

# Book Reviews

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# **NARRATIVES IN BLACK BRITISH DANCE EMBODIED PRACTICES**

**Adesola Akinleye (ed.)**

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 296 pp.  
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**review by**

**DASHA LAVRENNIKOV**

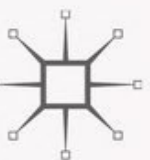
Interfluxos Artísticos Contemporâneos



# *Narratives in* **Black British Dance**

*Embodied Practices*

**EDITED BY ADESOLA AKINLEYE**



# N

*narratives in Black British Dance: Embodied Practices*, edited by Adesola Akinleye, is an essential read for artists, scholars, and activists from a diversity of fields, and particularly those interested in the confluences between decolonial thinking and practice; dance, theatre, performance, and cultural studies; and embodied and critical approaches to research and creation. This book offers a diversity of perspectives, with a focus on the stories, experiences, and creative processes of — as well as recounted and written by — dance makers, practitioners, and scholars of African descent in Britain today. That is people that are traversed by and redefine the experiences of blackness, Britishness, and dance. This includes individuals whose bodies, minds, and creative processes are marked by journeys, challenges, and questions concerning memory, dislocation, migration, displacement, belonging, and being part of a transnational African and diaspora arts community.

This book is a key contribution to the emerging research, practice, and reflection in and around — the when, where, and how — of diverse embodied arts approaches under the porous umbrella of Black British Dance. Using an ethnographic and narrative approach, this book is responding to and honoring oral traditions of African and indigenous diasporas that transmit embodied experience through story. It promotes a multi-perspectivism and pluralism that critiques the monolithic European narrative that ignores and invisibilises diverse non-western

aesthetics and modes of dance-making and understanding what dance may mean. To complement the book, a website has been created with an on-going collection of interviews and sharing of practices that can be accessed at <http://narrativesindance.com>

This book also contributes to and enters into dialogue with key issues being discussed within transdisciplinary perspectives of postcolonial and decolonial studies. In particular, it brings to mind and resonates with authors such as Patricia Hill Collins, who writes about the experience of being an ‘outsider within’, likewise using the narrative method in her research within the field of Black Feminist Thought. The ‘outsider within’ refers, in part, to a unique perspective on social, political, intellectual, cultural, and economic realities, and the possibilities and responsibilities that come with seeing from outside in. Through the sharing and weaving of diverse narratives, *Narratives in Black British Dance* contributes to a reflection of how bodies and unique artistic processes reveal the mobile ground that one’s multiple hybrid identities may fall or root into. It also brings to mind the notion of encouraging and cultivating what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013) refer to as an ‘undercommons’. That is, a space-time and way of being, studying, and experimenting with others on the borders and edges of institutions, as discussed by Moten and Harney in their co-authored book *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. In parallel, the book being reviewed here exemplifies diverse approaches to this mode of subversive and creative existence and shares essential questions around practice as research in relation to the body and its collective nature as a key source of knowledge.

A central issue in this book is that of contesting, negotiating, and moving through and beyond labels and categories that tend to simplify and stereotype. These get in the way of a deeper discussion and building of strategies to create cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary alliances. According to Akinleye, this means ‘Negotiating a label, a sense of

community, not a label that summarizes a community' (2018: 21). This manifests itself in a commitment to cultivating spaces to reflect on and visibilise emergent and consolidated contemporary artistic practices and non-western philosophies of African decent that contribute to dance and performing arts making, as well as a growing sense of *collective* empowerment through the embodied arts.

The book is divided into three very coherent and complimentary sections entitled 'Paradigms', 'Processes', and 'Products' respectively. As it is presented and explored in the introductory chapter by Akinleye, one of the central focuses of the book is to challenge specific contexts, give visibility to the lack of other essential contexts, and present new contexts and stories within and beyond the field of dance. This includes challenging the context of the 'other' and 'otherness', the context in which dance is given value, contexts for talking and writing about the dancing body, contexts for seeing the dancing body, the context that dualism creates, along with acknowledging the lack of contexts for telling non-western tales through dance. Ultimately the book presents new perspectives, environments, and stories amplifying the ways of thinking about, creating, seeing, and theorising dance 'informed by rich practices of artists that identify with Blackness and Britishness' (Akinleye, 2018: 14).

From my subjective perspective as a dance artist and scholar who has grown up, studied, migrated, and worked between contrasting cultures and identities, resonating with and finding deep inspiration and affinity with the cosmologies, philosophical visions, and artistic practices of indigenous, African, and African diaspora artists throughout the world, this book offered new and diverse tools, methods, and language play to analyse and question the dominance of western philosophical approaches to the body, dance, and society that inform our artistic education, arts industry, and cultural sector. As a reader I felt invited to reflect on many things such as the search for identity, healing and

a sense of home and ground through dance; acknowledging the challenges of writing about certain unspeakable elements that are only communicable through the moving body, yet that we attempt to articulate in words; dance as a movement philosophy over a technique or set of skills; the content, research and writing methods and philosophical debate brought up around accessing, embodying, and applying non-western and non-binary approaches to the artistic and academic process.

Ultimately, this book invites the reader to take on a subjective and embodied voice in relation to one's own position, perspective, and privileges: 'the story of dance is filtered through the I, crafting, writing the somatic, the I needs to be present [...] A re-articulation of self as embodied is a process of decolonization' (Akinleye, 2018: 6-7). Where embodiment is rooted in non-western views, this book acknowledges the legacies of colonialism and western dualist philosophies in how we perceive the body and the self on a daily basis.

To conclude, this past year, 2020, has been filled with unpredictability, fears, frustrations, and dis-orientations, as well as an inspiring growing force in social movements among the African diaspora throughout the world. This book is an important contribution giving voice to contemporary reflections and both historical and current practices, responding to the oppressions being dealt with daily, and proposing pathways of creative resilience and solidarity. Reading it in the current context of the Covid-19 pandemic, with collective embodied practices diminished and restricted, gives the material an additional urgency and relevance in the re-orientation and construction of an emerging present and future in dance. •

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# PERFORMANCE, MOVEMENT AND THE BODY

**Mark Evans**

London: Macmillan International  
Red Globe Press, 2019, 210 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0-230-39251-9 (hardback)

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THEATRE &  
PERFORMANCE  
PRACTICES

performance,  
movement and  
the body

mark evans

**I**n *Performance, Movement and the Body*, Mark Evans focuses on movement practice and the role played by the actor's body in the twenty-first century, without ignoring a larger historical background that has its roots at the beginning of the last century in the renovation of theatre and training practices. This is an element he had already pointed out in his previous books *Jacques Copeau* and *Movement Training for the Modern Actor*.

Specifically, Evans looks at different aspects of movement practice in theatre, from mainstream performances to more alternative forms, and proposes this analysis:

The body of the mainstream actor can become limited by too closely defined notions of craft, by what can become (particularly in some cultures and some industry contexts) very fixed notions of what it means to be an actor. Movement directors within mainstream theatre cannot change this directly, but only impact upon these forces through making opportunities for change available as and when they arise (p. 42).

Evans gives an insightful and detailed description of actor training trends nowadays and the way in which movement is central to their possible development, pointing out the necessity of going beyond fixed trainings and the preconceived assumptions of the actors' role in the

creative context of a performance, and specifically of their body. His analysis brings to light the risk of a rigid separation between a strictly technical and physical interpretation and a more "natural" physical one, a dichotomy that is always present in the traditions and techniques that define movement practice. The plural nature of this practice, specifically in the case of the physical theatre genre, according to the critical perspective of Simon Murray and John Keefe in their *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction* (2015) and *Physical Theatres: A Critical Reader* (2007), has always helped to find a balance between these two possible ways of approaching movement practice. According to Evans, there are 'challenges facing the moving body in performance within the twenty-first century' (p.177) that embrace many more issues also related to the socio-cultural context. He has an innovative approach that focuses on the body of the performer also as receiver of the training practice, bringing both a social and subjective perspective to the analysis of movement practice in theatre trainings and productions — '[i]n order to open up critical dialogue around the dominant narratives of movement practice for actors, we need to find ways in which students/actors can identify: how the stories underpinning their acting came to be; what practices they are built on; and what bodies wrote them' (p.11).

From this point of view, Evans is constantly rethinking the role of training and its function both for the actor and for the individual: '[the body] is an important location from which individuals and groups can assert their sense of difference and the significance(s) of using their bodies differently' (p.72). This is because he is interested in all of the multiple narratives that codified movement practices do not consider or bestow. Similarly to what Derrida has suggested about written text being woven by all the traces it leaves, the performance might be considered as a place where movement and bodies in movement tell the story, as Evans also suggests recalling — from de Certeau's argument — the spatial relevance implicit in telling a story: '[t]he stories we tell with our bodies

cannot escape the socio-political reality of where our bodies are from, and the spaces that we have taken them to' (p.178).

The starting point in the history of movement practice is the revolutionary vision, at the beginning of the twentieth century, of a theatre that should be centered on the role of the actor. Therefore, many aspects of theatre practice started revolving around the figure of the actor. In many cases this awareness led to the perceived necessity of a systematisation of the actor's work, and particularly of the actor's training. As Alison Hodge clearly states, in the introduction to her *Actor Training*, from a twenty-first century perspective many of the systems, methods, and protocols developed in Western theatre-making are still the basis of professional training and remain significant. Hodge also argues that many actor-training practitioners have investigated the body/mind dynamic, and that movement is a constant element of many practices, albeit to different degrees. In this book, Evans questions the extent to which movement is incorporated in theatre training and theatre production not as a secondary or extra element but as a 'means of meaning-making' (p.44).

*Performance, Movement and the Body* outlines the significance of movement in theatre practice both in conventional and innovative theatre approaches, thus bringing the focus back to the body not as mere executor of codified languages but as embodiment of personal and cultural stories: '[t]he body is also examined as an area of resistance, transgression, transformation and change' (p.13).

Stressing the importance of the possibility of communication through the body of the performer, and how this body becomes the medium that performers and audience share, Evans wants to analyse also how the body can be the direct point of connection between the cultural story and the inner self of the performer within the outer cultural context

of the performance. The author is looking at the consequences and uses of specific training methods and performance systems and at the possible effects of these on a performer's awareness of the theatrical context. This system of analysis is present also in Evans's investigation of well recognised movement-based training methods, for instance in his analysis of Lecoq's training in the third chapter. Here he focuses on the importance of the notion of play because it brings an element of freedom in relation to the body and the metalinguistic work that the actor might feel constrained to do with it: '[f]or Lecoq, although play may sometimes come very close to "reply", ultimately it allows the actor to transform or extend reality, though always rooted in the performer's embodied understanding of the world' (p.52).

Evans's research on actor training focusing on the actor as author of his movements is embedded in his own practical experience and experiencing as an artist, as he states in the introduction and in the conclusion of this book. This personal and direct relation with the material studied might be linked to the tradition of actors writing on the art of acting, a tradition that can be traced back to practitioners of the eighteenth century such as François Riccoboni in his *L'Art du Théâtre*. Here the author's entire theory is based on his own practice and this becomes a necessary and fundamental condition for discussion concerning the art of the actor and the legitimacy of his theorisation.

