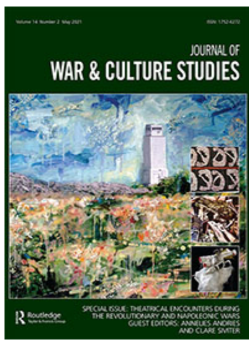

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Theatrical Encounters During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars

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'We are at war', the French president, Emmanuel Macron repeated six times in a martial tone during a speech on 16 March 2020, calling for a 'general mobilization' (Pietralunga & Lemarié, 2020). In the face of the Covid-19 crisis, Macron and other political leaders resorted to wartime rhetoric to justify their governments' drastic emergency measures. This was a problematic move, since this was not a war in any conventional sense of the word; citizens were not called to leave their homes and families to go fight for their country but they were ordered to stay home, to avoid gatherings and travel in order to minimize physical interaction. Using a rhetoric of 'total war' has become a popular stratagem of world leaders during the pandemic when seeking their populations' compliance with the imposed measures. After all, an important characteristic of the concept 'total war' is that it entails 'the complete mobilization of a society's resources to achieve the absolute destruction of an enemy' (Bell, 2007: 7). With a highly contagious virus as the enemy, it meant that theatres and concert venues around the world were to close their doors and cancel all performances for the foreseeable future.

Many artists started to advocate for the arts, framing their efforts in reference to this crisis: theatre, opera, and music were championed especially for their supposed potential to offer comfort and distraction. For instance, Joyce DiDonato and Piotr Beczała organized a house concert performing selections from the cancelled Metropolitan Opera production of Jules Massenet's *Werther* (1887). The plot of Goethe's 1774 novel, on which this opera was based, had first caused furore on stages across Europe around 1800 during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars (Cristea, 1971). Over two centuries later, the plot was rehearsed against a new background of crisis, with DiDonato stating that they performed 'at this moment of huge uncertainty' with 'the intention of remembering that there is beauty in the world, there is

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love' and to show that 'the power of music can bring us together'. The performance was live-streamed on her Facebook-page and later uploaded onto YouTube, earning over 300,000 views in the next two weeks (DiDonato, 2020).

This live-streamed salon concert was not a lone example of how the performance industry adapted to the crisis: countless theatres and artists temporarily made performances freely available online, while individuals offered readings and music on social media, by telephone, or through open windows. New works were created and old ones modified to fit the restricted performance possibilities or to include reflections – comedic or serious – on the situation at hand. The 'total war' against Covid-19 reshaped our engagement with theatre whether from the perspectives of audiences, artists, governments, or others. In this special issue, we go back to the Revolutionary and Napoleonic conflicts (1792-1815) – these are not only traditional wars but some of the first to have been dubbed a 'total war' (Bell, 2007) – to explore in what ways this 'wartime' (Favret, 2010) and its rhetoric became a predominant framework for theatrical encounters in the 1790s and 1800s.

After an overview of the historical period and of current scholarship on theatre in this period, the introduction to this special issue has two central aims. Firstly, it offers a methodological underpinning for what we have come to call 'wartime theatrical encounter' within the context of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, as a concept adaptable to other periods of conflict or crisis. Secondly, building on this concept, it teases out central themes in the five articles and their individual case studies of (sometimes unexpected) theatrical encounters that this special issue brings together.

The articles themselves emphasize the plurality of how these wars impacted theatre around the world, offering perspectives beyond the traditional focus on specific capitals or French cultural imperialism. They cover cities, regions, and polities at the heart of the conflicts, the literal 'theatres of war', such as the German lands, Italian states, and the Holy Roman Empire, as well as areas where these wars were experienced from a distance, such as Portsmouth and Rio de Janeiro. In doing so, the articles build on the recent scholarly interest in how war's impact stretches beyond the geographical and temporal boundaries of a specific conflict (Goodman, 2010; Favret, 2010; Williams, 2019). Focusing on how war was experienced from afar, literary scholar Mary Favret proposed the notion of 'wartime' to discuss the expanded period during which, in her case, the Napoleonic conflicts shaped British mindsets as expressed in literature and fine art. Favret also highlights how the rhetorical form given to a war determines its legacy; those that are conveyed as emergencies, as profound socio-political and cultural crises, tend to have a longer-lasting wartime and continue being invoked in other contexts that require drastic measures and governmental interference.

