

## Editorial: The Muses Roar from the Margin

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‘When guns roar the muses are silent’, goes the Latin saying. Should theatres remain open or go dark to protest the war and respect its victims? And what is the responsibility of artists, intellectuals, scholars, citizens in dark times? These were just some of the questions the roaring guns provoked (among many other things) in the 1990s when my country, Yugoslavia, was falling apart in a bloodbath of the civil war. In all the chaos and violence of war (any war) – one thing has become clear – the muses (excuse the patriarchal trope, but these are of a different kind) are never silent – they speak, they sing, they argue, they shout, they dance, they howl – they make themselves heard even when speaking comes at a cost. Writing this editorial, in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I am yet again reminded of the roaring muses as old and new, more complicated, questions emerge. For example, what does it mean to do international theatre research in the global context of continuous and unfolding wars?

Against this backdrop the theme of this year’s IFTR world congress in Reykjavik, Shifting Centres (in the Middle of Nowhere), brings another shift to the hierarchies of centrality and periphery – the war zone, and it is hardly a new site: Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Kashmir, Ukraine ... Does the perception of the world and what is performed in the realms of both theatre and politics look different depending on our proximity to the site of crisis, conflict, violence and destruction? Is the media spotlight what places a war zone centre stage, or is a site of violence and precarity, viewed from a safe distance, always in one way or another at the periphery? The kaleidoscopic lens of international theatre and performance research allows us to ask these questions critically and productively – even if, at times, frustratingly, asking and thinking is all we can do.

Gestures and actions of resilience originating from artists, theatre-makers and musicians have been emerging from Ukraine as fast as Putin’s invasion has been leaving its deadly trail. Violinist Vera Lytovchenko is playing concerts for her neighbours in a bomb shelter in Kharkiv. Actors of Kyiv’s Dakh Theatre and other theatre-makers are recording their war diaries.<sup>1</sup> Theatre buildings have become bomb shelters, as well as targets. Ukrainian theatre-maker Victoria Myronyuk reads Rebecca Solnit’s book *Hope in the Dark*, written after the US invasion of Iraq, to save her ‘thoughts from despair’: Solnit’s ‘two key words are hope and resistance. She differs hope from optimism because hope requires some efforts.’<sup>2</sup> That labour of hope emerges also in the act of resignation of the artistic director of Moscow’s Meyerhold Theatre, Elana Kovalskaya, in protest over her country’s invasion of Ukraine, in the words ‘I’m begging you to stop!’ with which Maly Theatre’s director Lev Dodin ends his open letter to Putin, in the flash-mob style interruption of the television editor

Marina Ofsyannikova, who burst on the set of a live news broadcast at the Russian state television with the slogan ‘No to War. Don’t trust the propaganda.’ While it is the imperialist and colonial logic that (through various forms of violence) still maps the world in dichotomies of centrality and marginality, framing some bodies more ‘grievable’ than others (Butler), it is these roars from the margin (in relation not only to place, but also to power) that speak the subversive performativity of hope.

Three of the five essays published in this issue deal in their own ways with conflict and political violence through different theatrical forms and styles. Case studies of both Laura Monrós-Gaspar and Maria Spitz are examined against the backdrop of dictatorship. Monrós-Gaspar uses historiography and performance analysis to explore the 1958 staging of Alfonso Reyes’s *Ifigenia cruel* – the Mexican poet’s pacifist rendering of the Greek classic in the context of Franco’s dictatorship. The article foregrounds how the propaganda machine of Franco’s regime used culture to spread its hegemonic ideology, including the form of Greek tragedy. While the staging of Reyes’s rather abstract dramatic poem was initially envisaged as a showcase of Latin American drama and a means of strengthening Spain’s relation to the rest of the Hispanic world through cultural exchange, the performance had different and unexpected political resonances. Monrós-Gaspar shows how *Ifigenia*’s peaceful rebellion could be transplanted to ‘the context of any modern conflict – in this case the context of Francoist Spain of the late 1950s’, where the text echoed topical references to political exile. Maria Spitz’s article focuses on Lola Arias’s *El año en que nací*, which explores the intergenerational trauma in the polarized Chilean society after seventeen years of Pinochet’s dictatorship. Spitz explores how Arias’s documentary play connects contemporary theatre, historical re-enactments, politics and the public to move beyond the official narratives of polarization. Conceptually, Spitz draws from both Diana Taylor’s dichotomy of archive and repertoire and Rebecca Schneider’s exploration of re-enactment as a mode of separation from the archive to show how, through the course of Arias’s play, one can become the other – the archive, imbued with personal stories, memories, family histories, begins to contradict the official narrative. In this blurring of binaries of archive and repertoire, through Arias’s dramaturgical frames, an opening for personal agency on the part of actors and audience emerges.

