

4x45

Performance and Migration

Edited by Emma Cox

DIGITAL THEATRE⁺



Performance and Migration

This third volume in the 4x45 series addresses some of the most current and urgent performance work in contemporary theatre practice. As people from all backgrounds and cultures criss-cross the globe with an ever-growing series of pushes and pulls guiding their movements, this book explores contemporary artists who have responded to various forms of migration in their theatre, performance and multimedia work.

The volume comprises two lectures and two curated conversations with theatre-makers and artists. Danish scholar of contemporary visual culture, Anne Ring Petersen, brings artistic and political aspects of 'postmigration' to the fore in an essay on the innovations of Shermin Langhoff at Berlin's Ballhaus Naunynstraße, and the decolonial work of Danish-Trinidadian artist Jeannette Ehlers. The racialised and gendered exclusions associated with navigating 'the industry' for non-white female and non-white non-binary artists are interrogated in Melbourne-based theatre scholar Paul Rae's interview with two Australian performers of Indian heritage, Sonya Soares and Raina Peterson. UK playwrights Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson of Good Chance Theatre discuss their work in dialogue, and with their colleague, Iranian animator and illustrator Majid Adin. Emma Cox's essay on Irish artist Richard Mosse's video installation, *Incoming*, discusses thermographic 'heat signatures' as means of seeing migrants and the imperative of envisioning global climate change.

An accessible and forward-thinking exploration of one of contemporary performance's most pressing influences, 4x45 | *Performance and Migration* is a unique resource for scholars, students and practitioners of Theatre Studies, Performance Studies and Human Geography.

Emma Cox is a Reader in the Department of Drama, Theatre and Dance at Royal Holloway, University of London.

4x45

Series Editor – Andy Lavender

The *4x45* project introduces a new series of short video lectures from Digital Theatre+ accompanied by transcript books, addressing key topics and emerging debates in theatre and performance.

Each entry in the series comprises four lectures, interviews and discussions from theatre experts, based around common themes and presented as 45-minute videos hosted on the Digital Theatre+ website. The edited companion books contain a link to this multimedia component and four written transcripts of the videos with related discussions.

4x45 talks aim to respond quickly to emerging issues and developments in all aspects of theatre and performance, reflecting and defining the important conversations across the field.

The Theatre of Katie Mitchell

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Neoliberalism, Theatre and Performance

Edited by Andy Lavender

Performance and Migration

Edited by Emma Cox

For more information about this series, please visit: <https://www.routledge.com/4x45/book-series/4x45>

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First published 2022

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Cox, Emma, editor.

Title: Performance and migration / edited by Emma Cox.

Description: Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Taylor and Francis, 2022. |

Series: 4x45 series | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021014235 (print) | LCCN 2021014236 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781032058962 (paperback) | ISBN 9781032059037 (hardback) |

ISBN 9781003199755 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Arts and society. | Theater and society. | Emigration and immigration in art. | Performing arts—Themes, motives.

Classification: LCC NX180.S6 P4435 2022 (print) | LCC NX180.S6 (ebook) | DDC 700.1/03—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021014235>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021014236>

ISBN: 978-1-032-05903-7 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-05896-2 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-19975-5 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003199755

Typeset in Bembo

by codeMantra

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Contributors

Majid Adin is an artist and animator from Iran, now living in the UK. In 2017 he won a competition to produce an animated music video for Elton John's 'Rocket Man'. His graphic novel, *Hamid and Shakespeare*, was published in 2021.

Emma Cox is a Reader in Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London. She is the author of *Performing Noncitizenship* (2015) and *Theatre & Migration* (2014), editor of *Staging Asylum* (2013) and co-editor of *Refugee Imaginaries: Research Across the Humanities* (2020).

Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson are co-Artistic Directors of Good Chance, which they founded at the Calais Jungle in 2015. Good Chance build temporary arts spaces in large geodesic domes in areas with high refugee populations. Their play, *The Jungle*, a co-production with the National Theatre and Young Vic, premiered in London in 2017 and was staged in New York in 2018.

Anne Ring Petersen is a Professor in the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies at the University of Copenhagen. Her research explores transcultural and migratory approaches to art and cultural production. Her current research project, 'Togetherness in Difference: Reimagining Identities, Communities and Histories through Art' (2019–2023), develops topics from *Migration into Art: Transcultural Identities and Art-Making in a Globalised World* (2017) and the co-authored book *Reframing Migration, Diversity and the Arts: The Postmigrant Condition* (2019).

