



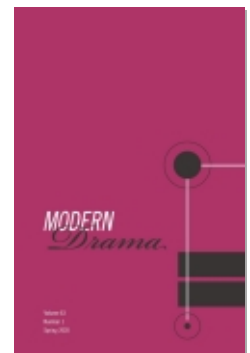
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The Very Thought of Herbert Blau ed. by Clark Lunberry and Joseph Roach (review)

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is “a way to remake worlds to counter the affective violence of minoritarian life” (212). Chapter seven is the play itself, described by Kondo as the culmination of the book. Staging the book’s earlier theorizations of reparative creativity, the play foregrounds our inability to know a past traumatic event. It follows Japanese-American character Diane Kubota’s struggles decades after the war to learn about her parents’ internment experiences. The play does not offer tidy resolutions in which the past is knowable; rather, it leaves many of Diane’s questions unanswered and focuses instead on the dialogue she builds with her mother. By ending with *Seamless*, Kondo enacts reparative creativity and emphasizes that these issues cannot be fully explored in traditional scholarly realms.

Worldmaking is a stunning contribution to discussions of racial representation, affect, ethnography, and practice-led research in our post-racial world. Working to “defamiliarize” American theatre for artists and scholars (56), the book re-evaluates the dichotomies of theory/practice, artistic passion/compensation, and resistance/complicity that are firmly ingrained in our thinking about the arts. The rigour with which Kondo encourages us to reassess artistic practices and scholarly enquiry, however, never verges on harsh criticism. Instead, it is with stirring generosity that she opens up avenues for further enquiry and redress.



CLARK LUNBERRY and JOSEPH ROACH, eds. *The Very Thought of Herbert Blau*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018. Pp. 233, illustrated. \$70.00 (Hb).

Reviewed by Iris Smith Fischer, University of Kansas

This important collection of eighteen essays by Herbert Blau’s colleagues, artist–collaborators, and former students assesses his work as an intellectual, director, and theatre theorist. Blau grounded his approach to theatre in the post–World War II thinking that was the present journal’s founding focus: *drama* – that is, words and writing. Although using a post-structuralist vocabulary in his many books, Blau never lost touch with the Cold War context in which he and Jules Irving created the San Francisco Actor’s Workshop (SFAW). Also significant in shaping his views, as several contributors note, were the political ferment of the 1930s – “Long before the Absurd, none of it made sense,” he commented (*As If 2*) – and the lasting legacies of modernism and the historical avant garde. This volume’s rich array of intertwining perspectives reveals Blau’s complex critique of “the extremities of poststructuralist thought” even as he produced a “critique as if from the inside” (143).

Clark Lunberry's introduction explains his and co-editor Joseph Roach's decision to publish essays that weigh and measure Blau's work. Organized alphabetically by author, these essays and interviews, together with Gregory Whitehead's concluding poem, produce an arc of developing insights and sharp disagreements that deepen our understanding of Blau's significance. Former student Sue-Ellen Case comments on how she was fundamentally influenced by "Herb's deft integration of theory to theater, while still insisting on the [. . .] close reading of theory" (27). In juxtaposing Blau with the equally formidable theatre scholar Ruby Cohn, Case critiques the late-twentieth-century divide between theoretical and materialist approaches to theatre scholarship. According to Case, Blau emerged as "the mentor of a generation" while Cohn was sidelined as the close-reading "housekeeper" (27). Elin Diamond, approaching Blau as a post-structuralist, finds his work in the multiple meanings of "re," which she defines as "the mirrored doubling within the sign that displaces its unitary authority" (32). In her view of Blau's enacting of patriarchal authority, the "protective father has transmogrified into the presiding Hamletic Ghost who unfolds a tale of 'dazzling paradoxes' in which evidence is appearance and the fullness of identity an illusion that will not 'stay'" (35). Like Peggy Phelan, Morton Subotnick, and others, Diamond lingers helpfully on Blau's attention to the specificity of Samuel Beckett's plays. Remembering a lost photo of Blau directing Robert Symonds as the blind Hamm in *Endgame*, Diamond re-enacts Blau's own "lonely seeing" (41): "In his reflections on the nerve and mind of Beckett, Blau fell in love with materiality, precisely the 'context' for Beckett's words that Derrida neglected in his love of citationality's drift" (40).

