

of audiences, and the reciprocal construction of emotions in playhouses, both offer substantial payoffs for our current investments in thinking through affect.

• • •

Dramatic Spaces: Scenography and Spectatorial Perceptions. By Jennifer A. Low. London and New York: Routledge, 2016; pp. xi + 207, 16 illustrations. \$145 cloth, \$54.95 e-book.

doi:10.1017/S0040557416000740

Reviewed by Steve Luber, *University of New Haven*

Discourse on scenography tends to divide among a limited number of species: historical survey, documentation of a particular artist's work, or divining contemporary trends in the field. There are exceptions to the rule, with cross-historical texts that examine the larger role scenography plays in the construction of theatre and performance history—Arnold Aronson's *Looking into the Abyss*, Marvin Carlson's *Places of Performance*, Una Chaudhuri's *Staging Place*, and Greg Giesekam's *Staging the Screen*, to name a few. Jennifer A. Low's *Dramatic Spaces* takes a decidedly interdisciplinary and intertextual approach. The author mobilizes playtexts, contemporary criticism and ephemera, art and philosophical histories, critical theory, and, when available, performance documentation, all in an effort to understand the matrix of forces at work in shaping the creation and spectating of performance. The chronological frame of the book is just as ambitious, with examples ranging from Plautus's *The Menaechmi* to David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*. Low's structure and evidence are clear, so even when a surprising new voice or piece of evidence is introduced, its place is immediately discernable. Low writes in the introduction, "I assert the primacy of spatiality, its centrality to the relation among performers and audience members, even shaping the choices of the playwright" (2), and sets a course for a complex set of considerations in how theatre is both produced and consumed by the space that sets and blurs the lines between audience members and performers.

To maintain focus in such a large project, Low frames the work as phenomenological encounter, for herself as a historian and for the subjects she studies. Frequent citations of Gay McAuley, Keir Elam, and Stanton B. Garner establish a clear tradition and approach to meaning making through scholarship. The significance of where bodies are onstage in relation to the play's themes, for example, dominate discussions of "penetration" in Ford's *Tis Pity She's a Whore* and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (51). While such imagery has been discussed at length with regard to textual analysis, Low brings the text to the potential uses of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stages, considering the visuality of the *locus* and *platea* both for staging the theme as well as implicating the audience in the act of looking, so that "crowds and (ultimately) the whole stage come to 'stand in' for a body" (61). A number of scholars have examined how stage and

space affect audiences and vice versa, but Low's interesting case studies and capable weaving of evidence make the book a useful contribution to the field.

A chapter on the history and influence of nineteenth-century claques, groups of audience members hired to catalyze a desired effect, is particularly creative, not only asserting that the claque began the reunification of theatrical and spectatorial spaces after the introduction of the proscenium, but also in its siting of the claque: where the professional audience member was seated in the audience corresponded to effect and appeal in shaping the larger audience responses. A weeper was to be placed in a highly visible section of the mezzanine, so that all could view the embodied response. This is the convergence of many of Low's emphases: the space of the theatre, the playwright, the managers, the performers, and the professional and amateur audience members all had a hand in the cultural, economic, and aesthetic functioning of the theatre.

Later chapters shift from the theatre space itself to the more complex interactions among the scenographers and their collaborators, including, of course, the audience. The designs of László Moholy-Nagy for *The Tales of Hoffmann* help to shape a German national identity via aesthetics; Edward Albee's *Tiny Alice* sets up an infinity mirror, of sorts, for a metatheatrical experience for the performers and audiences; and *M. Butterfly*'s themes shift from class to gender depending upon one's literal vantage point, thanks to the designs of Eiko Ishioka. For example, in *M. Butterfly*, Low considers the scale of Eiko Ishioka's design: the large political banners and fluid, abstract set rest outside the field of vision of those spectators close to the stage, and so they must focus on bodies and narrative; these same design elements dwarf the human form for those far from the stage, encouraging a more contextualized, almost Brechtian reading of the events playing out. There are some fascinating detours thrown in that do not detract from the case studies at hand, but rather illuminate the strength of historical trends and connections, including *A Chorus Line* to discuss metatheatricity and audience participation (or obfuscation) and William Busnach's "frothy one-act musical" *La Claque! La Claque!* to illustrate the highly codified and gossipy world of professional audience members (90).

The author claims that a key intervention of *Dramatic Spaces* is its historical comparisons, and that is consistent within individual chapters; but one is left wanting more connections among the chapters and case studies to generate a larger historical trajectory. Although there are a few references between them, the reader is left to connect the dots. The metatheatricity of *Adrienne Lecouvreur* resonates with that of *Tiny Alice*; *The Castle of Perseverance* is used as an independent reference point for two case studies; yet no conclusion is given to tie these elements together. But this desire for a larger conversation is prompted by Low's compelling narratives within the chapters that make up this volume, especially considering the framework of the author's unique phenomenological encounters with history.

• • •