

This practice research is a multi-component output consisting of a series of inter-related works of criticism which I developed as a critic and writer, as well as a series of accompanying written findings. The research expands the political and creative scope of cultural criticism at a time of fundamental changes to the role of critical communication for democratic politics.

The project emerged from my sustained inquiry into cooperative and collective structures for criticism, and professional and lived experience as a mixed ethnicity migrant critic and researcher operating across different political and cultural ecologies in Europe.

The research brings new insights into performance criticism as a distinct performative critical practice, rather than an instrument for performance dissemination. It examines the inter-relation of political structures within criticism (such as form, authorship and production) with its institutional regulation, by mainstream media, the blogosphere or cultural infrastructures on the one hand, and gendered, colonial conceptions of political rationality on the other. The project investigates the role of affective entanglements, cooperative strategies and techniques, such as the live, speculative or fictional, to act as political participation and change.

The project drew on methodologies from performance studies, creative writing and political theory, and unfolded through a series of collaborations with artists, researchers and writers; fieldwork engaging with communities from across Europe, academic, non-academic and professional; training programmes in partnership with organisations at the forefront of experimental performance practice; editorial collaborations that developed modes of collective critical writing; and residencies with independent cultural organisations.

The research has been shared internationally (UK, Germany, Denmark, Portugal, Serbia) through presentations, conferences, publications in peer-reviewed journals, articles in open access platforms and websites, and creative and digital publications.

Collaborative Critique

Be less critical, more often.

Just carry on.

Give the text some rules

Give the text some semiotic weight

Give the text something to take home

Give the text a good shave

Give the text a shape

Give the text some props



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

Give the text some credit

The work is ahead of this writing, because this writing can't grasp a temporality, it can only sustain it, at best.

Diana Damian Martin

Physical materials which comprise or support this submission can be found inside the box. For online materials, a live link is provided in a PDF of this publication found on the USB drive  embedded in the box's interior lid. Links are indicated by the symbol .

Within this publication, references for components of the submission are found in the right margin using a lettering system A–F. Items marked with an * are components of the output, all other items are contextual.

- A* Publication: Damian Martin, Diana. (ed). 2018. *States of Wake: dedicating performance* (Folkestone: performance space)
- B* Publication: Damian Martin, Diana, and Annette Pettersen. 2018. *Critics in Conversation: A Project Book* (Oslo: Kulturradet/Trafo)
- C* Publication: Damian Martin, Diana, and Bojana Janković. 2018. *Critical Interruptions Vol 1: Steakhouse LIVE* (London: Critical Interruptions)
- D* Article: Damian Martin, Diana. 2019. 'Hopeful Acts in Troubled Times: Thinking as Interruption and the poetics of nonconforming criticism', in *Performance Philosophy*, 5 (1 'Sites of Appearance, Matters of Thought: Hannah Arendt and Performance Philosophy'): 25–41
- E List of workshops and residencies 
- F List of short journalism, presentations and talks 

Further information on these materials can be found on the reverse of the box's interior lid.

Diana Damian Martin

COLLABORATIVE CRITIQUE

Expanded practices of contemporary
performance criticism

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama,
University of London

COLLABORATIVE CRITIQUE:
Expanded practices of contemporary
performance criticism

Diana Damian Martin

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Diana Damian Martin is a writer, artist
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Diana's work sits at the intersection
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between East and West Europe. In her
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connection and exchange across borders.

Diana is a core member of Migrants in
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critical co-operative Critical Interruptions.

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The project was designed through three inter-related processes: practice research spread across creative practice, workshops and dissemination.

- ⦿ **Creative practice** This was central to the research, as it shaped the research aims and methodologies, offered a space to deploy theoretical research, and model and work within theatre and performance. The creative practice was shaped by collaborators, who either commissioned work or hosted platforms for the work.
- ⦿ **Workshops** These were held at international festivals with independent arts organisations. Participants had a range of experiences of and relations to criticism as practice. The workshops offered a space to test out and develop new techniques and processes that could then feed back into the creative practice.
- ⦿ **Publishing and dissemination** As the subject of the research was criticism, publishing was both a mode of research — to engage with the process-led approaches — and dissemination. The dissemination of research findings created networks and facilitated sharing of the work in progress, as well engagement with different audiences and stakeholders, academic and non-academic. (For more information, please see v. Timeline).

The main partners in these projects were:

<i>Pacitti Company</i>	An experimental artistic and producing company based in Suffolk;
<i>performance space</i>	An artist-led organisation for experimental performance and live art based in London and Folkestone;
<i>Steakhouse LIVE</i>	An artist-led curatorial collective creating and supporting new contexts for live art and performance;
<i>Home Live Art</i>	Producing live events across Hastings, the South East and beyond;
<i>Live Art Development Agency</i>	An organisation supporting culture's most radical artists, practices and ideas;
<i>Performing Criticism Globally</i>	An initiative exploring criticism's global interconnections;
<i>Writers on the MOVE</i>	An international programme on mobility of critics in Europe;
<i>Exeunt Magazine</i>	An independent publication for theatre and performance criticism;
<i>Teatro e Critica</i>	An independent publication based in Italy.

