

FROM THE EDITOR

Performance and Its Opposition

As with many in our field, I did not fall in love with theatre through the written word. I became enraptured with theatre—its history, influence, and ephemerality—through performance. As a child, I remember watching actors use their bodies to make an idea, quality, or feeling tangible to the audience. By middle school, I decided to try my hand at creating a performance. I convinced four of my younger sisters and niece to form an acting troupe and perform Anton Chekhov’s one-act comedy *The Bear* (1888) for our neighborhood. As an eleven-year-old self-appointed producer, director, and company member, I quickly learned that I was in over my head. How can I mount a show with a limited budget of five dollars? How can I persuade my sisters to stay involved in the production even though I can’t make good on my promise of paying them? How can I help my four-year-old niece memorize lines when she could not read? After trying to problem-solve, I realized I had no other choice but to cancel the production and disperse what remained of my acting troupe.

I share this silly personal anecdote because, in all seriousness, this early experience creating an amateur production served as a foundation for my knowledge of performance (broadly construed) and its opposition. Performance is *messy*, ephemeral in nature, and relies heavily on the devotion and commitment of artists and spectators to make vision a reality. Whether investigating antitheatrical tracts of the seventeenth century, early Black women musical performers, the reality in materiality of Sherlock Holmes, or Germany’s agitprop amateur theatre movement of the twentieth century, the articles in this issue engage with the complexities of creating or disavowing live performance, encouraging readers to consider the oppositional forces that both hinder and sustain craft.

Joy Palacios considers how the embodied activities of seventeenth-century Catholic priests fostered the growth of antitheatrical sentiments alongside the Grand Siècle, or golden age, of French theatre. In “Antitheatrical Prejudice: From Parish Priests to Diocesan Rituals in Early Modern France,” Palacios argues that in addition to writing, the Catholic church utilized what performance and theatre scholars would consider a “performance repertoire” to circulate theological ideas, values, and arguments to the laity. Paradoxically, the use of performance repertoire—including the bodily comportment of priests and the gestures, ceremonies, and sacraments that made up the liturgy—helped situate actors as “public sinners” and theatre as a site of moral decay. Ultimately, Palacios finds that without ceremonial support to bring life into their argument, antitheatrical texts would have remained nothing more than “dead letters.” By exploring the (often overlooked)

human interactions and embodied activities of priests, Palacios offers an insightful glimpse into how antitheatrical ideas permeated the church and society.

Caitlin Marshall's "Ear Training for History: Listening to Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield's Double-Voiced Aesthetics" explores the artistic contributions of Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield and the opposition she faced as the "first Black woman concert vocalist and operatic singer." In so doing, Marshall develops the term "ear training for history" as a way to understand how Greenfield used her unique performance practice of double-voiced sound to foster a Black feminist aesthetics of liberation. By placing the nineteenth-century multi-octave singer within the genealogy of Black women's performance practices, Marshall's piece makes profound contributions to chapters in classical music, theatre, and performance studies histories.

In "William Gillette's Sherlock Holmes, or the 'Real' Sherlock Holmes: Seeking Reality in Materiality," Isabel Stowell-Kaplan analyzes William Gillette's turn-of-the-century production of *Sherlock Holmes*, considering how Gillette's use of (then) novel production effects and his body cultivated the material and physical presence of the "real" Sherlock Holmes for spectators. Stowell-Kaplan argues that "Not only is the fictional detective figure of Holmes—gathering in one man an impulse toward the latest evidentiary and cultural habits to look to the material for answers—primed to investigate these very issues, but the production itself invites its audience to become detectives too, immersing themselves in the materiality of the production as they assess its seeming reality." Within this layered performance of meaning making, Stowell-Kaplan writes that Gillette's "body becomes a major site of materiality in the production as the material reality of *Sherlock Holmes* becomes that of Gillette's Sherlock Holmes."

Finally, Jessi Piggott's "Playing the Police with the Agitprop Troupes of Weimar Germany" examines the risks and rewards of using theatre as a site of revolutionary class struggle during the Weimar Republic. Piggott persuasively argues that opposition from the police force both helped and hindered the transmission of their call to arms. For example, while police could curtail troupes by shutting down agitprop performances, troupes could also use loopholes and take quick action to outmaneuver the slower-moving law enforcement. Furthermore, some troupes outwitted the police force by dramatizing them in their performance. "Despite [the] risks, agitprop troupes largely welcomed police as new, if unwitting, coperformers. By offering police a stage upon which to play the aggressor, troupes found a potent new weapon for their agitational arsenal," writes Piggott. Though the tenuous relationship between police and performers was ultimately curtailed by the passage of law, their altercations demonstrate the power of performance, its opposition, and the ongoing need to maintain a critical attitude toward the status quo.