



PROJECT MUSE®

---

*Sites of Performance: Of Time and Memory* by Clark Lunberry  
(review)

Meghan O'Hara

Theatre Journal, Volume 68, Number 1, March 2016, pp. 145-146 (Review)



Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2016.0009>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/614428>

level" (166). This is a rare glimpse of a play that complicates rather than promotes state narratives of Rwandanity.

Breed's task is a delicate one. This book will potentially reach Rwandan audiences through its cautious explication of how a pro-Tutsi ethnicity continues to be promoted in the guise of national culture. She also regularly quotes government officials who express deep loyalty to the project of nation-building; she tends to avoid critiquing these quotations, but instead allows them to stand on their own. These quotations serve as a vivid example of the fierceness of Rwandanity as an ideological force. Breed's thoughtful negotiation of Rwanda's charged political climate, however, runs the risk of being misinterpreted, particularly by academics invested in robust critiques of the state. For example, in *Terror and Performance* (2014), Rustom Bharucha has written critically of what he perceives as Breed's endorsement of the performance of reconciliation; he implies that she is not critical enough of how state ideology is shaping the participants' investment in coexistence (117–18). Although I personally would have preferred a more sustained analysis of Rwandan performance texts—her discussion of plays that address transitional justice, for example, seems rather rushed—I would argue that a careful reading of Breed's book clarifies the high stakes of what it means to perform the nation in Rwanda. She concludes with a warning that "Rwanda will inevitably be caught between conflicting narratives of public versus hidden transcripts" (186). Although numerous scholars of contemporary Rwandan politics would agree that the state's tight control over public narratives has the potential to backfire, Breed's book also gestures to the capaciousness of performance to contain multiple transcripts. This tactic might, at least for now, serve as a far more pragmatic solution for Rwandans who seek to maintain a semblance of economic stability and a precarious peace. It would be foolish of us to dismiss iterations of Rwandanity as mere propaganda; Breed cautions us to take it seriously.

**LAURA EDMONDSON**  
*Dartmouth College*

Work Cited

Bharucha, Rustom. *Terror and Performance*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2014.

**SITES OF PERFORMANCE: OF TIME AND MEMORY.** By Clark Lunberry. Anthem Studies in Theatre and Performance series. New York: Anthem Press, 2014; pp. 206.

Clark Lunberry's new book, his first, begins by identifying a problem of the modern era: "we live in a world, we live in bodies, where there is both too little time and too much time" (xi). This study of the complex relationship between subjects and time in performance follows previous scholarship, such as Marvin Carlson's *The Haunted Stage*, Alice Rayner's *Ghosts*, and Rebecca Schneider's *Performing Remains*, expanding on their work by casting theatre and performances as spaces that foster a perceptual self-awareness. To this end Lunberry discusses works of performance spanning a variety of genres: classical dramatists Euripides and Shakespeare; modern playwright Samuel Beckett; installation artists Ann Hamilton and James Turrell; and experimental composers John Cage and Morton Feldman.

Framing the entirety of Lunberry's monograph is the image of Cage's encounter with the anechoic chamber, an "acoustically purified space . . . reconceived as a site of non-silence, a self-reflexive site in which the body within is thus positioned to hear itself hearing, think itself thinking" (xiii). Continually returning to this seminal image, which led Cage to his conclusion that "there is no such thing as silence" (*ibid.*), Lunberry argues that performance spaces stage time's passing and produce a temporal self-awareness. Although he echoes existing scholarship in his assertion that there no such thing as an atemporal theatre, Lunberry enriches this observation by self-reflexively analyzing his personal experiences to suggest that spectatorship, and criticism, is always a temporal encounter.

Beginning in section 1 with more traditional theatrical spaces, Lunberry dedicates chapters 1 and 2 to Beckett—first by arguing that objects onstage (specifically Estragon's boots in *Waiting for Godot* and Marcel's boots in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*) mark time's entropic passing. More germane to Lunberry's interest in the spectator's experience of temporality, his second chapter turns to Beckett's scripting of silence in *Endgame* and *Breath*; he suggests that as Beckett whittles away the stage's extraneous parts, all that is left is the rhythmic breathing of a self-aware audience—the sound and sense of one's own breath marking the passing of time and its inevitable end. In chapters 3 and 4 Lunberry places *Coriolanus* alongside Deborah Warner's contemporary adaptation of *Medea*, arguing that both expose the theatre's inner workings. In a particularly compelling section he figures the labor of *Medea's*

stagehands cleaning up leftover blood at the end of the production as an unintentional denouement to the tragedy. By bringing to light constitutive though often hidden backstage elements, Lunberry argues that these productions make spectators aware of performance's construction and manipulation of "a theatrical time that was, like the stage itself, separate from *our* time, the *real time* of us in the audience" (60; emphasis in original).

