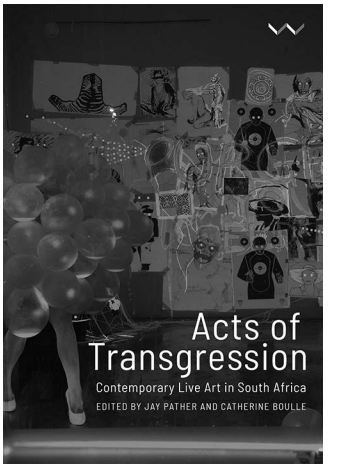
Acts of Transgression: Contemporary Live Art in South Africa. Edited by Jay Pather and Catherine Boulle. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019; 375 pp.; illustrations. $99.00 cloth, $50.00 paper, e-book available.



Acts of Transgression, edited by Jay Pather and Catherine Boulle, is a landmark collection of essays exploring contemporary live art in South Africa more than two and a half decades after the outset of a volatile postapartheid era (1994). The essays are wide-ranging, innovative, and employ different methodologies and diverse perspectives to provide comparative analyses of an array of performances that blur interdisciplinary boundaries. Yet they all provoke insights into social injustice and the complexity of identity to reject existing sociopolitical structures that oppress and marginalize. The 68 illustrations richly evoke the mise-en-scène of performances that have mostly appeared for limited viewings.

The performance of protest in its myriad guises forms the basis of live art at the Institute for Creative Arts based at the University of Cape Town. First held in 2012, the ICA Live Art Festivals showcase recognized and lesser-known artists, all of whom employ disruption to foreground deteriorating sociopolitical conditions in South Africa. Some of these performances are featured in the anthology; other artists are also included. At the same time that live art performances were gaining attention, political protests of the Fallist Movements of 2015 were taking place on university campuses. Students challenged authorities to decolonize education, remove symbols of apartheid, and make tertiary education accessible. They used sit-ins, marches to Parliament, and often violent means to resist oppressive social structures. These movements are clearly cross-referenced in the detailed and helpful index.

The editors provide a fulsome introduction to emphasize that in South Africa "live art is born of extremity" (2). They argue that the performances, inspired by both traditional African forms and Euro-American performance art, offer "shifting notions of crisis" and concomitantly reveal "artistic agency within a time of political urgency" (11).

The four parts of the book spotlight key themes. The first, "Live Art in a Time of Crisis," begins with a compelling chapter by Nomusa Makhubu, who focuses upon artistic citizenship, anatopism (being totally out of place, unhomed), and the trauma of the post-1994 city of Cape Town. Juxtaposing the wealth of the city with the poverty of overcrowded townships, Makhubu maintains that while black residents frequent the city, they occupy outsider status. She examines *Those Ghels* (2017), by Buhlebezwe Siwani and Chuma Sopotela, which is staged in outdoor city areas where black women watch US television sitting in cages evocative of the tiny spaces of township dwellings. They speak isiXhosa, a foreign tongue for many urban whites, and act provocatively, thus stressing their positions as interlopers.

Makhubu argues that the white queer artist Dean Hutton provokes vicious responses when they wear an outfit emblazoned with the words "F**k white people," "in bold type (in the style of American conceptual artist Barbara Kruger)" (35). Their interventions emphasize their anatopism, their state of being unhomed, and have created violent arguments about white supremacy, privilege, and nonconforming whites.

Catherine Boulle scrutinizes the internationally known white performance artist Steven Cohen, who joined contestants at a dog show by inserting himself into the line-up as a performing mongrel in *Dog* (1998), where he was bare-bottomed with his genitals exposed, only clad in a tutu, and exceptionally high heels. His impeded movement represented his difficulty negotiating the political terrain. Cohen's extensive oeuvre is disruptive and unsettling; for Boulle his "decentring of the white male subject [is] a provocation at the heart of his practice"

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1054204320000209 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(66). A disturbing performance titled *Maid in South Africa* (2005) highlights Nomsa Dhlamini, an 87-year-old Swazi woman, who has been Cohen's domestic worker since childhood and whom he regards as his collaborator. She sheds traditional garb for a maid's uniform, which she removes to perform her domestic worker chores while bare-breasted but wearing very high heels. This performance is disturbing for white viewers, especially those who were complicit in the oppressive maid/madam dynamic. Cohen was also critiqued for his demeaning positioning of Dhlamini and her lack of agency.

Pather's chapter, "The Impossibility of Curating Live Art," argues for a curator as the "initiator of the emergence of ideas that explicitly challenge dominant colonial discourse" (85). Curating live art is complex as crises shift and instability and anarchy intervene. Pather suggests "five elements (terminologies, spatialities, rhythm, opacity and audience) [...] in the creation of new grammars for curation" (97). However, he concludes "that the most productive strategy" may be for the curator "to disappear completely." He advocates "a curatorial approach that refines and redefines the edges of involvement and disengagement" (103). Pather imagines that in this way new live art will appear that continues to provoke, probe, and, most importantly, take risks.

