Book Reviews

Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment by Tim Etchells. London: Routledge, 1999. 208 pp. $24.95. Paperback. ISBN 0-415-17383-3.

Since its inception in 1984, Tim Etchells has served both as the artistic director and spokesman for the Sheffield, UK based theatre collective Forced Entertainment. Their work includes touring theatre performances, gallery based installations, site-specific performance, digital computer design, and film. This group has served as inspiration for a whole generation of theatre practitioners in England. *Certain Fragments* is an attempt to chronicle the work and aspirations of the company, as well as provide a methodology or language to experience the work of the company and the work of live art in general. It charts both the history of the company, and the evolution of one of British theatre's most innovative creator/ theorists. Etchells is not only a practitioner, but also a spokesperson for a particular brand of politically commitment through cultural practice. Rather than follow the commercial mainstream paths of contemporary theatre, he and the company have found an expressive form that articulates the voice of a generation of alternative theatre practice within England.

Certain Fragments is organised in three sections with an introductory essay by Peggy Phelan, which succinctly explicates and thereby grounds the imperatives of the book within a scholarly framework. Section 1: Essays, both chronicles the development of the company and articulates a range of views of performance issues, such as process and collaboration, documentation and performance, performance and technology. An interview with Ron Vawter pays tribute to the Wooster Group's influence on the company as well as emphasizes performance tactics that they commonly employ. The essays disrupt traditional narratives of theatre practice and theory by posing a series of questions on the nature of performance. It is an act of performance and an act of theorization through performance. Their form is part journal, part manifesto, part artifact, part philosophical document and part fiction. The blending of all of these qualities fuse together to suggest a way of looking, creating and observing the world and the ways in which we build narratives and arguments. The collaborative method of creation and exploration is suggested to be like the madness and free imagination of the child. Where does the wonder of theatre come from? Where and how do we understand life and death? Why is it that we pay to watch others perform and present? What is the relationship between the performer and the material or the spectator and the performance? How is the material created? How do these fragments of ideas in each of the essays relate to one another? How do the fragments compose the whole of theatrical performance? It is a text of performance inquiry, and the performances he describes are sorts of inquiry in themselves. How does one

capture a performance in documentation? How does one perform a city? What are the different tactics chosen to develop a work?

Section II, Performance Texts, collects the scripts of Forced Entertainment productions, *(Let the Water run its Course) to the Sea that Made the Promise, Emanuelle Enchanted, Club of No Regrets* and *Speak Bitterness*. Even with inclusion of production photographs, the texts do not give a full impression of the performance. As Etchells acknowledges, "These texts are ghosts. . . . These ghost texts are clues . . . I know that the clue they carry cannot be trusted as 'fixed' but only seen in the moment and understood in all contingency . . . The texts are vivid clues. And not to be trusted"(133). What arises from the fragmentary descriptions of work, photographs and texts are raw material with which someone can formulate an idea of the tropes running through the work. However, one cannot trust the performance texts because they leave so much up to the reader and thinker. It is difficult to match up the thirteen pages of dialogue in *Club of No Regrets* to the hour and twenty-five minutes duration indicated in the production notes. As a witness of some of these shows in performance, I can attest that the tempo, free-form physical actions and volume of speech all are critical to a meaningful experience of the work. The printed texts are open-ended and are part of the larger collection which itself does not have an overtly articulated central through line or argument. While this book is an excellent resource, it does demand some knowledge of the performance style and coterie ideas that were bouncing around the English live art scene in the 1990s. Etchells poses a series of questions that the practitioners seem to have a grasp on, but his deliberate elusiveness can leave the reader without a concrete understanding of the overall performances.

Etchells' fluency in articulating live performance becomes evident in Section III, Journalism and Programme Notes. Here he selects reviews he has written of productions that have been inspirational and influential. Forms such as choreography, installation, and live art are used to iterate abstract notions of performitivity, and alternative forms that Forced Entertainment represent in their work. As well, programme notes are included which are useful articulations of the context, framing and styles of various performance pieces such as *Some Confusions in the Law about Love, Club of No Regrets, Red Room, Dreams' Winter, Hidden J, Speak Bitterness, Showtime* and *Pleasure*. Taken as a whole, the notes are an indication of the mood and playful quality that is contained within the performance of their work. Additionally, the book contains a useful appendix listing past and present company members, and a chronology of productions.

Certain Fragments reads like a philosophy of art—it is a manifesto or a prayer book of the working relationship of theatrical practice. Its fragments, when considered as a whole, form a mosaic that the reader must work at to make into any sense. The organization and fragmentation of the text are used to try and give the sense of the non-linearity of the pieces themselves. It is a different way of

exploring theatre work—rather than describe and analyze the work in a pre-digested form, it offers a textual equivalent to the experience of watching the performances. Its effort to give shape to the complex relationship of the creation process to the material evidence left behind makes it an excellent resource for scholars and students trying to unravel the company's curious production tactics. By allowing the reader to engage with a range of questions and approaches that the company employs in the creation of the work, it provides insight into the devising and writing process that each of the shows undertakes and goes a long way to try and capture the fleeting transitory qualities of a theatre practice that is reliant on phenomenological experience of the spectators. It brings the dreams generated by the productions into focus by blending everyday life and theatre into a way of living and interacting with the world.

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Death & Taxes. Hydriotaphia and Other Plays by Tony Kushner. New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2000. 316 pp. $16.95. Paperback. ISBN 1-55936-156-5.

Despite an exceptionally diverse output of plays, most audiences are only familiar with Tony Kushner as the author of the two *Angels in America* plays, *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*. In fact, Kushner has also produced an impressive array of works including other full-length plays (*A Bright Room Called Day*, *Slavs!*, *Hydriotaphia*, or *The Death of Dr. Browne*, and the forthcoming *Henry Box Brown*, or *The Mirror of Slavery* and *Home Body/Kabul*), opera libretti (*Caroline*, or *Change* and *St. Cecilia*, or *The Power of Music*), adaptations (Corneille's *The Illusion*, Goethe's *Stella*, Ansky's *A Dybbuk*, Brecht's *The Good Person of Setzuan*), essays on a wide range of topics (several published in *Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness*), and one-acts. In Kushner's lastest collection, *Death & Taxes. Hydriotaphia and Other Plays*, a handsome volume published by the Theatre Communications Group, one-acts are stressed, although the collection also includes the full-length play, the aforementioned *Hydriotaphia*. Each of these diverse and singular selections demonstrates Kushner's characteristic gifts for language, characterization, fantasy and theatricality, multicultural and gender issues, spirituality, history, and politics.

