

(Re)Focus: An Introduction to Milo Rau and the Comparative Lens

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This introduction to the *Documenta* special edition “Milo Rau – Comparative Lenses” looks at Swiss-German theater-director Milo Rau’s career in context. From his early days a cultural critic at the Swiss daily *Die Neue Zürcher Zeitung* through the founding of the production company the International Institute of Political Murder to his work as artistic director, “(Re)Focus: An Introduction to on Milo Rau and the Comparative Lens” considers the time and place in which Rau began his theater practice and the many inspirations and parallels present throughout his directorial career. Contrasting the theater-maker’s own heroic self-portrait, this cumulation of over a decade of research situates Rau and his artistic output within shifts in Western Europe’s cultural landscape.

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With the premiere of the International Institute of Political Murder's first production *Die letzten Tage der Ceausesecus* [The Last Days of the Ceausesecus] in 2009, Milo Rau became a mainstay of European theater. Since 2009, the director's oeuvre has consisted of scripted, tour-suitable productions as well as one-time, unscripted theatrical trials, tribunals, and assemblies. Rau's work is celebrated for its critically and historically informed political mise en scène, its international scope, and the way his pieces – both scripted and unscripted – connect seemingly foreign conflicts with Western European memory politics in what Rau calls *Global Realism*.

At the time of writing, the Swiss-German theater-maker is one of Europe's most important contemporary directors, and certainly its most famous political director. Rau's work tours the globe, featured not only at Europe's state-funded theaters, but festivals throughout Asia, stages and screens in Rwanda, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chile, Brazil, Canada, and the United States. His work has been featured at Montreal's Festival TransAmériques and New York University's Skirball Centre. In early September 2025, Rau participated in an event at New York's Segal Center's "Down to Earth Festival." His speech was part of a most recent international speaking tour, *Resistance Now!*. The series emerged in response to what Rau saw as right-wing political interference in state-subsidized theaters across Europe, which came to a head with the sudden dismissal of Slovakian National Theater's artistic director Matej Drlička in August 2024.¹ *Resistance Now!* is significant not only because it stands out as one of Rau's most significant political interventions – the series is surprisingly traditional in its proclamation that we must rely, save, and conserve established institutions, respect their hierarchical structures, and their artist directors. But because it serves as an example of the political interests that have inspired Rau and contributed to his reputation as a political director. Additionally, such a speaking tour is only possible because of Rau's (niche) celebrity status as a *star director* within the well-funded theater milieu of Western Europe, and particularly the German-speaking realm.²

Resistance Now! also highlights the fact that Rau, more than most of his peers, is prolific in constructing a discourse around his work. Since very early in his career, Rau has been savvy in identifying the

importance of self-promotion, participating in lectures and roundtables at secondary institutions and theater events across Europe. IIPM, as his production company was ironically named, routinely combined productions with staged discussions and symposiums. The company's first publication with Theater der Zeit, *Die Enthüllung des Realen. Milo Rau und das International Institute of Political Murder* (2013), accompanied a three-day symposium at Berlin's Sophiensaele (Sophiensaele 2013). From early on, Rau understood he could control the developing narrative around his practice. Even today, with his star director and media darling status, no one writes more about Milo Rau than Milo Rau – not even close. Thus, alongside his theatrical output, there is a massive body of texts from Rau about Rau: his work, his life, his career, his theory, his politics, his opinions, his ideas, his inspirations, his contradictions.

Since 2010, Rau has published roughly twenty-two first-edition books translated into various languages (at times under different titles).³ Publications consist of vast collections of speeches, interviews, and short essays (with texts frequently republished), many of which are taken from Rau's work as a cultural commentator.⁴ In Rau's bibliography the three books *Was Tun? Kritik der postmodernen Vernunft* [What is to be done? Critique of Postmodern Reason] (2013), *Das Geschichtliche Gefühl. Wege zu einem globalen Realismus* [The Historical Feeling: Paths to a Global Realism] (2019), and *Die Rückeroberung der Zukunft. Ein Essay* [Recapturing the Future: An Essay] (2023) stand out, because, rather than collected volumes, they are full, independent texts. *Was Tun?* is a sleek 68-page critique of the indeterminacy of postmodernism (*à la* Terry Eagleton), and both *Das geschichtliche Gefühl* and *Die Rückeroberung* are publications of two three-part lectures written for poetic lecture series in Saarsbrücken and Zurich respectively. This writing, in combination with his theater, shows a carefully curated artistic profile situated within a very specific political landscape. Few of Rau's contemporaries have put as much work into establishing such a comprehensive writing and publishing practice. Taking the long view of Rau's career, watching his transition from freelance director to artistic director – and there is a convincing argument to be made that Rau's interest always lay in institutions – we clearly see how the director constructed his artistic profile.

Scholars and critics alike have jumped at the opportunity to engage with an artist so outspoken and willing to participate in dialogue. However, understandably, in this eager academic engagement, there is a tendency to zoom in and ignore the field that surrounds him. Although this microfocus has its function, it is also important not to miss the forest around the tree. To zoom out and consider Rau in context – as we should with star directors – is to move away from the so-called artistic genius to show something and someone more interesting, complex, and at times even problematic.

Milo Rau – A Prehistory of Milo Rau

The idea for this special edition of *Documenta* was born out my decade-long engagement with the theater of Milo Rau. It began with “Globalized Theatre | Tokenized Performance: Milo Rau’s German Intercultural Theatre in Belgium,” an article that looked at the influence of the German-speaking theater landscape of subsidized theaters with massive budgets, in-house technicians, built-in technology, actor ensembles, and multiple stages on Rau (Climenhaga 2024). While early productions during Rau’s days as a freelance director – *The Last Days of the Ceaușcus*, *Hate Radio* (2011), and *Breiviks Erkl rung* [Breivik’s Statement] (2013) – toured smaller venues like Berlin’s Sophiensaele, later productions from *The Europe Trilogy – The Civil Wars* (2014), *the Dark Ages* (2015), and *Empire* (2016) increasingly used subsidized theaters like Munich’s Residenztheater or Berlin’s Schaub hne as producers. “Globalized Theatre | Tokenized Performance” considered Rau’s institutional reforms within the context of Germany’s more stratified and conservative German theater landscape and Flanders’ less funded but more open one. Rau in context was both more exciting and under-utilized. What appears is a different story about Rau and his institutions than that written by the director himself. One intricately connected to shifts in Germany’s performance landscape: Gießen University’s Institution of Applied Theater Science, the emergence of theater collectives, and a renewed interest in the possibilities of the documentary form. It was over a decade into these changes that Rau and the IIPM began their political theater practice.

Rau’s biography shows a longstanding interest in such subsidized institutions as the city-theaters and festivals that now mark his

career. The IIPM was born out of an unsuccessful application for artistic direction of Dresden's Festspielhaus Hellerau. The name came from a planned installation, a diptych of two assassination attempts on Hitler: one in 1939 at Munich's Bürgerbräukeller, and another in 1944 at the Wolfsschanze (Rau 2019, 24-25; Fellmann 2012, 24; Rau 2013, 119). The IIPM was founded with Simone Eisenring – a somewhat enigmatic figure in Rau's early career – and a group of artists with whom the duo had frequently collaborated: Jens Dietrich (dramaturg), Marcel Bächtiger (filmmaker/architect), Nina Wolters (graphic designer), and Franziska Dick (actor). Although now synonymous with Rau, IIPM was founded under a collective model, with *The Last Days* co-directed by Eisenring.

The significance of Rau's early collaborations with Eisenring, while often overlooked, cannot be so easily separated from Rau. In 1999, Rau and Eisenring founded the short-lived production company Siamesis Produktionen with Marcel Bächtiger and produced *Paranoia Express* (2000), a ninety-minute film that flopped. From 2000 to 2007, Rau and Eisenring – then a directing student at Berlin's Ernst Busch Schule – made up the Eisenring/Rau duo. Here, Rau wrote many of the plays Eisenring directed – particularly prior to 2005. From 2005 onwards, Rau studied at the University of Zurich and Berlin's Free University – working on a PhD project that he would ultimately abandon – and worked as a cultural critic for the Swiss daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ). During this period, Eisenring directed numerous productions independent of Rau: Anja Hilling's *Protection* at Maxim-Gork-Theater in 2006; Andres Veiel and Gesine Schmidt's *Der Kick*⁵ at Schauspiel Dresden in 2007; and Händl Klaus's *Wilde – Mann mit traurigen Augen* at Theater Oberhausen in 2008 (NOFA 2010). Following Eisenring's departure from IIPM in 2010, she co-founded the Network of Factual Art (NOFA) in 2011 with Anna Eger and directed the documentary production and installation *Women and War* (2012, Sophiensaele Berlin) (Naegeli 2013, Scheuber 2013). Eisenring's final IIPM production was the self-authored and directed monologue *Riefenstahl*, a reenactment of André Müller's interview with filmmaker (and National Socialist darling) Leni Riefenstahl, performed by Fransiska Dick at Berlin's Monologfestival in 2010 (TD Berlin 2010).

