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**VIRTUAL THEATRES: AN INTRODUCTION.** By Gabriella Giannachi. London: Routledge Press, 2004; pp. 184. \$105.00 cloth, \$36.95 paper.

*Virtual Theatres: An Introduction* positions itself as the first full-length investigation of theatre and digital media, analyzing performances that not only incorporate the virtual but are becoming completely virtual in and of themselves. Performance in the twenty-first century, as analyzed in Gabriella Giannachi's book, has been rapidly ushered into the era of the simulacrum. Viewers are not so much "liberated from the canon and the dramaturgy of theatre arts or even life, but . . . continuously performing the simulation of that liberation, and thereby continuously re-enacting their own performance of the medium, creating an actual theatre, a theatre of virtual reality" (8). The virtual theatres studied in Giannachi's book place the viewer not only inside the work of art, but also in the position of "operating it, possibly even modifying it, in real time and being modified by it in return" (8). Giannachi, a senior lecturer in drama at Exeter University, has created a very compelling introduction to this emerging area of theatre, performance studies, and digital media.

The "virtual" in Giannachi's *Virtual Theatres* is understood as operating within the real, yet simultaneously "perceived as separate from it" (123). The virtual thus "consists of a dichotomous paradox, torn between its ontological status which locates it as part of the real and its aesthetic, through which it demonstrates its difference from the real" (123). Virtual theatres, Giannachi argues, "multiply and disperse the viewer's point of view, thus creating the simulation of a condition that the viewer also experiences in the real" (10). Giannachi's expansive definition of the virtual allows for a reading of a variety of performances, which are grouped into five well-focused and thoroughly engaging chapters: "Hypertextualities," "Cyborg theatre," "The (re-) creation of nature," "Performing through the hypersurface," and "Towards an aesthetic of virtual reality." She situates these chapters through a carefully laid out introduction, chronicling virtual performances and their accompanying theories. By linking Vsevolod Meyerhold's biomechanical actor and the forms employed by Bauhaus, Dada, and cubism to the theories of Marshall McLuhan, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, Brenda Laurel, Jon McKenzie, and Sue-Ellen Case, Giannachi lays a foundation of virtual performance upon which to analyze an array of performances.

Giannachi's selection of performances is one of the strongest attributes of the book. For example, in her first chapter, Giannachi examines the inter-

active CD-ROM performance by Forced Entertainment, one of Britain's foremost experimental theatre groups. Her description of the performance piece, combined with her thoughtful theoretical analysis and the book's crisp images from the CD-ROM, allow access to the virtual performance for those who have not encountered such convergences of theatre and digital media. In this digital performance, images function as clues to a hidden narrative, requiring the viewer to search the digital stage for various narrative connections. Yet in Forced Entertainment's interactive drama, set on the mostly vacant streets of an urban landscape, the viewer is only engaging with "leftover traces" of an event that has already taken place; thus, "all the viewer can witness is its aftermath" (37). Since, quoting Peggy Phelan, "History has already happened and the spectator-witness is left to decipher its elusive causes and meanings" (37), the process of narrative construction can "neither be completed nor fully grasped . . . the viewer is obviously excluded from the seminal act" (38). Although these performances are labeled as interactive or hypertextual—thus implying a degree of audience agency in narrative construction—they exclude the audience from this seminal act of meaning making.

Interactivity, as analyzed in other moments of the book, seems to take on the opposite effect, allowing an unprecedented level of audience agency in the performance. In chapter two, Giannachi discusses the work of performance artist Selarc, who connected himself simultaneously to the Internet and a muscle-stimulation system, allowing users to remotely move parts of his body. In this performance, interactivity allows the body to be positioned at the crossroads of "inside and outside, where everything is outside and the inside is no longer a private and inaccessible world, the body becomes an open and fluid entity that is always already enmeshed with a wider world" (62).