This materialist side emerges more fully in several accounts of Blau's directing, mentoring, and collaborative work. On how Blau will be remembered, actor-poet Linda Gregerson (who, like actor-comedian Bill Irwin and director Julie Taymor, participated in Blau's 1970s group work at Oberlin College) underscores his techniques of layered performance and layered viewing, which Gregerson defines as "a plenitude or surfeit of visual/auditory/conceptual input that requires both performer and spectator to actively choose a path, minute by minute, through the performance" (58). This practice has emerged variously in the work of many later artists. Writer-director Lee Breuer, an SFAW participant, acknowledges here his debt to Blau. Taymor, despite recalling the Oberlin work as elitist and insular, thanks Blau for "making me a much more verbal person, in improvisation" (206). Although composer Philip Glass, a founding member of Mabou Mines, did not study with Blau, Phelan compares his music to the repetition and accumulation that characterize Blau's writing (156). Phelan also points helpfully to the layering involved in Blau's self-assessment as a "separating presence" (157); that is, the audience members who complete the performance because they are

always observing, always thinking. This is akin to what performance studies theorist Richard Schechner has called the “personal vision” (qtd. in Fischer 200) that passionate spectators help to create through their sustained attention to an artist’s body of work. In the book under review here, Schechner notes that Blau’s bracing Group Theatre–style vision is needed in the current “media-infused virtual art-life blurs of 21st-century performance art” (192).

Other contributors interrogate Blau’s attention to history. Martin Harries, in an imagined pre-show dialogue with Julia Jarcho, notes, “There are moments where Blau’s statements about theater seem to knowingly, brazenly elide the historical” (62). In his monograph *The Audience*, for example, Blau interprets Aristotle’s take on spectacle not as “an affirmation of community” (124) but as drama already marked by social fracture. In then equating the “dividend of alienation” (124) produced in ancient theatre with those of modern capitalist spectacle, Blau moves too quickly for Harries from a Freudian to a Marxist context (63). Jarcho notes, though, that for Blau “Freud and Marx both have purchase here: modern alienation refragments [. . .] the already fragmented subject” (63). This wide-ranging debate ends rather inconclusively. While Jarcho both embraces and questions Blau’s modernist project of “againstness that now seems not just mystified but incoherent” (67), Harries asserts that Blau adopted a Beckettian “scorched earth” approach to official culture, leaving the spectator solitary and adrift (70–71). Alternately, Daniel Listoe, who studied with Blau at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, argues, “History saturates the thought of Herbert Blau. [. . .] [W]e should recognize history more through our process of apprehension rather than strictly through the [historian’s] interpretive product” (102, 104). Theatre instructs Blau on dealing with the burden of history: “seeing with the utmost compassion, at the limit of endurance, what we’d mostly rather not” (Blau; qtd. on 104).

At the volume’s centre, Blau’s own voice emerges in a 1992 interview with *PAJ* editors Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta. They push him to defend his apparent belief that theatre (or writing) can speak truth. Blau replies, “[O]ne is engaged in a limitless project of trying to ascertain what [truth] is. [. . .] All intelligence fails. The issue in writing is to make it as credible as possible, with intelligence as the measure, *before* it fails” (144; emphasis in original).

This review cannot adequately represent the volume’s rich, moving conversations. One could wish to hear more voices of scholars and artists working in other fields. Yet by focusing on Blau’s separating presence, the contributors trace the historical trajectory of theatre studies from the post–World War II formulation of modern drama; to Artaudian back-to-basics performance, post-structuralist theory, and performance studies; and on to the current era of post-theory, which fortunately Herbert Blau lived to see – and write about.

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SHANE VOGEL. *Stolen Time: Black Fad Performance and the Calypso Craze*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018. Pp. xi + 254, illustrated. \$30.00 (Pb).
Reviewed by Thomas F. DeFrantz, Duke University

In *Stolen Time: Black Fad Performance and the Calypso Craze*, historian of black popular culture Shane Vogel explores calypso, as it became manifest in the United States, as a constellation of activities that produced “counterfeit” (208) performances on stage, in recordings, on television, and in films. Vogel argues for a vibrant cultural politics activated by black entertainers’ commercial appropriation of Caribbean music and dance for celebrity and economic gain. Concerned with “how performers could grasp a provisional sense of authenticity through the performance of the inauthentic” (209), Vogel explores how that ersatz creativity creates a distinctive space worthy of academic attention.

Beginning with the 1956 disavowal of the calypso craze by Harry Belafonte, its biggest star, the book investigates how these performances “could unmake and remake diaspora” (4) as well as what kinds of black entanglements “were invented, critiqued, and imagined through the inauthentic” (5). Each chapter chases an innovative theoretical model to support its points of view. According to Vogel, black artists resisted any calls for authenticity through tactics of disavowal: “this is not that” becomes a mantra repeated by calypso artists whose celebrity grew through their work in the fake Caribbean idiom. Reminding the reader that “it is the not-real that bears positive force” (6), Vogel looks at specific instances of the calypso craze – the “copy that displaces the very question of the original” (10) – that illuminate the shape of black fad performance in the United States.

Vogel allows popular African-American entertainers of the 1950s and 1960s as much knowing political agency as possible despite their participation in the craze. “Stolen Time,” in this formation, refers to time stolen back from the marketplace by these artists and to their subtle reversal of imperialist