I Overview

Criticism has long been considered an instrument for the dissemination of theatre and performance, but it has also been a mode of political participation and a space for the development of radical politics. *Collaborative Critique* takes this as the basis through which it engages collaboratively with cultural criticism. The research was led by Dr Diana Damian Martin, with a range of collaborators, partners and participants (see II. Questions, aims and objectives) over a period of six years, from January 2014–February 2020.

The project had three phases:

Phase 1

2014–16 Towards a performative critical practice

This phase of the project centred on examining what constitutes a performative critical practice. It also addressed histories of criticism that have resisted an instrumental use of critique and, instead, sought a political engagement or deployment with its processes.

Phase 2

2016–17 An expanded politics of criticism: Reform and collaboration

Building on delineations, framings and practices of writing and criticism as performance, this phase of the research sought to shape an expanded politics of criticism looking at processes of reform and collaboration. The term “nonconforming criticism” emerged from this phase of the project.

Phase 3

2018–20 Nonconforming criticism: Models and infrastructures

This phase of the project focused on modelling non-conforming criticism across a range of contexts looking at the dialogue between local, cross-territorial and cross-disciplinary work in Europe.

Over the course of the project, I was part of the following collectives which informed, shaped and participated in the practice research:

<i>Critical Interruptions</i>	A Serbo-Romanian critical cooperative with Bojana Janković;
<i>Something Other</i>	A website, series of events and collaboration with Mary Paterson and Maddy Costa;
<i>Writingshop</i>	A pan-European collective of writers examining edges of criticism and its entanglements with performance, with Sergio Lo Gatto, Anette Therese Pettersen and Karl Svantasson.

Other key collaborators on the project include critic and writer Anette Therese Pettersen (for Critics in Conversation) and British experimental theatre company Forced Entertainment (for Quizoola LIVE!). Festival collaborations include SPILL Festival of Performance (UK), Coastal Undercurrents (UK), Stamsund International Festival (Norway), Ravnedans Festival (Norway), TANZ Berlin (Germany), Sterijino Pozorje (Serbia).

The project has received funding from Arts Council England; European Union Culture Programme; Administrația Fondului Cultural Național, România and Kuturprogram Norway.

The research led to a number of peer-reviewed academic publications (see vi. Findings).

II Questions, aims and objectives

Collaborative Critique engaged with an area of long-standing debate in the fields of criticism and political theory: the relation of discourse to democratic politics. In addressing this issue, the project considered the borders of what is constituted as practice and what is rendered as marginal. The urgency of the research is in its move beyond existing structures and definitions for criticism bound up with neoliberal and colonial structures of power and discourse; its importance is in reconfiguring practices of criticism, showing new ways of working and processes for interdisciplinary research. Criticism, as a distinct practice, offers new insights into how we

An Instruction

I have an instruction, which is to go into the impossible.

For example, Lady Gaga:

Bad Romance

I'm going to die but I don't want to see it.

Poker Face

Most people choose to do it that way.

Just Dance

If you don't want to remember it, close them, so you don't see the moment of impact.

Born this way

No.

Do What U Want

All the time.

Alejandro.

I'd love to.

Applause.

Suddenly

For example, Matthew Ghoulish's alphabetisation of terms for and of Forced Entertainment:

Absence

Breathing Corpse

FIG 1 Digital artefact: 'An Instruction, again' by Diana Damian Martin in *Quizoola LIVE!*, with *Exeunt Magazine*, 2014

conceive of political subjectivity and action, during a time of regulation and occlusion.

The principal research aim was to examine what productive relations might be between theatre and performance criticism, creative writing and political action, taking into account the colonial and patriarchal histories of public discourse and its constitution, especially within Anglo-American deliberative democratic scholarship. The project was, in part, inspired by philosopher Hannah Arendt, who proposes that thinking is 'always out of order, interrupts all ordinary activities and is interrupted by them' (1958: 33). The project stemmed from my own professional experience as a mixed-ethnicity migrant critic operating across different cultural infrastructures in East (Romania and Serbia) and West Europe (Germany, Norway, UK), in a range of cooperative and collaborative structures.

These questions mobilised my enquiry:

- 1 *What might a politicised relation between theatre and performance, criticism and political life foster?*
- 2 *What innovations in criticism are shifting its position and impact on public cultural discourse?*
- 3 *What new methodologies for examining criticism might be developed by bringing together distinct fields of inquiry and practice?*

To this end, the project drew on decolonial and feminist analyses of political rationality and its relationship to public cultural discourse. These perspectives situate lived experience as central to political action, shaping a practice of criticism informed by difference. In engaging with these perspectives, the project connected seemingly disparate practices of debate and critique.

