

## COMPTE RENDU / BOOK REVIEW

MICHAEL MCKINNIE

*City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City.*

Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2007. xii + 179 pp.

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McKinnie's new book is a very important contribution to the growing body of research on the inter-relationship of the theatre and the modern city. He further provides a valuable new perspective within such research by a more detailed and sophisticated use of the methodology of cultural materialism than any of his predecessors in this field to illuminate some of the major economic, social, and cultural forces that have significantly contributed to the location, organization, and image construction of a range of important theatres in Toronto since the late 1960s.

The book is divided into two major sections, both building up their arguments and conclusions from in-depth materialist case studies of particular theatres. The first section, "Civic Development," is primarily concerned with the utilization of theatre in the process of civic self-fashioning that marked Toronto's repositioning itself as a world city during this period. The St. Lawrence Center for the Arts and the Ford Center for the Arts are examined as alternative models for the theatre's contribution to the transition from a national to a transnational economy while the development of the Entertainment District is considered for what it can reveal about the relationship between space and the commodification of play in the modern global city.

The second section, "The Edifice Complex," considers the recent history of several important small companies, Theatre Passe Muraille, Toronto Workshop Productions, Necessary Angel, and Buddies in Bad Times, suggesting how their physical locations (in some cases shifting ones) can be related to larger patterns of urban change. Previous studies of theatre buildings and their urban context have generally called attention to the fact that a theatre's location in a certain part of a city is an important part of the public image of that theatre, but McKinnie explores this phenomenon in some detail and from a fresh perspective, emphasizing such matters as the effect of considering the theatre as real estate, of the

disappearance of inner city industry, of shifting demographics, and of gentrification.

Obviously this well researched and engagingly written study makes an important addition to the rather sparse field of Canadian theatre history. To the best of my knowledge only Ric Knowles's 2004 *Reading the Material Theatre*, which includes some Canadian examples, has attempted any analysis of the Canadian theatre which even remotely resembles McKinnie's project. This naturally leads to the question of what interest this detailed analysis of theatre in a particular (if major) Canadian theatre city might have for readers who may not be familiar with this approach. As McKinnie himself points out in several places in the book, at the heart of his methodology is the assumption that every theatre is a unique venture, shaped by a particular convergence of spatial and temporal forces that McKinnie studies through their material manifestations.

The answer is that while each of these cases illuminates very convincingly particular aspects of the developing post-Fordist era in the Toronto theatre, and thus will not have exact parallels elsewhere, they represent typical forces and dynamics found in different combinations in theatre everywhere today. This is especially true of course in the new global cities, which are increasingly intertwined in their urban structures and the functioning of these structures. Although not one of McKinnie's examples exactly paralleled the forces at work in any specific theatre I know in New York, London, Paris, or Berlin, not one of them exhibited forces at work that I do not recognize as important phenomena operating in particular theatres in those cities. Thus not only in the phenomena he is discussing, but perhaps even more important in the still not widely utilized materialist methodology that he brings to bear on this discussion, McKinnie has created a study that should have a wide, and well deserved readership in and impact upon the field of modern theatre studies.