

both sympathetic and desirable: key facets of celebrity. Yet, as Engel shows through a close reading of the *Memoirs*, Robinson was ultimately unable to reconcile this self-portrait of idealized femininity with her visual presentation and public reputation.

It is the subject of Engel's third case study, Mary Wells, however who is by far the most fascinating of the women examined. Unlike Siddons and Robinson, Wells departed entirely from conventions of eighteenth-century heroines, challenging rather than embracing idealized gender models. Her performance of madness, Engel argues, functioned as parody while her mimicry disrupted the fantasy of authenticity which was at the heart of successful celebrity self-fashioning. Drawing both on Wells's own writing and on that of her lovers, Engel presents a vivid picture of this 'monstrous *diva*' and makes a compelling argument for the recovery of this fascinating character, whose resistance to categorization, she argues, has until now resulted in scholarly neglect.

Overall this is a thought-provoking study which skilfully and unusually draws equally on both art history and literary analyses. Providing a nuanced picture of the possibilities and problems involved in using both the printed word and the artist's canvas to fashion celebrity in the late eighteenth century, Engel identifies the emergence of self-fashioning strategies which, as she argues in her epilogue on Fanny Kemble, only a generation later would have become as central to public women's profiles as they continue to be today.

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Sarah Burton

How to Put on a Community Play

London: Aurora Metro Press, 2011. 187 p. £12.99.
ISBN: 978-1-906582-15-9.

Burton's book claims to be a 'comprehensive guide' rather than a foolproof manual and, although she tells the reader she has a PhD in theatre, her voice here is definitely that of the practitioner rather than the academic. That said, there is a rather scholarly tone to parts of the first chapter as she sketches the possible history of the community play, tracing its routes primarily from the medieval Christian tradition of the Mystery plays.

The definitions of a community play from the Dorchester and Woking Community Play Associations are helpful in locating this specific form of theatre which Burton asserts may well be ripe for a revival. The opening chapter also includes a brief but useful consideration of the outside-in or inside-out model of community plays where the impulse to initiate a community play project can come either from outside elements or can build from a few interested individuals inside the com-

munity and work outwards. There follows a brief discussion on the claims made for community cohesion, or what Burton calls 'social harmony', but this is not considered in any detail and the comparison with drama work in prisons is not really very helpful.

The chapters that follow cover getting funding, putting a core team together, writing the script, casting and rehearsing, the production, administration, and publicity. The book ends with a list of useful contacts as well as a short bibliography, although none of the quotations in the first chapter are fully referenced, so following up any of the references would present a challenge.

All of the examples and the numerous black and white images in the book are taken from Burton's own experience of staging the Haddenham community play, a Christian nativity play initiated in 2000 in Burton's own village and performed there every two years since. There are several great stories about experiences and events that happen when a big group of people gets together to undertake a theatre project like this, all of which are used to make a sensible or helpful point about the best way to approach each aspect of the project.

This book would be really useful to anyone who did want to undertake such a project, and Burton's advice would certainly help to avoid reinventing the community play wheel. For theatre scholars it provides a fascinating insider's view into what seems to have become a local tradition and performance ritual, and, valuable as Burton's own warm anecdotes are, the long narrative sections where a wide variety of participants reflect on the experience of being involved are equally insightful.

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Gabriella Giannachi and Nick Kaye

Performing Presence: Between the Live and the Simulated

Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2011. 260 p. £55.00.
ISBN: 978-0-7190-8004-3.

In *Performing Presence*, a book that resulted from a major AHRC-funded research project, Giannachi and Kaye address a complex matter of current concern and a wide philosophical concept: the notion of presence in performance, and the differences, overlaps, and mutations between live, mediated, and simulated presence. Few concepts are more challenging to tackle than the notion of presence, and few are more persistently urgent in the advent of digital technologies as our lives and artistic practices become augmented with digital layers of data, reshaped by technological artefacts, and extended into the domain of the virtual.

The volume opens with a valuable introduction that, rather than seeking to contain the complexities of this challenging undertaking, acknowledges their breadth by unpacking and analyzing philosophical and existential notions of presence in performance and the wider cultural sphere. They seek presence not in a static and self-contained 'now' but in the movement towards another, in the active and performative sense of relationality: a "being present" to and before the other'. Giannachi and Kaye study the 'convergence and exchange between performance theory, cross-media modes of art and performance, and the advent of specific technologies of presence' through a number of eclectic artistic case studies, devoting a chapter each to Lynn Hershman Leeson, Gary Hill, Paul Sermon, Tony Oursler, The Builders Association, Blast Theory, and Mixed Reality Lab.

The case studies also include the authors' own practice-as-research experiment of presence within a CAVE virtual reality environment (as part of the Performing Presence project). The artists have been selected with forethought and precision as the works discussed are both significant as art historical examples and pertinent to this discussion. Though each work illuminates different methodological approaches, aesthetic concerns, and dramaturgical configurations, all practices are evocative of presences that intimate the other/

otherness within and without visceral bodies, mediatized artefacts, physical absences, telematic connections, televised images, and virtual/physical doubles.

The volume has certain shortcomings. The discussion on presence, though dense and nuanced, seems rather limited in scope. Understandings of presence are sometimes collapsed so that philosophical and existential notions of the term are conflated with the more ambiguous phenomena of 'stage presence' and the question of simulated, mediated, or disembodied presences. Finally, the authors offer stimulating discussion and analysis but do not commit to the proposition of a methodological approach that can facilitate understandings, practices, and experiences of simulated presence to exist in parallel with rather than in opposition to visceral and embodied presences.

However, those shortcomings appear insignificant when studied in context. Giannachi and Kaye undertake a challenging task and succeed in providing a timely, rich, nuanced, and situated analysis of presence in digital times, in performance, and in life. *Performing Presence* is an enthralling analysis of a complex concept and a diverse range of relevant practices which will be of interest to all artists and cultural practitioners, as well as researchers and students who study performance, art, and culture within a contemporary context.

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