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FROM THE EDITOR

"O world, thy slippery turns."[1] Another turn of the earth around the sun completed (that is how it works, isn't it?), and with this September issue of *Theatre Survey* in your hands, my spell as Editor will have come to an end. But what Shakespeare's Coriolanus has in mind is not the implacable movement of celestial bodies, let alone the periodicity of academic journals, but the sudden and unpredictable alterations in fortune that befall those called to assume what we nowadays term "leadership roles." I am not alluding to my own downfall, then, as this was already scripted from the very beginning, but to the news that broke just as the May issue of this journal was being mailed out to subscribers. That issue, with its special section on the ongoing controversy over Berlin's Volksbühne, reached you, a little unexpectedly, not as news hot off the press, but instead as a historical snapshot of a moment before a particularly slippery turn. On 13 April, Chris Dercon, whose appointment as the theatre's Intendant had been the occasion for the controversy in question, announced his resignation with immediate effect. "The concept of Chris Dercon did not work out as hoped, and the Volksbühne needs a fresh start immediately," according to a joint statement issued at a press conference by Dercon and Berlin's senator for culture, Klaus Lederer.[2]

Three weeks later, as work on the present issue was coming to its conclusion, a seven-hour production of Goethe's *Faust*—the last show to have been created at the Volksbühne by his predecessor, Frank Castorf—opened the 2018 Theatertreffen (a festival presenting a juried selection of the preceding season's ten best works by German-speaking theatres) at the Haus der Berliner Festspiele. This theatre, pictured on the cover of this issue, had previously served West Berlin as the Freie Volksbühne, during the period of the city's division, and was where Erwin Piscator—some of whose earlier and most influential work had been created at the original Volksbühne—was working as Intendant at the time of his death in 1966. The fate of the original Volksbühne seems to hang in the balance. German media report a serious hole in the theatre's finances. The Berlin government is apparently going to take its time over appointing Dercon's successor.

Turns—slippery or not, but clearly related both to the movement of celestial bodies and to the transactions of modern capitalism—are at the heart of Katherine Biers's essay that opens this issue. Biers considers the use of clocks onstage in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century popular theatre, not only in regard to formal developments in dramatic composition but also to how theatre making and theatregoing involved participants in a set of contemporary questions about the meaning of time in an age of work-driven punctuality.

Amy Hughes's essay is about what might seem at first sight to be an unusual and excessively theatrical object—a sword. But she takes up this sword, presented to the American actor and manager Harry Watkins, to suggest and exemplify an

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approach to theatre history in which the everyday experience of both theatre makers and theatregoers offers a rich alternative to histories that take the exceptional as their point of entry. Gift presentations such as Watkins's sword were a regular feature of theatrical life in the United States during the period of his career, and like all gifts, one might say, formed part of an economy of esteem, employment, and wage bargaining in which actors, audiences, and managements all participated.

Both Hughes and Biers are concerned, then, in different and varying degrees, with theatre and work. The "slippery turns" that befall such cultural leaders as Frank Castorf and Chris Dercon are also about work, of course—this is capitalism, after all. Taking a cue from Hughes's recommendation that theatre history attend to the everyday, it is thus appropriate to note (as have numerous contributors to debates regarding the Volksbühne's artistic leadership) that also at stake is the work of hundreds of others: practitioners whose names may appear in theatre programs but rarely, if ever, in scholarly indexes, yet whose livelihoods depend upon their theatrical employment.

Coriolanus, in his self-absorbed philosophizing, sees no connection between his own fate—in which he perceives himself as a tragic and heroic figure—and the life-threatening precarity that moved the citizens of Rome in the opening scene to organize themselves into political protest. In his adaptation of *Coriolanus,* Brecht might be understood to be exploring what might be available in the Shakespeare text that would invite spectators, such as the readers of Hughes's essay, to turn their attention away from sword-brandishing heroes and toward the unexceptional, everyday struggles of people who need to make a living, and whose lives, loves, and deaths are as worthy of regard as any other. Raymond Williams opens *Modern Tragedy* with a moving reflection upon "a terrifying loss of connection" between his own sense of the tragic, at the scale of the "unregarded working life" and silent death of his father, and the idea of tragedy as literary and dramatic form that the academy had reserved for the lives of the supposedly exceptional individual.[3]

The exceptional individual is always in "the room where it happens," as it is called in the song from which Donatella Galella takes the title for her essay on Lin-Manuel Miranda's exceptionally successful musical *Hamilton*. Galella encourages her readers to think about how this musical performs exclusions precisely by means of its programmatic inclusions. In other words, she invites consideration of how the musical itself—both as a theatrical form, and as a participant in a culture industry that persistently idealizes the heroic individual (and their bootstraps narratives)—tends to insist that it is "the room" alone that matters. All those things going on outside, offstage, away from the White House and the Great White Way, serve only to propel the exceptional individual toward that room. Galella's essay considers how casting and narrative in *Hamilton* work to make such exclusions the basis for a startlingly bipartisan hit.

The heroic individual often acts onstage under the influence of an unseen force (fate, destiny, Providence), and the slippery turns to which they are subjected are often brought to an end (reversed, redeemed) by the intervention of a deus ex machina. Alisa Zhulina proposes that this theatrical device be understood—in the case of the theatre of capital that is her topic—in relation to the ideological device of the "invisible hand," a metaphor for the (mythic) impersonal operations of the

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market economy, elaborated from the occasional use of the term by Adam Smith. The plays she examines here—Ibsen's *The Pillars of Society*, *John Gabriel Borkman,* and *An Enemy of the People*—show their audiences, in their deployment of both devices in parallel, something of how the rhetoric of capitalist political economy functions, thereby performing, she suggests, a kind of immanent critique on behalf of a theatre that acknowledges its own investments in capitalism.

In the last piece in this issue Rayya El Zein, Irene Fernández Ramos, George Potter, and Gabriel Varghese invite us to join a conversation about our responsibilities as scholars and producers of culture, and, specifically, to think and talk together about how we might respond, collectively, as members of professional associations and institutions, to the request from Palestinian cultural workers to boycott cultural and academic institutions funded by the State of Israel. The authors favor a boycott, but ask for a conversation. The publication of their invitation in the pages of this journal does not indicate the endorsement of any position on this issue on the part of this journal, Cambridge University Press, or the American Society for Theatre Research. All it indicates is an endorsement of the suggestion that we find ways of talking to one another about a difficult subject. Just as we do not ask the theatre we make and enjoy to abstain from engaging in urgent political questions or attending to everyday experiences of precarity, injustice, and exclusion—as the essays in this volume consistently demonstrate—so it makes sense to ask what kind of relationship we want to create between the scholarly work we make and enjoy and the conditions in which we are able to make and enjoy it.

ENDNOTES

1. William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, IV.iv.
2. "Volksbühnen-Intendant Chris Dercon tritt zurück," rbbl24 (Rundfunk Berlin–Brandenburg), *www.rbb24.de/kultur/beitrag/2018/04/intendant-der-volksbuehne-chris-dercon-tritt-zurueck-berlin.html*, accessed 10 May 2018.
3. Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 13.

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