’s other deficit.” The absence of critical thinking is one of the most pressing concerns, not only for academics and educators but for theatre practitioners. How can “critical thinking” be a part of our everyday lives? More especially, how can theatre offer audiences direct and interactive critical thinking as a part of a performance experience? Recognizing an urgent need to awaken conscious critical thinking What if Works, a community-engaged theatre group affiliated with Florida International University in Miami, and, variously with Solent-Southampton University in the UK, is addressing the question through an eclectic range of initiatives. Citing examples from “*Holocaust: a Living Journey-Book*”, “*The R+J Effect*”, “*Artist X*”, “*The Placemaker Poet*” and “*Soul of a Swimmer*” Professor Church will share the discoveries of form, content and application of approaches aimed at fostering interactive critical thinking as part of an audience’s felt experience.

Phillip Zapkin

Pennsylvania State University, USA

Merry Wives Out of Windsor: Geraldine Brophy's The Merry Wives of Windsor Avenue and New Zealand Identity

Geraldine Brophy's 2008 adaptation *The Merry Wives of Windsor Avenue* resets Shakespeare's comedy into the world of contemporary New Zealand politics, exploring the borderline nature of Kiwi identity. Settler colonial nations like New Zealand, Australia, and Canada sat at the edges of the British empire, creating their cultures by renegotiating/distancing from British identity. In Brophy's play, political wrangling and interpersonal relationships drive the action, while characters' relative positions and concerns demonstrate an anxiety about New Zealand's place in international affairs.

Broadly, Brophy's play triangulates between US ambassador George Page, British High Commissioner Frank Ford, and the NZ officials Jack Falstaff and Sir Robert Shallow. Page is entirely self-confident, never touched by any of the drama that flows around him—a reflection of the US' dominant global position and tendency towards unilateralism. Ford is ambivalent, alternating between critiquing the UK and a casually racist Anglo-supremacism. The Kiwi politicians reveal telling concerns about New Zealand's place in the world. Their political concerns are small, petty, and provincial; and Falstaff tries to claim surreptitious power through affairs with Ford and Page's wives. These power dynamics suggest a concern about New Zealand's position as a "small nation" at the edge of a much more powerful Anglophone global order—and the repurposing of a Shakespearean play to explore this dynamic aligns the craft with the content of this critique. Brophy uses the Bard, arguably the symbol of British literature, to write back to the Anglophone metropole, claiming a New Zealand ownership of Shakespeare, while simultaneously repurposing his work.

Qi Wang

Goldsmiths, University of London, UK

Deconstructing Authority: Gender Inversion and Anti-colonialism in L'Enfant S. Physical Theatre's *Le Balcon* (2019)

Jean Genet's *The Balcony* demystifies authority through carnivalesque playfulness, a theme reimagined in L'Enfant S. Physical Theatre's 2019 Taiwanese adaptation. Set against Taiwan's post-Sunflower Movement sociopolitical landscape, *Le Balcon* (2019) employs gender inversion and Foucault's "heterotopias" to deconstruct authoritarian symbols—religion, law, military power, and protest—through physical performance and cross-disciplinary media. This paper examines how the production critiques the enduring legacies of colonialism and re-contextualizes Genet's work for local audiences by deconstructing authoritarian imagery.

Since 2014, the Sunflower Student Movement and a succession of political turbulence have aimed to challenge the authoritarian system and strengthen Taiwan's independent identity. Director Wang Shih-Wei retranslated Genet's script, situating it within a local cultural context and making the revolution in the script echo the political turmoil in Taiwan in recent years. Performed in Zhongshan Hall—formerly an Air Force headquarters and colonial biochemical lab—the production transforms this symbol of authoritarianism into a brothel. By contrasting enclosed and open spaces and incorporating fluid gender identities, the performance transforms the audience from passive voyeurs to active participants, fostering critical reflection on contemporary authority and Taiwan's postcolonial identity. This study offers a new geopolitical perspective on Genet's theatre, highlighting its relevance to Taiwan's ongoing struggle for autonomy and self-definition.

Quanda Johnson

Durham University, UK

And Then There Were None: The Fight Over Blackface Minstrelsy (An Origin Story of Anglophone Blackness in Atlantic Modernity)

From 1958 to 1978, The Black and White Minstrel Show appeared on the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) prime-time television as a weekly variety show celebrating the "bucolic and homey" tradition of blackface. Similarly, from 1939 to 1985, Agatha Christy's detective novel, known in the U.S. as *And Then There Were None* (1940), remained in British libraries and bookstores by its original title, *Ten Little Niggers* (1939). How do these two historical facts juxtapose against a Britain that considers itself socially liberal while simultaneously, as recent as a decade ago, at least one third of its population admitted to harbouring racial bias (British Social Survey, 2014)? This question fuels my curiosity of origin stories surrounding Black Atlantic trauma, drawing me to Great Britain and a creative research project borrowing its title from the Agatha Christy novel. "And Then There Were None" is a theatrical performance, visual art installation, and essay that interrogates the nascence of Black Atlantic ontology in North America and parts of the circum-Caribbean through the Anglophone Transatlantic slave trade and British white normative gaze. Building on Simon Gikandi's *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (2011), it uses ethnographic and autoethnographic practice-as-research to position British imperialism within the origins of anti-African and consequently anti-Black racism in the United States, Canada, and parts of the circum-Caribbean. It then reaches across the Atlantic to explore residual anti-Blackness existing in the U.K. in comparison to that of its "cousin" nations "across the pond".

Rasheed Adedoyin Ismaila Otun

University of Louisville, USA

Faiths and Documentary Films: A Comparative Review of *One of Us* (2017), *Jesus Camp* (2006), and *Me and the Mosque* (2005)

Every film is a document, and it documents human conduct and conditions, nature and natural occurrences, dreams, imaginations, and realities. This documentation is done through selective processes requiring the application of creative and critical faculties in arriving at decisions regarding issues to focus on, what to shoot, and the directions of the camera lens. Regardless of the efforts toward objectivity in documentary films, the subjective preferences can be influenced by several factors, which include but are not limited to the film composition, arrangements of the shots, thematic concerns of the film, the narrative technique, the targeted audience, and the desired agenda settings of the producers of the films. This is because behind the camera is a human being with his subjective preferences, which determine and influence how the facts are presented to the audience. In the end, what is eventually recorded cannot be completely considered the truth, even with films documenting faiths, religious tenets, religious practices, and socio-cultural and political issues surrounding faiths. While employing an eclectic approach as a theoretical framework, the paper combines paradigms from different and related theories to review and compare the narrative techniques employed in the selected documentary films. The combination of New Historicism with New Criticism and the incorporation of psychoanalytical theories with Marxist dialectics deepen the understanding of the agenda settings of the producers of the documentary films. The theoretical framework reveals that while the selected films are about religion, they are also about the relationship between religion and culture, indoctrination and disbelief, gender issues and queerness, non-conformism and conformism, communalism and individualism, and sexual abuse and cultism. The paper concludes that it is impossible to have a documentary film without some elements of propaganda, subjectivity, creativity, and faction.