In this issue, we follow in Favret's footsteps but focus specifically on wartime's impact on the performative medium of theatre – a medium that because of its realization through repeated re-presentation is susceptible to the influence of a performance's particular wartime context. The articles also adopt a larger geographical

purview to explore instances of socio-cultural and political specificity in theatre's responses to a 'wartime'. To do so, we have conceptualized theatre as a medium that offers sites of encounter, nodes in networks comprised of agents as diverse as (non-exhaustively) people, works institutions, ideologies, and traditions. In studying this selection of theatrical encounters, the special issue elucidates the diverse *material* as well as *immaterial* ways that wartime affected late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century theatrical cultures found at the centres as well as peripheries of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. And in the epilogue, the resonances of this wartime are shown to reach as far as the early twenty-first century.

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars

It is safe to say that war has considerable repercussions on mobility networks and thus modes and possibilities of encounter. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars in particular have recently received much scholarly attention for the unprecedented number of individuals and regions they mobilized, leading historian David A. Bell to endow them with the debate-provoking epithet 'the first total war' (2007). Before progressing to the concept of 'wartime theatrical encounter', it is worth a quick overview of their progression. Even though the French Revolution of 1789 started as a political revolt within France, with the centuries-old absolute monarchy forced to transition to a constitutional model, the conflict was engineered quickly to spill over France's borders. The Holy Roman Emperor, brother to the French queen, Marie Antoinette (1755-1793), formed an alliance with other European monarchies and prominent French émigrés to protect Louis XVI (1754-1793). This led France's government in 1792 to declare war, to abolish the monarchy, and to inaugurate the Republic.

The first series of conflicts, commonly known as the Revolutionary Wars, lasted until 1802. In the rhetoric of the day, the French Republic needed to be protected against despotic monarchs and to spread republicanism with the help of its soldiers (many of whom had been conscripted since 1793) in order to liberate other oppressed peoples in Europe. France annexed some of its conquered lands, creating new *départements* in present-day Belgium and Germany, and a series of 'sister republics' sprung up in the Italian states. In the process of attempting to convert the populations of these regions to the republican cause, culture was crucial as it helped 'civilize' them in French eyes.

Europe was not the only theatre of war: France faced the Haitian Revolution in its extremely profitable colony, Saint-Domingue, and it led a campaign in Egypt and Syria against the British and the Ottoman Empire. The latter campaign was headed by Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), who in 1799 staged a coup against the French government and became France's First Consul. Under his auspices, the first period of war ended on the continent with the treaty of Lunéville (1801) and with Britain through the treaty of Amiens (1802). Yet, this peace was short-lived; in 1803, Napoleon's political ambitions led to another long decade of

conflict, the Napoleonic wars, which reached from the Iberian Peninsula to Russia and lasted until the battle at Waterloo in 1815. Since Napoleon had proclaimed himself Emperor of the French in 1804, imperialism, not republicanism, was the order of the day in this second series of conflicts. Still, as the French tried to impose their modes of governance such as its legal code, so France continued its policies of cultural imperialism and the use of culture to 'civilize' the conquered populations.

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars drastically altered the mobility of many individuals, exposing men and women to new cultures whilst also allowing them to reproduce central tenets of their own culture within a foreign setting. Thousands of people emigrated from France, fleeing threats of imprisonment or death by guillotine – a fate that befell many intellectuals, aristocrats, clerics, and others who did not comply with the fluctuating governmental ideologies. Across Europe people deserted their homes to take shelter from the wars' violence, or had their properties destroyed by passing troupes, forcing them to start a new life. Prisoners of war were carted across Europe. State borders and the relationship between states were also regularly revised, affecting the circulation of people, whether in the business of trade or entertainment. As Hilary Footitt argues, albeit in her case for World War II, war can create a transnational, even 'translational' moment precisely because it is a moment of flux (Footitt, 2016). Whilst this mobility was new for some, others had been far from stationary for years: like merchants, theatrical artists often led an itinerant life. Even if an artist was mainly based at one theatre, they would regularly travel to give (often lucrative) performances elsewhere, and many troupes spent their lives moving from place to place. With the ideological stakes of the war, the ability for these itinerant artists to become even greater vehicles of cultural imperialism was evident.

