

preparatory warm-up, ‘asserting the breath [became] the first political action: taking space, claiming a place to be’ (*CI*, 43). This mingling of practices elucidates the field not as sentimental yearning for the reified plenitude of ‘community’, but as an historical formation in dialogue with culturally dominant conditions of seeing, experience and material access.

Kuppers opens this meticulously researched but accessible work with the relatively non-committal assessment that community performance is ‘work that facilitates creative expression for a diverse group of people, for aims of self-expression and political change’ (*CI*, 3). This allows the text the flexibility to pose questions about the constitution of community, the inclusion of artists and their practice within the orbit of ‘community performance’ so defined, and the interaction between performance practice and the state. Much in the manner of Richard Schechner’s *Performance Studies* (2002), the ‘main body’ text offers compact and easily navigable pathways through each chapter, supplemented by boxes containing citations from practitioners or theorists. For me, the quality of visual bricolage lent by this design gives a sense of the questions, projects and methodologies it features working beside one another, as opposed to operating within a single authoritative narrative or in competition. Structured case studies, examples of practice and research exercises run through the text. Extended quotations from key thinkers such as Benedict Anderson and Victor Turner sit alongside suggested ‘reflection exercises’ asking the reader-practitioner to consider associated problems; for example, ‘the ability of “communitas” in performance to conceal difference’ (*CI*, 35). Sometimes these questions seem overwhelming in their scope, but they speak to the text’s ambition and desire not to efface difficulty.

If the *Introduction* is pitched as a guide, the *Reader* holds out the promise of more in-depth critical reflection. It brings together existing essays by familiar writers in the field (for example, Dwight Conquergood’s ‘Performing as a Moral Act’ and extracts from Boal, Freire, Eugene van Erven and Baz Kershaw) with newly commissioned essays, structured around five themes: ‘pedagogical communities’, ‘relations’, ‘environments’, ‘rituals, embodiment, challenge’, and ‘practices’. Though these categories are exciting, this text as a whole is uneven. At a procedural level, spelling errors and omitted references compromise the project. At a theoretical level, the most satisfying essays attend

closely to the detail of practice. Anita Gonzalez’s interesting account of community instantiated through the dance work of Urban Bush Women sits in productive tension with Jess Berson’s fine analysis of Laban’s Movement Choirs. Becky Shaw’s excellent reflection upon ‘The Generosity Project’, her short residency in a Dutch care home, concludes that ‘rather than provide me with a moment to bring “good” to the community, the prize presented an extraordinary situation where I could see political issues at play’ (*CR*, 131). However, this example contrasts with other, less critical celebrations. And, although the *Reader* is undeniably rich, and opens by suggesting that ‘different readers, teachers and practitioners will find different paths through the material’ (*CR*, 7), it may perhaps have benefited from more direction to the reader in the editorial introductions to each of the sections, especially given Kuppers and Robertson’s opening observation that ‘community’ and ‘performance’ are ‘open-ended, and neither describes a specific political project’ (*CR*, 3). One such introduction invokes ‘the possibility of low-cost, high yield dialogue’ (*CR*, 151) generated by community performance work – prompting a question as to whether the books’ desire to facilitate the creation of projects might sometimes mitigate against a more critical analytic perspective towards contemporary administrative structures and their associated languages.

If, as Kuppers and Robertson write in the introduction to the *Reader*, community performance ‘represents not a few, unusually dedicated individuals, but rather a gathering field that shares an unusual commitment to community thinking’ (*CR*, 2) then these productive books open up avenues for further enquiry into the conditions of increased interest in the category of community in performance.

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Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation by Steve Dixon

Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007, 825 pp, ISBN: 0-262-04235-5 (hardback)

Jason Farman

Spanning over 800 pages, Steve Dixon’s new book, *Digital Performance* – with substantial contributions by Barry Smith – is indeed the most

exhaustive study on the subject to date. The book's twenty-five chapters cover a wide array of topics 'broadly divided into two sections, the first examining the histories, theories, and contexts of digital performance, the second dealing with the specific practices and practitioners' (9). Conceived out of Dixon and Smith's research started in 1999 as a part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded *Digital Performance Archive*, this book has been widely anticipated for quite some time. *Digital Performance* is a unique and brilliantly written study that importantly addresses the glaring gaps that are present in the other works previously published on the topic.

In the first section, Dixon offers readers an in-depth genealogy of digital performance, tracing it to the nineteenth century, 'with Richard Wagner and his notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Total Artwork). Wagner's vision [...] was the creative unification of multiple artforms' and served as a precursor to digital performance's reliance on convergent media, exemplified in the modern computer as a "'meta-medium" that unifies all media (text, image, sound, video, and so on) within a single interface' (41). Dixon continues the genealogy of digital performance through several futurist theatre manifestos, the constructivism of Meyerhold's biomechanics, dada and surrealism, multi-media design of the 1920s, and the 'happenings' of the late-1950s and 1960s. He concludes the history section of the book by analysing multi-media art from the 1970s, including discussions of Nam June Paik, Laurie Anderson, and a very short discussion of The Wooster Group (the only attention the group is given in the book).

The historical analysis and theoretical contextualization section of the book immediately clues readers into the book's greatest strengths. Here, readers cannot help but notice Dixon's clear and lively writing style that presents an impressive breadth of knowledge on the topic of digital performance, its context, and the theoretical discussions previously written on the topic. This strength, however, can also be seen as the book's major weakness: the breadth of topics covered often does not allow there to be substantial discussion of the particulars of some very interesting performances. In my opinion, the sacrifice of depth at moments is well worth the amazing range of topics discussed in this thorough survey.

