Reseñas / Book Reviews

Intermediality in Theatre and Performance. By **Freda Chapple & Chiel Kattenbelt** (eds.). Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2006. Pp. 266. ISBN: 978-90-420-1629-3 / 90-420-1629-9 Pb. € 54 / US$ 81.
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Intermediality, associated historically with the exchangeability of expressive means and aesthetic conventions between different art and media forms, is a dominant trend in the arts and the media of the twentieth century due mostly to the emergence of hypermedia paradigms. We can speak of the fusion of different arts and media into new forms, the representation conventions operating in several media, and/or the representation of one medium in another medium. In *Remediation,* Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999: 45) argued that although remediation existed as artistic practice as far back as the Renaissance (a time when artists began to give their viewing public an access to their work from all angles and corners) it can be said to have become a «defining characteristic of new digital media». The gaps or in-between spaces among different media formats allow «a process of transformation of thought and processes where something different is formed through performance» (Chapple & Kattenbelt, 2006: 12).

Notions of immediacy and transparency are explored in Chapple and Kattenbelt's

volume in order to direct them towards the importance of corporeality. Thus, Andy Lavender studies immediacy in relation to *mise en scène* and the production of pleasure in contemporary mixed media theatre productions; and Ralf Remshardt engages with the exploration of remediation and acting in silent cinema. Of particular interest is Boenisch's theoretical framework which places the emphasis on medium as «an agency or means of doing something» (105), and which underpins the issue of media as cultural artifacts since, as Boenisch notes «media are by no means a neutral means to communicate or express something» (105). Boenisch quotes Benjamin's emphasis on the role of technology as fundamental to human perception: «the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well» (105). Boenisch also quotes McLuhan's assertion that «the use of any kind of medium or extension of man alters the patterns of interdependence

among people, as it alters the ratios among our senses» (106), in an attempt to show that the connection between «media to the body and the senses of their users» (106). He goes on to discuss Kittler's (1992) merging of McLuhan and Foucault, and Bolter and Grusin's (1999) notion of remediation: «a medium is that which remediates. It is that which appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real» (106). Thus, as Boenisch notes,

> it seems that what is new about the new media is not based on any inherent individuality guaranteeing their difference from old media. Instead, the new media build into the new format some of the existent features of the old; and in doing this they redefine the old media, who continue to survive very well in the updated versions (107),

and he goes on to add that «from this perspective, rather than a linear line of evolutionary progress, media history resembles an ever extending spiral; each seemingly radical progress in media technological development turns out as yet another remediation» (108). Boenisch's discussion brings forth the theme of representation, establishing a hierarchy between factual and fictional worlds and assuming a mimetic relationship between the actual thing and its mediatised representation in which the latter appears as «a "second order reality", whether as idealist representation of a crude reality in terms of the beautiful and the sublime, as a realist rendering of the actual thing, or as a

surreal invention of blatant Science Fiction» (109). In all cases, as he argues, the experience, whether factual or fictional, is felt in the same way because it is authentic, and this «authenticity of any medial world-making includes a significant *spatial effect*, as "making worlds" means creating spaces […] some […] quite literal, and others rather metaphorical» (110). He also notes the *sensorial layer*, the phenomenological experience added to the semiotic reality he terms *performance*, and which he tries to ground on the medium of theatre in the last part of his discussion, by returning to Manovich's notion of *transcoding* as «the translatability of virtually any kind of data, allowing blending various types of audiovisual information, and to store, access, display, exchange, and replicate them by means of a single machine» (Manovich, 2001: 45). Boenisch's reading of Manovich links transcoding to Benjamin's (1968) notion of technological reproduction and the emphasis on the semiotics of perception and theatrical reproduction beyond original presence. However, he fails to make the transition from sensorial to any bodily or corporeal experience in a convincing way, something betrayed in his choice of terms such as «observer» rather than the more agentive «user» (or even «participant»), or allusions such as «third meaning, attraction, and magic moment […]» (115).

Christopher Balme's paper analyses work by Michel de Certeau (1984) and Chambers' (1993) reading of Hosokawa (1984), all works that focus on perception and the role of the observer or «Walkman», as Chambers names it. The

main thesis can be summarized in Chambers' words:

> In the manifest refusal of sociability the Walkman nevertheless reaffirms participation in a shared environment. It directly partakes in the changes in the horizon of perception that characterize the late twentieth century, and which offers a world fragmenting under the mounting media accumulation of intersecting signs, sounds and images. (119)