Anika Marschall and Ann-Christine Simke’s article focuses on the work of the Turner Prize-nominated independent research organization Forensic Architecture, and its counterinvestigation into the racially motivated murder of Halit Yozgat in Kassel, Germany, in 2006 by the terrorist organization NSU (Nationalist Socialist Underground). This reflective and activist research is dedicated to the victims of racially motivated murders committed by this far-right terrorist organization in the ‘post-migrant’ Germany. In their analysis of Forensic Architecture’s presentation of Yozgat’s murder case at the ICA gallery in London in 2018 and at the people’s tribunal, entitled Tribunal NSU-Komplex auflösen (Tribunal Unravelling the NSU-Komplex), held at Schauspiel Köln in 2017, Marschall and Simke analyse the entanglement of forensic aesthetics, performance, social justice and arts institutions. They demonstrate how forensic aesthetics exposes violence, racism and institutional

shortcomings of political, legal and media forums by means of visualization and narrativization, but the authors also challenge and critically engage with the idea of art institutions' inherent counterhegemonic potential. As in Spitz's examinations of Arias's documentary dramaturgical strategies, here too theatre and art emerge as spaces of potentiality to offer a radical and critical shift in perceptions and even behaviours. However, Marschall and Simke warn that this potential is not to be taken as a given – foregrounding how theatre and gallery spaces, modes of representation and structures of knowledge production (through both art institutions and academia) reproduce modes of violence and micro-aggression as they aim at countering them – they stress the urgent need for a wider counterhegemonic strategy.

Ignacio Ramos's article 'Female Nudity, Interspecies Sexuality and "Horseness" in Laetitia Dosch's *Hate* and Micia de Wet's 'Critically Considering Embodied Cognition and Research in Theatre and Performance' offer two very different thematic and conceptual considerations, but they have in common their various engagements with binaries. Ramos draws from ecofeminist theories, Levinas, and Derrida's reflections on shame to explore how Laetitia Dosch's 2018 performance *Hate* – featuring female nudity and a white stallion – pushes the limits of interspecies identification. The essay explores the potential of theatrical performance to shift the binaries of human and animal – female and equine – to access the subjectivity of the non-human other. While the dialogue between the species has shaped both the creation process and the performance, this encounter, Ramos argues, ends up on a dystopic note of loss and the reinstatement of the human/non-human binary rather than hope. Micia de Wet offers innovative conceptual and hermeneutical perspectives to the role of embodied cognitive science in theatre and performance research, practice and pedagogy. This contribution carefully reflects on the usage of interdisciplinarity in our field, offering a productive critique of how theatre and performance studies utilize the science behind body and mind, whereby practice has become the hallmark of embodiment. De Wet warns that this perception of the relationship between thinking and doing often perpetuates the Cartesian body/mind dichotomy even when the aim is to destabilize it. This essay points out that doing and making – practices that have been perceived as embodied research – also facilitate a complex mental process, while conversely, the body still remains a source of cognition even when it does not perform. By challenging the mind/body binary in the concepts and strategies of embodied cognition within theatre and performance research, through a deep examination of existing scholarship, de Wet proposes new ways to think about the application of the methodology of cognitive science in both research and pedagogical processes by reconfiguring what we mean by embodiment.

This issue also features Janelle Reinelt's and Wilmar Sauter's tributes to Thomas Postlewait – a scholar who has left a great legacy in theatre historiography and was a prominent member of the IFTR. Reinelt's and Sauter's remembrance pieces also attest to the spirit of friendship and comradeship in our research community as an important factor in individual, collaborative and organizational processes. David Barnett's 'On Being Had: Publishing an Article on a Literary Fake' is a reflection on writing an article (published in this journal in 2002) that examined a fake Heiner

Müller play mistaken for an authentic part of the playwright's *oeuvre*. Yet this short piece offers more food for thought than just merely righting an error – indeed it might work very well as a companion piece to Jorge Luis Borges's famous short story 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote'.

In this issue, the questions of binaries – moving beyond them and the (im) possibility of shifting them – emerge as connected issues: centre and margin, archive and repertoire, human and animal, mind and body, real and fake. To return to the initial question of how to do international theatre and performance research against the backdrop of continuous violence on the international political stage, I would like to evoke another attempt of a binary shift – that by political theorist Mahmood Mamdani, who, in his latest book *Neither Settler nor Native*, proposes the idea of a new political imagination that emerges from the decoupling of the state and the nation:

The nation is not inherent in us. It overwhelmed us. The nation made the immigrant a settler and the settler a perpetrator. The nation made the local a native and the native a perpetrator, too. In this new history everyone is colonized – settler and native, perpetrator and victim, majority and minority. Once we learn this history, we might prefer to be survivors instead.<sup>3</sup>

Theatre and performance research and practice are well equipped to explore and model this idea of a political society of the survivors, providing a vigilant critical attitude towards our own institutional, epistemological and methodological blind spots as some of the essays featured here have shown in their own distinct ways.

#### NOTES

- 1 Available at [www.europeantheatre.eu/page/resources/voices-for-ukraine](http://www.europeantheatre.eu/page/resources/voices-for-ukraine).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), p. 355.