

NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rachel Clements

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Joe Kelleher

The Illuminated Theatre: Studies on the Suffering of Images

Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2015. 198 p.
£26.99.

ISBN: 978-0-415-74827-8.

The title of this book is taken from the philosopher Edmund Husserl's recollection of his visit in 1901 to the Palace Theatre in Berlin: 'I remember the illuminated theatre.' This brief but cryptic reference is taken from a lecture delivered by Husserl in which he refers to the Palace Theatre as part of a wider investigation into memory and specifically the way that memory is experienced in the present tense, as 'something that hovers before me as something present'. Taking his cue (in part) from Husserl's insight, Kelleher's important monograph explores the image repertoire of contemporary theatre and performance to consider how and why it is that theatrical images seize us, reside in us, 'hover' before us after the event.

The seven chapters of the book engage with work by an eclectic range of companies and practitioners including Dickie Beau, Desperate Optimists, the Italian performance collective Kinkaleri, Frank Bock and Simon Vincenzi, Alvis Hermanis, Split Britches, and Forced Entertainment. The approach interweaves personal accounts of his theatregoing and spectatorship with some acute excavation of philosophical writings from, among many others, Roland Barthes, Søren Kierkegaard, Marie-José Mondzain, and Gillian Rose.

The strength of Kelleher's method, aside from its rightful insistence on the irreducibility of the image in performance analysis, is its artful imbrication of first-hand narration of performance (the critical procedure of *ekphrasis*, discussed towards the end of the book) and theoretical exegesis that produces a dizzyingly combustible interaction of perspectives and ideas. Cumulatively, the chapters set out what Kelleher calls 'a thematic anatomy' of the theatrical image that 'illuminates' and integrates key conceptual apparatus such as contingency, recognition, return, doubleness, and (my favourite) diaphaneity in the service of an idea of the 'suffering' image freighted with ethical resonance.

For Kelleher, the image does not refer to 'the fixed contents of a stage picture'; rather, the image is an alchemical 'operator of relations . . . between [for example] the stage and the auditorium' which, in the examples of performance he

considers, opens the possibility for an encounter with alterity and difference.

The Illuminated Theatre combines filigree detail with a panoramic vista of contemporary performance and its preoccupations: 'what it might mean, what it might be worth, what there is to do with it'. It sets out the premises of a fresh discourse on the theatrical image that is responsive to, as the video artist Hito Steyerl puts it, a wider context of new technology and 'image spam'. As such, this book is timely, inspiring, and vital reading for scholars of visual culture across disciplines.

CHRIS MEGSON

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Kathryn Meredos Syssoyeva, ed.,
Scott Proudfit, associate ed.

Collective Creation in Contemporary Performance

London; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013,
240 p. £62.

ISBN: 978-1-137-331267.

This book offers an important compendium of research that assesses a 'new history' of collaborative practice. Its focus is on *devising* as a creative approach. The editors identify early on that 'polyphony, not consensus' is the 'norm' and 'beauty' of its many forms and practices. Correspondingly, the influence of devising on performance in general pertains to the 'conscious emphasis' placed on 'the *groupness*' of its diverse processes.

Syssoyeva's Introduction depicts three waves of contemporary collective creation. Where the first two waves are examined in a previous, partner volume, *A History of Collective Creation*, this edition is concerned with the third wave, from the 1980s to the present. This wave is notable for actor-generated performance coupled with an increase in academic *dissemination* of the collaborative and pedagogic practice that evolved as a consequence.

The Preface contextualizes the range of work surveyed across the book and guides the reader's navigation through the arguments presented, highlighting the variety of approaches to 'making and doing' that evolved through this period of devising practice. The essays raise necessary questions regarding the political implications underpinning collective practice, where the principles of 'togetherness' and the structures of power and responsibility exist in the very processes of creation as much as in the content of any work produced. By investigating the structures of artistic