Hydriotaphia is a play Kushner wrote in the mid-1980s, but significantly revised in 1997 for its first full-scale professional productions in 1998 at the Alley Theatre in Houston, Texas, and California's Berkeley Repertory Theatre. Well-received in both productions, the play is published in *Death & Taxes* for the first time. Through his imaginative rumination on the life of writer and scientist Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682), Kushner imagines the period in which capitalism was born. He creates a wild flight of theatrical and intellectual fantasy in *Hydriotaphia* that results, as he stated in program notes for the Alley Theatre production, from "a certain fascination that I've always had with death and dying, and I've been intrigued by the fact that it seems like a very lively kind of fascination." Browne is in a struggle with the imminence of his death, the subtle avarice and brutality of his own soul, the greed of his unloving family members and friends, and the ignorant and superstitious time in which he lives. Kushner asks what is the effect of unchecked acquisitiveness on an individual's soul, on those around him, and on the society of which he is an integral part? These are interesting questions in the affluent present and are curiously tied to a meditation on the meaning of death, both in its scientific reality and in its spiritual possibility. This multi-pronged play mingling the metaphysical with the mundane, explores the complexities of existence and the mysteries of the afterlife and, as such, anticipates themes Kushner explores in more contemporary terms in *Angels in America*.

Specifically focusing on Browne's 1658 treatise, *Hydriotaphia*, Kushner

invents the last day of Browne's life as a metaphor for his theories and what Browne symbolizes in the dialogue on social and economic progress. Browne's ruminations on death, burials, and the Christian view of eternal life are used by Kushner as a grotesque backdrop for a man facing his own demise. Kushner employs these notions as a jumping-off point for an irreverently whimsical, theatrically baroque exploration of life and death through his argument with Browne's own philosophical questions about existence and the material and spiritual aspects of death. Not binding himself to the strict facts of Browne's life, Kushner's close encounter with Browne is at once both outrageously comic and malevolently macabre.

A primer for appreciating the style and substance of Kushner's later works, *Hydriotaphia* establishes his ambitions for a revitalized epic theatre which, as he himself has explained, explores possibilities that "range from a vastly improved world to no world at all." The play is set in Kushner's wild imaginings of the seventeenth century—depicting the first awkward, unknowing stages of modern science, frightening in their horrific ignorance. Browne is little more than a science experiment himself, undergoing leechings, enemas with Rube Goldberg machines belonging more to commedia dell'arte than real life, and various other gross procedures which only hasten a death that mere decades later would not have to occur. Kushner thus effectively—if, in this case, with outrageous humor and ghoulish imagery—underscores his frequent theme of the wrenches of transitions, for it is not only the encroachment of capitalism, but the marriage of superstition to religion and religion's collisions with science that are also central to *Hydriotaphia*. Restoration comedy meets a Saturday matinee horror movie, Browne meets the Marxes (Karl and Groucho), and the result is a surprisingly bracing, nightmarish romp through church, cemetery, and the dawning ravages of capitalism.

Death & Taxes also includes several Kushner one-acts which, on a smaller scale, explore similar issues in the realms of economics, religion, death, and the personal. Kushner draws on his Jewish heritage for *Notes on Akiba*, a short and and dizzily silly duologue written for The Third Seder of New York's Jewish Museum in 1995. A typically Kushnerian mixture of humor, history, and socio-political concerns, *Notes on Akiba* features Kushner himself in a dialogue with his friend, director Michael Mayer (who staged the national tour of *Angels in America*). Drawn from what he calls a study of his "usual rabbinate," including Harold Bloom and especially Ira Steingroot, Kushner effectively and humorously twines together the Passover traditions of Judaism with the attributes of the modern skeptic who, despite his skepticism, is searching for meaning and understanding in ancient stories and texts. At one point, Mayer asks why the night of Passover is different from other nights: "On all other nights gay Jewish men are channeling their great-great-grandmothers from the Russian Pale" (258). Perhaps, Michael imagines, the rabbis are working out "strategies of resistance" instead of merely recounting the Exodus: "The garrison is weak, that one is vulnerably positioned, we might roll

big stones off the tops of those cliffs and bash in the skull of that centurion, this captain, that governor. Is Death a part of the miracle that brings liberation" (259)? Exodus, the act of freeing oneself from one constraint, oppression, or trial, places one within another, so, Kushner argues in *Notes on Akiba*, it is "a liberation and also an affliction" (259). As the play ends, Kushner has Michael say that the Akiba story, frequently overlooked in the study of Judaism, offers "a quadruple benediction: The Place, God, The Torah, God. Ha-Makon, Hebrew for 'The place,' is one of God's many names" (259). Seeking "the place" is a journey, Kushner allows his dramatic alter-ego to stress, "Towards which perhaps we are wandering" (260)—and Kushner, as in *Angels* and other works, depicts existence and death as a journeying, not necessarily to a reward, but, in itself, a strategy of existing, of finding meaning, of surviving.

Loss and change are central to Kushner's *Reverse Transcription. Six Playwrights Bury a Seventh, A Ten-Minute Play That's Nearly Twenty Minutes Long*, a 1996 play premiered at the Humana Festival of New American Plays at the Actors Theatre of Louisville. Finding the ten-minute form preposterous, Kushner crafted an amusing depiction of fictional playwrights based on aspects of his peers whose descriptions make some of them familiar to audiences. Although Kushner claimed in an interview that he found it "fun to try" the ten-minute format, although "I immediately failed," his play is not without some intriguing elements, particularly as it explores the role and struggles of the artist. This riff on the strains of being a contemporary playwright was called an "in-joke" by at least one dissenting critic, but it provides an opportunity for Kushner to argue, in a somewhat lighthearted tone, the pros and cons of the dramatist's life, the value of theatre in general, the nature of literature, and, as always with Kushner, the sufferings of life and the fears and fantasies of death or other, unknown worlds.

Reverse Transcription begins with Kushner joking with sublime self-deprecation via the recorded Voice of the Playwright (Kushner's own voice at Louisville) that this play includes seven characters, "too many for a ten-minute play. It'll be twenty minutes long! Fuck it. One of them is dead and the others can all talk fast" (8). As the action commences, six playwrights find themselves on Abel's Hill, an old Yankee cemetery on Martha's Vineyard, where a seventh playwright, Ding, has asked to be buried following his death from AIDS. Improbably, they have brought Ding's body here for a secret burial. The six live writers are a bold assortment of types, varying in ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and levels of success: some are critically acclaimed, some are unknown; some are rich and frequently produced, some are struggling and comparatively unknown; some are prolific, some are not. The difficulty of developing six characters in such a short form provides a significant challenge which Kushner addresses by allowing each to be a type, requiring the audience to fill in some of the more obvious blanks. Each character announces his or her own particular characteristics and distinguishing

sufferings, allowing connections to be made among the characters in their human and professional struggles and yearnings. Curiously, it is the deceased Ding who emerges most vividly, both as an inspiration and as an object of affection to the others. They are drawn together, despite their many disagreements and jealousies, in mutual sadness over losing Ding. The playwrights are a contentious group, and only in the play's final moments, as they finally prepare to break ground to bury Ding, do they come together to share some fleeting insights on their craft and art.

