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*Shattering Hamlet's Mirror: Theatre and Reality* by Marvin  
Carlson

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welcoming, of existing in a world where alienation is the norm. The relational factors of Ostermeier's *Hedda Gabler*, when viewed through this postmodern interpretation of a Beach Boys classic, call into question the very possibility of agency by presenting a "world view . . . that has made human action and genuine change near impossible" (30).

The book's third chapter is perhaps the most ambitious in its exploration of Ibsen adaptations produced in countries where the government maintains censorship authority over the theatre. His presumption—that the goal of censorship is ultimately undermined by an adaptation's openness to a range of interpretations—is borne out in the study of four reimaginings of Ibsen's plays in Vietnam, Iran, and China. The inherent malleability of these productions, however, ultimately prevents Helland from achieving the same level of incisive contextualization in this chapter that makes the rest of the volume so compelling. The creators of these adaptations all made substantial changes to Ibsen's original texts, presumably in an effort to transcend state censorship and reframe their own artistic expression within such confines. As a result, much of Helland's examination becomes somewhat obscured by the necessity of detailing and explaining individual alterations to the plots and characters of each respective play, which comes at the expense of the author's otherwise consistent methodological focus on the larger picture of Ibsen's influence on the contemporary global theatrical landscape. Furthermore, because these adaptations are open to myriad readings depending on one's familiarity with the political and cultural climates of their respective countries, Helland includes frequent caveats to remind readers that his assertions are not the only possible interpretation of each production. Although this is certainly a valid point, its repetition tends to further obfuscate the chapter's overall narrative.

This is, however, a very minor quibble with an otherwise excellent book. While Helland's acknowledgment of his own positionality in the aforementioned section is, in my opinion, somewhat overstated, his awareness of the fact that "there is no position outside of culture" (8) elucidates the deftness with which he handles cross-cultural relationships throughout this study. As such, *Ibsen in Practice* functions as a valuable text across disciplines, providing not only exacting explorations of Ibsen's plays in performance around the globe, but also demonstrating the power of precision in analyzing the contextual influences at work in the transfer of canonical literature across cultures.

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***Shattering Hamlet's Mirror: Theatre and Reality.* By Marvin Carlson. U of Michigan P, 2016. Cloth \$60.00, 145 pages.**

In his recent monograph, Marvin Carlson develops the premise first established in *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory Machine* (2003): that theatre capitalizes

on the memories of audiences to provide opportunities for meaning. The past lives of objects and the previous roles of actors *ghost* performances that follow. In this new monograph, Carlson argues that this hauntological feature is crucial when examining the tension between reality and imitation—a primary concern of modern and postmodern theatre. Using Hamlet’s allusion to Socrates as an organizing conceit, each chapter considers the theatre’s turn away from mimesis to the appropriation of the “real,” including borrowing words, the body of the actor, the affordances of physical surroundings, the prop, and, eventually, the audience itself.

While at first blush a study of “utilizing real words from the real world” may seem too all-encompassing, the first chapter effectively traces the evolution of documentary theatre from the living newspapers of the Russian Revolution to twentieth-century testimonial dramas (21). Citing examples from an international range of directors, special attention is paid to the Wooster Group and Tectonic Theatre. The initial intent of borrowing “real” words was overtly political: Utilizing found materials, troupes shifted their interest to structures of power (27). Carlson deftly traces the historical expanse of this tendency toward social justice themes from survivor testimony plays to the current fashion for reproducing literal slices of banal speech.

Through two especially compelling examples, the second chapter considers how the body of the actor produces multiple levels of mediation between the “real” and stage worlds. Carlson argues that the nineteenth-century fascination with the celebrity female actor, particularly Sarah Bernhardt and Adelaide Ristori, was partly driven by a contrast between their stage and domestic lives. Contending that the on- and offstage actor produces a “feedback loop between life and theatre” (56), Carlson turns to the Wild West show where attendees were given to understand that “during the summer months [Wild Bill] Cody would return to the West to pursue his scouting to fight the Indians...and during the winter he would tour,” which “provided a kind of authentication” (47). As in the borrowing of words, the borrowing of bodies was challenged by 1990s cultural theorists who argued it was impossible to present an uncompromised self if all identity was already a product of an acculturated set of codes. In response, a penchant for using nonactors has arisen and, by extension, so have concerns about exploitation.

In order to think about the history and connotations of non-traditional performance spaces that have been co-opted, chapter 3 draws on pre-modern performance traditions, such as the Easter liturgy, to demonstrate the ways in which postmodern “realist” strategies frequently seem to return to un-realist earlier ones. Like the testimony drama’s borrowing of words, the borrowing of places produced a cross-cultural trope of the passion play, evident in Vienna, across Egypt, Jerusalem, and even contemporary religious re-enactments by the Mormon Church. Where these early performances attempted to capitalize on the religious connotations of a man-made site, by the eighteenth century, experiments by Goethe and Marie Antoinette desired to make contact with the “real” by moving into ostensibly untouched, pastoral locales. This gave way to nineteenth-century stagings, especially of William Shakespeare’s plays, that attempted to reflect “with greater and greater realistic accuracy the locations indicated in the dramatic text”—live rabbits and mossy stage included (66). These strategies anticipated what the

1980s would eventually label *site-specific* theatre, not to be confused with the “part hobby, part recreation” amateur tradition of historical re-enactment prevalent in the United States (74). In his transhistorical and transcultural exploration, Carlson demonstrates that popular site-specific performances, returning to theatricalizing man-made spaces such as the factory and warehouse, are strategies for co-opting the “real,” rather than revealing a certain objective truth (77).

Chapter 4, on borrowing the pre-histories of props, is indebted to a line of questioning established by Andrew Sofer in *The Stage Life of Props* (1998). To demonstrate how “stage properties, like actors, not only have an extra-theatrical history, but in many cases a theatrical history as well,” Carlson considers the use of real skulls, some with known, unknown, or falsified lineages, willed by their owners to be used in productions of *Hamlet*. Props evince “a calculated recycling of production elements...to build up a web of associations linking together their productions but separated from the imaginary world or the particular theme or concern of any individual production” (92). In comparing cases of chairs and beds, horses and dogs, he argues that the prop produces a tension in the audience by bringing to light three overlapping realities: representing the fictional object being performed, summoning all of the different fictional versions of that object in different plays, and calling to mind the history of a private life of that object outside or before its public theatre life.

This book significantly contributes to the conversation about how dramaturgical practices, particularly those of appropriation and upcycling, have shaped major production trends of postmodern theatre. Carlson concludes by examining the ways in which theatre-makers have now extended their colonizing of the “real” to include borrowing even their audiences, who are now “encouraged to recognize material onstage as actually originated in their world, not as simply imitating” it (105). The chapter cleverly returns to previous examples in order to illuminate ways in which they consumed the audience, willing or unwillingly, from Filippo Marinetti’s futurist “evenings” to the fad for virtual emancipatory plays like that of Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More*. The only major impediment is that the book itself is marred by several minor copyediting errors, including fonts not re-sized after block quotations and misspellings, such as “image” for “imagine” and “as” instead of “is”—more a matter of the press than the author (61). Building on the strength of his initial study of *ghosting*, this examination of the ways in which theatre works to colonize the “real” establishes a range of possible trajectories—that of the prop and virtual emancipation tactics seemingly most rich for further discussion.

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