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- Sidiropoulou, Avra. *Authoring Performance. The Director in Contemporary Theatre*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Pp 217. ISBN: 13-978-0230120181.

The present work, written by Dr. Avra Sidiropoulou, stage director, playwright, and theatre scholar, is the third book published in a new series on theatre, “What is Theatre?”: a collection that wants to study the swiftly changing nature of audiences, entertainment, media, and theatre in present day situations. *Authoring Performance* analyzes the work of the director-*auteur*, a contemporary widespread artistic position that testifies to a whole range of changed attitudes toward text and performance. At first glance, the notion of *auteurism* may cause astonishment, since it rather belongs to the language of film criticism, but it is precisely this detour that will prove to be useful for all further analysis. Since its main objective is to reveal how and when the processes of adaptation and deconstruction of (older) texts and performances became the trademark of a great number of very heterogeneous directors, the idea of “authoring” and “auteurism” is a central tenet that asks for elucidation on a number of levels. And since these notions refer to a special attitude not only toward the playwrights’ original scripts, but also toward the outspoken desire to deploy one’s own unique style and easily recognisable form by present day directors, the book adopts a double perspective. It defines the phenomenon of *auteurism* from a simultaneously historical and theoretical standpoint, not only looking for past sources and models or describing performances of the most recent times, but also reflecting on many epistemological questions. Next to the six Chapters that testify to the shared attention to history and methodology (11-178), this work also comprises an Introduction (1-10), Notes (179-91), a Bibliography (193-203), and an Index (205-17).

The first chapter, “The Rise of the Modern Auteur” (11-32), retraces the origins and the communal context of auteur theatre as a phenomenon that reaches back only to the end of the nineteenth century. It valorizes the efforts made by Craig to turn the position of the director into one of a creator and recalls the artistic climate of the early-twentieth century that favoured so many artistic innovations like Jarry’s playful anarchy, Stanislavski’s blending of disparate scenic elements, or Reinhardt’s predilection for unorthodox and non-theatrical places. As history is never told from a single directional perspective, the birth of this new type of theatre involved many, even contradictory, decisions; Sidiropoulou disentangles, in this first chapter, a number of different directorial approaches, such as Antoine’s and Stanislavski’s devotion to realism, the gradual shattering of illusionism by Copeau, Piscator, and Brecht, and the return of many forms of festive, communal, or social forms of performance. Yet, parallel to this more historical review of (new) authorial ideas, she also discusses theoretical notions, such as mimesis, representation, or “theatre of images,” which are important methodological is-

sues in a landscape that has been constructed out of the convergence of several art forms. Next to the historical and theoretical approaches that will be also adopted in the rest of the chapters, a third dimension proves its value already at this stage: the attention paid to the contemporary reception of the historical archives. Apparently, Sidiropoulou saw many performances herself and is able, in all chapters, to elucidate theory by many concrete examples – a practice that turns the book into a really enjoyable and interesting piece of discovery.

The second chapter, “Enter Artaud” (33-50), is entirely dedicated to the *mémoire* of Artaud and the long lasting influence he exerted on the contemporary stage. Sidiropoulou focuses on the importance of his *The Theatre and its Double* (1936), both as one of the fundamental stepping stones towards the practice of the director as author, and as a most important act of rejection of Aristotle’s mimesis. Engaging some poststructuralist premises, this chapter aptly discusses Derrida’s interpretation of Artaud, especially his notion of the “theological stage.” This is a further step in the deconstruction of the notion of representation, since representation in the western theatre has traditionally relied on the author-God metaphor for meaning. Subverting the moral and structure of a tale that was always created and patronized by the presence of a theological instance, yielder of logos, fatherhood, and truth, Artaud, in Derrida’s opinion, needed to, first, expel the divine position of the author-God from the stage, in order to be able to introduce another type of spectator, no longer a willing victim of a predestined type of representation.

Chapter 3 focuses on Samuel Beckett’s later drama (“Beckett’s Turbulence,” 51-73) and discusses the consequences of his changed attitude, when Beckett, the writer, assumed the position of Beckett, the author-director. Surely, his performance texts offer an excellent occasion to witness the consequences of this totally different type of mentality, when the literary text no longer imposes its limits, but, alternatively, sound, image, and silence take over. Indeed, specific to his later plays was the way that this double position testified to a double and heterogeneous dynamic, situated somewhere between the elementary sign of the linguistic word and the more complex sign that corrupts, interferes, and subverts. This radically changed context gives Sidiropoulou the occasion to focus on a number of interpretational problems, all due to the double persona that Beckett assumes here, being at the same time author and director of a number of enigmatic texts that she so aptly calls his “tortured hybrids.”

Chapters 4 and 5 delve deeper into the complex processes embedded in recent directors’ theatre, focusing on how contemporary *auteurs*, primarily in Europe and the United States, deal with the worlds of the text and of the stage, and how they work with phenomena like adaptation, devised theatre, or solo performance. There is ample documentation, here, from several acclaimed international productions, which succeed in building a strong theo-

retical framework. These two chapters explore and evaluate these directors' applications of scenic and sensorial languages, as well as creative technological strategies that help to frame and structure images, sound, and body into new types of sign languages.

The last chapter, "Conquering texts" (135-57), gradually abandons the semiotic metalanguage for a poststructuralist perspective, highlighting the status of the open text, the open dramaturgy, and the radically changed position of the spectator/interpreter—a body-centred source of empathy, synergy, and participation. Surely, not the least "open dramatists" are presented here: successful "authors" and cultural icons, such as Caryl Churchill, Martin Krimp, Adrienne Kennedy, and Mark Ravenhill are studied and questioned in their ambiguous relationship with texts and verbal communication. Finally, as a kind of teaser and ultimate challenge, this book ends with "Six Case Studies" (161-78)—small exercises on how to persuade the reader of the qualities and immense potentialities that this type of new theatre offers. And full of power, interest, and radiance they are indeed. Anyone who saw *Complicité's Mnemonic* (1999), Marmarinos' *Ethnikos Hymnos* (2004), Van Hove's *Mis-anthrope* (2007), Terzopoulos' *Bacches* (1986), The Wooster Group's *Vieux Carré* (2011), or Reza Servati's *Macbeth* (2010) will surely never forget these amazing performances. Sidiropoulou describes them with much passion and accuracy, also with brevity and swiftness, turning the last chapter into a kind of personally lived and tested story of the state of art today.

This stimulating book will make for a well-argued, well-informed textbook not only for theatre scholars and professionals, but also for undergraduate and postgraduate students of directing and acting, as well as of theory of the theatre. If it becomes available in paperback, I will definitely use it as class material for my students.

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