Death & Taxes also includes a Kushner one-act called *Terminating, or Lass Meine Schmerzen Nicht Verloren Sein, or Ambivalence*, inspired by William Shakespeare's Sonnet 75. This hilarious and moving play was written for a bill of one-acts by several contemporary American playwrights (including Eric Bogosian John Guare, Marsha Norman, Ntozake Shange, Wendy Wasserstein, and William Finn) called *Love's Fire*, which was commissioned and staged by The Acting Company for a tour of the United States throughout 1997, followed by a month-long run at New York's Public Theatre during the summer of 1998.

Terminating, which is set in a present-day psychiatrist's office, focuses on Hendryk, a bizarrely disturbed and loquacious intellectual who believes himself to be in love with his shrink, Esther, who has recently terminated Hendryk's therapy. Esther is, in fact, afraid of Hendryk, a "godforsaken mess" (p. 267), and she tries to convince him that his proclamations of love for her are just transference. He retorts that all love is transference, begging desperately to sleep with her. Esther tries to laugh this off, pointing out that Hendryk is, in fact, gay. When he calls her "a dyke" in response, she tries to deny it, but he insists: "You wear . . . Harley Davidson boots and you have short hair" (273).

Esther and Hendryk see visions of their lovers as they continue their serio-comic battle of wills. Esther's domestic partner, Dympha, is younger than Esther and prone to possessiveness, while Hendryk's lover, Billygoat, appears occasionally to spout bits of Shakespearean love poetry—"So are you to my thoughts as food to life" (275)—to distract Hendryk. He tries to ignore these intrusions, shouting, "SHUT UP! I hate the sonnets. Boring boring boring" (275). However, this is not completely so, for the terminally ambivalent Hendryk talks incessantly in a torrent of literary references (a bit of Kushnerian self-mockery, although this is the only aspect of Hendryk that seems at all like his author), as well as a stream of hilarious contradictions and bizarre juxtapositions. These underscore Kushner's central exploration of the powers and failures of language to communicate feeling in this brief and imaginative encounter with Shakespeare's Sonnet 75. However, other than Billygoat's comic intrusions, Shakespeare is in little obvious evidence in *Terminating*, although the phrase "Possessing and pursuing no delight" permeates its essence. The lyrical language, episodic scene structure, startlingly original characterizations, and universality of themes describes Shakespeare's plays—and Kushner's as well. Critics have made much of the connections between Kushner's

dramas and Brecht's, but the influence of Shakespeare is, in its own way, as potent.

Also included in *Death & Taxes* is a very short Kushner one-act, *G. David Schine in Hell*, first published in the *New York Times Magazine* under the title, *A Backstage Pass to Hell*. It is little more than an hilarious sketch, written, as Kushner notes, "With apologies to George Bernard Shaw, Philip Roth, God, the Devil and everyone in between" (229). It gave Kushner an opportunity to bring back the hilarious and frightening vision of Roy Cohn so central to *Angels*, a character so rich in its ability to represent the aggressive hypocrisies of American conservatism that Kushner is clearly reluctant to let him go.

Kushner was inspired to briefly revisit Cohn and other significant figures of his era in response to news of the June 19, 1996 death of G. David Schine in a single-engine plane crash. Schine was a catalyst in one of the most disturbing eras of post-World War II American history, an unwitting central figure (though ultimately insignificant himself) in the political fall of Cohn, and, more importantly, Cohn's boss, Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy. Schine, a McCarthy consultant during the Army-McCarthy hearings in 1953-1954—and purportedly the object of Cohn's private desires—became the center of a public storm when McCarthy and Cohn applied inappropriate pressure on the military to get Schine, only a private, preferential treatment and a commission as an officer in the Army. The acrimonious Army-McCarthy hearings irrevocably damaged McCarthy's public image, leading to the ignominious end of his political career.

As *G. David Schine in Hell* begins, Cohn is discovered residing in Hell, much as he is at the end of *Perestroika*. As described by Kushner, Hell is a place resembling "a dinner theater in Orange County California" (231), where Cohn, dressed in a loudly colored tuxedo, holds court while Andrew Lloyd Webber music drones incessantly in the background. Cohn encounters an elderly man newly arrived in Hell, and, after some preliminary misunderstandings, he recognizes the man as G. David Schine, the slow-witted one-time object of his conflicted affections. David, recognizing that if Roy is present, "This must be Hell!," insists he belongs in Heaven—"I've been really good, the last fifty years, I mean, not perfect, but I produced a hit movie! I married Miss Universe" (232-233)! Roy, in the outrageously aggressive manner he exhibits in *Angels*, explains that they are both better off in Hell, for Heaven is "Fulla kvetchy communists" discussing "how the Great Leap Forward turned into the Biggest Bellyflop in History" (233). David asks Roy who else is residing in Hell and Roy lists: "All Republicans, many Democrats, Jesse Helms—I know, he's not really dead but he has a backstage pass" (233). Roy points out that David no longer has to look like an old man and, with that, David instantly transforms into his former self as a handsome young man dressed in a G. I. uniform. Roy is ecstatic to see the attractive young David again—"like the replacement lead in a Tarzan movie"—the man whom Cohn says helped push McCarthy "to perdition" for "our story is epic, it's tragic, it's . . .

South Pacific, Dave, my doomed love for you turned you into history, . . ." (235). "The Internationale" is heard playing in the background and Alger Hiss appears, visiting Hell for "a little moral certainty" even though, he says, it must be obtained at the price of "an appalling degree of moral shortsightedness" (237). In Heaven, Hiss complains, it's all questions and soul-searching. Many of the questions are apparently directed at Hiss about the meaning of the political struggles of the Cold War era—and whether or not Hiss was actually guilty of spying, but Hiss dismissively protests, "Do I look like Tiresias" (237)? "Who's Teresa?," the dim Schine asks Cohn, as Hiss scoffs at the "endless soul-searching" in Heaven, while adding that the conservatives in Hell "haven't got any souls to search" (238). They are interrupted by a burst of "Hail to the Chief" as Richard M. Nixon, the deceased former President of the United States, fresh from "finishing my 75th volume of memoirs and geopolitical stratagems" arrives, adding that "Just because I'm dead doesn't mean I have to stop writing" (239). Nixon gripes about life in Hell—"too many meetings"—and every few words he speaks are interrupted by "(expletive deleted)" (239). Unlike his old nemesis Hiss, Nixon longs to go to Heaven, "where people still believe in Government. I want some (expletive deleted) respect," but Hiss informs Nixon that in Heaven they "despise you" to which Cohn adds, "We hate him down here too. The man's entirely devoid of charm. He's hated everywhere. It's a talent he has," but unphased, Nixon responds, "Bob Dole likes me" (239). Abruptly, the "'Glinda' entrance music" is heard playing in the background and a "dumpy man with a face like a Walt Kelly bulldog, wearing a black Chanel dress, hose and stiletto pumps" (240) enters. It is, of course, J. Edgar Hoover, whose drag inspires Nixon to attack the "gender confusion" (240) he finds rampant in Hell. The stunned Schine, recognizing Hoover, turns to Cohn whining, "I'm real confused," to which Roy replies, "You always were. . ." (240) as the play ends.

