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MIGRATORY AESTHETICS AND POSTMIGRANT PERFORMANCE

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Already in the early 1990s, sociologist Stephen Castles and political scientist Mark J. Miller (2009) proposed that we live in ‘the age of migration’. This perception soon became widely accepted among scholars across the world. Recent global developments have infused a new sense of urgency into Castles’ and Miller’s observation. Work-related migration and forced migration, especially as a result of ongoing wars, civil conflicts and ecological crises have probably never been more extensive than today. As a result, mass migration and its consequences have become political issues of great urgency.

In some of the most recent studies of migration, migratory movement is no longer perceived as an abnormality or exception but rather as an integral part of society and as a naturalised part of everyday life that has influenced – and will continue to influence – most societies around the globe. In recent years, a new term has been introduced to capture this change of perception: postmigration.

The starting point of this lecture is the debates on postmigration and culture. They primarily concern thinking and cultural production in Germany and Denmark – but they have a much wider global resonance, because they are part of the texture of response in Europe to the global migration scenario.

In this lecture, I will talk about the impact of migration and postmigration on contemporary art, theatre and performance, and how issues related to migration and postcolonial critique surface in works of art and theatre productions. In other words, I will not focus on the performing arts as an isolated field but take an interdisciplinary approach. The ways in which issues and histories of migration are addressed in performance have many similarities with the way migration is reflected on in other art forms, so it makes good sense to cross the boundaries between the arts – like many practitioners do themselves.

Because I take an interdisciplinary approach, my understanding of ‘performance’ and my use of the term must be a broad and flexible one: I will use the term to refer to specific works of performance art, to the performance of actors, and I will also consider the ‘performative’, understood as the generative and participatory aspect of the spectator’s interaction with the work.

Recent years have seen a significant rise in the numbers of migrants and refugees. In 2017, the United Nations estimated that there are now about 258 million transnational migrants in the world – an increase of almost 50% since 2000. The number of international migrants includes 26 million refugees and asylum seekers, or about 10% of the total (UN 2017). Due to this increasing mobility, existing challenges related to security, rights and integration will only grow and intensify in the future. Notably, receiving countries will have to deal with lasting changes and face significant political, social and cultural challenges.

Recent flows of refugees and the ongoing flows of migration have pushed questions of integration, cultural encounters and cultural values, as well as questions of citizenship and the sharing of democratic values, to the top of the political agenda within receiving countries. The humanities – including studies in culture and the arts – can contribute significant insights, because the struggles over culture, identity, representation and (imagined) community at the core of these challenges are precisely their critical and conceptual priorities. And importantly, these struggles are often engaged and responded to with poignancy in the arts.

It has become increasingly evident that those who study culture and the arts also need to engage with the fact that ‘togetherness in difference’ has become a common state of affairs (Ang 2001, 17), because this condition has also affected artistic practices and thus also works of art. To engage with cultural encounters and differences as they present themselves in works of art, we need new frameworks for understanding art. I think that postmigrant and postcolonial perspectives can provide us with some useful frameworks, so in what follows, I will look at contemporary performance art and theatre from these two perspectives.

My talk has five parts. First, I will consider the concept of postmigration and its historical origin in so-called ‘postmigrant theatre’. Second, I will introduce an analytical concept that is useful in studies of art and performance: ‘migratory aesthetics’. Third, I will briefly introduce my approach to postcolonial and decolonial perspectives, their similarities and differences, because these are crucial to the artist that I discuss. Fourth, I will consider a work by the Copenhagen-based multimedia artist Jeannette Ehlers. Taking her performance *Whip It Good* from 2013 as my example, I wish to demonstrate how postmigrant and postcolonial perspectives can interact in a productive way in a performance such as this one. Finally, I will contextualise Ehlers’s performance by briefly considering her first theatre production, *Into the Dark* from 2017.

The origin of the term ‘postmigrant’ in postmigrant theatre

In this lecture, it is not my purpose to focus directly on practices of migration, i.e. the very act of migration and the actual movements of people, nor on the ways in which these movements are represented and reflected on in the arts. Rather, I focus on the social and cultural processes and struggles that come *after* migration.