Rebecca McNamara

Independent Scholar at Large, USA

We Are Our Own Ocean: The Skill of Adaptability in Theatre Practices in Cook County Jail

“I forgot I was in jail for a minute.”

Incarceration can be dangerous, a space without privacy, with over or under stimulation, with internal systems of behaviour; it can strip inmates of autonomy, freedom of movement, freedom of voice; and it can leave persons in cognitive and psychological distress. Incarceration can be traumatizing. In prisons, theatre programs can often guard against this, as demonstrated by reduced recidivism rates by participants. But jails, temporary holding for incarcerated persons while they await trial, can make traditional script-based theatre programs difficult. In jails, inmates may come and go every week or be incarcerated for years awaiting a verdict; and may regularly miss class to go before judges or speak with attorneys. Alternate ways of exploring theatre and building artistic work are necessary. EPIC is an ensemble of incarcerated theatre makers in the women’s division of Cook County Jail in Chicago. Housed under the umbrella of the Piven Theatre Workshop, the EPIC program runs workshop-style theatre training for primarily maximum-security women at the largest single-site jail in the United States. Grounded in the play theory of Viola Spolin, EPIC generates original work that allows for adaptability around changing populations and environments, shifting relationships, and inconsistent workshop times, to produce performance pieces authentically true to the lived experiences and desires of players. Examining the ways EPIC has utilized and adapted these processes both can help us learn more about collaborative theatre work in incarcerated spaces, but also about creating practices to incorporate diverse voices and be open to diverse inquiry in what is an increasingly shifting landscape outside of jail walls.

Rebecca Steinberger

Misericordia University, USA

Call Me by My Name: Staging Women and Incarceration in Ireland's Magdalene
Laundries

Who were the Magdalenes? Imperilled women, including prostitutes, unmarried mothers, orphans, women with intellectual and physical disabilities, and women considered temptresses, were sent to convent-run and state-supported laundries for alleged safeguarding. Upon arrival, their identities, freedom, and even babies were stripped from them. Laundries operated as labour camps, where women were forcibly incarcerated and imprisoned, for the commercial profit of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. In the years that have followed the closing of the last Magdalene laundry in Ireland in 1996, gruesome discoveries have uncovered unimaginable abuse, corruption, mistreatment, neglect, lack of healthcare, and violence at the hands of Catholic institutions associated with these so-called “asylums.” While we consider Ireland's shame and reconciliation, my project is even more essential in this current historical epoch. Writers and academics seeking justice for Magdalene victims must ask how to expose, redress and amplify the voice of those abused by the state and church. Through an examination of theatre's response to this history of trauma in Ireland both pre-and post—#MeToo Movement—such as Patricia Burke Brogan's *Eclipsed* (1994) and Emma Donoghue's stage adaptation of her novel *The Pull of the Stars* (2024)—we can recognize the role women dramatists play in facilitating the healing of a nation and lending a voice to those tragically silenced, ‘cancelled,’ and confine.

Rick Gilbert

Loyola University Chicago, USA

Politicizing a Classic: Raven Theatre's revival of Shepard's *A Lie of the Mind*

Often, when we talk about political theatre, we mean plays explicitly written with a particular political message in mind and produced in their own time to bring attention to that message for their particular audience. Revivals of political plays can do similar work if the political message is still on point. In fact, often the apparent timeliness of an old play is part of the appeal to the producer – a political message can be more effective when it is brought home to the audience that a playwright from decades or even centuries ago saw their own society struggling with the same issue. There is a long tradition of productions of classical works (Shakespeare especially) that are designed with a contemporary or otherwise ahistorical setting in order either emphasize that the political message already present in the text is applicable to the production's audience. Often such productions alter some aspect of the play in order to make it more easily make the point the production is shooting for. Handled awkwardly, making those alterations can leave the audience feeling manipulated. Handled gracefully, such alterations can make an old play feel startlingly new. Raven Theatre in Chicago's production of Sam Shepard's 1985 play *A Lie of the Mind*—which they call “a reimagined revival”—overlays the powerful play with an immigrant story, reinvigorating Shepard's critique of the American Dream through a lens that is one of the most relevant political issues for their audience. In this paper I will discuss their process and how their production does cultural work that builds on Shepard's text.

Robert Irons

Pine Crest School, Fort Lauderdale, USA

This Talk is a Joke (Seriously): Aristotelian Conceptions of Comedy and Menander's
Dyskolos

The aims of this paper are two-fold: first, to glean fundamental principles of Comedy through an analysis of the sparse passages devoted to it in both Aristotle's *Poetics* and the *Tractatus Coislinianus*; second, to observe these principles of Comedy through an analysis of Menander's *Dyskolos*.

Critics and scholars have long lamented the lost second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*, thought for many excellent reasons to contain his analysis of Comedy. However, the possibility of a commentary on Aristotle's theory of Comedy, originating from the Peripatetic school, came with the 1839 discovery of the *Tractatus Coislinianus*. In addition, it is likely that Theophrastus, Aristotle's successor, was also Menander's teacher. Thus, there was a direct line of influence from Aristotle to Menander, establishing the likelihood that the playwright possessed thorough knowledge of the philosopher's theory of Comedy.

This paper will argue that we can observe Aristotelian principles of Comedy—lost as philosophy—in Menander's play. Key passages will include *Poetics* 1448a and 1449a, *Dyskolos* 574, 578ff, 708-47, 729-39, and the conclusion of the *Tractatus Coislinianus*.

Robin Driver

Independent Scholar at Large, Ireland

Portugal Unmasked: Noh Theatre, Politics and Identity in Fiamma Hasse Pais Brandão's
Em cada pedra um voo imóvel

One of the foremost Portuguese dramatists of the 20th century, Fiamma Hasse Pais Brandão (1938-2007) produced a varied and politically engaged dramatic oeuvre that established dialogues with many of the major European theatrical theorists and practitioners of her time. Accordingly, her plays are often analysed with reference to the likes of Artaud, Ionesco and Brecht, all of whom undoubtedly influenced the Portuguese author's writing and practice. Brandão's first published dramatic work, however, took its inspiration from further afield, namely Japanese Noh theatre. Somewhat neglected by the author herself later in her career and frequently dismissed as juvenilia by the academy, *Em cada pedra um voo imóvel* (1958) nonetheless offers a unique vision of Brandão's early theatrical experiments, as well as of her developing political opposition to Portugal's dictatorial Estado Novo regime. Opening with an epigraph citing Armando Martins Janeira's 1954.

