

# NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rachel Clements

doi:10.1017/S0266464X17000100

Ulrike Garde and Meg Mumford

## **Theatre of Real People: Diverse Encounters at Berlin's Hebbel am Ufer and Beyond**

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016.

247 p. £21.99.

ISBN: 978-1-4725-8021-4.

The recent preoccupation of performance studies and visual arts with artistic forms that draw on the labour and knowledge of non-professional actors has expanded long-standing debates over the (re)presentation of the 'real' in the arts. Garde and Mumford expertly navigate and advance this exciting field of enquiry with specific reference to Berlin's theatre Hebbel am Ufer (HAU) during the tenure of artistic director Matthias Lilienthal from 2003 to 2012.

The authors clearly set out and develop the main scope of their study, that is, to discuss how HAU's socially engaged performances, which use 'theatre strangers' at their core, have facilitated encounters with cultural diversity. In pursuing this, they coin terms such as 'Theatre of Real People' and 'Authenticity-Effects', which are lucidly applied as the study's conceptual anchors. With reference to a range of archival material, interviews, and personal performance accounts, Garde and Mumford diligently show how the innovative reflexive vocabularies of HAU's artists and their direct engagement with Berlin's cultural vibrancy have sought to destabilize understandings of 'authenticity' and 'the real'.

In addition to the fresh contribution that the book offers to current discussions around documentary theatre and participatory performance, what makes it even more timely is its careful examination of different types of intercultural exchanges fostered by Lilienthal and the HAU. The book's organization in eight chapters allows both for a detailed exploration of 'Theatre of Real People' within existing discourses and histories of authenticity and Lilienthal's artistic remit, as well as a closer focus on selected productions from HAU's repertoire.

Although the more analytic discussions predominantly focus on flagship productions by the internationally established collective Rimini Protokoll and to a lesser extent by other artists, they usefully unpack complexities underpinning specific staged encounters with diversity and migrant 'others'. Of particular note is the discussion of Mobile Academy's *Blackmarket No. 7* and Rimini Protokoll's *Mr Dağaçar and the Golden Tectonics of*

*Trash* (Chapter 8) for its detail, clarity, and engagement with notions of 'the stranger'; here, the authors' homage to the work of cultural theorist Sara Ahmed suggests that it might have more ostensibly served as another key conceptual framework throughout the study.

In mapping the legacy of a significant European theatre institution with a wide international impact such as the HAU, Mumford and Garde's accessible and engaging project makes a particularly valuable contribution to theatre studies and will appeal to a wider readership interested in the burgeoning areas of: participatory arts practices; theatre and interculturalism; documentary theatre; contemporary theatres in Europe; and theatre and politics.

MARISSIA FRAGKOU

doi:10.1017/S0266464X17000112

John Mayer

## **Steppenwolf Theatre Company of Chicago: in Their Own Words**

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016.

261 p. £21.99.

ISBN: 978-1-4742-3945-5.

Near the end of this book detailing the history of Steppenwolf Theatre Company, one of the United States' premiere regional theatres, John Mayer says that 'the transformation of an inspired group of twenty-year-olds into a world-class theatre organization is the stuff of legend', and he successfully sets much of that legend in print, using mostly interviews he conducted himself, but also reviews and quotes from other sources, creating a personal and enriching history of Steppenwolf's forty-four years. The book alternates in format between narrative history chapters, photo collages, and groupings of ensemble interviews around a common theme, a move that substantiates its subtitle: this is Steppenwolf Theatre Company 'in their own words'.

Both the company itself and American theatre owe a debt of gratitude to Mayer, an admitted fan of the theatre and friend of its founders, for making what is largely oral – and in some cases urban – legend part of the official archive. Practitioners and scholars familiar with Steppenwolf or with the Chicago theatre scene will revel in what feels like an all-access pass to some of the most exciting moments in the company's history, particularly in Mayer's comprehensive relating of the events around two of the theatre's most im-