

Conference Report
29th CDE Conference
"Critical Theatre Ecologies"
June 03-06, 2021, University of Augsburg, Germany

The 2021 CDE conference officially opened with the welcoming words by the conference organiser Martin Middeke (University of Augsburg), followed by a welcome by Christiane Fäcke, the Dean of the Faculty of Philology and History at the University of Augsburg. The President of the society Ute Berns thanked the conference organisers for their work and commitment. Martin Middeke and Martin Riedelsheimer then introduced the conference theme.

The evening continued with the conference's first keynote: London-based playwright Ella Hickson in interview with theatre critic Aleks Sierz (London), chaired by Martin Middeke and followed by Q&A. Hickson spoke about her path to becoming a playwright, and the provenance of her 2016 play *Oil*.

The second day of the conference started with the first panel (chaired by Ute Berns). Helen Gilbert (Royal Holloway, University of London) spoke on "Climate Change Theatre and the Conundrum of Time". She traced instances of plays chronicling climate change in the Antarctic, such as the large-scale E. M. Lewis's *Magellanica* (2018) on the one hand and the microdramatic short plays emerging from Chantal Bilodeau's Climate Change Theatre Action project (2015-ongoing). Patrick Lonergan (NUI Galway) then spoke on "Staging the Great Acceleration: Carly Churchill's *Far Away* on Spike Island, 2017", suggesting to see the final act of the play as the current stage of the Anthropocene, and the first two acts as a kind of archaeology of how we arrived there.

The panel was followed by the second keynote, by Carl Lavery (University of Glasgow), who spoke on "Ecologising Theatre" (chaired by Martin Riedelsheimer) in the context of agency, politics and ethics.

In the afternoon, the second panel was chaired by Dorothee Birke. Christian Attinger (University of Augsburg) spoke on "An Ecology of Plants: the Post-Manufacturing Age in Philip Ridley's *Shivered* and David Eldridge's *In Basildon*", discussing the way in which theatre points at the corporate social and ecological responsibilities of transnational corporations and might offer counter-reactions to the "Capitalocene". Julia Rössler (KU Eichstätt-Ingolstadt) then spoke on "Embodiment, Atmosphere, and Materiality: Ecological Aesthetics in the Theatre of Adam Rapp", giving an overview of Rapp's body of work by historically deriving it from Gertrude Stein and Richard Schechner and then focussing on Rapp's 2004 play *Faster*.

The third panel (chaired by Anette Pankratz), brought together Kerstin Howaldt (University of Erfurt), Anna Street (Le Mans University) and Ramona Mosse (FU Berlin). Howaldt spoke about "Diffracting 'Stabilized/Stabilizing Binaries' of Climate Change Theatre (Plays)", Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* and Richard Bean's *The Heretic* in the context of Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. In their paper "To Be Like Water - Material Dramaturgies in Unthinkable Environments", Street and Mosse used three case studies of performing water to argue for fluidity and connectivity relate to notions of the unthinkable.

The day closed with the conference's third keynote, chaired by Martin Middeke: London-based playwright Martin Crimp in interview with Aleks Sierz, followed by Q&A. Crimp spoke on theatres as an ecology, as a trans-European network.

The CDE Annual General Meeting took place in the morning of the third day.

The conference's fourth panel took place in the afternoon and was chaired by Merle Tönnies. Leila Vaziri (University of Augsburg) spoke on "Alienation and Disgust – The Capitalocene in Contemporary Eco-Drama", referring to Dawn King's 2011 play *Foxfinder* and Tanya Ronder's *Fuck the Polar Bears* (2015) to draw a line from Kristevan abjection theory to the human-animal divide and the alienating effect on the connections between humans and nature. Jill Gatlin (New England Conservatory) then spoke on "Performing Reception Justice: Audience Disturbance and Ecological Toxicity in Cherrie Moraga's *Heroes and Saints*", outlining how the play invites audiences to evaluate their privilege and potential allied action.

The fifth panel followed immediately afterwards (chaired by Clare Wallace). Linda Heß (University of Augsburg) spoke on "Playing the Petrocene: The Toxicity of National Discourse in Leigh Fondakowski's *Spill* (2014) and Ella Hickson's *Oil* (2016)", arguing, alongside Judith Butler's concept of grievability and Timothy Clark's notion of scale, that both plays allow spectators to explore their own capacity for empathy and their entanglement into the ecological crisis on a global scale. Chukwuemeka Rowland Amaefula (Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike) then spoke on "Eco-Drama, Multinational Corporations and Climate Change in Nigeria", exploring the effects of climate change on the country through the lens of Greg Mbajjorgu's ecodrama *Wakeup Everyone* (2011).

This panel was followed by the conference's fourth keynote, by Theresa May (University of Oregon), who spoke on "Kinship and Community in Climate Change Theatre" (chaired by Martin Riedelsheimer). Referring to Marie Clements' *Burning Vision* (2002), Chantal Bilodeau's *Sila* (2015), and her own play *Salmon Is Everything* (2018), she argued for ecodramaturgy as a praxis, presenting theatre as a crucial tool of democracy for the Anthropocene.

Sunday morning saw the conference's fifth keynote, chaired by Martin Middeke. Vicky Angelaki (Mid Sweden University) spoke on "Writing in the Green: Imperatives towards an Eco-n-temporary Theatre Canon". Angelaki suggested in-betweenness as a key element towards understanding humanities' contemporary role and responsibilities.

The keynote was followed by the conference's sixth and last panel (chaired by Eckart Voigts). Jamie Harper (De Montfort University) spoke on "Performing Resilience", comparing the neoliberal approach to the concept with the one taken by ecological sciences and exploring radical transformation through evaluation of a research residency at a community orchard. Solange Ayache (Sorbonne University) then spoke on the merging of the brain, the stage, and the forest in her paper "'It's the Intricacy of the Forest ... That's the Treasure': Devising Ecological Theatre with Simon McBurney's *The Encounter*". Simon Bowes (University of Greenwich) then gave a paper on "Embodiment, Occupation and Solidarity: Theatre Environment as Territory in three Tim Spooner Performances", in which he outlined Spooner's refashioning of the theatre environment as 'territory' in his performances *The Voice of Nature* (2018), *Cuteness Forensics* (2018), and *Dead Nature* (2019). Bowes proposed that Spooner occupied nature and, by extension, the theatre.

The conference closed on Sunday mid-day. The next conference will take place in Paris (organised by our sister organisation RADAC) on 23-26 June, 2022.

Dr. Julia Boll

CDE Secretary