War itself also generated mass movements. The statistics of the armies of this period give an idea of the sheer level of military mobility: throughout the Napoleonic wars 3 million French were under arms against allied forces at least 2.5 million strong (France, 2011: 351; Riehn, 1991: 50; and Chandler & Beckett, 1994: 132). War thus created a world of opportunities to travel, to encounter different cultures, and to rise up the social ladder. Notable examples include Napoleon himself, born in Corsica to a minor noble family in the year the island came under French rule; it was his success in the Revolutionary army that allowed him to rise to the fore, a rise that would have been impossible in Old Regime France. The Revolutionary army also offered unparalleled opportunity to French citizens of mixed race, as shown by the meteoric rise of Thomas-Alexandre Dumas (1762-1806), father of the author and playwright Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870) (Reiss, 2012).

These opportunities for mobility were not just open to male soldiers: women also served in the wars (Cardoza, 2010); sutlers, for instance, often the wives of regimental soldiers, sold food and alcohol; armies of all stripes required engineers, medical staff, logistics corps, and people to be in charge of communications; artists were also another common presence on campaign; Napoleon for one took scholars on

campaign with him to classify what they found (notably 160 to Egypt). One such 'scholar' was Guillaume-André Villoteau (1759-1839). He lost his positions as priest and singer at the cathedral of Notre Dame after the suppression of Catholicism in 1792 and decided to join the chorus of the Paris Opéra quickly climbing up to the position of chorus master. After a colleague there had declined Napoleon's invitation, he joined the research team of the Egyptian campaign and became a pioneering – if prejudiced – ethnographer of Arab music. Villoteau was but one among many who suddenly found themselves engaging in unexpected encounters fabricated by the condition of this wartime.

Wartime theatrical encounters

The military movements of the period from 1792 to 1815 have roused the interest of historians and biographers for over two centuries; yet, it is only since the Revolution's bicentenary in 1989 that scholars have started to examine their impact on Europe's theatrical stages in greater depth. To date, this research has largely focused either on theatre in a particular city or nation (due in part to disciplinary and linguistic boundaries), or the circulation of a particular national tradition. Taking the case of French theatre as an example, Rahul Markovits (2014), has studied French theatre at the European courts in the eighteenth century, concluding it to be a form of propaganda continued after the Revolution; Alexei Evstratov has detailed the presence of French theatre at the court of Catherine the Great (1729-1796) in Russia (2016); and the edited volume by Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, Philippe Bourdin, and Charlotta Wolff (2018) on the circulation of theatre in Europe from 1700 to 1815 focuses predominantly on case studies of French theatre abroad. The handful of existing studies on the circulation of French opera in the late eighteenth century has largely focused on a few works or a composer (see, for instance, Vendrix, 1992; Altenburg et al., 2015). And while some of these works have given pride of place to the Revolution and its ideological consequences, the same attention has not been bestowed on the era's military conflicts. In contrast, this issue puts the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars centre stage as an omnipresent and consequential context to studying theatrical encounters – and how these encounters affected traditions and repertoires – in the decades straddling 1800.

To study theatre from this new perspective, we also propose a new theoretical emphasis on 'encounter' that builds on previous research into theatrical and wartime mobility. A dominant theoretical model in existing studies of French theatre circulation is 'cultural transfer'. This model, as developed by the Franco-German research team led by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner in the 1980s, gives prominence to the role of networks in the movement of cultural artefacts, and notably the potential for the latter's transformation via their reception and interpretation by different individuals and social groups (Espagne & Werner,

1985). In the decades since Espagne and Werner's work, the study of cultural transfer and networks has taken off in Theatre and Music Studies too.