Evans's book is organised around six different themes, following a non-linear but still chronological order to describe and analyse these processes — 'Moving into the Mainstream', 'Movement, Play and Performance', 'Doing Movement Differently: Dance and Circus — Danger, Touch and Sweat', 'Movement and the Cultural Context', and 'Movement and Digitized Performance'. This organisation of themes does not connect only to specific techniques, working methods, or companies, but stresses the importance of a perspective on the use of movement in

trainings and performances that would consider the political relevance of a story or stories told through the body and what effect this might have culturally both on the performer and on the audience:

Our dispersed, diverse, dynamic bodies are evolving in relation to a context that is itself in flux. Our bodies, throughout our lives, have to settle into new cultural environments, along with the coming-into-being and the letting-go of other practices that that involves. Though deeply conditioned within our own, often complex, cultural contexts, we are all also increasingly active in our struggles for agency, and aware of the need to be so (p. 126).

For this reason, Evans includes an analysis of the practice of ‘Animal Study’, probably never considered so specifically before. This practice is looked at in connection with the idea of abstraction and transformation, considering the results that occur on the body of the performer:

In animal study, notions of character are almost entirely physicalized and embodied; the actor (re)composes their bodily rhythms and dynamics, what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the ‘affects’ of their body, in order to take on the movement dynamics of the animal. In so doing, they enter into new knowledge about their own body and about bodies in general (p.61).

Evans wide ranging research on movement praxis and embodied performances presents an exciting point of view on the importance of recognising both ‘the socio-cultural context and the poetics of each form of movement practice in order to fully recognize its potential’ (p.178). The body, according to Evans, plays the role of communication not through gestures, mere translation of words, but also simply through its presence in the double role of producing movement and receiving movement.

In conclusion, *Performance, Movement and the Body* brilliantly situates movement practice in a new perspective. Evans acknowledges the plurality of movement trainings and techniques but brings the focus back on the story of the body and the story told through the body, through its singularities and differences, thus generating a political reflection. •

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# **A HISTORY OF ROMANIAN THEATRE FROM COMMUNISM TO CAPITALISM CHILDREN OF A RESTLESS TIME**

**Cristina Modreanu**

London: Routledge, 2020, 180 pp.

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**review by**

**ARMANDO ROTONDI**

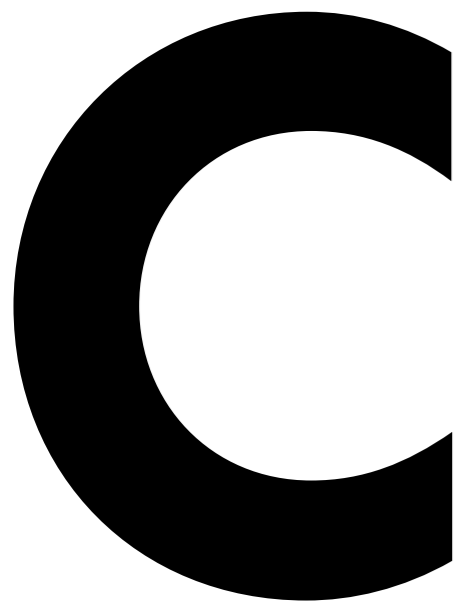
Institute of the Arts Barcelona

# **A HISTORY OF ROMANIAN THEATRE FROM COMMUNISM TO CAPITALISM**

**CHILDREN OF A RESTLESS TIME**

*Cristina Modreanu*

**ROUTLEDGE**  

**Cristina** Modreanu is currently one of the most expert figures on Romanian theatre, active in both the academy and in theatre journalism. *A History of Romanian Theater from Communism to Capitalism — Children of a Restless Time* is the latest piece within a considerable bibliography produced by Modreanu. The scholar has already dedicated important contributions to the subject of Romanian theatre both in the form of articles and monographic volumes such as *Fluturele gladiator. Teatru politic, queer & feminist pe scena românească* (2016). In addition, Modreanu has initiated the theatrical promotion organisation ARPAS (Romanian Association for Performing Arts Promotion), *Scena.ro* magazine dedicated to Romanian theatre, and the project *Hedda's Sisters* dedicated to the empowerment of female artists from Romania and Eastern Europe.

*A History of Romanian Theatre from Communism to Capitalism* is a multifaceted and complex book. Divided into ten chapters, plus an introduction (*Red past. An introduction*) and an epilogue (*Epilogue. Thirty years after Romanian theatre from communism to post-capitalism*), the volume has the strong ambition to outline an exhaustive history of the Romanian theatre from Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime and the moments preceding the end of the dictatorship to the present day. This is attempted through the analysis and descriptive investigation of the work of specific key figures. These figures are mainly directors, as we will see.

The introduction and first chapter (*The old road rapidly aging. Changes in Romania's theatre before and after 1989*) both provide a general picture of Romania and of the Romanian theatrical and cultural environment. It is a real review of events, artists, and shows. Here Modreanu pays attention to Lucian Pintilie and his version of *The Government Inspector* by Gogol (1969). Analysis is also offered of *The Oak* (1992), the first film Pintilie directed after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a work seen by Modreanu as a 'manifesto defending the right to see the world in a different way, the power of protest and the need to systematically question authority, as an act of social hygiene' (p.7). Other artists considered in this first chapter include Liviu Ciulei, Alexandru Tocilescu, Gábor Tompa, Mihai Mălaimare, Alexander Hausvater, and others. The chapter is an intense roundup full of information regarding artists and shows, which already highlights one of the main intentions of Modreanu's volume: the creation of a bridge between Romanian theatre and artists within the international performing arts environment. Highlighting the international relevance of Romanian theatre is one of the key thrusts of Modreanu's text. This can be seen, for example, in the relationship drawn between *Hamlet* as staged by Alexandru Tocilescu and *Hamlet* as directed by Richard Eyre, with Modreanu quoting Eyre speaking of Tocilescu's production: 'When I saw *Hamlet* in Bucharest, I was seeing a play whose resonances were, literally, painfully telling' (p.16).

This first chapter is followed by portraits of some of the main Romanian artists from a national, transnational, and global point of view: Andrei Șerban, defined as a 'prophet without a country'; Silviu Purcărete, defined as 'the visionary'; Mihai Măniuțiu and his 'trial of communism on stage'; and Radu Afrim as an example of an alternative path and 'a queer look at life'.

Before continuing, it is important to note how Modreanu proceeds in her analysis and which sources she uses. Each artist/topic is investigated

using both academic and journalistic sources. These are organized in a reference list at the end of each chapter, many times also with indications for further reading. In this way, each chapter has a sort of autonomy of its own which, on the one hand, facilitates reading, but, on the other, sometimes affects the flow of the volume as a whole. Secondary sources are also accompanied by the personal voice of Modreanu herself who often refers to her own direct experience as a journalist and theatre professional. From this perspective, academic discourse becomes imbued with personal memories at many points within this book. A clear example can be found at the opening of the volume:

When my mother told me how she cried in 1953 at the death of Stalin, she was the first one to be surprised. She was telling the story after such a long time. She was now another person living in another society. But she remembered well how the whole kindergarten was full of tears, teachers tearing their shirts in despair and children running home to find comfort in the arms of their parents, who were also devastated by the news. I saw the same reactions on television from North Korea, at the death of Kim Jong-Il in 2011 – young women having real crises, and even the men crying or fainting as Kim's coffin passed by. Kim was declared after his death 'the Eternal president': an amazing mix of politics and mysticism. (p. 2)

This is evident again within the following extract from the chapter dedicated to Andrei Șerban:

In 1996 I had a chance to witness one of Șerban's workshops in a small theatre in one of Romania's regions, Moldavia, at the Youth Theatre in Piatra-Neamț. His arrival there was like a small miracle for the actors, and almost all of them happily enrolled just to be near him for a while. He conducted the workshop, based mostly on stick exercises meant to enhance the physical presence and awareness of the

actors onstage, always smiling and avoiding any judgemental comments with an elegance and composure that made him resemble some kind of theatre God suddenly descended to Earth. (p. 30)

Yet another example of this tendency can be found within the pages about Silviu Purcărete:

Since the late 1990s, when I first began to travel abroad for theatrical events, the minute I said that I was coming from Romania the answer came in the form of a name, more specifically Silviu Purcărete's name. I remember that I used to hear his name almost as often as Nadia Comăneci's, so I guess sometimes, if one finds oneself in the right places, culture can after all compete with sports. (p. 36)

These are a few samples of Modreanu's personally reflective style that becomes yet more prominent within chapter seven (*Three pictures with Gianina Cărbunariu*). This chapter is dedicated to the artists of the so-called 'dramAcum' movement — 'drama of nowadays' — including Gianina Cărbunariu and David Schwartz. The text here is configured as an interesting first-person account, divided into three episodes about Modreanu's educational and theatrical experience with Gianina Cărbunariu. This chapter functions almost as an appendix that is at the centre of the volume, instead of at the end.

Chapters eight and nine complete the portraits of artists by investigating figures such as: Alexandru Berceanu, Cinty Ionescu, Peter Kerek (*Attempts at participatory art or cracks in the pedestal of the statue*); Catinca Drăgănescu, Ioana Păun, and Carmen Lidia Vidu (*Feminist theatre on Romanian stages*).

Here another fundamental aspect of this volume may be identified: Modreanu's predilection mainly for directors rather than playwrights,

writers, or other theatre practitioners. This is a tendency that can already be found in a previous short piece by Modreanu, *Prima e dopo Ceaușescu breve guida ai registi romeni*, published in Italian as a part of the *Dossier: La nuova scena romena*, edited by Irina Wolf, for theatre journal *Hystrio*.

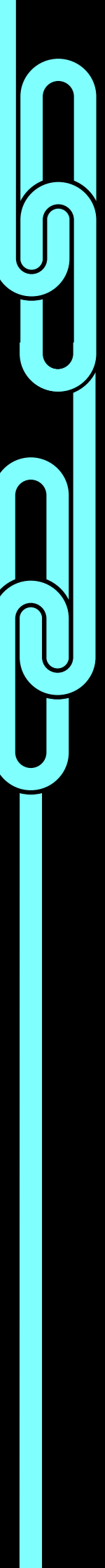
In *A History of Romanian Theater from Communism to Capitalism*, however, Modreanu dedicates the tenth chapter to, as the title puts it, *Mapping contemporary Romania: Thirty years of new drama*. In this section, the author considers some key playwrights that include Matei Vișniec, Saviana Stănescu, András Visky, and Alina Nelega. However, the consideration of playwrights would have needed more space in relation to the investigation of Romanian directors, in order to obtain a balance within the volume. Chapter ten may have seemed less incongruous if it functioned for the playwrights in the same way that chapter one functions for the directors: an overview before focusing on specific case studies. As for these, Modreanu could have selected some authors and dedicated monographic chapters to each one of them, thus creating a history in two parts (directors and playwrights) as would have seemed natural following the progression of the volume. However, this critique does not affect the overall strength of the book as an analysis and an understanding of a theatrical tradition of absolute value and interest, still little known compared to others and of which Modreanu is one of the main experts. •

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# **STRAVEDERE LA SCENA**

## **CARLO QUARTUCCI IL VIAGGIO NEI PRIMI VENTI ANNI, 1959-1979**

**Donatella Orecchia**

Sesto San Giovanni: Mimesis, 2020, 366 pp.  
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**DONATELLA ORECCHIA**  
**STRAVEDERE LA SCENA**  
CARLO QUARTUCCI. IL VIAGGIO NEI PRIMI VENTI ANNI 1959-1979



**I** volume di Donatella Orecchia presenta una struttura volutamente definita, apparentemente rigida e suddivisa in parti distinte e ben identificabili, che l'autrice ha denominato attraverso la terminologia letterario-teatrale — *Prologo, Atto primo, Atto secondo, Atto terzo, Epilogo* — corredando ogni Atto di appendici documentarie che rendono merito alla straordinaria ricerca delle fonti. Questo volume contiene numerosi documenti, notizie, riferimenti storici e personali, elementi che convivono all'interno di questo racconto e che rappresentano, in effetti, la moltitudine di esperienze vissute da Carlo Quartucci e, di riflesso, anche dall'autrice. Orecchia definisce questo lavoro 'il romanzo di una vita teatrale', raccontando la complessa carriera di questo artista pur limitandone l'analisi al primo ventennio 1959-1979, in previsione di un'ulteriore pubblicazione.

