

NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Alison Jeffers

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Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason, ed.

Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices

Bristol: Intellect, 2012. 224 p. £29.95.

ISBN: 978-1-841504-91-9.

In 1991 Giacomo Rizzolatti and his team of neuroscientists at the University of Parma discovered that specific neurons in monkeys' brains showed activity not just when they were performing a particular action but also when they observed another individual performing that action. This discovery of the so-called mirror neuron has influenced research directions within many scientific and non-scientific disciplines, and has had a bearing on understanding of concepts including embodiment, empathy, vision, and movement.

Alongside theoretical work in the humanities, such as that by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone relating to the 'corporeal turn', these developments within neuroscience provide an important context and provocation for the fifteen essays in Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason's edited volume. The collection brings together in five sections a range of responses to the notion of 'kinesthetic empathy' which the editors convincingly argue is a key concept for interdisciplinary research in creative and cultural practice. These responses focus on practices ranging from Nicola Shaughnessy's work in applied theatre, a series of chapters exploring engagement with film, and a section exploring uses of virtual technologies.

However, core to the work is a concern with dance spectatorship, which reflects its genesis in the AHRC-funded research project 'Watching Dance'. The focus on kinesthetic empathy emerges from a concern with understanding and interrogating the experience of seeing and otherwise sensing movement. The chapters represent attempts by different authors using diverse methodological approaches to explore and test out this concept and examine its implications. The value of the volume lies foremost in its scope and the way that it opens up connections between different disciplinary perspectives and practices. The sustained focus on the uniting concept of kinesthetic empathy is fruitful in providing the linkages, while at the same time sometimes resulting in the re-treading of certain theoretical paths.

However, it is this repeated grappling with the limitations of written discourse in dealing with multi-sensory experiences of embodied practices which is at the heart of the volume's appeal. The

struggle is made most explicit in Matthew Reason's own chapter documenting collaboration with the dance photographer Chris Nash that discusses and visualizes the challenges of representing kinesthetic empathy. Here the acts of translation by the photographer and the writer are juxtaposed and thereby create a sort of distorting mirror of each other's attempts to re-present senses of movement and (importantly) 'the anticipation of movement'. This is a highly stimulating prompt to consider forms of 'non-discursive' knowledge appropriate to engagement with embodied experience and encapsulates well the rich set of future research directions proposed by this book. It is also a very necessary corollary and response to the practice of dancers, choreographers, and theatre makers who are taking inspiration from and sometimes working with Rizzolatti's successors in reflexive discursive and non-discursive experiments with their own and others' mirror neurons.

SIMON PARRY

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Paul Binnerts

Acting in Real Time

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012.

266 p. £ 28.45.

ISBN: 978-0-472-03503-8.

'Real-time acting' as defined by Paul Binnerts borrows elements of Brecht's alienation and of Stanislavsky's identification techniques but is chiefly concerned with the dual role of the 'real-time' actor – who is simultaneously himself (a real-life physical presence on stage) and a storyteller impersonating a character.

This book is part history, part actor-training guide, and part manifesto for performance. It is heavily informed by postmodern theory and thinking. Binnerts maintains that 'The central task of the real-time actor is to maintain the separation of his two functions so that the audience can perceive both beings at once. As narrator of the play, the actor is seen by the audience as himself: the actor. As the narrator who plays a role, he is seen simultaneously as the actor *and* as the character he plays.' While drawing extensively on Stanislavsky and especially Brecht, there is a debt here also to Boal's notion of the *spect-actor* (which goes unacknowledged) in the creation of an empowered, self-aware, and self-observing performer.

The book has a three-part structure, beginning with the historical precursors of 'real-time' acting,