

FROM THE EDITOR

Assembling the Past

Imagine, if you will, that you have just received a large box filled with pieces of furniture to assemble. After you open the package, do you:

- a. Locate the instruction manual and follow the step-by-step guide, attending to both photographs and written instructions.
- b. Locate the instruction manual and ignore the written instructions—the photographs are all you need.
- c. Instantly regret not ordering the furniture preassembled. Instead of assembling the furniture, you reflect on your previous successes and unmitigated failures. You realize you do not have the skill set and simply head to the freezer for a bowl of ice cream.

Which option do you choose?

While I did not require the authors in this issue to assemble my Ikea furniture (I asked; they said “No”), the authors themselves do ask readers to consider different means of “assembling” the past. Melissa Sturges “reads” Black queer aesthetics in a 1970s roller-skating instruction manual; Kevin Riordan situates W. B. Yeats’s oft-forgotten nineteenth-century photographs and postcards as a “performing archive”; and Bess Rowen reflects on the importance of representation and finds meaning from the successes and failures of the contemporary American stage. These vastly different topics and methodological approaches share a common goal: to recover forgotten legacies while assembling the past.

To begin, “Queer Performance and Radical Possibilities: Bill Butler and the Post-Stonewall Roller Disco” assembles the past using a literal step-by-step guide as primary evidence: Bill Butler and Elin Schoen’s illustrated guidebook, *Jammin’: Bill Butler’s Complete Guide to Roller Disco* (1979). In this article, Sturges explores the expressive practice of roller-skating during the 1970s and 1980s, considering how “reading queer and skating queer in roller disco” fostered a Black queer aesthetic and radical possibilities. Sturges argues that although the instruction manual never overtly uses the word “queer,” the photographs and written directions discreetly reveal “several key methods to rupture homogeneity in athletic and artistic production.” These queer practices, in turn, extended “beyond the walls of the roller rink,” creating a sense of community that also furthered Black queer political tradition. Ultimately, Sturges finds that *Jammin’* offers much more than instruction for roller-skating; the manual celebrates Black queer aesthetics and provides resistive moves for everyday life.

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Continuing my imperfect analogy, Riordan's "Yeats's Photographs and the World Theatre of Images" tosses out the written directions and assembles the past through the use of photographic evidence. Riordan provides a critical approach to understanding the nuanced relationship between theatre images and the performance archive. Utilizing photographs and postcards housed at the National Library of Ireland as primary evidence, Riordan carefully recasts W. B. Yeats beyond the bounds of a "visionary poet." Situating Yeats as an accomplished collector, researcher, and playwright, Riordan uncovers Yeats's collection of often-ignored photographs as an entry point into larger discussions about the circulation of images of performance during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In reading Yeats's photographs as more than mere "illustration," Riordan invites readers to reconsider theatre images for what they truly are: a "dynamic—even performing—archive." Riordan writes that "a more dedicated and dexterous approach to image archives can help reveal how, among other things, modernist theatre corresponded with other contemporary phenomena, such as the age of mechanical reproduction, the rise of stage design as an art form, and the invention of celebrity." In other words, theatre images are much more than mere "accessories to theatrical performance"; they are an important visual legacy.

Rowen's "An Endless Capacity for Dissembling: Representing Teenage Girls on the American Stage from *The Children's Hour* through *If Pretty Hurts Ugly Must Be a Muhfucka*" offers a reflective view of assembling the past. Drawing from a host of contemporary performances, Rowen explores the representation of adolescent girlhood on the American stage, with particular attention to casting teenage girlhood, the importance of intersectionality, and the creation of the "bad teenage girl" archetype. She argues that although the American stage has "not served teenage girls in the past," moments of failure and success "can make us more aware of how to write and produce theatrical versions of adolescent girls that enable actors and audience members to engage phenomenologically with that complex time of a young woman's life without villainizing or dismissing the imperfect girls who populate it." In so doing, Rowen offers a refreshing analysis of the trials and triumphs of transferring teenage girlhood experiences from the page to the stage and makes an important interdisciplinary intervention within the fields of girlhood, gender, and theatre and performance studies.

Finally, I want to offer a few words of wisdom. Circling back to my very, very imperfect analogy: always choose the ice cream option. *Always*.