EDITORIAL

After a virally enforced stasis, history’s momentum toward the migration and displacement of people, ideas, and cultural practices has once again quickened. Even as refugees and migrants are once more being driven across the globe by war, human rights abuses, socioeconomic issues, and climate changes, live arts audiences, too, flood back into theaters and outdoor/site specific performance events to witness the artistic and aesthetic developments resulting from the influx of the ideas and questions even the most destitute of these refuge-seekers weightlessly carry with them. This rich intermingling and fluctuating co-presence of culturally diverse artistic and aesthetic concepts and practices, however, all too often collides with identitarian notions of cultural heritage as a criterion that, not unlike the equally elusive idea of race, defines clear boundaries between—and articulates one’s belonging to—social entities (communities, classes, regions, nations, or even continents).

When such notions drive conversations and debates around communitarian identities in liberal societies, underpin disputes on who can speak about what and whom, and motivate campaigns that question hegemonial orderings of the world and want to create cultural breathing spaces for diasporic or previously oppressed communities, they will seem beneficial enough. But the exact same identitarian notions will unfortunately also fuel unfathomable violence, such as in Russia’s current invasion of Ukraine. Born from the unwillingness of Russia’s leading elite as well as wide swathes of its population to accept and respect cultural, political, and social difference and diversity as well as the transculturally entwined evolution of knowledges and societies, this imperialist war, particularly in its early modernist gratuitous brutality, serves as a bleak reminder of the destructive evil that sleeps in identitarian notions of society—until someone recklessly decides to wake it up.

In this context, environmental activist and Ukrainian cultural scholar Adrian Iurii M. Ivakhiv sets out the terms for a non-imperialist idea of decolonialization, one that would apply to “every place in the world.” Western academics have acquired habits of studying and discussing colonialism
and decolonization that usually ignore centuries of Russian imperialism and colonialism. They therefore usually do not see the post-1990 evolutions of Eastern European and Central Asian societies as the processes of decolonization that they are, as Ivakhiv exposits in the full essay from which this excerpt was drawn. What if we understood Ukraine’s struggle, too, as a post-colonial trauma, one in which a former colonial power comes back after one generation to reclaim with military force what they still believe is theirs? In another response to Russian imperialism in light of the current Russian invasion, Ukrainian artist Alevtina Kakhidze offers her sardonic drawing “The Degree of Fault of Every Citizen of the Russian Federation.” She caricatures these citizens who, if you look closely, include, among others, artists, a dog, a cat, the gas, a mother, and the Russian culture. In other words, everyone and everything.

In this report by Can Dündar, the former editor-in-chief of Cumhuriyet, one of the largest newspapers in Turkey, who now is forced to live in exile, there emerges another instance of cultural destruction in the making. In May 2022, President Erdoğan, in his desire to “create a religious generation,” started to shut down and cancel live music festivals and concerts in his country, declaring them beacons of immorality, even threats to “public safety.” In a way, Dündar’s contribution somewhat foreshadows the next issue of TURBA in which—under the title “Speaking Curation to Power”—we want to give a platform to the voices of live arts curators and artist who ply their art in contexts of oppression.

Like Ukraine, many post-empire countries live with split or hybrid cultural legacies even after the actual oppressors have left. These different heritages often coalesce or mix with other contemporary cultural streams, creating complex political and cultural layerings—with sometimes contentious politics. Thirty years ago, Gerardo Mosquera had already decried the hegemonic division of the cultural world into cultures that curate and cultures that are curated upon. In 2010, prolific theater director Rabih Mroué had written a short text about the complex aesthetic innocence of Lebanese artists who are picked up by curators on regular “reconnaissance” trips to Beirut to perform in Europe or North America. These artists may assume that they are chosen for the quality of their work, but more often than not they may just be assigned the role of token artists in a curator’s diversity agenda. In our issue, Mroué revisits this text in an interview with Marta Keil. While noting that such situations may still occur, he also observes that there is an increased insistence on inviting collectives who make their curatorial process transparent. While a definite improvement on the previous exploitative practice, these collective processes pose new challenges if they remain isolated prestigious events and are not embedded in constant, equitable cultural exchanges.

