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FROM THE EDITOR

Reinterpreting, Reimagining, and Reckoning

From Njoki McElroy's Africanist proto-performance studies pedagogy, through Gerhard Gundermann's agitprop *Liedertheater*, to Bertolt Brecht's multiple revisions on manuscripts about Chinese theatre, into musical theatre that affects audiences in feminist historiographical ways, and finishing with Akram Khan's *Jungle Book Reimagined* to incorporate ecocritical concerns, this issue's authors take us on quite a significant and impactful journey.

Judith Hamera's "Njoki McElroy's Radical Oral Interpretation of Literature" gives credit to this professor's influence in shaping Northwestern University's brand of performance studies. McElroy began her foray into oral interpretation as a graduate student at Northwestern, where in 1970 she taught the very first "Interpretation of Black Drama" course in the United States. She strove to braid selections from the Black Arts Movement (BAM) with both practices and purposes of oral interpretation. Says Hamera, "her repudiation of interp's historic commitment to the New Criticism as its default methodology, and her centering of performance in its own right rather than its subordination to literature, anticipated the core commitments of performance studies" by a decade. In effect, McElroy's course, with its Black performance perspective, was the first intellectual precursor to what would become performance studies, and its popularity ensured a shift away from oral interpretation and toward that new field.

Hamera's is a genealogical and recovery project. Interpretation began as "a derivative discipline with no unique object to call its own" positioned somewhere between English and theatre with a performative relation to communication through elocution (speech). In 1984, Northwestern University changed its departmental title to Performance Studies, as defined by Dwight Conquergood and Victor Turner, following New York University's initial shift but with a different approach. McElroy's course anticipated this shift by more than a decade. Her work as an artist and intellectual also aided the transition from New Criticism to Africanist aesthetics. Hamera identifies McElroy's pedagogical methods as evidence of a "strategic quiet" that depolarized racially mixed classroom discussions of Africanist aesthetics and rigorous Black performance literature perspectives.

In David Robb's "Parables, Fairy Tales, and the Stasi: The *Liedertheater* of Gerhard Gundermann's Brigade Feuerstein," this author adds to his previous research on East German protest singer-dramatist Gerhard Gundermann. Here he discusses three specific pieces and their use of parables and fairy tales to protest the Socialist Unity Party (SED) practice. It presents the work of this artist's group, Brigade Feuerstein, in voicing political criticism through performance. "*Liedertheater* had its roots in the proletarian review of the Weimar Republic and the work of Bertolt Brecht. . . . In the field of political song, Wolf Biermann famously adapted the plebeian, antiauthoritarian lyrical tradition of Bertolt Brecht to apply it directly against the ruling Socialist Unity Party." It was during the mid- to late 1970s that groups such as Brigade

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Feuerstein detached themselves from their singing clubs to embrace a more political form of song theatre. Influenced by agitprop and international music, this group and others "updated the German political song by setting it within a full electric rock band format" in an effort to escape GDR censorship. Using a modern take on Brecht's *Lehrstück* (learning play), "what began often as a parable, couched within a fairy tale, would then morph into a realistic scene from GDR industry" in which Gundermann attacked its hierarchy and advocated for equal stakeholding for its workers. Parables, fairy tales, and allegories framed radical political commentary inside performance fiction in ways that made it less likely to get censored.

Brigade Feuerstein "'camouflaged'" this commentary with clowning in its parables. These pieces involved veiled criticism about how the government handled very early reports of global warming due to abuse of the environment and other topical stories. Gundermann rode a fine line between "subliminal socially critical content" and entertaining skits that made the audience laugh. The GDR did not find his work funny though, and kicked him out of the party. Thereafter, his work became even more critical. What is striking in his later pieces is "the complete lack of a utopian outlook, which had been an indispensable aspect of the earlier Feuerstein productions." The group itself disbanded in 1989 for obvious political reasons. He continued performing with his backing band, Seilschaft, while maintaining his lifetime job of working in a mine until his death in 1998. Andreas Dresen produced a feature film, *Gundermann*, in 2018 that gave international credit to this artist's work. "The remembrance culture surrounding Gundermann has recently widened to include musical theatre productions of his life and songs," and his political message lives on in a current age of environmental destruction and military conflict.

Min Tian picks up on Brechtian influence in "*Verfremdungseffekt* or *Entfremdungseffekt*? A Study of Brecht's Manuscripts on Chinese Theatre." This article uncovers previously undiscussed versions of Brecht's famous essay on alienation/estrangement effects in the art of Chinese acting. John Willett's translation published in 1964 has become the most widely recognized version, and yet Tian cites another translation, by Eric Walter White—published in a London-based journal, *Life and Letters To-day*, in 1936—which differs widely enough from Willett's that they reflect two separate German documents. Tian's discovery "underscores the historical and political, as well as artistic and theoretical, interests underlying the changes and revisions that Brecht made of his essay." Tian argues that this alternative version "contributes to a better understanding of the making of Brecht's concept of *Verfremdungseffekt* as well as his interpretation of the art of Chinese acting." Academic essays tend to go through multiple revised versions before settling on what might be considered their final state. What Tian finds fascinating is the number of different typescripts, abridged and allegedly unabridged, some with Brecht's handwritten notes, eventually typed and recorded by Elisabeth Hauptmann, one of his female adjuncts. This precipitated a search that led Tian to the unpublished German version on which White's translation was based. This article offers a comparison of the "'unabridged' typescript . . . the two identical abridged typescripts—and, most important, the typescript on which White's translation was based"—showing that "the corrections, revisions, cuts, and additions, all told, are neither minor nor insignificant," and are thus well worth discussing.