In contemporary globalised societies there is a constant coming and going of people, which means that the process of cultural mixing is an ongoing one. In continental Europe, the realisation that European societies have been profoundly changed by postcolonial and labour migration into Europe after the Second World War is a recent one, and in some countries only a nascent one. Countless politicians have sought to win votes by being tough on immigration and by promising to stem the tide of refugees. At the same time, the reputation of multicultural policies has been severely tainted.

Historically, there have been two different approaches to multicultural policies. One is the assimilationist approach, that sees multicultural society as a ‘melting pot’. The melting pot is a metaphor for a heterogeneous society becoming more homogeneous, as different types of people blend into one, typically according to a supposed shared ‘national identity’. The other approach sees cultural diversity and difference as positive things. It is a relativist approach that perceives society as a ‘salad bowl’ where different cultures coexist but remain distinct in some aspects. However, this kind of multiculturalism that seeks to maintain the distinctiveness of minority ethnic communities tends to place a particular burden on cultural producers: their works are often expected to express a specific national, ethnic or religious *group* identity. As a result, stereotyped ethnic labels are often assigned to cultural producers and their work.

The postmigrant approach offers ways of sidestepping some of these challenges of multiculturalism and ethnic labelling. In German social sciences and cultural studies, the concept of *das Postmigrantisches* – or, in English, ‘the postmigratory’ or ‘postmigration’ – has been introduced as an explanatory framework that captures the conflictual dynamics of globalised societies such as European societies. They differ from multicultural ‘immigrant nations’ such as the US, Canada and Australia in that immigration is not central to their national self-perceptions but in many cases perceived as a threat to national identity and culture. Consequently, even descendants of migrants can be perceived as racialised ‘Others’, as those who do not truly belong to the imagined community of the nation.

German social scientist Naika Foroutan has called European societies ‘postmigrant societies’ to indicate that they are in the process of realising that ‘the nation’ is a culturally diverse and not a homogeneous community, and that established values, hierarchies and national self-perceptions need to be re-negotiated because of the profound changes that the pluralisation of society has brought about. Accordingly, Foroutan (2015) aptly describes postmigrant society as a ‘society of negotiation’.

Postmigration is thus a new concept and a new discourse that seeks to shift the perspective on migration, culture and society. Interestingly, the critical use of the term originated in artistic circles in Berlin, notably in theatre. Shermin Langhoff is often credited as the person who first introduced the term around 2004–2006. She also provided the idea with an institutional framework: in 2008, Langhoff co-founded and became the artistic director of the Ballhaus Naunynstraße theatre – a small independent theatre in the multicultural area of Kreuzberg in Berlin.

Crazy Blood – a postmigrant theatre production

I would like to use the Ballhaus Naunynstraße theatre's most successful production, *Verrücktes Blut* – in English, *Crazy Blood* – to illustrate some key ideas associated with postmigration. This play, by Nurkan Erpulat and Jens Hillje, premiered in 2011. It effectively subverts the stereotyped identities often ascribed to ethnic minorities, particularly to racialised and Islamified bodies, both in society at large and in the world of theatre and film. *Crazy Blood* has generally been received by critics and audiences as engaging debates on integration and intercultural encounters in an intelligent and humorous way (Schramm 2015, 95-98).¹

The play is set in a contemporary German classroom. It portrays a teacher's failed attempt to teach Friedrich Schiller's play *The Robbers* from 1781 to a class of teenagers, the majority of whom have a so-called migration background. The class is chaotic, the students are disinterested and spend most of their time using their smart phones, and they swear at each other and at their teacher. Suddenly a loaded gun appears from one of the students' bags. Instead of confiscating it, the desperate teacher Sonia uses the gun to hold the class hostage for a lesson on Schiller and the idea of aesthetic education. She forces the students to rehearse *The Robbers* – a play that addresses questions of honour, family and individuality and relevant to the lives of these teenagers. Gun in hand, she finally achieves her goal: to make her students perform Schiller's play and, with the help of a coercive kind of 'aesthetic education', to contribute to developing their attitudes and personalities.