Portuguese translation of famed Noh play *Kantan* (邯鄲), the work presents a series of recitations that take both formal and thematic cues from classical Japanese theatre, all while articulating subtle political critiques. Notably, rural settings are combined with Noh-inspired expressions of ephemerality, a process that undermines the idealised bucolicism glorified by the Salazarist dictatorship as a fundamental constant of Portuguese culture, hinting at alternative configurations of national identity. This paper therefore seeks to explore the elements of Noh theatre that influenced Brandão, and the ways in which she adapted them, simultaneously expressing and concealing her political message at a time of strict state-run censorship.

Robin Elizabeth Haas

Rutgers University, USA

“Merrily, merrily shall I live now”: Reading for Trans Joy and Futurity in Shakespeare’s
The Tempest and Margaret Cavendish’s *The Convent of Pleasure*

In this paper, I analyse Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* alongside Margaret Cavendish’s closet drama, *The Convent of Pleasure*, drawing connections between Ariel’s period of arboreal imprisonment by Sycorax and the Princess and Lady Happy’s time of isolation and (trans)formation within the insulating walls of the titular convent. Placing my work in conversation with scholars who think critically about trans ways of being, trans phenomenology, and trans temporality, this paper is particularly interested in the ways that Shakespeare crafts for Ariel a recognizably trans past, present, and future, and how Cavendish links the period of self-exploration during pre-transition time (a period often depicted as tragic, tortured, or “trapped”) with time spent in the isolated, queer-feminine community created during the confinement period of pregnancy. Furthermore, I argue that in both dramas, the recognisably trans or perhaps proto-transfigures of Ariel and the Princess achieve self-actualization through liberatory acts of splitting, bursting, or breaking open either themselves or their surroundings both as a means of rejecting the necessity of their containment and as a way to begin living “otherwise.” Ultimately, I assert that both *The Enchanted Island* and *The Convent of Pleasure* function as sites of trans possibility, embodiment, and futurity, and provide important examples for scholars of early modern drama of dramatic texts which centre trans resilience, survival, and even joy.

Robin O'Connell

Florida Gulf Coast University, USA

Flesh & Stone: Representations of Pygmalion and Galatea

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the character of Pygmalion is a sculptor who falls in love with his own creation. Blessed by Aphrodite, his masterpiece comes to life. In the original incarnation, the creation is never given a name. She is anonymous in her identity and anonymous to those who desire her. She is an object, a vessel, a vase. Contemporary audiences call her Galatea - or Eliza Doolittle. George Bernard Shaw's interpretation of the myth, *Pygmalion*, captures the many shades and colours of objectification. Being regarded not as a human being -but as someone else's masterpiece. In the musical adaptation of Shaw's work, *My Fair Lady*, the Creator/Creation relationship is romanticized. Joseph Meardon's *Malion*, which drew inspiration from both Ovid and Shaw, is a feminist retelling of the myth. *Malion* grapples with identity, autonomy and what it means to be the ultimate male fantasy. In this analysis, I examine the performance of *Malion* I attended as well as the script and an interview with Meardon himself, Shaw's *Pygmalion*, and Lerner and Loewe's *My Fair Lady* among other texts such as writings by Andrea Dworkin and John Stoltenberg. This is in order to understand the relationship between idealization, objectification, and degradation. In *Malion*, *Pygmalion* and *My Fair Lady*, idealization and degradation are not antithetical to one another - rather they exist as different forms of dehumanization. As Philip Van Munching once observed, they [men] 'put you up on a pedestal - so they can look up your skirt.'

Ruby Jean Dudasik

University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Singing the Name of A Foreigner's God: A Comparative Study of Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* and Anne Carson's *Bakkhai*

At first, Wole Soyinka's and Anne Carson's re-imaginings of Euripides *The Bacchae* appear as two vastly disparate works; delving deeper, though, these two adaptations clearly engage with similar themes through the central deity of Dionysus. They also both emphasize transgression, collectivity, and ritual as powerful subversive tools. With this in mind, this paper compares the cultural contexts of Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (1973) and Carson's *Bakkhai* (2015). I argue that the cultural contexts of *Rite* and *Bakkhai* –1970s post-colonial Nigeria and 2010s Canada– allow each author to manipulate the source text to critique the hegemonic structures of power in their respective nations. Carson and Soyinka pull the source tragedy into newly relevant positions, using myth as a go-between between past and present to create new contemporary dialogue. The reworking of the Dionysian in *Communion Rite* is an exercise in freedom in a post-independence Nigeria, while the equivalent in *Bakkhai* is, for Carson, a way to address the rising tide of xenophobia in a Canada that was actively reckoning with its history of complicity in colonialism. Specifically, this paper compares the opening and closing scenes from each work to show how this narrative is an ideal container for engaging with 1970s Nigeria and 2010s Canada as spaces of friction and destabilization. I ultimately argue that Soyinka and Carson each recognize and leverage *The Bacchae* as a play extremely well suited to interrogate questions of transgression, subversion, and historical and cultural structures through the framework of adaptation.

Ryan Nock

University of Maryland, USA

The Deficit Fantasy and Autistic Possibility in Annie Baker's *Body Awareness*

This paper examines contrasting portrayals of neurodivergence in *Next to Normal* by Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey, and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* by Simon Stephens, analysing how each production's cultural context, narrative style, and specific characterization reflect distinct perspectives on mental health and neurodivergence. *Next to Normal*, a contemporary rock musical, approaches bipolar disorder through a family's struggle, using intensified emotional expression and musicality to illustrate the impacts of the disorder on individual identity and familial dynamics within an American cultural backdrop. In contrast, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* presents the experiences of a teenage protagonist with autism, employing minimalist staging, multimedia elements, and direct audience engagement to offer an immersive perspective on neurodivergent perception. This analysis highlights how each work's distinct genre and form influence narrative empathy, offering audiences disparate yet meaningful insights into neurodivergent experiences.

By comparing the cultural and performative nuances of these productions, the paper argues that the theatrical representation of neurodivergence requires adaptive storytelling to authentically capture the diversity of these conditions. Where *Next to Normal* foregrounds interpersonal conflicts around mental health stigma, *Curious Incident* enters sensory engagement and the protagonist's subjectivity, encouraging an empathic response to neurodivergence itself. This research contributes to the discussion on how the stage can serve as a dynamic space to both reflect and challenge public perceptions of neurodivergent identity.

