

Book Reviews

Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre and Performance: Make it Real by Daniel Schulze

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(hardback)

By Sara Reimers

Twenty-first century British society is marked by a sense of loss. The fragmentation and uncertainty of postmodernism—which shattered the illusion of a unified and abiding self and destabilised notions of truth and the real—as well as the impact of mass production and the ideology of late capitalism, has left a void that a new kind of essentialism appears to be filling. That is what Daniel Schulze argues in his first solo-authored monograph *Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre and Performance*. He suggests that 'the perceived superficiality and fakeness of contemporary culture leads to an increased wish for genuine experience, or some sort of reality that is perceived as not fake', or put another way, 'authentic' (8).

Theories of authenticity propounded by Jean Baudrillard (1981), Lionel Trilling (1972), and Julia Straub (2012) inform Schulze's work and he engages with an impressive range of scholarship from across a number of disciplines. Schulze draws particularly on Wolfgang Funk's theorisation of authenticity in *The Literature of Reconstruction* (2015). At times this close engagement with Funk slightly obscures the author's voice. However, as Schulze goes on to explore the concept of metamodernism and moves into specific performance case studies, his argument becomes clearer and increasingly compelling.

Schulze argues that in the context of the perception of

loss, ‘audiences are keen on bringing back the idea of truth’ (36). He goes on to argue that authenticity is ‘consciously created, specifically in the performing arts, as an aesthetic tool; it is both a strategy of creation and reception’ (37). This study identifies three genres of performance in which authenticity might be seen to be a defining feature: intimate theatre, immersive theatre, and documentary theatre. Offering case study analyses of specific productions that might be considered particularly representative of their genre, Schulze utilises the theoretical framework established in the first part of his book to explore authenticity in contemporary performance.

Focusing on the durational work of Forced Entertainment and also on the phenomenon of one-to-one performances as examples of intimate theatre—that is, theatre that ‘put[s] the viewer in the centre of attention, focusing on individual, unique experience and personal narratives as opposed to a commodified, uniform product’ (67)—Schulze argues that its ‘appeal to individual perception, narration and interpretation, which often closely links the life of the spectator to the spectacle on stage is one fairly prominent strategy of metareference that is able to effect authenticity’ (67). Drawing on Rancière’s notion of the emancipated spectator, Schulze explores the complex relationship between audience experience and authenticity in performance.

Considering immersive theatre—which ‘draw[s] each individual audience member into a world of wonder and discovery, where every visitor will go on a tailor-made, individual journey of exploration’ (127)—Schulze examines the work of Punchdrunk and specifically their productions *The Masque of the Red Death* (2007) and *The Drowned Man* (2013). Exploring the way in which immersive theatre’s ‘bodily experience, set and

politics provides the space where immersive experiences can be found and made', Schulze argues that it should be 'regarded as one expression of the culture of authenticity' and that 'this authenticity is both sought out and marked by the individual' (187).

Schulze then also explores the popular genre of documentary theatre, taking Robin Soan's *Talking to Terrorists* (2005), David Hare's *Stuff Happens* (2004), Edmund Burke's *Black Watch* (2007), Lucy Prebble's *Enron* (2009), and Dennis Kelly's *Taking Care of Baby* (2007) as examples of the genre. Arguing that documentary theatre is one of the most obvious examples of authenticity in contemporary performance (189), Schulze explores how authenticity operates in tribunal plays, verbatim theatre and documentary drama. He suggests that notions of authenticity function differently in each of these subcategories, but that the fact that 'the play is about something real' and often involves 'people speaking in authentic voices' (220) imbues documentary performance with a particular claim to the authentic.

One of the most exciting aspects of this study is its innovative engagement with practice. Schulze does not simply apply his theory of authenticity to his case studies, but uses the case studies to inform and develop his theory. As a result theory and practice are always in fruitful dialogue in this study. Furthermore, Schulze's study also represents an important contribution to scholarship on intimate, immersive, and documentary theatre. Those studying such genres of performance will gain much from Schulze's case studies, while scholars of authenticity and the real will benefit from his insights into the operation of authenticity in performance.

