

LIVING ON THE EDGE: CHAOS IN THEATRE, FILM AND PERFORMANCE

III. Theatre and Drama Studies Conference



5-7 December 2025 & Online via ZOOM

**Deadline For Paper Proposals:
30 September 2025 / Email: theatredramanetwork@gmail.com**



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CALL FOR PAPERS

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The concept of chaos has been central to dramatic writing and theatrical performances for centuries, as the stage has consistently served as a site for dissent and political critique. Theatres have abounded with stories of ontological crises, human struggles, catastrophes, political crises, tales of revolution, transformation and chaos as well as existential angst, identity confusion and ontological reasoning. From the antiquity and the religious counsels of medieval morality plays to the posthuman concerns of contemporary and eco-theatres, dramatic and recently Postdramatic plays have persistently explored the instabilities and subversions of meaning, form, identity, and sociocultural systems and practices.

Chaos, which encompasses meanings such as disorder, ambiguity, turmoil, and upheaval, is accepted in most cultures as the beginning of existence. Plato defines this existence with the phrase “*ordo ab chao*”. N. Katherine Hayles notes that “the cultural connotations associated with the word ‘chaos’ can be discerned in its etymology. The word derives from a Greek verb-stem, KHA, meaning “to yawn, to gape”; from this comes the meaning given by the Oxford English Dictionary, “a gaping void, yawning gulf, chasm, or abyss” (1991, p. 2). Chaos is associated with disorder. In ancient times, Dionysian rituals were accessible to the general public, allowing participants to have a direct experience. However, as these rituals evolved into theatre, a more structured form of mimetic art developed. Dionysian rituals also fostered an environment of chaos, challenging classifications such as master versus slave, citizen versus barbarian, and god versus human. William W. Demastes clarifies that “chaos was perceived as an essential and integral contributor to life and creative processes” (2005, p. 1).

Tragedies – and Aristotle’s *Poetics* in particular – have long shaped the creative processes of playwrights, providing a structural foundation rooted in unity, linearity, and order. Classical tragedies such as *Oedipus the King* and *Medea* exemplify this, as they not only adhere to Aristotelian principles but also expose and unravel the foundations of societal order, plunging their worlds into turmoil. However, the unity and conventional forms of drama have also been deconstructed, which can be described as a chaos of dramaturgy. *Hamlet* and *Othello* embody ontological dilemma and human fallibility, which are coupled with political references, individual liabilities and social chaos.

King Lear and *Macbeth* present the inevitability of chaos as a hallmark of political turmoil and existential crises. Comparably, Romantic and Realist drama portrayed human confusion and social disturbances in various contexts on stage. Henrik Ibsen, widely regarded as the founder of modern theatre, challenges the long-standing corrupted systems, rules, and orders in plays such as *An Enemy of the People* and *A Doll's House*. These works are credited with provoking social upheaval through their unflinching portrayal of individual agency, ethical conflict, and the hypocrisies embedded within societal structures. Across Modernist and Postmodernist theatres, texts and performances have significantly served as innovative spaces of experimentation, chaos, crisis, resurgence and (de)construction. From the estranging strategies of Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre to the shocking immediacy of In-Yer-Face drama, from the sensory assault of postdramatic performance to the interactive landscapes of digital theatre, the stage has persistently reinvented itself by turning chaos/crisis into its structural core.

In the twenty-first century, drama and performance have remained a vital medium, through which artists confront the ruptures of war, the legacies of decolonisation, the upheavals of migration, the pressures of capitalism, the weight of gendered violence, the reach of surveillance, human crises in conflicts and the looming shadow of ecological collapse. The power of theatre lies in its live, unpredictable encounter – it does not merely display chaos, it *becomes* chaos. Contemporary stage practices embrace fragmentation, disruption, and multiplicity, echoing a world of shifting identities and unstable truths. Thus, theatre reflects and reshapes the fluid identities, shifting narratives, and theoretical uncertainties of a world in perpetual transformation. Amid escalating ecological emergencies, political divisions, widespread disinformation, abuse of truth, authoritarian resurgence and global unrest, chaos has become a defining element of our time.