Last summer provided the art world with a spectacular failure of such a process. Israeli religious scholar Elad Lapidot offers us an incisive account of the documenta fifteen scandal, which centered around a banner hung in public space in Kassel by the Indonesian Taring Padi (People’s Justice) collect-
This “scandalous image of the Nazi-Jew” appeared on a banner used in political theater performances in the 1960s and prompted several months of acrimonious debates in the German cultural scene. Unfolding the different perspectives and sensibilities toward the global role of the Jewish state, he chronicles how this controversy undercut the documenta team’s intentions to decolonize this edition by consigning the curation to the Indonesian ruan-grupa artist collective—and highlights how Global North cultural scenes still retain the right to define what they deem to be legitimate utterances even while opening up their spaces to curators from colonial contexts.

Iranian-Canadian composer and architect Roozbeh Tabandeh reports on less turbulent, but nevertheless revealing, clashes of sensibilities in the sonic arts. In examining the workshop “Soundings: Assemblies of Listenings and Voices across the Souths” last August in Berlin, Tabandeh draws us into the complexities of musical migrations and the (possibly futile) desire to seek “authenticity” in the face of what he calls “the floating qualities of music-making in our era”—as musical forms and practices migrate, intertwine, and embody complex sonic memories and desires that oscillate between local and eurological traditions and aesthetics. For Berlin electronic musician Andi Teichmann, such oscillations manifest themselves clearly when he “organizes occasions for” (i.e., curates) exchanges of ideas between different music scenes and cultural traditions in his nomadic artistic projects. The sonic remains irreconcilable if it is not complemented by what he calls the technique of “social booking,” which affords ample space for both social and artistic experimentation. In his essay, Teichmann reflects on several trans-traditional music projects and concert series he co-curated with his brother Hannes, and unfolds the meaning, politics, and impact of bringing together musicians from a wide diversity of musical languages in workshops and informal curated performances, where, as he puts it, “the social and the musical meet.”

This seems to equally be a matter of concern within diasporic communities. As artists and curators continually create and work on trans-cultural and trans-traditional forms and practices, they cannot avoid the more social than aesthetic question how these new complexities of cultural expression might become as deeply meaningful for audiences as traditional models of art in established cultural contexts. One way to understand this might be to analyze musical projects not only from their aesthetical outcomes but also via their social genesis. Charulatha Mani, a South Indian Karnatik singer who migrated to Brisbane, Australia, does precisely this in her two texts about a concert project with singers from various traditions. One text details the conceptual framing of this project in the larger context of migratory and postcolonial thinking, while the other, more literary text, recalls the conversations, deliberations, and social connections that ground the framing in a particular social reality in which aesthetics are multilayered and familial and artistic demands overlap.

The European “Sounds Now” network of new music festivals wanted to know how curators living in diasporic communities reconcile the places they
live in with the cultural roots of their countries of origin. To this end, it has initiated the Curating Diversity Courses, with two sessions recently completed in Greece and Finland. Researchers Monika Zyla and Iuliia Lahchuk address the notion of dis/placement in their study of various hybrid “entry points” into music and sound arts curation for twenty-six of the courses’ young diasporic participants. The initial analysis of their interviews yields complex and even contradictory results, suggesting multiple futures for independent music curation, at least in the European context. These multiple futures also manifest themselves in educational contexts. The politics of cultural identities, post-colonialism, and racism have transformed pedagogical programs in every area of study. For decades now, they have determined the agendas of multiple symposia and publications—not the least in the burgeoning field of curatorial studies in performing arts/live arts/performance—since the inception in 2011 of the seminal Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance at Wesleyan University in the United States. In 2021, one of TURBA editors, Sandeep Bhagwati, was invited to a day-long workshop with students in Sigrid Gareis’s graduate program in Curation in the Performing Arts at the Universität of Salzburg in Austria. He devised a self-questionnaire that challenges students and curators to think about their own positionality in curating live arts events in the context of migrating identities and trans-traditional art making.

