

# NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rachel Clements

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David Calder

## Street Theatre and the Production of Postindustrial Space: Working Memories

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019.  
216 p. £80.00.  
ISBN: 978-1-52612-159-2.

David Calder's monograph is a rigorous study of the multifaceted participation of street theatre practitioners in the production of postindustrial space in France. Following the French use of the term 'street theatre' as that which 'occur[s] outside of purpose-built performance spaces', he examines performance events that in anglophone scholarship are usually referred to as site-specific, site-responsive, or site-sympathetic. Calder's choice not to use such terms is crucial as he emphasizes the ways in which street theatre might lay claims, and expand access, to public space. In doing so, Calder develops several narrative threads that are meticulously constructed and interwoven, in which performance is both an object of analysis and a means for interrogating wider processes of urbanization and deindustrialization.

This book, then, offers a discussion of key cultural policies in France in the post-war period; it sketches a brief yet comprehensive history of French street theatre, focusing on its temporal, spatial, and political work; it traces the scripts and repertoires of work as they developed in France in the latter half of the twentieth century and the first two decades of the twenty-first; and although it focuses on a relatively small number of case studies, it provides a much broader interrogation of urban redevelopment tactics and policies. In his endeavour to think about the complex and, as he vividly demonstrates, often paradoxical connection between industrial and postindustrial forms of work, Calder repurposes the notion of working memory as that which 'makes that transition intelligible, inventing the postindustrial as an imagined end to the turbulent processes of deindustrialization and redevelopment'. Subsequently, street theatre's claim to public space offers a potent platform for making the production of the postindustrial intelligible, while also enabling a critical engagement with such processes.

This is a fascinating study that takes the reader on a journey through France's industrial ruins and devises a robust methodology for thinking about processes of urbanization and redevelopment

through performance. It would be of interest to theatre and performance scholars, historians, critical geographers, cultural studies scholars, and urban theorists. Calder's exceptional exploration of the complex temporalities of the postindustrial transition that 'posit[s] an endpoint at which the past will be laid to rest' yet, by the same token, 'remains present' ultimately offers valuable insight into the work of history and the labour of the historian.

PHILIP HAGER

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Kim Wiltshire and Billy Cowan, eds.

## Scenes from the Revolution: Making Political Theatre 1968–2018

London: Pluto Press and Edge Hill University Press, 2018. 242 p. £75.00.  
ISBN: 978-0-74533-852-1.

*Scenes from the Revolution* is an informative and engaging celebration of political theatre practices over the past fifty years. While this territory might seem well trodden in theatre scholarship, a strength of this edited collection is its retrospective analysis of theatre from the 1970s and 1980s in combination with a discussion of a range of contemporary companies and approaches. This varied content enables the reader to map historical continuities, contexts, influences, and recurring preoccupations in political theatre practices, as well as points of contestations and divergence from 1968 to the present day.

The six chapters, designated as 'scenes', focus on specific kinds of politically engaged theatre-making: agitprop theatre, working-class theatre, theatre in education, women's theatre, queer theatre, and theatre and race. Each 'scene' begins with a short introduction followed by an extract from an unpublished play, interviews with practitioners connected to key theatre companies and organizations, and one or two scholarly essays on themes pertaining to the relevant topic. The editors thus curate a range of voices, testimonies, primary materials, and analytic perspectives, which creates a vibrant sense for the reader of ongoing dialogue and debate across the separate sections of the book; moreover, the emphasis on contemporary work, and the prominence given to women practitioners, helps to eschew the nostalgia that often marines discussions of 1968 and its legacy.

Highlights of the book include David Peimer's insightful essay on 'Contemporary Protest Theatre

in South Africa' (the only essay in the volume that reaches beyond the British context) and two of the autobiographical contributions: Chris Goode's reflections on the shifting contours of queer theatre practice ('We Who Are Here Together: (Re)Making Queer Theatre') and Sudha Bhuchar's thoughtful account of systemic racism in British theatre and the personal experience at the heart of her creative practice ('The Personal is Always Political'). Some of the dialogic contributions to the volume are compelling precisely because of their topical urgency – for example, Kim Wiltshire's conversation with members of the Manchester-based feminist theatre company Mighty Heart on #MeToo and sexual assault in theatre, or Billy Cowan's interview with Ruth McCarthy, Artistic Director of Outburst Queer Arts Festival.

Overall, this exploration of the myriad intersections between theatre and politics, past and present, is a highly recommended and lively resource, particularly for undergraduate students, and one that will prove inspiring for scholars and practitioners alike.

CHRIS MEGSON

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*Karen Barbour, Victoria Hunter, and Melanie Kloetzel*  
**(Re)Positioning Site Dance**  
Bristol, UK and Chicago, USA: Intellect, 2019.  
323 p. £74.00.  
ISBN: 978-1-783-20998-9.

Barbour, Hunter, and Kloetzel discuss the ethical and political dimensions of site dance through discussions of a wide range of works by current and historical dance and performance practitioners, as well as their own respective repertoires of dance and choreographic practice. Rather than presenting an overview of the field, they focus on themes including localized activist and resistant practices, the affective potential of dance as part of cultural shaping, and the relationship of site dance to wider ecological imperatives.

Within this framework, socio-cultural politics play a large part in the overall discourse, and Barbour, Hunter, and Kloetzel foreground their position as part of the discussion. The most substantial content within each chapter focuses on each author's own extensive practice research. This provides a level of detailed discussion that is both critically situated and highly engaging. The book aims to re-position the field toward a consideration of the 'implications' of site dance – ethically, politically, and ecologically. The analysis of dance events offers a range of meanings, feelings, and socio-political impacts of the work, which do not necessarily ripple beyond the experience of the maker(s) or intended audiences.

Barbour, Hunter, and Kloetzel highlight the need for further research as they point toward the possibilities of recognizing site dance as a form of critical action; and as a method for raising awareness, fostering debate, and effecting change. Throughout the book, discussion of methods used in creating dance events are particularly strong and would be useful for students, academics, and practitioners alike. These include initiating performance processes within different communities, developing and structuring dance works, reflexively responding to specific contexts, and dealing with problematic and challenging aspects of site and relationships. Each chapter of the book contains one or more 'excursions', which are instructions for the reader to explore practical site-based activity aligned to the themes and issues discussed. These excursions are enticingly written with the same critical awareness offered throughout the book. They would likely be useful to academics and students of dance and performance as a way of deepening an individual's or a group's understanding of the intersection between the personal, place, and broader social politics.

DANI ABULHAWA

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*Mark Brown*  
**Modernism and Scottish Theatre since 1969**  
London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. 254 p. £59.99.  
ISBN: 978-3-319-98638-8.

The idea that Scottish theatre, since the 1960s, has been going through an unprecedented golden age is by now very well established (see the work of Randall Stevenson, Trish Reid). Mark Brown's *Modernism and Scottish Theatre since 1969* is the latest text to make this case. Brown works as a theatre critic, and, as such, has been able to witness the changing theatrical environment in Scotland first-hand: his discussion of those changes rests on detailed first-hand knowledge of the field, and on contact with some of the key figures in this renaissance.

The argument that Brown assembles from this information is an interesting one, and it is justified by the history of the past fifty years. Scottish theatre did not have a strong tradition of culturally significant original work before the 1960s. Academics such as Ian Brown are right to point out that other types of performance thrived, and that the country had a theatrical tradition on which more recent generations have built. Mark Brown, however, is right that Scottish theatre rarely figured in debates over the nature of cultural life until, in the 1960s and '70s, a generation of theatre workers aware of and influenced by the modernist European stage began to produce theatre that was both performatively