Clare Wallace, Clara Escoda, Enric Monforte, and José Ramón Prado-Pérez, eds. 
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If the multitude of publications on different crises and their representation in contemporary theatre and performance is anything to go by, we are truly living in times of crisis (Angelaki; Balestrini, Lippert, and Löschnigg; Delgado and Svich; Duggan and Peschel; O’Hanlon; Zarouia and Hager). What distinguishes *Crisis, Representation and Resilience: Perspectives on Contemporary British Theatre* from the other recent publications on the subject is its focus on crisis as a source for opportunity and resilience. The volume starts with the observation that the many crises that are shared globally are overlapping and intersecting. Its aim is to “explore crisis as transformative in ways that open possibilities of transvaluation, and of interrupting the cynicism of commodification” (2). While preserving the “complexity and plurality” of crisis, the volume seeks to find “modes of imaginative recognition, action, resilience and repair” (2). At the centre of attention are, then, “the multifaceted relationships between twenty-first century British theatre and crisis, the potential of critical creativity and the forms it takes,” which includes critical thought, communal solidarity, structures of feeling, and their aesthetic representations in contemporary British theatre (2).

A major part of Clare Wallace and Clara Escoda’s insightful introduction focuses on the notion of crisis. Outlining how the term’s understanding changed from its Greek etymology of “judgement and decision” to the nowadays common use either as pathological “decisive point in the progress of a disease” (3) or, figuratively, as an often-prolangered turning point, they see crisis as “change wrought by excess and disproportion, that develops in a non-linear manner and ruptures structures of control or efficiency within a system social or otherwise” (3). It is this sense of crisis which the volume juxtaposes with theatre’s contextual, performative, and aesthetic form. A particular focus lies on the crisis caused and enhanced by neoliberal globalisation. Drawing on Walter Benjamin, Ulrich Beck, Pierre Bourdieu, David Harvey, and Sylvia Walby’s political and socioeconomic investigations into neoliberalism and crisis, Wallace and Escoda argue that “as this century progresses the realities of human-produced ecological change are increasingly devastating, and yet continue to elicit grossly insubstantial governmental and industrial responses” (5).
The editors not only convincingly outline the representation of crisis from various sociopolitical perspectives but also include aesthetic and affective representations of crises. They conclude that: “The confluence of heterogeneous economic, ecological phenomena, with social and political crises of value, amplify their respective affects and effects,” which leads to “a new ecology of crisis” in the twenty-first century (7). The introduction ends with a short definition of resilience, which is understood as “a response to risk, crisis or adversity, that implies transformation” (15), and the statement that “resistant resilience is intrinsic to the performative responses to crisis” (16).

The rest of the volume is divided into five parts. Part one, which focuses on corporealities, starts with a topic that is often neglected in recent discussions of twenty-first century crises, namely old age. Siân Adiseshiah’s contribution on the intersection of ageing and narratives of crisis seeks to find new “representations of crises that enable political agency” (24). In her persuasive analysis, she concentrates on Caryl Churchill’s Escaped Alone (2016) and Lucy Kirkwood’s The Children (2016) and shows how old age is still understood in terms of (neoliberal notions of) young age, and how this is reinforced in Kirkwood’s play and challenged in Churchill’s. By juxtaposing two works by female authors that focus on female characters, Adiseshiah’s contribution not only foregrounds the importance of ageing for the twenty-first century but also elucidates this topic from a female perspective.

Subsequently, Vicky Angelaki analyses Ella Hickson’s The Writer (2018) in light of crises of care. For Angelaki, Hickson’s play highlights “the mental, emotional and physical journey through a systemic crisis,” which primarily takes place in male-dominated institutional spaces (44). Reading The Writer against the backdrop of Walby’s gendered discourses on crisis, Angelaki convincingly shows how both the play’s content and its formal, metatheatrical aspects make visible institutional structures that oppose care in the context of the theatre. In doing so, she proceeds with the feminist tone of the volume and opens up discussions on the interconnection between gender, crises, and (lack of) care in British society.