The irony of the plot is difficult to overlook, as the play subverts the stereotypes of disobedient youngsters from minority ethnic groups by exaggerating them. Yet, the fact that Sonia enforces this 'education' by taking the students hostage arguably calls into question Sonia's own way of practicing the 'enlightened' values that she – and the national school system – seeks to convey to students.

As postmigration researcher and literary scholar Moritz Schramm has pointed out, the teacher's use of a gun to coerce students into participation reveals the underlying structures of power and coercion in education and integration. *Crazy Blood* thus suggests that education and integration are not processes of free participation, but social dynamics based on power relations and oppression (Schramm 2015, 98).

The play also puts front and centre the question of identity, particularly the interrelations between authenticity and theatrical performance in the formation of identity. In the first scene, for example, the actors arrive on stage in their ordinary clothes and begin to put on their teenage costumes – jeans, baseball-caps, sneakers. The boundary between authentic and performed identity is thus effectively blurred as they undergo the symbolic transformation into disobedient teenagers, i.e. the roles they perform, right in front of the audience and not before they go on stage.

Postmigrant theatre

The Ballhaus Naunynstraße was the first theatre to actively position itself as ‘postmigrant’. Since its founding in 2008, the theatre has been instrumental in bringing the idea of postmigration into the public realm (Stewart 2017, 56).² It is important to stress that the term was introduced as a self-chosen descriptor. Lizzie Stewart, a scholar of theatre and migration studies, has noted that the success of the Ballhaus theatre’s productions and self-labelling strategy has made the term ‘postmigrant’ emerge as one of the potential alternatives to the sociological categorisation of ‘people with a migration background’.

In Germany, theatre productions by practitioners of colour have usually been categorised as so-called ‘migrant theatre’, an exclusionary term that implies that productions by directors and actors of migrant descent are not considered a part of ‘German’ theatre, but as something external and alien to German culture (Petersen and Schramm 2017, 4-5). As an act of defiance and a gesture of cultural critique, Langhoff and her circle began to label their work ‘postmigrant theatre’ to claim the recognition they deserved and stress that their work is also part of German culture. In 2013, after some successful years at Ballhaus Naunynstraße, Langhoff moved to the leadership of the established, state-funded Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin.³ Since then, the Gorki Theatre has been voted ‘Theatre of the Year’ in Germany twice (2014, 2016), a gesture of public recognition that testifies to the innovative and empowering effect of postmigrant theatre.

As the artistic director of the Ballhaus theatre, Langhoff appears to have used the term as an act of defiant self-labelling, but also, as Stewart (2017, 57) has pointed out, as a means of establishing a strong profile for her theatre in the competitive Berlin theatre market. Langhoff used the word postmigrant as what she described as a ‘term for doing battle with’ (quoted in: Stewart 2017, 57). This suggests that the term is more important for the work it can do than as a descriptor for a particular genre of theatre or category of people. The ‘work’ that the term postmigrant theatre can do is twofold. Firstly, it has questioned existing knowledge frameworks: it has spurred critical reflection on prejudice and discrimination against migrants. Secondly, it has shifted these frameworks: it has inspired new perspectives and stories, particularly stories told by practitioners who are racialised or labelled ‘migrants’. Langhoff herself has stressed this asset of the Ballhaus theatre’s productions:

For us postmigrant means that we critically question the production and reception of stories about migration and about migrants which have been available up to now and that we view and produce these stories anew, inviting a new reception. (Quoted in: Stewart 2017, 57)

Although the artist Jeannette Ehlers has not explicitly linked her work to the idea of postmigration, but rather, to the postcolonial and the decolonial, I contend that Langhoff’s words also capture what

is at stake in Ehlers's artistic practice as one who seeks to critically examine the historical archive and create new ways of telling stories that invite a new reception.

