Editorial

Milo Harries and Grace Joseph

The central interest of this issue of *Platform* is a curiosity towards the ways gatherings are formed, on and beyond page and stage. In these pages we understand performance's 'ecology of mutual doings and beings' (Harpin and Nicholson 14), and the scholarship that studies it, as an opportunity to explore and experiment with the ways in which we relate. This fundamental interest allows this issue to range widely in its scope, moving its attention from practices of commemoration and resistance amidst state violence, to the politics of access in emergent technologies, and on to spontaneous dramaturgies of puppetry on planes. In doing so, these contributions also attest to the value of attending to such relationships, and demonstrate what might thereby be gained. Through their exploration of these gatherings, the contributions to this issue offer performance both as a site of possibility, and a means of critical enquiry into relationships structured by intersecting forms of power and harm.

Our ambition in constructing this issue has been to find resonances between the principles on which *Platform* is founded and 'the work of the audience encounter' that Rajni

Shah locates 'at the heart of the theatrical form' (17). *Platform* offers opportunities for postgraduate and early career researchers to speak in public: it is, most obviously, a platform for their (our) work. As importantly, however, each issue of *Platform* is also an invitation to collaborate, and a chance for researchers at the beginning of our careers to work within a space where we sustain each other. We therefore recognised in our editorship of this issue an opportunity, in Nicolas Bourriaud's terms, 'to invent possible encounters'—and, with our contributors and readers, to 'create the conditions for an exchange' (23). Honouring *Platform*'s ethos in the form of that interchange, we wanted to explore how we might give each other support, editorial and otherwise, whilst sharpening our thinking around some of theatre's fundamental terms— exploring the ways that we are encouraged to relate, in performance and in scholarship, and sticking to our convictions about the ways we believe that should work. As Shah observes, therefore, in this issue:

> The page and the auditorium (or their equivalent) might then be thought of as places where writers and readers and performers and audience members meet, not in order to think the same thoughts or to see and hear the same things, nor in order for change to occur (though— importantly—it might, and often will), but in order to explore the act of gathering itself. (Shah, 49)

This issue thus holds space, with Shah, for reflections on the formal politics of encounters in general, and theatrical and scholarly encounters in particular, engaging with theatre as both an expression of and experiment in what Doreen Massey calls 'the social in the widest sense': 'the challenge of our constitutive interrelatedness [...] and the ongoing and ever-specific project of the practices through which that sociability is to be configured' (195). In these pages we are interested in the way these dynamics are structured—both in performance and in the issue itself—following Petra Kuppers' play with I/you/we pronouns as 'a deliberate invitation—not to overidentify but to wonder' (1); Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò's provocation, 'How did you and I get to be here, interacting across this page?' (76); and Salomé Voegelin's endeavour to 'find my voice in reading yours aloud' (xi). We are curious about conventions of orientation, and habits and customs of arrival, asking: how do people meet, in theatres, and in discussions about theatre? Who is allowed access, and how are some denied it? When does a performance's political work begin? Who gets to attend at all? How are people made to meet and held apart from meeting? By whom? On whose terms? For whose ends?

In producing this issue, we have attempted to match this curiosity with a number of convictions. Perhaps the most important of these is our desire to open access to this issue to as wide an audience as possible, within the practical

parameters of a journal of this kind. Where issues of *Platform* have customarily been produced in both electronic and paper formats, therefore, this issue will only exist online, to facilitate the presentation of parallel audio and text versions of each piece—with the ambition that this format should represent neither a 'text-first' nor an 'audio-first' collection. Whilst this kind of work will always necessarily be imperfect—and will always be constrained by pressures on money and time—we hope that this dual format both indicates and goes some way to ensuring the principle of equality of access that we have attempted to honour from the time that work on this issue began.

We have also attempted to integrate a principle of collaboration into our editorial work as deeply as possible—extending, for example, to the form of these prefatory notes. It seemed unusual to us, and out of keeping with *Platform*'s ethos, to compose an editorial on the subject of collaboration without involving the issue's authors. We therefore invited our contributors to reflect briefly on their experience of working on this issue, and on what a journal like *Platform* might offer, as an indirect means of characterising the gathering in which we have all been engaged. In the following, we put these reflections into dialogue.

Caroline Astell-Burt, whose artistic contribution explores the multisensory production and reception of puppetry performance, offers:

> After the steering and cajoling offered to those engaged in institutionally based research, suddenly out in the world on your own with hardly a single reason for being (and there is an awful lot of space), *Platform* offers discipline, deadlines, and someone who is reading and commenting—and what a gift that is!

Keepa Maskey—whose contribution to this issue creatively shares her encounter with Ganga Maharjan, a farmer resident in Lalitpur, Nepal—writes to us:

> Entering academia at the age of 50 has been the most beautiful and rewarding experience in my life. A journal like *Platform* encourages and fosters inclusivity. It gives space and time for reflection—to learn/unlearn through our differences—which I think is crucial especially in today's critical times. It paves possibilities in understanding how performative perspectives could facilitate in the functioning of our communities. I hope, furthermore, for the acknowledgment and articulation of Indigenous practices in welcoming new perspectives and way of learning.

