

EUROPEAN JOURNAL  
OF THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE  
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sewing a gown  
A good & drinks

Smoking

Listening to GAMELOW  
WATCHING  
PERFORMANCE

Moving AROUND

PERFORMANCE

READING

PHOTOGRAPHING

FLIRTING

TALKING  
WATCHING  
BEING  
FROM  
BEING  
PERFORMANCE  
PERFORMANCE

RECORDING

RECORDING  
PERFORMANCE  
PERFORMANCE

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## ESSAYS

- 008** → **Pieter Verstraete**  
Editorial Introduction:  
An Open Call...
- 018** → **Irene Pipicelli**  
Material Memories:  
Choreographing Documental Bodies
- 060** → **Samantha Marenzi**  
Fotografare l'Antico: Memoria,  
profezia ed eredità di Isadora Duncan  
negli apparati visivi dei libri postumi
- 112** → **Dorota Sosnowska**  
The Mask as a Performative Object:  
History, Anthropology,  
and Political Theatre
- 146** → **Mischa Twitchin**  
Addressing 'the Cultural Level  
of an Average European' (Kafka)

## SCHOLAR IN FOCUS

GUEST EDITORS  
**Luk Van den Dries**  
**Pieter Verstraete**  
**Richard Schechner**

- 180** → Introduction
- 186** → Postpone the Great Game
- 212** → The Crash of Performative  
Circumstances: A Modernist  
Discourse on Postmodernism (1981)
- 252** → From Richard Schechner's  
India Notebook 1978
- 264** → Selections from *A Years Worth*
- 276** → Four Poems
- 286** → Portfolio

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

GUEST EDITOR AND AUTHOR  
**José Pedro Sousa**

- 308** → Theatre Censorship and Archival Research:  
Teatro Experimental de Cascais during  
the Portuguese Dictatorship

## BOOK REVIEWS

EDITORS  
**Valentina Temussi**  
**Maria João Brilhante**  
**Milija Gluhović**

- 382** → **Armando Rotondi**  
Aleksandra Jovičević (2022)  
*Orson Welles e il teatro.*  
*Shakespeare e oltre*
- 390** → **Alicia Rodríguez Campi**  
Anne Pellus, dir. (2021)  
*Danse et politique.*  
*Luttés, corporéités, performativités*
- 398** → **Maria João Brilhante**  
Georges Banu (2021)  
*Les récits d'Horatio. Portraits et aveux*  
*des maîtres du théâtre européen*
- 404** → **Maria Chiara Provenzano**  
Anna Maria Monteverdi (2021)  
*Scenografe. Storia della scenografia*  
*al femminile dal Novecento a oggi*
- 410** → **Yana Meerzon**  
J. A. E. Curtis, ed. (2020)  
*New Drama in Russian: Performance,*  
*Politics and Protest in Russia, Ukraine*  
*and Belarus*

# ESSAYS





# EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

AN OPEN CALL...

**Pieter Verstraete**

As the *European Journal of Theatre and Performance* is now steadily growing into a bi-annual publication, we are proud to present this fifth issue as a result of our first open call for contributions. From now on, we will alternate between one specially themed and one general issue per year and authors will have the possibility to submit scholarly articles for future issues on a continual basis.

Although no thematic focus was intended, unexpected convergences did emerge between the different contributions for this issue's Essays section. The four contributions all engage with memory, the body, and the archive in their various intertwinements. It seems that the urge for searching and understanding how 'performing remains' (Schneider 2011) has only been growing in recent years, not only in theatre and performance practices all over the world but also in scholarship. The complex issue of what exactly remains after a performance — which is quintessentially 'imbricated, chiasmatically, with the live body' (Schneider 2011: 97-98) — is indeed a question of the archive that goes right down to the pinnacles of western culture, of how we understand ourselves, but also of who controls the narrative and, therefore, regulates access to history. As Peggy Phelan's famous ontology of performance stipulates, because the embodied act at the core of performance seems to evade (and must also resist) the materiality of documentation, it always 'disappears' into the depth of memory (Phelan 1993). And yet, as Schneider

has shown, this influential view on performance is in fact defined by the logic of the archive, which prescribes that performance cannot do otherwise than disappear and leads us to ignore ‘the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently’ (Schneider 2011: 98).

