

**Judie Christie, Richard Gough, Daniel Watt (eds.), *A Performance Cosmology: Testimony from the Future, Evidence of the Past*. London & New York: Routledge, published for the Centre for Performance Research, 2006.**

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The term cosmology is helpfully aligned with ecology in these apocalyptic days of global warming. It also *poignant* (a word, with equal measures of regret and anger) that writing this review of such an extraordinary publication from the Centre for Performance Research (CPR) might also be a kind of ecological obituary. As I write, petitions are circulating to protest the closure of this vital centre.

*A Performance Cosmology* is testimony to nearly 35 years of performance and research instigated by, and/or connected to, the Centre for Performance Research, based first in Cardiff and now in Aberystwyth. The varied history of CPR and in particular its enunciation of performance research as expansive speculations is evident in the contents, layout and presentation of the volume. Performance research as it is recorded here is like an ecology of practice, reliant equally on ideas, cultural reflectivity and artistic intervention.

To navigate the field of performance, the editors Judie Christie, Richard Gough and Daniel Watt have compiled and commissioned performance texts, documents, critical essays, timelines and photographs. The travel metaphor is theirs: 'Journeys', they write 'rarely end at the intended destination and even less frequently begin at their point of departure' (xi). The editorial is clearly signalled but light to touch and the diversity of texts and images is careful and generous. Ordered sequences in the book give way to readers finding their own pathways and the 'journey' is intentionally elliptical. 'Footfalls echo in the memory...', a phrase borrowed from T.S. Eliot (ix) opens the work, while the last pages are a rollcall of CPR people.

Somewhere there, a reproduction of a 1950s travel poster with the slogan 'Aberystwyth: where the holiday pound buys more fun' (317) reminds me of a Forced Entertainment performance in one of the Aberystwyth beach pavilions during the 1999 'Here be Dragons' conference. This was a performance so piercingly pathetic in its treatment of the European beach holiday entertainment-experience; a reminder of how PS and place can work not only to revive a moment of familiar rediscovery, but to broach a violent critical intervention. The texts and images in this book, as well as memories of art works, ideas, meetings and ephemera are strips of history, what Gough calls moments of 'conditional remembrance' (266).

*A Performance Cosmology* is arranged in three parts. Part one, titled 'Intimate Conversations,' comprises recollections of CPR from those people most closely connected. Phenomenological in tone and utopian by temper, mention of experimentation, personal experience and a strong sense of community are key ingredients. Claire MacDonald's text 'Tools for Conviviality' elaborates on the task of performance research: 'It is profoundly material, evidenced in records, acutely connected to the page, to the mark, to the grain of voice... [but these] are always in question' (7). Part one closes with Gough discussing his investigations of food, alchemy, objects and performance. It is mirrored in part three, in the publication of text and images of his lecture-performance 'Perfect Time: Imperfect Tense'.

In part two, titled 'Testimony from the Future,' Mike Person reprising 'Theatre/Archaeology,' wants to know: 'Who made these marks?' (120), meaning cultural, performative and political inscriptions of knowledge and experience. This complex and engaging section of the book comprises more than half its contents. It is organised in curatorial fashion around nine field stations, too many to note here, but all are aesthetic, performative and political. They combine perspectives that invoke aspects of the cosmological, the formal and material, senses of place, of experience and art as activism.

In theoretical terms, *A Performance Cosmology* is a good companion to Schechner's *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (Routledge 2002) and

Rienelt and Roach's *Critical Theory and Performance* (University of Michigan Press, revised 2007). Arguably, *Performance Studies* aims to describe the global discipline of PS and *Critical Theory and Performance* theorises its wider academic relations and critical practices. A *Performance Cosmology* is more focused on fractious spaces between forms of thinking and practice. Performance research is decentred, partial and counter-hegemonic in this work.

John McKenzie's analysis of The Beatles in 'Global Feeling: (almost) all you need is love' turns to the sensorial notion of 'purfumance' to describe a new globalism in performance politics. 'A resistant performativity' (he writes after Hardt and Negri), 'cannot do without a global feeling of political love' (99). This calls to mind Iwabuchi Koichi's idea of the 'smell' of cultural production in its transfers around the world. Smell is powerful and subjective, a performative sensorium that is explored in original ways here. Jane Goodall's essay 'Stones in the mind' by contrast connects place and story: 'aporia/existentia' that 'invites comparison between states of the mind and states of the land' (117). Edward Scheer's essay on Mike Parr shows how 'disturbance in the flesh' is a violation of power at a time when such power is at its most brutal (190). But it seems too partial to identify individual contributions too closely as it is the composite accumulation of texts that aims to speak and marks the momentum of performance studies. One thing that connects these writings, however, is a principle of activism. In these essays, there are always senses of moving between perspectives and analytical frames; slipping between experiences of art, of analysis, shifting from discussions of artworks into process, into body, into place, into story, into action, into activism.

Part three, titled 'Evidence of the Past', is a shorter section of writing focusing on the historical moment of the CPR. DP Woveweft adds a visual essay, a bibliography of faded covers of first editions of relevant texts informing the field of PS. A chronology of CPR closes the book. This section in particular contains many images and is beautifully designed and printed. The resultant image-bank memorialises the cosmology of CPR, perhaps especially for

those readers who remember the textures and intensity of a field as it was developing. For people who came after, part three suggests a way of understanding how we learnt about the new paradigm.

In summary, the first and third sections of the book contain some exemplary PS history, performative writing and documentation. The middle section gathers some representative viewpoints and varied perspectives on PS as a disciplinary practice. Gullermo Gómez-Peña's 'Declaration of Poetic Disobedience' (75-78) makes claims for the 'artists & intellectuals who still don't wish to comply' and perhaps these comments are a fitting conclusion to this review. There is a pleasing and intelligent sense of resistance in this book and it is timely and helpful. It is to be hoped that it is not a final record of CPR and its huge contributions.

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