

Editorial: What Memory Wants

SILVIJA JESTROVIC

In her book *In Memory of Memory*, unearthing remains from archives to photograph albums and trinkets, piecing together the story of her family as it unfolds through the catastrophes of twentieth-century history, Russian poet Maria Stepanova writes, ‘This book about my family is not about my family at all, but something quite different: the way memory works, and what memory wants from me.’¹ In this issue of *TRI*, memory emerges as the keyword: be it echoing Derrida’s *hauntology*, Carlson’s *theatre as a memory machine* and *ghosted site*, or Roach’s *surrogation*. There is a vast range of scholarship in theatre and performance studies that has addressed memory inherent to artistic processes, such as that of intertextuality and intertheatricality, as a subject matter and a dramaturgical principle (Kantor’s theatre of memory immediately comes to mind), and even as an intervention into the cultural, social and political fabric of the day (the documentary theatre of Lola Arias that grapples with a traumatic political past is one of many examples). Theatre indeed holds a special relationship with memory. In Foucault’s famous concept of *heterotopia*, theatre gets a distinct mention, alongside gardens and patterns of Persian carpets, as a prime example of a site embodying various microcosms. Time is crucial in this heterotopic configuration of space capable of ‘juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible’.² They are, as Foucault puts it, ‘most often linked to slices of time’, whether as disappearance (cemeteries) or as accumulation of time (libraries, museums), and theatre has played with them all.

Answering in their own ways the questions of how memory works and what memory wants, some recent works of non-fiction and auto-fiction have made striking, thought-provoking contributions to the notion of memory and its performativity. Nobel laureate Annie Ernaux does not mention theatre in her autobiographical work *The Years*, where personal and collective memory of our time meet, but she does capture the inherent theatricality and performativity of memory when she writes, ‘memory was transmitted not only through the stories but through the ways of walking, sitting, talking, eating, hailing someone, grabbing hold of objects’.³ Irene Vallejo’s *Papyrus: The Invention of Books in the Ancient World* is in many ways a book about historiographical memory where ghosts whisper sweetly into the reader’s ear from the vast heterotopias of antiquity. Vallejo takes us to the time when the written word was scarce, books (scrolls, rather) were precious, history as a discipline was only in its formation, libraries were visionaries’ dreams, and theatres were in their incipience: ‘It’s no coincidence that in Greek mythology, the Muses were daughters of the goddess Mnemosyne, the origin of the word “mnemonic” and the personification of remembering and evocation. At that time, as in all times, no one

could create if they couldn't remember.⁴ I deliberately bring up these inspiring examples that are not, strictly speaking, of theatre and performance, since being of different forms and formats they enable us to contemplate the aesthetics and politics of hauntology, ghosting and surrogation from another perspective.

Remembering is ontological to any creative process, yet it is theatre that often reveals complicated, at times even contested, relationships between memory and its politics and aesthetics. What is the political and artistic obligation to memory, we might ask, and how is it performed? With ghosted bodies and embodied ghosts, in haunting and haunted voices, theatre in its unique heterotopic spatiality always unfolds in the present and through presence even when aiming to conjure the past or foreshadow the future. This spatiality of theatre's *hauntology*, its movable ghostly bodies and its cacophony of voices that whisper but can also scream from beyond, makes presence as well as absence particularly palpable. Without a premeditated curatorial design, serendipitously, the articles in this issue all in one way or another answer the calls of memory – so, to paraphrase Stepanova, what does memory want from our authors in this issue?

Ghosts of audiences past are placed centre stage in the opening article, Dorit Yerushalmi's 'How Does Khashabi Theatre Produce a "Dual Presence" of Palestinian Urbanism? Ghosts and Memory in Its First Season, Haifa, 2015–2016' and in the closing piece, Ed Menta's 'How the Teatro Olimpico and the Drottingholm Slottsteater "Perform" Their Pasts'. Even though these two contributions differ significantly in their subject matter, methodology and context, both explore the presence of the historical past in the relationship between spatiality and architecture. In both cases past audiences linger in the performance spaces, whether it be nostalgically or critically; they assert their presence in the here and now of the theatrical event.

Yerushalmi focuses on the Palestinian Khashabi Theatre in Haifa and how it performs 'dual urbanism' – the ghostly presence of Palestinian 'victims of history who were uprooted from the city' and the contemporary communities that still inhabit it. The article grapples with the notions of the 'right to the city' and the 'right of return'. Unlike urban renewal initiatives, Khashabi Theatre's 'dual urbanism' does not offer a promise of rejuvenation; rather, it opens the space for the ghosts to return and reveal 'what has been lost'. Both Yerushalmi and Camila Aschner-Restrepo, in her article 'Ghostly Interpellations: Testimonial Inscriptions on the Stage', explore the *political memory of space* and turn to Derrida's *hauntology* to ask, what are the ghosts here to tell us? Aschner-Restrepo's use of *hauntology* explores the aesthetics that Colombian theatre-makers deploy to speak about the country's conflict and traumas – to make the presence and voice of the forcibly disappeared palpable again. She points out that 'the use of ghosts as a stage resource serves as a substitute for the incomplete processes of justice that have taken place in Colombia over the past decades'. Yerushalmi's and Aschner-Restrepo's respective essays have, of course, been written unbeknownst to one another and in response to different cultural and political contexts, yet both are inhabited by ghosts of the past through bodies, objects, spaces and actions, and even audiences – conjured not so much in acts of mourning, as in

action of political memory. The ghosts here have an urgent need to speak to the living, to assert their inscriptions in the public memory.

