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Editorial: Climates of Denial

FINTAN WALSH

The availability of data to quantify our world is matched only by our readiness to ignore it. At the time of this editorial's writing, for instance, two events dominating world news appear to bear this out. In the more familiar story, fears of so-called climate denial troubled either side of the Atlantic. In the USA, Indur M. Goklany, an official at the Interior Department, was reported in *The New York Times* as deliberately including misleading information about climate change in the agency's official reports.[1] In Europe, on the brink of the EU signing its first climate law, concerns swirled around increased pressure from climate denial groups, including those with fossil fuel interests. Having left the EU, anxieties in the UK had a more urgent charge, not least given that the ruling Conservative Party retains links with prominent climate change sceptics, including the Global Warming Policy Foundation.

In the same weeks as these stories broke, news spread around the world about the transmission of coronavirus or COVID-19. Not only were facts difficult to disentangle from horror stories among the coverage, but it appeared that some people and countries may have intentionally suppressed or skewed figures. In the USA, some right-wing voices claimed concerns were fabricated to damage Trump, who at first denied the virus's gravity, while the UK's slow response seemed not to take the issue seriously enough. China, where the virus was first identified, was accused by some in the West of not being transparent with its data or handling of the situation. The Iranian government initially denied that its country would be affected at all, even while exporting face masks to China, while the latest reports claim that dozens of government officials and members of parliament have contracted the virus, with thousands more citizens affected.

When viral disease moves quicker than viral news, a pandemic is more difficult to rationalize than the progressive effects of global warming. Yet what both of these situations have in common is that, despite the swathes of data attainable if not immediately available, political ideology, economic imperatives and fear have the capacity to render them invisible. The products of scientific inquiry, in this regard, are only as useful as the degree to which people are willing to access and recognize them.

The viral is just one mode of information transmission which defines our time, entangling news cycles and bodies at a cellular level. But it is not the only way information is mediated. When it comes to theatre, for example, we are more likely to encounter information suggestively presented – sensed, felt or suspended in the time-space of a performance, or indicated by its material remains.

Nonetheless, theatre loves a good cover-up and reveal – this tease structures its penchant for curtains, lights and dénouement. But theatre typically trades in a very

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different kind of data to scientific inquiry. Information communicated by plays or live performance, in particular, is often based in language, image, emotion and mood, rather than microscopic formations, statistics and graphs.

This issue of *Theatre Research International* features articles which explore theatre's relationship to different forms of data, including cultural conventions, material and digital archives, and the fact of environmental destruction and climate change. Articles consider how theatre practices can uniquely intervene in patterns of data production, suppression and denial, and how different research methodologies can raise different kinds of questions and offer a range of nuanced outcomes.

In 'South Pacific Brownface: Racial Imposture, Global Markets, and National Theatre in *Tapu* (1903)', Margaret Werry examines how theatre can insidiously function to produce racial information and cultural stereotypes. Werry addresses the largely forgotten and short-lived production of *Tapu* at the turn of the twentieth century, one of the earliest and most wildly ambitious efforts to construct a national theatre for New Zealand. *Tapu* was a fantasy about Māori life made for and by non-Māori, Werry argues, that tried to appropriate, fetishize and commodify indigenous landscapes and culture. Our discipline often approaches theatre for its critical or subversive force, Werry suggests, but attending to the ways it aims to produce culturally authoritative information – however badly – is equally important.

Jason Price's 'Minnie Cunningham at the Old Bedford' considers the suppression of the history of Minnie Cunningham as a late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century musical hall star. This is partly due to Cunningham's gender, Price proffers, as well as a more generalized sense of music hall's subordinate value next to other art forms. The irony is best captured by the fact that Cunningham receded from attention even as paintings of her by the British artist Walter Sickert gained prominence. In an attempt to redress this imbalance, Price assembles original press notices, published interviews, and other evidence from Cunningham's career to afford her deserved status within musical hall theatre history.

The history of the incorporation of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* into the repertory system is a concern of Jens-Morten Hanssen's article. With 'Ibsen and the Repertory System: *Peer Gynt* on the German Stage', Hanssen uses the IbsenStage database as a research tool, to track the play's production life, focusing on Germany with some Scandinavian comparisons. Hanssen's usage of digital humanities methodologies represents an appeal to consider computerized forms of relational data patterns in conducting theatre history, so that discursive and cultural claims might be read alongside quantitative data.

Our final two contributions take as their focus issues of environmental destruction, and the ways in which performance draws attention to its effects, while making a desperate bid for a better outcome. In 'Human No-Go Zones: Theatricalizing Unintentional and Intentional Wildlife Sanctuaries', Catherine Diamond takes as her sobering starting point the certain destruction of the planet and the likely extinction of humans in the Anthropocene. Diamond's discussion loops around work that responds to sites of environmental disaster – including Chernobyl, the Korean Demilitarized Zone, Fukushima and a Philippine marine sanctuary – to explore how these events occasion rethinking the relationship between the human and non-human.

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Climate, of course, is the arena in which information is most hotly contested and manipulated. With the dossier 'Climate Change and the Decolonized Future of Theatre', a number of authors proceed on the basis that the world already looks very different due to global warming. Lisa Woynarksi unites numerous voices to question what theatre and performance can do and be in a climate-changed future. In what takes the shape of a dialogical manifesto, authors foreground the experiences and practices of Indigenous cultures in China, Australia, USA and Peru.

In the short scene 'Climate' in Caryl Churchill's *Love and Information* (2012), even knowing the crude data around environmental catastrophe is not enough – sometimes data form is the problem. 'Are you really not going to take it seriously?', a voice asks; 'I don't know how to. I don't know how to', comes the reply.[2] Theatre, in this instance, figures as an important forum for reckoning with all those phenomena we can readily see and quantify, but still struggle to process, understand or act upon. But what's most important isn't always what's most certain, and as the articles in this issue reveal, theatre and its research can afford due significance to all those co-existing experiences of ambivalence, doubt and creating-against-the-odds which characterize our work and worlds.

NOTES

1 Hiroko Tabuchi, 'A Trump Insider Embeds Climate Denial in Scientific Research', *New York Times,* 2 March 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/02/climate/goks-uncertainty-language-interior.html, accessed 12 March 2020.

2 Caryl Churchill, *Love and Information* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2012), p. 54.

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