

NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rachel Clements

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Jan Suk

Performing Immanence: Forced Entertainment

Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2021. 193 p. £72.50.

ISBN: 978-3-11-071095-3.

Jan Suk's book is only the second monograph dedicated to the experimental Sheffield-based theatre company Forced Entertainment, and the first to cover their output from 2004 to 2016. The author makes extensive use of Deleuzian 'poetics of immanence', described as being 'connected with their constant interplay with the real and representational, presence-driven, "here-and-now-for-you-tonightness"' in order to discuss the distinct approach and contribution of this avant-garde troupe. His analysis of the particular performances is well documented, and enhanced by his own personal correspondence with Tim Etchells, the artistic director of the group. The book's first chapter provides an overview of the career of Forced Entertainment and a description of their distinct artistic philosophy and approach. The second chapter provides the theoretical framework with a discussion of the philosophy and terminology of Gilles Deleuze and, to a lesser extent, Félix Guattari. Tim Etchells's prose texts, an area of his writing little reflected on thus far, are discussed in detail in the third chapter. The final two chapters examine the durational performances, in particular, of the company up to and including *From the Dark* (2016).

Performing Immanence is an impressive research achievement both in terms of critical theory and when it comes to in-depth analysis of the particular theatrical and prose pieces. The monograph should find its readers amongst those interested in contemporary theatre and performance art. The work of Forced Entertainment, with its frequently homemade, minimalist aesthetic, is and will continue to be very much inspirational for the Covid/post-Covid period, with its need for improvised and flexible mediums of performance. The durational pieces in particular, involving extensive online participation by the audience, signal a new direction, for better or for worse, in both British and world theatre and performance art.

The monograph is a dense read with a great deal of critical theory, especially in the first half. Having said that, Suk's distinct voice does come through with a great deal of humour (as is appropriate, given the subject matter) and self-deprecation; the obvious and deep enthusiasm for and about the subject of

analysis is compelling. The risk-taking and willingness to fail, embodied in the philosophy of Forced Entertainment, is captured in Suk's book with a refreshing honesty and irony. He concludes the book in a conspiratorial manner, apologizing for possible shortcomings in his analysis: 'By being exposed to the experience of one's own fragility, the realization is productive, transformative, and, indeed, performative. A failure signals a life. That I have made mistakes means I am. I am alive.' Suk's monograph, inspired by and focused on Forced Entertainment, also exudes a lively immanence and consists of a truly 'creative transformative experience'.

DAVID LIVINGSTONE

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Fintan Walsh, ed.

Theatres of Contagion: Transmitting Early Modern to Contemporary Performance

London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2020. 216 p. £67.50.

ISBN: 978-1-350-08598-5.

In his introduction to this edited collection, Fintan Walsh sets out his aim 'to investigate theatre's status as a contagious cultural practice by questioning its role in the spread or control of medical, psychological, and affective conditions and phenomena'. The book arose from a conference in 2017 and was produced in the year or two following the event. Its scope is broad, taking in the interdisciplinary currency of contagion as a concept, but also examining the intertwining histories of contagion and performance. The complex interconnections and blurring between (bio)medical and social conceptions of contagion are a central and important theme that recurs throughout.

The chapters are organized into three parts, which respectively address contagious bodies, contagious spaces, and the processes of contagion. Walsh's own chapter in the first part focuses on *Re-Member Me* by Dickie Beau, showing how the piece constitutes both a theatrical response to a pandemic (in this case HIV/AIDS), as well as a 'dramaturgy of contagion'. Other chapters in this section, by Marcus Cheng Chye Tan, Shani Bans, and Rebecca McCutcheon, extend this framework to examine different modes of sensory transmission: hearing, sight, and affect. In the second part, Kirsten Shepherd-Barr offers a transhistorical perspective examining the relationship between the idea of contagion as transmission within theatre