

[Resituating the Comedia Roundtables: For a Theater of the Future, Part I](#)

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Type:

Conference

Date:

December 4, 2020

Location:

California, United States

Subject Fields:

Early Modern History and Period Studies, Theatre & Performance History / Studies, Spanish and Portuguese History / Studies, Women's & Gender History / Studies, Literature

organized by Barbara Fuchs (UCLA)

Online event via Zoom

This event is free of charge, but you must register in advance to attend. All audience members will receive instructions via email after registration. Click the following link to register directly with Zoom: https://ucla.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJcrde-prz8iGdFix0bWId6_sqiyacfNGg2Q

The history of theater is intimately bound up with the creation of public fora, the development of the city, and notions of citizenship. Theater examines both our private and our social concerns on a shared stage; it has always thrived when it can provide a commons—a meeting place for minds and spirits. In the early modern period, which saw the first large-scale commercial theaters, performances occurred outdoors, moving from the streets to informal spaces that only gradually developed into open-air theaters, with little in the way of scenery or other apparatus. Whether at the edges of the city, as in London, or at its heart, as in Madrid, theaters offered a place to reflect on community and belonging. Across the Hispanic world, performances were authorized despite moralists' misgivings because they helped pay for social services through the *hospitales de pobres*. Early modern theater thus offers a model of relevance and resilience: although it was periodically censured and repeatedly closed down during epidemics, it remained flexible enough to adapt or relocate while continuing to engage audiences.

The Covid-19 pandemic has both exposed and exacerbated crises in the world of theater. There is a widespread sentiment among practitioners and critics alike that the closure of the theaters should afford the chance to come back stronger, rethinking key questions of form, audience, access, and funding models. Given the long history of theaters closed due to plague and political unrest, what lessons might we learn for how best to reflect, regroup, and reimagine theater going forward?

As part of the Center & Clark's year-long core program "Resituating the *Comedia*," we have convened a number of key figures in the Los Angeles theater world—directors, playwrights, producers, scholars—for two roundtables to be held on December 4, 2020 and January 15, 2021 to examine the affordances of the pandemic closures in light of the long history of urban theatermaking

and theater's enduring role as a civic commons. Our goal is to produce a set of recommendations for the theater.

We have also commissioned brief proof-of-concept digital theater pieces that enliven the classics in new formats. These will be presented at the January 15 roundtable session; we expect progress reports from the artists at the December 4 roundtable.

Key questions will include:

- What models of resilience does theater history offer contemporary practitioners (alternative modes/locations)?
- How can theater draw on its own history in bridging this transitional period, and how can it reemerge as a different sort of public art?
- What new affordances—more democratic access, greater diversity, transnational collaboration, lower bars to entry, etc.—has the pandemic yielded, and how might they be made permanent?
- What role can the classics play in appealing to audiences now? How can audiences be re-engaged, expanded, and renewed?
- What types of performance experimentation do periods of crisis elicit?
- How can theater provide community and a space for urgent cultural conversations through various media?

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<http://www.1718.ucla.edu/events/resituating-the-comedia-roundtable1/>