Come si evince dal titolo del volume, *Stravedere la scena*, la tendenza a combinare ossimoricamente un elemento codificato nel tempo, la scena, e la natura centrifuga del teatro, si colloca pienamente all'interno di un periodo di grande sperimentazione. Quartucci considerava la tradizione come solido punto di partenza per arrivare a soluzioni influenzate anche dagli artisti europei e statunitensi.

Il *Prologo*, intitolato *Carlo Quartucci o dell'irrequietezza come poetica del moderno*, descrive le esperienze personali attraverso cui Orecchia racconta gli anni Ottanta e Novanta trascorsi tra le lezioni all'Università di Torino, tenute da Gigi Livio, e gli incontri con le compagnie e gli attori della nuova avanguardia, individuando e analizzando le esperienze e i progetti che caratterizzavano la ricerca teatrale italiana in quegli anni e negli anni precedenti. Il *Prologo* viene offerto al lettore come esempio di 'autore a chi legge': l'autrice descrive, infatti, il processo di creazione del suo studio, attraverso approcci non solo scientifici, ma anche personali e privati, indicando come supporto imprescindibile le fonti e i contributi che Quartucci, fino al 31 dicembre 2019, data della morte, le ha generosamente regalato o suggerito inconsapevolmente.

Orecchia delinea la molteplicità delle modalità di recupero della documentazione, evidenziando l'eterogeneità dei contenuti e offrendo i codici e i mezzi per proseguire nella lettura, attraverso un percorso che include varie strategie d'indagine, tenendo conto di ogni possibile fonte, compreso l'indispensabile confronto e dialogo con l'artista in vita. L'apporto dato dalle interviste, dai dialoghi privati, dagli appunti sviscerati attraverso lunghe e amichevoli conversazioni, senza tralasciare il contributo degli articoli pubblicati sulle pagine dei giornali dell'epoca, affianca le fonti 'istituzionali' che documentano l'artista in questione, il contesto in cui ha prodotto, gli studi che lo riguardano, ma anche la storia di un Paese e di un'epoca.

Il *Prologo* è seguito da un *Abecedario*, che ne costituisce la parte conclusiva ed è definito un primo omaggio all'artista: anche questa sembra una scelta apparentemente didascalica, ma in realtà coerente con l'intento dell'autrice di proporre al lettore una sorta di percorso propedeutico affinché arrivi preparato al nucleo dell'analisi.

All'interno dell'*Abecedario* sono riportati termini specifici che derivano dal linguaggio teorico teatrale, descritti e approfonditi attraverso la poetica, il punto di vista e la genialità di Quartucci.

L'apparato su cui poggia questo studio e il suo percorso sono inevitabilmente caratterizzati da un approccio storico, attraverso cui si articola un discorso che sembra, in un secondo momento, orientarsi verso l'analisi critica e stilistica della poetica teatrale di Quartucci. L'attenzione alla stesura del testo è volutamente meno presente rispetto all'attenta osservazione della performance, dello studio sull'attore e sull'interpretazione del personaggio. Orecchia, però, non trascurava l'aspetto drammaturgico e inserisce, nella sezione finale del volume, la bibliografia di scritti e l'elenco delle opere firmate da Quartucci, lascito prezioso in un'epoca difficile per l'editoria italiana del teatro. Pertanto, confluiscono aspetti diversi, complementari o contrastanti, in uno studio riguardante un artista complesso e 'irrequieto'.

Il nucleo del volume è suddiviso in tre 'atti', intesi come periodi di vita artistica. Il *fil rouge* corre lungo la storia della vita privata e artistica di Quartucci, considerando gruppi, teatri, amicizie e innumerevoli sodalizi — De Berardinis, Remondi, Sudano, Squarzina, e altri — descrivendo la creazione di spettacoli e progetti. Non mancano i riferimenti alla cronaca italiana del ventennio in questione, le descrizioni delle vite artistiche dei suoi compagni di viaggio, i riferimenti alla tradizione teatrale, l'analisi dell'avanguardia italiana attraverso gli influssi delle tendenze internazionali, le citazioni dalla critica teatrale, quest'ultima

fonte imprescindibile che rende ancor più solido il discorso biografico, autobiografico e storico-artistico.

A conclusione del ricco excursus di ogni atto o periodo della vita dell'artista — *Roma-Genova 1959-1965; Torino-Venezia 1966-1969; Camion e oltre* — Orecchia aggiunge l'appendice *Pausa*, che contiene materiali fotografici, e una seconda intitolata *Documenti*. La 'pausa' inserita sembra un momento di respiro nella lettura. L'appendice intitolata *Documenti* è costituita, invece, da lettere e da carteggi dell'artista con i teatri, gli attori, gli autori.

L' *Atto secondo, Torino-Venezia 1966-1969*, è ulteriormente suddiviso in parti e fasi che analizzano la realizzazione dello spettacolo *Il lavoro teatrale*, attraverso sottoparagrafi che contengono testimonianze, lettere, note di regia, programmi di sala e registrazioni di interviste, i cui minuti sono riportati in nota e si riferiscono al testo sbobinato e citato all'interno del paragrafo. A conclusione, all'interno del sottoparagrafo *Disegni e progetti per un teatro in divenire*, sono inserite delle splendide fonti iconografiche: disegni e appunti autografi sulla ricerca scenica di Quartucci e dei suoi collaboratori.

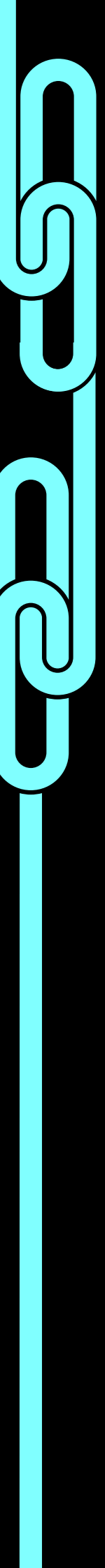
Nell' *Atto terzo*, l'autrice sceglie un cambio di direzione, allontanandosi apparentemente dal percorso cronologico per soffermarsi su un momento particolare della vita e della carriera di Quartucci. Orecchia afferma di scegliere un'altra forma di narrazione, cercando di assecondare le deviazioni e le ramificazioni del percorso dell'artista, il quale, ad un certo punto della sua vita, si dirige verso un'inaspettata scelta, dettata dall'irrequietezza sottolineata precedentemente. Non si tratta di una scelta avventata, sebbene possa sembrare tale, ma il processo che ha portato Quartucci a comprare un camion e a viaggiare si concretizza in questa definizione: un'opera aperta in viaggio. Si parla, dunque, di crisi del teatro, non solo di fuga dal teatro borghese, di crisi del teatro

di ricerca, di fuga dai luoghi del teatro, codificati e strutturati. Tra gli anni Settanta e Ottanta l'immagine del teatro italiano rispecchia quella di un Paese alla ricerca di cambiamento intellettuale, artistico, politico e sociale. L'esperienza di Quartucci, raccontata in *Camion e oltre*, rivive attraverso una narrazione dalle sfumature diaristiche, corredata di aneddoti che mutano la struttura e la natura dell'ultima parte del volume.

Altre cinque parti si aggiungono alle già descritte e contenute nel nucleo: un epilogo con relativa appendice di documenti, anche fotografici, sul progetto *Camion*; un'appendice firmata da Rodolfo Sacchettini, prezioso e raro documento sul radiodramma e sul contributo di Quartucci in tale ambito; un elenco delle opere firmate da Quartucci per il teatro, la televisione, la radio e il cinema; un'approfondita bibliografia degli scritti, che trasforma il volume in una vera e propria summa sull'artista. •

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# RITMOS AFECTIVOS NAS ARTES PERFORMATIVAS

Ana Pais

Lisboa: Colibri, 2018, 270 pp.  
ISBN: 978-989-689-773-4 (hardback)

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ANA PAIS

RITMOS AFECTIVOS  
NAS ARTES PERFORMATIVAS



Edições Colibri

# A

s Anna R. Burzyńska (2016: 9) has remarked, '[t]he nineteenth century was a century of actors. The twentieth century was a century of directors. The twenty-first century is a century of spectators'. In the last ten years, critical work on the audience/performer dynamic in contemporary performance has grown exponentially. Much of this work has focused on the ethical and political questions raised by the participation of spectators in performance, whether through minor scripted interventions or as co-creators in immersive performances. Such work has often been sceptical about performers' sometimes exaggerated claims for participation. Jen Harvie (2013: 40) argues that such 'delegated art practices' can 'model shared participation, engagement, community and responsibility-taking, features which are perhaps particularly important if conventional political models of democracy are feeling worn, slow, disappointing, faulty, moribund or dysfunctional'. However, as Harvie elaborates, when audience members are given no credit or payment for their performances then 'what might appear to be *participation* in such art and performance might be understood more accurately as delegated or outsourced labour' (2013: 43). As such, while audience participation in performance can function as a laboratory for exploring new forms of democracy within theatre and society, it can also reinforce neo-liberal forms of organization of labour that hide the 'work' of performance.

Ana Pais' wide-ranging work on affective rhythms in the performing arts analyses the relationship between performers and spectators from the perspective of affect theory rather than theories of political performance, although politics remains a key part of her approach. She makes this clear in her introduction: 'the thesis I wish to develop is that the affective atmosphere created and transmitted by the audience re-affects the stage in the sense that affects are performative, they 'do things' to the bodies on stage. As the concrete matter of the performer-audience relationship, they have aesthetic consequences' (p.13). Such atmospheres do not necessarily involve the active participation of audiences but can also include emotional and physical responses. The initial chapters of the book outline Pais' affect-based approach and offer a historical account of critical approaches to the audience from classical antiquity to Josette Féral. Following this, Pais analyses the relationship between performers and audiences in three performances: *Until God is Destroyed by the Extreme Exercise of Beauty* (2006) by the Portuguese choreographer Vera Mantero; Gob Squad's *Gob Squad's Kitchen (You've Never Had it So Good)* from 2007; and Punchdrunk's immersive adaptation of *Macbeth, Sleep No More* (2003-). While the latter has attracted much critical work because of its uncomfortable tension between consent and enforcement, the other performances are less well-known and contribute greatly to ongoing debates about audiences and performers. Pais notes how the affective rhythms of each of these performances differ, ranging from the wider affective spaces in the work of Mantero to the more restricted interactions of the Punchdrunk performances. In chapter four, a key chapter of the book, Pais interviews artists about the terms they themselves use to describe this relationship, counteracting a tendency within performance criticism to downplay the intellectual component of artistic comments on performance. The terms discussed include metaphors of 'heat', 'breathing together', an 'ocean', 'surfing', and 'chemistry' (p.204, 226, 230). While few of these metaphors will surprise readers, the fact that Pais takes such imagery seriously enables

her to build on these vivid and physical metaphors and create one of her own that is used throughout the book. This metaphor is ‘commotion’ (co-moção in the original Portuguese), which she defines as ‘an affective coming together to describe the reciprocity of the relationship between performers and audience’ (p.60). Pais explores the affective and relational potential of the etymology of this word, noting the suggestion of a movement ‘which requires something or someone to occur’. Connotations of social agitation and disturbance associated with the term are also noted within the argument that ‘commotion (..) suggests not only inner emotional agitation but also the impact of a collective atmosphere’ (p.242). The term thus combines a more personal, embodied response and a collective political one without pre-empting the specific form this ‘commotion’ may take in individual performance events. Such a role remains with the audience whose affective and corporeal responses either increase or reduce the flow of energy between stage and auditorium. This is what Pais labels moments of ‘affective resonance’ (p.12).

