

nonetheless has the effect of leaving “The Theatre and Its Double” seeming somewhat disembodied, lacking a grounding in its most immediate and personal context. Equally, although Jannarone argues very convincingly for the fluidity of ideas in this period, there is a concurrent assumption that fascism and the avant-garde remain entirely distinct, and that Artaud must therefore belong with either one side or the other. Historical research over the past twenty years has, however, tended to challenge this distinction, from Edward Timms and Peter Collier’s 1988 assertion that “there is no easy equation between experimental art and progressive politics” (*Visions and Blueprints*, xi) to more recent explorations of “avant-garde fascism”—notably the 2007 study of that title by Mark Antliff, to which Jannarone briefly refers. If the supposedly avant-garde Artaud could be fascist, this is perhaps also because fascism could be avant-garde—which leads one finally to wonder whether, given the wide-ranging, eclectic, and, in Jannarone’s words, “hardly classifiable” nature of Artaud’s oeuvre (6), it might not be too restrictive to categorize Artaud within any one political grouping.

None of these observations should, however, detract from the overall impact of this fascinating book. Indeed, such reactions are rather indicative of the lively debate that this stimulating reassessment of Artaud will be certain to provoke.

• • •

***Performing Bodies in Pain: Medieval and Post-Modern Martyrs, Mystics, and Artists.*** By Marla Carlson. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; pp. 240 + 8 illustrations. \$84.00 cloth.

doi:10.1017/S0040557412000191

Reviewed by Noa Turel, University of California, Santa Barbara

In *Performing Bodies in Pain: Medieval and Post-Modern Martyrs, Mystics, and Artists*, Marla Carlson applies a scholarly lens to the common (mis)perception of contemporary gruesome spectacles as somehow “medieval.” Defining her book’s object as “live events in the course of which a performer either simulates or actually experiences physical pain” (2), Carlson juxtaposes examples from the recent past with analogous practices from the late Middle Ages. Each of her five chapters thus features two focal objects.

In Chapter 1, “Feeling Torture,” she contrasts “pre-modern and post-modern” (27) notions of empathy by comparing the projected effects of the Apartheid-era play *The Island* and the fifteenth-century French miracle play *Le Geu Saint Denis*. The latter also features in Chapter 2, “Imagining Death,” along with a 2005 staging of *The Pillowman*; in this chapter, Carlson examines “the role of imagined pain in performances of sanctioned killing by the state” (50). The next chapters add the dimension of gender to the discussion: in Chapter 3, “Enduring Ecstasy,” Carlson discusses Marina Abramovic’s 2005 reperformance of *Lips of Thomas* alongside Jean Fouquet’s ca. 1450 illumination *Martyrdom of Saint Apollonia* to “examine the loophole through which women

using pain as a means to alter consciousness create a way to speak within regimes that would silence them” (79). Chapter 4, “Whipping Up Community,” is focused on “men’s formation of group identity through voluntary suffering in negotiation with specific structures of power, especially in the register of plague” (105), which Carlson explores through Ron Athey’s masochistic performances and medieval representations of Saint Sebastian (with the AIDS and bubonic plagues as their respective backgrounds). In her fifth and final chapter, “Containing Chaos,” a 2008 staging of *Blasted* and the late medieval *Mystère de Saint Sébastien* are the prisms through which Carlson traces “the relation of pain to laughter in the midst of violence that seems to turn the world upside down or inside out” (132).

“About all of these performances,” Carlson writes in her introduction, “I wonder not only why but also why now and why then. What cultural work do these painful spectacles perform?” (2). She thus sets two goals for her book: to contextualize these spectacles of pain historically, and to retrace their projected effects. In order to contextualize her already ambitious range of designated focal spectacles, Carlson introduces an almost dizzying array of supplemental objects, ranging from the 2004 Webcast beheading of Nicholas Berg to the fifteenth-century *Journal d’un bourgeois de Paris*. For the most part, both the focal and the supplemental objects are generously introduced and skillfully analyzed based on the latest relevant literature. Considering the range of objects, this is a substantial achievement, and Carlson should be commended for producing what is likely to become a good first reference for future scholars of the subject.