Do the issues raised in this questionnaire such as cultural rights, de-colonization, identity, appropriation, equity, and representation in institutions and discourse jeopardize prospects for cultural survivance? Two sets of conversations from three continents endeavor to examine current and historical curation in the light of decolonization. They both tackle thorny questions around racism, the “white gaze” and Black curation, and ask who they are curating/caring for.

In the Re/Visiting section, we revisit a conversation between Black scholars Seika Boye and Thomas F. DeFrantz that took place in Montréal in 2017 at the third of their ongoing symposium series “Configurations in Motion: Performance Curation and Communities of Colour.” Together with Jane Gabriels, they begin to critically unpack the problematic question “what might curation feel like for people of color.” They ask each other why it is important to engage with our histories, they speculate on who we are not reaching as we curate, and describe how curation can be a form of validation. In the second Global North-South conversation, curator/educators Sigrid Gareis from Berlin and Jay Pather from Capetown engage in an intercontinental dialogue that hovers around subjects such as the potentials of curating cultural exchanges by way of performance works and ideas, the various imbalances in curating live arts, questions of authorship in collective work, how framing and power differentials manifest themselves through structural racism as well as the lingering remnants of coloniality in dance.

In a category of its own, an unexpected submission arrived from a collective of Portuguese archeologists—Pedro da Silva, Inês Moreira, and Beatrix
Duarte—whose text introduced the editors to the vibrant Art/Archeology movement. Even as they curate live arts events within the archeological site of a proto-historical village, their alliance with “contemporary art formats and gestures” proposes new interpretive narratives of past civilizations in the present, radical resignifications of artifacts, and so an intriguing response to the notion of survivances.

TURBA always encourages book reviewers to filter the perspective of the publications they are perusing through their own critical readings, which in this issue concerns two major anthologies. Spanish musicologist Miguel Ángel Marin thus burrowed his way through the English edition of Martin Tröndle’s massive German anthology *Classical Concert Studies: A Companion to Contemporary Research and Performance*. It contains no fewer than thirty-six contributions, including a section focused on “concert programming and the innovation of formats,” which should be of particular interest to “the concert curator.” While most contributions mainly engage with the crucial-yet-circumscribed German classical music scene, Marin nevertheless concludes that the breadth, contemporaneity, and impact of this anthology has the potential to catapult the emerging field of concert studies into the heart of the global cultural and musicological debate. The anthology *Curating in Context: Political and Performative Imaginaries*, edited by Biljana Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski and Slavcho Dimitrov, arose out of a collective venture between Tanzfabrik in Germany, Lokomotiva Skopje in North Macedonia, along with Stockholm University of the Arts and the University of Zagreb. Our reviewer, performance curator, choreographer, and university lecturer Sarah-Louise Spies, comes to the conclusion that the tome is an “insightful and timely” collection that speaks to the practice of performance curation through the lens of socio-political and economic contexts.

This third issue of TURBA encompasses nineteen contributions from twenty-four contributors living on five continents. Our global awareness, presence, and readership is expanding, as TURBA finds its way into libraries, theaters, music venues, and the hands of curators in ever more corners of the (art) world, and thus continues to cultivate a collegial network of enthusiastic readers and writers. More than ever, the scope, quality, and geographic as well as cultural diversity of the contributions we receive (far more than we can print) shows us that the question of how and why curators in the live arts manage to reconcile and connect their local audiences and agendas with those of the nearer and farther world around them appears to be of increasing relevance. We are grateful for any feedback, advice, and, most of all, for lucid and engaging texts that afford us understandings of practices and situations in the live arts that we did not know about before.

Sandeep Bhagwati and Dena Davida