Schulze suggests that his study should be seen as

'a point of departure for further discussion' (7), rather than a comprehensive or definitive account of the operation of authenticity in contemporary performance. *Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre and Performance* provides a timely intervention in a burgeoning field of scholarship. His work has a political urgency as it highlights the way in which religion and nationalism appear to respond to the contemporary craving for essentialism. What is the potential cost of our quest for authenticity, he consequently asks. In locating contemporary theatre practice within this volatile political and social context, Schulze's book points towards a practice that might be able to indulge the contemporary appetite for the authentic, while simultaneously acknowledging its impossibility.

Works Cited

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***Theatre of Real People: Diverse Encounters at Berlin's Hebbel am Ufer and Beyond* by Ulrike Garde and Meg Mumford**

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016, 247 pp.

(paperback)

By Pepetual Mforbe Chiangong

'Theatre of Real People' is a participatory theatre practice that engages with patterns of aesthetics and techniques, which Ulrike Garde and Meg Mumford, the authors of *Theatre of Real People: Diverse Encounters at Berlin's Hebbel am Ufer and Beyond* (2016), have analysed. They do so by considering such patterns as multifaceted components for the creation, under-

standing, and reception of 'the real', 'the authentic' and 'the unfamiliar' in experimental theatre productions across time and the globe. On the path to critically explore the real in an unmediated, doubling, and inter-textual context of 'Theatre of Real People', authenticity and 'Authenticity-Effects' emerge as avenues for critiquing the cast and performances of several theatre productions hosted by Hebbel am Ufer (HAU) theatre house in the Berlin Kreuzberg neighbourhood, under the directorship of Mathias Lilienthal from 2003–2012. This exploration raises interesting questions about veracity and fiction and the oscillating space between the two. The productions explored are incorporated within three bigger performance formats namely Rimini Protokoll's 100% Berlin: A Statistical Chain Action (Eine statistische Kettenreaktion), Lilienthal's X-Apartments: Theatre in a Private Space (X-Wohnungen: Theater in privaten Räumen) and Mobile Academy's Black Markets No. 7 with an analytical focus on dramaturgy, performance aesthetics, and most of all the audience reception of the listed foci. Having these particular productions in mind, the authors employ the notion of 'Theatre of Real People' to succinctly discuss what they delineate as dealing with 'those people in a theatre context who present aspects of their own selves—their perspectives, personal histories, narratives, knowledges, skills, environments, social worlds, and/or socio-economic categories—rather than those of fictional or devised characters' (5). This understanding already resonates with the authors' findings from some of the listed productions, namely that no demarcation existed between professional and non-professional performances since the goal, relevance, and impact of practicing such a 'Theatre of Real People' needed to be felt both in the domain of performance, making its reception and the critical discourse that it brings forth.

Divided into eight chapters, together with an informative introduction and a succinct conclusion, *Theatre of Real People* aims at exploring the use of 'Authenticity-Effects' with focus on the presentation, performance texts and audience reception of the above-listed productions at HAU. The first three chapters of the book chronicle the history of Theatre of Real People by examining theoretical approaches connected to theatre, authenticity, and 'Authenticity-Effects'. Although the authors already introduce their readers to their case studies in chapter two, they are further divided into five more. It is worth mentioning that the authors employ elements from reception studies to be able to analyse how the performances as a whole engender the logic of truth in them. However, a question that a dramaturg, who is not necessarily emanating from a Western/German theatre background, might at the initial stages of engaging with Theatre of Real People ask, is whether other global forms of Theatre of Real People such as Theatre-for-Development, Theatre-for-Integrated-Rural-Development, Popular Theatre, People's Theatre, Legislative Theatre, and so on share certain similarities with Theatre of Real People in terms of its technique and narrative. Interestingly, Garde and Mumford catalogue autobiographical theatre, ethnographic performance, participatory performance, testimonial theatre, verbatim theatre to name just a few, in a bid to enunciate that no matter how one names Theatre of Real People and specify where and when they occur, modes of representation should engender, and yet subvert veracity and the genuine in ways that intimacy is generated between the performers and the audience in a social, cultural, and political engagement. This statement perhaps justifies why the authors engage with the complexity of the concept of real, authenticity and 'Authenticity-Effects' by showcasing the differences between idealising and