The last contribution in this first section continues the exploration of crises from a female perspective. In her essay, Elisabeth Massana links capitalism, the feminized body, and various forms of exploitation by looking at the invisibility and violence of reproductive work. Concentrating on Cordelia Lynn’s Lela & Co (2015) and Vivienne Franzmann’s Bodies (2017), she convincingly shows how the exploitation of feminized bodies helps maintain capitalist systems. Further, she demonstrates how both plays challenge what she calls a “chronology of crisis” (65), instead employing dramaturgical strategies that stage alternative temporalities, and thus highlight the ubiquity of these crises.

The second part of the volume discusses collective action. It begins with Enric Monforte’s contribution, which eloquently demonstrates why it is important to
bring together political action, community, and theatre’s utopian potential. Focusing on Jack Thorne’s _Hope_ (2014) and British touring company LUNG’s verbatim play _EI5_ (2015), Monforte analyses how both works portray the erosion of communities and, somewhat paradoxically, utopian nuances. Given that these plays employ more hopeful and utopian notes and an inclusive notion of community which opposes the neoliberal individual, the positive potential of crises as “opportunities to ‘counterintervene,’ to resist, to rebuild vulnerable collectives and precarious communities” becomes clear (74).

The second contribution in this section, which highlights the importance of collective action, is Sarah Bartley’s “Peopling the Theatre in a Time of Crisis.” She discusses the characteristics of two people’s theatres, namely Camden People’s Theatre and Brighton People’s Theatre. Focusing on the economic crises in the UK in 1990 and 2008, she outlines how both people’s theatres can respond to social and political turmoil by putting non-professional actors on stage. Building on Lauren Berlant’s concept of “crisis ordinariness,” which describes the “notion of systemic crisis” that “force[s] people to adapt to an unfolding change” (Berlant 10), she shows how both theatre companies “respond to the affective conditions of anxiety, divisiveness, anger and isolation” associated with both economic crises (91).

The third section deals with nationscapes and opens with David Pattie’s contribution on the staging of rural Britain in Jez Butterworth’s _The Night Heron_ (2002), _The Winterling_ (2006), and _Jerusalem_ (2009), Mike Bartlett’s _Albion_ (2017), and Simon Longman’s _Gundog_ (2018). Pattie relies on Mark Fisher’s notion of eeriness as “a failure of presence” (112) that is both part of and opposed to the idea of an unchanging Deep England. He convincingly argues that the portrayal of the English countryside in these plays “becomes something unresolved, unknowable and fundamentally eerie” and thus does not help to solve the crisis of English identity which the plays also address (112).

The second contribution in this cluster is by José Ramón Prado-Pérez, who compellingly writes about postdemocracy and the state of British politics in two plays by James Graham, namely _This House_ (2012) and _Labour of Love_ (2017). Referring to Chantal Mouffe’s notion of democratic agonism which sees “the political other as adversary rather than enemy,” Prado-Pérez, firstly, sees a recovery of debate in both plays (127). Secondly, Graham’s writing, which also invokes a female perspective on public affairs, can be understood as resistant because, in neoliberal times, it “seeks to reclaim the human element inherent in the political realm” by utilizing comedy and humour (127).

Part four of the volume, on contact zones, begins with an important contribution by Verónica Rodríguez on the theatre of migration. Looking at Clare Bayley’s _The Container_ (2007) and Phosphoros Theatre’s _Dear Home Office_ (2016), she traces how the “theatre of migration’s insistent ontological pressure may result in an even-
tual epistemological shift” in which the current representation of migrants and migration and the understanding of the refugee crisis are challenged through an imagining that is “uncontained, shared and co-created” and thus expands to the spectators (156).