Part two, "Loss, Language and Embodiment," concentrates on black female bodies. Lieketso Dee Mohoto-wa Thaluki analyzes the work of Chuma Sopotela, which "shows specific and uncurated 'black womanhood,' presented in all its complexities" (109); the black female spectator rethinks her own positionality in relation to Sopotela blurring the role of audience. Gabrielle Goliath's chapter centers on Tracey Rose's 2015 memorial performance, *Die Wit Man (The White Man)*, which commemorated the 1961 death of Patrice Lumumba. Her ritualized treatment of loss names Lumumba in a repeated incantation to mark the erasure of the person. Rose regards herself as a "kind of shaman" and confronts spectators with the "possibility of their lived complicity in a social and political paradigm inextricably entangled with the violent legacies of slavery, colonialism and apartheid" (134). In part three, "Rethinking the Archive, Reinterpreting Gesture," Bettina Malcomess examines queer performativity to deconstruct the binaries of race and gender through masquerade and destabilize the dominance of patriarchy and whiteness.

In part four, "Suppressed Histories and Speculative Futures," Khwezi Gule probes the work of artists who use traditional African religious practices to "instantiate counter-narratives of memorialization and mourning that work against a post-1994 memorial culture, which eclipses and erases complex histories" (268). The work of the artists Gule discusses problematized the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which relied on forgiveness and often disregarded the major oppressions of apartheid and colonialism.

Mwenya Kabwe's chapter on Afrofuturism analyzes her 2015 creation of a student performance of *Astronautus Afrikanus* at the Rhodes University theatre, which was redesigned as a space station for a shuttle launch. Spectators engaged with performers to discover worlds previously unknown through space travel. Kabwe writes about the importance of Afrofuturism: "These performative works indicate that bringing the speculative to bear on the past has everything to do with how we understand the present and, ultimately, with the kinds of new African futures we may actually imagine and bring into being" (305).

Acts of Transgression is an invaluable asset for academics, artists, and theatre practitioners. The editors have compiled a rich and unique examination of live art in South Africa.

—Marcia Blumberg

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1054204320000209 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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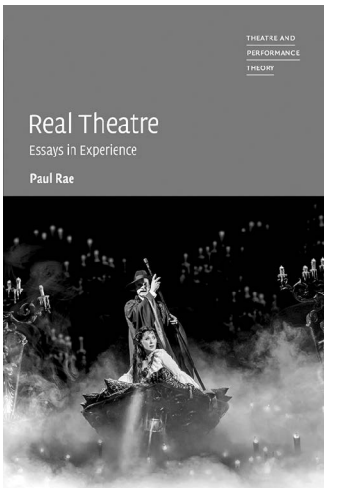
TDR 65:1 (T249) 2021 https://doi.org/10.1017/S1054204320000209

Real Theatre: Essays in Experience. By Paul Rae. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019; 236 pp.; illustrations. $99.00 cloth, e-book available.



Insecurity: Perils and Products of Theatres of the Real. By Jenn Stephenson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019; 286 pp.; illustrations. $75.00 cloth, e-book available.

"What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?"

What real? Which truth? Whose story? In an age of post-truth and postreality, how do we identify what is real? Does the real remain outside representation, even as acting, language, and symbolism try to represent it? Is the desire for truth and authenticity a product of natural law and binding ethics independent of politics and society? Or is it something else? A real that is not so distinguishable from a simulation? Should we just give up and live in a mise en abyme of media, news cycles, citations, and selves? As Hamlet attests, our perceptual consent enables theatre to turn the real into a fiction and perhaps a fiction into something real.

Hong Kong's burgeoning theatre of the real movement, led by Wu Hoi Fai of Pants Theatre Production, is a case in point. Wu's most recent work, *The First and Second Half of 204*7 (2019), refers to the date that ends the 50-year transition from what Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping termed "one country, two systems" to Hong Kong's complete integration with mainland China. Performing the work during the protests that have rocked Hong Kong since summer 2019 made some actors question why they should perform in a theatre at all, when they could more effectively protest on the streets outside the theatre (Fan 2019). Both actions require costumes, blocking, dramaturgy, casting, and a sense of urgency and conviction.

The dramaturgy of the Hong Kong streets was elaborate. Protest gear included garbage can lids and luggage used as armor, plastic wrap to protect the skin, and traffic cones and water bottles to help snuff out the tear gas and prevent it from spreading. Human supply chains, some over a mile long, used hand signals to ask for helmets and other gear. Information was anonymously shared through Apple AirDrop and Telegram chat. Laser pointers and spray paint obscured security cameras, and supporters taped single-use tickets to metro station entrances so protesters couldn't be tracked by transit cards registered to their names. The slogan "Be water" advised constant movement so that when demonstrations were reported, protesters quickly dispersed; this fluidity also allowed ambulances to safely pass through the crowds (Willis, Khavin, Horn, and Lai 2019). The ubiquitous umbrellas, which first emerged during the 2014 protests as a form of passive resistance to pepper spray, symbolized both the longevity of the demands of the masses for more transparent elections and continued passive resistance to the police. The actors' question about the usefulness of performing in theatres deftly notes theatre's limitations: