

*Theatre Journal*  
**Special Issue for September 2024**  
**“Abolition and Performance”**  
**Call for Papers**

In the US, calls for prison abolition have gained momentum in recent years and have reinforced the distinction between reform (developing less violent methods of policing, for example) and abolition (creating a world where policing is not necessary). Abolition as an alternative to reform animates many justice movements that seek to eradicate structural inequality. Abolitionist geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore, a self-described “drama school doctoral-program dropout,” integrates political and artistic labors, noting, via Karl Marx, that “By mixing our labor with the earth, we change the external world and thereby change our own nature. That’s what drama is; that’s what geography is: making history, making worlds.”<sup>1</sup> The notion that performance is world-making, as advanced in the formative scholarship of Dorinne Kondo, is moving quickly from a galvanizing and activating premise to a given (though no less radical) assumption for scholars of theatre, performance, and dance studies. Kondo’s theory<sup>2</sup> entwines aesthetic, social, and political domains of experience and integrates analysis of artistic and cultural production into a larger project of naming and resisting the ongoing devastations of what Gilmore calls never-not racial capitalism. For this special issue on “Abolition and Performance,” *Theatre Journal* invites submissions that consider how abolition and its historical and theoretical concerns of the plantation, carcerality, and liberation shift our understandings of performance as world-making, un-making, and re-making.

Plantation logics and their afterlives in the criminal punishment system rely upon regimes of authority that enact subordination, incapacitation, and extraction intended towards world-ending. We could, alongside Katherine McKittrick and others, think of these regimes as choreographies of space, time, bodies, energy, and breath.<sup>3</sup> Sociopolitical engines of the plantationocene – labor extraction, racialization, and capital accumulation – intersect histories of performance and their aesthetics and economies. Simultaneously, we could pay attention to what McKittrick has called “plantation futures.”<sup>4</sup> In such futures-lived-now, the plantation, the prison, and other spaces of enclosure may not always be separable from affirmative instantiations of sovereignty for oppressed peoples. Carceral aesthetics, as recently developed by Nicole R. Fleetwood, is one example of holding both the violences and futures of these sites together.<sup>5</sup> For this special issue, we ask how might performance offer insights into relations of freedom and un-freedom; practices of thingification, disposability, and non-humanity; enactments of property, ownership, and communality; and reassertions of white supremacy, such as white deputization? What are the relationships between performance and organizing, protesting, policing, the criminal punishment system, and alternative structures of justice?

Abolition discourse often emphasizes class struggle and its interlocking alignments with racial, gender, and sexual liberation, coming out of the Black Radical tradition and its thinkers’ and movers’ relationships to global Black freedom movements, such as W.E.B. DuBois’s call for abolition democracy during the Reconstruction Era. Criminalization and incarceration disproportionately impact Black and Indigenous people in the Americas and are widespread tools for asserting hierarchies of dominance globally as part of the afterlives of both slavery and

colonialism. As the “intimacies” of globalization, following Lisa Lowe, touch myriad geographies, temporalities, and socialities, so too does abolition travel, overlapping in rhetorical and political usage with anticolonization.<sup>6</sup> Abolition movements, practices, legislation, resistance, figures, and events are all of relevance to this call, and the journal welcomes submissions with transnational frameworks, understanding the project of liberation to be a broad one that is nonetheless articulated in specific times and places using the resources available.

This special issue will be edited by *Theatre Journal* coeditor Ariel Nereson. We will consider both full length essays for the print edition (6,000-9,000 words) as well as proposals for short provocations, video and/or photo essays, and other creative, multimedia material for our online platform (500-2,000 words). For information about submission,

visit: <https://jhuptheatre.org/theatre-journal/author-guidelines>

Submissions for the print journal (6,000-9,000 words) and for the online platform (500-2,000 words) should reach us no later than **December 1, 2023**.

Submit via ScholarOne: <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/theatrejournal>.

Editor Ariel Nereson ([anereson@buffalo.edu](mailto:anereson@buffalo.edu)) and Online Editor Tarryn Chun ([tchun@nd.edu](mailto:tchun@nd.edu)) welcome questions and inquiries.

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Abolition Geography: Essays Towards Liberation* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2022), 26, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Dorinne Kondo, *World-Making: Race, Performance, and the Work of Creativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Katherine McKittrick, “Plantation Futures,” *Small Axe* 17, no. 3 (2013): 1-15. For plantations as sites of sovereignty and futurity, see also Eve Dunbar, “Genres of Enslavement: Ruptured Temporalities of Black Unfreedom and the Resurfacing Plantation” (*The South Atlantic Quarterly* 121, no. 1 [2022]: 53-73) and Julius B. Fleming Jr., “Transforming Geographies of Black Time: How the Free Southern Theater Used the Plantation for Civil Rights Activism” (*American Literature* 91, no. 3 [2019]: 587-617).

<sup>5</sup> Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015). For another transnational framework of the afterlives of slavery and colonialism, see Rinaldo Walcott, *On Property: Policing, Prisons, and the Call for Abolition* (Windsor, Ontario: Biblioasis, 2021).