



A Century of South African Theatre

by Loren Kruger, London, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2019, 288 pp.,
£22.49 (pbk), ISBN 9781350008014

Anton Krueger

To cite this article: Anton Krueger (2019) A Century of South African Theatre, South African Theatre Journal, 32:2, 180-183, DOI: [10.1080/10137548.2020.1716515](https://doi.org/10.1080/10137548.2020.1716515)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10137548.2020.1716515>



Published online: 24 Feb 2020.



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practices and those writing traditions that generally accompany them. ‘*By interfering with accepted logics, live art in South Africa forces us to scrutinize our own constructions and to be vigilant*’ (p. 9). Vigilance is also required of the reader to engage with the breadth of ideas that are provocative and demand that institutions pay heed to the timeous and the long-overdue shift that recognizes art works as the site of knowledge production, without the reductive gestures of having to validate its place as a legitimate form of research in institutions. This collection of essays functions as a catalyst for further artistic innovation and writing which engages with a range of entry points: visceral, tactile (tactical) emotive and scopic – exploring the concatenations of the personal and often private (intimate in fact) with the in-situ, the spheres of community and socio-political life-acts.

It sounds trite to congratulate the editors on an exceptionally curated anthology that not only captures the consciousness, the zeitgeist of South African live arts but the commendation cues to an important hunger and prevailing appetite for spaces and opportunities that champion exploration, fearless experimentation and unapologetic self-expression. *Acts of Transgression* serves as exemplar of why on occasion (albeit to the chagrin of others) South African live arts can claim a resilience borne out of contradictory, antagonistic and conciliatory conditions.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/10137548.2020.1718308>



A Century of South African Theatre, by Loren Kruger, London, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2019, 288 pp., £22.49 (pbk), ISBN 9781350008014

In many ways, this is an updated repackaging of Loren Kruger’s seminal work of 20 years ago, *Plays, Pageants and the Drama of South Africa* (1999). The material has been extensively revised and reworked using similar categories as the first book, including: pageantry and representations of nationhood, neo-colonial theatre, urbanization and its consequences; the rise of Afrikaans theatre; theatres of resistance; black consciousness; and contemporary theatre. Some of these sections have been extended (such as a longer discussion of HIE Dhlomo) and there is also a completely new section which has not been published elsewhere on current theatre trends (cleverly titled “The Constitution of South African Theatre at the Present Time”).

I was pleasantly surprised to find the new book easier to read, more accessible; however, I’m not sure if this indicates a change in Kruger’s style or whether it is simply that, 20 years on, it has become a bit easier for me to read these dense scholarly

texts. The writing bears Kruger's trademark approach of compacting references from a wide range of sources into packed paragraphs emerging from a bedrock of deep knowledge of both South African history and politics, as well as many varied theories on theatre. Her learning is legendary and she is able, for example, to weave together connections between Schiller, Hegel, Boal and Brecht in a single paragraph on Dhlomo.

The text is tightly argued and energised by insightful reflections that sometimes catch one by surprise. For example, on a play already as over-analysed as Athol Fugard's *Blood Knot* (1961), Kruger manages to make a point that is – to my knowledge – new, and not uncontroversial. Citing the play's conclusion, when Morrie and Zach find a shared brotherhood in turning against the figure of their mother, Kruger points out that the play's "claim to authenticity rests directly on its representation of black men as exemplary South Africans and implicitly on its exclusion of the black women who gave birth to them" (p. 83).

The historical work is strong, and it is a pity that the book ends before the inauguration of Cyril Ramaphosa, since this would have been an ideal bookend to a text beginning with nationhood and pageantry ("Commemorating and Contesting Emancipation: Pageants and Other Progressive Enactments"). Kruger might have been interested in exploring the differences between the previous nation-building events and the most recent one, for which the creative director of the Market Theatre was reportedly paid 2.5 million rand (Blignaut and Mashego 2019).

When trying to encapsulate an entire century of theatre, there are of course bound to be many omissions and there will no doubt be scores of theatre practitioners and scholars silently fuming that they have not been included in its more contemporary study. Still, it is strange that Kruger calls Lara Foot a "rising star" (p. 194), whereas I would have thought she is by now well established, with a track record of works regarded as canonical, having run a major theatre for almost a decade. The project might rather have looked further for other "rising stars" to include people such as Sylvaine Strike, Amy Jephta or Napo Masheane.

There also is not really as in-depth an exploration of contemporary plays in indigenous Black African languages as one might have hoped, such as work by Mandla Mbothwe and Billy Langa, among others. Mbothwe is mentioned, but the first ever isiXhosa play on the main programme of the National Arts Festival – *Ingcwaba lendoda lise cankwe ndlela* [The grave of the man is next to the road, 2009] might have been given a more extensive analysis, rather than being presented mainly in contrast to Brett Bailey's *Zombie* (1996). Although Kruger does explore some indigenous language texts from the 1930s (such as work by the Mthethwa brothers), a lot more contemporary works could have been engaged with, possibly from within the context of translanguaging. However, I think she is aware of this, as attention is drawn to the importance of work in other languages in the Coda (pp. 193–194).

