

PREFACE

The special issue of *Culture Crossroads* dedicated to the performing arts brings together a collection of research articles inspired by the conference “Acting, Reacting, Enacting. Theory and Practice in Performing Arts” held in Riga in 2023 during the Baltic Drama Forum. These selected contributions critically examine evolving paradigms in theatre practice, theory, and infrastructure across multiple cultural contexts. They span a wide thematic scope – from artistic research to postdramatic performance, from historical legacies of political theatre to institutional and research challenges in post-Soviet and contemporary settings, mainly focusing on Baltic theatre space.

The structure of this issue follows the conceptual framework outlined in the conference call—*acting, reacting, enacting*—progressing from theoretical reconsiderations of acting to the socio-political dimensions of performance, and finally to institutional and historiographic perspectives, thereby reflecting the broad spectrum of inquiry envisioned by the gathering.

The opening section is dedicated to the ongoing redefinition of what it means to “act” in contemporary theatre. Ramunė Balevičiūtė’s article, “**How Could Artistic Research Contribute to Acting Theories?**”, serves as a conceptual cornerstone for this discussion. Drawing on her experience supervising artistic doctoral research, Balevičiūtė explores how artistic research—rooted in embodied, tacit knowledge—can contribute to a more holistic understanding of acting. By proposing a hybrid model that fuses artistic and scholarly paradigms, the paper challenges the traditional separation between theory and practice and offers a robust framework for the integration of experimental methodologies into the study of performance. The essay “**Rethinking Acting in Contemporary Theatre: The Paradox of the Contemporary Actor**” by Rūta Mažeikienė furthers this inquiry by revisiting Denis Diderot’s classic *Paradox of the Actor* and examining its resonance in contemporary Lithuanian theatre. Through two case studies—Bernard-Marie Koltès’ *Roberto Zucco* and the postdramatic *Lokis*—the researcher investigates the dissolution of stable character and the implications for actorly presence and audience engagement. The contemporary actor, the author suggests, navigates a paradox not between emotion and technique, but between representation and presence. Jurgita Staniškytė’s contribution, “**Enacting, Not-Acting, Post-Acting: Embodied Life Stories on Contemporary Lithuanian Theatre Stage,**” examines

the increasing presence of non-professional performers and autobiographical narratives in Lithuanian productions. She provides a nuanced exploration of “post-acting,” where the performer’s body becomes a site of both personal history and socio-cultural critique. The paper expands on theoretical traditions stemming from poststructuralism and performativity to frame the shift from dramatic role to embodied testimony, highlighting new tensions between authenticity and construction.

The second section shifts focus to the explicitly political dimensions of theatre, both historical and contemporary. In **“Acting on the Scene of Political Theatre: Leftist Drama Studios in Riga 1920–1930,”** Sanita Duka offers a historical-critical analysis of early 20th-century Latvian leftist theatre. She traces the ideological and aesthetic divergences between radical and centrist socialist theatre practices, with a focus on institutions such as the Riga People’s High School Drama Studio and the Workers’ Theatre. The study emphasises the role of participatory and devised methods in shaping Latvian theatre’s political aesthetics and links these to broader transnational currents, including Soviet agitprop and German political theatre. The article **“Simply Entertainment? Conspiracy Theories and Post-truth in Contemporary Comedy”** by Zane Radzobe explores how Latvian commercial theatre engages with contemporary conspiracy discourses. Through detailed case studies of recent performances (*The Last Straw*, *Don Quixote of an Apartment Building*, *Operation Mindfuck*), the paper argues that comedy in the post-truth era functions as both entertainment and ideological reflection. It draws attention to how theatrical humour can reinforce or disrupt audience biases, revealing the political work of laughter in a fragmented media landscape. Darija Davidovič’s study, **“Enacting “Real People’s” Experiences of War”** focuses on documentary theatre and the use of non-professional actors performing their own wartime testimonies. Set against the backdrop of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, *Exodus* exemplifies a Theatre of the Real, where the line between testimony, performance, and political action is blurred. Combining empirical interviews with hermeneutic analysis, the article reveals how such performances not only convey trauma but also activate ethical spectatorship and community engagement.

And last but not least, the final section addresses structural and historiographic questions surrounding theatre institutions and their role in shaping cultural memory. **“Theatre Management and Performance in the Regions of Latvia”** co-written by Vēsma Lēvalde and Sigita Ignatjeva, investigates the organisational models of regional theatres in Liepāja and Daugavpils. By comparing a municipally managed and a state-administered theatre, the article reveals how institutional frameworks affect artistic output, financial stability, and long-term strategic planning. It challenges the binary of centre vs. periphery and foregrounds the need for equitable

cultural policy that supports regional diversity. Lauma Mellēna-Bartkeviča, in her reflective essay “**Research Challenges Concerning the Late 20th-Century Arts in Latvia: Context for Music Theatre Studies,**” discusses the historiographical and epistemological problems faced when researching the late Soviet and transitional periods. Focusing on music and opera, the author articulates the tensions between memory, ideology, and methodological responsibility in postcolonial academic scholarship. By invoking the concept of “coloniality of knowledge,” the article encourages a more self-aware and critically engaged approach to Baltic cultural historiography.

In bringing together these diverse yet interconnected contributions, this issue of *Culture Crossroads* aims to both document and provoke. Whether by interrogating the epistemological foundations of acting, reassessing the sociopolitical functions of theatre, or exposing the institutional forces that shape cultural production, these articles collectively argue for a theatre studies that is both rigorously theoretical and deeply engaged with lived realities.

We thank the contributing authors for their thoughtful scholarship, and are grateful to the peer reviewers as well as the editorial team for their dedication. It is our hope that this collection will foster further critical dialogue across disciplines, generations, and geographies.

Editors

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