The second contribution in this section is by María Isabel Seguro and Marta Tirado and continues the volume’s feminist critique by putting an emphasis on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) – a topic that is often omitted in contemporary considerations of crisis. Analysing Charlene James’s Cuttin’ It (2016) and Gloria Williams’s Bullet Hole (2017), the authors explore the intersection of feminism with “the crisis of the prevailing liberal view of multiculturalism” (160). They not only argue that both Black British plays “undermine the justification for FGM” but also advocate that a global feminist approach can be used to invalidate arguments in favour of FGM (160).

The last part of Crisis, Representation and Resilience is called “New Directions.” For Elisabeth Angel-Perez, crisis is not only structural but also “a moment when meaning collapses,” which has its own temporality (179). A medium that is well-suited to portraying the specific temporality of crisis is photo-based drama like Simon Stephens’s Rage (2018), Kirkwood’s Chimerica (2013), or Chris Thorpe’s There Has Possibly Been an Incident (2013), all of which are inspired by iconic political photographs. Angel-Perez compellingly argues that by “rendering palpable the sense of ontological suspension attached to the notion of crisis,” the plays oscillate between “risk and newness and a sense of bereavement” with regard to alternatives not chosen (178).

Stephen Scott-Bottoms, in the next contribution, examines the connections between power, control, existential threat, salvation, and paranoia. Analysing Tim Crouch’s play Total Immediate Collective Imminent Terrestrial Salvation (2019), Scott-Bottoms focuses on cognitive dissonance – a concept borrowed from Leon Festinger “in which an individual is simultaneously aware of two or more contradictory cognitions” (194) – in the face of the imminent end of the world which the play addresses. Connecting this to Bruno Latour’s essay “Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climate Regime,” Scott-Bottoms argues that Crouch’s play “seeks to inhabit the dissonance, the uncertainty and the sheer, unholy mess of the crisis situation in which we now find ourselves” (206).

The last contribution of the volume is Louise Owen and Marilena Zaroulia’s perception of a digital performance of Lost Dog’s In a Nutshell (2020) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors are primarily interested in the notion of the theatrical assembly in times of crisis. Connecting the play to Judith Butler’s work on assembly, Owen and Zaroulia argue that it “condenses the different facets of the theatre, its utopian potential and its social and economic limitations, all of them hinging on the practices and constitution of theatrical assembly” (223).
The editors Prado-Pérez, Wallace, Monforte, and Escoda conclude the volume by taking us back to the 1970s in order to compare the current crisis with the various crises that preceded it. While this approach creates a useful juxtaposition of current and past crises, it would have been helpful if the concluding chapter had also traced the links and continuities across the collection’s five parts. In general, given its complex and very broad topic, the volume would have benefited from a more detailed introduction that might have addressed why the contributions are grouped in this particular way and how the different clusters relate to each other and to crisis, representation, and resilience. For instance, while resilience is fundamental to many of the contributions, it would have been great to learn more about the intersection of the various notions of resilience as well as the editors’ own understanding of this concept and its shortcomings. Furthermore, out of the five fields which the volume mentions at the very beginning – political, ecological, economic, social, and cultural crises (1) – there is one that is somewhat unfortunately underrepresented in the contributions, although it is without doubt a major contemporary crisis: the ecological catastrophe is only briefly addressed in Scott-Bottoms’s contribution and otherwise not mentioned (ecology does not even warrant an index entry).

Nevertheless, there is much to be gained and learned from this edited collection. It provides timely commentary on various crises that coincide in the present moment and make crisis such a pervasive topic: the economic situation in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash, housing and migration crises, the crisis of multiculturalism, the COVID-19 pandemic, crises of ageing, care, or gendered violence, amongst others. It is the volume’s strength that it sheds light on frequently marginalised perspectives on these crises. Impressive and persuasive throughout, both on an analytical and a theoretical level, Crisis, Representation and Resilience: Perspectives on Contemporary British Theatre is an indispensable anthology that will be a compelling read for all scholars interested in (feminist) perspectives on politics and contemporary theatre and performance studies.

Works Cited