The connections between *Angels* and this little play extend well beyond the character of Cohn. *G. David Schine in Hell* could easily fit into the texture of *Perestroika*, as its mixture of history, fantasy, and outrageous humor coincides perfectly with those aspects of *Angels*, as well as Kushner's depiction of the traditional battles between the twentieth century's political poles of conservative and liberal.

Finally, *Death & Taxes* also features a Kushner screenplay, *East Coast Ode to Howard Jarvis* that could work on stage as a one-act play. The piece gets its title from the elderly Californian who, in 1978 at the age of seventy-six, led a grassroots tax revolt. Jarvis circulated a petition to get a measure on the California ballot to curb burgeoning property taxes, securing enough signatures to get Proposition 13 on the ballot. The proposition called for an amendment to California's state constitution which would slash property taxes by as much as fifty-eight percent. On election day, the proposition passed by a two-to-one margin

and Jarvis became a populist icon inspiring similar tax revolts in Massachusetts and Michigan. *East Coast Ode* is large in scope, calling for sixteen men (roles can be doubled for eight actors) and seven women (doubled by five actors) in a variety of locations that Kushner suggests should be suggested rather than staged realistically; Kushner hints that the actors might be shot in closeup in front of a blank photographer's screen. Set in various locales around New York City between 1991 and 1996, *East Coast Ode* uses fanciful humor to reflect a multitude of attitudes about taxation, the Internal Revenue Service, government, anti-government militias, and law enforcement, it employs a mock-documentary style fictionalizing an actual mini-tax revolt inspired by a scheme created by a midwestern white supremacist. Instead of developing three-dimensional characters, Kushner uses an array of familiar social types simply identified as: Detective, Housing Police, Environmental Protection Officer, Woman in the Payroll Department, The Supremely Scary Girl Who Knows Practically Everything, etc. Revelation of the mounting bizarre plot to avoid taxes is accomplished through the recollections of those involved—centrally or peripherally—on both sides of the case. A Corrections Officer on Rikers Island who says, "I guess I have always felt I pay too much taxes" (297), earns from Skinhead Inmate of a scheme devised by one Leonard "Hap" Dutchman, the mastermind of the North American White Mens Freedom and Liberty Council, a white supremacist militia group in Indiana. Stressing that Dutchman "has proved through Thoreau and shit like that that the IRS is unconstitutional" (298), Skinhead Inmate whets the appetite of the Corrections Officer for a way of avoiding taxes.

Dutchman, who refers to the federal government as "the Zionist Occupation Government HQ'd in DC" (302), responds to the growing collection of New York city government workers interested in his scheme, with the suggestion that on a W-4 form the number 98 should be put in the space provided for exemptions. Reminding them that there is no legal limit on the number of exemptions a citizen might claim, Dutchman offers to send literature on the National Rifle Association and adds that the plan will "legally lift from your stooped but proud shoulders the oppressors' contumely, also known as your entire tax bill; and if your claim is initially rejected, repeat the process several times, and if that don't work, Ethan, E-mail me for further instructions" (302).

When a Housing Detective's claim reaches a Woman in the Payroll Department, she says she first thought it was a joke and sent it back. When it was filed again, however, she sent it back again to the detective stamped "ITEMIZE" which, she figures, will be "good for a laugh" (304). Returning via cyberspace to Dutchman, the Housing Detective is advised to attach a "secret weapon" (304), a letter, to his W-4 form which, he claims, has worked effectively. The letter, written in legalize, denies that the Housing Detective is a "citizen or resident of any state and federal conglomerate within your jurisdiction," stressing that since "I am alien to the United States, and am not a resident there" (305) he is not subject to taxation.

When the letter reaches the Woman in the Payroll Department, an African-American, she responds, "Alien to the United States. Baby, I hear what you're saying" (305). She sends the letter "uptown downtown all around the town" and enters zero for the state and federal withholding in the Housing Detective's paycheck, sending a "big fat check with no taxes withheld" to the Housing Detective, absolving herself by saying "let them sort it out it is not my problem" (306). The scheme continues spreading until an Attorney for the City of New York begins sending those following Dutchman's instructions letters stating that "the status you are seeking as 'non-resident, non-immigrant alien' does not exist" (311). As the scheme begins to unravel, the Housing Detective tries to get help via the internet from Dutchman, but the only message is "THIS WEB SITE IS TEMPORARILY UNAVAILABLE" (310). Dutchman is seen in a jail cell singing "The Impossible Dream," while it is revealed by a United States Attorney that "as few as 500 and as many as a thousand" (314) New York City employees have been involved in evading their taxes with his scheme. Kushner gives the last word to the Woman in the Payroll Department who worries about what will happen to "those poor stupid people" who evaded their taxes and, she is concerned that "Things coming unglued, that's how it seems to me. Don't it seem like that to you? Everything's just coming apart at the seams. And nobody understands" (316). As she finishes, a video clip of President Clinton's 1996 State of the Union speech shows him proclaiming: "So I join with Congress and my fellow Americans in declaring: The Era Of Big Government Is Over!" (316).

The entertaining and challenging plays in *Death & Taxes* prove once again Kushner's prowess as perhaps the most ambitious of contemporary American dramatists, demonstrating that *Angels in America* is just one selection from among an ever-expanding and deepening canon of work. It is a canon that mixes traditions of American realism with a new theatricalism while, at the same time, reinvigorating the dialogue between the play and the audience of the new millennium with a bold, disturbing, and amusing mixture of issues drawn from politics, religion, history, and sexuality.

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The "Weak" Subject: On Modernity, Eros, and Women's Playwriting by Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio. London and Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1998. 352 pp. $48.50. Hardback. ISBN 0-8386-3730-2.

In this study of modern women's writing for the theater, Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio sets out to gently, yet persistently, show her readers that there is indeed strength in a "weak" subject. The manner in which the book discloses its subject matter makes it a good reference for both scholars and teachers. In addition to offering effective feminist readings of modern American women playwrights in the realist tradition, from Zona Gale in the Progressive Era to Lillian Hellman in the Cold War or Counterrevolutionary Era, the book also places these women writers within a broader cultural framework. On the one end, the central analysis of the American Moderns is framed by a discussion of the western realist tradition of primarily male writers and critics, and on the other by a discussion of "absurdist" theater as it was used by postcolonial European women playwrights, from Lessing to Duras and Ginzburg. But the most provocative aspect of the book is its theoretical proposition f labial mimesis, which underlies all the subsequent readings of specific plays, laywrights, and their cultural contexts.

The first part of the book, *Theoria*, is most useful to scholars and perhaps achers of advanced students as it critiques traditional dramatic realism, and outlines an approach to feminist realism in drama. This approach can also be applied to film and used in women's and gender studies. The American women playwrights in the realist tradition successfully produce what Anderlini calls a "weak" subject as it exists in relation to a "strong subject." Curiously, the "strong subject" is absent from the title of the book, leaving it both excluded yet present. The focus, then, is a "weak," or conventionally female, subject within the western tradition of dramatic realism. Can this weak subject stand by herself? No, argues Anderlini. If the "weak" subject were to stand by herself, she runs the risk of becoming the cause of that which weakened her in the first place. She would become a copy of the strong, or conventionally male, subject. There is, however, a way of avoiding this inversion, and that is through labial mimesis, which is a defining aspect of this book.