sceptical approaches towards notions, which one can comprehend as analytical tools for the theatre performances of HAU.

Focusing on the performances of 100% Berlin and 100% Melbourne in Chapter 5, the authors illustrate how authenticity and the audience's expectation of the truth is challenged and destabilised in the performers' representation and verbal communications. An example is the authors' discussion of the chain recruitment of the second but last individual (98%) whose role will help to complete the cast of 100% Berlin. What the authors note about this scene is that a statistical constraint destabilises the originality of the performer and in effect creates 'Authenticity-Effects'. This constraint, according to the authors, emerges from the requirement to cast someone from a specific country of origin, neighbourhood, age and marital status, a process which prompts the authors to make important remarks about individuality. Garde and Mumford further note that hasty presentations of the chain recruitment of the cast on stage also contributes to the creation of such effects. For example, the audience was encouraged by the first performer (1%) in 100% Berlin to look at the biographical information of performers in the production booklet. While the audience was engaged with this process, they needed to watch the digital projections of the time and date at which the pictures of the performers in the booklet were taken. Moreover, the same audience that was then engrossed with the booklet and digital projections had to watch how the performance itself was unfolding on stage. Such a theatrical entanglement provides a platform for the authors to engage even further with the notion of 'Authenticity-Effects'.

This book offers illuminating insights into the encounter of cultural and professional diversity—individuals from different ethnic and professional backgrounds—at Berlin's Hebbel am

Ufer-hosted performances. The authors foreground contemporary theatre discourses and bring it together with the enactment of cultural diversity while focusing on the notions of the real, the authentic and the unfamiliar. In Chapters 4, they further accord a critical space to the concept of the 'unfamiliar' which for them engages: 'with not only people who are perceived by the participants in the theatre as different, foreign or insufficiently known due to their occupational, class, and ethnic background, but also 'theatre strangers', those who do not usually perform their everyday activities within the theatre or as theatre. The unfamiliar with regards to HAU production deals with concepts like 'different', 'foreign', 'strange' (90).

According to Garde and Mumford, 'Theatre of Real People' is about migration and it is about the neighbour, together with whom its participants and audience members experience the every day. Yet as he or she is not sufficiently known, it is all about cultural encounters and cultural identity. The encounter with individuals from different cultural backgrounds in such a Theatre of Real People practice necessitates the authors to explore the relevance of Lilienthal's Stadtteiltheater (city district theatre) in order to probably critique the ideology behind Stadtheater (city theatre). Practised alongside the concern of culturally diverse local communities in mind, Stadtteiltheater becomes a representation of the 'unfamiliar' within a liberating theatre space. What one may draw from the authors' discussion here is that the impact of Stadtteiltheater is mainly performed outside of the theatre space. And it is different to that of the performances inside a state-funded theatre, which Garde and Mumford have described as conservative, incapable of reform, professional and rich (58). To them, this paradox allows HAU to experiment with aesthetic forms, especially when it comes to

self-representational models of 'Theatre of Real People', which is not only transferable, but also adaptable (see Chapter 7 and 8).