Pais’ book is a novel approach to a much-debated question. It is invigorating and stimulating to read. Theory and practice are discussed in unison rather than creating a division between the intense subjectivity of performance and the distanced objectivity of performance criticism. As such, it approaches the kind of performative writing outlined by Peggy Phelan (1997) which ‘does things’ to the bodies, minds, and imaginations of those who read and write it, in much the same way as performers and audiences create energies and flows with material effects on those who create or co-create performance. In a saturated critical field that does not always question the premises on which it is based, Pais’ thought-provoking book is a welcome addition. •

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# **A HUGE REVOLUTION OF THEATRICAL COMMERCE**

**WALTER MOCCHI AND  
THE ITALIAN MUSICAL  
THEATRE BUSINESS  
IN SOUTH AMERICA**

**Matteo Paoletti**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, 88 pp.  
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Musical Theatre

**A Huge Revolution  
of Theatrical  
Commerce**

**Matteo Paoletti**



**N**el 1914 Luigi Pirandello pubblica la novella *Zuccarello distinto melodista*: il protagonista, *melodista* quindi esecutore dell'attardato repertorio belliniano o rossiniano, si può esibire solo in un oscuro caffè-concerto sotterraneo. Nella Roma affollata, convulsa e già pre-capitalista che fa da scenario alla misera performance, Zuccarello, cantante d'opera tradizionale, può ritagliarsi un suo spazio solo nell'estrema periferia del sistema teatrale, adeguandosi alle richieste di un'industria dell'intrattenimento che ha ormai ben altri obiettivi: ai primi del Novecento infatti si è ormai aggravata la crisi del melodramma (cfr. Guido Salvetti, *La nascita del Novecento*, 1991, per la serie *Storia della musica*), in concorrenza con generi spettacolari più leggeri e fascinosi, quali l'operetta; o innovativi, come il cinema. L'immagine degradata di un teatro — nel senso di luogo, operatori, pubblico — ormai asservito alla mercificazione, destinato quindi a snaturarsi privilegiando forme semplici, di immediato riscontro economico, costituisce un *topos* della narrativa italiana nei primi decenni del Novecento; dalla prospettiva autoriale, infatti, modernizzazione equivale a massificazione e perdita d'identità, soprattutto per i costosi e complessi allestimenti dell'opera lirica, ma anche, sia pure con minore intensità, per la prosa. Il quadro si modifica notevolmente se osservato dal punto di vista di chi si è occupato in quegli anni decisivi della gestione economica e artistica del sistema teatrale attuando, nel bene e nel male, la trasformazione novecentesca della scena italiana; questa storia, non raccontata dagli scrittori se non in

forma parodistica, attraverso figure grottesche di impresari avidi, ignoranti, furfanteschi, deve essere portata alla luce dal paziente lavoro degli studiosi. In realtà non molto è stato fatto in questo senso — ad esempio il noto lavoro di John Rosselli, *L'impresario d'opera. Arte e affari nel teatro musicale dell'Ottocento* (1985), riguarda l'età d'oro del melodramma, precedente alla crisi —; gli ultimi anni hanno visto però un rinnovato interesse per l'aspetto imprenditoriale della 'macchina' spettacolare nei cruciali primi decenni del Novecento. Si segnalano al riguardo in particolare un articolo di Livia Cavaglieri, *Trasformazioni nell'organizzazione teatrale in Italia all'inizio del Novecento* (2016) e due recenti atti di convegno: *La grande trasformazione: Il teatro italiano fra il 1914 e il 1924*, a cura di Federica Mazzocchi e Armando Petrini (2019); *Financing Music in Europe from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, organizzato dal Centro Studi Opera Omnia Luigi Boccherini a Lucca dal 16 al 18 ottobre 2020.

Il volume di Matteo Paoletti, *The Huge Revolution of Theatrical Commerce. Walter Mocchi and the Italian Musical Theatre Business in South America*, costituisce pertanto un contributo significativo alle ricerche in questo ambito, ancora *in fieri* e suscettibili di ulteriori sviluppi. L'autore, studioso di storia dell'organizzazione e dell'economia culturale e teatrale, prende in esame la figura di Walter Mocchi (1871-1955), la cui azione imprenditoriale ha interessato non solo il contesto italiano ma anche europeo e sudamericano, sfruttando il fiorente mercato del teatro musicale nell'emisfero australe per compensare la grave crisi in cui versavano gli operatori del teatro in Italia. L'operato di Mocchi, nel suo ruolo di 'interoceanic impresario' (p. 1), in grado di adattarsi con intelligenza e spregiudicatezza a ogni situazione, stabilendo relazioni professionali con editori e compositori quali, rispettivamente, Sonzogno e Mascagni, o audaci alleanze politiche — ad esempio quella, contestatissima, con il governo fascista —, tenendo sempre presenti le esigenze e i gusti mutevoli del pubblico, è analizzato sin dalle prime tappe di un'attività quasi cinquantennale.

Da una vivacissima e multiculturale Buenos Aires, in cui Mocchi fonda nel 1907 la Sociedad Teatral Italo-Argentina (STIA) che collega i principali teatri sudamericani alle attività italiane, il percorso dell'intraprendente uomo d'affari si conclude a Rio de Janeiro, dove egli approda nel 1955 come modesto organizzatore di spettacoli per la municipalità: 'The musical and theatrical impresario whose very name had inspired a mixture of curiosity, hatred, fear, respect, and envy on an international scale spent his final years employed as a civil servant far away from his homeland' (p.73). Paoletti evidenzia con chiarezza l'acume di Mocchi nell'adattare situazioni già esistenti a nuove esigenze di mercato, trasformando le episodiche tournée ottocentesche di cantanti e attori italiani nell'emisfero australe in un'organizzazione complessa, che prevedeva in primo luogo la creazione di una rete di teatri sudamericani con al centro il Colón di Buenos Aires, poi la possibilità di una stagione ininterrotta fra l'Italia e il Sudamerica, dove gli artisti italiani si spostavano dopo il periodo invernale; infine l'opportunità di sfruttare un mercato più ricco poiché, soprattutto in Argentina, l'opera lirica italiana diventa un simbolo di prestigio sociale, con conseguenti ingaggi più alti per i cantanti. La STIA dura pochi anni ma ha un effetto notevolissimo sulla gestione delle attività teatrali, ottimizzate secondo i principi del nascente capitalismo: 'Its extensive network brought together theatre managers and touring companies into a single enterprise, the ultimate aim of which was to minimize costs and maximize profits' (p.16). Mocchi sfrutta inoltre abilmente gli strumenti mediatici come cassa di risonanza acquisendo delle riviste, quali *Il Teatro illustrato*, in partnership con Sonzogno, per assicurare il costante supporto dei critici e del pubblico.

Paoletti sottolinea il carattere sinergico dello scambio Italia-Argentina all'interno del nuovo network teatrale, che costituisce un precoce esempio di *cultural mobility* (cfr. Stephen Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, 2010): i paesi sudamericani non si trasformano in 'colonia', degradati a serbatoio delle attività teatrali del Vecchio Continente,

anzi l'azione di Mocchi costituisce uno dei primi esempi di integrazione economica e culturale fra nazioni, poiché le città del Sud America giocano un ruolo importante nella promozione dell'opera lirica, ospitando anche prime mondiali di noti compositori, quali Mascagni, con il quale Mocchi stabilisce una fruttuosa, per quanto non sempre pacifica, collaborazione. L'impresario 'envisioned, and in many ways created, a holistic theatrical ecosystem in terms of performance and production' (p.75); un ecosistema che vive fra l'altro di un sapiente equilibrio fra 'alto' e 'basso' dell'industria culturale, quindi tra la costosa e impegnativa opera lirica e l'agile operetta, di grande *appeal* sul pubblico, i cui proventi sono destinati a risarcire le perdite degli allestimenti per il melodramma.

Il titolo del volume di Paoletti non ne descrive però compiutamente il contenuto: l'autore racconta infatti, ed è questo uno dei principali pregi del volume, l'intera parabola imprenditoriale di Mocchi, che dal Sud America ritorna in Italia, duplicando la STIA nell'italiana Società Teatrale Internazionale (STIN); una struttura complessa, che possiede direttamente il teatro Costanzi di Roma e controlla le principali *opera houses* della penisola: 'Through the STIN, Mocchi discovered creative solutions to the financial dilemmas engulfing the Italian theatre industry, namely mounting lucrative operetta seasons and promoting high-profile celebrities such as Mascagni' (p.39). Il ruolo di questo compositore è particolarmente importante per mantenere attivo il valore artistico di un'impresa economica che in alcuni casi non supera la diffidenza degli addetti ai lavori; è il caso di Arturo Toscanini, il quale, durante la prima guerra mondiale, critica aspramente Mocchi per aver realizzato una cooperazione tra il teatro La Scala e il Colón, fatto che il Maestro considera 'to be a betrayal of the cultural ideals and artistic mission of the most important theatrical institution in the world' (p. 54). Nonostante le critiche, l'impresario riesce ad ampliare il suo progetto includendovi anche l'Opéra e l'Opéra comique di Parigi, dando luogo quindi a un produttivo interscambio culturale fra produzioni

francesi e italiane. La successiva crisi durante l'era fascista conduce a fenomeni ancora oggi visibili sulla scena operistica, quali la cosiddetta ossificazione del repertorio, limitato a poche opere famose e di immediato richiamo, e la fuga dei cantanti nostrani all'estero, attirati da condizioni lavorative migliori. 'It was time for Mocchi to reinvent himself yet again' (p.63), mettendo in secondo piano l'Italia e rivitalizzando invece il mercato sudamericano all'interno del quale promuove autori locali sostituendo, al tempo stesso, l'opera italiana con quella tedesca, particolarmente apprezzata; Mocchi si sposta poi in Brasile, dove fonda la Società Teatrale Italo-Brasiliana per terminare la sua esistenza operosa come semplice 'addetto al settore culturale' a Rio de Janeiro.

