

INTRODUCTION

Guest Editors: Laura Levin with Andy Houston

If bodies are to be reconceived, not only must their *matter* and *form* be rethought, but so too must their environment and *spatio-temporal location*.

Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion* (84)

Audre Lorde, in a poem entitled “Syracuse Airport,” writes that “women/who take up space/are called sloppy.” Making theatre, or any kind of art, is taking up space. It’s not a lady-like thing to do.

Judith Thompson, “Epilepsy and the Snake” (5)

This issue brings together recent scholarship on the topic of space in Canadian performance, with a particular focus on intersections of space and subjectivity. Each article contributes to vibrant conversations that are taking place in theatre and performance studies, which ask how the spaces of performance can serve as productive locations for testing out the limits of self in the contemporary world.

The articles included here represent some of the best examples of performance research influenced by “the spatial turn” in the humanities and social sciences, a shift in thinking and analytical focus that has significantly influenced the field over at least the last decade. In theatre studies, much of this work has taken its cue from Una Chaudhuri’s groundbreaking book, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (1997), which turned to a vocabulary drawn from cultural geography (“borders, limits, rootlessness, territoriality, nomadism, habitus, homelessness, and exile” xi) in order to analyze the essential role that space plays in shaping theatrical meaning. Especially important within this book is Chaudhuri’s examination of the ways in which theatrical space produces and is produced by the identities of its characters as well as the subjectivities of those participating in the theatrical event (spectators, actors, etc.). In her words, “contemporary theater is, above all, a *remapping* of the possible terrain of subjectivity” (xv). Chaudhuri’s pioneering work on this topic synthesized and articulated a range of theatrical issues that a number of theatre researchers in North America had already begun to take up, and several of these early explorations have been assembled in two anthologies recently published by Playwrights Canada Press: *Space and the Geographies of Theatre* (ed. Michael McKinnie) and

Andy Houston's *Environmental and Site-Specific Theatre*.

This collection of essays extends current discussions about space in performance in a number of significant ways. First, it illustrates the extremely diverse interdisciplinary perspectives that can be brought to bear in exploring questions of space and subjectivity. We are especially interested in thinking about how the word "space" shifts according to the disciplinary location in which it is used and how each context produces a different spatial vocabulary for describing the self. In this sense, we were guided by Michel de Certeau's definition of space as a term implying a vectored relation. "SPACE," he argues "is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a 'proper'" (117).

The articles that follow make this definitional instability and contextual dependence clear in bringing a variety of disciplinary knowledges to bear in their approaches to questions of space. Kim Solga offers a complex articulation of the ways in which architectural theory might be applied to the study of performance, departing from the focus on cultural geography which has by now become the dominant lens through which space is read in the field. Solga's article reads theatre back through the architectural imaginary, illustrating how metaphors of walls, cracks, etc. are essential to the production of gendered and sexualized bodies on stage, to the terrain of the seen and the unseen, the plastic and the organic. Looking closely at Tomson Highway's *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling*, and Naomi Wallace's *One Flea Spare*, she makes a compelling case for treating specific characters in feminist theatre as "guerrilla architects," women who effect "a reconfiguration of [their] body's knowable limits which, in turn, [alter] the metaphysical frame of the space designed to contain that body by assuming it can be known without limit, can be easily called forth." In turning to architecture to think about theatrical space, Solga offers a conceptually innovative and powerful frame through which to read space in feminist performance.

Also contributing to the interdisciplinary investigation of space in this issue is a group of articles that explore intersections of theatrical space and technology. Bruce Barton draws on theories from the social sciences and media studies in order to understand

how intimacy—the “space in-between” spectator and performer—functions in theatre, particularly in the context of intermedia performance. Remarking upon the opening out of self that seems to emerge as an effect of mediatization, Barton asks what it might “mean to suggest that intermedia is, perhaps, a space of intimacy—is, perhaps, *the* space of intimacy in a wired world.” Briefly using the example of Toronto’s theatre company Bluemouth Inc. and departing from traditional analyses of site-specific performance, he argues that place (i.e. location) may be less important than space when it comes to articulating a shared point of reference for spectators; here, space is defined as a perceptual state wherein destabilization is acknowledged “*as a site of commonality.*”

Chris Eaket and Kathleen Irwin take up a different set of questions related to the meeting of space and technology. Both look at site-specific performance in Canada, and specifically those performances that employ new media as part of alternative mapping strategies. These case studies illustrate how locative media art is becoming an important site of collective urban memory, creating a sense of shared public space and giving voice to the lived experiences of city inhabitants. Eaket offers perhaps the most in-depth analysis to date of the artistic practices of [murmur], an urban annotation project designed to uncover the hidden stories of a city that only residents can tell, stories that can be accessed via cell phones throughout a walking tour. These stories, which rarely make their way into an official tour book, bring to life the many rich layers of personal and cultural history that ghost each city block.