Returning to IIPM's collective origins and movement to the single artistic director model, it is worth mentioning Rau's current position on collective leadership:

[C]ollectives don't operate in isolation; they usually operate within institutions. And often, within the overall structure of an institution, a collective is weaker than a single individual in a leadership position. Interestingly, collectives within larger institutions tend to be more hierarchical than a solo curator, precisely because they are weaker as a group. There are situations where three people agree with each other, and this can be used strategically to push through decisions. [...] I think that's sometimes a reason why collectives exist – because individuals don't always feel strong enough to bear the stress and responsibility alone. (Haitzinger, Lehnerer and Lin 2025)

By 2011, IIPM had already largely shifted to the more classic, top-down German Intendant (artistic director) model. In a not-so-unusual story, other founding members Eisenring, Bächtiger, Dick, and Dietrich gradually departed the company, making IIPM synonymous with Milo Rau.⁶ In this leadership model, the artistic identity of the Intendant becomes the institutional identity of theater/company and is rooted in a patriarchal myth of the artistic genius who is able, despite lack of organizational and managerial experience, to charismatically lead the institution (Bremgartner 2009, 303). On the institutional level of the artistic director, Rau has a clear desire to mirror the institutional (on an almost Gesamtkunstwerk level) work of such figures as Thomas Ostermeier at Berlin's Schaubühne and (even more so) Frank Castorf at Berlin's Volksbühne.⁷ Likewise, in his curatorial role at the Wiener Festwochen, Rau builds on the work of curators of what Keren Zaiontz calls "second-wave festivals." These are festivals founded outside the immediate postwar period, which saw the foundation of theater festivals across Europe as part of an effort to highlight cultural revival and a better future (Zaiontz 2020, 15-17). Another article is required to examine the impact and influence of such figures and festivals as Frie Leyson and Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Matthias Lilienthal and Theater der Welt, Florian Malzacher and Art of Assembly (among others), and Austria's steirischer Herbst festival on Rau's Festwochen.

At NTGent (see: Boensich and Houe 2021; Climenhaga 2024) and Wiener Festwochen, Rau has not just been a manager but the face of the institution. It is incredibly difficult to talk about either as

separate from Rau because of his overt presence. This is especially true at the Festwochen, where Rau is at nearly every premiere and afterparty (even building a bed in the festival office in the 2024 season, where he could ostensibly sleep) (Hift 2024). It is perhaps no coincidence that Rau – who certainly has never shied away from the genius distinction – has grown to be a detractor of collective and collaborative curatorship with its (comparatively) horizontal leadership compared to the top-to-bottom power structure of the “solo-genius curator” model (Gareis, et al. 2025, 1).⁸

When Rau was named artistic director of the Belgian city-theater Nederlands Toneel Gent (NTGent), it was as part of a three-man artistic direction team with then-dramaturg Stefan Bläske and Belgian artistic coordinator Steven Heene. This was more a shared than collective leadership model (Steenberghe 2017). By 2023 – when Rau announced his departure for Wiener Festwochen – he was the sole leader of the institution with Bläske departing in early 2020 for Theater Bremen and Heene in 2022 for Behoud de Begeerte (Leyman 2021, Hetscher 2020). The shift went largely unnoticed, because, as with IIPM where production dossiers were published under Milo Rau, it was Rau’s name that was associated with the theater.

Nevertheless, it would be unfair to characterize these shifts around the leadership as unique to Rau. IIPM is far from the only production company founded under a collective model only to shift to the more classic hierarchical model of a single artistic director. The Belgian theater company BERLIN was initially founded by Yves Degryse (part of the current leadership of NTGent), Bart Baele, and Caroline Rochlitz in 2003, but since 2022 has been headed solely by Degryse. Similarly, NTGent is not the only theater or cultural institution to launch a new artistic direction with a shared or collective model only to see the theater to eventually fall under the leadership of a single person. In 1999 Berlin’s Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz came under the new artistic direction of Sasha Waltz, Thomas Ostermeier, Jochen Sandig, and Jens Hillje (Boenisch 2020, 35). By 2009, Ostermeier was the sole artistic director of the institution, although his name had long since become synonymous with the theater’s institutional identity.

Looking back at Rau’s biography and texts predating IIPM, it is possible to situate him within broader shifts – like Ostermeier’s acquisition of the Schaubühne – in a changing theater landscape.

Rau's plays from 2000 to 2007 – for example, *Dämonen/Tanz das Tourette* (2005), *Amnesie* (2005), *Bei Anruf Avantgarde* (2005), *Pornografia* (2006), and *Montana* (2007) – were not documentary and were notably less political than the director's later work. During this period, Rau – then a playwright – frequently worked with adaptations and postmodern remixing: *Amnesie* is an abstract adaptation of Ivan Goncharov's *Oblomov* (1859), *Montana* a modernization and adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae* (405 BCE), *Pornografia* takes the story of Annelies Michel (a young German woman who died of malnutrition after being subjected to 67 exorcisms by a Catholic priest), and the film *Paranoia Express* adapted of Thomas Pynchon's postmodern novel *V* (1963).

In 1996, Rau began his studies in a semester abroad at the Sorbonne in Paris. He frequently recalls that during this period he studied under the renowned French sociologist and public intellectual Pierre Bourdieu (France 24 2018).⁹ After returning from Paris in October 1996, Rau studied sociology and German and French language and literature at the University of Zurich and Berlin's Free University. Starting in 1997, Rau wrote columns for various student and youth publishing venues: *Toaster*, *Denkbilder*, and *Zürcher Studentin*.¹⁰ In this last publication, Rau published his oft-mentioned 1997 report on the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, written during a research trip to Mexico (Rau 1997, 8-9). Between 2000 and 2009, Rau worked at the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ). This journalistic background is a key feature of his artist biography, where he wrote up to five articles per year, mostly book reviews, as *Milo Rau – Romanist* [*Romance scholar*], a cultural columnist.¹¹ Rau's first article was a feature on Roland Barthes, which, according to the director, led to a minor plagiarism scandal for the paper due to the author's failure to cite the translations used in the article (Rau 2000; Michaelsen and Rau 2025, 26). His final article in December 2009 was a book review of the recent German translation of Tom McCarthy's 2005 novel about reenactment, *Remainder* (Rau 2009).

Of Rau's thirty-six NZZ articles, nine are about theater, offering a few hints at the theater models and makers influencing the director. The nine theater articles include features on Thomas Ostermeier's second annual F.I.N.D festival at the Schaubühne (Rau 2001), René Pollesch's postdramatic theater (Rau 2002), a festival report from Matthias Lilienthal's *Simple Life* festival (Rau 2004a), and a full page

feature on Armin Petras's appointment as new artistic director of Maxim Gorki Theater (Rau 2005b). There are also three, more classic reviews of shows from René Pollesch (Rau 2003), Moritz Rinkes (Rau 2006), and Krzysztof Warlikowski (Rau 2005a) alongside a 2005 feature on *Baccae* corresponding with *Montana* (Rau 2005c).

On February 2, 2004, Rau wrote an article on Rimini Protokoll, "Wir alle sind Spezialisten. Rimini Protokoll und die Rekonstruktion der Wirklichkeit" [We're all specialists: Rimini Protokoll and the Reconstruction of Reality]. The feature responded to Rimini Protokoll's 2004 judicial production *Zeugen!* at Matthias Lilienthal's Hebbel am Ufer. The production was a meta-trial against theater, featuring two professional actors and a group of lay actors (Rimini Protokoll 2004; Rau 2004b, 36). The column is interesting because it comments on techniques that would later come to mark Rau's work and illustrates that Rau was very much aware that a shift was taking place in Germany's cultural landscape (Rau 2004b).

Beginning the 1990s and into the 2000s, documentary theater – what Carol Martin in 2012 called the Theater of the Real – experienced a (re)surgence in popularity in the German-speaking theater (Vennemann 2014, Irmer 2006, Cornish 2015). Thomas Irmer identifies this period – beginning in the late 1990s – as a third wave of German documentary theater, following an initial wave in the rowdy 1920s and a second postwar wave. Coinciding with this third documentary wave (a reality turn) was the emergence of theater and performance collectives that began outside the more stratified and traditional subsidized theaters. A major instigator in this cultural landscape was the University of Gießen's Institute of Applied Theater Science (ATW) founded by Andrzej Wirth and Hans-Thies Lehmann in 1982. ATW, home of the postdramatic theater movement and alma mater of René Pollesch, was and is unique in German higher education in its hybrid approach that brings together artistic and academic models of education. Models are usually strictly divided into the conservatory (for the artistic) and the university (for the theoretical and historical). ATW produced students – such as Pollesch and Rimini Protokoll – well-versed in the worlds of practice and theory (Yinan, et al. 2022). Rau never studied at ATW – although the IIPM's initial dramaturg, Jens Dietrich, attended ATW from 1995 to 2001. It is significant that Rau has built a reputation as theater-maker and public intellectual (someone also engaged in both theory and

practice), versed in a theory repertoire of Hannah Arendt, Pierre Bourdieu, Antonio Gramsci, and Bruno Latour (Dietrich n.d.).

Throughout the 1990s, ATW produced numerous collectives playing with new documentary forms: She-She-Pop (est. 1993), Gob Squad (est. 1994), Showcase Beat Le Mot (est. 1997), Rimini Protokoll (est. 2000), and Hofmann&Lindholm (est. 2000). Even outside Gießen, throughout the 2000s, other collectives working with documentary modes – like IIPM and NOFA – followed suit. For example, andcompany&Co (Frankfurt am Main, 2003) and werkgruppe2 (Niedersachsen, 2006). ATW also produced playwrights and directors – Hans-Werner Kroesinger, Regine Dura, and Boris Nikitin – while beyond Gießen such artists as Andres Veiel, Roland Brus, Volker Lösch, and Nuran David Calis also embraced documentary as a form to deal with the growing pains of reunification as well as the contemporary traumas and conflicts of an increasingly interconnected world.

