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Viral Performance: Contagious Theaters from Modernism to the Digital Age by Miriam Felton-Dansky (review)

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analysis of social performances profoundly refutes conventional versions of history that, among other things, begin with the arrival of US Americans supplanting Mexican society. Images throughout the book, particularly photographs of old homes and maps, remind the reader that this genteel society grew in harsh rustic conditions, and that performances of generosity were necessities of survival.

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VIRAL PERFORMANCE: CONTAGIOUS THEATERS FROM MODERNISM TO THE DIGITAL AGE. By Miriam Felton-Dansky. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018; pp. 256.

The theatre, as they would say in Silicon Valley, does not scale well. Although its audiences can be large, a performance is ultimately a quite local phenomenon. Yet few who attend the theatre would disagree with Miriam Felton-Dansky's insight that "when people gather, something spreads" (8). Performance, then, seems both miniscule in its scope and vast in its effects. *Viral Performance* does not so much coin a new term for a certain genre of artwork as pry open this paradox, exploring a series of evocative works that appear to both resolve and heighten the contradiction between local transmission and global ambition. Focused on case studies, drawn mostly from North American experimental practitioners, Felton-Dansky poses sharp questions for those working on devised theatre, media, affect, and the political efficacy of performance. As her four chronologically organized chapters step from the 1960s and '70s to an ambitious tour through the 1990s, the interplay between virality and performance reveals itself to be a foundational anxiety of the postwar period. As the "spreading" of disease, information, emotion, and people has become more rapid and pervasive, Felton-Dansky argues that it is precisely to the small petri dishes of performance that we should look to understand our hopes and fears about the viral.

This metaphor has attached itself to performance for some time, as Felton-Dansky shows by drawing together Plato's *Republic*, Gabriel Tarde's sociology, and Artaud's "Theater of the Plague." With nods to more recent theories of affective politics such as those of Raymond Williams and Sarah Ahmed, the author returns most consistently to Artaud's provocations. He proves an appropriate if familiar guide: especially in North America, interest in the virality of performance tracked neatly along the postwar

dissemination of *The Theater and its Double*. Influenced by Kimberly Jannarone's arguments for reading a reactionary Artaud, Felton-Dansky maintains a rigid agnosticism toward her artists' claims for an emancipatory "plague." *Viral Performance* could have benefited from deeper engagement with Artaud's work and context; Artaud, for example, might push this book to consider the pain of corporeal illness along with the form of "virality." The infectious panics aroused by the blood-throwing actions of ACT UP Paris beg for an Artaudian, theatre-historical reading, yet the HIV/AIDS crisis sits largely in the background of this volume. As a survey of Artaud's various interpretations by postwar theatre artists, however, *Viral Performance* excels.

The author's study of the Living Theatre is especially extensive. Working from detailed archival research and her interviews with Judith Malina, Felton-Dansky focuses on the Plague scene from *Mysteries* and the Rite of Guerrilla Theatre from *Paradise Now* (brilliantly considered through a stand-alone iteration performed on San Francisco television in 1969). Felton-Dansky argues that these scenes, along with much of the company's work, should be read as "acting exercises" and set into not just an Artaudian, but a Stanislavskian genealogy as well. As the group led their audiences through physical motions while urging them to draw on emotional memory, all while demonstrating the emotional extremity they sought to extend across the room, Malina and Julian Beck threaded these two icons of theatre theory—the saint of the avant-garde, the priest of the mainstream—together. This chapter's analysis of "theatrical contagion as a form of acting" functions not only as a significant recontextualization of major works, but also as an exemplary study of how theory became practice in postwar American theatre.

In her chapter on the 1970s, Felton-Dansky's archival methods again excel through her discussion of Canadian collective General Idea. Not only does she introduce these oft-neglected artists to a theatre studies audience, she provokes important questions as to the relations between the viral metaphor (employed by the group themselves), political subversion, and new telecommunications technology. Working with fax machines, radio, and mail-order subscriptions, the group made "transmission and circulation—not a singular live event—the primary action of their performances" (98). In a production of Gertrude Stein's *What Happened*, the artists programmed a telex to type and send the play, line by line, to audiences including the Toronto Stock Exchange and a meatpacking company. Communication performed itself as a live epidemic. Felton-Dansky's emphasis on telecommunications, networks, and scale is welcome: *Viral Performance*

allows now-familiar discussions of documentation and repetition to recede behind a fresh focus on process and effect.