A powerful example of how performance can go against the logic of the archive is the work of Walid Raad, as Irene Pipicelli presents to us in her essay. For this Lebanese-American artist and photographer known for working with mixed media, performance is central to his endeavour to disentangle the constructed and thus fictive aspects of history. The ways in which histories are transmitted also influence collective memory, which is a particularly critical topic in the context of the complex, catastrophic history of wars in Lebanon and the Middle East. Pipicelli discusses his artistic projects *The Atlas Group* and *Scratching on things I would disavow* against the background of Karen Barad’s (2003) new materialist understanding of posthumanist performativity and objects/subjects, which approaches bodies as specific configurations of matter expressing presence and agency. Performativity in this strand of theory allows for ‘intra-activity’ to occur in a non-hierarchical way in terms of ‘agential intra-actions’ between a diverse group of actors, including objects and bodies (Barad 2003: 803, 815). This agential potential of both objects and subjects is exacerbated by performance, enabling artists like Walid Raad to engage in an imaginative play with historical documents and to recompose rigid narrative structures and historical framings imposed by museums or archival collections. In so doing, Raad’s artistic practice lays bare the institutionalised, postcolonial power dynamics that continue to shape in very profound ways the ideas, the cultural production as well as the art markets in the Middle East. Through remediations and refigurations of the archive, Raad produces an ‘anarchive’ that reveals how bodies get caught in the discursive and material framings of western historiography. Here, the battleground of historiography is exactly the body that gets disavowed in the

archive and is reintroduced as a symbiotic, prosthetic body that relies on different devices, techniques, and discourses to emerge.

Similar kinds of self-conscious remediations of archives exposing how archival documents frame the body in specific ways are what attracts Samantha Marenzi in the posthumously published documents by and about the American modern dancer and choreographer Isadora Duncan. In her contribution in Italian, Marenzi invites us to read documented history through a network of ‘visual apparatuses’ (in this case, photographs) in a relational way; that is, as a project of ‘convergence’ between the origins of Duncan’s dance movements as captured by her photographed body and their projected future. This relational perspective allows Marenzi to stage various shifts between the many photographic and biographic materials and to reveal distinct lines of gestural heritage between Duncan’s successors in modern dance. It also compels her to consider Duncan’s own lineage within art history at large, as images of Duncan’s dance gestures reveal to us today traces of bodily experiences that are, in essence, ritualistic and remediating the western canon.

Besides opening up the visual archive of Isadora Duncan as a pioneer of western modern dance, Marenzi’s essay gives insight into a ‘geology’ of visual culture in a larger sense: she demonstrates how paratextual and iconographic apparatuses in dance historiography have to be considered relationally in order to understand how images work as instruments for the transmission of memory. Duncan’s representational body reveals itself through poses that relate back to a re-imagined antiquity, while simultaneously projecting her views on modern dance into a nascent modern culture of the New World as well as into a more distant future to us today. The semblance of authenticity that these images communicate even today is actually the result of curated montages as heterogeneous containers of collective (visual) memory. The constructivism inherent to archives, which is also foregrounded in Irene Pipicelli’s article

on Walid Raad's artistic practice, returns in Marenzi's contribution as an acute awareness that the knowledge we believe to gain from historiography is heavily mediated. In the same vein, both articles remind us of the significance of the body as produced through discourse as well as imagery, and the necessary interplay between performance or dance practice and scholarship in curating archival documents and memory.

Related to the question of the body as central to the discipline of theatre, dance, and performance studies, including discussions on performance historiography, is the role of theatre masks, which Dorota Sosnowska discusses in her essay. This topic connects with EASTAP's fifth conference at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan in May 2022, as it is reminiscent of Giorgio Strehler's famous theatre production *Il servitore di due padroni* (*The Servant of Two Masters*, 1947). In Strehler's comments on the use of the mask by actor Marcello Moretti, who played the role of Arlecchino, he highlighted the mask as a sensory object rather than a mystic tool for representation. Drawing on thing theory after Martin Heidegger, with philosophical excursions into the work of Polish philosopher Andrzej P. Kowalski and Hungarian Hellenist Karl Kerényi, Sosnowska argues that the mask always exists in between an autonomous 'live' *thingness* and a transparent 'dead' *objecthood*. As the mask always transmits the 'remains' of previous cultural practices, choreographies, and personas in the memory of its wearer and audiences, it constitutes by itself a living archive, where history is constantly 'in action' once the mask is worn on stage. Whereas early modern, seventeenth-century theatre practitioners like Luigi Riccoboni dismissed the use of masks as a problematic regress due to their limiting and obstructing materiality, Sosnowska shows that the mask was actually originally born as a vehicle for contemporary political commentary with a deliberate hailing of the past.