Rau's theater, with its reenactments and use of actors and lay-actors' personal experience, is closely related to Rimini Protokoll's experts of the everyday (*Experten des Alltags*) and Hofmann&Lindholm's accomplices (*Komplizen*). Rau fits within this sudden growth of successful, mainstage documentary work (Müller-Schöll 2023, 44). It is worth mentioning that Rau rejects the label of documentary theater, with his definition of documentary coming from Peter Weiss and the second documentary: "When I'm labelled as a documentary artist, this is ultimately based on a misunderstanding. Because what one does onstage is basically the opposite of documentation – if it is documentation then tightrope walking is also documentary because gravity is being documented" (Bossart and Rau 2018, 158). However, the third wave of documentary theater was, according to Irmer, marked precisely by:

New forms of documentary based on auteur-directors' projects, critical of historical or sociological knowledge-making while exploring history as an open project that could not be known through accepted principles and ideas. This work often engaged smaller subjects with complex social contexts that demonstrated the heterogeneity of contemporary events. (Irmer 2006, 17)

Throughout his oeuvre, Rau explores how specific events are remembered and re-constructed, how events in public and private are overwritten by specific ideologies to become historical (meaning remembered and memorialized as historically and politically significant) (Roy 2017). In other words, moments, as they happen, are not inherently historical, rather they become historical based on the significance inscribed upon them after the fact: sometimes immediately, sometimes much later, and sometimes in cycles of re-inscription.

Boris Nikitin – who works more site-specifically than Rau – makes a similar observation, stating: “what we call ‘reality’ is to some extent indistinguishable from ‘social reality’. [...] A construct, but one that is so convincing in its appearance and in its permanent repetition that we are often inclined to naturalize it, to take it for granted, to believe it and forget its constructedness” (Nikitin 2022, 186). Frederik Le Roy describes how documentary theater has, both historically and currently, served as a methodology to “disclose a reality that was allegedly hidden behind an ideological veil which served the powerful and their worldview.” How it undertakes a demystifying and rehumanizing process that removes the sheen of history from an event that was – beyond its mediation and historicization – lived (Roy 2017).

For this new group of documentary artists, the *document* of the *documentary* theater was no longer strictly a printed document. Rather, as Kroesinger explains, “by ‘documents,’ I mean that we work with things that really happened” (Kroesinger 2022, 95). Rau, like Rimini Protokoll, She-She-Pop, and many others in Germany and beyond (for example, the U.K.’s Verbatim Theatre), pull from reality by returning to people and everyday experiences. Often by bringing the so-called expert into the theater to perform their own testimony. Third wave documentary artists – no doubt because of changing borders (the fall of the USSR, the birth of the EU), globalization, the connectivity of the internet, and the yet-to-be-seen horizons of social media – engaged extensively with the audibility and visibility of those excluded and marginalized by society and, by extension, theater (Sacchi 2024, 318).

Neither Rau nor his political theater contemporaries can be separated from the paradigm shift seen in Christoph Schlingensiefel’s

performative interventions, projects like *Bitte liebt Österreich* (2000). Schlingensief created performances that took place not just in reality, but challenged understandings of reality. Tony Perucci defines Schlingensief's performatives as "reality frictions" that "frame themselves as alternatively and irreconcilably theatrical fictions and (f)actual occurrences with real consequences for the participants" (Müller-Schöll 2023, 44; Perucci 2021, 103). The parallel projects that have accompanied Rau's conflict zone productions, *Orestes in Mosul* (the Mosul Film School), *The New Gospel* (Houses of Dignity), or *Antigone in the Amazon* (greenwashing campaign), reflect Schlingensief's final, durational project *Operndorf Afrika* in Burkina Faso. Rau, like the Swiss-German collective Zentrum für Politische Schönheit (est. 2009), is heavily inspired by Schlingensief both in street level performance actions like *Revolt of Dignity* (2019) and *Free Schepenese* (2022). The funeral procession for the Egyptian mummy Schepenese in *Free Schepenese* exists in a network of similar actions including ZPS's Berlin action *Die Toten kommen* [The Dead are Coming] (2015), Chokri Ben Chikha's NTGent opening weekend performance *The Procession* (2018), or even Schlingensief's *Sterben Lernen* (2009) in Zurich. Meanwhile productions like *Wilhelm Tell* (2022) at Schauspielhaus Zürich directly reference Schlingensief's *Hamlet* (2000), performed with ex-neo-Nazis on the same stage, even featuring actors talking about their experiences working with the late director.

Schlingensief's impact on the contemporary political theater scene cannot be understated, nor the void left by his death in 2010. In the same way the numerous street-level performance actions initiated by ZPS cannot be separated from Schlingensief, Rau's first political action *City of Change* (2010), the founding of an imaginary political party for migrant rights that engaged the public space and self-produced media, is unimaginable without Schlingensief's *Chance 2000*, a self-founded party and performative campaign run under the motto "Action, action, action!" (Beyes 2013, Schlingensief n.d.).

Rau has at various moments even positioned himself as a Schlingensief figure. Sometimes quite literally reenacting Schlingensief in social media: posing with a posterboard and wide-brimmed felt hat in Times Square (Schlingensief, *Deutschland Versenken*, 1999), running around the Wiener Festwochen in a summertime linen boilersuit and raspberry beret (Schlingensief, *Passion Impossible: 7 Tage*

Notruf für Deutschland – Eine Bahnhofmission, 1997; Schlingensief, *Chance 2000*, 1998), or his ongoing media relationship with Austria's far-right FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria). Yet Schlingensief's theater had raw, sharp edges that were, as Evelyn Annuß identifies in her recent reassessment of Schlingensief's work and legacy, dangerous to himself and (particularly in the case of *Bitte liebt Österreich*) his participants and those engaging in the "daily political work being done by others" (Annuß 2025, 11). Similar concerns about the safety of Rau's actors appear in the pages of this special edition. While undeniably provocative, Rau's work lacks those sharper edges of Schlingensief. Whereas Schlingensief would plan to hurl 100,000 German marks from the balcony of Reichstag (*Rettet den Kapitalismus, schmeißt das Geld weg!*, 1999), Rau is careful: declaring a European Republic from the balcony of his subsidized theater in Belgium, NTGent (*European Balcony Project*, 2018), dropping manifestos rather than euros; declaring at the massive opening spectacle of the 2025 Wiener Festwochen that "unser V steht für Love, für Vienna, für Wien, für uns alle, aber auch ein bisschen für Veronica" [our V stands for Love, for Vienna, for all of us, but also a bit for Veronica], referring to Veronica Kaup-Hasler, Vienna's minister of culture (taz 1999; Kummer 2025, 00:05:29-00:05:39). Rau – for all his provocations – is careful to avoid the label of tasteless provocateur that haunted Schlingensief throughout his career following the 1996 performance of *Zweites Surrealistisches Manifest von André Breton* [*André Breton's Second Surrealist Manifesto*], which saw the execution of Helmut Kohl in effigy (Scheer 2019, 79). Contrary to its title, *Zweites Surrealistisches Manifest* was not a manifesto, but a fifteen-minute performance employing the changed language of Breton's manifesto in combination with visual elements of the Dada movement, Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, and the puppet theater Grand Guignol (Scheer 2019, 79-82).

Reverse Dramaturgy

Throughout his career, Rau has held a deep-rooted interest in the manifesto form, perhaps less as it applies directly to productions and more with how the form transverses the avant-garde, politics, and propaganda historically (Rau 2019, 33-36). The inaugural document of the IIPM is a manifesto, *Was ist Unst?* (2009), apparently published on the *NZZ*'s front page on February 20, 2009, "genau hundert Jahre

nach dem *Manifest des Futurismus* von Marinetti” [exactly a hundred years after Marinetti’s *Futurist Manifesto*] (Rau 2019, 35).¹² *Was ist Unst?* takes clear inspiration not only from Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s *Manifesto of Futurism* (1909) and the Situationists’ “International Manifesto” (1958), but builds on the dialogic structure of Bertolt Brecht’s *Dialoge aus dem Messingkauf* [Messingkauf Dialogues] (written between 1939 and 1942, and published in 1963).

Rau’s subsequent *Ghent Manifesto*, which won significant international attention in 2018, is inspired by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg’s *Dogme 95*, which was itself inspired by François Truffaut’s 1954 essay “Une certaine tendance du cinéma français” [“A Certain Tendency of French Cinema”]. In *The Schaubühne Berlin Under Thomas Ostermeier: Reinventing Realism* (2020), Peter M. Boenisch notes that the *Ghent Manifesto* actually follows in the footsteps of Ostermeier’s first season at the Schaubühne (Hendrickx 2018). In 1999, Ostermeier, alongside co-Intendant*innen (artistic directors) Jens Hillje, Sasha Waltz, and Jochen Sandig, published a manifesto under the title “The Mission”. In an end note, Boenisch makes the critical observation that “Rau’s manifesto from 2018 [*Ghent Manifesto*] echoes the call for a new mission for the theatre that Schaubühne had formulated at the beginning of Ostermeier’s tenure in 2000” (2020, 74). The Schaubühne’s manifesto – just as that of NTGent would nearly two decades later – asserts the theater had lost its connection to society, thus requiring a “new realism.” That is, a realism that “is not a simple depiction of the world as it looks. It is the view onto the world through an attitude that demands for change [...] It attempts to comprehend and to express these realities, and to refigure them” (2020, 34). The FIND Festival – which Rau reported on in 2001 – served as an exciting part of this new approach to programming by bringing international collaborators to the theater (2020, 67-68).

