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## Editorial Comment

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## Editorial Comment

The four essays that make up this issue seem, at the outset, quite different, spanning from scenic conceptions of the “not-performing” infant to an account of the lesser-known Saint Pelagia in the fifth century; from South African attempts to address transitional justice through performance to the emergence of ideas about “ham” acting in the nineteenth century. Indeed, general issues tend to be a bit of a collage. But in reading them all together, there is also a sense of framing that runs across these distinct essays. Framing is perhaps an obvious association; after all, theatre acts as a frame, holding a “mirror up to nature” as Shakespeare so famously put it. Here, framing also becomes a mode of analyzing the past through the present; it becomes a boxing in or around human life; and it becomes a mode of seeing and understanding intermedial exchange.

The issue begins with a literal framing: the newly invented incubator as framing tiny, premature infants. In Bryoni Trezise’s essay “Future Visions: A Pre-Performative History of Infant Theatricality” we encounter infants in “unexpected frames,” first in exhibitions of incubator technology in the early twentieth century, and then on the stage of Societas Raffaello Sanzio’s *Tragedia Endogonidia*, BR.#04 Brussels. Through these different instances, Trezise traces the emergence of what she describes as an “aesthetic modality that involves the pre-performative infant being staged as a device for ‘long watching.’” By looking at two distinct framings of infants, Trezise argues that the infant figure, the “not-performing child,” establishes a “temporal echo” with which to examine these scenes. Within technological frames (in the Societas Raffaello Sanzio piece the baby is onstage with a robot), the not-performing infant, she argues, becomes “intertwined with narratives of progress and is, both narratively and ontologically, responsible for a future.” The evocative idea of the temporal echo can be found in all of the essays in this general issue; authors explicitly and implicitly analyze questions and framings of the past that allow for provocative comparisons today.

In his essay “‘Better to burn’: The *Prima Mimarum* and Political Friction in Fourth-Century Antioch,” Scott Venters begins with the story of Saint Pelagia the “harlot,” a provocative tale of Antioch’s first actress, a “*prima mimarum*,” but also called a “*meretrix*,” the term for harlot. Venters introduces readers to Pelagia’s life as she transitions from actress to religious convert who donated her wealth to the poor, and then, disguised as a eunuch named Pelagius, traveled as a monk. Venters argues that it is her “mobility, ambiguity, and autonomy” that resist narrative closure around her descriptors, and that despite the texts’ erasure of her “performative transgressions” (by substituting *meretrix* for *mima*), it cannot ignore them gesturally (through Pelagia’s disguised cross-dressing). Although grounded in fourth- and fifth-century Antioch, the essay also reaches forward, to Arjun Appadurai’s ideas about *commodity* to show the exchange value placed upon women during this period. It is difficult not to reflect on the #MeToo movement and current wave exposing histories of sexual harassment when the essay reminds us how the *mima* was treated: “her political identity had been martyred, torn asunder, and disseminated . . . women were only cognizable through sexual associations with men: widow, virgin, harlot, (martyr).” Temporal echoes that ring louder and louder.

Gibson Alessandro Cima's "Exporting South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Global Arts Corps' *Truth in Translation*" analyzes the function and the use of theatre as a mode of facilitating dialogue and aiding in conflict resolution through his examination of the 2006 musical *Truth in Translation*, and the documentary it inspired, *A Snake Gives Birth to a Snake*. The production dramatizes the stories of eight language interpreters within South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which is then framed by the film, which follows the production as it tours through other conflict zones such as Rwanda, the Balkans, and Northern Ireland. The result is a layered examination of how the processes of developing a theatrical piece can, as Cima argues, perform "reconciliation as an ongoing and strenuous embodied practice." The essay focuses on the questions of transitional justice and how these ideas might be translated to other conflicts. It concludes with the difficulties faced by the *Truth in Translation* cast workshops with survivors in other countries as it toured. Cima explores how the reframing of one culture's trauma to another's may produce different outcomes due to "questions of translation, interpretation, and context."

The final essay of the issue, Eleanor Massie's "Ham Acting: A Circum-Atlantic Genealogy," expands Sianne Ngai's aesthetic categories to include "ham": "awkward, over-theatrical, and embarrassing." Massie historicizes and examines this aesthetic category as one linked to the precarity of a more stable or professional acting style, but also links its emergence to the precarity of black performers and to a reframing of blackness in the theatre industries of the United States and Britain. Although often understood in relation to the amateur or "bad" actor, Massie argues that the "attention-grabbing laboriousness" of the white actors in her examples masks the presence of the black actors whose labor is not acknowledged. The essay then frames three specific examples: from film (a 1939 Hollywood musical, *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*), vaudeville (a 1905 musical called *The Ham Tree*), and an 1888 dialect poem ("The First Banjo") in which white actors/writers use "ham" in ways that capitalize on, and problematically reframe, the labor of black artists.

Although addressing wildly different topics, these essays, each in their own way, exemplify the potential and strength of theatre research to respond and remain resistant to increasingly intolerant and narrow-minded politics and policies affecting much of our readership. Theatre's potential to frame immediate political crises (as in the affective production of *The Jungle* I recently saw at the Young Vic in London, which dramatized the hope, potential, and politics within and surrounding the refugee camp in Calais before it was demolished) and to tell stories about gender and racialized struggles and about nations themselves is mirrored back in these pages. Drawn together, these essays intersect in their framings to speak back, to act back, and to provide a space for potential change.

I would like to note that as of this issue I have taken over as editor from the incomparable Joanne Tompkins, who completed her editorship as of the December 2017 issue. I want to thank her within these pages for her friendship and support over these past two years. When taking on this role, I could not have imagined how fortuitous it was to be paired with such an excellent role model in editing—I have learned much from her skill and from the thoughtful care she gives to the work. I also did not realize the intensity and constant communication needed for the journal to run smoothly, and feel fortunate that Joanne made this aspect so pleasurable. As I step into these large shoes, I am grateful to welcome my new coeditor, E.J. Westlake, to the team. I am already excited by E.J.'s ideas and looking forward to the shape the journal will take as we forge ahead.

—Jen Parker-Starbuck