

Call for Papers: Special Issue on German Theatre - Diversity, Identity, Contestation

From debates around the use of Blackface on stage or a Muslim-centered production of *Black Virgins*, to legal attacks on Falk Richter's production of *FEAR* by members of the AfD party, German theatre has provoked controversy in recent years. Theatre has long been a site of collective self-examination in German society. Recently debates in German theatre have focused on questions of racialization, exclusion, and diverse German identities. As a result, German theatre has undergone significant changes, perhaps most visibly with the appointment of Shermin Langhoff as intendant at the Maxim Gorki Theater in 2015, signaling the de facto mainstreaming of postmigrant theatre. Postmigrant theatre (itself a contested term) has helped to shape the discourse on the hybrid identities of second and third-generation immigrants and "established an aesthetic and intellectual space for subaltern artists to speak for themselves, in their own voices, and thus to produce new theatrical discourses" (Sharifi 335). In response to events such as the so-called Refugee Crisis (2015) or Germany's public admission of genocide in Namibia (2021), attempts to address structural inequality in German theatre and to engage in discourses around identity, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, race, and class have become more pronounced. At the same time, the German theatre landscape has not been spared the pains around how these discourses play out in the public sphere, such as the charge of instilling a "culture of political correctness," the specter of Cancel Culture, and criticism of self-righteousness and what Swiss theatre maker Milo Rau, for example, has called "virtue signaling."

For this special issue of *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, we invite interdisciplinary perspectives to explore recent developments in German theatre, and the social movements and theatre histories that have led to them. The issue aims to investigate how marginalized German histories and identities are being reinterpreted and contested to reflect demographic changes in German society, and to shed light on the new sensibilities regarding diversification of representation, as seen in movements such as postmigrant theatre (Petersen and Schramm; Yildiz; Sharifi & Skwirblies). Here, for example, we can consider the current German theatre context as informed by contemporary experiences of racialized identities and a history of concomitant racializing performance (Sieg, "Race, Guilt, and Innocence;" Landry). We also invite papers on the "growing pains" of attempts at diversification, as direct attempts to challenge norms of visibility of marginalized groups that have themselves come under fire for the aesthetic practices they employ (Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*). We also welcome an exploration of the reappearance of class as an issue on the stage and earlier attempts to make the bourgeois theatre institution accessible to diverse audiences. That is, we are interested in current polemics around diversity and the historical debates and theatrical and performance practices that inform them.

Our special issue invites contributions that engage these discourses surrounding contemporary German theatre for a transdisciplinary German Studies readership. We are currently soliciting 500-word abstracts on topics and questions that include, but are not limited to:

- What contemporary representations of questions of social justice have recently emerged on German stages? What forms do political anger and outrage take?
- What are the marginalized histories of German theatre on which contemporary visible diversification of the theatre scene builds?
- How are decolonizing and postcolonial discourses shaping current approaches to the stage?
- What has been the effect of newfound openness to non-German languages on stage?
- What are contemporary forms of avant-garde transgression in performance? For example, what are the politics and aesthetics of boundary transgression in relation to current debates on appropriate and inappropriate representation.
- How do the discontents of German unification continue to inflect questions of belonging, especially for marked others in German theatre?
- What forms of queer, hybrid, and post-national identities are emerging on German stages and what speculative futures do they propose?
- How have criticisms of the politics of representation and political performance been taking shape, from rightwing anti-PC criticism to the left concern with “pseudoactivity” in the age of social media?

Please send a 500-word abstract and short bio to Christine Korte christine.korte@nyu.edu and Misha Hadar mhadar@ua.edu by February 28, 2023. Prospective contributors will be notified by March 15, 2023. The deadline for draft manuscripts (~8000 words) will be September 2023 and April 2024 for revised, final manuscripts. Each contribution will undergo rigorous double-blind peer review before publication of the special issue in autumn 2024. Submissions are welcome in English, French, or German.

Works Cited

- Landry, Olivia. "German Youth Against Sarrazin: Nurkan Erpulat's *Verrücktes Blut* and *Clash* as Political Theatre of Experience." *Türkisch-deutsche Studien*, vol. 3, 2012, pp. 105-122.
- Petersen, Anne Ring, and Moritz Schramm. "(Post-)Migration in the Age of Globalisation: New Challenges to Imagination and Representation." *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2017, pp. 1-12.
- Rau, Milo. "Ich bin auch nur ein Arschloch!" *Sonntagszeitung*, 27 December 2015, p. 55.
- Sharifi, Azadeh. "Multilingualism and Postmigrant Theatre in Germany." *Modern Drama*, vol. 61, no. 3, 2018, pp. 328-351.
- Sharifi, Azadeh, and Lisa Skwirblies. *Theaterwissenschaft postkolonial/dekolonial: Eine kritische Bestandsaufnahme*. transcript, 2022.
- Sieg, Katrin. *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany*. University of Michigan Press, 2002.

- . "Race, Guilt and Innocence: Facing Blackfacing in Contemporary German Theater." *German Studies Review*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2015, pp. 117-134.
- Yildiz, Erol. "Postmigrant Practices of Living as Resistance." *Handbook of Art and Global Migration*, edited by Burcu Dogramaci and Birgit Mersmann, De Gruyter, 2019, 385-395.