Rau’s theatre – as with his manifesto practice – does not emerge from a void but is part of a larger response to what came before and is happening among contemporary theater-makers. Within the context of this special edition, situating Rau and his work means looking beyond the celebrity to the surrounding landscape, thereby seeing the proverbial forest through the trees. And Rau is an extremely referential director, albeit one who does not strictly believe in citation. When formulating the call for this special edition, the idea of applying a comparative lens was imagined as an invitation to contextualize the work of an artist often looked at in isolation and who encourages this view. On a

personal level, behind comparative lenses is a longstanding interest in moving to what I consider the reverse dramaturgy of Rau's hidden citations. There is fun to be had – even if only in passing – splashing around in the waters of this reverse dramaturgy.

From early on, Rau and IIPM were inspired by Nikolai Evreinov's *Storming of the Winter Palace* (1920) (Rau 2015). Evreinov's reenactment offers a historical example of an event that was new construction and reconceptualization of a rather boring, unspectacular event (namely, the deposition of the Russian Provisional Government) into one that, to quote Silva Sasse, "could visually and narratively secure the future memory of the revolution" (Sasse 2020, 36). Rau's interest of Hannah Arendt's *banality of evil* can also be connected in this fascination with how historically significant events, people, and even catastrophes – when looked at in isolation – can appear mundane, even dull. Likewise, more recent projects reveal how every day and commonplace political, social, economic violence can be in our contemporary reality. Rather than disclose a reality hidden by ideology, projects reveal how ideology and those in positions of power construct the accepted reality around a historical event.

Looking at Rau's first trilogy, *The Reenactment Trilogy*, a broad web of inspiration appears, with *Die letzten Tage der Ceausescu* [*The Last Days of the Ceausescu*] (2009) following a long line of documentary productions about the trial and execution of Nicolai and Elena Ceaușescu: from those created in the immediate aftermath of the revolution – English playwright Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest* (1990) and Romanian playwright Denis Dinulescu's later *A Day in Nicolae Ceaușescu's Life* (2005) – to Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica's documentary film *Videograms of the Revolution* (1992) and Irina Botea's *Auditions for the Revolution* (2006). Botea's filmic project also engages the idea of reenactment, used Farocki and Ujica's footage to create a series of reenactments with American students. Botea's work with reenactment echoes those staged by Elizabeth LeCompte and Wooster Group in *Poor Theater* (2004) and *Hamlet* (2006). Inseparable from the *Reenactment Trilogy* is the 2007 exhibition *History Will Repeat Itself: Strategies of Re-Enactment in Contemporary (Media) Art and Performance* at Dortmund's Hartware MedienKunstVerein curated by Inke Arns and Gabriele Horn. In 2024, Rau invited Arns to curate the exhibition *Genossin Sonne* [Comrade Sun] in collaboration with his first edition of Wiener Festwochen (Mousse 2025).

Likewise, *Hate Radio*'s 2011 premiere at Kunsthaus Bregenz took place in a European performance landscape saturated with documentary projects about the Rwandan Genocide. While Rau's choice of using the radio perspective presented by *Hate Radio* is unique, in 1999, the Belgian collective Groupov premiered *Rwanda 94* at Avignon. This production, co-authored by Dorcy Rugumba who played Kantano Habimana in the first performances of *Hate Radio* at Hebbel am Ufer, similarly features survivors and people who lost family in the genocide. Two years prior to *Hate Radio*'s premiere, Kroesinger premiered *Ruanda Revisited* (2009), which moves its audience from the traditional theater to a hallway of photographs to a military tent. This production brings together different historical texts to reflect on colonial roots and Western failures through testimony performed by actors (Tindemans 2015, 80). The final play of the *Reenactment Trilogy*, *Breiviks Erklrung [Breivik's Statement]* (2012) came hot on the heels of Danish director Christian Lollike's *Manifesto 2083: A Play about how Anders Behring Breivik sees himself* (2012). Lollike's much anticipated and discussed production, also a solo performance constructed of the writing of Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik, premiered on October 15, 2012, at Copenhagen's Caf  Teatret¹³, with *Breiviks Erklrung* premiering on October 19 (Lollike 2012, Baron 2012, Kj er 2012).

With *The Europe Trilogy – The Civil Wars* (2014), *The Dark Ages* (2015), and *Empire* (2016) – Rau more directly engaged the autobiographical experience of the performers. This creation and performance method puts the plays in conversation with Rimini Protokoll's concept of experts of the everyday as well as professional actors performing their private selves in the work of She-She-Pop, andcompany&co., Gob Squad, and many others. *Five Easy Pieces* (2016), *Die 120 Tage von Sodom [The 120 Days of Sodom]* (2017), and *La Reprise* (2018) intersperse the actors' alleged biographies with reenactments of true crimes, or in the case of *The 120 Days*, the Pasolini film of the same name. *The 120 Days* was created in collaboration with the Swiss disabled theater company Theater Hora (est. 1993) within the scope of the long-term "Freie Republik Hora" [Free Republic of Hora] (2013-2019). *The 120 Days* builds heavily on the company's existing body of work and their adaptations of films and classic theater texts devised in collaboration with the ensemble of actors with down syndrome, cognitive, and intellectual disabilities (Theater Hora 2019). *Five Easy Pieces*, *The 120 Days*, and *La Reprise* – sometimes

referred to as *The Representation Trilogy* – integrate pedagogical discussions in which the actors explain their craft, a strategy was also employed in Boris Nikitin's *Imitation of Life* (2009), *Sei nicht du selbst* [Do Not Be Yourself] (2013), *Sänger ohne Schatten* [Singer without Shadow] (2014), and *Das Vorsprechen* [The Audition] (2015) (Müller-Schöll 2023, 45).

Five Easy Pieces, co-produced by the Flemish theater CAMPO in Ghent, used a chorus of seven child actors to examine the crimes of Belgian pedophile-murderer Marc Dutroux. In 1999, fifteen years before Rau's production, Ghent's Het Muziek Lod (now LOD muziek-theater) produced the music theater production *Diep in het bos* [Deep in the Woods]. Directed by Eric de Volder with music by Dick van der Harst, this production was also about Marc Dutroux (only arrested in 1996) and featured a chorus of seven women lamenting the collective trauma of the horrific crimes and lost children (Cools 2021, 103). Rau again employed a child chorus in his first NTGent production, *Lam Gods* (2018), here a literal choir of local children. Schlingensiefel also employed a children's choir in his 1998 collaboration with Theater Basel *Abschied aus Deutschland – Exil in der Schweiz* [Farewell to Germany – Exile in Switzerland], a three-day, site-specific performance at Basel's central train station. Playing one of the children in this choir was Elia Rediger, a composer, musician, and theater-maker who composed the musical score for *The New Gospel* (2020), *Grief and Beauty* (2022), *Wilhelm Tell* (2022), *Antigone in the Amazon* (2023), *Medea's Children* (2024), *Burgtheater* (2025), and *Die Seherin* [The Seer] (2025).

Lam Gods was a ritual performance to show the new artistic director's appreciation for the city, as is also the case for Vienna and *Burgtheater* (which was itself laden with references to other productions of Elfriede Jelinek texts). *Lam Gods* additionally builds on a long tradition of Tableau Vivant of the Lamb of God in Ghent, live performances of scenes from *The Ghent Altarpiece* or *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (1432) by Hubert and Jan van Eyck. The altarpiece is uniquely connected with the city in that it was painted using local models, thus offering a peek into the city in the 1400s. In his production, Rau re-enacted the altarpiece using current citizens of Ghent, thus showing the diversity and heterogeneity of the city on NTGent's largest stage. Rau's is far from the only artist to reenact the altarpiece using the city: In 2012, Polish artist Pawel Alhamer

created the participatory *Agnus Dei* within the scope of the Track Festival, a site-specific installation festival organized through S.M.A.K Gallery. *Angus Dei* engaged several hundred citizens to reenact the altarpiece in a silent tableau in the square in front of both St. Bavo's Cathedral, home of the altarpiece, and NTGent's Schouwburg (Defraeye 2014, 33).

Rau's 2020 *Familie* again saw children on stage – this time the two teenage daughters of Flemish actors An Miller and Filip Peeters. The real family played another family, the De Meester family, who in 2007 chose, for unclear reasons, to take their own lives. In 2013, the Dublin based theater duo Dead Centre – known in Germany for their frequent collaborations with Vienna's Burgtheater and Berlin's Schaubühne – produced the true crime production: *Lippy*. This piece looks at the strange, inexplicable case of a family in Ireland – three sisters and their elderly aunt – who entered a suicide pact and over the course of forty days starved themselves (Dead Centre n.d.). An interesting feature of *Lippy* was that it opened with a fictional audience talkback, thanking the audience for coming to the show and introducing the actors. Rau would use this same technique in his final piece at NTGent, *Medea's Children*. Following *Five Easy Pieces*, *La Reprise*, and *Familie*, *Medea's Children* is also a true crime production, featuring, as the name suggests, six child actors. But where these previous three productions toggle between the actors and their personal experiences with theater and reenactments of the crime, *Medea's Children* adds an extra layer of enacting Euripides' ancient text. The production explores the case of Genevieve Lhermitte – given the pseudonym Amandine Moreau in the production – and her murder of her five children in 2007. The case had already been turned into the film *Our Children* in 2012, directed by Joachim Lafosse and resulted in a lawsuit from Lhermitte's ex-husband and his close friend. In 2014, at International Theater Amsterdam, Swiss-Australian director Simon Stone also used Euripides' *Medea* to investigate a real-world case of a mother killing her children. Stone uses the case of the American Debora Green murdering two of her three children for his *Medea*, also using child actors (Farrell 2024).