Anderlini begins her discussion of labial mimesis by examining phallic mimesis, and what better play to use as an example than *Oedipus Rex*? Aristotle, of course, used *Oedipus Rex* in his *Poetics* as an example to discuss tragic mimesis. Anderlini reviews this discussion with an eye to the phallic mimetic mode, which envisions the chronological, narrative plot preferred by Aristotle as phallic, with the narrative order of prologue, episode, and exode mimicking the phases (erection, climax, and detumescene) typical of phallic sexuality (31). Basic to this mimetic arrangement is the subordination of "others" to the phallic center, or Oedipus, in the case of Sophocles' play. Oedipus is the phallic center: he narrates himself, and all action depends on his character. Clearly, Iokaste's fate is equally tragic to that of

her husband/son, but in the phallic mode, her eros is inevitably invisible and "weak." Anderlini shows how both women and men realist playwrights write within this tradition, although some, like Ibsen and Shaw, challenge it from within. These male playwrights will be an inspiration to the modern American women playwrights who, in the early twentieth century, due to specific historical and cultural circumstances, create an alternative mimetic structure. But an alternative mimesis, argues Anderlini, does not merely invert the order that would render the weak subject strong.

First and foremost, Anderlini's proposition is that this alternative mimesis is labial, which genders the concept of mimesis by integrating previous feminist critiques of phallic mimesis. In naming and developing a female alternative to the conventional concept of mimesis, Anderlini goes further, even as, interestingly enough, she claims it is inclusive of phallic mimesis "because [labial mimesis] interacts with phallic mimesis" (83). Labial mimesis makes the "weak" subject viable to the general public by placing her in a homosocial framework that, while providing the play with a dynamic, allows the play to move in an alternative, non-linear fashion that is not focused exclusively on a central character. Also, Anderlini proposes that labial mimesis organizes the play's structure around a figure of two-in-one, which clearly derives from the early works of Luce Irigaray. Both plot and character are thus supported by others and the play can be dynamic without depending on the "phallic" forward thrust that underlies most realist plays.

In order to further develop her theory of feminist realism, Anderlini shifts the focus from "action" to that of "interaction." Her aim is to "critique phallic realism as the expression of a masculinity rooted in a liberal-capitalist culture" (39). Women circulate in an economy that views their bodies as commodities in an expanding market. The alternative, homosocial and homoerotic economies represented in the American plays that lie at the heart of the book break away from the phallic economy. The concept of labial mimesis, therefore, allows us to interrogate what counts as reality. Realism, Anderlini claims, depends on whose reality we are talking about. In her reading of *Miss Lulu Bett*, by Zona Gale, she shows that realism "lies in its representation of an ongoing social transformation as it affected these women's lives," rather than in how they end up within an order that traps them into a specific type of marriage economy (135). Anderlini contrasts the protagonists of the Progressive Era plays by Crothers, Gaspell, and Gale—Frankie, Claire, and Lulu—with Shaw's and Ibsen's heroines. She carefully foregrounds the fact that in the women's plays, female character development and plot development depended on relationships between women characters, while Elisa and Nora suffered social islolation.

Right in the middle of the book, at its heart, lies the most careful study: that of Lillian Hellman's plays. Hellman is, after all, the most canonic of all the women playwrights discussed in the book. True to her notion of women's realities as interrelated, Anderlini places Hellmen at the center of the book and thus presents

Hellman surrounded and supported by women playwrights of the previous era, of her own time, and of a subsequent period. Hellman's work, according to Anderlini, is not and could not be examined in a monographical study; this would be a phallic approach to presenting her. The section that deals with Hellman's plays, "Gender and Genre," is dedicated entirely to this playwright, unlike the previous and subsequent sections. Of the three plays Anderlini reads through the theory of labial mimesis, she pays less attention to *Toys in the Attic* than to the other two plays, *The Children's Hour* and *The Little Foxes*. *Toys in the Attic* is a criticism of the myth of the "male provider," which subverts the economy of the nuclear family.

Anderlini discusses *The Children's Hour* in two chapters. First, through the lens of the labial figure of two-in-one. She presents the two schoolteachers, Karen and Martha, as a prime example of this figure, situated in a homosocial environment that brings out its homoerotic undertones. Then, in a chapter, called "The Counterrevolution," Anderlini makes effective use of Kate Millet's feminist analysis of the post-Depression backlash against the previous political and sexual revolutions. She argues, through a careful reading of the text and its various productions, that the figure of two-in-one—the labial mimetic structure underlying Karen and Martha's relationship as well as Mary and Mrs. Tilford's—was a way of resisting the binary politics (good/evil) of the Cold War era, and a way of criticizing the "happy" ending of a traditional marriage. Thus, Anderlini restores the issue of sexual politics to the conventional reading of the play as a desexualized political allegory of the McCarthy era.

"The Counterrevolution" chapter also takes a look at *The Little Foxes* through the figure of two-in-one. This play, claims Anderlini, uses unspoken alliances between women hidden within an extended family. These alliances undermine the "nuclear family" ideal of the time. As with *The Children's Hour*, there is a pair of two-in-one figures at work in the play. Regina and Birdie's interaction is not the only focus of the play. In fact, the more interesting interaction is between Alexandra and Addie, the African-American nanny and housemaid with whom Alexandra eventually escapes. Anderlini convincingly demonstrates that the strong bond between the two women was formed by Regina's intentional and Birdie's unintentional rejection of Alexandra. However, this bond needs more scrutiny. Can a relationship between the young, white, Southern woman and her African-American nanny be equal? Anderlini's otherwise close reading does not address this question.

Anderlini is also somewhat evasive with the thorny question of Hellman's sexual identity. Rather than attempt a biographical investigation of her author, Anderlini wisely focuses on Hellman's works, their reception, and their possible link to her sexual identity and politics. For example, Anderlini contrasts Hellman's characters, particularly the duo accused of lesbianism in *The Children's Hour*, to those in *The Well of Loneliness*. The latter work did not receive the same sort of

general public acceptance due to the psychology of the time, which labeled lesbian friendships as "pathological inversion." Anderlini concludes that Hellman's play "successfully transferred the romantic friendship trope from the private dimension of a woman's journal to the public dimension of a popular stage production without falling into the category of pathological inversion" (162). Anderlini portrays Hellman as working within the established codes of morality in order to push their limits and ultimately criticize their failures. In the chapter, "Keeping Labial Eros in Sight," Anderlini addresses the issue of *Julia* in Hellman's memoire and *Pentimento* a similar way: "The narrative self-dramatization indicated that the toughness of the playwright was a mask that enabled her to become the first canonical female writer of American drama" (207).