Throughout *Digital Performance*, Dixon offers convincing new approaches to the theoretical

debates of the subject. Some of these debates have become tired and well-worn, yet, his phenomenological approach to the subject of 'liveness', for example, offers a thoroughly satisfying approach that theorists on both sides can align with. The final chapter of the 'theories' section focuses on digital dance and begins the extremely subtle transition into chapters that elaborate more extensively on specific performances. (From my perspective, Dixon's proposed shift from the first section of the book to the second is so subtle it's practically nonexistent.) One of the best discussions of the use of digital media in performance is in this chapter on digital dance, in a discussion of Merce Cunningham's *BIPED* (1999). The performance used motion capture markers on the dancers' bodies that relayed their movements into the computer to 'create complex and beautiful hand-drawn figure animations performing the same dances' on a huge screen behind the material, 'live' dancers (188). The piece, which was 'regarded as a turning point and seminal moment in the development of digital performance', created gasps from the audience and an overwhelming sense of 'approaching the supernatural, affording insights into the great unexplained. Critics were enthralled by the experience, and given to eulogies and superlatives' (190).

Digital Performance goes on to discuss hundreds of performances (accompanied by 235 photographs) and frames a large majority of these performances under the rubrics of subsequent sections on 'The Body', 'Space', and 'Time'. The Japanese performance troupe Dumb Type is discussed in the section on the body. In *Lovers: Dying Pictures, Loving Pictures* (1994), the group utilized laserdisc projections to highlight the fragility of the body in the face of AIDS. The virtuality of the projected bodies in the performance 'provides its real aesthetic power, their virtuality renders the bodies poetic and metaphorical, symbols of the always already ghostly and ephemeral status of the physical body' (229–230). A chapter on robots, followed by a chapter on cyborg performances, rounds out the section on bodies. Dixon's memorable and humorous discussion of Norman White and Laura Kikauka's 1988 performance, *Them Fuckin' Robots*, in which the performers designed a male and female robot that fit together for copulation, works to exemplify the 'contemporary fascination with the conjunction of technology and sexuality' (275). This is followed by a more serious discussion of the cyborg as emblemized in the several

performances by Stelarc and Guillermo Gómez-Peña discussed. Dixon argues, 'Our own view is that cyborgism constitutes a technological response to existential and spiritual uncertainties and crises within late industrial Western societies, symbolizing a human desire for wholeness within an alchemical, technological matrix' (306).

The section titled 'Space' is one of the most engaging and diverse of the book. Spanning nearly 200 pages, it begins with in-depth analyses of George Coates, The Builders Association, and Robert Lepage and goes on to discuss a wide variety of topics including virtual reality in performance, liquid architecture, telematic performance, webcams, surveillance, and chat rooms. The 'Space' section would have made an interesting book in and of itself and covers far too many performances to discuss adequately here. Each of the performances discussed, however, has in common a 'theatrical paradigm change' that is addressed in a quotation from John Reaves, co-director of the Gertrude Stein Repertory Theater: 'Our experiments begin to change our ideas about theater. It becomes ridiculous to think of theater as what can happen in one room, with one audience... Experimentation yields its own rewards: every new feature or facility we play with fragments our conventional thinking, sheds new light on the essential nature of drama or theater or narrative' (421). Ultimately, this section successfully develops the ways that theatrical space is reconsidered in the digital age.

The final sections of the book on 'Time' and 'Interactivity' importantly bring topics such as video games and CD-ROMs to bear on the live stage of theatre. Though these media have been discussed in relation to performance studies in such works as Janet Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck* and the anthology *First Person* (also by MIT Press), Dixon synthesizes these studies to show how 'videogames are a most prolific, effective, and developing form of popular theater' (620).

These final sections display how Dixon successfully addresses multiple audiences throughout the book. Performance studies scholars will be just as enthralled as those only interested in digital technology and cybertheory. Theorists and practitioners in both the theatre and the world of net art will find the entire book engaging and will undoubtedly draw from it time and time again in the classroom, in the theatre, and in their own writing.

Contemporary Theatres in Europe: A Critical Companion edited by Joe Kelleher and Nicholas Ridout

London: Routledge, 2005, xvii + 214 pp, ISBN 0-415-32940

Brian Singleton

Readers approaching this book might expect an overview of the state of contemporary theatre in Europe from a quasi-historical perspective, siting the contemporary within the historical march of the avant-garde. However it is far from such an impossible totalising narrative that Kelleher and Ridout, and their twelve contributors, lead us. All of the contributors work in the UK and most of their experiences of contemporary European theatre has been made possible by the international festival touring circuit. Historians need not fear a faulty methodology based on a skewed viewing position, however. We swiftly learn that the primary concerns of all the contributors to different degrees is not the theatre they see in front of them as subject, but what that very theatre teaches them about spectatorial practice in a postmodern and postdramatic context. I would go as far as to recommend that potential readers arm themselves with another Routledge publication (Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*) and read the two books in tandem as there is much dialogue between the two.

First, the editors are careful to spell out their definitions of the title. 'Contemporary' is taken in its temporal sense of the moment of encounter with performance, and yet also embraces the (intellectual) engagement with that performance subsequently. The potential signification of 'Europe' is also teased out given the various splits within the concept historically, geographically, politically, economically and ideologically. And finally 'theatres' is used in the plural throughout imbuing the form with a history in the process as well as a critical mass, but also and more importantly the use of the plural 'betrays an anxiety around definition' (3).

With such a diverse set of approaches to each of the three terms in the title, and given the variety of critical approaches, it would be impossible to treat each contribution individually, although they all merit marking in their own way. Each contributor is careful to record the 'experience' of the theatre, charting the subject position, and thereby extrapolating some cultural, social and political relevance from their 'encounters'. Joe Kelleher's