La ricerca di Paoletti restituisce al lettore, tramite una scrittura agile, avvincente, ma al tempo stesso rigorosa, la figura sfaccettata di un impresario che tenta, con alterni successi, di conciliare le esigenze economiche e la componente artistico-creativa di un mondo spettacolare in rapida e tumultuosa trasformazione. Il volume mostra anche, pur non discutendone esplicitamente, i prodromi del teatro musicale odierno, della sua fragilità e delle sue contraddizioni, tra il fascino e la presa sul pubblico di innovativi allestimenti e artisti d'eccezione, e l'inevitabile declino dovuto alla presenza di più moderne forme d'intrattenimento. La globalizzazione dell'offerta spettacolare e la sinergia fra prodotti elitari e commerciali appaiono oggi fra le poche strategie possibili per risolvere una crisi profonda del sistema teatrale; il lungimirante Mocchi, sembra suggerire Paoletti, già un secolo prima aveva indicato la strada da seguire, qualificandosi come attento interprete della modernità. •

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**LA MALATTIA  
CHE CURA IL TEATRO  
ESPERIENZA E TEORIA  
NEL RAPPORTO TRA SCENA  
E SOCIETÀ**

**Andrea Porcheddu  
and Cecilia Carponi (eds.)**

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**La malattia  
che cura il teatro**

Esperienza e teoria nel rapporto tra scena e società

A cura di **Andrea Porcheddu**  
e **Cecilia Carponi**



Dino Audino

**T**he project of this book originates from the homonymous conference organized in 2019 in Bolzano by Teatro la Ribalta-Kunst der Viefalt to mark World Mental Health Day. The title, which can be literally translated as *The Illness that Cures Theatre*, clearly outlines not only the subject, but also the new perspective that the volume explores through a multiplicity of angles. The main question appears to be subverted: the starting point for this investigation is not ‘How may theatre help people to cope with disability?’ — as it used to be within the Italian-speaking discourse — but rather ‘What can people with disabilities bring into the theatre?’. From this premise, each of the authors contributing to the book develops a different reflection.

Actors, dancers, directors, organizers, psychologists, scholars, and theatre critics, formerly gathered by Antonio Viganò (Teatro della Ribalta artistic director) for the 2019 conference, were invited by the editors Andrea Porcheddu and Cecilia Carponi to further investigate and reflect upon a variety of issues connected to applied theatre and, more specifically, to theatre with disabled performers. The volume consists of a collection of fifteen articles divided in two parts. The first part — entitled *Theatre in the Gaze* — assembles the critical and theoretical contributions of Guido Di Palma, Fabrizio Fiaschini, Piergiorgio Giacchè, Susanne Hartwig, Stefano Masotti, Oliviero Ponte di Pino, and Andrea Porcheddu. The second part — entitled *Theatre in*

*Practice* — collects the testimonies of different practicing artists concerning their experiences with applied theatre, such as Alessandro Argnani, Gianfranco Berardi and Gabriella Casolari, Thomas Emme- negger, Alessandro Garzella, Gianluigi Gherzi, Michela Lucenti, Ugo Morelli, and Rosita Volani. Many pivotal questions emerge from the panoply of voices that this volume intertwines:

What is the creative potential of people’s wounds?

From which standpoint are we looking at the extraordinary presence of these performers on stage?

What new directions can we imagine for theatre research within this field?

The narratives the reader will discover in response to such questions within this book range from studies focused on the social impacts of creating theatre with disabled performers to explorations more interested in going beyond the therapeutic framework. In this dialogue between apparently opposed stances, points of contact and affinity still occur. For example, bodies remain the centre of most experimental efforts in finding new codes. Meanwhile, it is undisputed that the sense of community amongst performers is strengthened when they are sharing the same efforts toward the *mise-en-scène* or even just when they are involved in a training routine. As Viganò himself explains in Porcheddu’s thorough interview:

In spite of the enormous diversities between all the different experiences, you can still feel at home, if that home is built on foundations shared by everyone. The various issues are not solved, but they gain a different weight. (p. 22)

Upon this common ground, the variety of each specific approach and even conflicts between different approaches become extraordinary opportunities for the continuous transformation that theatre needs to undergo to stay alive.

More specific discourses arise about how physical and mental disease may turn into an exceptional opportunity for an audience to seize and delve into the mystery and magic on stage. More than one author challenges assumptions that consider applied theatre practices as mere therapy, rather emphasising both the artistic qualities of the performers involved and the aesthetic value of the overall result. An attempt is made to encourage a shift in spectators' attitudes from a charitable inclusion of otherness (*allowing* disabled people to be on stage *just the way normal people would*) to a recognition of disabled artists' performances as professional practice (with distinctive features not aligned with dominant aesthetics or a normative perception of the world). Other authors avoid any definition that may apply to this field — as their aim is to include *this kind of theatre* on an equal basis within the wider realm of *the theatre* — and mainly concentrate their analyses on the performers' authenticity or on the importance that the quality of human relationships assumes for artistic creation.

Ethical and political issues are also addressed. For example, there is some discussion of how new approaches in theatre pedagogy should move away from predetermined protocols and embrace a more open and flexible way to deal with the unexpected. An issue which resurfaces throughout the book concerns the obsolescence of the idea that learning should consist in acquiring and repeating a technique, risking the mechanisation of any given process. In this case, the emphasis shifts to developing an awareness of the situation and associated relationships, or to adopting a ludic approach, or to being able to relocate ourselves in a provisional mental space situated between our original standpoint and the place the 'Other' resides in.

*The Illness that Cures Theatre* is valuable for its contribution to thinking about contemporary applied theatre. Its importance comes not only from the fresh perspective it proposes but also from the breadth of

different issues thoughtfully addressed in order to provide the reader with a careful navigation of such a delicate topic. As Porcheddu states in his lucid introduction to the book, the theatre needs to be healed: 'Theatre needs everything our society seems to expel. Diversity, awkwardness, disease, handicap, pain. It is the Other world, or perhaps just the Other's world, the source from which theatre can draw a new energy, a new spirit, a new research' (p.8). •

# MARIONNETTES ET POUVOIRS CENSURES, PROPAGANDES, RÉSISTANCES

Raphaèle Fleury  
and Julie Sermon (eds.)

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## MARIONNETTES ET POUVOIR CENSURES, PROPAGANDES, RÉSISTANCES

OUVRAGE DIRIGÉ PAR RAPHAËLE FLEURY ET JULIE SERMON



éditions  
DEUXIÈME ÉPOQUE

DOMAINE MARIONNETTE

**L**e théâtre de marionnettes est souvent associé à un théâtre de marges, populaire et irrévérent, rémunéré au chapeau. Cependant, si les marionnettes rassemblent les foules, déclenchant une participation collective immédiate, elles ont été, par ce fait, un instrument privilégié de propagande dans différents moments de l'Histoire. L'ouvrage *Marionnettes et pouvoirs : censures, propagandes, résistances*, organisé par Julie Sermon et Raphaèle Fleury ouvre une nouvelle perspective qui rompt avec les stéréotypes et lance une curieuse réflexion sur l'impact du théâtre de marionnettes dans l'Histoire politique, culturelle et sociale.

Ce volume collectif s'encadre dans un cycle de recherche du même nom qui a eu lieu entre 2011 et 2018, faisant suite au colloque tenu à Charleville-Mézières du 20 au 22 novembre 2014, organisé par l'Institut International de la Marionnette, avec le soutien du laboratoire Passages XX-XXI (EA 4160, Université Lyon 2), en partenariat avec la Bibliothèque nationale de France, les musées Gadagne, le Clastic Théâtre et THEMMAA.

Décelant les différentes traces identitaires des marionnettes dans l'usage langagier et dans son sens philosophique, le livre apporte un éclairage innovateur sur la notion de pouvoir associée à cet art. Manipulées, frondeuses, inoffensives, tels sont quelques adjectifs souvent attachés aux marionnettes et qui ont motivé, dans le cadre de cet ouvrage, une réflexion sur sa terminologie dans les représentations et les imaginaires

collectives. A ce propos, il convient également de mentionner le travail développé dans le cadre du chantier de recherche sur la terminologie multilingue des arts de la marionnette, coordonné par Raphaèle Fleury (IIM), Jeanne Vasseur (Cnac) et Stéphane Riou (chaire ICiMa).

Si les rapports de pouvoir sont forcément présents dans les enjeux discursifs associés à l'univers des marionnettes, ils peuvent se voir également reconfigurés dans le travail de création, tel qu'il est mis en question par Gabriel Hermand Piquet qui a banni dans son lexique de création l'idée de contrôle. Dans l'entretien mené par Raphaèle Fleury, l'artiste partage un changement important dans le processus créatif, évitant le rapport de force dans l'animation des marionnettes et ouvrant une autre dimension esthétique dans le travail de conscientisation du corps : « Je pense qu'entre la personne qui manipule une marionnette et celle qui l'accompagne, il y a une différence de vision du monde, comme il y a une différence entre la position de l'enseignant qui remplit un vase de son savoir et celui qui, suffisamment lumineux, permet à l'autre de laisser aussi passer la lumière » (p.351).

Organisé en quatre sections (Appareils d'État, Profession, Dramaturgies, Espaces alternatifs), l'ouvrage croise les recherches historiques et théoriques avec le partage d'entretiens, tables rondes et témoignages d'artistes. La première partie « Appareils d'État » aborde la notion de pouvoir incarnée par les régimes totalitaires européens au cours du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les exemples de l'Allemagne nationale-socialiste, de l'Espagne sous Franco et de la Tchécoslovaquie sont mis en étude par Anthony Liébault, Adolfo Ayuso et Rachel Fourmentin. Rassemblant les témoignages d'artistes, le chapitre « Profession » cherche à montrer les coulisses pour éclairer les trajets et les propos de création d'un ensemble de professionnels partagés par différents contextes et aires géographiques : Juraj Hamar et Jaroslav Blecha (Tchécoslovaquie), Kathy Foley (Indonésie), Annie Rollins (Chine), Daniel Urrutiaguer, Sylvie Baillon, Lucile

Bodson et Patrick Boutigny (France). Cherchant à éclairer comment les répertoires et les figures marionnettiques peuvent marquer l'histoire des nations et des sociétés, le chapitre « Dramaturgies » réunit des études qui portent sur la guerre civile en Espagne (Hélène Beauchamp), la Tchécoslovaquie à deux périodes de son opposition à l'Autriche et à l'Allemagne (Cheryl Stephenson), puis quand elle se trouva sous influence soviétique (Ida Hledíková), l'Indonésie de la Reformasi (Sarah Anaïs Andrieu) et l'Iran contemporain (Salma Mohseni Ardehali). La quatrième et dernière partie intitulée « Espaces alternatifs » clôt l'ouvrage, tout en proposant une mise en question des filiations, des mythes et des usages militants de la marionnette dans l'espace public (Alexander Gref et Elena Slonimskaya), dans les usines (Élodie Chaumaret), dans les manifestations et les parades de rue (John Bell), ou sur Internet (Karim Dakroub).

