

however, is an agreed definition of what actually constitutes avant-garde theatre practice. Without such a set of parameters, subsequent essays are in danger of moving in divergent directions. I am surely not the only reader of this tome who is bemused when contributors include under their exemplars of avant-garde the authors Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg, D'Annunzio or Brecht, or when we hear of a representative of *Shingeki* who in 1906 'sought to modernize Japanese theatre by introducing translations of Shakespeare to Japan' (p. 229). Modernization, renewal, experimentation, radicalism, innovation, opposition to established traditions: all of these practices seem to be used, in this collection, synonymously with avant-garde, yet they could also function as part and parcel of any modern cultural practice. If we do not maintain any distinction here, we are at risk of blurring the role of the avant-garde in twentieth- (and possibly twenty-first-) century culture.

Harding and Rouse's collection is an important step towards a comparative understanding of the avant-garde. Only if such an approach is not predicated on the European experience, or on any of the recent North American models, are we able to arrive at a global understanding of the role of the avant-garde in cultural processes, drawing on practices that have existed independently of each other in various corners of the world and on those that were the result of the confluences and two-way exchanges in the colonial and postcolonial eras. I can only hope that many more such attempts will follow.

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A Performance Cosmology: Testimony from the Future, Evidence of the Past.

Edited by **Judie Christie, Richard Gough and Daniel Watt**. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2006. Pp. xi + 321 + illus. £29.99/\$53.95 Pb.

The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance. By **Paul Allain and Jen Harvie**. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2006. Pp. xii + 244. £60/\$105 Hb; £14.99/\$26.95 Pb.

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It is tempting to posit this pairing as wholly contradictory. On the one hand, Allain and Harvie offer a selection of 'defining and influential' terms (p. 4) that have shaped twentieth-century theatre and performance. The three sections of their *Companion* cover 'People', 'Events', and 'Concepts and Practices'. Entries are bolded so that readers may track their cumulative relevance throughout the text. The Wooster Group is cited thirteen times, yet they are one of only six ensembles to be recognized; the bulk of notable people are directors, theorists or solo artists. The volume ends with a chronology of births, deaths and world and performance events. Here one can visualize the authors' overarching project: 'to present the main debates, ideas and practices... plotting how these have evolved with time (or not) and tracking their subsequent influence' (p. 2).

By contrast, Christie, Gough and Watt use the thirtieth anniversary of the Centre for Performance Research (CPR) 'as a pretext, subtext, and context' for considering 'a raft of

interests in . . . theatre, performance, and performance research' (p. ix). Where Allain and Harvie defend their subjective biases writing as British academics, these editors flaunt their ex-centricity: 'celebrating the position of Wales on the periphery of Europe, CPR seeks that which makes the marginal central' (p. ix). Rather than plotting CPR's journey as a succession of seminal individuals and events, they begin with 'Intimate Conversations' where fifteen long-term associates share anecdotes about working with CPR. Next, thirty-one collaborators (many of them well-known theorists and practitioners) envision what performance might one day encompass in 'Testimony from the Future'. Finally, CPR's directors perform their personal and professional histories in 'Evidence of the Past'. Readers are told that 'multi-directional readings can be made across . . . themes and interests; there are no prescribed modes of relation' (p. x).

Despite obvious contrasts in form and scope, subtle conversations emerge among these texts. They usefully fill one another's gaps, telling diverging versions of a connected story. Joan Mills recounts a 1981 invitation to 'research the voice in performance' (p. 18), a task that evolved into Giving Voice, an annual event including over 1,600 'voice users' (p. 20). Voice is absent from the *Companion*, yet integral to CPR. Allain and Harvie likewise leave food untouched, yet its uses in performance are complexly theorized by Gough: 'As soon as you begin to work with food, you move into an area of some controversy. You're accused of playing with your food . . . the whole notion of playing with food is forbidden territory' (p. 52). More blatant political tensions surface as well. Allain and Harvie posit the Gulf War of 1990–1 as embodying Baudrillard's theory of simulation: that postmodern life 'is intensively theatricalized and mediated, so we lose sight of what reality is' (p. 97). Meanwhile, Heike Roms discusses the UK's foot-and-mouth epidemic as exposing the performative nature of map-making, a political exercise that resulted in the destruction of millions of animals who lived within computer-generated disease maps. She keeps sight of the epidemic's brutal realities despite its excessive mediations. Whereas Allain and Harvie exclude 11 September 2001 because 'it is not yet clear how it has altered the ways we do and think performance' (p. 4), Jon McKenzie uses the attacks to propose the affective interventions groups might make into the discourse of fear that saturates our decade. Rustom Bharucha recounts his conflicted responses, suggesting why the chaotic 'once' of the terrorist acts might be 'the most formidable metaphor for . . . how thought *strikes* in the theatre' (p. 220; added/original emphasis). These writers embrace the recent past to imagine a future that is not fully coalesced; nevertheless, their risks are welcome provocations.

Where *Performance Cosmology* often seems overly new-age in its tone and structure (Chinese numerology orders the book's theoretical 'Field Stations', making for allegorical reading), the *Companion* offers straightforward prose and lucid mapping. Allain and Harvie reassess ubiquitous terms such as 'acting' and 'liveness' in insightfully nuanced ways. Rebecca Schneider, in the *Cosmology*, hauntingly enacts what the *Companion* describes as 'Performative Writing'. Philip Auslander's essay on the relation between zoological and technological performance bridges key concerns of both texts. Poland likewise recurs as a spiritual and conceptual 'home'. Precisely because of these harmonic dissonances, both books will instruct students while challenging experts seeking surprises.