The notion of cultural transfer, however, has not been so wholeheartedly adopted by all theatre scholars. When considering intercultural theatrical interactions, a number of scholars of both Eastern and Western theatre have decided to frame their studies via 'theatrical exchange' (such as Cheng-Yuan Huang, 2009; Weiss, Schnauder, & Fuchs, 2015; Du, 2016). In all three of these works, theatrical exchange is more complicated than basic definitions of cultural exchange (loosely defined as 'the reciprocal exchange of symbols, artifacts, rituals, genres, and/or technologies between cultures with roughly equal levels of power' (Rogers, 2006: 477). The most elaborate theoretical development that advocates the use of 'cultural exchange' is given by Rudolf Weiss, Ludwig Schnauder, and Dieter Fuchs' introduction, which shuns the notion of 'cultural transfer' because 'theatre-related cultural transfer […] appears to defy mono-directionality' (2015: 9). By opting for the term 'exchange' and circulation instead of transfer, the authors maintain that they can thus embrace 'a multi-lateral or circular vantage point' (2015: 9), adopting not only the view of the elite culture-producing institution, but that of heterogenous cultural producers and consumers.

Whilst this is a welcome contribution, the ideas of 'exchange' and 'circulation' are still too totalizing: the definition of 'exchange' predicates '[t]he action, or an act, of reciprocal giving and receiving' whilst 'circulation' predisposes '[t]he movement of any thing [*sic*] in a 'round', not strictly circular, but such that it returns again into itself after making a general circuit of the intermediate points' or '[t]he transmission or passage of anything (e.g. money, news) from hand to hand, or from person to person' (Anon, 2020). In reality, the brush between different theatrical traditions or cultures may have been more fleeting, more uneven, and more uncomfortable than the terms 'exchange' and 'circulation' allow for.

In recent years, scholars in Theatre Studies have turned to other methodologies and terminologies, such as Actor-Network Theory, Network Theory of Cultural Evolution, and historical network analysis, for more multidirectional concepts of exchange. Joachim Küpper's *The Cultural Net: Early Modern Drama as a Paradigm* (2018) and Christopher Balme's (2019) study of 'the globalization of theatre' from 1870 to 1930 are prominent recent examples. These works bring much needed insight into the study of networks but their models still rely on the terms of 'transfer' (Küpper, 2018) and 'exchange' (Balme, 2019).

By choosing 'encounter' as the issue's main concept, we aim to emphasize the ideas of meeting and experience, which are less central to notions of 'transfer' and 'exchange' (Anon, 2020). We are certainly not the first to espouse the term 'encounter': in the volume edited by Joseph Clarke and John Horn, *Militarized Cultural Encounter in the Long Nineteenth Century* (2018), historians research the dynamics of confrontations between Europe and its peripheries during military campaigns, and how encounters induced moments of self-reflection (whether on

the personal, institutional or governmental level) and changed approaches to the 'other' (or 'Other').

That said, we do wish to expand upon the methodology surrounding the notion of theatrical encounter during times of war. In our schema, 'encounter' methodologically intersects with the concepts of 'intercrossing' (or *histoire croisée*) and 'hubs'. The former was developed by Werner in collaboration with Bénédicte Zimmerman to address, amongst other concerns, the directionality suggested with 'cultural transfer'. Werner and Zimmerman's 'intercrossing' is a method to study objects, people or ideas as they cross with others. By the prefix 'inter-', they seek to heed 'a multiplicity of possible viewpoints, and the divergences resulting from languages, terminologies, categorizations and conceptualizations, traditions, and disciplinary usages' (2006: 32). This attention to multiplicity and divergences can open up new avenues of research, but it also presents the researcher with a wealth of possible connections among which to choose. The terminology used by Werner and Zimmerman suggests that diachronic impact is an important rationale for choosing which intercrossings to research: the term 'intercrossing' is borrowed from the biological sciences and implies a fertile offspring, while *histoire croisée* hints that these crossings are used to illuminate larger historical narratives.

More recently, Nadia Kiwan and Ulrike Hanna Meinhof's concept of 'hubs', as defined in their research on contemporary North–South and South–North relations, largely privileges synchronic impact (which sometimes plays out as diachronic impact on a small scale). They conceptualize hubs as 'key nodes which link all the other parameters in [the] network model' (2011: 4). In the case of human hubs, they centre on a 'main agent', who 'provide[s] the focus for everyone in the network' and whilst everyone may know them, they do not have to know everyone else (2011: 4). Like the 'intercrossing' and the 'encounter', hubs are not exclusively human, but can be spatial, institutional, or accidental. With the accidental hub, they are accommodating the anthropological issue of the 'observer paradox', meaning that the researcher can unintentionally come to stand at the centre of a network (2011: 7–8).