The true crime genre has become a mainstay of Rau's body of work. His recent series of *Pelicot Prozesse/Le Procès Pelicot* [The Pelicot Trial] (2025) – co-organized with French dramaturg Servane Dècle – is a staged reading of the excerpts from the trial of Gisèle Pelicot's

rapists. It takes inspiration from Peter Weiss's 1964 *Die Ermittlung* [*The Investigation*] and other staged readings of trials. The production was performed in a seven-hour version at the 2025 Wiener Festwochen and four-hour versions at Festival d'Avignon and Lisbon's BoCA Bienal.¹⁴ Prior to Rau's arrival at NTGent, Rau produced one of his most famous true crime productions, *La Reprise* (2018), about the 2012 murder of Ihsane Jarfi, a 32-year-old gay man in Liège. Unlike many of Rau's other projects, *La Reprise* has an obvious reference within the documentary theater: Moisés Kaufman and Tectonic Theatre's *The Laramie Project* (2000) and *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* (2009). Kaufman and his team travelled to the Wyoming town of Laramie to investigate a brutal murder of Matthew Shepard, a young gay man, in 1998 and its aftermath on the community. These two murders have several notable similarities: both men were gay, were savagely beaten, left to die in a field, and both cases had broader social and political implications. Likewise, Kaufman and Rau both undertook ethnographic research, conducting interviews within the community, however, whereas *The Laramie Project* focuses on aftermath and impact – never reenacting the crime itself – Rau's fourth act features a full reenactment of the murder.

Even when Rau is not dealing with crime or violence, death remains a central focus. *Grief and Beauty* (2022), another NTGent production, deals with aging, death, and euthanasia. Controversially featuring a video of a woman they'd contacted for the production, Joanna, dying by euthanasia, for which Rau and his team at NTGent had received consent from Joanna. Other Belgian productions like Alain Platel and Fabrizio Cassol's *Requiem pour L* (2018) similarly deal with euthanasia. *Requiem pour L* (also with L.'s consent) likewise shows a video of the moment of her passing (Cools 2021, 78-82). Several years earlier, the German documentary collective Markus&Markus (est. 2012, Hildesheim), in a production that is part Ibsen adaptation and part documentation, showed the 81-year-old Margot's journey through euthanasia (Markus&Markus n.d.). Rau's pandemic production *Everywoman* (2020), created for the Salzburger Festspiele, also holds this dialogue with the dead, featuring a woman diagnosed with cancer February of that year and given six months to live. The production is haunted by a sense that the woman, Helga Bedau, will soon be absent. *Everywoman* is – as with Markus&Markus and Ibsen's text – interspersed with text from Hugo von Hofmannthal's *Everyman*.

The interweaving of a classic text with documentary material seen in *Everywoman* – what Nuran David Calis refers to in his own documentary practice as *überschreiben* [writing over] and andcompany&co. as “remixing” – is not unique to Rau (Behrendt 2007, andcompany&Co. n.d.). A key component of Rau’s work since 2018 is his attempt to reconnect classic texts with contemporary struggles, as multiple articles in this edition explore.

In Rau’s adaptations of classic texts, he explores: What can Sophocles’ *Antigone* tell us about the struggle of Brazil’s Landless Workers’ Movement and Indigenous communities? What can Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* tell us about cycles of occupation in the Iraqi city of Mosul? About the relationship between Europe and resource centers? *Orestes in Mosul* (2019), *The New Gospel* (2020), and *Antigone in the Amazon* (2023) – the *Trilogy of Ancient Myths* – are also Rau’s conflict-zone projects, a term taken from Rule Nine of his *Ghent Manifesto*: “At least one production per season must be rehearsed or performed in a conflict or war zone, without any cultural infrastructure” (Rau and NTGent 2021, 23). However, it is important to ask: What is a conflict zone, and who makes this designation? There is a much more nuanced discussion about these productions within the tradition of what Daphne Lei calls Hegemonic Intercultural Theater – the combination of “First World capital and brainpower with Third World raw material labor, and Western classic texts with Eastern performance traditions [and actors]” – a movement marked by such figures as Peter Brook, Robert Wilson, Ariane Mnouchkine, and Richard Schechner (Lei 2011, 571).¹⁵

Looking at the documentary landscape, *Orestes in Mosul* and the subsequent documentary film by Daniel Demoustier *Orestes in Mosul: The Making-Of* (2020) follows a vigorous discussion within the German-speaking realm about the influx of refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere that began during the 2015 Refugee Crisis. It also fits within a larger body of documentary plays about the people of Iraq during the various occupations of the oil-rich territory. These include: David Hare’s *Stuff Happens* (2004), George Packer’s *Betrayed* (2008), and Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen’s *Aftermath* (2009). Moving beyond the European and American theater sphere, *Orestes in Mosul* should also be viewed alongside non-Western theater projects engaging Greek tragedy. For example, the *Syria Trojan Woman* project (2013) is an adaptation

of Euripides' *Trojan Women* conceived by Refuge Productions and performed by fifty non-professional female actors at the National Centre for Culture and Arts in Amman, Jordan. It was the subject matter of the documentary film, *Queens of Syria* (2014) (Remoundou-Howley 2017, 20-24). The documentary *We Are Not Princesses* (2015) similarly follows the creation and production of *Antigone of Syria*, an adaptation of Sophocles' play, in Beirut, Lebanon, by Aperta Productions. This production was created through eight-weeks of workshops in refugee camps in Shatila, Sabra, and Bourj el-Barajneh (24-27).

For *Antigone in the Amazons*, pre-dictatorship Brazilian political theater frequently explored agrarian issues. Examples include Vianinha's *Four blocks of Land* (1963) and *The Azeredos and the Benevides* (1963), and Nelson Xavier, Benedito Araújo, Modesto Carone, Hamilton Travanço, and Augusto Boal's *Mutirão em Novo Sol* (1961). Rau's partner, the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), has a longstanding theater tradition. Since the 2000s the organization frequently worked with Augusto Boal and the Theater Center of the Oppressed (Bôas and Canova 2019). In 2007, Schlingensiefel directed a production of Richard Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* [The Flying Dutchman] (2007) in collaboration with the Bayreuth Festival and Festival Amazonas de Opera at Teatro Amazonas in Manaus – the same region Rau filmed in for *Antigone in the Amazon*. Schlingensiefel's massive production featured filmed elements from within the Amazon, lay-actors, and reenactments from films such as Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *120 Days of Sodom* (1975) (Billand 2007; Schlingensiefel.com 2007).

Rau has also tried his hand at opera. A production of *The Flying Dutchman* is planned, though yet to be given a premiere date, with the Deutsche Oper Berlin. He staged Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito* in Geneva (2021), Antwerp (2023), and Vienna (2024). In a second collaboration with Grand Theatre Geneve, Rau directed *Justice* (2024), a new work composed by Hèctor Parra. The opera is about mining conflicts in the DRC and the Swiss mining company Glencore. It follows following the tradition of Elia Rediger and Dorine Mokha's *Hercules from Lubumbashi* (2020), a post-documentary oratorio about exploitative mining practices in the DRC. The *Hercules* oratorio from George Frideric Handel was performed by eleven Congolese and European musicians and a chorus of Congolese miners, with

dramaturgy by Rau's former long-time dramaturg – and the driving force behind *Congo Tribunal* and *New Gospel* – Eva-Marie Bertschy (Group 50:50 n.d.). For *The New Gospel*, Rau and his team were invited by the Italian government to create a project to celebrate Matera – where Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964) and Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) were filmed – becoming a 2019 European Capital of Culture. Rau initially heralded the project as “der erste schwarze Jesus der Filmgeschichte” [the first black Jesus in the history of film], but it was in fact preceded by Valerio Zurlini's *Black Jesus* (1968)¹⁶, *Son of Man* (Mark Dornford-May, 2006; South Africa), and *Color of the Cross* (Jean-Claude La Marre, 2006; USA) (Tagblatt 2019). Additionally, in a surprising synchronicity, within a month of *The New Gospel*'s September 7, 2020, premiere at the Venice International Film Festival, on October 15, Luca Lucchesi's *A Black Jesus* premiered at the UN Association Film Festival.

Returning to localized adaptations of Greek classics: American director Brian Deorries has since 2009 facilitated staged readings of Greek drama with marginalized and traumatized groups, using these ancient stories for communal therapy and ritual reintegration. The company, Theater of War Productions, has presented more than twenty community-based programs tailored for specific audiences to explore local issues (Theater of War n.d.). From 2006 to 2008, German theater-maker Claudia Bosse and her company theatercombinat (est. 1996) created *tragödienproduzenten reviews* [producers of tragedy reviews], adaptations of texts from Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Racine, Seneca, and Elfriede Jelinek for different contexts: cities, locations, institutions, and performers. In 2009, theatercombinat presented another review series of *The Persians*, *Coriolanus*, *Phèdra*, and *Bambiland* that confronted the stagings from 2006-8 and adapted them for a new space and partly new cast (theatercombinat n.d.b). For *The Persians* (2009), Bosse employed a citizen chorus for each of the cities in which it was performed (Geneva, Vienna, and Braunschweig), thus engaging 340 participants (theatercombinat n.d).

