Editorial

This double issue entitled 'Theatres of Labour' comes at a time when the labour of theatre, the logistics of live performance, and the lives of those making a living from theatre are the subjects of much public debate. When COVID-19 brought about the abrupt halt of almost all live theatrical production in spring 2020, it threw into sharp relief the theatre industry's interdependencies and left not only individual theatre professionals, but whole businesses and industries in a lurch. As many workers in the arts sector faced further precarisation, commentators and campaigners turned towards economic arguments to justify the labour of theatre and lobby for its future. They brandished statistics and studies on the contributions of theatre and the arts to the GDP (Toynbee 2020), cited them as 'drivers for tourism' (Lewis 2020), or pointed to the impending 'cultural catastrophe' that a projected drop of £74bn in revenue would mean for the UK economy (Brown 2020). When faced with an unprecedented economic crisis, the theatre industry's instinct seems to have been to defend itself by pointing to its economic significance. And while many lamented the hundreds of thousands of jobs in danger of being lost, few considered the actual labours performed in these jobs or how they relate to other now endangered jobs, such as in the service industry. Yet, theatre practitioners and scholars have, for some time now, thought about the connections between theatrical labour and other forms of contemporary work, and asked how theatrical performance can stage issues of labour politics. This issue offers a contribution to this debate, and while largely conceived before the outbreak of the pandemic and the consequent lockdown, the pieces in this issue still speak to this peculiar moment in theatre history.

When we first envisioned this issue of *Platform*, we took our cue from several scholars who have analysed theatre and performance *as if* they stand in for labour practices in post-industrial societies. Unlike other contributions that examine labour and working conditions in the art industries (like Harvie 2013, Kunst 2015, Gillick 2016), these scholars

look at the stage as an allegory for contemporary working practices and a commentary on forms of physical, emotional, and cognitive labour. Rather than macro-inspections of the industry and institutions within the field of cultural production, they employ a performance analysis to make claims about how, respectively, labour acts on bodies (Hamera 2012), immaterial work disappears the producer (Ridout 2012), the recipient of services is implicated into the performative nature of the affective economy (Matthews 2017), and the (immersive) spectator reads as a neoliberal subject/worker (Alston 2013). Following these scholarly discussions, our call for contributions for this issue invited scholars and practitioners to reflect on how the material and aesthetic spaces of theatre can illuminate a daily and bodily dimension of work in and beyond artistic performances. With this issue we ask: how does theatre and performance inform and is informed by a materialist and/or artistic reading of labour?

Coincidentally, we were not the only people asking this question. In her keynote at the conference 'Net-Works: Mapping Labor in Theatre and Performance' (organised by the Doctoral Theatre Students Association's of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York) in April 2020, Shannon Jackson asked how we can bring together discourse on immaterial labour—of which a lot has been made in theatre studies over the last few years—with material analyses of labour, especially when it comes to the now ubiquitous modes of internet performances. And in November 2020 a new issue of *Shakespeare Bulletin* (38.1) will turn to 'Labour in Contemporary Shakespeare Performance' to bring a critical focus on labour to Shakespeare Studies.

The issue 'Theatres of Labour' touches upon many forms of material and immaterial theatre and performance. Some articles directly address the making of performance and theatre production from various roles like dramaturgs, producers, and singers. Others address the training of performers and components of casting or discuss the content of a performance linked to contemporaneous political climates, historical through-lines, and bureaucratic systems. And yet, within this wide array of articles and essays, we see overlapping and

sometimes contrasting arguments. Below we want to briefly outline these interwoven threads illuminating the multiple conceptions of the 'theatres of labour'.

Stage(d) Labour

Within discussions of theatre and labour, we must define the various areas or types of labour as immaterial, service, affective, and material labours that all sit within the creation and production of theatre. After all, according to art theorist Keti Chukrov, labour 'cannot be reduced to the thing produced or the labor process. Labor is a form of a person's vital activity, yet it lies outside the person and is realized in the form of the "things" he or she creates' (np). When applied to performance, the labours of making and performing can occur within the same person—and even at the same time—but are distinct types of work.

Hansol Oh discusses the many layers of stage(d) labour in her analysis of Tony Kushner's musical *Caroline, or Change*. Her analysis contrasts the musical performers' virtuosic labours with the domestic, subjected labours their characters perform on stage; these labours, according to Oh, are spectacularized within the musical machine. Oh discusses the power of an actor's performance to illuminate historical and gender injustice/inequalities of labour. Tim Cowbury's analysis of his own performance and production highlights both the act of labouring in Fringe theatre and the contemporaneous labour politics in early twenty-first century Britain. Cowbury's article illustrates the messy processes of making theatre through word play and autoethnographic description. Both Cowbury and Oh point to the cracks in the performance, which expose the labour involved in its making.