Sarahleigh Castelyn

University of East London, UK

Unconscious Bias and Stereotypes: *Giselle* and its 'Mad Scene'

Giselle, premiered in 1841, choreographed by Marius Petipa after Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot, is a key work in ballet repertory with choreographers such as Mary Skeaping, Dada Masilo, Akram Khan, MatsEk staging the work. As a person with Bipolar, I am extremely frustrated with portrayals of madness, and this is particularly with the ballet *Giselle*. Although recent productions of *Giselle* do approach the hetero-normative narrative and disrupt it with decolonial and feminist choreographic strategies, nevertheless, an unconscious bias of mental illnesses remains, Hinshaw writes '[M]y contention, increasingly shared by almost everyone who does serious research on this topic, is that individuals with mental illness receive extreme stigma' (2006: 14). Nearly twenty years later, not much has changed. While campaigns have raised awareness of hidden disabilities, and the importance of mental healthcare is stressed in the popular media, the stigma remains. Choreographers and reviewers of *Giselle* are too often complicit in perpetuating negative representations of madness and adding to the stigma. This is a ballet that has reviews of productions stating that '[t]he work in itself is bipolar. The first act begins with two lovers prancing around a sunny village and ends with betrayal, a psychotic meltdown...' (San Francisco Examiner, 2014) or 'her descent into madness is one of terrible stillness followed by desperate jumps' (Crompton, 2021). There is a 'long and complicated relationship between madness and performance (Harpin and Foster, 2014: 4), and this performative presentation argues that perhaps it might be time for *Giselle* to no longer be danced as this ballet will always be complicit in contributing to stereotypes of madness.

Scott Taylor

University of Missouri, USA

A Dramaturgy of the Real: Documenting the Intimate on the 21st Century French Stage in Mohamed El Khatib's *Finir en beauté* and *Stadium*

In his “end-of-century inventory” of French theatre, published in 2000, Patrice Pavis asserted that a new generation of playwrights had slowly transformed the French stage throughout the 80s and 90s, ushering in an age of “interpellative theatre,” which had abandoned the ideological and artistic preoccupations that had dominated French theatre since the 1950s.

In the 25 years since Pavis’s “inventory,” transformative global changes have affected an even younger generation of playwrights who have developed their craft in an age of ever-increasing economic and social instability, hyper globalization and automation, unprecedented technological advancements, and revolutionary social justice movements.

One of the most innovative playwrights to emerge from this new generation is Mohamed ElKhatib. The son of working-class Moroccan immigrants, El Khatib practices what has been described as a “dramaturgy of the real,” acclaimed for its deeply intimate and “profoundly human” qualities. His plays explore the boundary between reality and fiction by embracing creative method that is inspired by a documentary approach and concretized from *matériaux-vie* (e-mails, recordings, letters, articles, interviews, and most importantly, amateur actors who play themselves).

Thus, this paper will seek to better situate El Khatib’s dramaturgical practice in the greater context of 21st-century French theatre by examining two of his most famous plays, *Finir en beauté* (2015) and *Stadium* (2017), arguing that this work has not only absorbed many of the characteristics of “interpellative” theatre as described by Pavis, but also reflects a new direction toward an emancipated French dramaturgy that privileges “mise en performance” over “mise en scene.”

Sean Metzger

UCLA, USA

Love and Politics from *Vietgone* to *Poor Yella Rednecks*

A common anti-war slogan, “Make love, not war,” is perhaps most associated with Vietnam War protests. Qui Nguyen’s play *Vietgone* concludes with the word “love.” My essay uses this coincidence to elaborate politics, theatricality, and love through two of Nguyen’s plays that explore his own autobiography as a product of refugees. I place my analysis in dialogue with the work of Hannah Arendt and that of her commentators, like Giorgio Agamben and David Kim, in addition to several queer theorists who have discussed love. Arendt’s essay, “We Refugees” describes the refugee as the product of social institutions. Loss of home, occupation, and language attend this status. Here we might think of the idea marked in Qui Nguyen’s title “Viet-gone,” where viet denotes ethnic affiliation. More importantly, of course, *Vietgone* demonstrates the refugee’s remarkable proclivity for theatricalization—becoming whomever the authority might desire or, in some instances, who the person seeking refuge might want to become. Whereas Arendt privileges action, speech, and the active participation in community as criteria for being human(qualities that correlate with certain kinds of theatre), Nguyen teaches us not the need for civic participation as Arendt would have it but the need to recognize the performativity of institutions in creating personhood and the need to imagine differently and reorganize the conditions that produce the human and its marginalized others.

Siyuan Liu

University of British Columbia, USA

Using Imperialist Slaughter to Shock Awake the Sleeping Chinese Masses: *All Quiet on the Western Front* as Proletarian Avant-Garde Theatre from Japan to China (1929-1930)

In March 1930, after a bitter split of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT), the first CCP-led theatre group, the Shanghai Art Theatre Society, staged *All Quiet on the Western Front*, adapted from Remarque's anti-war novel by the Japanese playwright, director and designer Murayama Tomoyoshi. This essay analyses the production as part of worldwide dramaturgical and production transfer of proletarian avant-garde theatre, in the vein of Meyerhold and Piscator, from Europe, through Japan, to China. Murayama introduced Piscator to Japan after his one-year stay in Berlin in 1922, including translating Piscator's *Political Theatre*. Meyerhold was brought to Japan by Hijikata Yoshi, a director and co-founder of the Tsukiji Little Theatre, flagship company of modern Japanese theatre *shingeki* (new theatre), after seeing Meyerhold's production of *The Earth in Turmoil* in Moscow in 1923. In the late 1920s, as *shingeki* turned to Marxism and overt proletarian theatre, both of them asked several Chinese art students in Tokyo to help them stage Chinese-themed plays, such as Hijikata's direction of *Roar, China!*, a favourite of worldwide leftist theatre since Meyerhold's premiere in Moscow. Murayama also involved these students with his plays set in China and *All Quiet in the Western Front*. He then assisted them with the translation, directing, and design of its production in Shanghai. Based on archival sources and contemporaneous publications in Chinese and Japanese, the essay examines, but also complicates, the ideological and artistic vocabularies shared by the worldwide proletarian theatre movement inspired by the Soviet Revolution.

Stephen G. Tabor

University of Wisconsin, USA

Hoods Turned Heroes: Gang Dynamics and Social Perception in the Musical Adaptation
of *The Outsiders*

This paper examines the construction, performance, and policing of masculinity within gang dynamics as portrayed in the musical adaptation of *The Outsiders*. The work presents tightly bonded male collectives navigating rites of passage, clan allegiance, and legitimacy of manhood under the pressure of socioeconomic and cultural marginalization. This study investigates how theatrical conventions, including song, dialogue, and ensemble performance, articulate homosocial masculinity and its dependence on collective identity.