Volker Lösch is also well-known for his adaptations of classic theater texts and integration of layactors: *Oresteia* (2003) used a chorus of twenty-eight elderly, unemployed, or retired men and women; *Medea* (2007) included a chorus of sixteen Turkish women, and *Enemy of the People* (2021) adapts Ibsen's 1882 text to reflect the present reality of climate activists and includes a chorus of young climate

activists. Nuran David Calis (artistic director of Landestheater Salzburg since 2025) also rewrites classics to fit modern contexts and contemporary societal conflicts, most famously *Frühlings Erwachen* (*LIVE FAST—DIE YOUNG*) (2007).¹⁷ She-She-Pop connects themes from classic texts with the autobiographical experiences of the actors: Shakespeare's *King Lear* and the company's relationships with their fathers in *Testament* (2010), feminism meets Chekhov in *7 Sisters* (2011), and the sexual identities of the group meets Frank Wedekind's *Frühling Erwachen* [Spring Awakening] in *50 Grades of Shame* (2016).

In recent years, Rau has also won international acclaim for political action projects, frequently employing the trial and tribunal form. These trials and tribunals – *Die Moskauer Prozesse* [The Moscow Trials] (2012), *Die Zürcher Prozesse* [The Zurich Trials] (2012), *Das Kongo Tribunal* [The Congo Tribunal] (2015; film 2017; 2020/21), *General Assembly* (2017), *Die Wiener Prozesse* [The Vienna Trials] (2024), and *Die Wiener Kongresse* [The Vienna Congresses] (2025) – take inspiration from Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre's Russell Tribunal(s). These were various tribunals independent from state or international legal entities that in 1966 began examining war crimes in Vietnam, human rights violations in Latin America, civil liberties in Western Germany, Indigenous peoples' rights, the invasion of Iraq, and the Israeli occupation of Palestine (Manfredi 2018, 76). While the Russell Tribunals are not quite political theater in the sense of Rau's judicial productions, the concept of a people's tribunal is at the core of such pre-enactments of transitional justice that offer collective emotional experience and give voice to those otherwise excluded from legitimized judicial forms and theatrical representation (Nellis 2021; Bahun 2015, 156).

Rau's first foray into the unscripted trial performance – *The Last Days of the Ceausescus* also reenacted a historical trial but was scripted – was with *The Moscow Trials*, a three-day event held at Moscow's Sakharov Center (a museum and cultural center dedicated to the protection of human rights until it was shut down by the Russian government in 2023) between March 1 and 3, 2013. This event was shortly followed by *The Zurich Trials* (May 3-5, 2013) which employed the same format as its predecessor with the notable difference being that rather than a re-trial of an existing case, *Zurich* brought its own accusations against the right-wing Swiss newspaper *Die Weltwoche*.

Based on the *NZZ* article, it is known that as early as 2004 Rau was aware of Rimini Protokoll's early engagement with trial theater. *The Moscow* and *Zurich Trials* as well as the later tribunals, assemblies, and congresses emerged amid a groundswell of judicial productions, many of which drew inspiration from Chantal Mouffe's theory of antagonism (Malzacher 2023, 116). Florian Malzacher in *The Art of Assembly: Political Theatre Today* (2023) connects the historical roots of the trial and tribunal theater form with the Russell Tribunals as well as Bertolt Brecht's *Lehrstück* (learning plays) and the agitpop theater of the early Soviet Union (Malzacher 2023, 119).

The mock trial, or *agitsud* – often spontaneous and improvisational by nature – cemented itself as a genre of theatrical propaganda in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union. Julie Anne Cassiday's dissertation, *The Theater of the World and the Theater of the State: Drama and the Show Trial in Early Soviet Russia* (1995), identifies that at the same time as Evreinov's *Storming of the Winter Palace* – which Rau attempted to reenact as the final event of his *General Assembly* – several mass *agitsudy* were staged against “enemies of Bolshevism.” Such “enemies” might be individuals, groups, or concepts. They might be negative or positive: say, a trial against the former factory owner, a deserter, the Red Army, the working class, the communists, an atheist (Cassiday 1995, 53-55). Mixed into the early Soviet performance landscape are the Stalinist show trials against alleged political opponents as well as artists, the latter of which has been studied extensively by Sandra Frimmel (Frimmel and Traumane 2018) and Sylvia Sasse (Frölicher and Sasse 2015). Both collaborated with Rau on projects and panels. It is no coincidence that Rau's initial proposal for *Moscow Trials* – then under the working title *Der dunkle Kontinent. Komplex Gulag Reenactment & Szenischer Kongress* [The Dark Continent: Gulag Reenactment & Scenic Conference] – was to be a reenactment in the style of *The Last Days* of the original three Moscow Trials and an accompanying conference (IIPM 2011, 7-8). Outside the Soviet Union, on May 13, 1921, French artist André Breton – from whose manifesto Schlingensiefel would later pull inspiration – organized a mock trial of the author Maurice Barrès for “attacking the integrity of the mind” (Chamberlain 2012). Barrès, like BANRO in *Congo Tribunal* or active representatives of the FPÖ in *Vienna Trials*, did not attend his theatrical trial (Petterson 2008, 123-125; Chamberlain 2012).

During the real Moscow Trials, Evreinov, then living in Paris in exile, using newspaper reports, wrote a scripted, anti-Stalinist reenactment of the Moscow Trials: *The Steps of Nemesis: A Dramatic Chronicle in Six Scenes form Party Life in the USSR (1936-1938)* (first performed 2022) (Kurzahls 2022). There is a longstanding interest in the trial format within the documentary theater and even more broadly in theater. Trials are inherently dramatic and have a clear and easily identifiable structure, they are thus an idea setting for conflict. Within the documentary tradition, plays such as Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung. Oratorium in 11 Gesängen* [The Investigation: Oratorio in 11 Cantos] (1965) – which Rau references in the updated title to his four- to seven-hour *Pelicot Trial: A Scenic Oratorio* – used reports of the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials (1963-1965) to construct a five-hour description of Auschwitz through witness accounts. In *Zig-Zag* (2017), Laila Soliman uses historical transcripts from the 1919 trial of Nazlat al-Shobak to find historical parallels between a British attack that resulted in five deaths and twelve rapes and Egypt's recent history: Egyptian Revolution of 2011, gang rapes and virginity tests in Tahrir Square (Schanda 2016). Kfir Lapid-Mashall, who offers a contextualized reading of his own performance practice against Rau's in this edition, performed *The Merchant of Venice: The Trial* in 2019, a restaging of HaBima Theater's 1936 mock trial against Shakespeare, the theater, and the director following a production of Shakespeare's play (Lapid-Mashall n.d.).

A more explicit reference for Rau's documentary films that accompany *The Moscow Trials* and *The Congo Tribunal* is the film *Cleveland versus Wall Street* (2010) by fellow Swiss film-maker Jean-Stephané Bron. In closely related opening and closing shots, Bron uses a drone shot of the Ohio industrial city followed by local resident and activist Barbara Anderson travelling through the city on public transit as a framing device to bring the viewer in and out of his staged trial. Rau uses a drone shot of Moscow and images of himself in transit (subway, moped, walking) as the centering device in *Moscow Trials*, *Congo Tribunal*, and *The New Gospel*¹⁸ (Climenhaga 2023a).

Rau's first unscripted trial was a re-staging of three trials of Russian artists and curators, and the final day of his 2024 *Vienna Trials* was a trial of Milo Rau; namely, was Rau misusing Festwochen subsidies? Malzacher lists a number of show trials about the politics of art: Anton Vidokle and Tirdad Zolghadr's *A Crime Against Art* (2007), Tea Tupajić

and Petra Zanki's *The Curators' Piece (A Trial Against Art)* (2011), and Yan Duyvendak and Roger Bernat's *Please, Continue (Hamlet)* (2014) (119). More recently, German-Norwegian performance duo Julian Blaue and Edy Poppy put themselves on trial in their *Reverse Crime Story* series (2018-2023). In the *Vienna Trials* and *Vienna Congresses* Rau uses certain sessions to interrogate the internalized politics of theater. Numerous theater-makers engage the tribunal and assembly form for political topics removed from art: Polly Higgin's *Eradicate Ecocide* (2011) in the UK Supreme Court; Jonas Staal's first iteration of *New World Summit* (2012); Terike Happonen and Laura Gustafsson's *History of Others: The Trial* (2014); Rimini Protokoll returned to the genre with *World Climate Change Conference* (2015); French philosopher Bruno Latour staged the massive climate assembly *Théâtre des Négociations* (2015). This technique is also employed for longer-term projects like *Tribunal «NSU-Komplex auflösen»* (2017-2022) and its extension *Kein Schlussstrich!* (2021-2025), both of which seek justice for murders committed/ by the National Socialist Underground.

As with Rau's documentaries, his work in the tribunal and assembly form emerged at a specific moment when the genre was gaining popularity within the Western European cultural scene. There are various plausible reasons for its emergence and transformation into what is now a mainstay of political theater. Both the boom in documentary theater and the impact of Schlingensiefel likely played a significant role. Schlingensiefel's death at 49 in 2009 created a void that political artists in the German-speaking realm rushed to fill but never succeeded in doing so.