Destabilising 'Authenticity-Effects' allows the audience to engage with reality in different dimensions, especially when the performance space is moved from a theatre hall into individual apartments, located in the neighbourhood. The authors' reflections on the performance of X-Apartments in Chapter 6, speaks of postdramatic experience as 'everyday life and artistic projects become blurred due to the absence of a clear frame of reference that audiences can use to interpret their experiences' (127). Negotiating ones way through non-familiar neighbourhoods is certainly a strategy to acquaint the cast and audiences of X-Apartments with the unfamiliar, or simply put with people from different ethnicities. Caught in the web of sceptical authenticity, the narrative of X- Apartments for instance provokes the participants to question whether theatre is reality or fiction. Yet the participatory model of 'Theatre of Real People' is what lends credence to the productions of HAU, especially as the authors explore the opportunities and potentials of such experimental forms of theatre. Non-formal adult education is certainly one of such potentials of 'Theatre of Real People'. In this regard, the publication *Theatre of Real People* is a contribution to material previously published on the relevance of experimental/improvisational theatre related to any society—such as the edited accounts in *Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice* (2009) by Monika Prendergast and Juliana Saxton and *The Applied Theatre Reader* (2009) by Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston. Just as these studies are concerned with people, differences, and borders, Garde and Mumford focus on how the audience is not only informed about cultural diversity in Berlin, but also about complex issues around immigra-

tion. But their poststructuralist approach to the performances discussed and audience reception of the plays is what makes this book self-standing. The representational format of the productions examined by Garde and Mumford articulate 'Authenticity-Effects' that are ambivalent and reminiscent of postdramatic notions of theatre practice.

What is of particular interest in *Theatre of Real People: Diverse Encounters at Berlin's Hebbel am Ufer and Beyond* is its subject of inquiry, i. e. how the people in 'Theatre of Real People' deal with everyday engagements and how the authors critically explore them. Looking beyond the capital of Germany, the real people examined in the book are described as 'the unfamiliar', a concept that speaks to cultural, social, political, ethnic, and professional diversity, which the authors term 'contemporary people'. The manner in which the authors connect the performers in the production listed above with the unfamiliar and authenticity allows them to investigate how aesthetic patterns of the productions analysed in the book create a negotiable platform for social encounter. Authenticity with regards to 'Theatre of Real People' highlights the diversity of the cast and the required unprofessional, semi-profession and professional acting skills, which according to the authors are relevant to the dissimilar life narratives that are represented on stage. Such narratives, as the authors note, are communicated in verbatim text, pre-recorded interviews, films and videos. These forms are integrated in some of the productions in such a way that they bring content, aesthetics, self-representation, and patterns of presentation together with authentic life experiences, igniting sceptical notions of 'Authenticity-Effects'. The publication of this book is timely as its critical approach does not only create a platform to reflect on contemporary relevance of postdramatic forms, but

also as it explores collective and individual narratives that create resonance with current debates on diversity. Having said that, I think that the book contributes interesting concepts—such as authenticity and 'Authenticity-Effects' in regards to new experimental theatre practices, and that it is a useful handbook to theatre practitioners, students and lecturers of theatre.

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***Reader in Comedy: An Anthology of Theory & Criticism* by Magda Romanska and Alan Ackerman, eds.**

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016, 375 pp.

(paperback)

By Adrian Centeno

Reader in Comedy: An Anthology of Theory & Criticism, edited by Magda Romanska and Alan Ackerman, sets out to situate comedic performance, theory, and criticism at the forefront of intellectual discourse, in contrast to its historic place on the periphery by examining the pragmatic utility of comedy from antiquity to modern day. The reader fills a necessary gap in the field of dramatic arts scholarship by placing historicist and formalist interpretations of comic theory into a dialectic exchange. Romanska and Ackerman assert that 'comedy and theories of comedy are historically contingent,' and a sense of self-awareness inherent in the form allows for the irreverent manipulation of comic structures in such a way that 'form becomes content (and vice versa)' (4). With the establishment of this historicised form, the reader utilises various texts to reveal how comic theory may create, re-

veal or disrupt notions of truth that shape the human experience.