The German discourse on postmigration

Before I turn to Ehlers's practice, I wish to proffer some further theoretical remarks. One of the assets of the concept of postmigration is the performative work that can do, i.e. its ability to initiate a *process* of questioning and reinvention. This is evident from its academic trajectory. The idea gathered meaning and was elaborated theoretically around 2010 as it moved from a theatre practice informed by theory into the theoretical discussions of the social sciences and the humanities.

The term postmigrant had been used for a long time in medicine and the social sciences as a relatively neutral descriptor for 'descendants of migrants'. Langhoff and her team at the Ballhaus theatre injected the term with a new political meaning. They deliberately used it to provoke the dominant public and media discourses on migration and to question the common perception of the migrant as 'the Other', that is to say: the migrant perceived as a 'foreign body' that is not recognised as belonging to the imagined community of the nation.

Today, the term postmigration is also associated with an analytical perspective on a social condition characterised by mobility and diversity. As an analytical perspective, postmigration engages with the struggles, societal transformations and processes of identifications taking place *after* migration – while recognising that migration is obviously still going on.

One of the most vociferously contested arenas in postmigrant societies concerns 'identity'. Identity is also a classic subject in performance, theatre and the visual arts. A postmigrant perspective invites us to think about identity and belonging in dynamic and complex ways. It inspires us to move away from old notions of national and individual identity as uniform and static, as well as simplistic ideas of belonging as an attachment to one culture and one nation only. Instead, we must adopt an understanding of identity and belonging as open-ended processes of shifting identifications. We also need, the postmigrant perspective insists, to pay attention to the complex or 'intersectional' nature of identification, i.e. to develop an awareness of how multiple forms of identification and discrimination are interlinked and bear down on individuals in different ways.

Migratory aesthetics

I would like to stress the relative newness of the postmigrant perspective within the arts: presently, there is no clearly defined toolbox for postmigrant cultural analysis, so we have to devise and test concepts and approaches we use as we go along. In this regard, the postmigrant perspective differs from the by now well-established postcolonial perspective. Therefore, I would like to introduce a concept from art theory that I think can help us develop and clarify a postmigrant perspective in performance studies: migratory aesthetics.

Cultural theorist and video artist Mieke Bal introduced the concept of migratory aesthetics around 2005 (Bal 2007; Bal and Hernández-Navarro 2007; Bal 2015). Since then, the term has spread in scholarly discourses on the arts. Migratory aesthetics offers an alternative to categories such as ‘migrant art’ and ‘migrant theatre’, which are problematic because they suggest that the producers of the works are migrants and thus belong to a category of citizens and cultural producers who are often not considered full members of society. Terms such as migrant art and migrant theatre tend to situate the creators of the works as outsiders. In other words, such terms have exclusionary effects. Conversely, the term migratory aesthetics refers to the aesthetic character of *the work itself* and the aesthetic *experience* of an audience. It thus provides a better frame for understanding the aesthetic and political dimensions of art and culture created by individuals with a migrant background, or by individuals exploring the topic of migration without having a migrant background themselves.

The term thus helps us focus our discussions on the interrelations between artworks and migration. Bal herself has described the concept of migratory aesthetics as a ground for analytical experimentation that can open up possible relations between the artwork and ‘the migratory’. In Bal’s understanding ‘the migratory’ is ‘a quality of the world in which mobility is no longer the exception but on its way to becoming the standard’ (2007, 23; see also: Petersen 2017, 56-59). This means that it is on its way to becoming normal, something many people have experienced in one way or another.

As the discourse on migratory aesthetics is not so much concerned with the artist, but rather with the work, the idea of migratory aesthetics as a feature of art resonates with the idea of the postmigratory as a feature of society rather than a label attributed to people of migrant descent.

The postcolonial and the decolonial

Although this is not the place to consider in depth postcolonial theory and its impact on the arts, I wish to make a brief remark on the relationship between postcolonial and decolonial approaches, as they are both important to Jeannette Ehlers’s work.

