

NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rachel Clements

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Adam Ainsworth, Oliver Double, Louise Peacock, ed.

Popular Performance

London; New York: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2017.

289 p. £69.99.

ISBN: 978-1-474-247351.

Popular Performance builds on the notable work that Oliver Double and co-editors Adam Ainsworth and Louise Peacock have already done to bring stand-up, clowning, and variety entertainment into the theatre syllabus. Across eleven chapters, the volume provides sustained analysis of the performance techniques practised by the kinds of professionals who are habitually overlooked in the discourse of actor training: vaudevillians, magicians, cabaret artists, sketch-show performers, and comedians.

The first part of the book includes richly detailed historical accounts of the work of music-hall performer Dan Leno, the Swiss clown Grock, and the variety act Annie Abbotts, otherwise known as 'The Little Georgia Magnet', from Caroline Radcliffe, Peacock, and Ainsworth respectively. In his introduction, Double explains that the version of popular performance under discussion can be identified via four key features: direct audience address, acknowledgement of the 'here and now' of the performance situation, the presentation of 'skill and novelty', and the 'interlacing of performer and role'. These four themes run throughout the book, with many of the contributors making explicit reference to them in their own chapters.

However, the discussions I found most compelling were those that problematized the editorial attempt at substantive definition. Stand-out chapters include those by Michael Mangan on 'the reconfigured mentalism act' of Derren Brown in the UK, and Simon Sladen on Pamela Anderson's appearance in a 2009 production of *Aladdin* at the New Wimbledon Theatre. Both proffer useful acknowledgement of the complex interdependence of mediation and liveness in contemporary popular performance.

This book will provide a valuable starting point for those seeking to orient themselves in the field, and its accessible written style makes it ideal for undergraduates. However, it is necessary to point out that the version of 'popular' that emerges is somewhat narrowly defined and, at times, de-politicized. For example, there could have been more direct acknowledgement of the politics of identity at play in the construction of a

performer's authority over a potentially unruly crowd. In their respective chapters on neo-burlesque striptease, street theatre in the 1980s, and a DIY stand-up club night, Lynne Sally, Bim Mason, and Sophie Quirk go some way to redress this imbalance, each offering thoughtful takes on the positional potential of grassroots or 'underground' practice, and stimulating critical reflection on the political possibilities and limitations of popular performance in an age of advanced capitalism. Such discussions, vital and timely as they are, might have been given more prominence in the framing of the collection.

EMMA BENNETT

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Sheila Preston, ed.

Facilitation: Pedagogies, Practices, Resilience

London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2016, 255 p.

£21.99.

ISBN: 978-1-4725-7693-4.

Facilitation is a welcome addition to the Methuen 'Applied Theatre' series, offering a more forensic analysis of the practice of the applied theatre facilitator than is otherwise available. Preston uses the first part of the book to propose a conceptual model of critical facilitation that builds upon the three foundations of critical resilience, creative practice, and critical pedagogy. The contributions in Part Two of the book are personal reflections on facilitation authored by seven experienced practitioner-academics working in the fields of criminal justice, mental health, conflict prevention, and disability arts. Preston's conceptual framework encourages the contributors to be remarkably honest about their own practice and (largely) prevents them from drifting into a rose-tinted narrative of practice. The admissions of failure and descriptions of subsequent adaptation of practice are a refreshing contrast to the successful 'practitioner's tale' that tends to dominate the literature (and arguably makes this text a more valuable learning resource).

The first of these chapters, Paul Murray's 'Send in the Clowns', explores the idea of the facilitator as a performer and offers insights into the importance of play in applied theatre practice. In her contribution, Sarah Woodland also reflects on the importance of play, as she details its increasing importance in the development of her practice research in a New South Wales diversion from custody scheme for Aboriginal people.