Both White and Eric Bentley provided translations that differ from Willett's but are not nearly as widely disseminated as Willett's. As Tian suggests, "White's and Bentley's translations, ironically, have been nearly forgotten or rarely used, even

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though based on the earliest extant complete text of Brecht's essay—and were most likely approved by Brecht, who knew of their publications at the time." Whereas both Willett and Bentley translated *Verfremdungseffekt* as "alienation effect," White thought *Verfremdungseffekt* was more precisely translated as "the effect of disillusion" in its most Chinese acting sense. Other terms used include "defamiliarization" and "estrangement," although these also have the danger of missing their intended mark. Tian then complicates all of this with the understanding that Brecht used the terms *Entfremdung* and *Verfremdung* somewhat interchangeably in his typescripts. Charting various manuscript revisions and erasures in a helpful visual, Tian gives "a detailed comparative analysis of these manuscripts" that allows for the consideration (first proposed by Martin Esslin) that the differing versions of Brecht's essay may have much to do with German and Chinese cultural politics of the time. What came of this was Brecht's understanding of Mao's treatise *On Contradiction*, which led to his theoretical discussion of materialist dialectics in theatre. In Bentley's translation, *Entfremdungseffekt* is "*effect of estrangement*," whereas *Verfremdungseffekt* is "alienation effect." Tian ends his essay by claiming that the second of these two German terms was a neologistic version of the first that essentially made a familiar idea strange, striking, and new.

In "Changing the Musical's Major: *Beautiful* and *Fun Home* Redefine Feminist Historiography," Laura MacDonald draws on two successful musicals about famous female artists to examine women's power. These two biographical pieces—one about singer-songwriter Carole King, and the other about cartoonist-graphic novelist Alison Bechdel—bring feminism and sexual identity to the fore. Bechdel was also famous for introducing "'the Bechdel test' to evaluate women's presence and agency in films," a criterion that continues to be of use both in Hollywood and in the independent film industry as a baseline for female representation. MacDonald calls upon live musical theatre's emotional affect to pull audiences in as witnesses to a celebrated history of women's artistry.

As MacDonald suggests, "the feminist biographical musical genre is *also* using musical theatre to expand feminist historiography. The grounding of female-centered storytelling in women's history, like feminism's longstanding deployment of history, may also be doing significant labor in dismantling the theatre industry's patriarchy." She draws on Charlotte Canning's belief that live performance can move beyond print's cultural legibility to reach audiences on powerful visual, aural, and gestural levels. MacDonald applies theatre scholar Kelsey Blair's theory of affect to "musical theatre moments inspired by real women's life stories." She offers a comparative history of bio-musicals that involve empowering moments for their female characters, but claims that *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* and *Fun Home*, about Bechdel, are musicals that center the women they portray and use their real-life experiences to affect audiences through their expansion of feminist historiography.

Jihay Park discusses Akram Khan's *Jungle Book Reimagined* as a key contribution to the evolution of a burgeoning field, ecocritical theatre, in her article "Staging the Entangled Human–Natural–Technological Worlds in *Jungle Book Reimagined*." Influenced by new materialism, this conversation explores the likely possibility of human extinction caused by environmental degradation. Material ecocriticism raises two main points: matter as generative power/agency, and a "recognition that the activities and arrangements of matter are imbued with narrative significance, rendering them susceptible to critical examination aimed at unveiling their stories and the intricate interplay between materiality and discourse." Park calls for a new narrative that places humans in relation to nonhumans in an Anthropocene

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framework. Khan's performance production is part of the climate fiction genre, and "signifies a transition from human-centered historical narratives to narratives centered on ecological dynamics and the agency of the nonhuman environment." Park pulls ecodramaturgical attributes from Khan's work, which transforms the character Mowgli into a female climate refugee after an environmental calamity that has "rendered life on earth difficult and even impossible." The audience for this production is cast "into the imminent threshold of human extinction," where Mowgli navigates "an entangled environment" that Parks situates "somewhere at the junctions between places." Such a deterritorialization embodies "'polytopianism,'" wherein multiple layers of spatial order are stacked upon each other in an "entangled pluriverse" that forms the "conceptual framework of eco-cosmopolitanism." This theatre space demands "a condition of placelessness." The stage in this representation is "portraying the interplay between human actions and the global repercussions of their consequences through the personal experiences of entities," and thus could be said, Parks argues, to envision "a widespread and expansive manifestation of hyperobject through a deranged and multiperspectival interpretation of scale." Khan offers climate change as a transcorporeal entanglement of material interrelatedness that Parks compares to Donna Haraway's cyborgian discourse.

This issue's persistent questions about cloaked meaning, relationality, representational icons, and affective responses engage the authors who guide us through their research with an eye toward performative ecocriticism, feminist historiography, Africanist influence on oral interpretation's shift to performance studies, song theatre as radical protest, and the effects of translation in archival deep dives. We have also included a special section commemorative tribute to the life's work of LeAnn Fields, whose editorial career with the University of Michigan Press jump-started the careers of many published ASTR academics. Enjoy!

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This is the final issue of *Theatre Survey* published through Cambridge University Press. Cambridge has recently dropped a number of the journals it has supported for years, due to downsizing, so we will now be making a smooth transition to Johns Hopkins University Press. Our cumulative thanks go to our amazingly talented copy editor, Michael Gnat, for making all of our work that much better over the years. Many thanks, Michael! Your attention to detail has saved us time after time.

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