

NATALIE REWA, ed.

Design and Scenography

Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English. Vol.15.
Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 2009. 162pp.

MICHAEL MCKINNIE, ed.

Space and the Geographies of Theatre

Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English. Vol. 9.
Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 2007. 226pp.

ANDREW HOUSTON, ed.

Environmental and Site-Specific Theatre

Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English. Vol. 8.
Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 2007. 196pp.

SOPHIE NIELD

These three books read together as a series of ongoing conversations between scholars, artists, places, and ideas. Although these reflections take different routes and perspectives, and foreground discrete questions and concerns, all three volumes invoke geographies, spaces, and identities. Places, productions, artists, and voices are threaded through them as touchstones or shared points of reference. Reading them is not unlike walking through a landscape which offers different scenes and vantage points at progressive stages of the journey, revealing new vistas and hidden landmarks.

In her introduction to *Design and Scenography*, Natalie Rewa outlines the productive tension between design and scenography, allowing that scenography, understood as an architectonics of visual/aural narration of performance, has become the word of choice, and is usually deployed to indicate the presence of a dramaturgy. The collection takes a catholic range of approaches to the themes: theatre as collaborative practice, treatments of individual designers and their engagements with the field, and concerns of cultural and regional diversity particular to the Canadian context—a consideration that will play through all of these volumes with differing inflections.

This collection opens with an extract from Herman A. Voaden and Lowrie Warrener's 1930 *Symphony: A Drama of Motion and Light for a New Theatre*. This piece, shaped through interaction with landscape and the movement across it, articulates place and space explicitly. This is the first invocation, in this

collection, of the landscape (or rather the various landscapes) which has given rise to the range of thoughts here. These are foregrounded again and again, from Michèle White's treatment of the work being materialised in gallery spaces in Toronto and Vancouver, to Michael Devine's account of Jillian Keiley's mathematically-based choreography and directing practice based in Newfoundland. There are investigations here too of the spaces inside performance: Natalie Rewa's own unpacking of Astrid Janson's sculptural design does good work here. There is much of the politics of location and of being located. Ronald Fedoruk considers immigration and pedagogic questions; Rahul Varma discourses on Robert Lepage's colonial fantasy in *Zulutime*. Jerrard Smith on the process of "seeing place" in environmental scenography, and Kathleen Irwin on the *Bus Project* both offer perspectives on movement and staged displacement. Camellia Koo, finally, compresses and extends the whole series of questions into a space of eight by eight feet, making a landscape of exchange out of the theatre itself.

Space and the Geographies of Theatre begins with a map of Canada—the world within which its questions, intersections, and divergences are staged. Michael McKinnie's fluid introduction begins in the landscape, situating questions of place and space in performance as intellectual and political projects rooted in material geographies. Here we find geographies embedded inside theatre, and outlines for the environmental, political, and cultural geographical lenses through which the territory covered in the book will be perceived. There are significant interests in material geographies of course: we traverse the nation from the frontier between Canada and the US, in Mayte Gomez's thoughtful piece; through civic centres and the ways in which they imagine and manifest the citizens they serve, in McKinnie's own contribution; to the idea of "north" itself, in Sherrill Grace's subtle account of "a landscape of extremity that resists the human need to capture it in words" (133).

But geographies are also here as strategies and provisionalities: as political, post-colonial, urban, rural, and transnational layerings of place, space, subjectivity, and power. The role of performance in materialising the effects which space enacts upon us as citizens, subjects, and peoples is at the heart of this volume; not least the palimpsest of nations invoked in first nation, settler, and post-colonial identifications. The space of performance holds all these connections, reflecting on the very nature of culture itself. We encounter several of our touchstones again here. Anton

Wagner writes on *Symphony*, figured here explicitly as an encounter with the Canadian environment, and several key essays turn the spatial context back into questions of national identity and definition. Of note particularly here are Alexander Legatt on the question of a “national” drama in rural Ontario, and Alan Filewod on “true Canadianism,” and the “nostalgia for a perpetually re-invented past” (56) that is somehow embedded in the search for a post-imperial nationhood. The volume as a whole evokes the tensions and superimpositions that make up the plurality of Canadian voices: Rob Appleford on nostalgic desire and the production of place in the idea of tradition, Laura Levin on “Torontopia” and the Nuit Blanche, and Erin Hurley’s witty view from the outside, on “passing” and the “Canada brand,” all contribute to this rich seam.

The invocation of Michel de Certeau and Edward Soja in Andrew Houston’s introduction to *Environmental and Site-Specific Theatre* again situates the discussions to come within a frame of cultural geographic perspectives, pointing both to the condition of “being in the world” and to a strategic historicisation of the various spaces inside which the work is consolidating. This is a useful starting point for a collection in which environment, site, and the distance between them prove so important. The thematic flagging of space, site, history, performance, and journey give the reader a strong sense of the kinds of mapping which will unfold in the course of the collection, in negotiation with the wide range of forms of work which serve to offer nodal points in the broader theatrical landscape. Although the land of Canada has been a central theme woven in and out of the previously discussed volumes, it is of course here that the environment makes its most explicit appearance as itself. Chris Brookes’s fascinating account of making work in Newfoundland reads very productively in relation to Rachael van Fossen’s reflections on community plays. In a piece of intelligent and thought-provoking editing, Kathryn Walter’s reflections on the witty and wry *Lesbian National Parks and Services* is followed by some of the performance documents themselves. As with the other volumes, this one also combines conceptual reflection with a rich appreciation of the materialities of space, place, and environment: bluemouth inc.’s reflexive performance documentation and treatment of guidelines and legislation covering quotidian performance spaces grounds the discussion in a very material and practically-oriented awareness of performance disciplines (as well of course as invoking a further socio-spatial consideration: that of ownership of land). Some of

the touchstone performances which have been our sighting-off points throughout the volumes are here again seen from different and complementary perspectives. Alan Filewod reflects on the relationship between the body politic and public space in his discussion of Necessary Angel's *Newhouse*, whose staging in an ice hockey rink placed the audience in a not unproblematic situation inside the space of the performance. Richard Plant, in a neighbouring piece, reflects on the work of the same company and focuses also on John Krizanc's promenade performance *Tamara*, as an example of a democratic theatre. Finally in this volume, we join Keren Zaiontz on the pavement with bluemouth inc. and Michel de Certeau.

It is impossible to read these volumes without recognising how much they invoke the spaces, the landscape, and the multiple and plural voices of Canada and Canadian theatre scholarship. They enjoin so many of the key strands in contemporary theatre and performance thinking, reflected through a particular landscape and a community of people in dialogue. As Erin Hurley observes in another context in her essay in *Space and the Geographies of Theatre*: "Canadian theatre [...] shows the world around itself, through itself" (185). We can all learn from these exchanges, and find application for their discoveries and observations as we track though our own geographies, and our own symphonies of motion and light. To conclude with Keren Zaiontz, in her *Environmental and Site-Specific Theatre* piece, "walking alone, one can only travel so far" (185). In these books, the people on the journey have engaged in a lively, productive and warm conversation, and covered substantial ground.

ROSALIND KERR, ed.

Queer Theatre in Canada

Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English. Vol. 7. Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 2007. 282 pp.

HERVÉ GUAY

Dirigé par Rosalind Kerr, *Queer Theatre in Canada* est le septième volume de la collection « Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in Canada ». Comme ce recueil de textes est paru en 2007, il peut paraître étrange au lecteur de le voir recensé si tardivement. Mais il en va parfois ainsi pour de tels livres quand presque l'ensemble des chercheurs qui travaillent dans une spécia-