In the realm of performance art, Laurel McLaughlin's collaborative interview with performance artist Leah Modigliani reveals both her labour of analysing historical speeches about labour equality and the work of enacting her personal interpretation of these speeches. Modigliani's discursive labours of exposing these historical words to audiences today becomes a rallying cry for advocacy and resistance.

Beth Weinstein's photo essay reveals how she designed a gallery installation in a way as to make complicit the gallery visitor's labour with the labours of her original performances being exhibited. She exposes the spatial labours of her practice-based research project into the erasures of the labour(er)s involved in the construction of internment camps of Japanese Americans during the Second World War and prisoners-of-war camps in Paris during the Algerian War. Weinstein's essay depicts several spatial strategies that engage the visitors in acts of forensic labour while investigating the subject matter at hand.

Each of these contributions conjures its own theatre of labour by contrasting the labour depicted on stage (or in the gallery) with the labour of making the performances.

Precarious Labour

Several other contributors follow Jackson's call for what is needed from theatre scholarship, which is to illuminate the typically 'obscure[d] economic asymmetry within the "creative" class itself' and to reveal the 'relative precarity that some [...] endure over others' (Jackson 23). Laura Kressly and Cowbury both discuss the inner workings involved in British fringe theatre production and performance. Cowbury's article, in which he uses an example from his own experience as a fringe-theatre maker, illuminates not only the complicated (and rarified) process of securing funding in the UK, but also the precariousness of that labour once obtained. Kressly interviews members of a fringe company whose London VAULT Festival 2020 show was cancelled with the onset of the national lock-down. These young theatre makers, as Kressly writes, live in a constant state of precarity that affects many other aspects of their lives, including physical and mental health as well as creative outlets and financial stability.

Martin Young complicates this idea of the theatre worker as a precarious labourer by looking at the performative strategies of protest used by *corps de ballet* dancers of the Paris opera during the national strike in 2019. Reading the bourgeois aesthetics of ballet as ultimately

juxtaposed to the demands of the class struggle, Young argues that the strike performance illuminates the peculiar position these artist-labourers inhabit within the larger movement of the general strike. Young asks to what extend it is productive to align theatrical work with the work of non-artistic workers.

These contributions reveal the precarity of theatre labour—from unstable funding structures to insecure gig work—while also interrogating the way in which the language of 'precarious labour' within the context of theatre and performance can conceal materialist differences between artistic and non-artistic labour and obscure conceptual asymmetries between labour theory and performance practice.

Resisting and Resistant Labour

Many contributions touch on the question of how and if performance can resist the all-encompassing logic of contemporary work. They comment on modes of post-Fordist labour, which has transformed many non-artistic workers in the service or communication industries, for example, into people who 'work like artists' (Jackson 'Essential Service'); and therefore, artists' work is increasingly understood not in terms of labour, but as a 'calling'. What gets packaged as freedom, self-actualisation, and self-centered entrepreneurialism are actually modes of affective, emotional, and cognitive labour. This label of 'creative work' obscures the modes of (self-)exploitation of workers. Contemplating theatrical practices that subvert the idea of creative work as self-exploitation, performance and architectural scholar Juliet Rufford asks: "If performance is a skill set in the sphere of immaterial labour and production, a resistant theatre practice will want to highlight and counter this situation. But how might it do so?" (Rufford 56). Several contributors to this issue provide answers to Rufford, either by questioning their own positions within institutions and the larger arts industry or by offering provocations to the ways labour has previously been conceived in performance theory.

Like Young, Antonia Tretter and Angeliki Roussou question

the role of the artist-labourer and the imperative to perform productive labour in a precarious position in an arts institution or within the wider "creative industries". In an auto-ethonographic account of her work as a dramaturg in a German municipal theatre, Tretter reflects on the double-bind in which many dramaturgs find themselves where they work as both representatives of a theatre machine and as integral members of individual creative teams. Her account illustrates the limitations of such a doubling of institutional responsibilities and calls for a reconsideration of the role of the dramaturg in state-funded theatres. In her interview artist Shona Macnaughton, Roussou discusses her performance work *Aquatic Needs,* which traces the impact of austerity politics and discourses of aspiration on the realities of artistic production. Macnaughton discusses how the labours of motherhood have made her once again reconsider these connections. Both of these artist-researchers reflect upon their own labour and possible ways of resisting the all-encompassing logics of the institution (in Tretter's case) and the gig economy (in Macnaughton's case).