Giannachi makes similar claims about the performances of Eduardo Kac in her third chapter: Kac's performance *Rara Avis* (1996) placed a telerobotic bird-machine in an aviary with live birds. Giannachi writes, "Spectators could assume the perspective of the bird-machine by using the Internet or data glasses and observe themselves, or the real birds in the aviary, from the bird machine's point of view" (84). She goes on to describe the effects of audience interactivity in the performance piece: "Thus, in *Rara Avis*, it is no longer possible to distinguish between real and virtual because the viewer's point of view is ultimately a construction of the interaction between the real and the virtual" (84). Giannachi employs these interactive performances in an almost fetishistic manner, reading them as significantly able to deconstruct numerous binary oppositions

in performance (inside / outside, public / private, real / virtual, audience / performer). Though these moments of her survey may reduce the complexity of interactivity in virtual performance, Giannachi's overall theoretical analysis of these performances remains very persuasive.

*Virtual Theatres* operates as a successful introduction to the convergence of performance and digital media by locating itself in a specific cultural moment in theatre, as well as gesturing towards the impulses that are altering the future direction of performance. Giannachi's analysis of the shifting role of the audience in performances that incorporate new media is strong, as is her study of alterations of stage space in chapter four. Looking at examples of telepresent bodies that converge on various hypersurfaces, she posits a theatrical space that allows actors and spectators to simultaneously inhabit the real space and the representational space, to exist "between locations" (105). Paul Sermon's piece, *Telematic Dreaming* (1992), exemplifies this theatrical hypersurface. In her concluding chapter five, Giannachi offers a promising look at the future of these converging media: "Virtual reality is not only a rehearsal space and a theatre, but an archive, a place of memory, a repository for humankind's past, present and future plans, activities, dreams and failures" (151). *Virtual Theatres* is thus a significant work which creates a foundation for many more academic studies of digital performance to build upon.

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**EXPRESSIONISM AND MODERNISM IN THE AMERICAN THEATRE: BODIES, VOICES, WORDS.** By Julia A. Walker. Cambridge Studies in American Theatre and Drama, volume 21. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; pp. vii + 300. \$75.00 cloth.

Expressionism is unquestionably one of the more significant early-twentieth-century artisticisms, exerting enormous influence on the shape and scope of creative expression in the West, including the practice and theory of theatre. The received narrative of expressionism is that it had its genesis in the graphic arts in Paris in the first years of the century; quickly made its way to Germany via arts criticism early in the second decade; was, in turn, applied by German critics, editors, and historians to describe the work of a loosely connected though never formalized group of artists, including notable theatre

artists; and was eventually replicated (though not necessarily enhanced in any discernable way) by a handful of artists working in the United States during the 1920s. Hence, the practice of expressionism in America typically is situated as something of a minor, albeit fascinating, splinter of the better-known European movement. Even those few critics who have offered focused studies of American expressionism—most notably Mardi Valgemaie's *Accelerated Grimace* (1972)—situate it as essentially linked to and entirely derivative of the better-known German movement.

In her fine study, Julia A. Walker convincingly counters this often-rehearsed narrative, suggesting instead that "American expressionism . . . is not simply a minor derivation of the better known German movement, but a complicated artistic response to the forces of modernization" (2). In light of this view, Walker poses her primary research question: "What if [American expressionist playwrights] were not directly influenced by German expressionism in the writing of their plays?" (5). For Walker, then, while German and American expressionism share certain traits—"the stylized presentation of the subjective inner world, compressed syntax, exaggerated caricatures, and episodic action" (4)—such parallels should not be taken as indisputable verification of the German form as the only or even the principal influence on the development of the American. Instead, by way of a nuanced consideration of the larger American cultural field, Walker works to position the expressionist theatre in America as essentially related to the anxiety many turn-of-the-century Americans felt regarding the forces of modernization. Additionally, she persuasively argues that those American playwrights working in the expressionistic mode were largely responsible for establishing a space in America for dramatic modernism. They did so, Walker contends, by challenging the status of playwrights as fundamentally connected to the traditional modes of theatrical production—particularly the view that their art was created to support actors—and modeled instead a conception of the playwright as an independent artist who composed autonomous works of dramatic literature.

At the heart of Walker's argument regarding the autonomy of American expressionism is her locating of the now nearly forgotten expressive culture movement as the chief motivation in the development of the art form. In view of this, in the first part of her study Walker maps the development and achievements of this movement, noting how this wide-ranging and broadly practiced program of reform, which placed the performing arts as the primary method for opposing the alienating conditions of modernity and modernization, exerted its influence on the larger culture. This program of