The discussion of masks as 'things' that call forth scripts of actions in the mind of the observer brings Sosnowska to an interesting new concept

of 'performative objects', based on Robin Bernstein's notion of the 'scriptive thing' (2009). The latter was in turn inspired by Diana Taylor's famous distinction between the archive and the repertoire (2003), which seems to get blurred in the workings of the theatre mask as a living archive of enacted and embodied repertoires. Following Kowalski and Kerényi, Sosnowska extends these notions to the realisation that the mask always presents us with a double: it is both a tool of transformation (and agency), and an object invested in its own materiality. Put otherwise, rather than a scriptive 'thing' by itself, the mask operates in the dialectic of thing theory, between being a thing in itself and an object for performance. This double-sided nature of the mask discloses more emphatically its potential for political art and theatre, which ultimately resides in its close inherency to the body. As such, Sosnowska presents us with a concrete performative object that binds the body to the archive, the theatre to memory, connecting anthropology to historiography.

The final contribution by Mischa Twitchin delves deeper into the political potential of theatre when staging memory or, rather, a haunting of the past. In his essay, Twitchin questions the role of collective memory as a basis of a European identity through the more uncomfortable memory of Germany's Nazi past in conjunction with the colonial construction of human zoos in Oliver Frljić's 2019 production of Kafka's *Ein Bericht für eine Akademie* (*A Report to an Academy*) at Berlin's Maxim Gorki Theater. The resonant question, 'are you afraid of Jews?', posed by a character on the stage, is the starting point for Twitchin to investigate further the subtext of that question, implicating our fears for Nazis, racists, 'other' non-Jewish Germans, immigrants, Muslims, antisemitism, and democracy at large. His contribution is not only a critical analysis of key moments in Frljić's staging but also an ethical plea, inspired by Aleida Assmann's *Shadows of Trauma* (2016). This plea is situated amidst a rising cross-European right-wing tendency to disrupt and contest matters of cultural memory vis-à-vis opposing

forces that aim to work on a European framework of memory and thus, an imagined community of European citizens that is not merely a fantasy or an ‘empty’ container. This leads Twitchin to question what we may share as public memory. From antisemitism in the past to Islamophobia in the present, Kafka’s ‘parable of implication’ interpellates us through discomfort and unease, showing us our own cage as an index of our ‘cultural level’ reflecting in the institutions that define our current social existence. It is as such that the future comes to haunt us through the past, as the future ‘has potentially already occurred’ (Twitchin, p. 169).

This final dystopic scenic exploration by Frljić marks the end of this first open Essays section. It addresses the very core of what the *European Journal of Theatre and Performance* sets out to do: that is, to investigate ‘European’ theatre practices and the critical perspectives they call for, including the very question of what being European may mean in light of its troubled past and, even more so, its troubling future. In this context, inquiring into what *remains* after performance gains even a stronger critical urgency. As the Essays section of EJTP’s fifth issue shows, the answers to this inquiry can take many different forms. For Sosnowska/Strehler, it is a mask’s material dissolution by its turn into a ‘wet rag’ held by a performer’s sweaty hands; for Twitchin/Frljić, a hope for a common public memory that is built on a harsh self-questioning; for Pipicelli/Raad, a reclaiming of collective memories in a constant withdrawal from the archive; and for Marenzi/Duncan, memory itself as transmitted through networks of images of a dancing body’s transience into the future.

These varied approaches, tied together by their focus on the intertwining of bodies, memories, and archives, constitute in themselves an open call for further critical responses to how performance will have been a remaining force, both on the stage and beyond. •

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