Importantly, these perspectives were considered in a European context, moving away from the prism of the nation-state to understand criticism and towards a more nuanced engagement with global politics and neo-colonial tensions and how they impact criticism. "European" remained a contested term throughout the research process; migration and mobility — of people and practices — was central to our understanding of a criticism infrastructure that went beyond border politics.

The project also deployed critical techniques from adjacent disciplines, such as speculative writing, live writing, orality or documentary practices to develop collaborative spaces of critique, as well as new methodologies for understanding the relation between criticism and the political.

The project asked how form, language and voice can be developed through collective and collaborative processes. Practice, in this sense, was the method, process and object of *Collaborative Critique*.

Research objectives were as follows:

- ⊙ To articulate new relations between political practice and theatre and performance criticism;
- ⊙ To understand how political rationality has shaped dominant modes of thinking about, rather than within, performance and, to this end, to explore new relations between experimental theatre and performance, and nonconforming criticism;
- ⊙ To explore new methodologies for examining the nature of criticism as an expanded practice, in dialogue with developments from adjacent disciplines, such as visual art, architecture or literature;
- ⊙ To develop coalitional and collaborative forms of criticism that centre on the experience of doing criticism.

III

Context

Collaborative Critique explicitly connects historicisations of radical criticism, political discussions on Europe and its edges, and recent scholarship on affect and political rationality to develop forms of practice and new modes of reflecting and analysing criticism. It concentrates not on questions of representation, but on those practices that explicitly or implicitly position themselves on the margins. Drawing on a diverse register of research also situated within different ecologies of practice, the project uniquely embedded its processes in a range of communities and political contexts with different relations to these fundamental questions.

The project cultivated a different mode of thinking about and practicing criticism and disseminated research from a range of cultural contexts and geographical networks. The project contributed an archive of practice and by doing so explored the radical potential of criticism as a political space. The research contributes to and expands ongoing professional and scholarly dialogues on the political potential of criticism (Doyle 2013; Lijster, Milevska, Gielen, and Sondergger 2015; Radosavljević 2016) and on the need to develop

structurally different modes of public debate that operate across borders and communities. The practice research sits in conversation with contemporary debates on criticism and its efficacy (see E-flux 2017) as well as performance and politics (see Fisher and Katsouraki 2017; Kelleher 2015; Read 2013). *Collaborative Critique* brought previously isolated practices and scholarship into conversation, addressing the urgency to examine criticism as a space for political experimentation and participation.

There has been, to date, little examination of the coloniality implicit in modernist radical critique or the mastery in dominant histories of authorship within criticism in theatre and performance; the research addresses this gap in the scholarship. The project drew inspiration from decolonial and feminist examinations of political rationality and considers how these examinations challenge and offer opportunities to examine form, authorship, scope and context in criticism as a practice. Neoliberalism, despite its national variances, has placed unprecedented pressure on the spaces for, and circulation of, critical discourse on the one hand, and on cultural value, particularly for experimental theatre and performance practices (Brown 2015; Dean 2005; Harvie 2013), whilst research on networked communications (Dean, Anderson, and Lovink 2006; Steyerl 2009) has evidenced the increasing regulation and surveillance of digital spaces, questioning their presumed democratisation. Political philosophers have explored the potential limits of the deliberative democracy model and new conceptions of what constitutes political thinking (Arendt 1958; Mouffe 2002; Rancière 2004), whilst affect theory has foregrounded the emotional contours of political experience (Ahmed 2006; Ngai 2007; Staiger, Cvetkovich, and Reynolds 2010), and postcolonial and decolonial scholarship the politics of dominant epistemologies (Bhabha 1994; Mignolo 2011; Singh 2017). This project connects these diverse areas of scholarship, by examining the ways in which criticism offers a space to construct political rationalities in communities not delineated solely by border regimes.

Criticism continues to be historicised and articulated as a practice rooted in the development of the “European” public sphere, and this view problematically erases the centrality of patriarchal and colonial articulations of public voice and political rationality. Instead of analysing the politics of criticism solely in relation to histories of deliberative democracy, the project paid attention to how rationality and experience constitute a liberatory politics for criticism. It did so by placing in dialogue feminist critiques of sovereignty and nationhood (Goodman 1992; Fraser 1990), and the political agency of affect and its entanglements (Ahmed 2004;

Chow 2012; Singh 2017). Such approaches were foundational to developing collaborative forms of critical practice, as they offer a shared lens through which to connect seemingly disparate practices of criticism.

Scholarship on contemporary criticism in theatre and performance has concentrated on the impact of networked communications (Radosavljevic 2016; Vaughn 2020) without addressing the ways in which these developments continue to undermine and exclude political communities. The ecology of criticism is changing and is starting to address questions of representation and audience from within through the development of initiatives like Critics of Colour, The White Pube and gal-dem. These projects have been essential in centering British-based voices from Black, Asian and other ethnic minorities within critical practice, but they remain separate from academic discussions on criticism and its remit, and, importantly, should hold autonomy of their own and do not necessitate or warrant legitimisation, performing their own processes of cultural and institutional change.