De souligner, la richesse iconographique qui émaille le livre, souvent méconnue, inédite et issue pour la plupart des fonds d'archives privés, et qui de plus se voit complétée par un ensemble d'annexes disponibles en ligne sur le carnet de recherche, organisé dans le cadre du projet : [puppover.hypotheses.org/annexes-a-louvrage-marionnettes-et-pouvoir](http://puppover.hypotheses.org/annexes-a-louvrage-marionnettes-et-pouvoir)

Le lecteur trouvera des études et témoignages qui s'engagent à repenser la notion de pouvoir dans l'art de la marionnette, tout en parcourant différents contextes d'époques et de cultures. A travers les textes, les témoignages et les études de cas, le livre trace un parcours sur un ensemble de traditions et pratiques des arts de la marionnette dans le monde (en Europe, au Moyen-Orient, en Asie et aux Etats-Unis), tout en décelant les préoccupations théoriques qui constituent la base de ce projet de recherche. •

**DIVADLO  
PREKRAČUJE  
HRANICE  
(THEATRE CROSSES BORDERS)**

**CHÉREAU  
MNOUCHKINE  
WILSON**

**Soňa Šimková**

Bratislava: Divadelný ústav, 2019, 373 pp.  
ISBN: 978-80-8190-042-6 (hardback)

**review by**

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**DIVADLO**

SOŇA ŠIMKOVÁ

**PREKRAČUJE**

Patrice Chéreau  
Ariane Mnouchkine  
Robert Wilson

**HRANICE**

# U

ntil 1989, knowledge of Western theatre culture was somewhat limited in Czechoslovakia. Because the Iron Curtain dividing Europe formed a watertight border, few theatre historians in Slovakia are able to give a direct testimony concerning the theatrical performances of directors active in the West in the years before the fall of the totalitarian communist regime. In this sense, Soňa Šimková, author of the book *Divadlo prekračuje hranice (Theatre Crosses Borders)*, is a very rare case of a Slovakian theatre scholar analysing the work of three major directors of the Western tradition: Patrice Chéreau, Ariane Mnouchkine, and Robert Wilson.

Although one of the directors in question is American, the thread that unites the practice of these three great personalities of theatre in recent decades is the French context. While Šimková avows that Chéreau, Mnouchkine, and Wilson are her 'three favourite theatre authors' (p.5), her choice to focus on exactly these directors in one monograph goes far beyond mere personal predilection and neither is it a forced combination. Throughout the volume, we discover that among the three artists there are various notable convergences. The monograph consists of an introduction, three central chapters, and a conclusion. The three chapters, which are respectively dedicated to the aforementioned directors, have a fixed structure. At the beginning of each chapter, we find some useful biographical references, followed by a series of case studies, and

finally a section dedicated to the theatrical concepts of the three directors in their own words, as reported in interviews conducted by theatre critics and translated into Slovak by Šimková herself. Thanks to a careful selection, these interviews complement the picture that the reader can already construe throughout the case studies.

To provide an image of the three artists in question, Šimková selects a number of performances she considers most characteristic of their work, especially those produced in France and, in the case of Wilson, also those made in Prague. For each case, she offers a fairly detailed description of the staging, the sets, and the actions on the stage. In crafting these reconstructions, Šimková reports making use of video recordings, yet in some cases confesses that the only supporting material consists of the personal notes she took while viewing the shows. These reflections are supplemented with quotes from other theatre critics, mostly French, and photographs. Both the author's resources and approach make clear that she is not aspiring to offer an allegedly objective analysis of the pieces she singles out. The use of the first singular person in some statements and the occasional references to 'the author of these lines' remind us that what we have before us is a personal interpretation. Therefore, the illusion of an absolute truth is not created: an openly subjective discourse becomes an honest and above all authentic one. Although Šimková clearly has great respect for the three directors under consideration, this does not prevent her from sometimes giving a critical judgment of their works. For example, by recalling her review, Šimková expresses lack of conviction in relation to the historical attendability of the Chéreau's reconstruction of the classicist theatre in *Mithridate* by Racine (p.72).

In part, the title of the book reveals to us what the main common ground is that connects Chéreau, Mnouchkine, and Wilson: the three directors somehow go beyond the boundaries. They do so by working outside their own country, collaborating with artists of different origins, or creating

works whose enjoyment is not conditioned by the knowledge of a language or a concrete cultural context. Even if the approaches change, the international character remains. In this respect, the monograph offers a contribution to the question of globalization in the context of theatre. In the introduction, there are various references to Schechner's Performance Studies, including the intercultural scope and potential problems of this label. References are also made to Hans-Thies Lehmann's postdramatic theatre and Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction. Looking at her object of study from another perspective, considering the political engagement of the directors, the author opens the question of the mission of theatre in society. It is precisely these references that provide a basis for future research, for which the book can provide valuable materials.

While the introduction and conclusion contain several suggestions for reflection, the three central chapters have documentary value. They document the work of the three directors, but at the same time also the research method of the author herself. Reading this monograph, we not only become knowledgeable of the concrete works, but we also have the opportunity to observe the functionality of the analytical tools used, especially the verbal description of the performances. In the case of Wilson, whose performances usually are not linear narrative, Šimková changes the way of describing the scenes in order to make the descriptions more concise. This process is interesting because it reveals in what measure different types of performances can be narrated and which elements can be described in words.

Soňa Šimková collects the results of studies carried out over many years within this book. We must not forget, in fact, that she is a critic and a scholar who has not been restricted by the Iron Curtain. In this way, with this monograph, boundaries are overcome in several ways and the practise of the three important directors is disclosed towards larger audiences in Slovakia. •



# THE CHOREOPOLITICS OF ALAIN PLATEL'S LES BALLETS C DE LA B. EMOTIONS, GESTURES, POLITICS

Christel Stalpaert, Guy Cools  
and Hildegard De Vuyst (eds.)

London: Bloomsbury Academic  
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ISBN: 978-1-3500-8001-0 (hardback)

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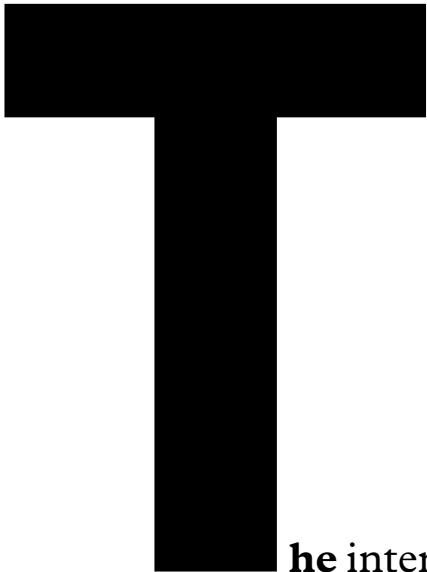
Royal Conservatoire Antwerp & University of Antwerp

## The Choreopolitics of Alain Platel's *les ballets C de la B*


Emotions, Gestures, Politics

Edited by  
Christel Stalpaert  
Guy Cools  
Hildegard De Vuyst





**T**he interdisciplinary book series *Dance in Dialogue*, established in 2020 by the Society for Dance Research and Bloomsbury Academic Press, has launched two new publication formats: *In Conversations and Moving Forward*. The *Choreopolitics of Alain Platel's les ballets C de la B. Emotions, Gestures, Politics*, is one of the two full-length edited collections opening the publication strand *Moving Forward*. In their introduction to the book, editors Christel Stalpaert, Guy Cools, and Hildegard De Vuyst state their intention: to broaden the range of critical dialogues about the cultural and social bodies presented in the work of this esteemed Belgian choreographer. The key notion in the title of the book, 'Choreopolitics', is a concept that the editors borrow from André Lepecki (2013) to compile a series of analytical approaches to Platel's idiosyncratic dance idiom. As the editors explain in their introduction, choreopolitics focuses on 'redistributing habitual and legitimate ways of moving in time and space' (ch.1 p.3) and, as such, this concept provides the shared focus of the writings of the thirteen scholars and practitioners who were invited to contribute to the volume. Together with the editors' own contributions, they comprise a heterogeneous collection of sixteen chapters, organised in four parts: 'Multiple Dramaturgies', 'Emotions', 'Gestures', and 'Politics'. In addition to this structure, the editors indicate that the 'Responsibility/response-ability' that comes with Platel's choreopolitics is the running thread through this volume (ch.1 p.13). With 'Responsibility/response-ability',



the editors refer to Platel's creative working process and different kinds of agency it produces in performance. Some of the examples clarifying this shared responsibility principle are collaborative dramaturgy, the reliance on particularly differing bodies, gestures, and cultures, and the conflictual emotional experiences shared by dancers and audience during the performances.

Editor Guy Cools elaborates on this particular choreographic agency when he opens the book's first part, 'Multiple Dramaturgies'. Guy Cools — one of the first curators to programme the early works of Platel — revisits two public dialogues with the choreographer (1993, 2010) and synthesises Platel's choreographic agency during his creative processes as an 'empathic witnessing' (ch.2 p.20) of the performers, a particular soft attitude of being with and caring for the improvising dancers. Different sections in the book address Platel's choreographic agency by referring to his personal composition method called 'bastard dances' (see, for example, page 126 in chapter eight or page 198 in chapter thirteen). This notion points to how Platel creates phrases or unisono dance passages as collages of movement qualities and personal gestures that cannot be identically reproduced or shared between performers. This implies nobody can claim ownership of the dances; they are disowned or 'bastard dances'. Referring to Christel Stalpaert's play on words, Cools renames the audience 'with-nesses', who are 'to be moved by and take responsibility for the instability and the fragility of the stuttering bodies' (ch.2 p.29). This ethical mirror of the productions is taken up again by Adrian Kear in chapter six, where he offers an insightful analysis of *Bernadetje* (co-created with Arne Sierens in 1996), a theatre-dance by teenagers in which a disturbed voyeuristic spectatorship is the main theme. In chapters seven and eight respectively, musicologist Francis Maes and PhD scholar in theatre and dance Claire Bessuelle reframe this call for individual and collective responsibility, tracing it back to the sacred polyphonic choirs in Platel's *C(H)OEURS* (2012)

and *nicht schlaffen* (2016). Bessuelle and Maes interpret the collective gestures of voices and the energy of the sound as metaphors for togetherness, community and society (ch.7 p.111, ch.8 p.123). According to Lourdes Orozco (chapter fifteen), studies on group dynamics and toleration are also the explicit theme that grounds the critical allegory *En avant, marche!* (co-created with Frank Van Laecke and local British brass bands in 2015). Orozco describes this staged struggle between mourning and celebration of community and friendship in a Europe in crisis as ‘a constant reimagining of personal and community identities’ (ch.15 p.218).