The narrative begins amid the hedonistic revelry of Greek civic festivals. The Athenian philosopher Plato was unnerved by arts ability to ‘inflare people’s passions’ (19), and specifically lamented comedy for its association with sensory indulgences. Sex or inebriation may be pleasurable, but earthly pursuits diminished the capacity for thought and thus distracted Greek citizens from the pursuit of Plato’s idealist conception of truth. In the Socratic dialogue *Philebus*, Plato placed the root of comedy in malice, suggesting that laughter at others is a character flaw derived from a lack of self-knowledge. In responding to Plato’s philosophical division of truth and comedy, Romanska and Ackerman arrive at two important questions: ‘But what if comedy doesn’t simply *reflect* a degraded reality? What if it *shapes* or even *creates* reality?’ (20). The idealism of Plato was supplanted by the pragmatism of Aristotle, a student of his, who advanced comic theory by ‘emphasizing logical causality’ (22) and suggested comedy, if well-constructed, could be a tool for normalising Greek virtues like moderation.

If comedies were used as magnifying glasses and held up to socially undesirable behavior could they be used for a more constructive purpose? The pragmatic potential of comic theory was observed by Roman theorists Horace and Quintilian, who noted that comedy could be used as a rhetorical device to correct non-normative behavior or to ‘win goodwill’ (23) that could convince others in debate. The problematic nature of who defines non-normative behavior, and to what degree the corrective effort extends—Is it playful and informative? Is it abusive and harassing?—creates unique problems specific to each period and culture. Later entries by the likes of Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim, Molière, Immanuel Kant, George Meredith, Sigmund Freud,

and Jacques Derrida highlight the importance of the present moment on works on art and, conversely, the influence of works of art on an interpretation of the present moment. In this regard, Romanska and Ackerman dutifully advance us through the social and political complexities of each period and frame the accompanying texts thoughtfully.

The fluidity of the reader is a major virtue. The general introduction clearly outlines the reader's methodology and establishes key questions for the journey ahead. Chapters are divided logically, arranged chronologically and include virtually all the major dramatists, critics, and theorists one would expect to find, as well as several that one wouldn't. Many of the seventy-plus texts featured in *Reader in Comedy* are translations and, though the anthology doesn't include originals for those able to translate for themselves, that work appears seamless as well. A work of scholarship spanning this breadth of time, featuring the text of so many contributors, and from so many languages runs the risk of being bogged down by the weight of its information. In reaching backward and forward in time at so many points without creating confusion, the reader is a testament to the work of Romanska and Ackerman. *Reader in Comedy* feels appropriately challenging and would make an ideal text for university-level coursework.

It should be noted that much of comic theory since the mid-twentieth century has focused on the socio-political development of identity politics. Romanska and Ackerman acknowledge this trend in contemporary scholarship, but the reader perhaps misses an opportunity by containing very little comic theory rooted in contemporary identity politics. The stock representation of 'the trickster' is connected to African and Native American gods in the general introduction, but only in pass-

ing and isn't revisited in subsequent chapters. Texts by Glenda R. Carpio, Ruth Wisse, and Romanska herself help satisfy this gap in part, but the omission of something like Luis Valdez's *actos* in conversations about the reclamation of stereotypes or the pragmatic use of comic theory by politically oppressed groups is felt. Scholarship in the field will probably always lean heavily on European influences, but a greater diversity of voices in contemporary theory would be welcome in future editions.

The final chapter of *Reader in Comedy* begins with a review of the major atrocities of the twentieth century: the use of weapons of mass destruction, multiple occurrences of genocide, and wars on a global scale. The collective weight of these tragedies is too much for one person to imagine and that they occurred in such a short period is horrifying. The fatalistic nature of tragedy presumes inevitability. The intent of this opening isn't to crush the reader just before the finish line, but to remind them that comedy 'reflects tensions between order and disorder' (238) and, most importantly, comedy endures. As the unique challenges of the twenty-first century materialise *Reader in Comedy* arrives precisely when it is needed most, and it provides an excellent starting point for those looking for relief, resistance or both.