In addition to considering how [murmur] works through mobile technologies, Eaket offers a sophisticated argument for the social potential of this kind of locative performance. This work, he argues, illuminates how subjects make and are made by the routes that they habitually take through a city. This in turn sheds light on what Eaket calls the “performativity of space,” or “the ‘acting-out’ of a place through social practices, specifically actions and utterances, that contextually and through repetition determine its functional meaning within a meshwork of social habitus.” This reading, which brings together Butlerian notions of performativity (the production of identity through “a reiteration of a norm or set of norms” 12) and Michel de Certeau’s idea of space as “a practiced place” (130), offers a valuable model for future analyses of urban performance.

Irwin’s article serves as a bridge between Barton’s examination

of interactivity in intermedia performance and Eaket's discussion of urban performativity. Irwin offers a rich description of *The Bus Project*, an interactive public art installation that she created in collaboration with multimedia artists, computer scientists, and graduate students at the University of Regina in 2004. In this work, game stations were installed in Regina and Saskatoon bus terminals, which provided travellers unusual encounters with the arrival and departure stories of immigrant women. To borrow words from Solga's paper, the inclusion of these culturally-specific and private narratives made audible those "bodies and bodily relations" that public spaces "cannot comprehend, cannot order, cannot see through." Here, Irwin argues, the private stories of immigrant women disrupt the functional and seemingly "neutral" spaces of the bus terminal, in effect giving transportation a new set of cultural and gendered meanings. Irwin's paper is essential reading for site-specific practitioners and theorists, particularly since many site-specific performances fail to register issues of gender difference as they shape experiences of space.

Another important intervention made by this issue lies in its exploration of space and subjectivity through overtly performative means. How might scholarly writing become more conscious of itself as a space of performance? How might it register language as a site of world-making, where ideas of self and location are shaped through the material specificities of words and the associative processes of metaphor? Some of this issue's contributors address these questions by experimenting with the form of the traditional scholarly essay, from Barton's self-consciously rhizomatic mapping of the theoretical literature on intimacy to Solga's performative illustration of the "space-making capacity" of feminist performance. Solga's poetic use of language, for example, brilliantly enacts the radical feminist tactics that she is working to theorize. Like the guerrilla architects that she describes, Solga "plays at the cracks" of architectural theory in order to remind "architecture of everything it embeds and forgets in the drive to produce the clean, white surface, the smooth and sexy glass wall, the line between you and me, the vista on the world that empowers the eye and leaves the flesh behind."

These experimental essays are complemented by two pieces of critical writing that are explicitly designed for live performance. The first is the text of a keynote lecture delivered by Michael Greyeyes, a series of reflections on "an Indigenous Life in Film." Using the format of a cinematic screenplay, Greyeyes playfully illustrates how his identity position as Cree performer has been

constructed time and time again within the Hollywood dream machine—e.g. through casting and the stereotypical framing of his body as “exotic other” by Hollywood sets. The second piece is a script by Melanie Bennett, devised for a site-specific performance at the Legion Hall #51 in Kitchener-Waterloo. In this imaginative text, Bennett performs a kind of theatre archaeology, digging up the histories of war veterans that the Legion Hall might contain. In the play, these voices are juxtaposed with the “repressed” of this site: the stories of refugees who have been displaced by war. By releasing these opposing voices together into a single space, Bennett creates a powerful laboratory for investigating the damaging effects of war and activates those physical elements of the site that serve as witnesses to traumatic history.

While this issue offers a broad range of approaches to studying space in performance, all of the pieces featured here are committed to rethinking subjectivity in its various modalities and suggesting new forms for defining the contours of identity. To return to the words of Judith Thompson in our opening epigraph, it is clear that theatre as an art of “taking up space” offers the ideal physical conditions for transforming the ways in which marginalized bodies are positioned within the world. We hope that these essays continue to inspire performances that experiment with theatre’s spatial promise, its invitation to alter the relations between bodies and the ground upon which self is built. ❁

Works Cited

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