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Editorial: Looking Back

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Editorial: Looking Back

ELAINE ASTON

This is my final issue for *Theatre Research International*. Handing over to Charlotte Canning as Senior Editor and Paul Rae as Assistant Editor, I want to wish them every future success with the journal. At the same time, I would like to thank everyone involved in the journal over the last three years, from those who submitted articles to those who contributed invaluable, behind-the-scenes labour – the editorial board, books-reviewing team and peer reviewers. A special thanks to Cambridge University Press for the assistance they provided with all aspects of the production process – especially to James Carr who has overseen each and every issue during my term of office. Leaving the editorship of the journal, I am pleased to note its buoyant subscription and submission rates – its revenue, despite the global, economic recession, continues to rise, while the number of articles offered for review has doubled over the course of the last three years.

In terms of *international* theatre research, however, there is no room for complacency. Editing the journal has taught me many things, but above all has impressed upon me the need to develop and sustain strategies to internationalize more thoroughly our field of theatre and performance scholarship. At one basic level, the invisible act of translation that occurs when authors for whom English is not their first language seek assistance for writing and submitting to a major, English-language journal such as *TRI* ought to become a visible concern, in order that a writer's language needs can be more thoroughly addressed and met. In more complex ways, the need for research strategies that serve to increase international encounters and dialoguing are called for in order to expand the field of theatre and performance enquiry, opening up, if not contesting, the circumference of its anglophone 'centre'.¹ 'Actions of Transfer', as introduced by Sue-Ellen Case and Diana Taylor in *TRI*, 35, 2, are actions of the kind needed: those that facilitate cross-border understandings of differently located theatre cultures and are rooted in the principle of collaboration and exchange. Additionally, to 'map' more thoroughly geographies of theatre and performance requires bringing into critical view those traditions and practices that have hitherto been overlooked and neglected (a significant case in point being theatre from the Arab world).²

To look back over the last three years of *TRI* is also to see some of the current, major preoccupations in our field of scholarship such as the ongoing concerns with censorship (36, 2); modalities of transnational exchange (35, 2); an enduring interest in theatre's 'radical bodies' as sites of social, sexual, political and cultural questioning (36, 1); the

desire to get closer to and ‘inside’ performance processes and practices (36, 3); and the enduring preoccupation with theatre’s transformative capacities – with exploring what theatre can ‘do’, what ‘role’ it ‘plays’ socially, culturally and politically (37, 2). ‘Celebrating 35 Years of Publication’ in issue 35, 3 created an opportunity to look back at the history of *TRI* as a ‘journal’ of theatre and performance scholarship, while 37, 1 explored a range of ‘Critical Turning Points’ in the field, opening these up for debate and renewed consideration.

The very first issue I put together as editor (35, 1) brought together articles, including Helena Grehan’s award-winning ‘*Aalst: Acts of Evil, Ambivalence and Responsibility*’,³ which, while offering different critical treatments of radically diverse performances, underlined how theatre’s experiential claims on our attention are often what move us to ‘think’, or help to ‘unsettle’ habitual critical and theoretical ways of knowing. In this latest and my last issue of *TRI*, performances that ‘unsettle’, provoke or disturb critical thinking are a feature of the article discussions that open with Bryoni Trezise’s conceptualization of ‘Spectatorship that Hurts’, explored through the work of Societas Raffaello Sanzio; and that move to Gareth White’s treatment of ‘Immersive Theatre’ and performances by the London-based companies Shunt and Punchdrunk; and on to Sruti Bala’s ‘Vectors of Participation in Contemporary Theatre and Performance’. Hereafter, questions of artistic creation and communication are addressed in Willmar Sauter’s analysis of Swedish artist Anna Odell’s highly controversial re-enactment of an attempted suicide, restaged for an installation, and the issue closes with Gillian Arrighi’s ‘Circus and Sumo’, detailing the performances and reception of what appear to be the first Sumo wrestlers to arrive on the popular, circus scene in Australia, this at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Looking back leaves me – and I hope all *TRI* readers – looking forward to the future, *international* histories of our theatre journal.

NOTES

- 1 A good example of such strategies can be found in the ‘Dossier: History, Memory, Event: A Working Archive’, compiled by Nobuko Anan, Bishnupriya Dutt, Janelle Reinelt and Shrinkhla Sahai, *Theatre Research International*, 37, 2 (July 2012), pp. 163–83.
- 2 See Khalid Amine, Hazem Azmy and Marvin Carlson, ‘IFTR’s Arabic Theatre Working Group’, *Theatre Research International*, 35, 3 (October 2010), pp. 263–74.
- 3 Winner of the the Marlis Thiersch Research Award for excellence in drama, theatre and performance, awarded by the Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies (2011).