

Conference Report: 27th CDE Conference: Fear and Anxiety in Contemporary Drama, May 31-June 3 2018, University of Hildesheim

The 2018 CDE conference officially opened with the welcome speeches by the conference organiser Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier and the Dean of the University of Hildesheim's Faculty of Arts Prof. Dr. Jens Roselt. The President of the society Prof. Dr. Ute Berns thanked the conference organisers for their work and commitment. She then informed the members of the recent death of long-standing member of CDE, Dr. Christoph Henke, PD (Augsburg), who died the weekend before the conference. A minute of silence followed.

The President then announced the two winners of the Bi-Annual CDE Award for outstanding dissertations (jury: Annette Pankratz, Kerstin Schmidt, Christina Wald). She read the laudations for Cyrielle Garcon and Jan Suk, who shared the prize this year: Cyrielle Garcon (Univ. de Avignon) for her thesis *Beyond Documentary Realism: Aesthetic Transgression in Contemporary British Verbatim Theatre*, and Jan Suk (Charles University Prague) for *The Poetics of Immanence: Performance Theatre of Forced Entertainment*. Both theses will be published as monographs in the CDE book series.

The conference organiser then spoke a few words on the conference theme: fear and anxiety. Quoting from Charles Darwin and his notion of emotional and social utopia, she mused on the relationship between fear and depression. Referring to Paul Virilio, she drew a line between fear and the expulsion of the other, extending an invitation to the participants to explore the depths of fear on a theoretical level, but to experience days without fear and anxiety at the conference. She then invited British dramatist Laura Wade to join her in conversation. Wade spoke about her progress of becoming a playwright, on questions of communication and the difficulty to communicate, the reclaiming of grief as a process (which is a topic she returned to in her adaptation of Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*), the playwright's process of research and how it shapes character creation, on how it impacts a play to work with a casting director. Her new work has moved towards writing parts for particular actors, building the play around them.

The second day started with the conference's first keynote: Graham Saunders (University of Birmingham), "Masters (and Mistresses) of Menace" (introduced by Susanne Bayerlipp). Saunders spoke on the legacy of Harold Pinter's oeuvre in contemporary British playwriting. He argues that the nature of fear had changed by the turn of the millennium, therefore the way it was discussed in drama also change: the causes of menace in Pinter's plays were not mysterious and opaque any more, but actually became rather concrete. Referring to David Hare's *The Vertical Hour* (2008), the work of Martin Crimp (*The City*, 2008, and *Fewer Emergencies*, 2005), and Anthony Neilson (*Motortown*), Saunders traced the discussion of states of fear in post-millennial plays and their relation to Pinter. Other plays discussed were Mark Ravenhill, *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat* (2008), Jez Butterworth's *Parlour Song* (2011), Simon Stephens, *Punk Rock* (2009), Caryl Churchill's play *Escaped Alone* (2016), Alecky Blythe's *Little Revolution* (2014), and Mike Bartlett's *Bull* (2015). Saunders concluded that, while Pinter may have been superseded by the dramatists that followed him, his shadow still looms over the portrayal of fear in contemporary drama.

The keynote was followed by the conference's first panel, "States of Disorder" (chair: James McKenzie). Yeliz Biber Vangözü (Ataturk University) spoke on "Confronting Fear and Anxiety through Theatre: Idiot's Child's *What if the Plane Fell out of the Sky?*" Her paper traced how Idiot Child's play uses a humorous approach to the gently mocking discussion of contemporary states of anxieties and various forms of coping mechanisms, often rooted in self-help techniques. Ondrej Pilný (Charles University) then spoke on "Anxieties in Irish Theatre", touching on Michael West's *Freefall* (2010), new productions by Corn Exchange and ANU Productions as well as Amy Conroy's *I <3 Amy <3 I* (2010) and David Ireland's *Cyprus Avenue* (2016).

The second panel, "Anxieties Across (Genre) Borders" was chaired by Anette Pankratz. Eda Debedas Dundar spoke on "From Involuntary Bystander to TRC Hearing Audience: The Dilemma of the Spectator in Yael Farber's *Molara*", discussing Farber's adaptation of the Oresteia trilogy (2007) as a double of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Marlena Tronicke (Univ. of Münster) then spoke on "Terror by Candlelight: Tanika Gupta's *Lions and Tigers* and the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse", giving an extended overview on the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse's history and function, then moving on to Gupta's contemporary play, underlining the playhouse's mission to also be a hub for new writing (in the tradition of the original Globe). Ivan Lacko (Univ. of Bratislava) then gave a talk on "FeArt and Dance-xiety in Nature Theatre of Oklahoma's *Pursuit of Happiness*" and its connection to Jill Dolan's concept of utopian performatives.

