

philosophical reflection—this book provides a wealth of material to follow through on that curiosity.



Violence Performed: Local Roots and Global Routes of Conflict. Edited by Patrick Anderson and Jisha Menon: Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; pp. 391. \$85 cloth.

Performance in Place of War. By James Thompson, Jenny Hughes, and Michael Balfour. Calcutta and London: Seagull Books, 2009; pp. xii + 352. \$29 cloth.
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Reviewed by Sruti Bala, University of Amsterdam

Violence Performed is a collection of essays that emerged from a seminar called “Documenting Violence/Violating the Document” at the 2003 conference of the American Society for Theatre Research. This anthology seeks to assess how performance studies scholars may serve as interlocutors and analysts of events, representations, and historiographies of violent conflict. The essays include discussions of the genre of “atrocious photographs,” close readings of playtexts representing violent conflicts and audience responses to them, contemporary coverage of violent events in the media, theorizations on the theatricality and spectacularity of politics in the public sphere, as well as studies of theatre work in conflict zones. The contributions present a diversity of topics and vary vastly in terms of quality and rigor. Two of the highlights in the volume are the article by Catherine Cole on the performative aspects of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and the eruditely contextualized reading of Hanoch Levin’s plays by Freddie Rokem, though both pieces have previously appeared elsewhere. Cole’s essay brilliantly elaborates on how public performance is an integral part of the legal process of transitional justice, requiring special attention from a performance studies angle. Rokem reads two plays of Hanoch Levin, a playwright not very well known outside of Israel, closely looking at narrative strategies of depicting violence, while asking larger questions about the possibility of separating history and tragedy in aesthetic experience. Susan Haedicke’s study of contemporary French street theatre-based interventions around the discourse on immigration, as well as Sonja Kuflinec’s reflections on Boalian image-theatre work with youth in ex-Yugoslavia, the Middle East, and Afghanistan are examples of performance analysis that include discussions of the politics of rehearsal, audience responses, and the ever-looming issue of impact. These contributions indicate a refreshing personal engagement with their subjects and testify to the fact that the authors have spent substantial time on fieldwork.

While the volume genuinely attempts to show a diversity of approaches and regions, tracing, as the subtitle indicates, the “local roots and global routes of conflict,” it is disappointing in those instances where critique is conflated with

analysis, a distinction crucial for humanities researchers. Analysis without critique risks becoming descriptive and enumerative, failing to extract questions of sustainable interest. Critique without analysis, on the other hand, borders on journalistic social commentary. Several articles in the volume fall into the second category. The force of the critique, whether it be of media manipulation, neoliberalism, citizen dissent, or the politics of remembering, is often slackened because of methodological opacity and the lack of carefully developed arguments or assertions. If theatre and performance research is to enhance the conceptual and analytical categories and the modes of understanding violent conflict, surely more effort needs to be invested in honing the tools in the box. Despite the postdramatic hype in theatre and performance research, it is notable that primarily those articles that employ a straightforward close reading of texts turn out to be more engaging and forceful in their critical appraisal, rather than those seeking to gain insights about a social-political phenomenon by viewing it “as performance.” The essay by Laura Edmondson on three recent plays on Rwandan genocide is an instance of the former, whereas Tony Perucci’s commentaries on the performance complexes of neoliberalism and Ketu Katrak’s opinions on ethnoglobal artist-activism belong to the latter cluster.

The introduction by Anderson and Menon could have provided a better elaboration on these analytical categories of performance research (are they categories at all?), rather than dabbling in theorizing violence with random and admittedly tentative observations, such as “violence is a *binding, affective* experience” (5) or “enactments of violence are *embodied* in their transaction and effect” (4). What does it imply to view violence as being performed? Readers are likely to ask in what ways the field has moved on from the ‘performance as methodological lens’ approach, as elaborated by Richard Schechner or Diana Taylor, among others. In the three essays dedicated to interpreting the Abu Ghraib torture photographs, one wonders how performance analysis actually differs from or moves beyond what discourse analysis already offers. It would have been more fruitful and timely to provide methodological reflections to these questions in the introduction, rather than simply reformulate axioms around violence using the metaphors of performance.

The six-page list of acknowledgments at the beginning of the jointly authored volume *Performance in Place of War* is a fair indication of the international breadth of collaboration in the U.K. Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project, of which the book under review is one of the main outcome documents. The Manchester University-based research group, under the leadership of James Thompson, has made several key contributions over the past five years to the investigation of creative performance practices in zones of violent conflict. This study covers examples of grassroots practices in the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo as well as Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine, and Sudan. One of the important premises underlying the project is that there is much to learn from artists and practitioners who have been working in extremely complex areas of conflict. The project has amply succeeded in highlighting these lesser-known names and organizations, existing outside the visibility of international conferences or

festival circuits. At the same time, the book critically documents a series of commissioned workshops, seminars, performances, and other public events that took place during the project's duration. Though adopting a case study approach, it is presented in a lively and dialogical format of an "organized scrapbook with commentary" (20), with interludes between chapters foregrounding voices of practitioners, extracts from performance scripts, text boxes with background information on organizations and brief histories of conflicts, workshop notes, press extracts, and photographs, mostly of regrettably poor quality. Another useful resource is the extensive bibliography on the arts and conflict and the list of key organizations around the world active in this field, though the online database (www.inplaceofwar.net) that accompanies the project is likely to stay more up-to-date.

The final chapter, entitled "Other Places," focuses not on specific practices in war zones such as Sri Lanka or DR Congo, but rather seeks to complicate our view of what constitutes a place of war, touching upon the so-called War on Terror and its implied global outreach. Here examples of theatre and performance practices are given that do not fit into the framework of a specific national or intrastate conflict. The study engages some recent work across disciplinary boundaries, thus introducing the researcher in performance studies to the work of anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom, conflict and peacebuilding theorist Jean Paul Lederach, or debates in trauma studies that are relevant to a study of theatre in postconflict zones. At the same time, it also references current scholarship in theatre and performance, thus serving as an excellent resource for students and researchers entering a complex field that requires thinking about the humanities and social sciences in tandem.

The celebratory and hopeful tone in which theatre practices are presented is of course understandable, given the difficult circumstances of this small-scale theatre work and the need to acknowledge these efforts in the world of academia. Yet the politics of intervention, funding, and collaboration in the international nongovernmental sector and the complicity of some artistic practices with the status quo of violent conflict deserve more critical attention and appraisal. In this regard, the book is more invested in rethinking and critiquing existing Eurocentric theories of trauma and healing, or of the supposed expectations of art in conflict zones to prove a positive community impact. The book is better viewed as opening windows to a range of issues and perspectives in the field of theatre and conflict, rather than providing a comprehensive exploration of these issues. Readers are advised to consult other recent publications of the research team, such as James Thompson's *Performance Affects* (2009) and articles authored by Jenny Hughes and Michael Balfour in journals such as *Research in Drama Education* and *Applied Theatre Researcher*, where some of the arguments touched upon in *Performance in Place of War* are elucidated in detail. On the whole, this accessible and unpretentious book is a valuable addition to current scholarship.