

Editorial

For Friedrich Schiller, a human is only completely so while playing. This is a proposition, he promises, that supports ‘the whole fabric of aesthetic art, and the still more difficult art of living’ (80). An important basis for this fabric can be found in Immanuel Kant’s third critique, *Critique of Judgment*, where the author influentially couples the imagination and understanding as dancing partners, choreographed in an improvisatory mode dubbed ‘free play’. This, for Kant, forms the heart of an aesthetic theory – a heart that still beats, even today, having passed through a number of hosts throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who thought out and fought with the beautiful and the sublime as they appear, or irrupt, in aesthetic art and, after Schiller, in the still more difficult art of living.

Play, then, as a theme, can be seen to vitalise the philosophy of art: that is, how we might think about art, both in its composition and in its reception. But it can also be seen to vitalise a philosophy of life, particularly an artful philosophy of life. And play, it should not be forgotten, also constitutes the lifeblood for two particular forms of these (potentially) interwoven branches: theatre and performance, representation and behaviour, twice behaved. A play, to play, to play out, to play with, to be played with, to play on, to play a role, to role-play... Play is pervasive, but particularly so in theatre and performance. So might studies of theatre and performance be a good place to start unpacking, further, what play is, or what it might be? What play means, or what it might mean? How play functions, or how it might function? For the ‘might’ in these questions is surely one of the most enlivening aspects of enquiring into play, whether in normative promises and utopian ambitions, attempts at radical subversion, or in the hopeful crafting of something better on stages and streets, or in thought, print, image, tableaux, gesture, invitation, revelation, or even failure.

It is with this, fairly broad framing of play in mind – considering how notions and practices of play might feed into aesthetic art and artful life, theatre and performance – that we invited our authors to contribute to this edition. Play as a performance practice, understood in the broadest sense of that term, provides this edition with a point of departure. Theatre performances, certainly, but also performance practices that might also take place outside of the theatre: through performance as a

capitalist imperative, for instance, as an imperative that might just as well come into appearance in a theatrical mode.

This point of departure took root in an event that, for *Platform*, marks an especially exciting venture. For the first time, this edition stems from a postgraduate symposium organised by the Theatre and Performance Research Association's (TaPRA) Postgraduate Committee on 19 January 2013, titled 'Play in Performance Practices'. Many, but not quite all of the submissions in this edition are developed from papers presented on the day, or from delegates who contributed towards the roundtable discussion which concluded the event. The editors were particularly struck by the vibrancy and ambition of these papers, loosely pooled into two main groups: those that approached play as a pre-ideological phenomenon, with potentially subversive attributes, particularly politically radical attributes, as a virtue of that pre-ideological status; and those that advocated for technique and disciplined structures to help foster the emergence of play, in as fruitful a form as possible. In other words, in starkly contrasting ways, strategies for pursuing play and thinking about play were put forward, which set out to put play to work and/or to examine how play works: through practice, through intervention, through critical reflection and even through kinetic architecture from an architect in residence, Aliko Kylika. This edition looks to celebrate the vibrancy and ambition of those papers, while opening out the theme of the TaPRA symposium towards a wide-ranging survey of work by postgraduate and early-career researchers who directly, or indirectly, even tangentially, engage with the theme of 'play'. The papers grouped in this edition explore aesthetic art and artful life, occasionally in their permeability, from two, potentially complementary perspectives: from staging play to playing stages, encompassing both iterations of play in theatre and performance, as well as the uses to which play can be put, or worked towards and the ways in which play might be historicised.

In 'Child's Play: A Postdramatic Theatre of *Paidia* for the Very Young', Ben Fletcher-Watson addresses the increasing prominence of Theatre for Early Years: i.e. theatre for audiences from birth to three years old. He grounds this address in Roger Caillois' theorisation of *paidia* and Hans-Thies Lehmann's identification and examination of 'postdramatic theatre'. Theatre for Early Years is framed as being intrinsically postdramatic, particularly given its onus on eventfulness and a move away from logocentrism. At the same time, this framing underscores how the *paidic* functioning of play among very young children secures, for the author, a de-centring of

creative authority from the enablers of performance (such as performers) to the audiences with whom they share aesthetic space.

Daniel Oliver, in ‘Post-Relational Paranoid Play in Reactor’s *Big Lizard’s Big Idea Project*’, addresses the staging of play as an invitation to play, but to play within an event that resists a clear identification of purpose, or meaning. The invitation, then, is to play for the sake of playing, but without that invitation being touted as such and with a suspicious undertone of submitting to something unclear, balanced against the presence of a totemic figure that seems to undermine that submission in its weirdness and ridiculousness: a big, green, manically smiling lizard. Drawing on work by Donald Winnicott and Slavoj Žižek, this invitation to play with a big green Other, alongside what seems to be a disturbing injunction to ‘Enjoy!’, is unpacked and critiqued in the light of three models of paranoia, derived, but departing from, Douglas Kellner: critical paranoia, clinical paranoia and constructive paranoia. These models of paranoia are used to theorise the invitation to participate in play as an audience member, working towards an understanding of playful audience participation that does not seek closure in what the author sees as a fantasy of knowing, but rather revels in the participant’s lack of comprehension of what it is that they share, or fail to share, in negotiating participation.

Matt Cawson, in ‘Towards an Anarchist Theatre’, proposes a manifesto on play in its *paidic* form, which the author frames as an expression of anarchist principles. Drawing on his experiences in laboratories at the Grotowski Institute, play is figured as a point of departure for the celebration of free expression in a commoditised world, treating *paidia* as a strategy of subversive resistance that can be nurtured. Reminiscent of Peter Brook, the author condemns what he sees as the stranglehold of a ‘Vampiric Theatre’ on Broadway and in the West End. Inspired by the Living Theatre, but critical of its positioning as part of the so-called ‘sexual revolution’, Cawson approaches engagement with *paidia* as an incessantly creative answer to commoditisation. His lyrical manifesto is as much playful in theme as it is playful in style, treating the page as a playing stage that points towards a means for staging play.

This edition concludes with a selection of short submissions that were solicited from postgraduate and early-career researchers. The editors were interested in letting the theme of this edition feed into and inform our own editing practice. We wanted to include work in this edition not just from those whose research is informed by, or focused on ‘play’ in theatre and performance; we also wanted to invite theatre and

performance studies researchers to consider how the notion of 'play' might, perhaps tangentially, tie into their own scholarly research, activity, or practice. In many ways, we were interested in *challenging* these authors to think about play, even though this may not have been a theme that explicitly feeds into their current research, in an acknowledged mode. In other words, we wanted to see how play might arise as a latent theme in a broad spectrum of postgraduate and early-career research in theatre and performance studies today, asking: how might that potential latency be brought to light?

These solicited texts are amalgamated into one polymorphous, multi-vocal document, titled 'Play Area: Performance Perspectives': Shaun May examines how humour and play have a hand in the social induction of human beings; Adam Alston responds to Daniel Oliver's article in this edition, unpacking the implications of enjoyment being commanded; Charlotte Bell uses play as 'a tool for critical inquiry' for analysing public engagement events; Kris Darby proposes various modes of play based on walking tasks; Geraldine Brodie addresses translation and supplements to the linguistic text in Thomas Ostermeier's staging of *Hamlet* at the Barbican, London, in 2011; David Coates frames amateur theatricals in the nineteenth century as an opportunity for the upper classes in adult life in Victorian and Edwardian society to express and explore identity and personal and social relationships; and Deborah Leveroy explores conceptual slippage, (un)neatly emblematised in the malapropism, as a potentially enabling, playful and deeply creative process for actors with dyslexia. Acknowledging this edition's link with the TaPRA Postgraduate Committee, Alston, Bell, Brodie and Leveroy all represent either winners, or runners-up of the TaPRA postgraduate essay competition in 2011 and 2013.

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This edition marks Adam Alston's last as an editor of *Platform*. He wishes to express a deep note of admiration and thanks to the editorial board, past and present and wishes Will Shüler all the very best in his continued editorship of the journal.

Adam Alston and Will Shüler, Editors

Works Cited

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Trans. J. H. Bernard. Mineola: Dover, 2005.

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