Drawing on theories of gender performance and group identity, this paper considers the ways masculinity is ritualized and enforced within gang culture of a musical, revealing the tensions between camaraderie and competition. The Greasers' struggle for legitimized manhood juxtaposed with the socially established Socs reflects a critique of classed masculinity and offers insights into the evolving depictions of masculinity on stage. This analysis highlights how musical theatre uses group dynamics to portray both the allure and toxicity of male solidarity, while contributing to ongoing conversations about gender, performance, and collective identity.

Sterling Neill

Georgia State University, USA

Quieting (Con)science: Medical Suppression of Feeling in Naomi Wallace's *The Breach*

Depression in the United States is prevalent yet underdiagnosed, leading individuals to treat their unresolved pain and trauma themselves. While some individuals choose to self-medicate with illicit drugs or alcohol, others seek refuge in the healthcare system, where doctors overprescribe drugs to treat daily unhappiness. The perils of medically induced happiness are most prominently explored in Naomi Wallace's play, "The Breach," where four teenagers battle with childhood trauma that forces the end of their familial and friend relationships. Wallace illustrates how medicinal crutches meant to treat an individual for their depression may accomplish the opposite, preventing the person from recognizing how drugs, even when prescribed by a doctor, can work to quiet their internal struggle. One of the characters, Jude, demonstrates resistance by refusing medication for her mental ailments and physical situation, whereas the other characters rely on medication to quiet their guilt, leading to further unresolved trauma. Through Jude, Wallace underscores how systemic issues such as sexism and poverty contribute to the increasing desire to induce medical quieting, which ultimately benefits the capitalistic healthcare system. Wallace stresses the importance of acknowledging how capitalistic overture drives healthcare, while often times neglecting patients who seek relief from internal strife. By exposing the capitalistic overtones, Wallace advocates for confronting past, personal or social traumas that prevent true connection. In "The Breach," confronting past or present traumatic experiences enables an individual to resist the lure of capitalistically driven medical quieting, offering a longer lasting solution to issues of societally implemented issues of oppression.

Stratos E. Constantinidis

Ohio State University, USA

Manufacturing Illusion

The first known “political” drama, Phrynichus’ *Miletus Captured* and the first known “legal” drama, Aeschylus’ *The Eumenides*, were produced in Athens, Greece, in 493BCE and 458BCE respectively. The thousands of “political” and “legal” dramas written and staged worldwide ever since that time have continued to stir up strong emotions in their audiences. Strong emotions make audiences susceptible to illusion. Is there any reason for us to be concerned when emotionally aroused actors and audiences mistake fiction with reality and then respond to fiction in real terms? Are illusion-producing performances as harmful for performers and theatregoers as Plato, Diderot, Brecht and their followers would want us to think? Do theatregoers, operagoers, cinephiles, and tele-buffs willingly suspend their disbelief at any point during a show as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and his followers would have us believe? Should we worry at all when fiction imitates the narratives of reality, or should we worry more when reality imitates the narratives of fiction? I will argue that we should be less concerned when playwrights and production teams model fiction after reality and more concerned when lawyers and politicians model reality after fiction by using its tropes to manipulate and influence people—be they twelve jurors or millions of voters.

Svenja Kolpack

University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany

Disabling Richard III: How Shakespeare shaped our thinking about the King under the car park

Shakespeare makes Richard III describe himself as “some tardy cripple”, neither flattering nor fair-looking, defective and “unfit for state and majesty”. This depiction of Richard III has led many filmmakers to have the king played as seriously disabled. When in 2012 the bodily remains of Richard III were excavated under a carpark in Leicester, the press was thrilled and stunned at the same time. While the skeleton showed distinct curvature, Richard III would not have looked anything as disfigured as Shakespeare portrayed him. Investigations of Leicester University even pointed at the fact that the curvature of the spine stemmed from a form of scoliosis but would not necessarily have been visible to his contemporaries.

This presentation will focus on the development and the history of the Shakespearean portrayal of Richard III and analyse the function of such a portrayal and how it fit the societal norms of early modern England. Additionally, it will analyse the 2016 performance of Richard III in the Hollow Crown series. It will herein focus on the question whether the findings surrounding the Leicester excavation had any impact on the representation of Richard III and the possible directorial reasoning that led to this performance.

Theodora Mantzari

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

The Power of Things in *Intimate Apparel* and *In the Next Room*, or the *Vibrator Play*:
Props as Agents of Transformation

Sarah Ruhl's *In the Next Room*, or the *Vibrator Play* (2009) and Lynn Nottage's *Intimate Apparel* (2004) are two powerful plays that examine the complex interplay between societal constraints and human desires in late 19th-early 20th century America. The playwrights shed light on the often-overlooked experiences of marginalized individuals, particularly women, during a time of significant social and technological change, exploring how characters navigate repressive norms to pursue intimacy, desire, self-expression, and personal fulfilment. To achieve this, both use props on stage in such a way that the latter go beyond their strict professional use, with the vibrator becoming more than a medical device and the fancy creations of the sewing machine more than a means of making ends meet; instead, they transform to serve as conduits for desire, agency, and fulfilment, embodying the characters' struggles and aspirations. By examining the symbolic objects beyond their professional dimensions from a minority perspective, we uncover how the playwrights offer profound insights into the human condition and the enduring struggle between restrictive societal expectations and the unconquerable force of Eros. Incorporating Thing Theory into the analysis of these props will offer a deeper understanding of how material objects can become powerful vehicles for expressing human affect and challenging societal norms. The vibrator and the various articles of clothing transcend their physical forms to become potent symbols of repressed longings and aspirations, inviting audiences to reflect on their own relationships with desire, identity, and social expectations.

Theresa J. May & Wendy Arons

University of Oregon, USA, Carnegie Mellon University, USA

Speculative Futures in Climate Change Theatre

This paper will look at two recent examples of “eco drama” to examine the ways in which theatre and performance speculate a future impacted by climate change. Our interest is in unpacking how theatre artists extrapolate scientific understanding of the impacts of climate change into dramatic worlds that aim both to shift spectators’ understanding of their relationship to the more-than-human world and to prepare them for new relations and losses as well as unexpected gains. Focusing on two works- Shonni Enelow’s “Carla and Lewis,” and Yvette Nolan’s “The Unplugging,” we argue that speculative futuring grounded in queer ecology and Indigenous ways of knowing contain the potential to profoundly alter spectators’ relationship to a future radically altered by climate crises.