Livia Daza-Paris' article, 'Assemblies of Solidarity in Simultaneous Acts', manifests co-creative border crossings by proposing 'the idea that distant terrains between North and South America can offer poetic testimonies on each other's survival by "performing" assemblies of solidarity even across human-imposed-borders'. Ruba Totah's article, meanwhile, investigates how music constituted resistance and solidarity in gatherings at Sheikh Jarrah. 'Regarding the journal's future', Totah writes:

> I believe it has successfully created a holistic dialogue between the editors, reviewers, and contributors, which is not provided in seminar or conference venues. The journal succeeds in overcoming the many challenges of meeting across borders and time limitations by providing in-depth and to-the-point support to the contributors, thus advancing the creative thinking process.

Maria Oshodi, Artistic Director and CEO of Extant—the first performing arts organisation in the UK managed for and by visually impaired professional arts practitioners—reflects on the company's more-than-25-year history, and considers the future via Extant's legacy. About *Platform*, Oshodi says: '*Platform* offers a vital opportunity to accrue emerging academics their publishing chops in the competitive world of research profiling'. Xueting Luo, meanwhile, whose performance response offers a

heady evocation of Shen Wei's *Integrate* at West Bund Dome Art Centre in Shanghai, China (2023), suggests an international focus for Platform:

> Regarding your question about what a postgraduate/early career journal of Theatre and Performing Arts might achieve, I would like to share my thoughts that it could partially serve as a platform to present current methodologies and research directions. It would be beneficial to include diverse perspectives and concerns from different universities worldwide. This approach could significantly help early career researchers like myself to align our work with the broader academic discourse and current concerns in the field.

Georgie Hook responds to various states of gathering at Miet Warlop's *One Song* at Leeds Playhouse (2023), and for our editorial offers a quotation she found when re-reading Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (2015), in the chapter 'Contamination as Collaboration':

> How does a gathering become a 'happening', that is, greater than a sum of its parts? One answer is contamination. We are contaminated by our encounters: they change who we are as we make way for others. […]

> [S]taying alive—for every species—requires livable collaborations. (27-28)

Thinking with Tsing, Hook posits 'the journal as a livable (and lively) collaboration'. Nina Kunzendorf, a member of *Platform*'s Editorial Board, has contributed her own lively account of a note-taking collaboration with artists in Oslo, Norway. Here, Kunzendorf is a go-between twice: as contributor and editor; and as artist and notator.

Harshadha Balasubramanian, whose experimental photo essay plays with embodied and AI audio descriptions, poses a series of provocations for *Platform*:

> Following the thread started in my contribution, what should the discipline (especially scholarship around performing arts) do about emerging tech, like XR (extended reality) and/or AI? Access is important but increasingly challenging to implement, especially when journals have limited resources. How can we work together? What do we need (infrastructurally, perhaps) to ensure that postgraduate journals like *Platform* can lead the way in implementing access? I find that postgraduate journals are generally better at this, because their editors take on a lot of responsibility, and at times stress, to institute healthy conditions for their authors. What support would you have liked?

Balasubramanian's final question—which speaks to the ethic of care and reciprocity expressed across our editorial correspondences—will be addressed beyond this issue on an ongoing basis as the journal's future is determined by its board and host institution. Here, though, we will put Balasubramanian's queries in contact with other contributions: director and theatre maker Stephen Bailey, for example, reflects on disability, access, representation, and digital technologies in their interview with Grace Joseph; and Fiona Crouch offers us her access expertise on 'presenting information for neurodivergent audiences', which, she acknowledges, 'will be tricky to adhere to in an academic journal'.

Whilst acknowledging the difficulties that Crouch is describing, in this issue we have attempted to apply principles of access wherever we were able. The text of the print version, for example, is uniformly presented in size 16, sans serif font, with 1.5 line spacing. Large print is the standard and original in this issue, attending to Sandra Alland's distinction between the 'ands' and 'ors' of literary access: 'The extent of literary access is usually various "versions"', Alland observes, 'an audiobook, or a plain language book, or an e-book, or a Braille book. Always "or". Rarely "and"'. We have attempted to follow the spirit of this distinction in designing an issue that is accessible from the ground up, as far as possible. Rather than producing

several versions, therefore, we include collaborative image descriptions in the text; large print isn't siloed for access; and the audio version has been designed, using synthetic voice, by our audio producer Ian Rattray, Founder and Director of Clear Voice Enterprises. Rattray regularly works with disabled-led organisations, and, as a visually impaired producer, is invested in—and ingenious about—access. We recommend listening with headphones to experience Rattray's design: you may (or may not) notice the 'room ambience beneath' the pieces 'to create a sense of space' ('without them it sounds empty'); and the 'image descriptions pinging off to one side'.

In closing this introduction, and opening towards the rest of the issue, what remains is to express our gratitude to our contributors, and to the supporters by whom this process has been sustained. Firstly, we would like to offer our thanks to each of our authors, for their effort, their care, their insight, and their time—and for allowing us to participate in their work. Secondly, we would like to thank the team at Royal Holloway, and the *Platform* Editorial and Advisory Boards, for offering this issue a sturdy and supportive frame within which to grow. Finally, to all of those to whom we owe our thanks, we would make clear that we will attempt to honour this in what we do next, in a manner that we hope is in keeping with the ideas and beliefs at this issue's heart. Our gratitude for this gathering, that

is, might be understood as an orientation in time: an attitude towards the past that inflects what is to come.

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