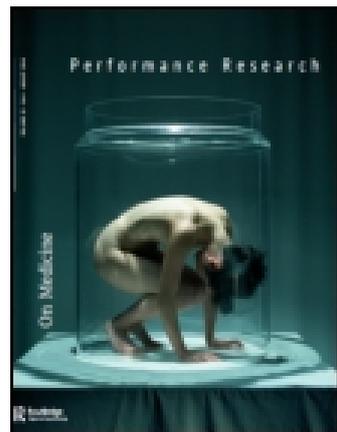


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REVIEW

Performance and the Global City

edited by **D. J. Hopkins and Kim Solga**

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 · 277 pages

MELISSA POLL

Following on from *Performance and the City*, a well-curated collection of essays exploring performance's role in renegotiating urban space in the industrialized West post-9/11, editors D.J. Hopkins and Kim Solga have published a formidable follow-up. *Performance and the Global City* builds on its predecessor through a range of essays that explore performance's role in the process of global city mobilization – be it Ana Martinez's discussion of the Zapatistas' 2001 mass occupation of Zócalo Square, which physically performed Mexico City as an international platform for Indigenous rights, or Jean Graham-Jones' analysis of President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's calculated matrixing of celebrity, politics and the city of La Plata to rally support for her vision of a global Buenos Aires. Divided into three sections, *Performance and the Global City* charts contemporary developments and acts of resistance while aspiring to position urban centres beyond North America and Europe as central to the discussion.

Part 1, 'Mobilities and (In)Civilities: The Global Urban Borderlands', focuses on the challenges faced by burgeoning global cities within 'megaregions' (12) as well as the obstacles confronted by smaller cities in their relationships with major cosmopolitan centres. In her essay exploring urban renewal in Johannesburg, Loren Kruger vividly illustrates how playful

performance practices in South Africa validate societal concerns and diffuse tensions between Johannesburg's citizens and migrants. She describes the work of Maja Marx, who created a series of temporary crosswalks composed of statements including 'I walk in two worlds' and 'These are bridgeable divides' (29). Marx's *Pedestrian Poetry* provided a performative platform where tensions between taxi drivers and pedestrians were played out, temporarily prompting aggressive drivers to respect the rights of those on foot. Kruger's piece segues well into 'Performing Survival in the Global City', an essay by director Jennifer H. Capraru and anthology co-editor Kim Solga. Their co-authored chapter examines the cross-continental journey of Canadian playwright Colleen Wagner's *The Monument*, a play highlighting resistance to dominant neo-liberal models of urban progress in the aftermath of the Bosnian genocide. Capraru directed the production in Kigali (at various locations, including auditoriums and cafés) in 2008 and at Toronto's Harbourfront World Stage Festival in 2011. Both productions were performed in Rwanda's official language, Kinyarwanda, and featured the same actors, Jacqueline Umubeyeyi (Mejra) and Jean Paul Uwayezu (Stetko), survivors of the Rwandan genocide. The production's emphasis on the process of nation rebuilding

as resolutely 'in progress' productively disrupted Toronto's utopic 'creative city' rhetoric. Such rhetoric casts art as a means to demonstrate 'sufficient social "progress" to qualify as a community "good" (and perhaps as a profitable commodity)' (43). By refusing to enact progress through representations of national unity and, instead, dwelling on Bosnia's uncertain future after 1994, Capraru's production fulfilled the World Stage Festival's mandate to challenge spectators in Toronto. In Kigali, *The Monument's* focus on the enduring work of establishing a reunified Bosnia countered the Rwandan government's own post-genocide push towards mega-city-building displays of national unity.

Susan Bennett also contributes to the section 'Mobilities and (In)Civilities', developing Doreen Massey's concept of a 'global sense of place' through an examination of contemporary traffic between the West and China. Bennett finds that Western appetites for Orientalism have endured and are now being mobilized in the work of high-profile Occidental theatre-makers as guaranteed investments. She argues that though scenically stunning, Robert Lepage's *The Blue Dragon*, set in twenty-first-century Shanghai, is a visual throwback to the exoticized Orient popular in films and literature of the 1930s – an Orient that, according to Bennett, guarantees audiences

(and capital) on the international festival circuit. Comparatively, as represented by Shanghai's World Expo in 2010, performing the global West is a matter of acquiring its high-end products. Bennett posits that sales of Western products to millions of urban and rural Chinese citizens furthers Shanghai's ascent to global city status.

