

World of Dissocia, Realism, Narrative), Neilson has crafted a series of performance texts that are impossible to predict. It is a measure of the atmosphere created in his productions that the second act of *Dissocia*, which is scrupulously realistic (almost to the point of dramatic inertia), feels as uncanny as the dream logic of the play's first act.

In this, the first full-length monograph devoted to Neilson's work, Trish Reid succeeds in providing a context for perhaps the most protean playwright on the contemporary stage. The book follows a very rough chronology, from Neilson's early, tense explorations of power, sexuality, and trauma in *Penetrator*, *The Censor*, and *Stitching* through to the complex interrogations of the nature of performance in recent plays such as *Narrative* and *Unreachable*. In doing so, she remains alive to the theoretical and cultural questions that Neilson's work poses. As she points out, he interrogates certain key assumptions that audiences, critics, and academics make about performance.

She argues that the central fact of Neilson's texts is that they simply will not settle – that they aim to disrupt a simple mapping of the events staged on to contemporary debates about identity. It is this, Reid argues, that makes Neilson's work political, at least in its effects. The characters in his work can't be read; they do not yield up any fixed meanings; and as such this implicitly argues for an idea of identity which is radically fluid (even for characters who seem rooted firmly in quotidian reality, such as Stuart in *Realism*).

Reid's discussion is well supported by short essays from Gary Cassidy (on Neilson's working practices), Anna Harpin on the complex relation between theatricality and realism in the plays, Mark Brown on Neilson the Scottish theatre maker, and by an interview with Neilson himself. This is a very strong, comprehensive introduction to Neilson's work, and a thought-provoking examination of a playwright whose place in discussions of contemporary performance should, by rights, be far more secure than it currently is.

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Alison Jeffers and Gerri Moriarty, ed.

Culture, Democracy, and the Right to Make Art

London: Bloomsbury, 2017. 280 p. £75.

ISBN: 978-1-474-25835-7.

This is a vital collection for those among us undertaking, teaching, and researching a whole range of practices that are descended – directly or indirectly – from the community arts movement. It offers welcome reminders of what motivated a key period of innovation – ideas of how art could stand for things by standing *with* people, in their communities. For those, like myself, who started

out inspired by these practices but arrived too late, it clarifies what changed and how.

It's a tale of highly committed people, excited by the potential of a new way for art to play its part in political change, discovering allies within and between the communities they invested themselves in, and becoming a movement. The movement writes its manifestos and has its disputes, formalizes and improvizes, and gleefully bites the hands that feed it. The Arts Councils of England, Wales, and Northern Ireland step in and out, out and in, until ultimately it's Thatcherism that does for the resources that have allowed community arts to grow.

The unresolved issue of the book, and the field of practice, is the mutation from commitment to professionalism, the changed basis on which artists, in most cases, now create work with non-artists. Work is now led by the priorities of funders, enlightened or otherwise, but susceptible to impact-focus and target-chasing, and organizations whose priorities lie in more conservative aesthetics take a share of the work and the money that comes its way.

The mood is often melancholy about the drift away from explicit political commitment under multiple political and cultural pressures, and about the move from *cultural democracy* to the less radical *democratization of culture*. The distinction is made, quite forcefully, between community arts and participatory arts, on the basis of the key principle of shared authorship. The later chapters hold intriguing theoretical interventions – Sophie Hope on the 'aesthetic third', for example, the object that takes the space between artists and people they work with, and Owen Kelly on the 'dividuality' (as opposed to individuality) of the human subject, as a conceptual basis for the interdependence that community arts sought to celebrate and stimulate. In the conclusion the editors offer hope that the revolutionary impetus of community arts has not been lost, but lives on in a persistent spirit of dissent.

GARETH WHITE

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Tony Fisher

Theatre and Governance in Britain, 1500–1900: Democracy, Disorder, and the State

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

282 p. £75.

ISBN: 978-1-107-18215-8.

Fisher seeks here to 'describe a discourse on the theatre that began to emerge in the early modern period and whose aim was nothing less than to bring the stage within the orbit and sphere of government'. His argument astutely observes the gradual formation of the (modern) practices of governance from the 'theatre of the multitude' of