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Introduction

Performance and migration

Emma Cox

The current century's frenetically mobile character has been shown by a novel human virus to be a vulnerable set of conditions, and not – as many might reasonably have assumed – an economic, technological and social inevitability. The publication of this volume of Digital Theatre's 4x45 series, *Performance and Migration*, coincides with restrictions on movement and assembly that have radically curtailed the work of all of the artists named in these pages, whether they are from migrant backgrounds or not. Of course, the determination of human life in the context of power structures that shape a body's movement within and across territories, its day-to-day mobility, its taking of risk, is nothing new to some: refugees embody a legal status that depends precariously upon the nation state, even as the state is often what prohibits forced migration by administrating it as 'unauthorised' or 'illegal'. Rather than as any sort of leveller, therefore, it seems more useful to perceive the Covid-19 pandemic as bringing into a wider field of vision the privileges and hardships that already shape the means by which people migrate, and the means by which art is made in migration's wake. This issue includes discussions of artistic works that were

made during and in response to a pre-pandemic crisis, the so-called ‘migrant crisis’ in Europe of 2015–2016, marked as it was by the arrival of large numbers of mostly Syrian refugees into the EU. If, on the one hand, our current predicament has slowed the pace of international migration to an unprecedented degree, it has also made visible – and for many, visceral – the extent to which human movement was always contingent upon the rights and freedoms assigned to categories of person by sovereign nations. Perhaps now, more than ever, a greater number of people are thinking about how migration is authorised by states, how it is experienced by individuals – and how far it underlies the capacity to imagine a future.

This volume comprises two lectures and two curated conversations with theatre-makers and artists. Danish scholar of contemporary visual culture, Anne Ring Petersen, brings artistic and political aspects of ‘postmigration’ to the fore in an essay on the innovations of Shermin Langhoff at Berlin’s Ballhaus Naunynstraße, and the decolonial work of Danish-Trinidadian artist Jeannette Ehlers. The racialised and gendered exclusions associated with navigating ‘the industry’ for non-white female and non-white non-binary artists are interrogated in Melbourne-based British theatre scholar Paul Rae’s interview with two Australian performers of Indian heritage, Sonya Soares and Raina Peterson. The representation and participation of refugees in arts projects is a central focus of an interview with playwrights Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson of London-based Good Chance Theatre, part of which includes a conversation with Iranian animator and illustrator Majid Adin. Thermographic ‘heat signatures’ as a means of seeing migrants are linked with the imperative of envisioning global climate change in my own (London-based New Zealand theatre scholar Emma Cox) essay on

Irish artist Richard Mosse's video installation, *Incoming*. The four videos that accompany this text were filmed in the UK, Denmark and Australia during 2018–2020. They offer a range of perspectives on the vast topic of performance and migration, moving from refugee art-making collectives in fringe territories of France, to mainstage drama in the UK, to a piece of videography encompassing images from the Persian Gulf to the Saharan desert to the borders of Europe, to anti-racist performance art shown in Germany, the US, the UK and Denmark, to queer classical Indian inflected dance performance in Australia. While this range must necessarily be selective, it is hoped that the artistic forms, the modes of collaboration, the provocations and the cultural contexts introduced here will generate points of connection for readers seeking to approach elsewhere the rich, confounding, messy nexus of performance and migration.

Artistic and cultural contexts within Germany and Denmark inform Anne Ring Petersen's discussion in her essay, 'Migratory Aesthetics and Postmigrant Performance', the first contribution to this volume. A core idea in Petersen's piece is specific to continental (mostly northern) European discourses on migration: the *postmigrant*. This term is largely unfamiliar in Anglophone contexts but has gained traction in Europe as a means by which theorists and artists have, as Petersen puts it, considered 'the social and cultural processes and struggles that come *after* migration', with the temporality of this 'after' understood as intergenerational. The idea of postmigrancy frames an interest in the multi-cultural or multiethnic societies that emerge after demographic changes, and is attentive to the structural bases of those changes. Crucially, however, postmigration opens up, as Petersen explains, a '*process* of questioning and re-invention' that is not limited to descendants of migrants.