Less cohesively bound, the second group of essays, 'Transacting Bodies/Embodied Currencies: Subjects and Cities', converges broadly around physical labour and the daily performativity of the city by tourists and citizens. This section is introduced by the paradox that is contemporary Venice – a city literally sinking under the weight of the tourists keeping its economy afloat. Nicholas Whybrow's open-ended photo essay reassembles the archive of a research trip to Venice with twenty-four undergraduate students, noting that, as per Laura Levin's seminal question in the first edition of this series, sites in the city can – and do – speak. While Whybrow's piece is a departure from the collection's more structured essays, it offers a useful format for prompting reader responses; nonetheless, 'Losing Venice: Conversations in a Sinking City' left this reader wanting more. Though Whybrow states that his essay's aim is not 'to analyse how the students did what they did' (108), the absence of this analysis leaves many questions surrounding the outcome of students' efforts 'to make something happen' and 'perform Venice into a form of being' through self-initiated exchanges with tourists and locals (108). Jason Bush's contribution to this section returns to the more conventional structure featured

in previous essays. An incisive examination of globalization's role in the evolution of the Peruvian Scissors Dance, Bush's piece makes a convincing case against discourses of authenticity that narrate the dance's shape-shifting as the degradation of 'tradition'. Bush argues that, as it performs the nation on a global scale today, the Peruvian Scissors Dance is the productive result of a complex interweaving of rural and urban influences over time. This hearkens back to arguments emphasizing the problems with authenticity discourses; they are often limited to a 'selective past but not a present or a future' (Lo and Gilbert 2002: 34). Ultimately, who has the authority to decide what's 'Peruvian enough'?

The final and most evocative section of *Performance and the Global City*, 'Citizen Stages: Acts of Dissent in the Global City', focuses on cities in crisis and the valuable ways in which protest can perform alternative visions of the globalized city beyond capitalist and neo-liberal paradigms. Punctuated by descriptions of artistic protests in the rubble, Silvija Jestrovic's study of Sarajevo under siege sketches vivid images including one of cellist Vedran Smajlović's tuxedo-clad performance in the crossfire of a war zone. Jestrovic maintains that by aestheticizing Sarajevo's physical destruction, local artists captured international attention, bringing the war and the city into global focus. Another highly affective piece in this section, Nesreen Hussein's 'Cairo: My City, My Revolution', offers a personal meditation on a city in crisis. As a Cairo-born, London-based academic, Hussein's theoretical perspective is contextualized by her longing to return to the city during the 2011 revolution and,

finally, by her arrival in Tahrir Square. This essay keenly charts the power of Tahrir's symbolic, non-violent protests, including a mock trial for Hosni Mubarak, prayer chains and incisive graffiti, demonstrating that new realities must first be conceived in imagined spaces. With such provocative final essays, it is a missed opportunity that Hopkins and Solga don't follow up on their strong introduction by bookending it with an equally compelling conclusion or afterword.

Overall, the level of scholarship in *Performance and the Global City* is consistently high, including further contributions from Melissa Bucher, Philip Hager, Simon Jones and Paul Rae, and the cities covered represent an international cross-section of urban centres. The editors' aim to include a range of perspectives beyond northern North America and central-western Europe is commendable. In articulating this objective, Hopkins and Solga prompted me to reflect on the challenges faced by contemporary scholars working to transcend 'West' and 'rest' binaries amid a globalized landscape. My questions include: What constitutes a non-Western perspective? How can scholars educated in the West engage comprehensively with non-Western theoretical frameworks? Is the lack of alternative cultural and theoretical paradigms (whether in translation or not) featured in current Occidental scholarship simply a function of a field dominated by Western universities? Bennett's essay provides an insightful example of authorial positioning with an eye to addressing these imbalances productively; she intentionally highlights her work's West/non-West duality, calling for attentiveness to what

cultural geographers Tim Edensor and Mark Jayne have identified as the 'geographically uneven foundations of contemporary urban scholarship' (94).

Beyond highlighting the need to look outside the Western academy for contemporary perspectives on renegotiating urban space, *Performance and the Global City* also does the vital work of questioning relationships between major centres and comparably smaller cities, asking what the former might glean from the latter. As a Canadian studying in London, I am keenly aware of my own position between the centre and the periphery, which is,

in many ways, bound to an enduring post-colonial need for legitimation. And yet, when I consider that Vancouver's Adbusters called for the Occupation of Wall Street, the ways in which four First Nations women in Saskatoon disseminated the call to be Idle No More, and how a group of Toronto students launched an international movement against sexual violence and victim-blaming through SlutWalk,¹ I see that Canadian cities are mobilizing unique global platforms. London might do well to prick up its ears.

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¹ For further reading on Occupy Wall Street, Idle No More, and SlutWalk, see references.