I also thought that the section dealing with land issues in Afrikaans theatre might have been extended diachronically to include the volatile recent debates on land, reflected in plays such as Monageng "Vice" Motshabi's *Ankobia* (2017), and Yaël Farber's *Mies Julie* (2012). In general, there seems to be a lacuna around works which responded to and commented on the violent protests which shook all of the country's universities from 2015 to 2016, a few years which were surely more destabilizing than any in the last twenty. For example, no mention is made of *The Fall* (2017), an important historical work from the lineage of Barney Simon (directed by Claire

Stopford, one of his protégés), which brought together a number of concerns raised by a new, resurgent black consciousness.

The fact that Kruger is reading South Africa at somewhat of a distance, from her vantage point at the University of Chicago, may have certain benefits. One can often more easily discern patterns, shapes and outlines from afar, gaining an overall perspective which might have been missed by those embedded here. But it does mean that a good deal of one's analysis remains of necessity text-based, relying on scripts and scholarly works rather than on the direct experience of engaging with performances themselves. With regard to works of the last two decades, it does feel sometimes as though certain years when works were presented at the National Arts Festival (such as 2012 and 2014) may have been highlighted over other years, which could be an indication that these were years when Kruger was able to be in attendance at the festival and was able to access performances more directly.

Nevertheless, a book of this sort cannot possibly hope to be all-encompassing, and Kruger is aware of this, reflecting that her book is an invitation to further research, rather than a conclusive statement. She writes that her book weaves together “apparently disparate threads from different times, places, and cultural practises that belong in the expanded field of play” (p. 193). This seems to include a broad range of performance forms; however, there is, for example, no mention of the explosion of stand-up comedy and the rise of improv during the last two decades. There is also no mention of the massive rise of Live Art and other forms of embodied performance. Neither Andrew Buckland's many works nor those of Gary Gordon are cited, two key players whose influences in physical theatre have been felt in all corners of the South African theatre community, especially since 1994. One might counter that the title of the book (as focusing on “theatre”) indicates a quite specific and perhaps conservative definition of a performance form, and yet Kruger does branch out into pageantry and public forms which do not necessarily subscribe to this narrow definition, and her comment above alludes to a wish to include a greater range of cultural performance practises than those confined to a theatre. Kruger does write extensively on Magnet Theatre, and, granted, there are already other books such as *Acts of Transgression: Contemporary Live Art in South Africa* (2019), which deal specifically with Live Art, so possibly I'm nit-picking here. However, this could also be an encouragement for a scholar to take up the task of extending this research into other performance forms over the last century.

And Kruger does encourage this ongoing work. She describes her work as an invitation for others to participate in

ongoing research in South Africa and other locations in the world where researchers and practitioners aspire in these turbulent times to forge links in performance between subjective and indicative acts, imaginative and social practises, public spheres and intimate moments to illuminate the struggles of citizens, migrants, and other people that inhabit nations or animate spaces between them (p. 193).

Loren Kruger has made an enormous contribution to the scholarly study of South African theatre, not only in reflecting us to ourselves, but also in placing us within the context of a world theatre. She repeatedly reveals her mastery of the rigorous tools of analysis in tracking and mining rich seams of cultural activity which she is able to filter into potent, tightly packed categories. A book of such bold scope and

vast reach could not possibly have been all-inclusive and exhaustive, and I share Kruger's wish that the book will provide "a foundation for more investigation by colleagues in the field" (ix).

Works Cited

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/10137548.2020.1716515>



Training the actor's body: a guide, by Dick McCaw, London, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2018, xv + 253 pp., £20.69 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-4725-8779-4

In this book, McCaw offers an informed guide to anyone involved with, or interested in, the complexities and challenges of training the actor's body. It provides the reader with a generalized overview of some of the basic principles of movement training for the actor whilst recognizing that there is no 'single, agreed training for the actor's body' (p. 237). Rather than selecting a codified movement system or training style, his approach to training is that it should encourage a 'progressive understanding (a making present or visible) of your own body, which is to say, yourself' (p. 237). McCaw claims that he wrote the book for 'all those thousands of students and practitioners of theatre (in its widest sense) who use games and exercises in their training' (p. 2). I consider it to be especially useful to, and well-suited for, a less-experienced movement teacher working at tertiary or high school level, a movement teacher faced with decisions around curriculum planning, a student actor intent on deepening their experiential knowledge of the body, as well as to students and practitioners who are involved in devising theatre. Importantly, it engages the reader with an informative discussion of what it means to teach and to learn about movement in this way.

Appropriately, McCaw explains some of the unique processes involved in actor movement training and discusses what differentiates this kind of training from other areas in the performing arts, including dance. He parallels the rise of specialized actor training (in a Western context) with the rise of the theatre director in the twentieth century, when directors such as Konstantin Stanislavsky (1864–1938), Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940), Eugenio Barba (b. 1936), Jerzy Grotowski (1933–1999) and Peter Brook (b. 1925), amongst others, proceeded to develop very specific systems of physical training for their actors to support their respective aesthetics.

During the twentieth century, numerous books and articles were published on and by various movement theorists and practitioners, including certain key figures who have informed a contemporary understanding of expressive human movement, some of whom include Rudolf Laban (1879–1958), Frederik Matthias Alexander (1869–1955), Litz Pisk (1909–1997) and Moshe Feldenkrais (1904–1984). Their