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FROM THE EDITOR

The cover image for this issue was produced, like this editorial, in Berlin in September 2017, just a few days after the new Volksbühne season had opened with a ten-hour dance program on the tarmac of the former Tempelhof airport (rather than at its theatre) and just over a week before federal elections were to be held. As many readers will be aware, the new season at the Volksbühne has been the subject of much controversy, ever since March 2015, when Tim Renner, then Berlin's State Secretary for Culture, announced the appointment of Chris Dercon, formerly the director of Tate Modern in London, as the Volksbühne's new Intendant, to replace Frank Castorf, who had led the theatre since 1992.

Criticism of Dercon's appointment and of his subsequent programming decisions has mobilized a range of arguments, at the heart of which lie questions about theatre history and the role of theatre practice itself in the preservation and the making of that history. Under Castorf's leadership the Volksbühne represented, for many, the continuation and the continuing renewal of a distinctive German socialist theatre tradition, in which politically engaged and formally experimental work was made by a permanent company comprising not just directors such as Castorf (and others whose work has been associated with the theatre, like Dimiter Gotscheff, Christoph Marthaler, René Pollesch, and Christoph Schlingensief) but actors, designers, technicians, and the entire staff of the theatre. Dercon's appointment seemed to signal a repudiation of this tradition, in which theatre, politics, and the working lives of theatre makers were intimately and productively entangled with one another, in favor of an "internationalization" strategy (currently advocated in government thinking on both culture and higher education); a project-based rather than a production-based approach to theatre programming; and the dissolution of theatrical specificity in pursuance of a diffuse interdisciplinarity of the performing arts.

There are four things that the cover photograph does not show: first, the opening of the theatre season, because it did not take place in the theatre; second and third, two distinctive objects that had come to be linked almost automatically in at least some public imagination with the Volksbühne and the theatre tradition it had come to represent. The first of these was the *Räuberrad* (Robber Wheel), a sculpture created in 1994 by the theatre's most celebrated (and recently lamented) designer and one of Castorf's key collaborators, Bert Neumann, to mark the first production of the Castorf period, Friedrich Schiller's *Die Räuber* (*The Robbers*). This metal sculpture stood on the grass in front of the theatre in Rosa-Luxemburg Platz until it was dug up and removed (initially to travel with the company to the Avignon Festival) as a gesture to mark the close of the Castorf "era." It had also, over the years, effectively become the logo of the theatre, appearing all over its printed and online materials. The second is the neon sign that stood on the roof the theatre, spelling the single word OST (east), to affirm the theatre's affiliation

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with the social, political, and theatrical life of the former DDR (socialist East Germany)—or perhaps, more specifically, to use that gesture of affiliation to signal opposition to all that for which its antonym, WEST, might be imagined to stand in a reunified, capitalist Germany and a postmodern city of culture like Berlin. The neon was removed on 24 June, during the final performance of Castorf's production of *Die Brüder Karamasow* a week before the end of his final season. Finally, it does not show any signs of the short-lived occupation of the theatre by a collective of political activists and artists, who entered the theatre on 22 September, proposing an alternative program, only to be evicted by police on 28 September. In light of this occupation the next issue of Theatre Survey will carry a special section reflecting at greater length on the context and implications of the Volksbühne controversy.

The photograph does, however, show some election advertising for a leading parliamentary candidate of Die Linke (The Left), the left-wing political party whose headquarters sit next to the Volksbühne on Rosa-Luxemburg Platz, in the Karl-Liebknecht-Haus, which had been the headquarters of the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) between 1926 and 1933. Among those competing against candidates from Die Linke in the Bundestag elections of 2017 Berlin was former State Senator for Culture Tim Renner, the Social Democratic Party's (SPD's) candidate for Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf (who did not, in the end, win a seat). His successor as State Senator for Culture, Klaus Lederer, is a leading member of Die Linke who had publicly dissociated himself from Renner's decision to terminate Castorf's contract. Lederer even attended Castorf's farewell party, giving a short speech from the front steps of the theatre in which he cited playwright-director Heiner Müller on the importance of theatre's capacity to disturb, provoke, and unsettle.

That theatre's entanglement with politics is not new—and is not, of course, news, perhaps especially not in Germany, nor to readers of this journal. But to read and think about the histories of that entanglement and to learn from contributors about such things—including, of course, theatre's capacity to write its own histories—is one of the greatest pleasures of being this journal's editor. Perhaps that is why this issue is the way it is, and begins, as it does, with Kyle A. Thomas exploring the relations among texts, theatricality, and politics in Carolingian Europe, suggesting that the early medieval page was used as a stage for negotiations and competitions over power, and that this should alert historians of medieval theatre to the existence and persistence of a theatrical culture even in the absence of dedicated theatres for its production.

Bethany Hughes excavates the construction of a widely held myth about Edwin Forrest—that he based his portrayal of Metamora on his knowledge of a prominent Choctaw leader—and, in conclusively debunking it, invites us to think about how such myths participate in the formation of a national identity that depends upon the existence of Native Americans while systematically rendering their actual lives (and identities) invisible.

Joyelle Ball's essay on the Globe's "battlefield" performances of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays also investigates national identity—in this case, to think about how theatre spectatorship both actual and virtual (the productions were also made available for streaming) might contribute to its formation.

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Patricia McKee's essay investigates player portraiture in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, tracking the appearance of an identical gesture—the hand placed over the heart—in portraits of both actors and pious puritan figures. McKee proposes a reading of this gesture that sheds new light on the period's well-documented struggle between the theatre and church for the attention and the adherence of an audience to which both appealed.

The issue closes with Sebastián Calderón Bentin's essay on the spectacular rise and fall of the Fujimori regime in Peru, in which he argues that a theatrical understanding of illusion—as a play into which spectators enter in pursuit of pleasure, rather than an error into which they might fall—offers insights into contemporary political realities. This applies not just in the specific case of Peru, but wherever images, dramas, and narratives are at work within the sphere of political struggle.

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