When adapting this method to historical research, the notion of the accidental hub demands that we pay attention to our own agency as a researcher and to the 'archive' as sites that exert influence on the 'encounters' we select to research. After all, the politics surrounding 'archives' determine the survival of historical material (whether deliberate or accidental) and its accessibility (through institutional regulation, digitization, or scholarly knowledge networks); wars and crises are no minor players in shaping what is available and accessible. By focusing on regions outside of France, the case studies in this volume present lesser trodden territory in the realm of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century theatrical encounters; much of the material discussed is found in 'archives' that have not traditionally been at the centre of work on the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. Still, disciplinary and personal preferences have guided this research (indeed, all the authors in this issue are from the Global North and have actively engaged

with mobility by living and working in different countries to that of their birth); the recent boom in scholarly interest in networks and regions at the margins of conflict has been partially facilitated by the wide-spread digitization efforts of archives and libraries. Nevertheless, language barriers remain an obstacle to expanding comparative studies.

Returning to the concept of theatrical encounter, our choice for the term 'encounter' is motivated because it neither implies that 'cultural transfer' or 'exchange' takes place, nor puts special importance on the diachronic of synchronic impact of these encounters. This is crucial because the focus thereby shifts to the conditions and experiences of encounter, and away from its consequences. After all, the impact of the 'theatrical encounters' discussed in this issue was at times fleeting or its long-term effect difficult to ascertain – and the absence of change after an 'encounter', or its fleetingness, is as important as change actually occurring as a direct result of the 'encounter'. This conceptual shift from 'transfer' and 'exchange' to 'encounter' is an important antidote to narratives that stress the French Revolution and its aftermath as a moment of rupture and long-lasting, ground-breaking change – narratives that have come under fire for some time now (Darlow, 2006 and 2012: 6; Mason, 2015; Heuer, 2015).

The case studies in this issue show that there is no 'one size fits all' solution to questions of rupture or continuity during the period at hand. They provoke questions about how the impact of war was felt differently in different regions and by their theatrical cultures: Did they experience governmental interference? If so, did this interference come from the occupying forces or local authorities? How did wartime change the configuration of audiences, artists, works, theatrical traditions, and performance spaces? Using the methodology of the 'wartime theatrical encounter' allows us to take the encounter as a snapshot of a particular moment of meeting and to extrapolate the nodes that result in this event for further analysis, abandoning a diachronic approach. In doing so, this special issue highlights that the complexity of theatre's wartime responses depends on an intricate nexus of relationships between people, works, institutions, ideas, and traditions brought together in performances.

Overview and themes

This special issue features five original articles that examine theatrical encounters outside of France during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars to question how wartime experiences impinged on the production and reception of theatre. These articles are designed to be read individually, but also together: by comparing distinctive theatrical encounters in diverse contexts, this special issue is able to move away from the predominantly national frameworks that have structured existing scholarship. In doing so, it shows the variety of conditions under which theatre functioned and the dynamics at play in theatrical encounters in Revolutionary and Napoleonic wartime contexts.

