

## From the desk of the Editor-in-Chief

### Introduction to the Black Theatre Review, Environmentalism

*the Black Theatre Review* takes up the theme of environmentalism for Vol. 2.2. The contributors to this issue and some of the agents they cover through their work offer readers several considerations for why theatre as a medium is an important mode through which to explore this theme, namely its power to raise awareness about environmental issues, spark dialogue and encourage audiences to act within their communities. Depictions of environmental challenges and their impact on the lives of humanity create emotional connections that arouse empathy and a sense of responsibility towards the environment. By incorporating environmental themes and ecological concerns into theatrical productions, as well as the practice of theatre-making, we challenge artists to find new ways of engaging audiences and encourage creativity and innovation among all the artists involved. Additionally, contributors to this issue expand on the theme highlighting the interconnectedness of environmentalism with racism, social justice, and economic disparity.

In the last issue, we were pleased to include a performance review of Lorraine Hansberry's *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* staged at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. For this issue, we turn to Hansberry again, this time with critical coverage of *A Raisin in the Sun* through the lens of environmentalism. In "Prefiguring the Environmental Justice Movement: The Ecodramaturgy of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*," Theresa J. May re-reads Hansberry's canonical work, opining that "Thirty years before the rise of the current environmental justice movement, *A Raisin in the Sun* details the intersectional aims of environmental justice by centering women's experience, by making connections between the health and well-being of women and children, and the larger environment." Bringing themes of environmentalism and historical memory together, May states further that, "the white supremacy that the Youngers face when they plan to move to a new home not only constitutes systemic environmental racism but reflects and arises out of the historic abuse of land and bodies on which the U.S. extractive economies depends."

In the essay to follow, Stephanie Engel approaches environmentalism, not through a direct exploration of the topic, but through an analysis of Josephine Baker's "Danse des Bananas." In "Bound to the Banana: Re-Evaluating the Discourse Surrounding Josephine Baker's "Banana Dance," Engel argues that Baker's use of staged environments, ecological props, gesticulation, and manipulations to her physical appearance reinscribed exoticized settings of Africa within the popular imagination of Westerners. Engel explores and evaluates the effectiveness of Baker's most iconic performance at the Folies Bergère in both garnering cultural capital and subverting false ideas about Black identities. Drawing on the work of numerous scholars, most notably Zora Neal Hurston, Engel contends that Baker performed within a "turtle shell," projecting a style of performance that "served as an outer mold of Black "authenticity" for white Americans to seize upon that in no way represented the true identity that burrowed underneath.

Our final critical contribution comes from Kenneth Bamuturaki, who discusses his experience as a researcher and participant observer with the Walukuba Theatre for Development project in Jinja City, in Eastern Uganda. Under the direction of Jane Plastow and Kate McQuaid of the University of Leeds, United Kingdom, Bamuturaki argues that the Walukuba Theatre for Development project was an overall useful endeavor for engaging members of the Walukuba community—gravely affected by industrial waste—in an “endogenous” and democratic dialogue about issues pertaining to environmental sustainability. Through participatory research action techniques, participating community members of Walukuba “unearth[ed] deep-seated realities underlying their conditions of living,” and began to build a longer-term strategy for transforming the environment of the community.

Iris Goode Middleton reviews Mohebat Ahmadi’s *Towards an Ecocritical Theatre: Playing the Anthropocene*, a critical analysis of dramatic literature through the lens of ecocriticism and an inspiring contemplation on how theatre can help develop an environmental consciousness within humanity. While we do not have any performance reviews for this issue, we do have Gibson Alessandro Cima’s Note from the Field, a reflection on an inflammatory act of protest at the University of Cape Town, South Africa which sparked the #RhodesMustFall movement. Here, Cima reflects on political activist, Chumani Maxwele and his use of human feces as an element of protest in an all too brief, but poignant reflection, “Dirty Work: An Ecocritical Reflection on Human Feces as a Tool of Protest and Performance.”

For this issue, we are also pleased to offer our readers another digital art experience in the form of a short film, *Waters Wisdoms: Honoring and Reclaiming Indigenous and Ancestral Practices in the Face of Climate Disaster* directed by Ann Mazzocca Bellecci. *Waters Wisdoms* was commissioned by and premiered at the Art(S)cience Festival at Christopher Newport University on January 31, 2024. Through a beautifully choreographed sequence at the Chesapeake Bay and James/Powhatan River, the film illuminates the wisdom of Indigenous American and African-embodied epistemologies as a means of responding to the global climate crisis.

On behalf of the *tBTR* staff, we hope you enjoy this issue, our latest contribution to the building of Black institutions through accessible, timely, interactive, impactful, and cost-effective knowledge production. Attend to the environment as you do yourself, for as I say in my film *Dance of the Orcas* (2021), “We are a reflection of nature, nature is a reflection of us. Together we tell the story of the one.” Also, if you have not seen the call for papers for Vol. 3.1, “Nurturing,” visit our website at <https://journals.librarypublishing.arizona.edu/tbtr/>. Share our call widely with your networks and consider submitting a piece.

—Omiyemi (Artisia) Green