Postcolonial thinking is sometimes seen as a tradition of critique aimed at Western colonialism, and its accompanying institutions and ideas. It emerged out of the writings of thinkers concerned with imperialist race-relations and mindsets, such as Franz Fanon and Edward Said, and theorists associated with subaltern studies, such as Gayatri Spivak. Postcolonial approaches have played an important part in devising a language to describe difference and hybridisation in and between cultures. Even so, these approaches have tended to remain fixated on notions of difference, dissidence, oppression and marginality, and this fixation has had the adverse effect of perpetuating a Western tradition of othering (Ong 1999, 34). Nevertheless, postcolonialism’s strong political focus on difference and on the silencing of histories of oppression and racism makes its points of view very relevant to Ehlers’s work, as I shall show.

Like postcolonial theory, decolonial theory emphasises the interconnection between modernity and coloniality. Coloniality constitutes what decolonial theorist Walter D. Mignolo has described as the ‘the darker side of Western modernity’ (2011, 2-3). In his view, coloniality and modernity are two sides of the same coin, but, according to Mignolo, Western thinkers have prioritised one side, modernity. Mignolo thus considers Western thinking misleading, and he states that racialised and previously colonised people need to emancipate themselves mentally. Compared to postcolonial theory, decolonial theory is thus more concerned with the decolonisation of the mind (Mignolo 2007, 450, 459).

Another important difference between postcolonial and decolonial approaches is that decolonial thinking puts a strong emphasis on art and aesthetics as a means of emancipation, and decolonial discourse in art and theory has significant purchase in dialogues between artists, curators and intellectuals from Latin America, the Caribbean and the diasporic communities in the US, Europe and beyond (Mignolo and Vázquez July 2013).

Contrary to many postcolonial scholars, Mignolo also insists on the need to ‘delink’ from Western ways of thinking. This method of ‘delinking’ can perhaps be seen as an academic and artistic parallel to civil disobedience where large groups of people refuse to obey certain laws or perform other forms of peaceful, but effective and transformative protest.

The artistic practice of Jeannette Ehlers

Jeannette Ehlers is one of many contemporary artists who take a postcolonial or decolonial approach to formerly overlooked or suppressed histories, which have never been acknowledged as parts of ‘national’ history. Ehlers examines the archives of Danish colonialism with a view to increasing public recognition of the country’s involvement in colonialism, especially Denmark’s part in the transatlantic slave trade and chattel slavery in what was formerly known as the colony of the Danish West Indies, and today as the US Virgin Islands.

It is well known that the Kingdom of Denmark–Norway was engaged in the transatlantic slave trade. In the context of this lecture, the trade in enslaved people can perhaps best be considered one of the most gruesome forms of forced migration, and the colonial plantation system in the Caribbean was built on it.

In recent years, Ehlers has created works in which she seeks to strike a balance between critical interrogation and affective evocation of the history of enslaved Africans. Having a Danish mother and a father who was born in Trinidad, she is herself a distant descendant of enslaved Africans. It is Ehlers’s identification with the Caribbean that has fostered her engagement in the history of slavery. Moreover, Ehlers’s approach is informed by an anti-racist awareness of the Western history of racism that can be traced back to colonialism and all the way up to the present.

Despite her strong political and antiracist engagement, Ehlers's works are always open to different interpretations. There is also a distinct participatory – and thus performative – dimension to her works, as she often engages her audiences in different forms of active participation.

Jeannette Ehlers's performance Whip It Good

Ehlers first performed *Whip It Good* at the Ballhaus Naunynstraße theatre – the breeding ground of postmigrant theatre. She was commissioned to create *Whip It Good* by Art Labour Archives and Ballhaus Naunynstraße, as an artistic contribution to the event 'BE.BOP: Decolonizing the "Cold" War' in 2013. BE.BOP is an acronym for Black Europe Body Politics. It is a recurring decolonial curatorial initiative by the founder of the art agency Art Labour Archives, Alanna Lockward, a Berlin-based curator, writer and scholar. Walter Mignolo has been an advisor and a regular participant since BE.BOP's inception in 2012, so here there is a direct connection between Ehlers and Mignolo as a protagonist of decolonial thinking.