Timmia Hearn DeRoy

University of California, USA

Moving Beyond Text and/or Author: An Anti-colonial Feminist Interrogation of Derek
Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*

This paper critically engages with the question of artist/art divide, using the case-study of Caribbean playwright Derek Walcott and his most performed work, *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, with a sampling of his other works. Utilizing a transnational feminist approach, drawing on theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Jill Dolan and Sue Ellen Case, I theorize on how a director or a production of the text can use said production to reveal the misogyny located in the text, as well as the critical post-colonial work that it simultaneously does, and move a conversation about intersectional oppression forward. I argue that Walcott's extensive documented history of sexual harassment and exploitation of women cannot be ignored when viewing/reading/interacting with his works, while also arguing that this is not grounds to dismiss the work. The paper concludes that one cannot separate the artist from the work but can instead interrogate the work and the artist in tandem, revealing the work's biases, and utilizing such to gain deeper and more meaningful understanding of the work and how it can contribute to advancement of socially conscious conversations both within and outside of the academy.

Tosin-Joshua Oluwafemi

University Ede Osun State, Nigeria

The Politics of Representation: Ahmed Yerima's Portrayal of Niger-Delta Identity in *Layefa*

This study examines the politics of representation in Ahmed Yerima's *Layefa*, focusing on its portrayal of Niger-Delta identity. The play highlights socio-political issues in the Niger-Delta, including the erosion of cultural and moral values, family disintegration, and the detrimental impact of crude oil exploitation on traditional ways of life. Using **Cultural Theory** as its framework, the study investigates how Yerima portrays the intersection of culture, identity, and socio-political realities in the Niger-Delta. The study employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing structured interviews with the playwright, director, and performers of *Layefa* to explore the thematic and representational elements of the play. Data from these interviews reveal that *Layefa* critiques the moral decadence and psychological instability resulting from greed and resource exploitation. The play positions crude oil as a political weapon, contributing to the disintegration of core values such as love, unity, and communal harmony. Findings indicate that Yerima's portrayal effectively underscores the consequences of cultural and societal neglect, showing how materialism disrupts the Niger-Delta's cultural identity and human dignity. The study concludes that *Layefa* serves as a poignant critique of socio-political and moral decay, urging a return to African values of unity and love. Recommendations include using arts and performance as platforms to advocate for the preservation of cultural identity and fostering societal reflection on the Niger-Delta's challenges. This research contributes to the discourse on cultural representation and identity politics in Nigerian literature and theatre.

Tracy Bersley

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA

Cabined, Cribbed, Confined: Macbeth Through the Lens of Polyvagal Theory

Then comes my fit again. I had else been perfect,
Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,
As broad and general as the casing air.
But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in
To saucy doubts and fears.

Macbeth III.iv

In a modern look at our social ways of being in community, one might say that we are one nervous system meeting another nervous system according to Polyvagal Theory. Developed by Dr. Stephen Porges, Polyvagal Theory focuses on the role of the vagus nerve in regulating the body's response to stress and emotions. The theory suggests that our autonomic nervous system is not just a simple fight-flight-freeze mechanism but has more complexity in how it responds to perceived threats and safety. When investigating classical texts like Shakespeare, we can see the vagal responses activated in nearly every character. This paper analyses the main characters in *Macbeth* as a means of understanding Polyvagal Theory. Equally important, however, is the investigation of why applying the Polyvagal Theory to plays can be a beneficial means for actors to explore and safely play characters experiencing extraordinary traumatic circumstances. As a neurosomatic practitioner, I study the brain, nervous system, and body in relationship to the creative process of making theatre. Examining *Macbeth* from this point of view is particularly useful in understanding how the muscularity of the language is matched by the muscularity of the physical action and how, in turn, this activates the nervous system, contributing to emotional wellness or grave instability in Shakespeare's characters.

Valerie Kaneko-Lucas

London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art (LAMDA), UK

“I just lit up. I did not burn”: women’s challenges to patriarchy in British East Asian Theatre

In 2008, director David Tse Ka-Shing reported in *The Guardian* that of “the three largest ethnic minority groups in the UK, the British East Asian (BEA) presence in arts and culture is still the most invisible. Go to any subsidised theatre or turn on the TV and you’ll know what I mean...The need for accurate representation—and cultural change—is paramount. “In 2021, Lucy Sheen-actor, playwright, and poet—and a founding member of BEATS (a UK advocacy group for British East and South East Asians) cited the ongoing need “to change the current and historical narratives that have dictated who and how BESEAS are portrayed in our (UK) culture.”

Recent plays by British East Asian writers and companies present questions about female agency within patriarchal political contexts which attempt to delimit, oppress, and eradicate female resistance. Abhishek Majumdar’s *Pah-La* (Royal Court 2019) and Kyo Choi’s *The Apology* (Arcola Theatre 2022) address women’s engagement with patriarchal governmental structures in Japan, Korea, and Tibet.

Majumdar’s *Pah-La* (2019), based on news reports of the 2008 Lhasa riots, considers the power of non-violence exemplified by a Buddhist nun’s challenge to a Chinese coloniser. Choi’s *The Apology*, based on true accounts of the Korean ‘comfort women’ during World War II, brings to light a family’s shameful secret. Arguably, all three productions can be considered a dynamic re-evaluation of landmark global events, this time viewed through the lens of the female protagonists’ courage, resistance and integrity.

Verna A. Foster

Loyola University Chicago, USA

Do Robots Have Electric Souls?: Consciousness and Artificial Life Forms in Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* and Tim Foley's *Electric Rosary*

Karel Čapek's early science fiction play *R.U.R.* (1920) introduced the term "robot" (meaning "forced labour" in Czech), though Rossum's Universal Robots are actually synthetic protoplasmic life forms rather than the mechanical humanoids or androids that the term later came to define. Čapek's play also introduced many of the salient themes arising out of the relations between humans and artificial lifeforms that would remain central to later science fiction literature and films: the definition of what it means to be human; the social and economic consequences of creating and using ever-more intelligent and human-like artificial life forms; humans' moral obligations to artificial life forms; and perhaps most fascinating and vexed of all, whether artificial life forms can experience consciousness and, indeed, what defines consciousness. In *R.U.R.* consciousness seems to be equated with the soul. Helena, the main human female character, wants the robots to have souls, and the more highly developed ones created at her behest do display a higher degree of consciousness and free will. A hundred years later Tim Foley's *Electric Rosary* (2022) explores several of Čapek's themes and in particular develops the notion of a robotic soul in a novel direction. The robot Mary is assigned to work in a decaying convent, where she participates in the life and work of the few remaining sisters. Mary has a religious vision, possibly caused by a problem in her circuitry but also suggesting that she may be capable of the same kinds of intellectual and emotional experiences as the nuns. The play's conclusion, like that of *R.U.R.*, is at once ambiguous, optimistic, and not a little disconcerting. Both plays suggest that as the creation of humans, robots may also be their legitimate heirs.