In this context, this interdisciplinary online conference sets out to examine how theatre, drama, and film express and are shaped by chaos in its many forms – philosophical, environmental, social, and aesthetic. From their earliest origins to contemporary forms, theatrical and cinematic works have long embraced and dealt with crisis and upheaval, offering both reflection and resistance. We invite contributions from academics, artists, postgraduate researchers, and practitioners that engage with the complex intersections of chaos and crisis across dramatic writing, performance, and film. Proposals may address any genre, period, or cultural context. Interdisciplinary approaches – particularly those bridging theatre and performance with adaptation studies, philosophy, feminist and postcolonial theory, ecocriticism, film studies, or the digital/post/trans humanities – are especially encouraged.

Resources

N. Katherine Hayles (Ed.). (1991). *Chaos and Order Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science*. The University of Chicago Press.

William W. Demastes (2005). *Theatre of Chaos: Beyond Absurdism, into Orderly Disorder*. Cambridge University Press.

The list below summarises some suggested topics and areas of study for prospective papers; however, this is a non-exhaustive list, and new suggestions are welcome.

- Antiquity, tragedy and comedy: Performance in times of social and political upheaval.
- Shakespeare's drama featuring chaos, political collapse, religious narratives, individual dissent, as well as apocalyptic and tragic scenarios.
- Feminist dramaturgies, gendered violence, embodiment, performativity and fluidity in times of upheaval. Intersectional narratives of collapse and survival, re-imagining identities beyond binary logics in the chaotic world.
- Queer chaos, queer landscapes, and the politics of anti-normativity.
- Authoritarianism, genocide, migration, forced displacement, asylum seeking, exile, trauma and memory.
- Political theatre and performance in times of turmoil, economic collapse, and the return of radical politics.
- Precarious lives: Class, inequality, and the politics of social crisis.
- Nationalism, populism, protest, revolution in political theatre and performance art, as well as activist aesthetics and stage performances in conflict zones or under oppressive regimes.
- Postcolonial dislocation, cultural hybridity, ritual conflict, language crisis, indigenous dramaturgy of resistance.
- Ontological instability, language collapse, temporality, cyclical dramaturgy in Theatre of the Absurd.
- Climate crisis, environmental enactment, (non)human agency, planetary dramaturgy, eco-theatre and the Anthropocene
- Postdramatic Non-linearity, fragmentation, intermedia, sensory excess, anti-narrativity.
- Theatre and AI, digital theatres and performances: surveillance capitalism, posthuman subjectivities and identities
- Embodied resilience, community theatre in times of disaster, protest performance, theatre in pandemics.

- Chaotic temporalities, non-linearity and disrupted chronologies, memory and historical rupture in dramaturgical, performance and film studies.

Keynote Speakers

TO BE ANNOUNCED SOON. We are currently finalising a panel of internationally recognised scholars and practitioners working on chaos and crisis in drama, theatre, performance and film studies from diverse theoretical, geopolitical and cultural perspectives.

Submission Guidelines

Please submit an abstract of (around) 300 words and a brief bio (150 words) with contact details to **theatredramanetwork@gmail.com** by **30 September 2025**.

We welcome proposals for 20-minute academic papers, Panel discussions (3–4 participants), Practice-based or performance-as-research presentations, Video essays or multimedia presentations (pre-recorded or live) or Postgraduate/ECR lightning talks.

We aim to publish selected papers in a special issue of a peer-reviewed, internationally-indexed (SCOPUS, etc.) journal following the event.

Organising Committee

This conference is organised by **THEATRE AND DRAMA NETWORK** in collaboration with scholars of theatre and performance studies.

Contact

For inquiries or additional information, please contact: **theatredramanetwork@gmail.com**