A second major theme running throughout the volume is introduced in Kéline Gotman’s movement analysis of Platel’s engagement with the concept of ‘chorea’, or ‘the neurological disorder most closely likened to dance’ (ch.11 p.156), which has long inspired his choreographical language. She categorizes Platel’s aesthetics as an ‘alterkinetic regime in the arts’, an alternative aesthetic order that dissolves the conventional urge for somatic control in popular dance genres by integrating ‘spasmodic and involuntary choreic gestures’ as meaningful qualities in his movement language (ch.11 p.159). In her analysis, Gotman situates this dance regime in stark contrast to the post-Judson contemporary dance and the French anti-dance as defined by Lepecki’s ‘exhausted anti-dance paradigm’ (2006). For her, the ‘alterkinetic regime’ is ‘a genre of gestural anarchy’ because it queries hierarchising gestures and counters representation and identification in the institutionalised dance theatre space (ch.11 p.163). Platel’s ‘alterkinetic regime’ is reframed in contemporary philosophy in Erwin Jans’ close reading of *Bernadetje* in chapter 10. Jans approaches this choreography from the angle of what Giorgio Agamben calls the ‘loss of gestures’ (1993), which for Agamben, is not only a sign of our loss of experiences in modern life, but also of the ethics underlying them. In addition, Jans refers to the dialectic dimensions in Antonin Artaud’s and Bertolt Brecht’s theatre regimes. Agamben’s philosophy returns in Piet Defraeyes ecological

description of *tauberbach* (2014) as a ‘somatic organism’ with a ‘puzzling gestural language’ (ch.13 p.194), a choreographic landscape that ‘leaves its inhabitants negotiating the meaning of everyday gestural movement’ (ch.13 p.196). Similar to Defraeye’s reflection, Claire Besuelle’s dissection of *nicht schlaffen* nuances the inquiry on aesthetics offered in other chapters. She analyses the aesthetics through what she calls a ‘dramaturgy of the skin’ (ch.8 p.119). I read this as a somaesthetic analysis (Shusterman, 1999) that articulates Platel’s regime of expressions in a most direct manner, by describing the sensitive sensibility of the dancers performing. Eventually, the middle ground between philosophy and the embodiment of the dancer is found in theatre scholar Miriam Dreysse’s essay on the dancer’s body and identity politics. Drawing on Judith Butler’s ‘precarious bodies’ (2009), she puts the fragile representation of identity, gender, and nation(ality) in *Gardenia* (2010) into question. Butler’s discourse on the responsibilities that come with ‘non-normative’ representations, in this case of *Gardenia*’s drag and queer aesthetics, ties the first two running threads, ‘response-ability’ and the ‘alterkinetic regime’ together and announces the last guiding principle of ‘decentred dramaturgy’.

In the volume’s third chapter, Katelin Trenscényi refers to ‘decentred dramaturgy’ (ch.3 p.52) — a notion coined by Peter Eckersall (2014) (ch.3 p.58) — to describe the shared responsibilities of all collaborating artists and dramaturgs in Platel’s creative processes. Trenscényi later describes it, citing Christel Stalpaert, as the ‘distributive agency of dramaturgical labour’ (ch.3 p.54). At that point, it becomes clear that this ‘decentred dramaturgy’ is a macroscopic version of the ‘bastard dances’: both the dramaturgy and dance composition of Platel stem from mixing and stretching personal repertoires beyond their initial ownership or authorship. According to Ann Cooper Albright, Platel’s dramaturgy produces, as such, a corporeal effect that she sees occurring in *Pitié!* (2008) as an ‘intertwining of somatic feeling and political

urgency' (ch.5 p.73). This structures not only an affective relationship with the audiences, but also, as Stalpaert remarks in the last chapter, a new mode of relationality between the international performers, their differing artistic backgrounds, and their folkloric heritages. According to Stalpaert, what is celebrated in the African-European productions, such as *Pitié!*, *Badke* (2013), or *Coup Fatale* (2014), is what Lepecki names 'bodies-as-archives' (ch.16 p.238), or, our personal storages of techniques, movements, and habits. In addition, these choreographies can be considered templates for Platel's choreopolitics as they open up a restless space between the artistic material, the performers, and the audience, by making these agents in performance 'with-nesses' of their own and shared 'response-ability'.

This volume brings together a series of personal, social, and political spheres of contemporary dance and choreographic practices making numerous excellent insights into Platel's oeuvre. Its inquiries, deeply informed by scholarship in dance studies in different languages, also breaks new ground by incorporating new stands of scholarly inquiry in dance studies such as somaesthetics and eco-politics. As such, it opens up a complex debate on the breadth of Platel's choreography in both a multicultural society and a multidisciplinary arts field. The publication is a significant and fascinating critical look at this artist's practices that was certainly still missing from Dance Studies scholarship concerning the Flemish Wave and is therefore a warmly welcomed and auspicious start of the new interdisciplinary book series *Dance in Dialogue*. •

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# LABOR AND AESTHETICS IN EUROPEAN CONTEMPORARY DANCE: DANCING PRECARITY?

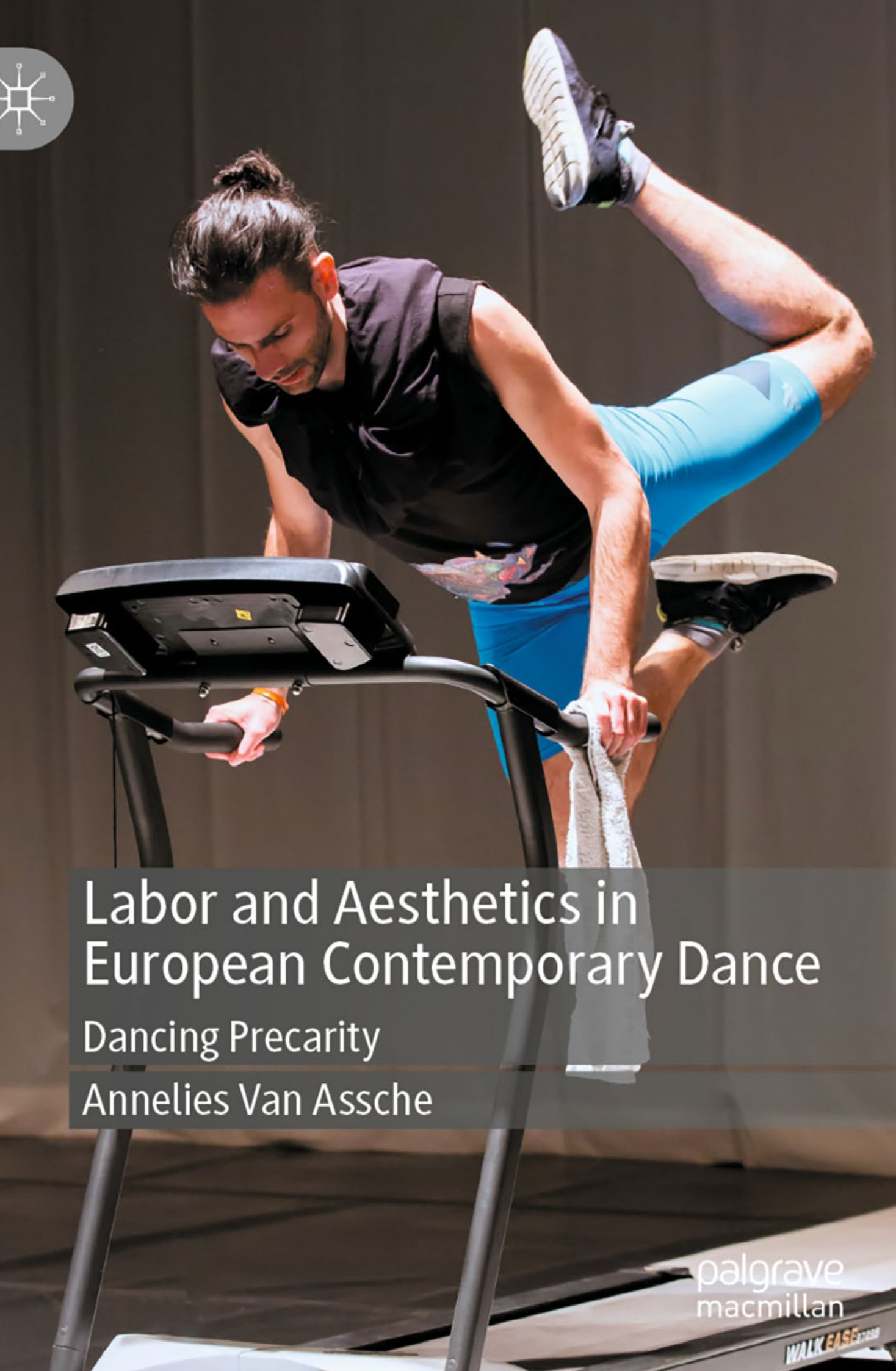
**Annelies Van Assche**

Palgrave Macmillan (CH), 2020, 293 pp.  
ISBN: 978-3-030-40692-9

review by

**KINGA JACZEWSKA**

Independent artist/ scholar



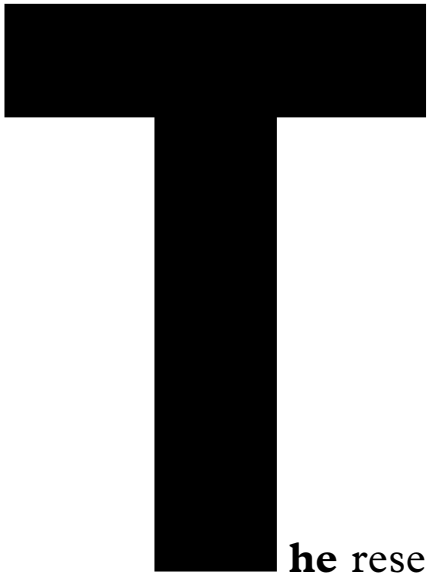
Labor and Aesthetics in  
European Contemporary Dance

Dancing Precarity

Annelies Van Assche

palgrave  
macmillan

WALK EASE



**T**he research for this book began with the author's interest in the project-based *modi operandi* in which contemporary dancers operate today. By tracing the main features of how contemporary dance artists organise both their work and life, Annelies Van Assche investigates the precarious conditions of dancers in relation to our current neoliberal society at large. This book examines to what extent individual (or entrepreneurial) freedom, competition, deregulation, and privatization as characteristics of late capitalism affect not only the living conditions of artists but also the aesthetics and quality of their artistic work. This inquiry is based on quantitative and qualitative data that Van Assche gathered through comparative fieldwork and a series of interviews with dancers active within the dance scenes of Berlin and Brussels.

In 'Probing Precarity', the book's first chapter which may be seen as an extensive introduction, Van Assche provides readers with a broad yet necessary elaboration of the term 'precarious', outlining her own understanding and approach to this notion specifically in relation to the arts. She describes precarious labour as 'involving work that is carried out in a variety of economically and legally insecure circumstances such as absence of long-term contracts and career prospects, low wages, poor working conditions and only minimal or no social protection' (p. 8). Laying out her 'Field of Inquiry and Methodology' in the third chapter of the book, Van Assche identifies the multitude of tasks and functions

that contemporary dancers have to fulfil aside of their profession as a dancer. Precisely for this reason, Van Assche decides to address them as *contemporary dance artists* instead of using what she calls 'slash-identities' such as 'dancer/choreographer/performance artist/...' (p. 43). The flexibility required from contemporary dance artists means that they may need to occupy all these roles depending on the opportunities for work. Van Assche examines these different roles, as well as their impact on the work and life conditions of artists, through a fairly unique interdisciplinary approach that combines 'conventional dance studies tools with sociological research methods' (p. 46).

After the introductory chapters, the book is structured in three major parts, the first of which is titled 'Lifestyle and Survival Artists'. This part presents us with various motives, approaches, and tactics that contemporary dance artists may choose to (or have to?) follow within the field. Van Assche exposes the high value that immaterial capital, such as artistic pleasure or life-long learning, carry for contemporary dance artists. In this respect, self-development and increased autonomy often seem to act as a currency to compensate for the shortages of material benefits within the dance sector. These tendencies are critically questioned by Van Assche, who demonstrates how they can lead to a distinct type of self-precarisation, the continuous interweaving of work and life, and the confusion of personal and professional relationships. Van Assche casts doubt on so-called artistic autonomy by showing how, more often than not, artists appear to make choices influenced by their work's marketability as opposed to their artistic vision. The very same focus on marketability, Van Assche contends, tends to put artists in competition and can thus be linked to the disappearing sense of community that seems to be happening within the dance field.