Michael Balfour's contribution, 'The Art of Facilitation' is a highly valuable and pithy exploration of the interpersonal attributes of effective facilitators. In 'The Artist as Questioner: Why We Do What We Do', Ananda Breed unpicks her own practice as a facilitator of applied theatre performance in Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, and India, and explores the influences on her 'in the moment' decision making. Kay Hepplewhite explores the role that responsiveness plays in facilitation, and Liselle Terret considers the role that critical facilitation may play in challenging models of practice for people with learning disabilities. The final chapter, by Cynthia Cohen, steps back from applied theatre practice and considers the ethics and politics of facilitation for social change.

Facilitation questions the continued validity of the outcome-driven model of applied theatre practice and successfully articulates the case for practitioners to step away from the instrumental application of applied theatre in favour of a more playful, creative approach. It will be of interest to applied theatre researchers and practitioners alike and is a valuable resource for undergraduate study.

SIMON RUDING

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Barry Freeman

Staging Strangers: Theatre and Global Politics
Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017. 198 p. \$32.95.
ISBN: 978-0-7735-4952-4.

Barry Freeman starts his book *Staging Strangers: Theatre and Global Politics* by challenging the very concept of stranger/étranger and by revealing how theatre, particularly contemporary immersive theatre, can make us strangers to ourselves. This kind of introduction immediately speaks to the author's awareness of the problematic notion of 'stranger' and, by extension, the notion of 'non-stranger', presumably a representative of a 'dominant/unmarked culture'.

Within this difficult dichotomy Freeman's text navigates, seeking a theoretical understanding of 'global ethics' and its application to contemporary theatre practices in Canada. *Staging Strangers* looks at the official 'backdrop' of multiculturalism that has been dominating Canadian political discourse for a long time and how it has been affecting a number of theatre practices in the country. Specifically, the book aims to demonstrate 'how the near and distant stranger has been staged in "immigrant theatre", in "multicultural theatre", and in a "theatre of global ethics"'.

The first case study of the book is the work of Czech immigrants to Canada and the problematic role of the Multicultural Theatre Association – a former funding body for 'immigrant theatre' – in recognizing and simultaneously propagating cul-

tural silos in which immigrant artists and community members had to create their work without being acknowledged by representatives of the 'dominant culture'.

Following that, Freeman switches to a thoughtful and necessary critique of two mainstream stage genres currently proliferating in Canadian theatre: the generational family drama, a production focusing on the 'second generation immigrant's experience', and the melodrama of globalization, a 'public fantasy of cosmopolitanism' often attempting to domesticate 'strangers' by making them more recognizable for the mainstream audience. Freeman suggests that in contrast with the ethics of these two genres, recent examples of post-dramatic theatre that deal with the 'stranger' in a non-moralist, multi-perspectival, and fluid manner offer a more ethical way of engagement with the subject of the 'other'.

In his last chapter, Freeman acknowledges the main limitations of the publication: he tends to weave his personal experience of watching the productions in question into a more generic understanding of how audiences may have perceived those productions. He acknowledges that a book about ethics turned out to be a book about audiences, which, perhaps, represents a fruitful path to continue the exploration of 'strangers in Canadian theatre'. Overall, *Staging Strangers* is a timely addition to the research of other Canadian scholars (for instance, the works of Ric Knowles and Yana Meerzon) exploring theatre by, for, and about strangers.

ART BABAYANTS

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Elizabeth L. Wollman

A Critical Companion to the American Stage Musical

London: Bloomsbury, 2017. 312 p. £21.99.
ISBN 978-1-4725-1325-0.

Elizabeth Wollman offers a substantial historiography of the musical, in the context of the form as a commercial industry, in this recent addition to Bloomsbury's excellent 'Critical Companion' series. She keeps a clear eye on the increasingly industrialized strategies which grew up to support the musical's eventual transformation into a global enterprise. The volume comprises a substantial monograph section, with several valuable contributions by figures such as Stacy Wolf, who offers an important consideration of amateur musical theatre; Robert Meffe, who lays out a particularly helpful description of the musical's production process; and Jessica Sternfeld, who adds to a growing field of work on the 'American' musical and globalization.

The book offers a useful starting point for discussions around the musical as a production