

The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader

Second Edition

Edited by
**Michael Huxley
and Noel Witts**

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The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader

The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader is the key introductory text to all types of performance. Extracts from fifty practitioners, critics and theorists from the fields of dance, drama, music, theatre and live art make up an essential sourcebook for students, researchers and practitioners.

A best seller since its publication in 1996, this second edition has been fully updated and includes:

- New writings by practitioners and theorists
- Notes about each writer
- A completely new introduction

Each extract is fully supplemented by a contextual summary and suggestions for further reading. Organized alphabetically, this Reader makes it possible to compare major writings on all types of performance in one volume. The ways in which different performance practitioners' ideas inter-relate are pointed out in a series of detailed cross-references for readers. In so doing, it becomes clear that one of the key features of twenty-first century performance is its boundlessness and its capacity to cross borders.

All who enjoy or work with live innovative performance will find this book invaluable.

Michael Huxley is head of performing arts at De Montfort University, Leicester. He has contributed to a number of books and is author of articles on dance and dance theatre. He holds national and international positions in research and in learning and teaching.

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Preface

Preface

THIS IS THE SECOND EDITION of *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*. It is published at the start of a new century and has been re-written deliberately to encourage a transparency of ideas between the last century and this one.

Readers of the first edition will find a number of changes in this edition. We have included eleven new texts and dropped one or two of the old ones. This has, we hope, given a greater range to the texts and thus greater scope for the reader. We hope that the range of ideas has been opened up too. Some of these texts are relatively recent in publication, others not. Either way, we think there is now an unrivalled range of debate *about* performance practice included in the same volume.

The introduction has been completely re-written and we have dropped the use of themes but at the same time have continued to resist the temptation to categorise. Many readers have thanked us for taking the line we have done, and for promoting an open-ness of enquiry and an open-ness of reading. We are happy to acknowledge their support and encourage others to do likewise. We have also included a new section on how to use this book.

This book contains selected texts on performance practice and theory that, together, help define the field. The selections are primarily statements or writings by practitioners about performance itself, which are supplemented by key critical and theoretical texts that have helped to define or codify what artists themselves have produced. It is a book for all those interested in performance – a celebration of those who have led the way and brought about change. It contains writings by artists, directors, choreographers, composers, devisers, writers and critics, as

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well as live and performance artists, that show how the field of performance has developed through our time. The texts speak for themselves, and the ideas that they contain can be seen in relation to each other. There are both resonances and dissonances, though these may not necessarily come in the places you might expect.

All the work chosen has as its focus the practice of performance – its skills, concerns, techniques, viewpoints, and philosophy. The book covers all aspects of live performance (theatre, dance, opera, music, performance, live art), which are compared with other performance media where appropriate.

We are fortunate in that many twentieth century performance innovators have committed their ideas to paper. This book, unsurprisingly, contains familiar texts from Bertolt Brecht, Isadora Duncan, Jerzy Grotowski and Konstantin Stanislavski. It also contains many less familiar texts from practitioners such as Laurie Anderson, Tatsumi Hijikata and Richard Foreman. The ideas that they deal with in performance and which they have written about can now be easily compared, and there are also key statements from theorists which give both a historical and a critical context to these writings, for instance the items by Sally Banes, Judith Butler and Raymond Williams. In the last edition we included the last of these because of what he had to say, as a theorist, about text and performance. In this new edition, we include texts from Samuel Beckett and Tim Etchells that broaden the notion of what a text is, and what can be said about it. At the same time we have included more on live art, with texts by Marina Abramovic and Allan Kaprow. This edition focuses even more on performance as a current and contested construct, which has been one of the many international developments since our first edition, and we have now included focussed articles on the subject by Marvin Carlson and Judith Butler.

Many major twentieth century performance practitioners have written little about their work or if they have, have done so in a way that is not immediately and readily comparable with the ideas of others. In compiling this book, we have therefore not included a number of people who, nevertheless, are central to defining performance as a historical phenomenon. To understand the work of these figures it would be necessary to experience it or to read what the critics have written about it but we have not included criticism as a means of describing others' work. The only critical essays that we have included are those that refer to general performance issues, rather than the work of one specific artist.

It is immediately apparent that the artists included here did not write for each other, or for an anthology such as this. This is evident in the way they have often tended to use different terminology to describe similar activities. Terms such as 'performance', 'actor', 'director', 'maker', locate the writing historically, geographically, and culturally. The language used changes with the innovations that this book documents and the introductory essay that follows explores this phenomenon.