Distinct from projects that focus on representation, this project deploys and contributes to an expanded notion of criticism that includes critical creative practices (Hilevaara and Orley 2018) and experimental practices marginal to mainstream media, such as digital projects, embedded criticism, live writing, collaborative publishing and writing. Whilst there has been an increasing interest from disciplines adjacent to performance on shifting paradigms of the relationship of criticism, art and politics, in architecture (Rendell 2010), visual art (Bal 2001; Steyerl 2009) or literature (Felski 2018; Singh 2017), there has been little engagement with conceptions of politics beyond those offered by continental and deliberative traditions. This project contributes to such debates by centering a different conception of political rationality that enables a transdisciplinary approach to modelling and developing, rather than legitimating, criticism as a practice.

IV

Methodology

As the project centred on criticism *as a practice* distinct from performance, the methodologies deployed had process and embedded reflection at all stages at their core.

In the project design, the following methodological considerations were taken:

**1 Performance as lens, criticism as practice:
Liveness, orality, fiction and documentation**

Central to the project was the relation between criticism and political practice. Key to this approach was to use performance not as an object of study, but as a lens through which the practice research was developed. That, is, the project repositions criticism *as* performative, rather than solely as an instrument *of* performance.

In the project, critique is embedded in performance, and performance is embedded in critique as acts of political engagement and change. Moving beyond colonial histories of criticism necessarily implicates engagement with revisionist and decolonial work which looks to different forms of value, relations to language and to the role of cooperation (see *Beyond a “European” deliberative model* below). The project pays attention to the political communities (Bhambra 2015) of criticism. In doing so, it explored techniques such as live writing, orality and listening, feminist modes of exchange, speculative fiction and approaches to the documentary in its strategies *for* and *of* criticism.

**2 Transdisciplinarity: Experimenting across
writing disciplines**

The creative writing drew on techniques from performative writing, art writing and transdisciplinary writing, and also engaged with archives of feminist and radical publishing. Such techniques included but were not limited to live writing, embedded writing, site writing, live writing, speculative fiction and visioning. The project engaged with writing with, rather than about, performance as a means of repairing relations of utility and power which dominant traditions have reinforced (see *States of Wake* and [online blog](#)). And finally, with modalities of relation drawn from feminist work, in particular, those of proximity and intimacy (see [blog](#)), love or friendship (see *Critics in Conversation: A Project Book*).

The project attended to the entanglement between theory and practice within criticism and sought to connect histories of non-conforming practices to decolonial and feminist conceptions of political rationality that concern difference rather than consensus (see iii. Context). In the project, Sara Ahmed’s queer phenomenology and Rey Chow’s conception of entanglements informed the practice research process as a ‘repetition of gestures’ (Ahmed 2006: 553) and an

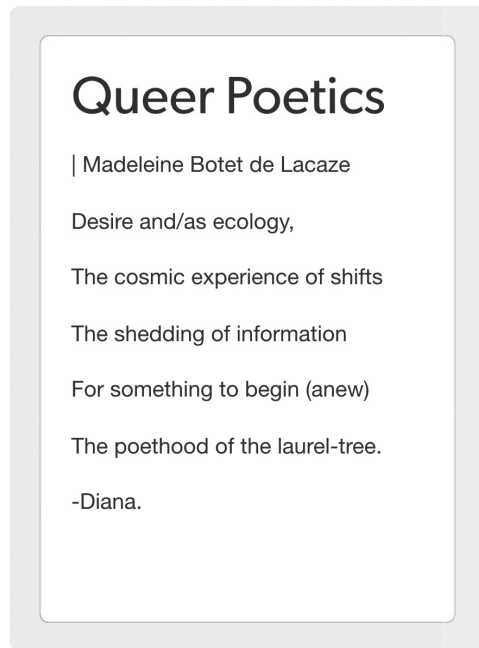


FIG 2 Digital artefact: 'Queer poetics' by Diana Damian Martin in *Critical Interruptions: Steakhouse LIVE*, 2018

enmeshment of topics (Chow 2012: 12). Disciplinary orientations included political theory that examined the development of political rationality (notably from continental tradition, as well as decolonial and feminist examinations) and creative writing to understand conceptualisations of criticism beyond theatre and performance.

