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discusses how, within the Platonic ideal, narrative elements are used to interrupt, frame, qualify, or otherwise contradict the “undesirable” effects of mimetic performance. Besides serving as a necessary interruption, theatrical narration shows “a conscious commitment to some cognitive frame beyond the imitation” (83). Reviewing a history of diegetic techniques, including prologues, teichoscopy (a “blow-by-blow” account of offstage events as they happen), self-conscious narrators, the use of a naïve or amateur actor, or conspicuous repetition, Gruber identifies the effect, especially in the plays of Bertolt Brecht, as one of “a theatre that is openly narrative and ‘literary’ at the same time it is ‘dramatic’” (111).

Chapter 3, “Theatres of Absence,” studies plays structured around absence that “foreclose any attempt whatsoever at direct enactment of people or events” (127). Evidence drawn from the inevitable *Waiting for Godot* to less obvious examples, such as Terence’s *The Girl from Andros* and Plautus’s *The Pot of Gold* and *Casina*, allows Gruber to demonstrate the complex relationship between sight, representation, and power. Absence provokes imagination, Gruber maintains. “Theatrical power is then born, paradoxically, of the deliberate act of concealment” (129). In Federico García Lorca’s *The House of Bernarda Alba*, for example, the absence of men creates an implicitly gendered tension between offstage and onstage space. Gruber also discusses the films of Marguerite Duras, in which a tension between diegesis and mimesis often functions as an organizing principle. He concludes the chapter by considering the pain-oriented plays of Thomas Bernhard, in which the dead are represented onstage through their effect upon living characters. In Bernhard’s plays, Gruber notes, “the offstage dead hold sway over the living and moving characters with a potency that is anachronous, relentless, and enfeebling” (177).

For a study concerned with the power of language to stimulate the imagination, *Offstage Space* benefits from Gruber’s own literary energy, or “*enargeia*—the power of language to create a vivid presence of that which is set forth in words” (24). The book is a pleasure to read. But it is also refreshing in the scientific approach it brings to the study of drama, demonstrating how narrated action triggers the audience’s imagination to “[piggyback] on the neural machinery of actual perception” (33). *Offstage Space* thus contributes to the emerging field of cognitive theatre studies in important new ways. As it shows, between mimesis and diegesis, there really is more than meets the eye.

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**THEATRE, COMMUNICATION, CRITICAL REALISM.** By Tobin Nellhaus. What Is Theatre? series. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; pp. 272.

Tobin Nellhaus’s *Theatre, Communication, Critical Realism* is a thought-provoking addition to the literature on theatre historiography. The central claim is simply stated: changes in a culture’s communication structures cause shifts in theatrical practice. Nellhaus’s approach, though, is far from ordinary; he critiques foundational assumptions of historical theory and offers a new and useful method with which to question agency, structure, and causality. His case for this new perspective is solid, and its applications are well-demonstrated and clearly presented.

Through its careful interlacing of philosophy, theatre history, and communication studies, the book posits a cogent paradigm with which to untangle historical thinking. Following the critical realism of Roy Bhaskar, Nellhaus explains and applies a realist model of social ontology. This model contends that three kinds of entities—material objects, intentional agents, and socially constructed discourses—have causal power to effect historical change. Realism in this context refers to the idea that knowledge is socially conditioned, yet maintains an existence separate from individuals’ thoughts. This perspective informs Nellhaus’s historical argument. Deftly sidestepping Ong’s technological determinism, Nellhaus grounds specific communication structures in frameworks of both material and social practices in order to argue that changes in those structures trigger the emergence of new theatrical forms.

The first chapter interrogates ontology, the mode of philosophical thinking that addresses conditions of existence and categories of being. Nellhaus begins with an elegant critique of positivism and social constructionism, pointing out that both rely on similar flawed assumptions. Neither adequately explains causality, either reducing history to simple mechanics or discounting it as mere discourse. Critical realism, by contrast, contends that reality exists independent of perception, but that knowledge of it is a product of socially conditioned activity (24). With this assumption in place, Nellhaus outlines his tripartite ontology and posits three analogous levels of historical questioning: the technical “How?”; the sociological or functional “Why?”; and the hermeneutic/symbolic “What does it mean?” Neatly presented in a chart (46), this model of culture and history ensures that historians account for all causal powers—structures, agents, and discourses—and seek explanations of them on all possible levels. The chapter also examines Peircean semiotics as comple-

mentary to critical realism. Since communication relies primarily on signs, Nellhaus productively leans on Peirce to contextualize communication in its material, symbolic, and embodied aspects.