Steyn Bergs and Raimund Rosarius offer provocations to the way artistic labour (or resistance to it) has been perceived. They each theorise ways in which artistic practice might defy a narrative that identifies artistic work with current trends in labour practices. Bergs' article illuminates the political potential within the seemingly passive and ambivalent state of the recalcitrant bodies depicted in Sophia Ceasar's artworks. These bodies may neither fully embrace nor completely resist being incorporated into post-Fordist labour practice (labour stances), but they do set up a state of *not yet* resisting. Bergs poses these bodies just on the tipping edge of political resistance as a performative act that may yet become politically fruitful. Rosarius looks at the ways the foundational training at Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts in Berlin might use the metaphor of the *craftsperson* to resist the idea of the future entrepreneurial artist. He argues that stressing the importance of craft in acting through the academy's training fosters the potential for these actor-students to become self-advocates and campaign for better work environments. This training

also gives students the opportunity to see parallels between their future work and craftspeople which may lead to a forging of seldom-seen solidarity between artists and other workers.

Throughout this issue, several contributors question how artists can build resilience within and towards an often blatantly exploitative arts industry. They highlight considerations of how forms of material and immaterial work coincide in theatre.

Labour and Subjectivity

Kathi Weeks reminds us that many forms of contemporary work 'require not just the use but the production of subjectivity' (241), which means that contemporary workers are constantly encouraged and expected to involve their own identity or personality in the performance of their work. The contributions by Jaswinder Balckwell-Pal and Kirstin Smith show that this is as true for a worker in the service industry asked to 'perform their authentic self' as for an actor responding to a casting call, who must constantly construct 'a contextual index of identity' from which they approach the pressures of casting.

Blackwell-Pal's article examines the corporate practices of harnessing the authentic identity, or 'self', of their employees for their work in the service industry. Through a case study of Pret a Manger's training practices, Blackwell-Pal reveals the top-down managerial direction of seemingly 'authentic' labour undertaken when interacting with customers. She contends that by focusing only on the emotional labour performed by service employees, scholars can miss the corporate, economic, and political contexts these labours are performed within.

Through her discussion of Zawe Ashton's fictional-auto-biographical account, *Character Breakdown*, Smith analyses an actor's work as 'identity work', which materialises the actor through the act of being cast. This 'identity work' has severe consequences for how actors experience their own subjectivity. This is true for all actors, but Smith contends, can be particularly harmful for actors from marginalised communities. Training a critical eye onto mainstream casting practices, Smith advocates for a decolonisation of normative

casting that redistributes the power held over the continual (re) working of identity; she proposes several contingent strategies drawn from mid-twentieth century radical or advocacy theatre groups that indicate different resistant ways to labour. Smith and Oh each trace connections between an actor's performance work and (the casting agent's assumptions about) their character's staged labour, thereby drawing out the interdependencies between wage relations and the production of subjectivity.

This focus on the relationship between labour and the productions of subjectivity shows not only that many forms of contemporary work invite a theatrical frame and benefit from an analysis based in acting and performance theory, but also that theatre's investment in 'identity work' often brings it in close proximity to corporate interests and a (self-)exploitation—both on stage and off.

Performance and Book Reviews

The performance responses for this edition of *Platform* come at a time when the notion of watching theatre (whether for professional purposes or otherwise) is under great strain as the ability for audiences to be in close proximity to the live and labouring bodies of performers has been necessarily lacking. However, the two performances responded to in this issue playfully and inventively overcome these challenges while effectively integrating the contemporary lived experiences of the performers and their audiences. Olivia Lamont Bishop's response to Action Hero's *Oh Europa* (2018-present) reveals how the piece redefines standardised notions of proximity in a context of personal isolation and political insularity. Heidi Liedke's experience of Creation and Big Telly's *Alice – A Virtual Theme Park* (2020) depicts theatre that mobilises the lived situation of the 'locked-down audience' as necessary to the performance's construction.

Meanwhile, our two book reviews highlight studies on theatres of labour that directly contribute to political and cultural advancements and transgressions rather than economic ends. Satkirti Sinha's review of Brahma Prakash's book, *Cultural Labour: Conceptualising the Folk*

Performance in India (2019), highlights how Indian folk performances assist in the preservation of lower Hinduist castes. Alessandro Simari reviews Mary McAvoy's research on American labour college drama programmes presented in her monograph, *Rehearsing Revolutions: The Labor Drama Experiment and the Radical Activism in the Early Twentieth Century* (2019). These four responses and reviews showcase how the labours of theatre makers and audiences have proved to be, and often remain, at their most affirmative and vital in situations of crisis.

As the contributions of this issue discuss working practices across some of the Western world (the UK, Europe, Australasia, and the US), this issue contains a variety of analyses and opinions about (artistic) labour politics and practices. And while many of the realities described are universal within these different institutional and cultural contexts, there are, indeed, particular variations and discrepancies between certain historical and economic developments. And as such, we have tried to contextualise these cultural specificities wherever possible. We hope the range of topics enables engaging insights into the state of today's multiple 'Theatres of Labour'.

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- Meg Cunningham and Clio Unger, Editors

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