Where Carlson’s work falls somewhat short is in composing its well-crafted pieces into a coherent picture. No concrete central argument emerges from the twenty-three-page Introduction. The chapters feature thesis statements (see above) but lack consistent threads of argument. In the absence of those, Carlson’s rich mosaic reads as an aggregation of fascinating but tangential discussions. The three asterisks that bisect each chapter to delineate the discussions of the medieval and contemporary focal objects are symptomatic: in lieu of a rhetorically motivated structure, the book features an arbitrary organizing scheme. More often than not, the two purported focal spectacles register as forced scaffolding rather than the true objects of inquiry. For instance, as the title and thesis statement of Chapter 3 may suggest, Abramovic’s fifteenth-century conceptual counterparts are neither Saint Apollonia nor Fouquet’s illumination, but late medieval female mystics.

In Chapter 1, the choice of focal objects points to another flaw: Carlson never accounts for her examples *as* examples. “The difference between *Le Geu Saint Denis* and *The Island*,” she writes in the conclusion, “is the sort of commitment that they nourish. The post-modern martyr play inspires outrage and public action, whereas the medieval saint play nourishes private spiritual practices” (48). While this phrasing implies something universal about the “post-modern” and the “medieval,” in truth this statement is defensible only for those two specific plays. A very different conclusion would emerge if one were to replace *The Island* with, for example, MTV’s equally gruesome *Jackass*—a spectacle far more visible, and therefore arguably more indicative of the current “cultural work” of pain, than the Off-Broadway play. Implicitly stripping late medieval pain displays of political

efficacy is even less convincing. What was the “moving play of the Passion of Our Lord,” staged as part of a 1420 royal entry into war-torn Paris, which left no spectator “whose heart was not moved in pity” if not a clear instance of the sort of “politics of pity” (27) that Carlson suggests uniquely characterizes postmodern pain spectacles? This problematic structure of perplexing examples leading to questionable conclusions repeats in every chapter. It undercuts the validity of Carlson’s broader extrapolations, without which it is hard to appreciate the value of the transhistorical inquiry in the book. While analyzing each object well, Carlson fails either to articulate or to show what is to be gained from the joint consideration of past and present spectacles of pain.

Carlson’s highly engaged reading of the 2005 reperformance of *Lips of Thomas* invites an analogy. Perhaps *Performing Bodies in Pain* should be appreciated much as the postmodern artworks it surveys. It is a deep and serious attempt to engage with the heritage of the Middle Ages, in which Carlson—like an artist—skillfully spins a host of fascinating associative threads, but leaves the task of weaving them together to the reader. Future scholars taking on this task would greatly benefit from the valuable research and insight she has laid out in this book.

• • •

***Theatre & Sexuality.*** By Jill Dolan. Theatre&. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; pp. xi + 107. \$9.00 paper.

***Theatre & Feeling.*** By Erin Hurley. Theatre&. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; pp. xv + 88. \$9.00 paper.

doi:10.1017/S0040557412000208

Reviewed by Lisa Sloan, University of California, Los Angeles

Jill Dolan’s *Theatre & Sexuality* and Erin Hurley’s *Theatre & Feeling* are two recent titles from Palgrave Macmillan’s Theatre& series. Edited by Jen Harvie and Dan Rebellato, the Theatre& series examines theatre’s intersections with other fields. These slim volumes are designed for a general readership; consequently, they offer an introductory tour of their respective topics and supply straightforward definitions of key terms. Each book also features a foreword from a prominent practitioner: Anne Bogart opens *Theatre & Feeling* with a discussion of how she approaches feeling in her work, and Tim Miller primes the reader for *Theatre & Sexuality* by highlighting connections between theatre and desire. For the reader whose appetite has been whetted by these guidebooks, a list of additional resources is included. However, there is one glaring inconsistency between the Theatre& series’ mission and Dolan’s and Hurley’s respective volumes: though Harvie and Rebellato rightly assert in their preface that people working in theatre studies must expand their focus beyond the Western canon, Dolan and Hurley explicitly limit their content to Western theatre—likely for reasons of space and expertise. That aside, Hurley and Dolan prove to be skilled guides.