Anderlini closes the book by looking at another development that frames her study of realist American playwrights: the development of a "theater of the absurd" and its use by European women writers. This is a necessary way to contextualize the main theme, especially since Anderlini's theory stresses women's relationships as interpersonal and "labial" instead of heroic and "phallic." For the European women writers, absurdism is the realism of their time, since their reality is absurd. Yet, barring her close reading of Natalia Ginzberg, these readings are not as carefully rendered nor as compelling as those of the American women playwrights. This leap into the abusurd, while necessary, forms part of the greatest shortcoming of the book for use by scholars and teachers. *The "Weak" Subject* makes great leaps in time and geography, from Sophocles to Ibsen and Shaw, to the American women playwrights, to absurdist theater and its European women writers. If you are looking for information about Doris Lessing's *Play with a Tiger*, this is not the book to read. However, these leaps do place the American women playwrights into a broader, more global and diachronic perspective that does indeed deepen one's reading of their plays. This "big picture" perspective also suggests further uses for the theory of labial mimesis beyond the analysis of modern American women playwrights and their works.

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The Theatre of Maria Irene Fornes ed. by Marc Robinson. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. 276 pp. $19.95. Paperback. ISBN 0-8018-6154-3.

Maria Irene Fornes is one of America's most innovative theatre artists. However, it is precisely this ingenuity which makes her work difficult to write about. Although the phrase, "there is no Fornes style" has become cliché, it is still accurate. As the preface suggests, "Maria Irene Fornes's critics are just beginning to keep pace with their prolific subject"(ix). Robinson's new book is a compilation of both previously published and new work: scholarly essays, theatre reviews, interviews and notes by Fornes herself. The volume also provides a good chronology of Fornes's career and a valuable collection of production photos.

Robinson's lucid and interesting introduction compares Fornes's dramatic work with still life paintings by Zurbarán and Juan Sánches Cotán. (This comparison to painting is echoed in several of the later essays.) Fornes's plays, like the paintings, operate on precise balance. Despite their seeming simplicity, they contain detail, anxiety, tension and demand from us intense concentration. Robinson encourages us to think of Fornes's work as a "series rather than a single work, or as a current that eddies into pools of text (manuscripts, editions) and production" (21). Because of its disparate variety, this is also a useful concept to follow when approaching this book.

The main body of the book is separated into three parts. The first section, "The Plays," begins with an essay by Ross Wetzsreon on the elements of Fornes's style. His objective is to point out some consistencies in Fornes's work despite her fantastic variety. To do this, he gives account of Fornes as a director, playwright and teacher and flags *Fefu and Her Friends* as the turning point in Fornes's career. It was "the beginning of her switch from antic abstraction to a more three-dimensional realism." (34) Bonnie Marranca's essay, "The Economy of Tenderness" considers Fornes's realism. She qualifies "realism" as an attempt to strip away everything but the essence of experience, rather a desire to represent details of everyday life. Using *Albingdon Square* as an example, Marranca argues that Fornes's work is an ascetic form of *Lehrstrück* that relies heavily on a didactic use of space. She goes on to emphasize the importance of the physical body as the crucial center of Fornes's plays. "Still Playing Games" by W. B. Worthen discusses the interplay between Fornes's mise-en-scene and dramatic action.

Two notable essays which had not yet been published in other sources are Elinor Fuchs' "*Fefu and Her Friends*: A View from the Stone" and Robinson's "*The Summer in Gossenass*: Fornes and Criticism." In *Fefu and Her Friends*, Fefu describes the contrast of the clean, smooth surface of a garden stone and its dirty, worm-covered underside. Fuchs uses this image as the basis for an analysis of the play. The clean side of the stone is a metaphor for the outdoor world of men, while

the underside represents the interior world that women inhabit. Fuchs effectively argues that the tension in the play is a result of the women's association of themselves, in various ways, with the underside of the garden stone. In his essay, Robinson explains how Fornes wrote *The Summer in Gossenass* as a result of her encounter with reading and directing *Hedda Gabler*. The play centers around an impromtu rehearsal of Ibsen's play to which the two actresses playing Hedda and Thea have access to only twenty-eight lines of dialogue. The actresses delve into the fragment with all of their resources, exploring minute details in order to try and grasp the larger meaning of a play they have not yet read in its entirety. Robinson points out that "By depicting characters who, in their enthusiasm for their subject, agitate for, chase after, and eventually steal a text, then treat it as a fetish, Fornes expands our usual narrow idea of critical engagement."(125) Fornes's play demands that we passionately engage in both literary and performative analysis of a text and even though we may never come to solid conclusions, a re-examination of what we think we already know will give life an important vitality.

The second part of Robinson's book is devoted to "Fornes in Performance." Previously published work includes reviews and a discussion by Susan Letzler Cole on Fornes as a director. New to this book are interviews with actors and an essay by Scott Cummings, "The Poetry of Space in a Box: Scenography in the Work of Maria Irene Fornes." Robert Coe interviewed five actors who worked with Fornes: Rebecca Schull, Sheila Dabney, John Seitz, Madeline Potter and Crystal Field. All of the actors agree that Fornes's work as a director involves meticulous attention to gesture and detail but that there is still a great deal of freedom to explore in the rehearsal process. Anecdotes are always welcome and Dabney describes her experience with Fornes's *Joan of Arc*. On opening night Fornes introduced twenty-two new pages of dialogue thirty minutes before curtain. The actors carried their new scripts on stage with them and once they were finished with a page, they threw it into the air, littering the floor beneath them. The actors also expressed an appreciation for Fornes's mastery of character. Scott Cummings's essay examines, what he calls, the "reciprocal interiority" of Fornes's scenography. "That is, they take place indoors, in rooms that are cut off from the outside world, and they depict the interior experience (mental, emotional, and spiritual) of one or more quietly heroic figures"(175). Using examples from of variety of plays written and/or directed by Fornes, Cummings analyzes how her use of double space physicalizes the interior struggle of the characters.

Part Three, "Fornes on Fornes" consists of writings by and interviews with the playwright. With one exception, all have been previously published. Fornes wrote "Order" for the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1996 with the intention that it would be published at the time of the Broadway opening of her play *The Office*. However, *The Office* closed during previews. The article is Fornes's musings on the place of order in the office world, acting and in her own life. The rest of the

selections vary in content from discussions of specific plays, rehearsal and directing processes, to her approach to playwriting.

Although certain biographical information is repeated in some of the articles, *The Theatre of Maria Irene Fornes* is a useful introduction to this prolific playwright's body of work. It is valuable to have a collection of diverse writings in one complete volume. Hopefully this book will encourage other scholars to thoughtfully consider the complexity of Fornes's work as both a playwright and a director.

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Performing Chekhov by David Allen. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. pp. xii+263. $24.99. Paperback. ISBN 0-415-18935-7.