3 Beyond a “European” deliberative model: International, collaborative practice across Europe

The project was shaped by Europe and its limits, seeking to understand networks of mobility and movement for performing arts in relation to criticism beyond national borders. Criticism, in the project, was seen as holding ‘affective engagements with regulation’ (Jansen 2009: 815). To this end, the research design engaged with different regions of Europe: UK, Norway, Portugal, Romania and Serbia (see list of workshops and residencies). This enabled us to access local histories and practices, collaborate with communities and festivals rooted in those contexts but connected beyond the local, and work with an ongoing understanding of issues of post and neo-coloniality in Europe. This implicated attention to questions of professionalisation (working with communities with different relations to criticism), those of material conditions (working with independent festivals, collectives and organisations), those of process (creative projects, active workshops and collaborative frameworks) and dissemination (industry bodies, cultural institutions, masterclasses, workshops [see creative publications and list of workshops and residencies]).

As outlined in the Context section, moving beyond historicisations that situate criticism within the development of the public sphere required an engagement with post-colonial understandings of Europe on the one hand, and feminist and decolonial conceptualisations of political rationality on the other. The project centred Gurinder K. Bhabra’s conception of citizenship as understood beyond ‘categories of membership’ as it embeds ‘racialised forms of inclusion and exclusion’ (2015: 398). This was fundamental to how we approached collaboration across different geographic and political contexts. This methodology was also informed by engagement with political practices that centre on rethinking what constitutes political rationality (for example, see writing for Spill Festival [↗](#)).

4 Collaboration: Co-authorship, collaborative writing and editing, and other cooperative work

The project explored authorial politics through collaborative work within a range of territories, which also led to considerable online content ([Critics in Conversation](#) [↗](#), [Quizoola](#) [↗](#), [Steakhouse Live 2016](#) [↗](#), [Steakhouse Live 2018](#) [↗](#) and [\(states of\) wake](#) [↗](#)). The research developed models for collaborative writing and new modes of critique, shaped through a range of collaborative residencies and workshops, with participants with diverse relations to criticism and performance, and connecting histories of countercultural publishing (see list of workshops and residencies). This also manifested itself in explorations of criticism as a space for political participation (see publications and peer-reviewed article).

v

Timeline

Phase 1

2014–16 Towards a performative critical practice

The first phase of the project was shaped by explorations of performative critical practice. This was undertaken through collaborations with four main partners: Forced Entertainment, a long-standing experimental theatre company; Pacitti Company, producers of the award-winning annual festival of experimental performance and live art; SPILL Festival; Steakhouse, a producing collective (Katy Baird, Mary Osborn and Aaron Wright) and international partner Stamsund International Theatre Festival.

2014	November	<i>Quizoola LIVE, Forced Entertainment and Exeunt Magazine</i>
		A collaboratively authored, real-time, durational project in dialogue with Forced Entertainment’s performance Quizoola (Millennium Gallery, Sheffield and live-streamed). This project involved development and experimentation of modes of live writing drawn from creative writing and deployment of techniques of speculative fiction and critical analysis.

2015	October– November	<p><i>SPILL Writing, SPILL Festival of Performance, On Spirit</i></p> <p>A lab for experimental writing from performance, led by myself with a group of participants in advance and over the duration of the festival. The project explored the resonances of spirit as a lens through which to examine politics of encountering, writing and thinking performance. This project involved a collaborative approach to writing in dialogue with performance; archival work was involved as part of the pre-festival workshops, particularly working with materials from Performance Magazine, Mukti and Spare Rib. This preparation work connected histories of radical feminist publishing from a range of perspectives to discussions about form and critique from a range of contexts, including politics and art writing.</p>
<hr/>		
2016	May–June	<p><i>Critics in Conversation, with Anette Therese Pettersen, residency at Stamsund Theater Festival, (three conversations and two labs)</i></p> <p>An international research-led collaboration exploring publicness, intimacy and community within criticism. In this first phase of the iteration, we hosted conversations and labs that looked at multi-lingualism and intimacy, connecting to writers and artists lived experiences of migration. We drew on techniques of live writing and speculative fiction to develop provocations on intimacy and friendship through criticism.</p>
	October	<p><i>Steakhouse: LIVE Writing, with Critical Interruptions (Diana Damian Martin and Bojana Janković)</i></p> <p>Steakhouse: LIVE Writing brings together writers new to criticism or live art to respond to performances as they occur across festival spaces, searching for critical practices that are formally daring and critically rigorous. This pilot project involved working with collaborators from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, including sound and visual art. The pre-festival workshops developed approaches to collective and digital writing by engaging with decolonial and feminist perspectives on authorship, listening and voice. These were then deployed within live writing practice for the duration of the festival.</p>

Adjacent to these was a continued investigation into histories of non-conforming critical practices in relation to orality, radical forms and political practice. This research was developed through a series of presentations and talks, disseminations (for *Exeunt Magazine*, *Critical Stages* and through digital websites and project publications) and two international residencies (see list of workshops and residencies and list of short journalism, presentations and talks for full details).

Knowledge produced within this first phase of the project was also instrumental in shaping the international project *Made in Yugoslavia*, a transnational project in Eastern Europe looking at perspectives on critical practice and notions of “Europe” from its periphery.

