

NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rachel Clements

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Catherine Hindson

Theatre in the Chocolate Factory: Performance at Cadbury's Bournville 1900–1935

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.
248 p. £85. ISBN: 978-1-009-27188-2.

Catherine Hindson's adventures in the Cadbury archives underpin this study of Quaker capitalism's provision and use of forms of recreational play and performance in the Cadbury's Midlands factory and surrounding village during the early to mid-twentieth century. Hindson identifies what she calls 'factory theatre' as central to the development of Cadbury's strategy of employer–employee relations, as well as their developing brand, which saw Cadbury products become an affordable luxury for lower-middle- and middle-class households into the mid-century. The book explores the dynamics of the theatre and performance culture developed at the factory, where workers, employers, and the public enjoyed performances in both ready-made outdoor as well as purposefully constructed indoor sites for performance: Cadbury's had their own theatre and various committees in charge of a suite of theatrical activities, some of which involved local theatre professionals such as John Drinkwater.

Divided into three sections on 'Factory Theatre', 'Theatre in the Factory Garden', and 'Theatre, Education, and Worker Well-being', Hindson explores the ways in which theatrical activity was designed and driven by Cadbury's 'business principles, organizational structure, and people and estate management'. Performance, she suggests, was interwoven with the firm's history and its approach to experimenting in the relationship between ethical business practice, social duty, recreation, and worker welfare. Hindson's approach allows her to delineate the interrelations between practices of capitalist accumulation and the shaping of bodies at work. Providing brief but informative comparative contextual overviews of Robert Owen's social-industrial experiments in New Lanark and the setting up of Port Sunlight's community frameworks for worker leisure, Hindson notes that while all were connected, such industrial endeavours cannot simply be grouped together. Whilst this is the case on some levels, a wider comparative history of industrial provision for worker leisure, specifically theatrical and performance-

based participation in factory settings, might be a useful further project.

A more politically nuanced critical engagement with the archive might have framed Cadbury's practices as somewhat coercive: a happy worker is a worker nevertheless. There is no question that Cadbury's were radical in their approach to employment, but Quaker capitalism is still capitalism at the end of the day, and Hindson is perhaps less critical in this respect than she might have been. One can't help but see, quite cynically, that part of the Cadbury project was to provide a compensatory framework for low-paid employment. There is also little mention of the underpinning colonialist project that enabled the low-cost extraction of cocoa, in what were often slave conditions in the late nineteenth century, until quite a way into the study. The Cadbury family, along with many others who offered new approaches to worker welfare on home soil, benefited greatly from the exploitation of workers elsewhere in the globe.

Where *Theatre in the Chocolate Factory* works best, however, is in its meticulous detail and attention to the interaction between Cadbury's ethical consideration of local worker welfare and theatrical leisure, on the one hand, and on the other, with their engagement with and contribution to civic arts development outside the factory grounds in the wider city of Birmingham. This is a useful study of a specific context for amateur theatre which will resonate more widely across new theatre and performance histories.

MAGGIE B. GALE

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Nicosia Shakes

Women's Activist Theatre in Jamaica and South Africa: Gender, Race, and Performance Space

Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2023. 212 p. £23.99.
ISBN: 978-0-252-08737-0.

From its Introduction, it is explicitly clear that this is a book that will make a major contribution to many disciplines: Theatre Studies, African and African Diaspora Studies, Black Studies, Gender Studies, Social and Political Sciences, and more. It opens with Shakes sharing her personal connection to her book's topic. Her early interaction with women's activism occurred when she 'watched

the TV film *Miss Amu and Miss May* (1990), produced by Sistren Theatre Collective', and this resulted in the collective being 'a significant place in my and others' education about women's lives'. From this encounter and her 'early research' on Sistren, Shakes's journey leads her to study the Mothertongue Project from South Africa, and especially the project's *Walk: South Africa* (2014).

