

## FROM THE EDITOR

A construction site is a messy place, but a theatre under construction or, better yet, a theatre under reconstruction is an apt metaphor for the work that we as theatre historians do. Reconstructing a theatre, like reconstructing the events of theatre, is always a balancing act between excavation, speculation and innovation. In fact, in the sphere of theatre history, the border between reconstruction and construction is never entirely clear. Conceptually at least, theatre historians work in a construction zone, even if hard hats are not *de rigueur*. If for no other reason than to underscore the perpetual state of (re)construction that characterizes our work, I am thus delighted to open my first issue as Editor with a messy photo of the renovation of the Royal Court Theatre. Most immediately, the photo provides visual documentation for Stephen Berwind's article "Reconstructing the Construction of the Royal Court," and I am grateful to him for helping to procure the photo from Natalie Land at Haworth Topkins Limited in London. But the more I study the composition of this photo, the more its theatricality strikes me, especially the image of its suited elder central figure grappling with a cable loosely connected to the not yet anchored steel girder of support (an image that might double as a scene from Ibsen's *Master Builder*). How rich that image is, and if it does indeed remind us of the constructive nature of our own work, so too does it remind us that our work repeatedly necessitates that we renegotiate the boundaries separating the practice of theatre from the practice of everyday life. In this respect, the photo of the Royal Court Theatre "under construction" rather brilliantly captures what I would argue are the foundations of theatre history: a fundamental acknowledgment of the provisional nature of the histories we construct combined with an ever-evolving definition of theatre itself.

The essays published in this issue are committed to precisely such a definition of theatre history, and in grouping them together, I could not help but be reminded of the closing comments that Rosemarie Bank made at the end of the introduction to her first issue as Editor two years ago. Implicitly admonishing us to return to one of the theatre historian's primary sites of excavation, Bank led us into her first collection of essays with the call "Now, back to the archive." In many respects, each of the essays in this volume heed Bank's call as their point of departure, and the result repeatedly proves to be not merely the discovery of new material but material that necessitates a revised construction either of theatre history, of the relation of theatre to history or of the boundaries of theatrical practice. The first two of these essays, Judith Thissen's "Reconsidering the Decline of New York's Yiddish Theatre in the Early 1900s" and Dennis Beck's "Setting the Stage for Revolution: The Efficacy of Czech Theatre, 1975–1989," were brought to our attention by Tom Connolly and Henk Gras, and I am very grateful to them not only for helping to send quality scholarship our way but also for pointing out the significance of how these two essays in particular contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the archive

not as a place of stagnant history but as a site where history is constantly being renegotiated.

Probably, the best example of such renegotiations is Thissen's essay, which provides an absolutely fascinating materialist historical account of the decline of New York's Yiddish theatre. The archival research that serves as the foundation of Thissen's essay is significant in itself, but one of the real accomplishments of her article is Thissen's ability to marshal that research into an argument which challenges the long-standing assumption that the decline of New York's Yiddish theatre resulted from the rise of cinema. If Thissen's work in the archive forces a reconstruction of our understanding of the history of New York's Yiddish theatre, Dennis Beck's essay on the debt that Velvet Revolution owes to the work of theatre practitioners suggests the need to reconsider how we conceptualize the relationship of political history to theatre history. Drawing upon archival evidence dating back to the 1970s, Beck convincingly argues that the case of Czechoslovakia is a case demonstrating the efficacy of theatre as a force of history. Nowhere is that case more compelling, Beck argues, than in the image of the playwright Václav Havel assuming the role of President of a newly democratic Czechoslovakia, a Czechoslovakia that he and his colleagues in the theatre help to forge using Czech theatres as a staging ground for revolution.

While Beck's article gives us ample room to rethink the place of theatre in history, Stephen Berwind's article "Reconstructing the Construction of the Royal Court" gives us a detailed history of a single place of theatre. Perhaps the least overly theoretical of the essays in this issue, Berwind's article is nonetheless a substantial piece of archival research and, I think, is rich in theoretical implication—not to mention the fact that Berwind's history of the Royal Court provides some simply fascinating reading. But I would contrast Berwind's article with the short final essay in this issue, Michela Calore's "Elizabethan Plots: A Shared Code of Theatrical and Fictional Language," for if Berwind's archival research focuses our attention on the excavation and (re)constructions of a theatrical site, Calore's work on Elizabethan plots focuses our attention on the exegesis and interpretive construction of archival documents. One of the fascinating aspects about Calore's essay is that it echoes Thissen's strategy of using the archive to debunk long-standing myths in theatre history even as it reminds us, in an implicit echo of Hayden White, that in the archive interpretation begins prior to any history being constructed or reconstructed.

Combined, the four essays published in this issue of *Theatre Survey* offer a wide spectrum of theatre histories and a wide array of strategies for doing theatre history. They reflect what at this stage in the history of the journal is an abundance of riches, for I begin my tenure as Editor with a journal that, under the previous guidance of Rose Bank, has already successfully negotiated the transition into the journals division of Cambridge University Press and that has grown significantly because of Rose's seemingly inexhaustible practical and intellectual energy. That we are now in a position to seriously plan two issues in

advance is in no small respect a consequence of Rose's efforts. My job is easier and the journal is healthier because of work that she has done, and I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank her for her service to the journal, to ASTR and to the profession. She is an Editor's Editor, and it will be difficult to live up to the example she set in her all too short affiliation with *Theatre Survey*.

If the end of Rose's tenure as Editor is a loss for the journal, the arrival of Jody Enders as the new Associate Editor is the journal's clear gain. There are few scholars as capable of hitting the ground running as well as Jody has. I cannot welcome her enough! I am delighted to work with her and am anxious to see where she ultimately takes the journal once her tenure as Editor begins. In the mean time, we will be working to increase both the quantity and quality of articles that *Theatre Survey* publishes each issue. I also want to thank Jeff Mason (our Book Editor) and Angela Weaver (our *Re: Sources* Editor) for their work on this issue.

Now, how does that go? Ah yes, "Back to the Construction Site!"