In Yana Meerzon's article "'Stalin Died But Not Completely': On the Theatrical Legacy of Totalitarian Catastrophe' the past haunts the genre of tragic farce and it is rather demonic. The article focuses on Artur Solomonov's play *How We Buried Josef Stalin* (2019) and its performances in both Moscow and Tbilisi against the backdrop and in response to the Russian war in Ukraine. With this material Meerzon interrogates the ghostly presence of totalitarianism – the legacy of Stalin that permeates Putin's war in the Ukraine and is also underscoring the deterioration within Russia. She shows how Solomonov's farce confronts the audience with the dilemma of Stalinism in contemporary Russia. The play imagines Stalin's funeral as a one-time theatrical event to bury Stalin for good. Meerzon argues that the legacy of Stalinism still haunts Russian political consciousness, yet the show that buries Stalin again and again with every new performance suggests to us a ritual of political cleansing – a political act of hope that the moment will come when the ghost of Stalinism will be put to rest for good.

Both Menta's article focusing on the Teatro Olimpico and Drottingholm Slottsteater and Wei Zhang's "'Try Again. Fail Again. Fail Better": Adapting Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* for the Chinese Stage – Real and Virtual' explore intertextual and intertheatrical dimensions of heterotopia of theatre and drama. Wei Zhang traces the journey of Chinese theatre-makers in search for *Waiting for Godot* from 1980s performances to a recent pandemic online version of Beckett's famous play. The article invites us to reflect on the process of adaptation to a different cultural context, but also inspires the idea of cross-cultural and intra-cultural adaptation as an act of memory. In that sense each of the *Godot(s)* featured in the article becomes an intertextual reference, echoing its past performances from other places and from other times. Menta takes us to the lavish interiors of the Teatro Olimpico and Drottingholm Slottsteater, where interperformativity emerges through architectural features, motion and stillness to demonstrate how these spaces transport the audience into the theatrical past. The notion of a 'silent ghost audience' that is conjured in the process is especially interesting as it foregrounds the theatricality and performativity of sculptures, painted figures and furniture that adorn the interiors of these theatre buildings. From the walls of the Olimpico built nearly five centuries ago, members of the Olympic Academy, including the theatre's architect, Palladio, catch glimpses of the theatre-goers of today as they settle into their seats. Meanwhile, in Drottingholm, even empty royal chairs in the auditorium are enough to conjure, in the audience's imagination, the ghosts of their distinguished theatre-loving predecessors. Whether evoking the kings and queens of the past as the empty chairs of Drottingholm do in Menta's article, or of forcibly displaced Palestinians in Yerushalmi's depiction of dual audience presence in Khashabi Theatre in Haifa, the 'silent ghost audience' works in a way akin to Juri Lotman's principle of the *minus device*, which he describes as a way an expected but excluded element resurfaces as a 'meaningful absence' – making the *minus device*, and, by the same token, the 'silent ghost audience', 'a wholly real and measurable quantity'.⁵

Ghosts featured and analysed in this issue of *TRI* have spoken through bodies and objects, presence and absence, in different tongues, and from different rooms in the house of theatrical and political memory. So what does memory want here? Different things, we might say. And while we recognized some well-known conceptual tropes of the theatre and memory discourse, the emphasis here is less on mourning and melancholia, not even so much on finding ways to speak of the traumatic past towards some form of healing. Rather, memory here is performative in the sense that it wants to inscribe itself actively in the present. While the ghostly spectre might be deliberately conjured or appear uninvited, as ally or as enemy, as truth teller or as demonic trickster, the responsibility of how the wants of memory are answered remains with the living.

NOTES

- 1 Maria Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory: A Romance*, trans. Sasha Dugdale, ebook original (New York: First Directions Publishing, 2021), loc. 506.
- 2 Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', in Neil Leach, ed., *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 354.
- 3 Annie Ernaux, *The Years*, trans. Alison L. Strayer (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2018), p. 22.
- 4 Irene Vallejo, *Papyrus: The Invention of Books in the Ancient World*, trans. Charlotte Whittle (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2022), p. 81.
- 5 Juri Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. Ronald Vroon (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977), p. 51.