There is an extremely high rate of gender-based violence in South Africa, and Shakes provides careful and considered research. She shows an awareness of ethics and a duty of care, and does not simply provide an overview of policy that often centres metrics instead of people. This sensitive research is present in the chapters that focus on Sistren's and Hannah Town Cultural Group's *A Slice of Reality* (2009) and a *Vigil for Roxie* (2015), a play that formed part of *Song for the Beloved: Memory and Renewal at the Margins of Justice* (2015), an 'exhibition and performance' in Kingston, Jamaica. As a reader who is very familiar with the South African context but not Jamaica, I found these chapters informative and helpful, and I was able to work through the complexities of Jamaican society and its history. Without Shakes's detailed work on the West Kingston incursion I would not have been able to understand the importance and urgency of works such as *A Vigil for Roxie*, which put at the forefront the stories of women. As a result, I can understand why a performance work such as this is extremely important, and why, as Shakes argues, 'Justice also means engaging the subjectivities of marginalized people and the communities in which they live'. This is what this type of theatre does; this is activism. Shakes makes links with experiences of women both in Jamaica and South Africa, and how there are similar theatrical strategies in play, but ensures that she is very articulate in the differences, and stresses the importance of recognizing the specificities in play in Africa and the African Diaspora.

In closing this review, I need to turn to Shakes's inclusion of the Olive Tree Theatre. The Olive Tree is an apt example of the importance of place for women's activist theatre. The theatre was based in Alexandra and then Marlboro, both areas with their roots in apartheid segregationist geographical legislation that resulted in forcing Black South Africans to live in townships. These are areas where the legacy of apartheid policy remains present, and therefore the Olive Tree's establishment in 2013 is an act of defiance against the historical marginalization of Black theatre in South Africa, and especially Black South African theatre made by Black South African women for Black South African women. However, like many theatres, the Olive Tree Theatre was closed because of Covid-19's impact. This is a loss that I mourn. I know that those who read Shakes's

monograph will do so too, as the space and place of women's activist theatre has become even more urgent.

SARAHLEIGH CASTELYN

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William W. Lewis and Sean Bartley, eds.

Experiential Theatres: Praxis-Based Approaches to Training 21st Century Theatre Artists

New York: Routledge, 2023. 298 p. £23.99.

ISBN: 978-1-032-03603-8.

The 'experience economy' is increasingly a feature of western late-capitalist life. Buying and selling, previously an exchange of money based on use-value, has been rebranded into sellable experiences, personalized for the individual buyer. In their new edited volume, William W. Lewis and Sean Bartley outline this resurgence in experiential practices in the twenty-first century, arguing that contemporary theatre and performance practice is part of this experience economy, as well as everyday life 'experiences' being increasingly theatricalized.

The authors argue that the growing prevalence of experiential-based contemporary performance practices, which may be categorized within related terms like 'immersive' or 'participatory', necessitates a new set of pedagogies in our theatre training and education systems to prepare students for this shift. The volume offers such pedagogical re-imaginings for teachers, students, and performance scholars, encouraging us to rethink not just our individual classroom content, but whole structures of theatre and performance degree programmes. The authors have, for example, identified an over-focus in US degrees on training the individual artist in a particular discipline. They argue instead for an interdisciplinary training practice to create collaborative ensembles of artists to produce the kind of experiential theatre demanded in contemporary life.

The book offers an incredibly useful codification and categorization of experiential theatre practice, dividing a multitude of work into four clear modalities: immersion (where an audience are *inside* the work); participation (where the audience engage in some level of interactivity); game-play (where the audience have an active decision-making role in the piece); and role-play (like game-play, with the addition that the audience are expected to interact in a role other than themselves). The book also begins to explore how the rapid development of interactive, virtual, and augmented technologies play a role in this performance practice, and how this impacts the audience's 'experience' of performance.

Whilst offering a clear theorization of the rise of experiential theatre, the authors offer a