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BOOK REVIEW

Melissa Gibson, Editor

PERFORMING THE MATRIX: MEDIATING CULTURAL PERFORMANCES. Edited by Meike Wagner and Wolf-Dieter Ernst. IN-TERVISION—Texts on Theatre and Other Arts Series, no. 8. Munich: ePodium, 2008; pp. 357. €29.00, $37.00 paper.

There are few popular films in recent memory that have received as much scholarly attention as Andy and Larry Wachowski's *The Matrix* (1999). Since the release of the film (and two sequels, *The Matrix Reloaded* and *Matrix Revolutions*, both 2003), numerous books have emerged linking the film's futuristic vision of a computer-controlled humanity to contemporary culture. Books such as The Matrix *and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real* and *Exploring the Matrix: Visions of the Cyber Present*, as well as dozens of articles on religion, philosophy, cybernetics, new media, and cinema have turned to the digital world of Neo (aka Thomas Anderson, played by Keanu Reeves) and his fellow hackers as a metaphor for the evolving relations among new media forms and society.

Now comes a book—the first to my knowledge—to adopt the metaphor of *The Matrix* for the study of theatre and performance. Although editors Meike Wagner and Wolf-Dieter Ernst begin with dialogue from the film, their introduction to *Performing the Matrix* quickly moves beyond the film proper, and more broadly defines the matrix as a system of communication that itself "communicates, i.e., it engenders that which it is also a part of" (15). Including theatre, performance, and political activism within an understanding of a cultural performance that is "always already mediatized," Wagner and Ernst argue that new media forms, particularly digital technologies, are "fundamentally reshaping modern culture" (11). How, they ask, might this reshaping of mediatized culture influence performance? Or, more precisely, how might these new media technologies (for which the matrix serves as

a metaphor) redirect methodologies within theatre and performance studies?

Wagner and Ernst's answer takes many forms in this collection, both in their own introduction and in the individual essays edited from the International Postgraduate Programme, "Performance and Media Studies," at the University of Mainz in 2005. Like many such collections, the range of material is diverse, with some essays inevitably digressing from the book's central themes and others retaining too much of their original form as conference papers. Nevertheless, there is much to recommend this book, both for the diversity of subjects and for perspectives on individual artists, writers, and performances not often noted in North American theatre studies.

The collection is introduced by Wagner and Ernst's conception of the matrix, which they define as a complex and contradictory structure inherently related to performance. This structure is expressed as "queer performativity," a concept adapted from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and encompasses multidisciplinary instances of the matrix such as "the social matrix" (Gregory Bateson), a "heterosexual matrix" (Judith Butler), and a "disciplinary matrix" (Thomas S. Kuhn). Wagner and Ernst connect these varied matrix metaphors to illustrate the indeterminacies of contemporary cultural performances and to suggest a critical model to analyze the paradoxes, dilemmas, and "messy embodiment" (18) of performance in digital culture. It's an intriguing idea, one that could have been further explored (and perhaps will be) in a longer essay. Here, it functions mainly as an attempt to frame the very different essays engaging cultural performances through the key aspects of the matrix that constitute the four sections of the book: "The Power of the Matrix" (identity and social theory), "Looking through the Matrix" (visualizations and perceptual modes), "Writing the Matrix" (text as media in graphics and performance), and "Subverting the Matrix" (political performances).

What follows in these sections is a range of essays considering the intersection of culture and performance, broadly defined. Most of the essays are quite good individually, although some strain the overall conceptual themes. Section 2, "Looking through the Matrix," adheres relatively closely to the introduction's aims and has much else to recommend it. Series editor Christopher Balme's essay on visuality in contemporary opera, "Seeing Sound: Visuality in Contemporary Music Theatre," engages image and sound theory to articulate new dynamics of these components in performance. Ernst's own essay, "Becoming the Image," and Pieter Verstaete's "Interactive Dance" similarly explore the effects of new media technologies in contemporary theatre and dance practice. Ernst compellingly draws from Diderot, and Verstaete from Deleuze and Guattari's "haptic space," to analyze the material (and immaterial) performing body.

The link to the image in cultural performance is taken up again in section 3, "Writing the Matrix." Maria Ines Aliverti's "History and Histories in Edward Gordon Craig's Written and Graphic Work," for example, traces Craig's interest in images, specifically his engagement with the book as a theatrical influence and even as a kind of theatrical medium itself. This section also includes Michal Kobialka's reflection on contemporary theatre historiography as a dynamic "discursive form that mediates the immediate, 'reified' surface of reality" (198), and Martin Puchner's essay on Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw. This latter essay, while fascinating, at first seems oddly placed among other considerations of mediated theatre. Whereas Wagner and Ernst's introduction specifically separates the matrix from Plato's conception of the cave, Puchner returns to his theory of the Platonic theatre (or, as he describes it, per Brecht's coinage, *thaeter*). But, with his usual insight, Puchner turns from a philosophical theatre to theatre's effect on philosophy, arguing that "impersonation and embodiment lead to multiple perspectives that challenge monological authority," thereby confronting philosophy with the very qualities of the matrix: namely, its accidental construction, immateriality, and relative perspectives (245).

For some readers, the pleasure of this collection will come not so much from these accomplished and well-rehearsed essays (including also Baz Kershaw's "Citizen Artists in the Twenty-first Century," which some may remember from FIRT/IFTR 2005), but from the new voices, particularly in section 4, "Subverting the Matrix." Sruti Bala's "The Dramaturgy of Fasting," Martin Doll's study of the Atlas Group Archive, and Mehmet Siray's review of Kutlug Ataman's video installations provide valuable insights into work not readily available in North America.

There are some limitations to the collection. The lack of an index makes negotiating its 357 pages unwieldy, and the occasional unevenness and theoretical level of the collection gives it a limited appeal for courses. However, for the reader interested in new perspectives on and broad methodological approaches to performance, *Performing the Matrix* will provide an appealing addition to current readings of cultural performance.

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SHAKESPEARE, MEMORY AND PERFORMANCE. Edited by Peter Holland. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006; pp. xx + 357. $104.00 cloth.

Shakespeare, Memory and Performance, a collection of thirteen essays by some of the best scholars in the field of early modern drama and performance, is an ambitious study of Shakespearean performance from a strikingly original angle. As editor Peter Holland notes in his introduction, "Shakespeare performance studies have so far . . . tended to ignore the recent theorization of memory and investigation of its cultural and social practice" (4). This is a problem Holland seeks to address with this collection.

The essays included in *Shakespeare, Memory and Performance* approach the topic in a wide variety of ways. The book is divided into five thematically organized sections, which focus on memory in Shakespearean texts or performance; editing Shakespeare; costumes, properties, and actors; reconstructing past performances; and in the final section, technologies of performance. Within these sections, the chapters often speak to one another; for example, the second chapter, "Shakespeare's Memorial Aesthetics," in which John Joughin uses theories of aesthetics to explore suffering, scapegoating, and collective mourning in *Richard II* and *Hamlet*, is juxtaposed with Anthony Dawson's chapter, "Priamus is Dead: Memorial Repetition in Marlowe and Shakespeare," in which the author examines similar themes of suffering and loss from an individual rather than social perspective. These two chapters, as well as Bruce Smith's fascinating and personal opening chapter in which he gives an excellent close reading of issues of memory in the text of *King Lear*, all serve as a superb entry to the topic by providing definitions of memory, including early modern conceptions of this faculty.

Particularly noteworthy are chapters by Barbara Hodgdon, Peter Holland, and W. B. Worthen. Hodgdon's beautifully illustrated chapter, "Shopping in