Phase 2

2016–17 An expanded politics of criticism: Reform and collaboration

Building on delineations, framings and practices of writing and criticism as performance, this phase of the research sought to shape an expanded politics of criticism, looking at processes of reform and collaboration.

This phase was undertaken with collaborators in Norway (Stamsund Festival and Ravnedans Festivals), Portugal (through FITEI and International Association for Theatre Critics) and the UK (performance space collective).

2016	October– November	<p><i>SPILL Writing, and Writer in Residence, SPILL Festival of Performance, En Masse</i></p> <p>The project examined the resonances of “en masse” for thinking about reparative histories of deliberation, strategies for authorial explorations and questions of publicness within and through critical writing. As with previous iterations, pre-festival workshops brought together a range of discussions and approaches countering the predominant place of the public sphere in speaking about criticism’s reach and efficacy.</p>
<hr/>		
2017	June	<p><i>This is not a FITEI School, Festival Internacional de Teatro de Expressão Ibérica</i></p> <p>Focusing on themes of memory, community and civic participation, the 40th edition of the Festival brought together a series of workshops with the public, alongside performances and discussions with artists from Portugal, Spain, Argentina and Chile.</p>

As part of the residency of the Festival, I held a workshop over a number of days looking at revisionist practices of memory as they relate to criticism. Building on an archival visit the year before, exploring FITEI and its relation to ideas of locality, internationalism and postcoloniality, working with FITEI's programme and a broad public, this workshop, attended by twenty participants, explored how orality, collectivity and dissent might offer new modes towards a civic criticism. The workshop was part of *This is not a FITEI school*, the Festival's outreach and engagement activities.

July *Critics in Conversation, with Anette Therese Pettersen, residency at Ravnedans Festival*

An international research-led collaboration exploring publicness, intimacy and community within criticism. In this second phase of the collaboration, we were resident with the festival, exploring questions of movement within criticism — how does writing move dance, and how does dance move writing? What are the politics of bodies which criticism re-enacts, and what practices might be drawn on for a collective approach to critique? How might intimacy or friendship provide positions from which to explore this? As part of the residency, we hosted conversations, workshops with local community, a collaboratively shaped workshop with participants and a sharing session.

September *Something Other and the poetics of writing on the periphery*

Something Other and the Department of Feminist Conversations are two inter-related projects that think politically about performance and performatively about politics. This session consisted of readings and discussion revolving around generative labour, collaboration, alternative spaces and intersecting practices.

(states of) wake: Dedicating Performance, wake festival by performance space, Folkestone, Kent

In collaboration with activist curators performance space, I co-hosted an embedded project as part of wake festival that examined the dedication as critical form. Along with Jennie Klein and Madeleine Hodge, we engaged in dialogue with works in the festival and conceived of the dedication as a political act, as well as

devised a format for participation for those within and outside of the festival. How might “encounter” offer a way in to examine performance and its many intersections? How might the multiple histories and meanings of “wake” explore the many modes and forms of attention performance invites? The dedication might be understood in different ways — the devoting or setting aside of something for something else, a particular kind of commitment, an inscription or announcement, a ceremony of opening or completion and a ritual of devotion.

Articles, publications and other research dissemination in this period are listed below (see vi. Findings). Further project outcomes include publications such as *States of Wake: dedicating performance; Critics in Conversation: A Project Book; and Critical Interruptions*.

A-C

Phase 3

2018–20 Nonconforming criticism: Models and infrastructures

This final part of the project focused on modelling nonconforming criticism across a range of contexts, looking at the dialogue between local, cross-territorial and cross-disciplinary work in Europe. This phase of the project continued to examine the potential of nonconforming criticism to engage connections with diverse practices outside of canons of criticism and to invite reconsideration of what politics of locality might open up in understanding how criticism thinks locally, without the pitfalls of exclusion which often emerge within this paradigm. This phase of the project saw collaborations with Home Live Art in Hastings, a development of the *Steakhouse LIVE* collaboration, and international partnerships in Italy (Centrale Fies) and Germany (Tanz).

2018 February *Steakhouse: LIVE Writing, with Critical Interruptions (Diana Damian Martin and Bojana Janković), Rich Mix*

Following a pilot project in 2016, in the format of Serbo-Romanian critical cooperative Critical Interruptions, I returned to the Steakhouse Live Festival to curate a live digital publication, joined by writers Libby Norman and Lewis Church, as well as Berivan Altun, Alice Iardella and Zoe Onatoye, three young women from the Live on the Drive programme. This iteration of the project sought to develop models of participation

in and through live writing and brought together writers new to performance and live art. Prior to the programme, we undertook a series of workshops that sought to centre the knowledge of the participating writers in order to develop a frame for engaging with the festival work.

