

COUP DE THÉÂTRE vol. 38 (Fall 2024)
Call For Papers

Seriality, reboots and iterability on the contemporary Anglophone stage

Theatre is subject to a paradox anchored in its very nature as live spectacle. It is a repetitive, re-iterable and rehearsed act, a (more or less) scripted performance that occurs several nights a week. Yet, no performance is ever a complete replica of the previous one. Theatre is an art of variations, more than repetitions, each performance a slight tweaking of the text, the staging or the audience reaction. Thinking about seriality, reboots or iterability as a thematic focal point is therefore particularly fruitful when it comes to addressing contemporary theatre's capacity to transform and be transformed. Contemporary productions on the Anglophone stage have drawn on the highly transformative potential of rewrites and returns, through structural (through the radical revision of the melodramatic act for instance) and thematic (by focusing on race, sex and gender issues) explorations. This issue of *Coup de Théâtre* wishes to document this process of transformation-through-iteration that shapes the contemporary English-speaking stage.

The aesthetic resetting of theatre has been engaged through the reboot of older dramatic models or old myths, that has either favored their rejuvenation or their complete explosion, such as in Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* (1996), which drastically uses mythology to blast open the codes of the tragedy and marshal the obscene onto the stage, "in-yer-face". In Branden Jacob-Jenkins' *Girls* (2019), his rewrite of Euripides's *The Bacchae* transforms the menacing chorus into a celebratory and liberating polyphony. Over the years, literal re-performances, multimedia performances based on repetitions and variations have been developed, most notably by the Wooster Group and its many *bricolages* (*Vieux Carré*, 2009, or *The Town Hall Affair*, 2016) or the repetitive reboots of plots and modes of staging suggested by the Real Time Editing of the Big Art Group. In terms of dramatic texts, repetitive motifs and iterations might both suggest the redundancy of the cliché or signal a reboot of the signifier.

Contemporary iterations are also the occasion for theatre to *revive* old plays, to resuscitate a material envisioned as old-fashioned and adapt it to contemporary concerns, especially regarding the visibility of marginalized subjects. Musical theatre is a form especially prone to such revivals (see the Lincoln Center Encores! series launched in 1994), that come to correct the dramatic text (such as Suzan Lori-Parks' rewriting of the 1935 Gershwin opera *Porgy and Bess* in 2012 or Lin-Manuel Miranda's translation of certain lyrics of *West Side Story* into Spanish in 2009) or the casting (see for instance the colorblind casting of the 1943 musical *Oklahoma!* in 2019). These revisions become synonymous with historical reparations: the reiteration of history onstage can therefore reboot historical episodes to question the many failures of history, such as in Jeremy O'Harris's *Slave Play* (2019) or Suzan Lori-Parks's *Topdog/Underdog* (2001). The historical dimension of such plays also conjures up the notion of reenactment as a theatrical practice: those returns of time on stage, as Rebecca Schneider theorizes in *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (2011), are variations through which the multifaceted dimension of History can emerge. Similarly, David Greig's *Dunsinane* (2010) invites us to reconsider the Shakespearean text under a Scottish lens, excavating the complex contemporary politics of devolution – especially since the play was subject to a re-iteration in Scotland in 2011 after a first production in London in 2010.

This publication wishes to address the aesthetic, political and formal potential of seriality, iterations and reboots on the contemporary English-speaking stage. It aims to bring together

scholars who specialize in all fields and all geographical areas of contemporary English-speaking theatre. Publications may engage with (but are not limited to) the following themes:

- The rewriting and re-adaptation of classical theatrical forms and/or authors on the contemporary stage
- The stylistics of repetitions and variations, in the dramatic text and in the staging
- The political potency of new productions and revivals
- The rewritings of History on stage
- Re-iterability and the question of audience accessibility and reception
- Iteration and the issue of circulation and re-territorialization
- Intermediality and the mixing of live and virtual performance as processes of theatrical (re)iteration
- Repetition and the performing body

Suggested bibliography

- Babbage, France. 2017. *Adaptation in Contemporary Theatre: Performing Literature*. London: Bloomsbury.
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- Carlson, Marvin. 2001. *The Haunted Stage*. Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Press.
- Fishlin, Daniel, ed. 2014. *Outerspears: Shakespeare, Intermedia, and the Limits of Adaptation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hutcheon, Linda. 2013. *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd edition. London: Routledge.
- Keefe, John and Knut Ove Arntzen. 2020. *Staging and Re-cycling. Retrieving, Reflecting and Re-framing the Archive*. London: Routledge.
- Komporaly, Jozefina. 2017. *Radical Revival as Adaptation. Theatre, Politics, Society*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Laera, Margherita. 2014. *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat*. London: Bloomsbury.
- O'Toole, Emer, Andrea Pelegri Kristic and Stuart Young. 2017. *Ethical Exchanges in Translation, Adaptation and Dramaturgy*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Reilly, Kara. 2018. *Contemporary Approaches to Adaptation in Theatre*. London: Palgrave Macmillan
- Sanders. Julie. 2016. *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 2nd edition. London: Routledge.
- Saunders, Graham. 2017. *Elizabethan and Jacobean Reappropriation in Contemporary British Drama*. London: Palgrave.
- Schneider, Rebecca. *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. London & New York: Routledge, 2011.

Submission process

Proposals (300-word abstracts) must be submitted by email to anouk.bottero@gmail.com, claire.helie@univ-lille.fr and marianne.drugeon@univ-montp3.fr by June 1st, 2023. Notification of acceptance will be sent early July 2023, for a complete article submission by the end of October 2023.

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About *Coup de Théâtre*

Coup de Théâtre has been published by RADAC (the French Society for Contemporary Anglophone Theatre) since 1981. Each yearly issue, along with occasional special issues, gathers and promotes various scholarly perspectives on contemporary anglophone theatre. Each issue is theme-based and published in coordination with one or more guest editors. *Coup de Théâtre* is also a bilingual publication, with articles written in English and in French and new translations of Anglophone plays into French. Past issues can be downloaded for free on the RADAC website, and more recent issues can be ordered online as well (visit <http://radac.hypotheses.org> for more information).