Simultaneously, this was a time of significant political upheaval that saw the creation of various international and transnational judicial bodies. The late 1990s began an era of international tribunals and commissions made more accessible by new technologies capable of delivering verdicts and images of atrocities across the globe almost instantly. In 1996, the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC) was established in South Africa and the format soon spread across the globe. In some ways these legitimized commissions filled the void addressed by early iterations of the Russell Tribunals. However, the TRC's promise of restorative justice – which was more formalized than those of Russell and Sartre – was frequently accompanied by disillusionment as populations promised justice found themselves with neither reparation nor restitution at the end of long processes.

As early as 2013, Ben Chikha and Action Zoo Humaine created the unscripted series *The Truth Commission*, employing South Africa's TRC model as dramaturgy to engage the topic of Human Zoos in Belgium. The project enjoyed successful performances in theaters and public spaces in Ghent, Cape Town, Antwerp, Brussels, and Mechelen. Action Zoo Humaine rebooted the format in 2023 for *The Truth Commission Netherlands*. The 1990s also saw genocides – now televised – in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the reverberations of which led to ethnic violence in Burundi and the First Congo War. In the aftermath of these events, International Criminal Tribunals for these regions were established by the United Nations. In 2002, the International Criminal Court (ICC) was established, holding its first investigations and trials in the mid-2000s. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda held trials from 1995 to 2015, while the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia dragged on from 1993 to 2017. Amidst this upheaval Theater tribunals offered a space that could be more utopian than real-world counterparts, criticizing these real institutions' inefficiency while recognizing their own insufficiency (as art and only art).

Comparative Lenses – A Post-history

The articles and portfolios included in this special edition of *Documenta* follow two lines of investigation: (1) Milo Rau's theater and theory examined through the lens of the classic performance philosophies; and (2) side-by-side analyses of Rau productions with performances created by other actors. For many authors, Rau's work at NTGent is of particular interest, as this period saw an increased engagement with classic texts: *Orestes in Mosul* (2019), *Antigone in the Amazon* (2023), *Medea's Children* (2024), and *The New Gospel* (2020). The use of classic texts was surprising considering *The Ghent Manifesto*, which explicitly forbade the use and literal adaptation of such texts (Rau and NTGent 2021, 23).

This special edition is opened by none other than Carol Martin, whose *Theatre of the Real* (2012) is a seminal text for the continued study of documentary theater. In "Dead Awaken: Milo Rau and Greek Tragedy", Martin undertakes close readings of *Antigone in the Amazon* (2023) and *Medea's Children* (2024) alongside textual analyses of Sophocles' and Euripides' original texts.

Where Martin finds transformation, the stage imbued with the power to split the violence it portrays between its real-world referent and onstage double, Nina Morais in “Staging Violence: Milo Rau, Theater of War, and Postcolonial Critique” questions the use of violence. Morais grapples with the complex ethical questions that emerge in such productions as *Antigone in the Amazon*, *The Last Days of the Ceausescus* (2009), and *The Congo Tribunal* (2015) when explored through the lens of postcolonial critique and the Theatre of War tradition.

Lindsay Parkhowell breaks down Rau’s recent *Die Rückeroberung der Zukunft. Ein Essay* in “Postdramatic Katharsis and Milo Rau’s *Global Realism*” and, using *The New Gospel* (2020) and *Antigone in the Amazon* (2023), examines the theorists Rau uses to articulate his performance and political theory. In his interrogation of the genre of Global Realism, Parkhowell closes his text by turning to a seminal text in the Theatre of War tradition, *The Trojan Women*. He imagines what Global Realism might look like in a performance of *The Trojan Women* in combination with *Letters to Gaza: By the People, From the Year that Has Been* (2025), a recent volume of reflections on post-October 2023 life from Gazans.

Finally, the series of articles investigating the adaptation, violence, and aesthetics of Rau’s *Antigone* is closed by Telisa Courtney’s comparative analysis “*Antigone in the Amazon* and *šxʷaṁat (home)*: A Critical Comparison of Two Anti-Colonial (?) Plays”. Courtney compares this production with *šxʷaṁat (home)*, a project staged (and Joked) by the Canadian director David Diamond. This comparative study explores how two white, male, star theater-makers working with resistance movements from marginalized and oppressed groups from different cultural contexts. Using World Systems Theory to engage the questions of violence, Global Realism, and visibility introduced by Martin, Morais, and Parkhowell, Courtney, in their side-by-side analysis, interrogates the distance between intention and outcome.

Kehan Zhang in “A Study of Milo Rau’s *La Reprise: Histoire(s) du Théâtre (I)*,” like Martin and Parkhowell, considers the theoretical and philosophical concepts that surround the concept of repetition – and its historical references – at the heart of the production. Zhang interrogates where Rau sits in relation to the ideas on theater,

repetition, and self-presentation (Peter Brook, Søren Kierkegaard, Foucault, and many others) that he evokes in the production.

Tanja Nusser turns her attention to Rau's unscripted trials – specifically *The Zurich Trials*, probably the least celebrated of Rau's judicial enactments. In “unter dem Vorwand eines Prozesses eine ‚Schweiz‘ zusammenzubauen, die in dieser Verdichtung unmöglich ist, die nicht existiert”: Milo Rau's *Die Zürcher Prozesse*,” Nusser reads the performance as a triangulation of trial show, experiment, and propaganda to uncover the political aspirations of the courtroom drama.

Where Nusser identifies a transmedial nature within Rau's trial theater, Cynthia Shin in her comparative reading of *Medea's Children* and Jürgen Kuttner's *The Tutor* explores the use of multilayered mediation in two highly intermedial productions. “Mediated Re-enactment: Screens and Queer Time in Milo Rau's *Medea's Children* and Jürgen Kuttner's *The Tutor*” uses queer temporality – although created by straight men – to reveal how both the two productions use mediation to reconsider tragedies by moving beyond linear time.

Eyck Marcus Wendt returns to transmediation in his analysis of *The Congo Tribunal*, another unscripted judicial staging. In “Procedures of Imagining: The Nuremberg Trials and *Das Kongo Tribunal* (2015),” Wendt compares the visual mechanisms of the televised courtroom employed at the Nuremberg Trials with the dramaturgy of *The Congo Tribunal*, highlighting the political aspirations also pointed to by Nusser as well as the disrupting temporalities at play identified by Shin.

The edition closes with two portfolio pieces by Kfir Lapid-Mashall, who considers his own queer performance piece, *SHOW.TRIAL*, against that of Rau, as discussed by Nusser and Wendt. “Queering Show Trials: The Judge's Body as a Site for the Metamorphosis of Violence” returns to some of the questions around violence first addressed by Martin and Morais, while employing to a more analogue and explicitly queer performance form than Rau. Wrapped up in Lapid-Mashall's practice is the responsibility and vulnerability of the theater-maker in the performance, inscribing judgements on his own body rather than pointing outwards.

This edition closes with a reflection from Kasia Wojcik, a dramaturg, curator, artist, and activist who worked with Rau from 2017 to 2022 on *General Assembly*, *The New Gospel*, and *School of Resistance* (2020-2022). In “The engaged artist? A reflection on entangled practices,” Wojcik weaves a narrative about her work with Milo Rau, one of many teachers she has encountered in her transnational, socially engaged artistic practice. Wojcik’s reflection rounds out this exploration of Rau, looking at him as one part of a massive network of political and socially engaged theater-maker.

At the top of the IIPM’s first website – a rudimentary website of white text and lime green titles against a black background – stands the short text: “the past is unwritten” (IIPM 2009). This same statement adorns the final page of the first dossier published by Rau and IIPM for *The Last Days*, also as white letters against an entirely black page. However, with Rau it is not that the past is unwritten. If anything, Rau has overwritten it. Rau’s theater work explores the possibilities of remediating events from the recent past, isolating the event through the personal, and thus implicitly conjuring associations between past and present. This *Documenta* edition seeks to remediate Rau by inviting de-isolation. It explicitly explores and engagements the links Rau and his work have with productions and movements in the larger performance landscape, as well as within the context of his own performance philosophy and the sources he draws upon. By looking at these complex and multifaceted links, connections, and commonalities, we find something far more interesting than a so-called artistic genius.

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Endnotes

- 1 Since his dismissal, Drlića has been a central feature in the European wing of the *Resistance Now!* tour.
- 2 It is worth mentioning that the landscape of cultural subsidies that Rau primarily works within is at risk of defunding. Since 2024, Berlin's cultural scene has faced brutal funding cuts with proposed cuts of: 110,000,000€ in 2025, 145,000,000€ in 2026, and 142,000,000€ in 2027, with further

possible cuts possible (rbb 24 2025; Connolly 2024).