August

Collective Entanglements: Residency, Supercontinent 2, Centrale Fies, Dro, Italy

A collective residency as part of Supercontinent festival and Centrale Fies art space. The residency explored how collective writing makes visible different forms and politics of labour and voice, beyond the networks of mobility of the European Culture Programme. Building on the work of collective Writingshop, who accompanied me as part of the residency, we developed a series of interventions on and about collective critical writing and held a discussion with an open audience.

for people who use writing as a tool for experiment in their practice, but whose work doesn't necessarily fit into easily defined categories. The group welcomes those who might hold writing in critical relationship with performance, see writing as a space for or refuge from performance or transform writing through dialogue with performance. This is an open community forged by those who participate on the day. Within the structure, techniques and processes of collective writing are shared and so is the facilitation of the sessions.

2018
2019 February–
August

Coastal Undercurrents, Home Live Writing

Coastal Undercurrents was a writing project supported by Home Live Art for writers based in the South East of the UK who wished to learn more about criticism and live performance. Following an open call, in the format of Critical Interruptions, we worked with six writers local to Hastings to develop a series of texts drawing on the *New Queers on the Block* and *Performance Salon* programmes.

2019

Collaboration and Cooperation in Contemporary Critical Writing. Performing Criticism Globally, TANZ Festival, Berlin, Germany

Working with an international group of eight writers (Romania, Sweden, Germany and Serbia), this workshop shared and developed modes of cooperation and collaborative authorship in contemporary critical writing, with a focus on experimental practices. At the centre of the workshop was examining, through shared practices and research, the implications of the term “cooperation” and the relations between migration and mobility in experimental criticism. The workshop culminated in a shared text co-authored by participants.

2018 August–
ongoing

Writers Gatherings, monthly at the Live Art Development Agency

Created and hosted by Something Other, the Gathering is an open discussion group

VI

Findings

The creative practice and research produced findings in four main areas:

1 Criticism and political context

The first finding is that there is a relation between the poetics and politics of experimental and collaborative criticism in Europe and regimes of knowledge and political regulation that have dominated theatre and performance criticism since the Enlightenment. Criticism's professionalisation and the predominance of the review in its historicisation have been significantly influenced by political circumstances. To this end, the denomination of crisis often attributed to criticism, particularly but not exceptionally within the UK, emerges in close relation to how deliberative democracy has been historicised, particularly in Anglo-American scholarship.

This finding articulates new relationships between theatre and performance criticism and political practice. Across the practice research, the paradoxical claims of criticism's crisis and democratisation revealed how shifting concerns over form, authorship and production exist in tension with criticism's institutional sanctioning and political participation. This is connected to the ways in which the notion of the “European” has been deployed as masking a particular traditionalism in criticism, marking a relation between nation-states, imperial histories and public rationality.

The project found that grassroots and local engagements with new forms of criticism open up necessary conversations on politics of convention and modes of

relation that move beyond ideas of nationhood, into assembly, community, multi-lingualism, political participation and forms of regulation of public debate.

2 Criticism, form and power

The second finding is that criticism is closely connected to power and its distribution. Within theatre and performance, where structural change is difficult in part due to the under-resourcing of criticism, discourses of legitimation have occluded the development of a wide range of modes of thinking and discourse that have been shaped around decentralised authorship, modes of assembly and new forms of participation. Far from the threat of demise, there is an ongoing political struggle for practices to be recognised as criticism, and many of these continue to strive to operate outside of the traditional paradigms of authority.

Through the emergent lens of nonconforming criticism — that is, practices of criticism that reject, play with or dispute the category of criticism — new relations between experimental theatre and performance critique and political practice are fostered.

3 Criticism as practice

The third finding is that criticism and performance can operate in a multiplicity of relations. The project developed new methodologies for examining these relations, placing in conversation seemingly distinct disciplines, for example, political theory, performance studies and creative writing, to explore their intersections. This understanding of an expanded practice in dialogue with adjacent disciplines moves beyond the colonial logic of traditional thinking about criticism.

A more porous engagement with criticism as a performative practice creates different and more open spaces for debate. By drawing on a wide range of practices, there is more opportunity to diversify the forms and spaces in which criticism occurs and create new cultures of political participation.

4 Cultural valuation and the “European” project

Lastly, by looking to the peripheries of meaning-making in criticism, the practice research discovered that what is rendered visible as criticism is shaped by conceptions of cultural valuation, European infrastructures for mobility and networks of power, and dominant conceptions of political

