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Teaching Performance Studies

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[Stucky, Nathan](#) and [Wimmer, Cynthia](#) (Editors),
[Schechner, Richard](#) (Foreword)
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Reviewed by: [Cheryl Baugh](#), [Fontbonne University](#)
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Trying to compose a text on teaching performance studies is a daunting task. *Teaching Performance Studies*, however, accomplishes that and more. Edited by Stucky and Wimmer, the text is an eclectic collection of eighteen essays addressing the theory, practice and pedagogy of performance studies. Although the text is not a comprehensive look at the field by any means, it does cover a variety of topics from multiple perspectives, thus making it a cross-disciplinary treatment of the emergent area of performance studies.

This type of approach, while fragmented and overlapping in spots, brings a real strength to the reader's understanding of performance studies. Each chapter addresses the study of performance in a unique way. For example, Bruce McConachie's, "Theatre of the Oppressed with Students of Privilege: Practicing Boal in the American College Classroom," introduces the reader to the application of Augusto Boal's ideas and techniques in performance. Through recounting the experience of a freshman class at William and Mary College, McConachie demonstrates the illustrative impact of performance as a vehicle for understanding the oppressor/oppressed. Though somewhat melodramatic, this approach has clear and relevant application to many situations in the world today and thus can help the student define his/her world through performance.

The text is loosely organized into three major areas: positioning performance

studies; embodiment and epistemology; and negotiating borders. According to Stucky and Wimmer the text, "moves through essays designed to establish performance theoretically, to pursue issues of situated performance ethnographically, and to expand pedagogical practices and field through personal descriptions of performance studies work" (16). By choosing this type of organizational format the editors allow the various chapters to work together while still maintaining their individual integrity. While areas of performance studies may be difficult to categorize, the flexibility provided by this structure allows the reader to clearly see the connections among the various topics.

The framework provided by the editors as illustrated in the first section of the text challenges the reader to grasp the vast, distinctive approach to the evolving area of performance studies. For example, Joseph Roach (chapter 1) examines the field from a literary perspective while Michelle Kisliuk (chapter 6) takes an international/cultural approach. Each chapter contributes with a different approach to the reader's understanding of the elusive field of performance studies.

Perhaps the most controversial yet innovative aspect of *Teaching Performance Studies* is the clear multi-perspective vision it provides for teaching performance studies. As the field of oral interpretation metamorphosed to performance studies, there has been a substantial amount of controversy among scholars. Just where does performance studies belong as a discipline? Professional organizations such as NCA and ATHE have sought to define it through special interest groups—subdivisions of the main organization. Yet arguments of duplication and fragmentation have abounded. Stucky and Wimmer seem less concerned with the categorization or claim to the discipline and more concerned with the value of performance in personal and public environments. They carve out a unique, interdisciplinary approach, which serves to enhance our knowledge without eviscerating other fields.

Teaching Performance Studies is a groundbreaking text. Undoubtedly both undergraduate and graduate students will benefit from this eclectic approach. Stucky and Wimmer should be congratulated on this unique collection of essays and the contribution they make to the understanding and teaching of performance studies.

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