Since 2013, the impact of *Whip It Good* has been heightened by Ehlers's re-enactment of the performance in, among other places, the US, the UK and Denmark. Moreover, her audiences have included people of colour as well as white people, such as myself. In what follows, I will focus on the first performance at the Ballhaus theatre.

In her solo performance, Ehlers re-enacted one of the slavery era's most brutal forms of punishment – flogging – as a symbolic act. What was punished was not an enslaved person, but a white canvas. Associations with white skin and painting as a Western hegemonic art form came readily to mind. In the performance, Ehlers alternated between flogging the white canvas and rubbing the whip with black charcoal, so that as more black strokes were imprinted on the pristine canvas from the whip, the darker it became.

At the same time, Ehlers re-enacted a tradition that was, and still is, practiced across the continent of Africa: that of using the skin as a black canvas to be decorated with body paint on important social occasions. Inspired by West African rituals, Ehlers employed white paint to symbolise cleansing. The white also linked her body with the canvas while simultaneously stressing its differences. The body paint was white, but it was a paler shade of white than that of the canvas. As body painting, it was also infused with different connotations: ritual action, embodiment and temporariness, as opposed to the abstraction and permanence of the 'disembodied' canvas.

The postcolonial and the postmigrant perspectives intersect, but they also diverge in some respects. Therefore, I regard them as complementary, and I find it very useful to combine them. Ehlers's work is usually read as a de- and postcolonial practice. A de- and postcolonial perspective is arguably very apt for framing the social and historical critique articulated by Ehlers. However, seeing her work through the lens of postmigration means that her work can be appreciated at the same time for the way in which it contributes to the development of new frames for understanding

contemporary societies. In other words, a postmigrant perspective can help us comprehend why a performance like *Whip It Good* should not be seen merely as a critique of a colonial past but also as a creative reimagination of history that inspires us to change things in the present.

The performance also introduced another way of ‘doing’ critical art. This was partly due to the way Ehlers engaged her audience. The performance at the Ballhaus theatre included the participation of a live audience. The performance developed into a collective ritual of transformation or, better, a rite of passage that could ideally lead from a state of oblivion to a new state of historical awareness and spiritual liberation. After a thorough flogging of the canvas, Ehlers ended her performance by inviting the audience to help her ‘finish the work’, handing the whip to those who volunteered. This was the transgressive and transformative moment when the character of the work changed from a performance piece to a participatory event that engaged the audience as co-actors in a performative critique of history. The piece thus enacted a ‘working through’ the past and engendered solidarity and empathy between artist and audience members.

Many spectators – of different colours and backgrounds – have been deeply moved by *Whip It Good*. For some, it can be argued that the work awakened a new consciousness. The question is *how*? To answer this question, I would like to invoke memory studies scholar Marianne Hirsch’s notion of postmemory. As opposed to history, the notion of memory denotes ‘embodied experience in the process of transmission’ (Hirsch 2008, 111). Following Hirsch, I use the term postmemory in the broad sense as referring to the ‘guardianship’ of a traumatic or genocidal past with which some people have what Hirsch describes as ‘a living connection’ (104).

Can postmemories of slavery and colonialism be transformed into action and decolonial emancipation? I am sure that Ehlers’s answer would be ‘Yes!’ Seen from a postmigrant perspective, the rite of passage that *Whip It Good* enacted draws the contours of a new pluralist and connective paradigm of cultural identity and memory, precisely because it draws on postmemory. According to Hirsch, postmemory’s connection to the past is not mediated by recall, but it can be mediated by cultural representations, for example by representations of the slavery era in film where flogging scenes often figure prominently, for instance *12 Years A Slave* (2013), by British artist and filmmaker Steve McQueen. In other words, postmemory is fuelled by imaginative investment in and projection into the past. Thus, it is not identical to memory. It is disconnected from actual, personal memories, i.e. it is ‘post’. At the same time, it can approximate memory in its affective force, meaning that it can have a similar emotional impact to one’s own memories (Hirsch 2008, 107, 109).⁴ By letting her performance end in a participatory ritual, Ehlers enhanced the emotional and decolonising impact of the performance.