David Allen's *Performing Chekhov* is a descriptive account of Chekhov's major plays as produced by eleven selected directors from Chekhov's day forward and in three different nations: Russia, the United States and Great Britain. The selection is based upon Allen's effort to trace a thread that alternates between the internal school of acting (represented by Stanislavski, Strasberg, Komisarjevski and others) and the external school (represented by Meyerhold, Efros, Serban, Alfreds and others.) Naturally, he might well have selected more directors, for there are many to choose from even if we restrict ourselves to those three countries. Laurence Senelick's recent book, *The Chekhov Theatre: a Century of the Plays in Performance*, provides quite a thorough account of productions presented in Russia, Europe, England and the United States from the 1880s to the 1990s. Allen's book, however, is not intended as a comprehensive chronicle. He chooses rather to concentrate on the issues involved in staging Chekhov, especially his four major plays, *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard.*

The opening section deals with Constantin Stanislavski's struggle with Chekhov's plays. After the fiasco of the *The Seagull's* premiere, directed by Evtikhi Karpov at the Aleksandrinski Theatre in St. Petersburg, Chekhov's play seemed unstageable. Chekhov himself declared he would never write for the theatre again. Allen makes it clear that it was Vladimir Nemirovich Danchenko, co-founder with Stanislavski of the Moscow Art Theatre, who exerted the great effort it took to persuade Chekhov to return to the theatre and that it was he, more than Stanislavski, who understood the demands of these plays. Allen documents in detail the struggle Stanislavski endured trying to make these plays work, often over against Chekhov's impatience and even anger. The struggle eventually resulted in the System, but that was well after Chekhov was dead.

Allen makes some very interesting revelations that are not generally known. First of all, much of Stanislavski's approach initially was external, using objects, physical activity, and above all atmospheric mood produced by sound effects more than anything else. He was convinced that the key to the inner action lay in mood. This is what led to the famous chirping crickets that Chekhov complained about. It also led to Stanislavski's practice of "novelizing" the play in his production notes, descriptive narratives of what happens at each moment in the play. Allen quotes Chekhov as having said to Karpov, who staged *The Seagull* years earlier, "I would like them to perform my work quite simply, primitively. As in the old days—a room: on the forestage, a sofa, chairs . . . And with good actors. And that's all. No birds, no theatrical mood. I would really like to see my play performed like that. I'd like to know, would my play collapse? That is very interesting! Perhaps it would collapse.

And perhaps not. Who knows. . . ." Chekhov died a few weeks later.

A second interesting revelation has to do with the approach Stanislavski took to the initial production of *The Cherry Orchard*. The conventional wisdom is that he treated the play as a tragedy, while Chekhov objected and gave the play the subtitle "comedy." It is true that there is a exchange of letters between playwright and director in which Chekhov declares that the play is "not a drama, but a comedy, in places even a farce," to which Stanislavski opined, "It is not a comedy or a farce, as you wrote—it is a tragedy." According to Allen, Stanislavski eventually infused a considerable measure of light comedy and even farcical shtick in the production. The result was that the play became light, cheerful, funny, and sometimes ironic and mocking of the landed gentry characters.

Following the treatment of these initial productions of Chekhov's great plays at the Moscow Art Theatre, Allen turns attention to other Russian directors, first Yevgeny Vakhtangov, then Vsevolod Meyerhold, both of whom worked with Stanislavski early in their careers and both of whom broke with him on issues of realism and theatricality. The division between them, Allen demonstrates, is not as sharp as generally viewed: Stanislavski spoke of an "imaginative realism" that moved toward theatricalism and away from naturalism, and he came near the end of his career to some agreement with Meyerhold on the value of an actor's exploring the physical and external in developing a role. Vakhtangov, for his part, was convinced that the best approach lay somewhere between "formalism" and "naturalism" and he played upon the audience's sensibilities and imagination. Unfortunately for this study, the only plays these two directors produced were the early Chekhov farces. Vakhtangov produced "The Wedding" and Meyerhold an anthology of three plays ("The Anniversary," "The Bear" and "The Proposal") under the collective title of *Thirty-three Swoons*, based on his actual count of the number of swoons that occur in the three plays. At any rate, there is little room for full comparison or contrast when the plays produced are of such a different nature.

Two much more recent Russian directors come under examination: Anatoli Efros and Yuri Lyubimov. There is only brief mention of the socialist realist versions of Chekhov's plays mounted during the thirties and on into the sixties, productions that accentuated the positive and made the plays into heralds of the New Russian. Nemirovich-Danchenko's revival of *Three Sisters* in 1940 and Mikhail Kedrov's *Uncle Vanya* seven years later, both at the Moscow Art Theatre, are the only examples. With Efros, we are already in 1967 for his *Three Sisters*, and 1975 for his *The Cherry Orchard*, and still later, 1981, with Lyubimov's *Three Sisters*. Much has happened in the meantime. By this time, the directors chose to rebel against strict realism and resorted to single unit sets that represented a generic and metaphoric space with central elements such as a mound of earth, a tree, or a mirror. Efros also creates a novelty by bouncing the subtext to the surface every once in a while, having the actor shout what is usually muted. The device gave expression to

the character's agonized frustration. Lyubimov approached the characters almost as automatons, victims of a march of history neither they, nor we, can control. The whole society is out of joint. This attitude, demonstrated as well in other of his Taganka Theatre productions, did not endear Lyubimov to the Soviet authorities who relieved him of his directorship of that theatre.

The second part of the book turns to productions in the United States. Allen develops a concise and well considered account of the impact of the Moscow Art Theatre's visit to New York in 1923. Their performances of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* struck audiences, and especially theatre people, as an amazing display of understated, "truthful" acting. It inspired the development of the American Method, a distorted version of Stanislavski's System accentuating affective memory or emotion recall. The founders of the Group Theatre, Stella Adler, Harold Clurman and especially Lee Strasburg, were responsible for this approach carried forward after the Group's demise in the classes of the Actors Studio. The story is a familiar one and Allen does not add any new revelations, but his account of the Actors Studio Theatre production of *Three Sisters* in 1964, culminating in its disastrous performance in London, is fresh material.

In the late seventies, a new approach began to develop, illustrated here first in Andrei Serban's productions of all four of Chekhov's masterpieces, then with the Wooster Group production entitled *Brace Up!* based on *Three Sisters*. This approach treats the text as pretext, the director developing, as it were, a new text out of the old. In Serban's case, the new text comes out of internal commentary and an abstract and physicalized enactment. For Elizabeth LeCompte and the Wooster Group, the new text is a quotation/paraphrase of the original, performed on a bare stage with the help of a narrator and actors whose speeches make some reference to the original play. It is a postmodernist melange deconstructing the original text and laying it out as unrelated strands for the audience to grasp if they might wish to.

The British came to producing Chekhov with any regularity only after the successful, slightly romanticized productions of Theodore Komisarjevski in the mid-twenties. His approach was infused with the System (despite his having written against Stanislavski's approach) but it also tended to beautify the world and some of its characters. Perhaps the one director who came closest to accomplishing what Chekhov had hoped for in his statement that he would like to see his plays produced "simply, primitively" was Jonathan Miller. His productions of *The Seagull* and *Three Sisters* in 1973 and 1976 respectively emphasized simplicity even to the point of shabbiness, played quietly but comically. Mike Alfreds' productions between 1981 and 1998, by contrast, were infused with a wild, almost uncontrolled improvisational method, unleashing the intense slavic emotional tone that Alfreds felt the English needed to experience. No two performances were ever alike. The

stage sets were generally abstracted and metaphorical, even slightly expressionistic. Alfreds is the last of the directors taken under examination. With him we seem to come back around to Meyerhold and his bio-mechanical style.