Victoria Olwell

University of Virginia, USA

Bad Taste Saves the Planet: Malaprop's *Hot House*

What if “bad taste” could save the planet? Such is the stated hypothesis behind Malaprop Theatre’s 2023 play, *Hot House* (written by Carys D. Coburn with Malaprop). Written and performed in a mode of queer camp, *Hot House* absorbs cabaret, drag, karaoke, and line dances into its loose-limbed performance aesthetics, wrapping its political urgency in exuberant artifice while spiking its call to climate action with low-brow humour. Malaprop gooses the typical aesthetic austerity and sober demeanour of most environmental discourse in the hope that “refuting good taste while wallowing in bad taste affirms that the world transcends both” (from the introduction to *Hothouse*).

But how exactly could bad taste accomplish such world-affirming purposes? My presentation argues that the play’s boisterous campiness tackles to the challenges that protesting catastrophic climate change poses for the conventions of theatrical representation. I consider the play’s aesthetics in light of the “hyper-objects” and “ecological thought” theorized by environmental philosopher Timothy Morton. Morton claims that global warming exceeds the capacities of human perception and thought (making it, in his terms, a “hyper-object”) and thus requires “thinking big,” so big that we must experiment with new cognitive and representational models. *Hot House*, I argue, deploys its aesthetic superabundance and kitsch sensibility in ways that capaciously imagine the magnitude of our environmental emergency.

Victoria Scrimmer

Millikin University, USA

The Lehman Trilogy: Putting the Epic Back in Epic Theatre

The English translation of Stefano Massini's *The Lehman Trilogy* has been critically acclaimed since Sam Mendes' production opened on the West End in 2018, winning a slew of awards including a Tony for best play after its transfer to Broadway in 2020. Epic in scope, the play follows the rise and fall of Lehman Brothers, which was one of the largest investment banks in the United States before the bank's collapse amid the 2008 subprime lending crisis. Despite the play's popularity, its message or purpose seems to have eluded many. For instance, in a 2021 issue of *Interfaces*, the title of novelist Donald Friedman's essay about the play asks bluntly, "Does it have a point?" Friedman laments, "Not only did I not get any kind of message, no moral, or instructive truth—there were no ethical questions to contemplate, not even the obvious one of whether we should see the brothers' profiting from slave-produced cotton as making them complicit."¹ More pointedly, others have criticized the play for glossing over the Lehman brothers' early reliance on slave labour and others have faulted it for playing into antisemitic tropes.

This paper suggests that such critiques miss the "point" of Massini's play which seeks neither to heroize nor vilify the Lehman brothers. Rather, the meaning of the play comes primarily from its engagement with style and form. Of central importance to the play's meaning is Massini's self-conscious deployment of nearly all the conventions of a literary epic—to the extent that the script serves, if nothing else, as an apt text for teaching students about epic poetry. I argue, however, in performance, the play illuminates the often-overlooked relationship between epic poetry (typically designed to celebrate and enshrine national values) and epic theatre (typically concerned with questioning such values) and effectively raises critical questions about the role of literature and performance in the construction of national narratives.

¹ Friedman, Donald. "The Lehman Trilogy: Is There a Point?" *Interfaces* (Dijon. En Ligne) 46, no. 46 (2021)

Weiyu Li

Independent, USA

(Re)Staging Transitional China in Blackface

In the 2021 CCTV annual Chinese New Year gala's opening performance, a seventy-year-old famous Chinese singer and dancer named Zhu Mingying led a performance titled "Festival." Dressed in African-style clothing and painted in light black paint, Zhu sang a Congolese song, "Yiyayaouleiou." Following her leading performance, a group of young Chinese dancers performed an Egyptian classic belly dance, an Argentine tango, and a Russian folk dance. Then, they concluded with the Chinese Red Silk Dance—a dance form that emerged from Chinese folk and revolutionary dances.

This spectacle—particularly Zhu's performance—drew criticism from African/African diasporic communities and Western social media, as it was viewed as a harmful practice of blackface minstrelsy. Among the voices, the performing history of "Yiyayaouleiou" was kept unmentioned: Zhu first sang the song in the "New Star Concert" in 1980, one of the earliest grand events after the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

This paper aims to closely read Zhu's two-time performances and weave them into the three-layered history: China's Third World revolution during the global sixties, the transitional period from the revolutionary to post-revolutionary/socialist China, and the pandemic moment. In doing so, this paper argues that, instead of reading the second performance as a repetition of the first one, they actually fused onto one another over time, which embodies China's intertwined histories of nationalism, anti-colonialism, and revolution. In addition, by distinguishing the use of blackface in China from blackface minstrelsy, the paper intends to offer additional readings of "blackface" as well as the significance of racial performance.

Wen-ling Lin

National Taiwan University, Taiwan

Adapted Playback Theatre as Field Research: A Critical Study of Love Across the Sea by Taiwan's Hsinchu Women's Theatre Troupe on Marriage Immigrants and Their Children

Around 2009, Taiwan saw the emergence of theatrical performances and drama activities that raised awareness of the struggles faced by Southeast Asian migrant workers and marriage immigrants. Applied theatre has played a pivotal role in this development, while professional productions have made notable though limited contribution. A key example is the Hsinchu Women's Theatre Troupe, a community-based ensemble committed to socially engaged performance since 2012. In 2020, the troupe launched its "New Immigrants Project" in collaboration with Zhusong Community College but faced challenges in recruiting marriage immigrants for interviews and participation. In response, the troupe innovatively adapted Playback Theatre, both to serve marriage immigrants and, with their consent, as a research method for gathering authentic narratives. The resulting production, *Love Across the Sea*, dramatizes the experiences of three marriage immigrants and critically engage with the discrimination their children encounter in schools.

This paper examines the adaptation of Playback Theatre across three venues, focusing on venue selection, the cathartic effects for storytellers, and the empathy developed by troupe members. It further analyses the transformation of these narratives into *Love Across the Sea* and evaluates the production as a pedagogical participatory performance, originally designed for elementary school classes and later revised and performed for new immigrants at a New Immigrant Learning Centre. Throughout the process, the troupe remained critically aware of their positionality and the risks of reinforcing stereotypes, continually refining their strategies to enhance emotional resonance and educational impact. This study contributes to the growing discourse on applied theatre methodologies, showcasing an innovative approach to socially engaged performance that upholds ethical considerations in representing marginalized communities.