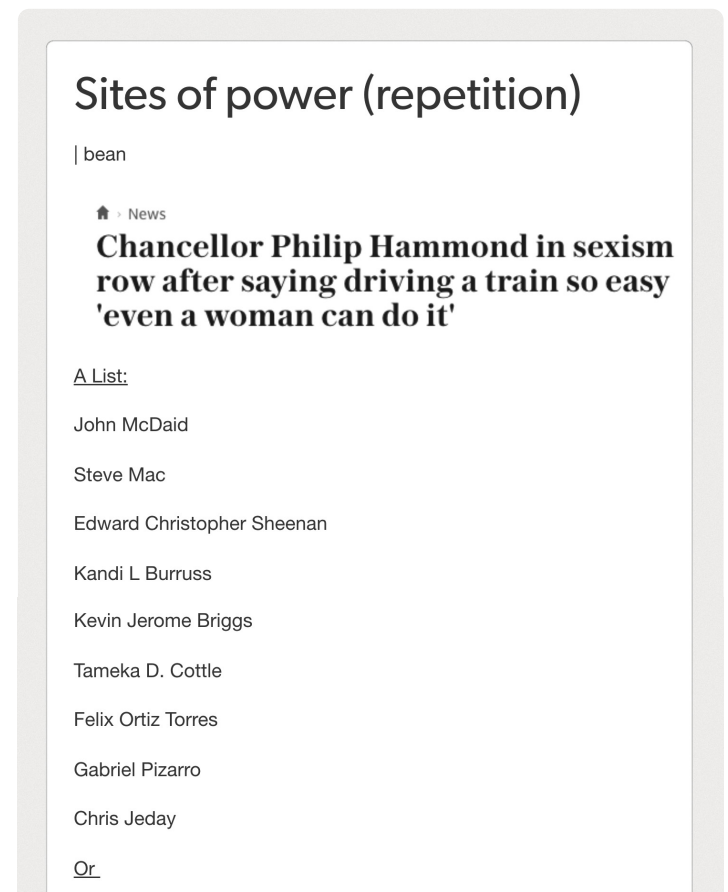


FIG 3 Digital artefact: 'Sites of power (repetition)' by Diana Damian Martin in *Critical Interruptions: Steakhouse LIVE*, 2018

rationalism, often shaped by a colonial logic. There is, therefore, a relation between experimental performance and experimental criticism.

By centring on the doing of criticism, the project studied and developed coalitional and collaborative forms of criticism. These were informed by feminist and decolonial approaches to authorship and modes of knowledge that offered a reparative approach to what might constitute criticism without the need to legitimise or instrumentalise these practices.

The value of the project is its contribution to a range of academic and non-academic contexts, developing and disseminating new practices, modes of collaborative work, bodies of interdisciplinary knowledge and localised practices. The project has been influential in relation to new forms of knowledge of criticism through, for example, open-source projects, different modes of exchange, collaboration and networking across contexts, and different modes of dissemination and new modes of practice, for example, through formats that became more regularly deployed across a range of contexts, such as live writing, collaborative writing, collaborations with independent organisations, assemblies and open discussions.

As evidence of its value, the project has been noted in several academic publications (Radosavljevic 2016; Fricker 2015; Vaughn 2020; Schmidt 2018) and has shaped the work of several organisations (International Association of Theatre Critics, in a developed training programme and editorial work for its main publication; Live Art Development Agency, in its resourcing of and support for criticism; SPILL Festival, for developing new ways to make space for criticism as a practice alongside performance; FITEI Festival, for its outreach work).

Furthermore, the book chapter 'Criticism as a Political Event' has been translated into Norwegian and three pieces of writing have featured in the Live Art Development Agency's Almanac, an annual publication of new writing about experimental performance.

The project has also led to a number of international talks and sharings across different European countries, as well as the coordination of an academic conference. I have also advised on a number of European projects, notably *Made in Yugoslavia* (2014–18), a training programme on criticism and politics in post-socialist states.

Digital projects continue to be open access and have numbers exceeding 5000 unique visits, providing an accessible repository of new work. Elements of the projects have also been part of teaching programmes in undergraduate and postgraduate courses on theatre criticism

(Royal Holloway and King's College London), and participants have been involved in the redevelopment of editorial policies for a range of independent publications (*Exeunt* in UK, *Nachtkritik* in Germany, *Teatro e Critica* in Italy, *Revista Arta* in Romania).

A number of written outputs were produced as part of the research:

- © 2016. 'Criticism as a Political Event', in *Theatre Criticism: Changing Landscapes*, ed. by Duska Radosavljević (London: Bloomsbury), pp. 219–35;
- © 2016. 'Unpeeling action: critical writing, training and process', in *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 7(2) (Special Issue: Showing and Writing Training): 195–211;
- © 2018. 'Virtual embodiment: critical writing and liveness', in *The Creative Critic: Writing as/about Practice*, ed. by Emily Orley and Katja Hilevaara (London: Intellect), pp. 81–9;
- © 2018. 'Performance Criticism: Live Writing as Phenomenological Poiesis', in *Performance Philosophy: to the thing itself*, ed. by Stuart, Grant, Jodie McNeilly, Matthew Wagner (London: Palgrave), pp. 217–236;
- © 2019. 'Hopeful Acts in Troubled Times: Thinking as Interruption and the poetics of nonconforming criticism', in *Performance Philosophy*, 5(1) (Sites of Appearance, Matters of Thought: Hannah Arendt and Performance Philosophy): 25–41.

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