Chapter 2 digs back into history to analyze two specific events in which communication changed theatrical practice: the emergence of tragedy in ancient Greece, and the performance of the York Cycle dramas in medieval England. Through a critical realist method, the book examines the events' "conditions of possibility," focusing on those structural elements that permitted new theatrical (re)presentations. In the case of ancient Greek culture, Nellhaus argues, the transition from oral to manuscript culture made tragedy possible insofar as "writing opened up a conceptual space which theatre then occupied" (66). He hypothesizes that tragedy's linear narrative structure, lack of archaisms, and basic semiotic system grew out of an increasing use of written communication. Medieval drama was similarly the product of a shift from oral to manuscript culture, but dependence on the Bible encouraged thinking based on similitude. This "figural thinking" (69) emerged with the increased use of writing in exegetical literature, contractual and legal validation, and memory aids. Nellhaus shows how the York Cycle performed similitude through acting technique and use of theatre space. Distinct from ancient tragedy, medieval drama conceived of theatrical performance as a "superior devotional aid" (92), a means of bringing the Bible to life.

Chapter 3 focuses on genre in eighteenth-century drama, using the cognitive concepts of metaphor and image schemas (subconscious models of the world that structure thought) to explain its emergence. Here, Nellhaus pinpoints two developments that made the sentimental strategies of Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* possible. Periodicals such as *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* used metaphors that encouraged a sense of psychological depth and the disclosure of an "inward self," while simultaneously creating imagined and intimate communities of readers. Additionally, these periodicals equated gesture and writing, popularizing the idea of readable gesture onstage and off. Nellhaus argues that these elements—gesture, sentiment, psychological depth, and intimate community—formed an image schema of the beloved circle of friends, and a metaphor of selfhood as text. *The Conscious Lovers* bears proof of this analysis in its inclusion of pathetic incidents, depiction of exemplary characters, and gestural acting style. Thus Nellhaus shows how the rise of sentimentalism can be attributed to new schemas popularized by periodicals.

Chapter 4 treats metatheatricality as a performance strategy rather than a descriptive category,

and posits a reason for its prevalence in particular historical periods. Nellhaus claims that metatheatricality comes into fashion during crises in representation, when a "revolution in communication structures generate[s] a need to reconceive discourse within discourse" (166). Taking the plays of Ben Jonson as his case study, Nellhaus demonstrates how society is ontologically doubled onstage. Each element of a society's ontology (structures, agents, discourse) has a virtual analog in theatre insofar as it is also characterized by structures, agents, and discourses. Real agents in the world (people who undertake actions, including actors) are doubled by real agents in the play (the characters); a similar doubling occurs on the structural and discursive levels. This doubling undergirds the practice of metatheatricality and also distinguishes live performance from film or performed ritual. Challenging Philip Auslander's polemical attack on "liveness," Nellhaus argues that there is a difference between live and recorded performance, and it relies on the lack of doubled, embodied, intentional agents in film.

The major strength of Nellhaus's book is its rigorous philosophical consideration of ontology in relation to theatre and its rich insights into the particular case studies it examines. At points, however, the reader is left to make connections between the philosophical foundations he lays out and the case studies he presents, especially in chapters 2 and 3. While these gaps are not an impediment to the reader's understanding of Nellhaus's individual claims, more explicit links between the two would aid future historians interested in working with the same model. Such minor concerns are outweighed, however, by the book's clear and engaging style, compelling synthesis of historical evidence, and brave willingness to bridge disciplinary gaps between theatre and philosophy.

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**DEVISING IN PROCESS.** Edited by Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; pp. 208.

*Devising in Process* is a welcome introductory examination of eight contemporary British theatre companies that create devised performance. This accessible and concise collection of essays, edited by Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart, presents valuable insights into the vibrancy of alternative British theatre. These insights derive in part from the fact that the book's contributors were embedded within their focus companies to observe their devising of