

the book of potential interest to non-specialist readers as well as students, theatre-makers and academics.

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Adam Alston and Martin Welton, ed.

Theatre in the Dark: Shadow, Gloom, and Blackout in Contemporary Theatre

London; New York: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2017.

283 p. £75.

ISBN: 978-1-4742-5118-1.

Midway through this edited collection, everything becomes enormous. In *Unknown Cloud . . .* (2015–) by Lundahl & Seidl, documented here by Josephine Machon, the theatre space becomes the cosmos, performance becomes the movement of clouds and stars, and being ‘in the dark’ refers less to blackout and more to concepts we can’t quite grasp about our universe, or the limits of human perception. A few chapters later, everything is tiny. Matthew Isaac Cohen describes Indonesian artist Nasirun’s installation *Between Worlds* (2013), a collection of miniature beakers and bottles holding hundreds of Lilliputian *wayang kulit* puppets, reminding us how shadows (and shadow puppets) can disregard fundamental laws of gravity and visibility, appearing and disappearing at will, flying through the air, becoming vast or minuscule as conditions shift and change. Such perceptual, perspectival, and contextual adjustments are key to *Theatre in the Dark*, and we revisit them throughout.

Alston and Welton’s important book is about theatre’s relationship with darkness and its many complex allies (shadow, gloom, dimness, night), and the historical, social, and technological contingencies of any elimination of light. Crucially, for the editors and their contributors, ‘darkness is a form-giving entity animated by the presence of others (both immediate and mediated) in the social event of theatre’.

The book’s ten chapters are divided into three sections: ‘Dark Aesthetics’, ‘Dark Phenomena’, and ‘Shadow, Night, and Gloom’. The essays, useful for theatre scholars and practitioners at all levels, interrogate problematic pairings between darkness and racialized blackness, between darkness and blindness. They complicate anti-theatrical assumptions about darkness, and challenge the ocular centrality of much contemporary theatre. We are reminded of the labour attached to creating darkness and lightness in the theatre, the historical journey towards a darkened auditorium, and the exciting moments when light and its absences become more than practicalities, transforming into dramaturgical devices, political symbols, social and participatory ventures, and aesthetic wonderlands.

Alternative ways of sensing are here explored throughout – many writers borrowing from Tim

Ingold’s work on aurality and ‘earsight’. Welton suggests the peer as a technique of active seeing; Amelia Cavallo and Maria Oshodi of Extant discuss a ‘haptic interactivity’ of touch, sound, and movement in pitch black conditions. Welton has the last word, arriving at what might be called an ethics of darkness, building on the political, phenomenological, and aesthetic analyses of dark and shadow that have come before. How, he asks, ‘does one appear and act responsibly to others *sans* face in a cultural milieu in which faces are brighter and more visible than ever?’

KAREN QUIGLEY

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Michael Wood

Heiner Müller’s Democratic Theater: the Politics of Making the Audience Work

Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2017. 225 p.

£75.

ISBN 978-1-571-13998-6.

Readers of Michael Wood’s new book on Heiner Müller’s theatre should avoid reading the blurb on the back cover. This claims that Wood’s study is based on two premises: one, that Müller scholarship so far has concentrated on his written texts rather than the performance of these texts, and secondly, that the focus so far has not been on Müller’s interest in a democratic theatre. The first claim is simply wrong – there are numerous studies discussing Müller in performance (Kalb, Barnett, etc.) – and the second is hardly a claim anyone would dispute.

Instead, let’s begin by looking at the book proper because this is miles apart from its sleeve text. In his investigation into Müller’s democratic theatre Wood presents a discussion of three well-chosen plays: *Der Lohndrücker* (*The Scab*) in two key productions in the 1950s and 1980s, *Der Horatier* (*The Horatian*), and *Wolokolamsker Chausee IV: Kentauren*. By doing so he covers four decades of Müller’s plays in performance and is able to discuss in detail how he took his audience to task. Wood usefully points out that Müller’s understanding of democracy – following Rancière – was one characterized by ‘dissensus’ not consensus.

The introductory chapter provides a useful reading of various theoretical approaches to audiences. It offers some context of theatre production in the GDR, too, but the wider political and socio-economic dimensions are only properly fleshed out in the following chapters. Wood’s discussion of the 1950s production of *Der Lohndrücker* succeeds in establishing Müller’s apparent interest not to teach anything or present something finished but to actively engage the audience in ‘the conflict between old and new’, with the notion of *Produktion* being central. *Der Horatier* is similarly characterized by an absence of closure in searching for an audience as ‘democratic collective’. Related to Brecht’s

Lehrstücke, the play does 'not contain a single moral, nor does it offer an answer to the paradox of the Horatian'.

Written towards the end of the GDR, *Wolokolamsker Chaussee IV: Kentauern*, a scathing attack on the current shape of Socialism in the GDR, is a farce as tragedy. It showcases the apparent lack of ideas, ideals, and progress in 1980s East Germany in the guise of a 'perfect state' where progress is no longer needed as all previously set goals had been achieved. This was clearly understood by East German audiences not as a perfect state of affairs but as a biting satire which Müller hoped would urge them to generate conflict, contradiction, utopias – a potential only democracy provides.

Set against the backdrop of the hard-liners in the GDR politburo gaining the upper hand again in 1987 (in opposition to Gorbachev's *perestroika* in the Soviet Union), Müller directed another pro-

duction of *Der Lohndrucker* – a deliberate choice of play which invited audiences to reassess the current state of socialism in the GDR and its development since the 1950s. The 1988 *Lohndrucker* was an exercise in a critical 'archaeological excavation' *vis-à-vis* the construction of an official East German historical consciousness – a process in which Müller wanted his audiences to participate.

Overall, Wood's investigation usefully foregrounds Müller's interest in democratic processes in which he wanted his audiences to be actively involved. What he perhaps does not stress enough is that this kind of knowing and intelligent audience – one that was able to read between the lines, was sensitive to even the slightest gesture and could read its political meaning – really only existed during a relatively small window of time in East Germany until 1989.

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