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***The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* edited by Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein and John Bell**

London and New York: Routledge, 2015, 352pp, ISBN 9781138913837 (paperback)

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Despite its increasing prominence in both contemporary theatre practice and academia, puppetry is still an undernourished field of enquiry. As this volume's editors point out, puppetry continues to be 'viewed by many as a form that is intellectually and artistically less substantive than theatre in which text or the live body of the actor is concerned' (p. 1). As a result their claim that this is 'the most expansive collection of English-language puppetry scholarship to date' (p. 1) is not hyperbole. The nearest competitors are distant: far slimmer works such as *The Language of the Puppet* (1990) edited by Laurence Kominz and Mark Levinson; and *Puppets, Masks and Performing Objects* (2001), edited by John Bell.¹ Further, this volume stands out by merit rather than default and will likely become a standard text for researchers and practitioners alike wishing to explore puppetry and object performance further.

Although the title might imply a subject encompassing anthology or even a broad introduction to the field, this is a collection of contemporary, often quite specialist essays that, bar one, were all written specially for this volume. They assume broad knowledge of puppetry and jump between specialisms and performance forms with alacrity from Javanese *wayang kulit* to modern robotics. While many different aspects of puppet theatre are featured the editors do not attempt 'to play all the pieces in the puppet's repertoire'; rather they seek 'to demonstrate the expansiveness of its range and the tremendous breadth of its resonance' (p. 11), to harness the momentum of what Claudia Orenstein identifies as the current 'puppet moment' (p. 2), in the wake of high-profile shows such as *War Horse* (2007) and *The Lion King* (1997).

Split into three parts, this volume moves through current practical and theoretical approaches to puppetry, to reassessments of historical and traditional uses of puppetry and finally to more contemporary hybridisations including puppetry's uses of technology and even foodstuffs. Some of these sections are more obviously coherent than others. For example, the section on 'Negotiating Tradition', with articles by Matthew Isaac Cohen, Kathy Foley, Claudia Orenstein, and Ida Hledíková very clearly speak to each other in their reassessment of traditional – predominantly Asian – puppet forms. Cohen's concept of 'post-traditional' puppetry in *wayang kulit* (p. 178), for example, neatly intersects with Foley's assessment of the reimaging of traditional Korean puppet forms in the contemporary world. Other sections, such as 'Perspectives from Practitioners', are more varied in their grouping and quality. However, all are still of interest and include stellar contributions: Eric Bass discussing his

¹ *The Language of the Puppet*, ed. by Laurence Kominz and Mark Levenson (Vancouver: Pacific Puppetry Center Press, 1990); *Puppets, Masks and Performing Objects*, ed. by John Bell (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

approach to visual dramaturgy and the 'dramatic event' inherent in the 'arrangement of materials onstage' (p. 55); and Basil Jones's now well-known deconstruction of the authorship, ontology, and authority of the puppet.

In a more established field such a wide reaching volume, which covers everything from pre-modern Japanese body substitutes (Jane Marie Law) to interactions between puppetry and contemporary special effects animation through motion capture (Colette Searls), might feel unfocused. However, here it provides an enticing introduction to the many ways that puppetry and material performance have impacted the world across cultures and history. It also reflects that many of the included authors have arrived at careers writing about puppetry tangentially, approaching puppetry through other disciplines including anthropology, religious studies, robotics, and engineering. As a result, this is the first time many of these authors have appeared in the same volume, driven by the editors' desire to unite 'scholars whose publications had previously often appeared piecemeal, scattered in journals or book volumes, without a clear means for their ideas to participate in direct conversation with one another' (p. 1). As such, this volume bridges many fields that should allow it to find a wider audience.

For those with a direct interest in puppetry this volume is worth reading in its entirety. Many others will find individual articles highly relevant to their particular disciplines. This affordable paperback edition places it firmly in the reach of students and theatre practitioners and means it will likely become a standard resource for those teaching and learning about puppetry and material culture.

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