- 3 This number refers specifically to *first* publications of lectures or collected volumes of texts. For play texts, I count the dossiers published by Rau and IIPM, which includes the script and contextualizing texts selected by Rau and his co-editors, not individual plays.
- 4 Rau's *Widerstand hat keine Form*, *Widerstand ist die Form* m [Resistance has no Form, Resistance is the Form] (May 2025) was recalled on September 12, 2025, because the text, specifically the speech "Die Kunst, viele zu bleiben" from the *Resistance Now!* tour, included a false statement about right-wing Austrian politician (and amateur rapper) Heinz-Christian Strache (ORF 2025, Pizzera & Jaus 2020). The sentence reads: "Was ist aus einer Zeit - unserer - zu lernen, in den ein Angehöriger der größten österreichischen Partei, der FPÖ, ein Mann namens H.C. Strache, morgens das SS-Lied 'Wir schaffen die Siebte Million' singt und nachmittags die Gedenkstätte Yad Vasshem besucht, wo der Toten des Holocaust gedacht wird?" [What is there to learn in a time - our time - in which a member of Austria's biggest party, the Freedom Party of Austria, a man by the name of H.C. Strache, will sing the SS song 'We'll Manage the Seventh Million' in the morning and visit Yad Yasshem, the memorial for the victims of the Holocaust, in the afternoon] (Rau 2025, 100). With this quote, Rau was presumably referring to a report from 2019 (shortly before the Ibiza Affair that ended Strache's career in office), where the politician - the then vice chancellor of Austria - allegedly attended an event where songs adopted by the SS, such as "Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?" [What is the German's Fatherland] and "Wenn alle untreu werden" [If all become unfaithful], were included in the written

- program (Winter 2019). Verbrecher Verlag's correction notice and recall announcement (undersigned by Kristine Listau, Jörg Sundermeier, and Rau) stated that Strache – who since sharing an antisemitic meme on Facebook in 2012 has faced accusations of antisemitism – had never sung “Wir schaffen die Siebte Millionen.” Strache did visit Yad Vasshem in 2016 (Verbrecher Verlag 2025, Spiegel 2012, Die Zeit 2020, Hoare 2016). On September 18, 2025, IIPM's e-newsletter declared the book had been banned because of legal action initiated by Strache. It should be noted the book was not banned but recalled with a new version printed and distributed in October/November 2025 (Augustin 2025). Strache ultimately won his lawsuit against Verbrecher Verlag, resulting in the continued recall of the first edition (already in progress by the announcement of the verdict) and the publisher paying a fine of 1500.00€ alongside legal costs (Die Presse 2025). The speech “Schönheit wird die Welt retten” included in *Widerstand hat kein Form* also resulted in the cancellation of Rau's *Pelicot Trial* on October 27, 2025, from Belgrade's BITEF festival because of its criticism of lithium mining practices in Serbia (Chambers 2025).
- 5 *Der Kick*, which Veiel turned into a film in 2006, features two actors performing monologues composed from transcripts of court proceedings and interviews about the murder of a sixteen-year-old boy by two of his friends in the town of Potzlow in 2002 (Gampert 2005).
 - 6 Rau is frequently credited as IIPM's founder, with the company's website “About IIPM” section reading: “The IIPM – International Institute of Political Murder was founded by director and author Milo Rau in 2007 for the creation and international utilisation of his theatre productions, actions and films” (IIPM n.d.).
 - 7 There is another article to be written about the success of Frank Castorf in creating an institutional identity for the Volksbühne in connection with his artistic identity that it has proven, in the ten years since his departure, impossible for the Volksbühne's ensuing parade of artistic directors to overcome.
 - 8 As Rau points out collective models of leadership (which is distinct from shared leadership models) are not without its challenges and difficulties, see: Keil 2024; Vercauteren 2025.
 - 9 It is difficult to identify precisely when Rau studied under Bourdieu in Paris. A resume from 2007 shows Rau attended the Université Paris IV (Sorbonne) from February to October 1996 (the second semester of French universities runs from January/February to May/June). At this time Bourdieu not associated with the Sorbonne (where he had previously worked from 1960 to 1961). In 1996, Bourdieu was a professor at Collège de France's Centre de Sociologie Européenne (where he was later chair of sociology) and a professor at the graduate only research institution École Pratique des Hautes Études (later renamed Hautes Études en Social Sciences). Annual reports of Bourdieu's courses and seminars for the 1995/1996 and 1996/1997 academic years show him giving seminars in Strasbourg, Fribourg, Lyon, and Paris (although based on the nature of the reports, it is impossible to lay out a concrete timeline for these classes). The reports also show Bourdieu spending the final week of February (roughly 23 to 29 February) 1996 in Oxford and Cambridge, and in Montreal and Berkeley from March 29 to April 8, 1996. On February 22, 1996, Bourdieu – the day after a public debate with Joseph Jurt titled “Le champ littéraire” at Paris's Maison Heinrich Heine – gave a presentation for a research seminar in contemporary philosophy “Les mondes possible” at École normale

- Supérieure and on September 23, 1996, spoke at a seminar on rhetoric and epistemology at Paris's Maison des Sciences de l'Homme on "Relations between the positions of 'scholar' and 'public intellectual'" (Collège de France 1995-1996, Collège de France 1996-1997).
- 10 Since 2006, *Zürcher Studierendenzzeitung*. The online archives of the periodical can be found at: <https://www.e-periodica.ch/digbib/volumes?UID=zus-001>.
 - 11 The short biographies of Rau included in program booklets or at the end of published collections frequently include the detail that "[Rau] spent years reporting from conflict areas such as Northern Iraq and Syria" (Malzacher 2022). These reports are not included in the online archive for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, zeitungsarchiv.nzz.ch/archive, or e-newspaperarchives.ch, which houses a larger archive of newspaper articles published in Switzerland.
 - 12 An in-depth breakdown of the publication history of Rau's first manifesto is provided by Eyck Marcus Wendt in his forthcoming article "Manifestoing – A Milo Rau Guide," *ephemer* 1:1, On Theater Manifestos to be published in June 2026; and in Thomas Traupmann's "Milo Raus Manifeste. Inszenierungen einer Gattung" [Milo Rau's Manifestos: Staging an Literary Form]. A special thanks to Wendt for his help and advice in writing this introductory article.
 - 13 Renamed Sort/Hvid in 2014
 - 14 There are several significant problems with this project that have yet to be fully examined in critical responses to *The Pelicot Trial*. Beyond reducing the complexity of the situation, which is almost inevitable in documentary theater because the director is making a selection of what is encountered by the audience, (1) by focusing on the trial, the selection of readings focuses largely on the perpetrators of the crime and their justifications and defenses of their actions rather than the larger significance of the crime itself (a noted difference from many of Rau's self-staged trials which highlights victim perspectives). (2) The reading frequently participates in a problematic himpathy, imploring the audience to have empathy for the perpetrators during a time while the real Pelicot trial is ongoing: a verdict was only announced in mid-December 2024 with individual cases still (as of October 2025) still being appealed. (3) The reading frequently – despite short excerpts mentioning it – still evokes the trope of "the perfect victim" and the addition of sentences to the effect of "this would be different if Gisèle Pelicot were not white, trans, or a sex worker", without doing the work of applying a critique to the justice system while repeating "Saint Gisèle" and "Gisèle the icon". (4) In an interview with Wolfgang Höbel and Britta Sandberg at the German outlet *Der Spiegel*, Rau stated: "ich dachte immer, das Patriarchat sei überwunden" [I always thought that the patriarchy had been overcome]. In this interview Rau goes on to identify one of the causes of the rape as pornography (an excuse often brought out to explain violence against women), which is also reflected in the staged reading (Höbel and Sandberg 2025). Rau gives so many interviews it is easy to lose sight of what has been said, but it is important to hold him accountable for statements like this one. What is missing from the discussion of *Pelicot Trial*, which continues to tour Europe and has a planned performance in the United States, is that Rau does not appear to understand feminism or how patriarchy and rape culture is perpetuated in different parts of society, including the cultural scene. Another recent Rau production *Die Seherin* [The Seer] (2025) featured an extended monologue about a gang rape perpetrated against

the female protagonist (played by Swiss actor Ursina Lardi) by a mob on Egypt's infamous Tahrir Square (presumably based on the case of Lara Logan). It is also worth mentioning in passing that the initial credits on the Festwochen website from March to the performance of June 17, 2025, as archived by *Web Archive*, for *Pelicot Trial* – then under the title *Der Prozess Pelicot. Ein Tribut an Gisèle Pelicot* [The Pelicot Trial: A Tribute to Gisèle Pelicot] – list “Recherche und Dramaturgie Servane Dècle[,] Recherche und Regie Milo Rau” [Research and dramaturgy Servane Dècle[,] research and direction Milo Rau] and the original program from Festwochen lists Dècle's name followed by Rau's on the cover (Wiener Festwochen 2025b, Wiener Festwochen 2025c). At some point between July 17 and October 25, 2025, the name of the (now past) production change to *Der Prozess Pelicot. Ein szenisches Oratorium*[,] *Milo Rau & Servane Dècle* [The Trial Pelicot: A scenic oratorio Milo Rau & Servane Dècle] (a reference to Peter Weiss's *The Investigation*) and the credits changing to “Recherche, Dramaturgie und Regie Milo Rau & Servane Dècle” (Wiener Festwochen 2025a). A seemingly innocuous, but not insignificant change, also applied to the performance programs at Avignon, Lisbon, Warsaw, and Stokholm (Wiener Festwochen 2025d).

- 15 Lei further explains: “Elitism and vast capitalism are crucial to this form: international festivals, master directors, traditional artists with the stature of ‘living national treasures,’ academic sponsorship, and intellectual discourse all contribute to the hegemony of this type of intercultural theatre” (Lei 2011, 571). For a deeper analysis of Rau and his conflict zones within this tradition, see: Climenhaga 2023b

- 16 A combination of final days of Patrice Lumumba and the Jesus story, *Black Jesus* could be said to be more a Jesus story than a direct portrayal of Jesus.
- 17 Calis is far from the only Turkish-German playwright/director from Germany's postmigrant theater movement to undertake rewriting of classic texts, for more information see: Stewart 2021.
- 18 The filming of *The New Gospel* included an assembly held in Rome, but this element of the lived performance event was not included in the film.