

NTQ Book Reviews

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Roselee Goldberg

Performance Now: Live Art for the Twenty-First Century

London: Thames and Hudson, 2019. 272 p. £32.
ISBN: 978-0-500-02125-5.

For more than four decades, Roselee Goldberg has been an authoritative voice in accounting for the role of performance and live art as visual practices. Her influence is both art historical (her 1979 *Performance Art: from Futurism to the Present* has been a starting point for students of performance since it appeared) and in shaping contemporary practices (most prominently as the founder of Performa, a biennial of performance in New York City). Goldberg celebrates the possibilities of live performance as an essential cultural mode for artists, institutions, and audiences. Her book takes as its motivation the major shift in the valuation of performance by academics and arts institutions since the turn of the millennium – a shift to which she might be said to have contributed significantly.

Performance Now comprises six sections, each introduced with a brief essay and followed by short snapshots of works and projects by contemporary artists. The design and images are lush, befitting a book whose major argument is that performance is primarily a visual medium. The book begins by looking at performance within the established international visual art circuit, with its nodes in cities like New York and London, and art festivals like Documenta in Kassel (Germany), the Venice Biennale, and her own Performa.

Goldberg emphasizes the influence of performance on the changing structure of the contemporary art museum ‘from contemplative edifices of the past to lively cultural hubs’. She also considers how artists working outside these nodes have used performance to access the resourced international circuit, a form of what she calls ‘world citizenship’ (and perhaps more attention could have been devoted to the ways such ‘citizenship’ is fragile).

The final chapters consider three disciplinary intersections – dance, theatre, and architecture – in which Goldberg looks at how the development of visual performance has allowed these disciplines to enter visual art spaces like museums and galleries. Of the three, theatre seems to produce the most anxiety: Goldberg is at pains to distinguish performance art from theatre with the latter

defined as fundamentally orientated towards a text.

Ultimately, *Performance Now* is less a comprehensive survey of global contemporary practices (obviously an impossible task) than an account for a broad readership of how a series of separate but related styles of live performance practice has interacted with the international art world, shorthand for a powerful system of cultural production entangled with other powerful systems.

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Liz Tomlin

Political Dramaturgies and Theatre Spectatorship: Provocations for Change

London: Methuen, 2019. 205 p. £75.
ISBN: 978-1-4742-9560-4.

In *Political Dramaturgies and Theatre Spectatorship* Tomlin presents a compelling analysis of contemporary theatre spectatorship together with an analytical model for political theatre. The subtitle *Provocations for Change* is apt as well as timely: as I write this the UK is preparing for a difficult election and many University staff members are striking to protest the ongoing neoliberalization of Higher Education (unfortunately my Institution did not vote to strike). Tomlin’s main provocation is that a rethinking of spectatorship can help us align political theatre practice with the post-Marxist project of radical democracy.

The first part reconceptualizes the spectator of political theatre as a theorized spectator (an essential aesthetic element in any dramaturgical invitation), an autonomous spectator (who requires freedom from ideological steer by the artist), and the precarious or ironic spectator (who is shaped by contemporary neoliberalism). In the second part Tomlin presents a compelling framework of analysis that proposes the field of tension between two political logics of egalitarianism and autonomy as central to contemporary political dramaturgies.

The egalitarian (and therefore ideological) project has been dismissed as too deterministic. However, Tomlin astutely points out that without a collective project for spectators to participate in there is no possibility for the work to meaningfully align itself to the post-Marxist project of radical democracy. This egalitarian