

EDITORIAL

Ticking Time ...

Time's up—the end of an exam. #TimesUp—a rallying cry for women fed up with abuse. Time's up—the end of the world? On 23 January 2020, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* moved its metaphorical Doomsday Clock forward to 100 minutes to midnight, the closest it has ever been to midnight/the apocalypse since the clock's post-World War II creation: "Humanity continues to face two simultaneous existential dangers—nuclear war and climate change—that are compounded by a threat multiplier, cyber-enabled information warfare, that undercuts society's ability to respond."¹ Declared BAS President and CEO Rachel Bronson, "The moment demands attention and new, creative responses."²

Theatre, of course, has a lot to say about time, as do the authors in this issue. Their essays explore time as it relates to birth and death, to work and play, to the days devoted to community, to the hours invested in learning new skills, to the practicalities of arguing for proper compensation, and to the many ways that performance defines individuals in life, death, and the afterlife.

In "Ex-Chromosomes: Contemporary Performance and the End of Gender," Miriam Felton-Dansky opens by reflecting on Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1915 novel *Herland*, a fantastic depiction of a world where women have existed happily without men for two millennia. Gilman's novel is a fitting springboard for Felton-Dansky's deep analysis of four twenty-first-century productions—*Preparation for the Obsolescence of the Y Chromosome* (2015), *Mankind* (2018), *The End of Men; An Ode to Ocean* (2016), and *Future St.* (2017)—each of which "contemplates gender separation or extinction in tandem with considerations of procreation, climate crisis, and the gender binary." Felton-Dansky explores how these new works look back to "1970s gender-separatist discourse," while envisioning a future where human extinction is no longer a fantasy. Surprisingly, Felton-Dansky finds that these plays, despite their dystopic outlook, leave room for hope and offer tools for survival.

Jesse Bucher investigates a different kind of ending in "Theatre and Performance in Alternative Histories of Steve Biko's Death in Detention," focusing on the 1977 death of South African activist Steve Biko and the many performances it incited. A leader of the antiapartheid Black Consciousness movement, Biko died under suspicious circumstances while in the custody of the Security Police. Blending historical and performance studies methods, Bucher revisits the performances that followed Biko's death: from the inquest where members of the Security Police claimed that Biko had "shammed" his injuries, to later Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings, to the controversies surrounding recent theatre productions that retell his final days. Tracking the competing narratives that continue

to swirl around Biko's death, Bucher demonstrates how frequently the language of performance was used "to help answer questions posed at the limits of historiographical explanation."

Heidi Carolyn Feldman offers another perspective on black consciousness, performance, and time as it relates to repertoire. In "Staging Public Blackness in Mid-Twentieth-Century Peru: The Repertoires of Pancho Fierro and Cumanana," she examines how two Afro-Peruvian performance troupes laid the groundwork for later social movements by "making blackness visible in Peru." Building on the work of Diana Taylor, Feldman demonstrates how the Pancho Fierro company challenged dominant narratives about the disappearance of Afro-Peruvian culture and people by consulting with "black families that had preserved music and dance traditions" and producing performances that stirred feelings of nostalgia. The Cumanana troupe led by Nicomedes and Victoria Santa Cruz took a different approach to raising black consciousness and elevating Afro-Peruvian cultural achievement; their performances staged the racism that black Peruvians encountered in daily life, and in so doing forged stronger connections to a wider African diaspora.

The final two articles revolve around definitions of artistic labor and the value of an artist's time. In "Defending the Standard Contract: Unmeasured Work, Class, and Design Professionalism in United Scenic Artists Local 829," David Bisaha documents the complicated, often fractious, negotiations that led to the establishment of a general standard contract for members of United Scenic Artists Local 829 in New York City. Drawing on Marxist histories of labor, chiefly Maurizio Lazzarato's writing on "immaterial labor," Bisaha considers how in the 1920s–1930s "designers' highly individualized emergent professionalism conflicted with the usual tactics and ideology of organized labor." Stage design involves both artistic creation and manual labor, yet the standard contract's strategic equivalency of the two fueled existing tensions between scenic designers who worked on a contract basis and painters who worked for wages. Bisaha's account of this pivotal moment in the history of theatrical labor invites readers to continue asking how artistic labor is defined and valued.

Elyssa Livergant's "The Call to Play: New Work and Labor at Artsadmin" is an ideal companion to Bisaha's piece in its consideration of how nineteenth-century notions of labor continue to inform twenty-first-century notions of play. Reflecting on her experience as a participant in a 2010 workshop led by Anne Bean at Artsadmin's Toynbee Studios in East London, Livergant challenges tendencies to celebrate play as "as a counterpoint to work within practices and discourses of theatre and performance." Instead, she insists that the "call to play" that characterizes many recent workshops "has serious limitations for the social and material organization of those working in the new work sector and for a more just future." Interweaving past and present, Livergant traces the history of play to the political writings of eighteenth-century European philosophers and the nineteenth-century development of sites like Toynbee Hall, built to serve the emotional needs of the laboring poor with classes in art and craft. The legacy of Toynbee Hall, now home to Artsadmin, is discernible in the weekend workshops the latter offers exhausted artists hoping to escape the 24/7 grind of late capitalism. Livergant's piece is a sober reminder for theatre and performance studies scholars to continue

pursuing “solidarities and organized collective action across a range of marginalized bodies, practices, and forms of social organization.”

The clock is ticking. ...

Notes

1 Science and Security Board, “It Is 100 Seconds to Midnight: 2020 Doomsday Clock Statement,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/current-time/#full-statement>, accessed 26 January 2020.

2 Rachel Bronson, “Statement from the President and CEO: Inside the Two-Minute Warning,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/current-time/#from-the-president>, accessed 26 January 2020.