The original idea for this book came from teaching on the cross-disciplinary BA (Hons) Performing Arts course at the then Leicester Polytechnic, and particularly from one of its contributory lecture series – 'Perspectives in the Performing Arts'. It developed further with De Montfort University's Leicester-based performance degree courses and, especially the module 'Performance: the State of the Art'. This second

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edition has been refined by our work at De Montfort University Leicester and University of Hull Scarborough Campus respectively. Our common interest, though developed in different institutions, has come about through dialogue and is the richer for it.

For many years we looked for a source book that would encompass all aspects of performance; one that would be relevant to students of dance, music, theatre, performance studies and the visual arts, however those fields may be currently defined. Our first thanks, therefore, must go to our students for demanding more than we could give them at the time. They continue to do so, which is why this edition is larger and fuller and contains some of their suggestions (some items that you suggested have been included, some articles that you never read have gone). We don't tire of having what we have included in the reader quoted back at us. After all, that is the purpose of such a book since the ideas have stood the test of time and are always worth thinking about.

Secondly, we would like to thank Julia Hall for recognising that this need was reflected in similar courses throughout the world and for having the confidence in the original idea and in us.

Thirdly, we would thank Talia Rodgers and her colleagues at Routledge – Rosie Waters and Sunje Redies – for their continuing support and the opportunity to publish a larger second edition.

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Fifthly, we would like to thank everyone who has commented on the first edition. Most of these comments have been warm and supportive; none have been less than helpful. We have received them in the mail, in reviews, by email and in conversation from all around the world, from students, teachers, performers and those whose articles contributed to the first edition. To all of you, thank you. We welcome comments on this edition too.

Last, but not least, thanks again to Jayne Huxley and Krys Witts, whose continuing support and patience allowed this book to be completed.

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How to Use this Book

THIS BOOK ALLOWS the reader choice in the ways in which it can be used. It is not prescriptive, and therefore is not organised according to either chronological or thematic categories.

Each text can be read on its own, if that is what you wish. However, after each there is a brief summary that anchors it historically. There then follow some brief suggestions as to immediate connections with other authors and texts. Some of these connections are purely historical (who else was working then); some are conceptual (wherein are found development, argument and debate). In other cases the links are direct, through people working together or commenting on each other's work. There are some connections that are serendipitous and some that we did not see before we wrote and compiled this book.

The texts are deliberately organised alphabetically rather than chronologically, but we have included a chronological list at the end for interest. We wish to avoid spurious intimations that artists, simply by following each other chronologically, develop the idea of performance or, even worse, are part of a cultural 'evolution'. We have therefore continued to resist demands that we categorise these artists' writings, and have therefore not grouped them according to themes or even art form, as many contain more than one theme, and cross art forms, something that itself may be said to be a characteristic of twentieth – and certainly twenty-first – century performance.

Placing a text within a thematic category tends to ossify its position and implies that it is resistant to further examination, or indeed to critical examination that might turn up a new theme that was not apparent at the initial time of writing. In this edition we do not

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

suggest thematic signposts either, for the same reason. Issues, concepts, ideas can be found listed in the index, and texts and writers can be cross-referenced by this means.

A particular feature of this book is that each text is followed by a contextual summary, which gives some key facts about the author and an introduction to the text in its historical or other context. This is then followed by suggestions for further reading about either the specific topic or about the author.

Another key feature of this book is the cross-references, which allow the reader to begin to work through the network of ideas and historical connections that are to be found in this collection. It is intended as an open system so that the reader can make comparisons with other historical figures and ideas.

The general bibliography is designed to support the introductory essay and includes an extensive selection of those texts, which refer to the wider issues of the nature of performance.

This is a collection, which can therefore be used in a variety of ways, and we list here a selection of methods you might like to employ:

Method 1: start from the performance text, read what the writer has written about performance. Read the biographical summary to locate their writing historically, culturally etc. to better understand what they have to say. This will lead you to ideas that you might wish to pursue to deepen your understanding. Some of these are in the summaries, some can be found in the index, some can be found in others' writings that you will be referred to.

Method 2: start from two or more texts. Read them and what the writer has said about performance. Compare them to see where they agree/disagree. Read and compare their biographical summaries that will then lead you to further information and texts to help you understand what the writers are saying and the extent to which this is tied to the period in which it was written.

Method 3: identify an idea that you want to pursue, such as gender, nationality, and theatricality. Use the index to identify texts where this might occur. Compare these texts; compare summaries and context as in method 2 above.

These suggestions are all selected from published sources. Of course you may wish to develop your search further, including the worldwide web. Guidance on such sources is not included here, being beyond our scope at present.

Everyone will find ways of working through this book. Wherever you begin you will find help, but not prescribed patterns, to lead you further into the debate. What you will not find are one way streets labelled 'dance', 'music', 'drama', 'live art' etc. The thinking behind this book is unashamedly multidisciplinary, which, of course, reflects a major concern of performance in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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