The book uses perhaps too many quotations and paraphrases and depends very heavily on end notes and documentation. It is indeed very well researched and organized. All in all, it is a testament to the rugged durability of Chekhov. His plays have so many dimensions to them that they lend themselves to a wide variety of stagings, some more externalized and physical, others more internalized and spiritual. Although many may think of the "chekhovian" as carrying a fixed set of tonal qualities, there are many facets to these plays. Allen demonstrates this well.

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Performing the Body/Performing the Text edited by Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson. London: Routledge, 1999. 306 pp. $24.99. Paperback. ISBN 0-415-19060-6.

In the last few years a range of books on the relationship between art and theatre have emerged, where scholars from art history, performance studies and theatre studies are adopting interdisciplinary approaches to criticism to broaden our notions of the way in which fine art practices shape perception and interpretation. These explorations in visual culture are an important step in articulating the way in which differing art practices can illuminate each other as well as reveal cultural practices. *Performing the Body/Performing the Text* is an attempt to bridge the gap between ways of looking at body art, performance and figurative art using theoretical models drawn from philosophy, performance studies, queer studies and cultural theory. It attempts to reassess ways of constructing meaning from art and performance, drawing attention to the element of performativity both in the processes of art production, and in the act of interpretation as a culturally specific construction of gender, identity, class and race. This reassessment reveals the body to be a signifier that must be read with a whole history of ideological assumptions attached to it.

Performing the Body/Performing the Text uses ideas of embodied signifiers to discuss gender, sexuality and race through the eye of spectators who view art through gendered, racial, and cultured bodies. It is composed of eighteen essays; rather than subdividing the articles into sections, the editors leave the reader to sift through the titles for indications of probable methodology and ideology. Overall, it is a compilation of the last decade's developments in cultural theory, as it has developed into visual culture studies within the art history discipline. Leading off the book are essays by Karen Lange, Donald Preziosi, and Amelia Jones, which theorize the ways in which the philosophical tradition serves as a discourse that preserves the authority of art history and criticism at the expense of alternative art practice. These essays suggest that the modernist movement has brought critical praxis into the realm of the performative. Preziosi's "Performing Modernity" postulates that modernity is the embodiment of the contradiction between what we believe ourselves to be and who and what we are. In Jones' "Art History/Art Criticism", the practice of criticism is a performance of bodily experience of artwork and the expression of those experiences into discourse. Production, practice and interpretation are all a functions and representations of modernity.

Further essays by Reina Lewis, Michael Hatt, and Jennifer Devere Brody focus on racism and ethnocentrism within the histories of visual culture. They explore the ways in which race and ethnicity have been interpreted through the lens of institutional ethnocentrism. Lewis examines racial and sexual identities using 'Oriental' literature and visual art, while Hatt and Brody contribute views of events

surrounding race in US history to re-evaluate cultural culpability in the processes of constructing negative social ideologies. With a similar perspective, Lisa Bloom looks at Eleanor Antin's explorations of Jewish identity, whose significance only becomes possible through interpretation that relies upon social hegemony. Performitivity was defined according to what art represents within a culture and the ways in which culture perceives cultural assumptions represented through art.

Both Gavin Butt and Fionna Barber abandon the art object in favor of the experience of the artist or critic to examine identity politics. Butt looks to the persona of Larry Rivers, who adopted a 'camp' identity in the hip 1950s art world, while Barbara assesses her role as a feminist as she takes pleasure in William de Koonings portraits of mutated female figures. The signifiers that are associated with individuals regulate constructions of identity. Following this logic, the next essays approach the ways in which we interpret bodies marked by race, gender, sexuality, or physical deformity, which carry with their appearance a host of culturally-coded signifiers. Jonathan Katz, B.J. Wray and Meiling Cheng highlight the way in which artists manipulate our perceptions and assumptions about bodies subversively to call attention to unconscious suppositions of sexual identity. Cheng's essay on Sacred Naked Nature Girls examines how culturally diverse groups of performers frustrate traditional ethnic, gender, class and sexual reading of culture and spectatorship through performative creation. While Wray and Cheng use theatre performance to discuss absence and presence of culturally marginalized voices, Katz interprets the work of Jasper Johns to bring to light strategies of unveiling assumptions about the representation of bodies.

Peggy Phelan offers a curious exploration of the way in which visual art can be read as the bridge between performance and performativity in "Andy Warhol: performances of Death in America." She discusses how his work both makes literal the experience of death in the act of spectatorship simultaneously as it depicts the moment of death, thus demonstrating that visual art triggers the embodiment of depiction. A radical inclusion in the volume is the performance text of "Stuff" by Nao Bustamante and Coco Fusco. Rather than offering an interpretation of culture and gender in academic prose, they harness performance to challenge ethnicity, identity and culture by way of theatre, art and performance conventions, and thereby challenge the spectators' complicity in the participation within structures that perpetuate ethnocentricity and oppression. They make tangible the ways in which bodies and text can work together to make evident bodies of knowledge.

By far the most captivating essays in the volume are by Christine Poggi, Jaonna Lowry, Barbara Schmidt and Philip Ursprung. All three employ a language of art history to describe performance, but also consider the role proxemics play in interpretation of art objects. A phenomenological methodology is essential to the practice of their criticism. Philip Ursprung's "Catholic Taste: Hurting and Healing the Body in Viennese Actionism in the 1960s" uses the body art of the Vienna

actionists to talk of the production and reception of their works in relationship to public and private experience. It is about the art object/performance and the experience of the art/performance rather than being merely about the intellectual processing and literal interpretation of the work according to ideological frames of political discourse. The treatment of phenomenology and the gaze are a hybridization of philosophy, art theory and performance theory, and demonstrates the possibilities that the interdisciplinary form of criticism the volume advocates can be a redefinition of the critical discourse of art and cultural theory.

At its worst, *Performing the Body/Performing the Text* is filled with jargon and obfuscated arguments that manipulate interpretations of art and performance to explicate ideas of political ideology. At its best, the essays are highly articulate conceptualizations of the way in which bodies and representations of bodies carry with them the baggage of history, language and academic tradition. However, the book does not limit itself to performance theory, but works instead in the discipline of visual culture theory, which treats the body as a metaphor rather than a corporeal being with shape and mass. Performance researchers need to explore more fully corporality and perception and the mingling of art and theatre practice, yet, they also must be aware that the treatment of the body as a metaphor for political and ideological arguments about gender, sexuality and culture can undermine the performative three-dimensionality of bodies used as expressive sculptural objects. *Performing the Body/Performing the Text* may raise questions of race culture sexuality and feminism, but by restricting the interpretation of form and expression to these narrow ideological perspectives it negates the polysemous ranges of communication possible when art theory and performance theory are used in tandem.

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