From the articles, it appears that these theatrical encounters often disclose the effects of wartime-induced moments of self-reflection and alter processes of identity formation. It is perhaps unsurprising that the latter is a recurring theme; scholars have long contended that the eighteenth-century developments of 'nation' and 'nationhood' gained momentum during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, and theatre tends to be discussed as a prominent tool in contemporary practices in nation-building (Hambridge, 2015; Andries, 2019). Still, the articles complicate the existing narratives by highlighting the fluidity of what 'nation' meant around 1800 as it intersected with other markers of identity. In 'Staging Imperial Identity: Music Theatre, the Holy Roman Empire, and the French Revolutionary Wars' Austin Glatthorn addresses this question with respect to the Holy Roman Empire by interrogating the different ways theatrical works from various regions conceptualized the relationship between their local identity and the Empire. The absence of a clear idea of nationhood in Milan, as Alessandra Palidda argues in '"D'un bel canto patrioto francese": On the Penetration of French Revolutionary Elements in the Spectacles of Republican Milan (1796-1802)', explains the population's confused responses to the importation of French festivals and the insertion of patriotic anthems in operatic productions. In 'The Berlin Premiere of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide* in 1809: An Opera to Restore the Monarchy and the Nation' Eric Schneeman, in turn, explains how a composer and his oeuvre can be appropriated in different national narratives: in Berlin in 1809, German language versions of Christoph Willibald von Gluck's (1714-1787) French operas aimed at subverting French patriotic sentiment as well as enlisting the composer for the German national cause. Consideration of rank and class are crucial, Katherine Astbury contends in 'Confronting Cultural Difference: French Prisoner-of-War Theatre in England during the Napoleonic Era', to understand how ideas of 'Frenchness' were performed in prisoner-of-war theatre, with the upper ranks taking a more cosmopolitan viewpoint. Finally, in Benjamin Walton's article, 'Operatic Encounters in a Time of War', issues of 'nationhood' take a step back, as he examines how the fluidity of wartime encounters impinges on aesthetic discourse and artistic production around Europe and in South America, affected by an encounter's temporal and geographic distance to these conflicts. As such, he opens up the discussion about the boundaries of 'wartime' beyond the confines of Europe and the theatrical world.

The articles also showcase the variety of ways in which theatre was used by governments and intellectuals as soft power, a gentler method than military and economic measures for persuading individuals to support the desired political causes. Consequently, this special issue draws attention to the various gradations of power dynamics at play in these theatrical encounters. Governmental interference, for instance, could range from authoritarian interventionism, like the French rolling out a full programme of republican festivals in Milan, to gentler forms of persuasion displayed by the authorities in the Holy Roman Empire. Yet spontaneous theatre initiatives by supposedly 'powerless' individuals, like the prisoners of war, were still feared by the British government for their potential to corrupt both

performers and audiences, as Astbury shows, and eventually interdicted. The incessant governmental attempts to regulate theatrical encounters, discussed in the articles, also reflect the era's profound belief in the forceful, affective impact – whether positive or negative – of theatrical performances.

Affect has indeed been central to recent studies on how theatre mediated and mitigated war(time) experiences (Schneider, 2011; Williams, 2019). The consequences of military engagement could be justified in moving theatrical representations of military heroism and patriotic martyrdom, but there are other forms of mediation and mitigation too, as shown in the articles. By 'transporting' audiences into representations of current or historical conflicts, theatre can validate (and prescribe) emotional responses and thus overcome the geographical and temporal distances separating audiences from the actual conflicts. This supports modern studies, which argue that performance can transmit 'social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated [...] behaviour', and do so differently within the space of the auditorium to the written medium (Taylor, 2003: 2–3). In this sense, the theatrical encounters of this issue build upon the current analyses of 'space' and 'place' within Mobility Studies, notably by Peter Merriman: certainly, the theatrical auditorium, for example, acts as an absolute 'space' where the encounter occurs (2012: 49), but it can also become a 'place' that is 'specific, subjective, inhabited and lived', with 'personal and collective meanings', or even a process (2013: 49). Whilst these effects are potentially useful for theatre as a tool of soft power within the context of a military campaign, performance could also recreate a sense of 'home' to counter the nostalgia and melancholia displaced persons experienced, as Astbury indicates with the case study of the French prisoners of war in Portsmouth. At the same time, theatrical performances could serve as a distraction too, 'transporting' audiences away from the misery at hand, which Walton suggests may be linked to the obsession with 'the sublime' in nineteenth-century music aesthetics. Still, as Williams and Favret have warned, these attempts at mitigation and mediation are not always successful, possibly leading to an 'unmaking of sense', an effect that is perceived in the confounding reactions from the Milanese to the French festivals and patriotic hymns.

By focusing on 'wartime theatrical encounter', this special issue's methodological approach and its five case studies provide a prismatic view on how military conflicts, and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars specifically, are major players in the development of theatrical cultures. This in turn draws attention to how theatre was framed as providing answers to the supposed socio-political and cultural crises caused by these wars, as this wartime rhetoric spread across Europe and South America – continents that witnessed at first hand the effects of revolutions, nationalism, and military conflicts throughout the nineteenth century.

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