In referring to the role of audio theatre, Balme explains that «an important effect of this walkman-induced or directed theatre was the almost complete effacement of the narrative in the traditional diegetic sense» (123). Thus, he adds «the overall effect of audio theatre is to intensify spatial perception in the sense of basic physical orientation» (123). Balme's argument moves one step closer towards an exploration of the corporeal implications of remediation. His exploration of *spatial metonymy*, following Lehmann's (2000) work contributes indeed to «a destabilization of borders between work and frame, perception and participation» (123), but unfortunately it stops there. Yet again, Meike Wagner's contribution takes this argument one step further with an exploration of puppet theatre and a new definition of intermediality as «a matrix, which shapes and produces theatrical bodies through a negotiation between the *discourse of the body*, the *spectator* and concepts of *materiality*», a definition that, unlike Boenisch's and Balme's work «does not subscribe to semiotic ideas of mediality as the signifying code of a

technical apparatus» (128). Rather, she investigates

> the intersections of phenomenology and media theory, where theorists working in these fields consider corporeal perception as an interplay between the perceiving and the perceived, and thus introduce the spectator as a corporeally involved perceiver rather than only as a decoding and signifying mind whose position, traditionally, was to interpret a pre-existing message. (128)

Wagner makes use of Merleau-Ponty's (1945, 1964, 1986) works, where he develops an «ontology of seeing and flesh, which contradicts hermetic concepts of subjectivity, Ego and presence» (128), grounding inter-subjectivity in a dialectic between what is seen and unseen (the invisible), the familiar and the non-familiar, «the reversibility of seeing and being seen, perceiving and being perceived», a conclusion that «is always beyond one's reach, in this never-ending interplay of differences». Echoes of Merleau-Ponty's work can be found in Paul de Man's (1979, 1983) work and in postmodernist critical approaches in general. Wagner moves on to Tholen's (1995) own reading of Ponty in relation to Paul Virilio's work, which postulates that vision machines could accelerate and substitute human perception. Wagner notes it, distinguishes the visible from the invisible and offers no fixed perspective; but rather one «that can be shifted by the demands of the other» (130) becomes more relevant to our interests since

subjectivity is also constituted by non-symbolic forces (body, acts, feelings, drives) and, due to its self-reflexive consciousness, capable of strategic self-fashioning and responsible acting. For this reason the subject-agency interferes in existing codes and texts, employing them as scenery for engaging in the symbolic interaction with others and her or his own gaze. The subject thus absorbs foreign texts, utterances, and signifying systems of the past and present, but also transforms and revises them.

Language and semiotic theories of the past century have been important in conceptualizing the relation between subject and object, capturing the mutual construction of speaker and cultural system at the point of enunciation without resort to the freedom-determinism binary of ontologies that inscribe subjects and objects. It is in this sense that Chapple and Kattenbelt's volume is of particular value.

As Wagner recognizes, «technical apparatus […] set a constant limit and cut off a well-demarcated invisible» (130). We need to seek new epistemological theories that ground vision, the construction of intersubjectivity and its cultural implications *clearly* in the material substrate that now characterizes most of our human-machine interactions. Finding third-spaces, in betweens «intermedial interplay of the border between the own and the other» (136), between puppet theatre and Haraway's (1985) cyborg machines might be useful in order to frame intermediality in a historiographical, and thus, a cultural way. However, we continue to fall short of a radical theory that will allow us to make sense of identity and its

representations in the age of digital machines, of «the twin preoccupations of contemporary media: the transparent presentation of the real and the enjoyment of the opacity of media themselves» (137). Like us, Robin Nelson argues that «an emergent habitus of virtual spaces, which afford experiences that are in part embodied, is shifting the phenomenal relationship with machines» (139). Thus, Nelson turns to Bourdieu's (1979) notion of *habitus* to propose a hypothesis grounded in the changing «disposition whereby viewers *engage* with the apparatus - to be in some sense *present within the medium* -while at the same time, being *consciously aware of the medium* with which they are engaging» (139), coming as close as possible to Bolter and Grusin's notion of *hypermedium*. Nelson's research has the advantage of grounding the study of the intermediality of *screen spaces* in cultural studies. The author speaks of

> a continuum of increasing depths of immersion, ranging from a temporary suspension of disbelief in traditional television fiction, through a deeper immersion in a role-playing computer game, to a full simulation of an unreal world experienced as if directly through sense-perception but in fact through the wiring of a virtual reality head-set. (139)

Local beliefs, values, and practices can no longer be held as absolute or as exclusive, at the expense of others, where problems become shared problems and, hence, difficult to ignore. «*Images have been transformed* from static representations of

the world *into spaces in which events happen that involve and engage people to various degrees in physical space*» (148).

To sum up, the collection of articles edited by Chapple & Kattenbelt shows the need for further research in the question of performance, audience participation and corporeality in intermedial exchanges. This excellent volume points towards the need for a new hermeneutic theory for identity, one that no longer underscores the agency of the different media formats.

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