The migratory aesthetics of Jeannette Ehlers’s Into the Dark

By way of a conclusion, I would like to offer some final remarks on Ehlers’s first theatre production, *Into the Dark*, in order to shed more light on migratory aesthetics and how these can be

used to connect a local context to the global to show that such transnational entanglements are at the core of local postmigrant culture.

Into the Dark premiered in 2017 at a small theatre in Copenhagen named FÅR302. Although it was performed on a theatre stage, it was not a conventional play based on a narrative, but rather a multimedia performance with black performers only – and shown to a primarily white Copenhagen audience. *Into the Dark* took as its starting point a scene from the nineteenth-century play *The Mulatto* (1840) by the Danish author Hans Christian Andersen. In this scene, one of the protagonists, Paléme, who is a maroon (a fugitive black slave), is trying to convince his acquaintance Horatio to participate in a revolt against the plantocracy of colonial Martinique. Notably, this scene had been displaced in time and space, from nineteenth-century Martinique to contemporary New Orleans. And from a live performance on a theatre stage to a video-recorded performance in public urban space. This scene thus connected colonial past and postcolonial present. It also connected the site in Copenhagen to other sites of black diaspora culture, in the Caribbean and the US. Moving between and interconnecting times and places in such a complex way is typical of migratory aesthetics. As such, *Into the Dark* highlights important aspects of studying the migratory and the postmigratory.

Firstly, the piece underscores the need for interdisciplinary approaches and the futility of isolating one artform from others: *Into the Dark* consisted of more than a poetic, fragmented series of performances and soundscapes, as it also included dance, poetry and video works. Secondly, its numerous references to black cultures highlighted an important point: art emerging from postmigrant conditions is at one and the same time engaged in local or national struggles – in this case a critique of Danish colonialism and racism – and transculturally connected to a wider world. In *Into the Dark*, this was evident from the many references to African diaspora aesthetics and histories which mixed with references to Danish colonialism and Danish racism. Thirdly, *Into the Dark* demonstrated that, more than anything else, Ehlers is engaging post- and decolonial critique. Yet, at the same time, the migratory aesthetics of her production emphasised transcultural connectivity, thus prying open the very notion of culture as a contained entity.

If we compare *Into the Dark* with postmigrant theatre, for example the Ballhaus theatre's production *Crazy Blood*, two things become clear: firstly, that a postmigrant lens can be applied to other forms of artistic expression than those explicitly labelled 'postmigrant'. Secondly, that these forms may differ considerably.

By moving from *Into the Dark* back to *Crazy Blood* we have come full circle, back to where I began, with postmigrant theatre and the question of what contemporary theatre, performance and art can bring to the debate on migration, culture and society: they have the potential not only to create critical counter-images, but also to envision ways out, not in the sense that the arts can solve social problems and political crises, but in the sense that they can be a means of exploring new ways of seeing and acting in the social and political world.

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Notes

¹ The following account draws on Schramm 2015 and Stewart 2017.

² The following account draws on Stewart 2017, pp. 56-59.

³ For a more elaborate account, see: (Petersen, Schramm, and Wiegand forthcoming).

⁴ A note on the dichotomy between history and memory. Hirsch ties (post)memory to the aesthetic and institutional transmission of the spectrum of ‘embodied knowledge absent from the historical archive (or perhaps merely neglected by traditional historians). For better or worse, these supplemental genres and institutions have been grouped under the umbrella term “memory” (Hirsch 2008, 105). Hirsch’s distinction between memory and history implies that, although Ehlers draws on the writings of history, her own artistic practice should rather be characterised as memory work, or better, postmemory work than historical knowledge production, as she seeks to adopt, reactivate and reembody distant social, archival and cultural memories by ‘reinvesting them with resonant individual ... forms of mediation and aesthetic expression’ (Hirsch 2008, 111).