Shifting the focus away from the conventional proscenium arch theatre, Lunberry's second section theorizes performance's temporality in nontraditional performance spaces. Here the argument develops with more consistency, narrowing the focus to the temporal experience of spectators, readers, and critics. Beginning by discussing Antonin Artaud's letters to Jacques Rivière, Lunberry expands on Jacques Derrida's work on Artaud to suggest that these letters can be understood as performative spaces, and the act of writing as a performance of trauma. Moving on to his own acts of writing and rewriting, in chapter 6 Lunberry revisits his marked-up copy of Derrida's "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation," reading his highlighting, marginalia, and other marks on the page as artistic works themselves, even reconstituting them visually in the pages of his book as aesthetic works. Lunberry's most successful contributions are in these moments of self-reflexivity: his own reading and rereading become acts of communion with the past, "a means to read in real-time—'live'—something of my own dispersal as a reader across past-time" (87; emphasis in original).

Lunberry productively extends his analysis of the scene of writing in his discussion of Hamilton's and Turrell's installation art. In Hamilton's *tropos*, writing as a performance becomes literalized, staging the private act of writing (and in *tropos*, unwriting) as public performance. Lunberry argues that in "Hamilton's installations, there is presented a space within which we stage ourselves, or find ourselves staged, traces alongside the other (in)stalled, arrested elements" (102). Indeed, this is the case for the author himself, who turns to his memories of visits to Hamilton's exhibitions, characterizing her work as producing spaces that stage one's own acts of remembering. Similarly, Lunberry describes his experience of Turrell's silent installations as accompanied by his own "seemingly unstoppable engagement with a mediating language, a kind of 'voice-over' to [his] own viewing" (111). For Lunberry, Hamilton's and Turrell's works are not only artistic achievements, but also valuable in their creation of spaces that facilitate self-recognition of and self-reflection on spectatorial processes of listening, reading, interpreting, and experiencing.

In his final chapters Lunberry at last comes to his touchstone, Cage, and his fellow composer Feldman—both of whom produced work that encourages not only listening, but an awareness of listening. While Cage is interested in producing work that invites listeners to hear beyond the room itself, to hear the myriad concurrent sounds of the world, Lunberry points out Feldman's alternate approach: to create musical spaces in which audience members are "situated to hear aspects of their own hearing in the physical act of listening" (159). As Lunberry meditates on his visits to hear Feldman's work performed live, he grapples again with age-old issues of time and memory. Foregrounding this struggle is a beneficial strategy: he finds that his acts of listening and perceiving in the moment are unceasingly infused with memories of previous encounters with the work, manipulating and modifying his experience of the work in the present.

*Sites of Performance* offers an original approach by foregrounding Lunberry's personal (and subjective) experience as a spectator. Weaving together analyses of traditional performance genres with other platforms for performance, Lunberry finds resonances in disparate though linked forms to demonstrate the complementarity of different spectatorial experiences. While *Sites of Performance* does not sustain a theorization of temporality through each chapter, the strength of the book lies in the author's exploration of his personal memories, writing and rewriting his own experiences of the performances he discusses. By interrogating his own processes of perception and self-reflection Lunberry creates a complex reading of the relationship between spectatorship and mortality, illuminating our tenuous relationship to time.

MEGHAN O'HARA

*University of Western Ontario*

**Itinerant Spectator/Itinerant Spectacle.** By P. A. Skantze. Brooklyn, NY: Punctum Books, 2013; pp. 262.

Reading the pages of P. A. Skantze's wonderful new book *Itinerant Spectator/Itinerant Spectacle*, I cannot imagine having a better performance companion or a better model for how to watch theatre. Skantze delivers nothing short of the deepest and most beautiful recitation on, and poetic manifesto about, learning to spectate. While she embraces Walter Benjamin's construction of the *flâneur*, the "semi-conscious wanderer," she nonetheless offers something much more complex and compelling than the productive sparks that occur as a result of