William B. Covey

Slippery Rock University Pennsylvania, USA

Newman's Own: The Effects of Gender and Mental Illness on *Gamma Rays*

After seeing the play live and purchasing the rights, Paul Newman produced and directed his 1972 film version of Paul Zindel *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds*. He chose Oscar-winning Alvin Sargent as screenplay writer and wife Joanne Woodward and daughter Nell Potts to star, intertwining talent and women from his own family to re-create this powerful drama. Rising above conventionality, Woodward and Potts' acting and Newman's unobtrusive directing style centre on, "the dramatic content of a scene rather than its visual style" (Ebert). Woodward plays Beatrice Hunsdorfer as, "simply mentally ill and suffering greatly . . . allowing the film's audience to feel sympathy and perhaps even empathy for her" (Schudson 12). Beatrice is angry that her ex-husband has abandoned her, self-medicates with alcohol, and delusionally seeks get-rich schemes to improve her family's lifestyle. Potts plays daughter Tillie, a smart, sensitive, and science-fair-winning adolescent who represents growth and life, persevering despite her mother's questionable parenting and focus on death. Loomis' feminist reading reveals, "Beatrice fully intends to create a freer, more dignified life for herself and the children she loves" (123); yet she ultimately fails. Newman's anti-sentimentality and Woodward's emotional power undercut the town's "lack of tolerance and[decry]the levelling down to sameness and mediocrity, that, paradoxically, is part of the American system" (Adler 131). This presentation analyses filmic techniques such as close-ups and medium close-ups to support dramatic themes concerning mental health, familial drama, and survival instincts within a single mother's working-class reality.

William Boles

Rollins College, USA

The Pressures of the Aughts Seen through Store Front Windows in Kwame Kwei-Armah's
Elmina's Kitchen and Tracy Lett's *Superior Donuts*

While the family kitchen has always been a powerful dramatic setting to explore familial tensions and secrets (see Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class*), another location where food is prepared and served has also been a powerful dramatic device for playwrights: the restaurant. Immediately one's thoughts may turn to Athol Fugard's *Master Harold...and the Boys* or August Wilson's *Two Trains Running*, but for this presentation I want to explore how Kwame Kwei-Armah in *Elmina's Kitchen* (National Theatre 2003; West End 2005) and Tracy Letts's *Superior Donuts* (Chicago 2008; Broadway 2009) use this dramatically rich setting.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, both plays focus on small, struggling food establishments. After all, where is the drama if the restaurants are highly successful? However, what is surprising is how similar the plays are beyond this initial narrative framing device. Both feature lonely, haggard owners, struggling with a younger male worker, while the outer world of crime, gentrification, and name brand competition threaten the existence of the business. In addition, both playwrights situate their story upon the importance of ethnic identity to the characters as well as the surrounding community. In essence, the two plays share a similar DNA, as both playwrights use the public and community-based setting of a restaurant to glimpse at the tensions that dominated the Aughts and show that even though separated by 4000 miles, both cities and its citizens faced similar threats and challenges.

Yalçın Erden

Gendarmerie and Coast Guard Academy, Türkiye

Reconsidering Merit and Lineage: A Comparative Analysis of *All's Well That Ends Well* by William Shakespeare and *Sergüzeşt* by Samipaşazade Sezai

This study aims to analyse *All's Well That Ends Well* by William Shakespeare and *Sergüzeşt* by Samipaşazade Sezai from a socio-historical perspective. It discusses how these works of art problematize the lineage-associated classification of humans despite their distinct genres, periods, and cultures. After displaying how Shakespeare castigates the class bias in the Elizabethan era revolutionarily by focusing on the descriptions of a commoner, Helena, and her interactions with the individuals descending from an upper class, the study interrogates the class distinctions and slavery in the late Ottoman era that Sezai challenges through a slave girl, Dilber, and her pathetic experience resulting from several upper-class members' horrible attitudes. Furthermore, it reveals how Shakespeare and Sezai distort the concept of nobility by juxtaposing morally weak or villainous characters descending from noble families with virtuous commoners and slaves. Shakespeare transgresses the norms of the class system of the Elizabethan era; likewise, Sezai raises his voice against the slavery system prevalent in the late Ottoman era. Although Shakespeare's play ends happily and Sezai's novel offers the reader a tragic end, both works prioritize merit rather than lineage. Accordingly, this study argues that *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Sergüzeşt* defy the conventional lineage-based value systems of their societies transcending time and cultural boundaries.

Yoshiko Fukushima

University of Hawaii at Hilo, USA

Teaching Intra/Inter-cultural Performance: from Japanese Drama Classroom to Noh Theatre, Hawaiian Hula and American Hip-Hop

Japanese drama is often taught as a part of General Education requirements in US universities to expose students to non-Western culture in the arts or humanities. Noh's song and dance and Kabuki's acting are usually taught in the workshop style as extracurricular activities. These two decades, I was fortunate enough to experiment at two US universities to produce Japanese contemporary drama with Japanese language learners and direct adapted performance composition of traditional Japanese performing arts. In 2024 my former student Keli'i Kalaukoa Masao Grothmann brought to Hawaii Island Sano Noboru, a Noh master of the Hosho School. Grothmann now operates his halau teaching hula and Hawaiian culture for his students in Japan. He is Sano's disciple and recently produced a collaboration work by his two mentors, Michael Dela Cruz from hula and Sano from noh, remembering his own dance solo merging hula kahiko and noh in our campus.

Today's presentation introduces Grothmann's teacher Sano who has been travelling all over Japan to teach Noh K-12 children in a hands-on style and breaking barriers of dance genres through a collaboration work with a hip-hop dancer SAM. I examine how physicality-based training methods highlighting transmission of Noh's chanting, singing and movement skills help students to discover universalities of the language of theatre across cultures beyond time and space. I propose the effectiveness of teaching Japanese drama for the young generation who are familiar with flatness of Japanese anime and computer games, which promotes multi-dimensional understanding of new cultural values.

Zoe Detsi

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Gender and Aging in Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women* (1991)

This paper offers across-disciplinary examination of Edward Albee's play, *Three Tall Women* (1991), from the perspectives of age, gender, and theatre. Ever since the publication of Susan Sontag's "The Double Standard of Aging," feminist scholarship has taken slow but steady steps to demonstrate how gender contributes to our understanding of age and, particularly, the idea that aged women are socially marginalized, physically restrained, and emotionally alienated. Furthermore, age scholars, like Margaret Cruikshank and Kathleen Woodward, have stressed the performative quality of age and defined it "as an act," in the sense that it requires social performance in accordance with culturally acceptable rules and behaviours. Through his play, Albee makes a unique contribution—inadvertently or not—to the discussion of the aging process from the perspective of the female experience. Cutting through the age span, Albee's characters represent the circular pattern of life, where the past, the present, and the future merge in the aging process. The audience are faced with the relentless biological transition from youth to midlife to old age and the inescapable identification with the social stages and cultural roles this entails. It is the aim of this paper to show how Albee's theatrical exploration of the experience of old age transcends the dominant perception of the aging process as inevitable physical and mental decline and exposes the broader context of social conditioning and cultural prescriptions in relation to the stages of age, thus recognizing that age is far more social than biological.