

## Introduction: Resistance and resilience

Dr Rebecca Scollen and Michael Smalley

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**Michael Smalley** is the Lecturer in Technical Theatre and Scenography at the University of Southern Queensland. He graduated from a BA (Theatre - Technical Production and Management) from QUT with distinction in 1999. Before becoming an academic, his professional theatre practice included freelance roles as a stage manager, lighting designer, director, and actor in Australia, England and Canada. His current research interests include scenography, especially of stage management, and critical pedagogy.

Depending upon whether you are thinking of the Borg from Star Trek or the Vogon from the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, the old saying goes 'Resistance is futile/useless'. Sometimes it is best to adapt, revise, regroup, move, bend, or change rather than resist. To remain relevant, vital and strong resilience is important. Resilience enables us to hang in there, to recover quickly, to rebuild and thrive.

Sometimes the focus of our art/research/educational practices/sector is building resilience in others. Sometimes it is important to focus on building resilience within ourselves as individuals or in our communities of practice. Resilience implies a source of compression, a

passage of time, and a process (or an innate ability) to spring back to a (positive) “normal” state.

In setting “resilience” as the theme for ADSA’s 2016 conference, we were conscious of the challenges facing both the entertainment industry and the higher education sector in Australia at the moment, but throughout the region more broadly. We were also aware of the parallels with two other recent ADSA conferences. Namely, the 2014 conference hosted by the Victoria University of Wellington New Zealand with the theme of “Restoring Balance”<sup>1</sup> and the 2012 conference hosted by Queensland University of Technology with theme “Compass Points”, especially the words of the editors in their introduction to that conference’s proceedings:

we think the ADSA community too is characterised by the strength, resilience and determination sometimes needed to push through the rough patches to continue to create and report on some of the most meaningful elements of our local, national and international cultural landscapes.<sup>2</sup>

We hoped that these parallels would allow us to continue previous conversations, while hoping the theme was broad enough to start new ones as well. We were delighted with the breadth and depth of responses the call to papers engendered. We are also thankful that the authors represented here, and the army of peer reviewers, were up to the challenge of reflecting a little of that diversity in this first volume of conference proceedings. The proceedings will be launched at the conference itself, in another parallel with the 2012 ADSA conference. A second volume of conference proceedings will be published approximately a month after the conference. This will enable us to reflect some of the flavour that can only be captured during the conference, including a chance for our many colleagues whose work can only be peer reviewed in a live setting to have a pathway to publication – one of the “sources of compression” ever present in the higher education sector which heightens our need for resilience.

The process by which these articles came to be a collection ran in parallel with the call for papers for the broader conference. This challenged the authors’ resilience at times by asking them to write a publishable version of their conference paper, months out from the

conference itself. Without the resilience and generosity of our peer reviewers, this collection would also not be possible. The diversity of the collection speaks to the broad interests, approaches, and stages of academic career present within the ADSA community which we feel is a key to the organisation's resilience as a whole.

The diversity of these articles is such that we thought it best to arrange them simply alphabetically by author and let the reader make the connections between them for themselves. For as diverse as they are, there are connections. Many of those connections we see, are because of our own biases as editors, but we shall offer some to whet your appetite and trust that many more will become apparent to you. It seems that resilience in our fields of interest is strongly tied to the embodiment of knowledge with the articles by Anja Ali-Haapala, Janys Hayes, Vahri McKenzie, and Leah Mercer all emphasising this can play a key part of building resilience for dance companies, university students, regional artists and performing arts venues, and theatre audiences respectively. There is a strong sense of the resilience required of women throughout the ages with Sasha Janowicz's detailed account of the challenges of writing a play about historical characters and restoring their humanity from the myths that have built up around them, in this case Catherine the Great; in Jane Woollard's article which revives our appreciation of the work and lives of two prominent early colonial actresses Eliza Winstanley and Maria Taylor; and in reconnecting us to the work of Joanna Murray-Smith, Emma Hughes points not only to the resilience of this contemporary female playwright, but also to that of the central character, Harper, in *Pennsylvania Avenue*. This sense of a historical connection is also palpable in Madeline Taylor's discussion about the scenographic challenges of representing timelessness or the contemporary relevance of plays from the early modern period which have proven resilient over time. Improving the resilience of practitioners provides one possible connection between Jennifer Andersen's argument that looking to models of how actors work with children may provide some useful guidance and James McKinnon's analysis of how devising performance can help build resilience and creative agency for students of the creative arts.

Throughout these articles much that is useful and heartening about our purpose, and the promise of enhanced resilience can be found. As one example, Hayes suggests that this is part of the attractiveness of actor training in particular as participants are placed "into an

emotional three-dimensional lived world, or in Cataldi's terms, into 'sensitive space', enabling new and reflective modes of being that empower professional and personal resilience". Perhaps the most fitting final word to the collection and to sum up the conference more broadly can be found in McKinnon's assertion: "Resilience is vital to creative success".

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>ADSA. 2014 Conference. Retrieved June 1, 2016, from <http://www.adsa.edu.au/conferences/past-conferences/2014-conference/restoring-balance-ecology-sustainability-performance-vuw-25-28-june-2014/>

<sup>2</sup>Bree Hadley and Caroline Heim (2012) "Introduction: Navigating the field of Contemporary Performance" in *Compass Points: The Locations, Landscapes and Coordinates of Identities in Contemporary Performance Making*, Australasian Association for Drama Theatre & Performance Studies (ADSA) 2012 Conference Proceedings, ed. Bree Hadley and Caroline Heim, Queensland University of Technology, 2012.