

institutions and the social order in and through which they live” (24). This definition appears amid discussions of the common use of the term “bourgeois” as a pejorative in contemporary (bourgeois) culture. Disidentification thus describes the author’s (and perhaps reader’s) own sense of their relationship to the term “bourgeois.” In subsequent chapters we find that the figure of disidentification may in fact be intrinsic to theatre (insofar as the use of theatre as a machine of ideological reproduction is prone to failure) (73), and implicit in the emergence of the trunkmaker and related figures (137). It serves as a marker of ideal subjects of capitalism (154), but also as one way to escape interpellation as such an ideal subject (177). Disidentification is innate to bourgeois subjectivity insofar as it reiterates the distance at the center of that subjectivity, but it might also be cultivated to encourage more bourgeois subjects to resist interpellation as good subjects of capitalism. Surprisingly, the book does not directly engage with other approaches to disidentification in performance studies, especially José Esteban Muñoz’s *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999) which offers a theory of precisely some of those subjectivities the author frets he may be excluding by extrapolating from his own subjectivity.

The absence is hardly fatal and points to ways in which *Scenes from Bourgeois Life* will have a significant impact on conversations across the disciplines of theatre and performance studies. *Scenes from Bourgeois Life* provides an account of the historically contingent mode of spectatorship that remains dominant today, an account that must be reckoned with by any effort to theorize the capacity of theatre to make political subjects, to impact its audiences, or to play a role in addressing the oppressions it so often depicts.

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Struggle and Survival under Authoritarianism in Turkey: Theatre under Threat

By Burcu Yasemin Şeyben. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021; pp. xix + 175. \$95 cloth, \$45 e-book.

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Prominent theatre scholar Burcu Yasemin Şeyben focuses in her book *Struggle and Survival under Authoritarianism in Turkey: Theatre under Threat* on the theatre institutions, companies, and artists in Turkey working under the current rule of the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, since 2002. The trajectory of the book can be explained as a historically grounded political analysis of contemporary theatre in Turkey that focuses on changes in theatre-related legislation and direct pressure from the AKP on the artists. Grouped into four parts, eight critical essays provide an overall view of the theatre in Turkey and analyze specific case studies that flesh

out broader arguments. The first part, “Theatre Systems,” guides the reader in the historical formation of the theatre world of contemporary Turkey; the following parts focus on institutional, commercial, and independent theatres and analyze their negotiations with the state power. “Subsidized Theatres” is valuable for its discussion of how legislative changes impact the institutional theatre culture in Turkey; “Decentralized Theatres” and “Oppressed Theatres” are valuable as they document previously under-documented struggles of contemporary theatre practitioners. The case studies of Diyarbakır and Nilüfer City Theatres, analysis of the Kurdish theatre company Şermola Performans, and discussion on the governmental attacks on the play *Mi Minör* are significant contributions to the literature on the multifaceted practices of resistance in the theatre world of Turkey. Throughout the analysis of these case studies are many accurate and well-articulated observations on the many microshifts in the field since the early 2010s, such as the “internationalization of Turkey’s theatre . . . becoming more forced than voluntary” (69). In this sense, the volume begins to compensate for the major gap in the field of Turkish theatre studies by attempting—potentially for the first time in English—to illustrate academically the structural elements and historical processes that shape the theatre field in Turkey today.

Perhaps paradoxically, the book’s use of strong and observant language also raises my concerns, as it sometimes comes off as inclining toward hasty generalizations. Şeyben uses words and phrases loaded with implications throughout; this practice raises questions of how members of the English-reading public that do not know Turkey’s intricate internal politics may misjudge the tone. For example, in the Introduction the AKP is described as “fascist” (xii), but this political term is not explained or defined within the context of Turkey. Şeyben also mentions “Islamic theatre” (xi), which is an ambiguous term due to the biases against theatre among some conservative Islamic circles in Turkey. “Islamic theatre” can potentially be used to define the culturally conservative propagandist theatre practices that emerged throughout the history of Turkey, but again, the term is not defined. Şeyben further constructs a venerating discourse in Chapter 1 around these “Islamic theatres” by mentioning them as the “only companies . . . that challenged the cultural policy and the theatre system” (15)—forgetting to note the casual misogyny and ethnonationalism of such conservative theatres—and misses out on mentioning the opposition of countless left-wing intellectuals, including theatre practitioners, who were assassinated, imprisoned, and exiled throughout the history of Turkey. The book also claims that Ottoman Armenian theatre practitioners “made no real effort to reflect on Armenian stories” (8). This statement might cover the plays made in Ottoman Turkish but completely dismisses the lively nineteenth-century field of theatre made in Armenian in imperial Istanbul. Similarly, in another chapter that criticizes the foundational period of the Republic of Turkey (est. 1923), educational institutions, such as Village Institutes, and state-controlled public gathering places, like People’s Houses, are dismissed as mere spaces of propaganda (12) without noting the class mobility that these places provided for the most underprivileged classes or how they intervened in the gender-segregated public sphere. The major problem of this lack of nuance is that it represents Turkey as a homogeneously oppressed country where no counterpublic sphere was ever sustainably built, no theatre aesthetic beyond institutions emerged, and no theatre director challenged the institutional aesthetic within the theatre institutions over the course of these past hundred years.

Later, the 2010s are defined as the first decade in which theatres could address “topics that had rarely been presented to large audiences before,” from LGBTIQ issues to minority identities (57). It is true that the 2010s have seen an unmatched and incomparable blossoming of performances that touch on taboo topics, but once again this observation is overshadowed by a lack of nuance. For example, taboo topics such as prison rape and male homosexuality were successfully addressed on Turkish stages, most importantly through John Herbert’s play *Fortune and Men’s Eyes*, famously directed by James Baldwin in Istanbul in 1969. Similarly, the 1990s avant-garde theatre scene is characterized as “not integrating any subjects that deviated from the discriminatory norm, meaning they did not integrate the Muslim, non-Muslim or other ethnic themes, plays, or artists to their productions and companies” (10). This is not true; there are well-documented plays that addressed exclusively the meanings of being a minority in Turkey, such as *Kim O? (Who Is There?)* by Kumpanya Theatre Company, made in the 1994–5 season. There are also some minor mistakes in the text. The year of death of Atatürk is written as 1939 when actually it is 1938 (20n14); the performance named as “Kurdish Theatre” (97) that took part in the Ottoman Empire’s section of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago ambiguously appears as if it was in the Kurdish language when it was actually in Arabic; and the Kurdish theatre group Şermola Performans’s play *Antigone2012* is summarized as a “play about a Kurdish girl who has two brothers: one is a Kurdish guerrilla and the other is a soldier recruited by the Turkish army, and they fight against each other” (103), though it is actually about a Kurdish woman who tricks the soldier who has murdered her older brother into marrying her years later, so as to torture him and learn where her brother’s buried bones are.

None of the issues mentioned above hinders the overall value of this pioneering publication. There are parts of the book that document previously undocumented intertheatrical conflicts, which is precious for any future researcher interested in Turkey’s theatre history (101–2). It is also among the very few works that investigate self-censorship and self-exile practices among contemporary theatre practitioners in Turkey. All of these strengths make this book a valuable document for future studies on the theatre of Turkey.

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The Challenge of World Theatre History

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The Challenge of World Theatre History by Steve Tillis is essential reading for professors of theatre history seeking to restructure course offerings in a manner that is not