The CDE Annual General Meeting took place in the afternoon and was followed by supper and a wine reception on the balcony.

The third day kicked off with the third panel, "Affecting the Audience", chaired by Anja Müller-Wood. Sarah Ablett (Univ. of Braunschweig) spoke on "'You'd be ugly if you had a life like mine': The Repulsive Other in Tim Crouch's *I, Caliban* (2004) and *I, Malvolio* (2010)" and analysed how disgust functions as a highly efficient driver to elicit responses. Davide Giovanzana (Theatre Academy of Helsinki) then gave a talk entitled "How can we make sense of violence? Oscillations of Experience", outlining a project looking at theatre's response to the medial representation of violence. His talk was followed by Dorothee Birke's "Houses of Horror: Addressing the Anxieties of the Housing Crisis". Referring to *Radiant Vermin* by Philip Ridley and Mike Bartlett's *Game* (both 2015), Birke details how the housing crisis has become one area in which the increasing social stratification becomes more visible.

The panel was followed by the conference's second keynote: Patrick Duggan (University of Surrey) spoke on "Performance & the Politics of Fear: Reflections on Aman Mojadidi's *Remembering a Future*", a close reading of the performance, reflecting on questions of authenticity and revealing.

The fourth panel, chaired by Eckart Voigts, was entitled "The Fearsome Other". Abir Al-Laham (University of Heidelberg) spoke on "'And you are Fear and Darkness': Strategies of Fear and Anxiety in Identity Politics", discussing Mark Ravenhill's *Product* (2006), Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children* (2009), and the casting of the Arab Muslim as subhuman other in the public response to the 2001 terror attacks. Nina Skogli (University of Agder, Kristiansand) gave a talk on "Experiences of Uncertainty and Ambivalence in *Soft Eyes* by Artilleriet Produksjoner", asking how performances make us engage in the discourse. Merve Kansiz (Bogazici University, Istanbul) gave a close reading of Akhtar's play and Sarah Ahmed's theory of the politics of fear in "Post 9/11 Language of Fear in Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*".

The panel was followed by the third keynote, an interview of Samuel West, "On Acting and Directing Contemporary British Drama", conducted by Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier. Several conference participants were by then on their way to Braunschweig to watch performances at the local theatre.

The last day started with a workshop by Anna Harpin (Warwick) on "What if how I feel about the world at 4am is the truth? Fear, anxiety, and protest". It was followed by Trish Reid's keynote "The Dystopian Near-Future in Contemporary Drama" (introduced by Daniel Schäber), in which she spoke on the epicacy of anxiety and fear as it has become a trope in recent dystopian near-future theatre. Referring to Mike Bartlett's *13* (National Theatre 2011), Jennifer Haley, *The Nether* (2014), Rory Mullarkey, *The Wolf From the Door* (2014), Debbie Tucker Green, *hang* (2016), Lucy Kirkwood, *The Children* (2016), E.V. Crowe, *The Sewing Group* (2016), Alistair McDowall's *Pomona* (2014) *X* (2016), Keiran Hurley *Heads Up* (2016), Stef Smith, *Human Animals* (2016) and *Girl in the Machine* (2017), Zinnie Harris, *How to Hold Your Breath* (2015), and Caryl Churchill, *Escaped Alone* (2016), she argued that future worlds are created to

examine current political and social structures, the link is often made via the presentation of otherness, discourses of realism, fear and anxiety.

The keynote was followed by the conference's last panel: "Uncannily Familiar Disasters", chaired by Susanne Bayerlipp. Banu Ögünç (Aksaray University) spoke on understanding blackness in "Anxiety in Racial Politics in Kwame Kwei-Armah's *Seize the Day*". Jan Suk (University of Hradec Králové) gave a talk on "Fear, Anxiety, and the Uncanny in Contemporary US #19 PSi Performance", commenting on Guillermo Gomez-Pena, *Strange Democracy: Border Wars* (2013), Heather Cassil, *Teresias* (2013), and Ron Athey, *Incorruptible Flesh: Messianic Remains* (2013). William C. Boles (Rollins College) then gave a talk on "Disasters (Natural and Familial) in Steve Waters' *The Contingency Plan* and Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London*".

The conference closed on Sunday afternoon. The next conference will take place at the University of Graz (Austria) on 20.-23. June 2019.