In the following part, 'The Fast, The Mobile, The Flexible', the reader encounters what may be considered to be the most important segment

of the book. Here Van Assche interweaves her own writing with at times uncomfortably honest testimonies of her informants, presenting a dynamic and very engaging dialogue between researcher and artists. For example, in this part's first chapter, entitled 'The Fast' (which is chapter six in the book), Van Assche elucidates how artists, in order to pursue their art-making as well as to simply earn their living, are pushed to chase funding and programmers and to do a lot of paperwork. She exposes the problematics of the external subsidy system and the (power) relations between artists and 'gatekeepers' (as she calls programmers), showing how easily the subjective nature of such relations can corrupt the creative process.

The seventh chapter, 'The Mobile', unravels the causes and effects of dance artists' mobility between various work contexts and locations as well as the short-term nature of such arrangements. Here we get a closer look at the residency system, which provides artists with a studio space and — in the best cases — with financial and technical support for the development of their work. As we learn how dance artists often rely on this system as 'a form of indirect funding that compensates the lack of direct funding' (p. 170), we discover numerous issues caused by the nomadic and temporary modes of working (and living) which such residencies encourage. More specifically, Van Assche's fieldwork reveals how the sector itself often fails to recognise the working conditions of dance artists that at times basically consist of accommodation for the duration of a residency, a heated dance studio, or uninterrupted working time. This leads her to question the necessity and sustainability of such residency-based ways of working. In the eighth chapter, 'The Flexible', Van Assche uncovers yet another set of characteristics that immaterial workers within neoliberal society must display in order to remain employable, including polyvalence, flexibility, and adaptability. Interestingly, her analysis shows how these characteristics do not only relate to an artist's ability to adapt to various working conditions, but also

extend to the corporeal level: dancers' bodies must remain flexible and be able to incorporate various movement vocabularies and techniques whilst simultaneously maintaining their unique stage personality.

In the third and final major part of the book, entitled 'Burning Out and Slowing Down', Van Assche discusses the effects of fast, mobile, and flexible modes of working on dance artists themselves as well as their artistic work. Van Assche points to the vulnerability and fragility of the human body that, while trying to sustain the speed of today's neoliberal machine, is constantly being pushed to its limits. We learn that burnout is not only a looming risk that contemporary dancers struggle with but that it actually also applies to their artistic projects. Performance pieces tend to burn out shortly after their premiere due to little if any touring opportunities. Once again, we are made aware of the impossibility of drawing a firm line between the work and life of a creative worker in today's neoliberal society.

As Van Assche situates her book at the interdisciplinary crossing of dance studies and sociology, she accordingly complements her quantitative and qualitative research with performance analyses. Thus, besides from being presented with some of the real-life testimonies of various dancer-informants, readers are introduced to a few carefully selected performances that in their subject matter or performed contexts may be seen to embody and highlight the questions and problematics that arise from working as a contemporary dance artist in today's neoliberal society. This approach allows the author to connect the languages of both performance and academia into a remarkably accessible, integrated, and well-functioning marriage.

*Labor and Aesthetics in European Contemporary Dance: Dancing Precarity* brings to visibility the vicious circle in which contemporary dance artists seem to be functioning. As much as Van Assche's field study

reveals various modes in which artists try to operate, the question remains whether it is actually possible to escape from these precarious, nomadic, often opportunistic, and highly individualised ways of working. As the author herself admits in her conclusion, the book also leaves us wondering whether the current working and living conditions of dance artists are their individual choices or rather an effect caused by a lack of alternatives to neoliberal logic and its competitive dynamic. Van Assche does not offer a conclusive answer to this question — she never promised to. However, by unravelling a range of telling facts that are otherwise kept silent about the working and living conditions of contemporary dance artists, she does make a convincing case for the urgent necessity to re-evaluate the structures within which contemporary dance artists are working today. Hoping to resist the tendency of dance and art in general to turn into a solitary and lonesome process, Van Assche's book could or even should be read as a critical and timely call for more sharing and caring, and — most importantly — for more sustainability and less precarity in the field of contemporary dance. •



# THEATRES OF CONTAGION TRANSMITTING EARLY MODERN TO CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE

Fintan Walsh (ed.)

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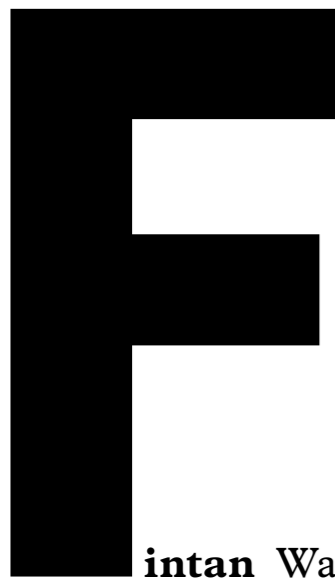
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## THEATRES OF CONTAGION

Transmitting Early Modern to  
Contemporary Performance

Edited by  
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**F**intan Walsh's *Theatres of Contagion: Transmitting Early Modern to Contemporary Performance* appears in the middle of a pandemic when the anxiety of contagion has become humanity's biggest unifier. Drawing from a wide range of theoretical frameworks including affect theory, Renaissance medicine, and Early Modern psychology, this book convincingly suggests that theatre has historically been a locus for such anxieties to be transubstantiated into hope. The text is organised around three themes — 'Infections Bodies and Behaviours', 'Sites of Contamination and Containment', and 'Conducting Emotions, Moods and Minds' — which roughly move from the early modern to the contemporary period. Walsh along with contributors Marcus Cheng Chye Tan, Rebecca McCutcheon, Kristen E. Shepherd-Ban, Julius Green, Lynne Mc Carthy, Liam Jarvis, Mark Pizzato and Ana Pais discuss theatre's status as a contagious cultural practice by questioning its role in the spread and control of medical, psychological, and affective practices.

Walsh's introductory chapter (*Contagious Performance: Between Illness and Ambience*) and first chapter (*Viral Hamlet: History, Memory, Kinship*) set the tone of the volume by boldly bringing together the debates around the status of theatre as a contagious cultural practice and recent queer theories of kinship construction through the exchange of viral loads. Through an analysis of Dickie Beau's *Remember Me* (2017) as an evocation of a séance in which the voices of dead leading actors who

played Hamlet in the UK theatre are conjured in the present to query the compulsory invocation of the past, Walsh suggests that theatre can be a crucial agent of kinship building that does not represent social relations but produces them in the present connecting the living with the dead and those to come. He pays particular attention to Ian Charleson (1949-1990), an actor who played Hamlet's own prospect of death while going through chemotherapy for Kaposi's sarcoma in 1989. By collapsing representation (the past) and the possibility of a life beyond death (the future), Walsh elegantly circumvents the more pedestrian take on contagion as contagion through affect (in the present).

From the point of view of queer sociality, Walsh places his discussion closer to the alternative queer futures suggested by Jose Estebán Muñoz's seminal *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) than to the type of anti-social position represented by Leo Bersani's *Homos* (1995). From the point of view of how queer contagion has been performed in theatres, Walsh's work follows in the steps of David Román who in his book *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture and AIDS* (1998) echoes Douglas Crimp's rejection of AIDS represented as tragedy in favour of viewing art as presenting ways to cope with catastrophe.<sup>1</sup> Drawing from Tim Dean's *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (2008) where the wilful acquisition of HIV via unprotected sex is discussed as a form of kinship creation across bodily and generational divides, Walsh invites us to imagine an erotic as well as a theatric of contagion. This is to see contagion not just as dramaturgical form but as a way in which bodies, subjectivities, affects, and histories intermingle across time, creating a communion between the living and the dead. The significance of Walsh's intervention is that, according to him, queer futurity can only be achieved in communion with our queer ghosts.

1. Román, David. 1998. *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture and AIDS*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), p.68.

Many chapters in this book broach the issue of theatrical contagion by linking the present to the Elizabethan past as a continuum. Shani Bans' chapter explores the place of the body as porous and the place of the stage as a locus of anxiety in an illuminating way. Drawing from medical theories of vision prevalent in Elizabethan times mainly in northern Europe, Bans suggests that actors and spectators were actively participating in the creation of a theatre of visual contagion. Her exclusive focus on vernacular theories prevents her from addressing the influence of Italian Neo-Platonism that, according to Ioan Couliano's *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (1987), was brought by Giordano Bruno to the Elizabethan court when they were exiled to London. Bans' discussion of the influence of medicine in Early Modern English theatre could benefit from these debates that may enable broader questions regarding the place of art in the manipulation of memory as magic through theatrical imagery as in Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1467) and Giulio Camillo's *L'Idea del Teatro* (1550).

The use of affect theory is more traditional in Rebecca McCutcheon's practice-based research on affective contagion as a site-based performance in a former church in Dilston Grove, London, through which mob behaviour is conceptualised. By attempting to revert the negative connotations attached to ideas of affective contagion after their appropriation by the intellectual right, McCutcheon helps prove Walsh's point that contagious performance helps prevent historical and aesthetic closure through an infectious flow of voices, images, and ghosts. Meanwhile, Marcus Cheng Chye Tan approaches musical affect through a discussion of sonicity and sonority as a way of bringing audiences and characters together. Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr explores the transition between nineteenth-century theatrical representation of biological transmission to more recent approaches to infection as transmitted from mind to mind such as within contagion-based gaming. Julius Green examines purportedly fear-induced responses amongst theatre

audiences and specifically the phenomenon of fainting as a contagious reaction at the Parisian *Théâtre du Grand-Guignol* (1897-19632) and at Lucy Bailey's notoriously bloody production of *Titus Andronicus* at Shakespeare's Globe in 2014. These are convincingly presented as examples of how a medical condition could be passed from the stage to the audience. Molly McPhee analyses two plays by UK-based *Clean Break Theatre Company* where pre/conceptions of social contagion are activated through sites of textual infection and emotional contagion. By pushing sex trafficked children out of the role of helpless victims, the play does not provide any easy object on which to hook a quick judgement of the situation. Lynne McCarthy discusses how metaphors of contagions are transformed into reality in an unauthorised Irish Traveler settlement at Dale Farm, Essex which was located nearby polluted sites in 2011. She convincingly shows how the State uses infrastructure as stagecraft to dramatize physical space and enact what she considers to be environmental racism. Linked to Tan's approach to affect through sound, Ana Pais situates Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* (2011) as an example of how immersive theatre can paradoxically invite the roaming spectator to follow his or her instinct within a contagious atmosphere of threat and tension propagated by soundscape and other devices such as masks and self-absorbed performers. This allows her to effectively counter recent critical approaches to participation, spectatorship, and labour in immersive theatre as ideologically neoliberal and 'entrepreneurial'. The last chapter is one of the most thought provoking. Drawing from neurology, Mark Pizzato offers a detailed anatomisation of how the brains of those representing characters' minds on stage connect with the brains of those in the audience, complementing Green's chapter on clinical suggestion through stagecraft.

From an academic point of view, this book brilliantly situates current debates of performance and theatre studies into a wider critical context where neurology, alternative visual cultures, queer studies, and

art history interact to bring much needed light to stagnant disciplinary discussions. As a political intervention, this book makes a very strong case for theatre as a locus for critically approaching contagion as something deeply implicated in the discourse and practices of socio-political formation. Indeed, as we have all experienced during recent times, contagion is often weaponised in language, imagery, and law. •

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