In her standout chapter on the 1990s, the author connects these foundations of affectual contagion, guerrilla infiltration, and mediated transmission to our more contemporary spin on the viral. As her case studies multiply, including Critical Art Ensemble, Eva and Franco Mattes, Cristoph Schlingensief, and Shu Lea Cheang, the book's overall project comes sharply into view. Virality is less a type of performance than a *concern*, one that has become explicit since the early 1990s as HIV and fears of computer viruses dominated public discourse. "Viral technology and viral anxiety continue to emerge in tandem," she shows, persuasively detailing how biological, digital, and political concerns intertwine in each of these fascinating cases (145). In response to these specters, artists often pursued a strategy here described as "inoculation": provoking real responses to potentially real threats through vaguely deceptive stunts, with the aim of raising audiences' skepticism and resistance to politics of fear. We learn of a Python virus entered into the Venice Biennale, vintage bio-weapons sprayed over the North Sea, and a faux dirty bomb detonated in a German park. As parafiction, public violence, financial networks, and the internet all began to lay claim to metaphors of infection, Felton-Dansky turns her focus to what is perhaps the signature pandemic of our age: "vertiginous terror inspired by technology," which she terms "viral fear" (123). What had initially seemed a book on a performance tactic here reveals itself to be a study of a performance history. "Virality" names a postwar panic over the networks we are increasingly embedded within; artists in the first two chapters use virality as a queasy tool, while those of the third defend against its queasiness.

The book's fourth and final chapter, which turns to theatrical events that have "gone viral" such as Carol Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children*, pivots from the wide-ranging perspective and millenarian stakes of the previous three. This more grounded section asks whether the "multitude and scale" offered to theatre artists by online collaboration and spectatorship might invite decentralized emancipation or corporate control (174). Citing some bitter academic debates on the politics of such networks, Felton-Dansky does not make her own position clear. Yet for a book on virality, one could hardly ask for a better approach than the one found here: a sharp shot in the arm of ideas and questions, open-ended and bound for vast transmission.

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IVO VAN HOVE ONSTAGE. Edited by David Willinger. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018; pp. 334.

Few people have followed Ivo van Hove's trajectory as closely as David Willinger. Indeed, it was Willinger who published the first articles on the director's initial production, *Rumors*, in *The Drama Review* and the Flemish newspaper *De Standaard*. A small-scale production, *Rumors* was initially neglected by the press. Only when Willinger, who was researching the theatre in Belgium, drew attention to the outstanding quality of the performance did Flemish reviewers flood the small auditorium. It marked the beginning of Willinger's life-long fascination with Ivo van Hove's work, a fascination that has now resulted in a richly documented book that spans the director's entire career.

Although technically an "edited collection," the bulk of the volume is written by Willinger himself. His contributions consist of two major parts: the first considers different thematic motifs in van Hove's oeuvre, while the second presents performance analyses of fifteen key productions. Willinger's contribution is followed by five essays in which other scholars focus on one or more of the major productions.

Through the course of his two parts, Willinger considers the entirety of van Hove's career, from its early beginning in Antwerp, to his artistic leadership of Zuidelijk Toneel and the direction of the Holland Festival, right up to his current role as the director of Toneelgroep Amsterdam (now Internationaal Theater Amsterdam). Never falling into the trap of idolatry, Willinger does not shy away from considering the difficulties that have cropped up in van Hove's career. In particular, his early years as head of Toneelgroep Amsterdam were turbulent, with an ensemble that could not cope with his more distant style, leading some actors to leave the company. That his first productions were not greeted enthusiastically only compounded the problem. Willinger also considers van Hove's decision to combine the leadership of both the Holland Festival and Toneelgroep—a decision met with severe criticism, and which eventually led to his giving up the former position.

The first part of Willinger's contribution is organized not chronologically, but thematically, around recurring themes in van Hove's work such as sex and violence, and he highlights performances that underscore these themes. Although this approach does not encompass all of van Hove's productions, it still amounts to considerable coverage and offers a thorough overview of his work, as elaborate