Call for Papers: *Theory and Criticism Focus Group—ATHE 2022 Conference*

**Rehearsing the Possible: Practicing Reparative Creativity**

Detroit, MI | July 28–July 31, 2022

Please send questions to Theory and Criticism Conference Planner: Abby Schroering (abby.schroering@gmail.com)

**Submission Deadline:** Monday, 1 November 2021

The Theory and Criticism Focus Group will accept individual 250-word position paper abstracts for the Tending the Garden Roundtable Series. Submissions should include:

1) Abstract (250 words or less)
2) Title
3) Contact information (name, institutional affiliation, email address, and phone number)
4) Bio of 50 words or less

**Tending the Garden—An Interactive Roundtable Event**

*Progress is a forward march, drawing other kinds of time into its rhythms. Without that driving beat, we might notice other temporal patterns. Each living thing remakes the world through seasonal pulses of growth, lifetime reproductive patterns, and geographies of expansion. Within a given species, too, there are multiple time-making projects, as organisms enlist each other and coordinate in making landscapes. [...] The curiosity I advocate follows such multiple temporalities, revitalizing description and imagination. This is not a simple empiricism, in which the world invents its own categories. Instead, agnostic about where we are going, we might look for what has been ignored because it never fit the timeline of progress.¹*

In response to the 2022 ATHE conference theme, “Rehearsing the Possible: Practicing Reparative Creativity,” the Theory and Criticism Focus Group will focus our annual roundtable series on explorations of “gardening” as scholarly, creative, and pedagogical practice—both metaphorically and literally. For the “Tending the Garden” roundtable series, we welcome a wide range of contributions from practitioners, educators, and scholars.

This roundtable series will explore gardening as a cyclical, seasonal practice of regeneration and reciprocity. To plant and tend a garden is a radical act of faith that assumes a future in which interspecies communities will flourish and actively create that future; it is also a continual encounter with the past through memories of prior seasons, intergenerational knowledge, and material encounters with soils, saved seeds, and compost. If theater and performance—and theory and criticism—is a garden, what does it mean to tend it? How do we believe in and create a future of mutual flourishing? (As Robin Wall Kimmerer reminds us, “all flourishing is mutual” (20).)² How to compost old ideas, frameworks, and materials into a generative bed out of which something new might grow? How to regard the practice not as a means to a fruitful harvest, but

as an ever-evolving process of growth, change, and care? Following Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s provocations above, how to resist the timeline of progress in favor of alternative worlding and time-making projects, human and non?

The Theory and Criticism Focus Group seeks position papers from theatre artists, educators, scholars, activists, philosophers, and critics interested in examining our 2022 Roundtable Series theme, “Tending the Garden.”

The roundtables eschew formal paper presentations in favor of short position papers and provocations designed to encourage interactive critical conversations among panelists and audience members. Building on our previous roundtable series, we strive to include a diverse range of participants from graduate students and emerging scholars to professional critics, artists, educators, and senior scholars.

Position papers can take the form of a short essay, a manifesto, an outreach exercise, a critical review, a theoretical musing, a research report, a creative project, an interview, or an embodied performance practice. Suggested topics include, but are not limited to:

● How do actors, directors, designers, dramaturgs, and teachers cultivate a future through engagement with the past? What pasts do we consciously or unconsciously reinforce, reify, or ignore? To what ends?
● How does imagining the field of theater and performance as a garden to be tended change our usual patterns, modes, and ways of doing work? What would flourishing look like?
● What must be weeded, composted, broken down, re-tooled, or re-combined to contribute to the flourishing of theater and performance theory and criticism?
● What are the daily, seasonal, annual “chores” of the field? What must be constantly done and redone in order to maintain the cycle?
● What does it mean to “get your hands dirty” in this field? Where is the productive messiness?
● What are the seasons of rest, growth, and harvest in theater and performance?
● What is the theoretical equivalent of monocultural, industrial-scale agriculture? Of organic/regenerative farming? Of the community garden?
● What is already growing in Detroit, and who is tending it? How might we engage, guided by an ethic of genuine reciprocity?
● What does it mean to truly recognize land?
● How does attention to the nonhuman change perceptions of space and time?
● What would it look like to value process over product, cyclicity over linearity? How would such a shift impact narrative, theory, pedagogy?
● How does environmental racism shape worldings both locally in Detroit and more expansively across other geographies? What is the role of theater and performance in that system of oppression?

T&C will inform participants of their acceptance approximately one week after submission and the Theory and Criticism Focus Group will oversee the submission of the Roundtable Series panels through ATHE’s online proposal process. Send your roundtable abstracts to the Theory and Criticism Focus Group conference planner Abby Schroering, abby.schroering@gmail.com.