

## Performance Study in the Finnish Way

Arlander, Anette, Erkkilä, Helena, Riikonen, Taina & Saarikoski, Helena (eds.) 2015. *Esitustutkimus*. Helsinki: Kulttuuriosuuskunta Partuuna. 412 pp. ISBN 978-952-67777-6-4.

Performance Study as an academic discipline has its roots at the University of New York in the late 1960s. A theatre scholar named Richard Schechner, together with some of his colleagues, founded the Performance Group of New York, which later became the core of the Performance Study Department. Although the discipline has been connected mostly to theatre studies, the first director of the department, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, was a folklorist. This fact – and e.g. the contributions made by the ethnographer Dwight Conquergood of Northwestern University in Chicago – has been important and today performance and performativity are more often seen as necessary tools for analysing everyday life in cultural studies. Interest in interpreting various phenomena as performances has since spread all over the Western world, and the method is used widely in different disciplines and with researchers adopting different approaches. This year, we have had the privilege to welcome the first Finnish anthology on performance studies – or performance research, as is the preferred term in the UK.

As one of the editors, Anette Arlander, points out in the introduction, the aim of the book is not

merely to translate Anglo-American performance study into Finnish, but rather to gather together Finnish scholars from different disciplines interested in performance as a method or a perspective for their research. The result is as promised: a multidisciplinary approach with contributions ranging from arts and popular culture to history, the social sciences and cultural anthropology as well as folkloristics. Ethnologists remain behind the scenes in this publication – but only for the time being, I hope. One must also remember that this kind of joint publication often has a particular background with long-term co-operation, and so it is in this case. Most of the articles, nine of them, are based on papers from seminars and workshops organised by the Finnish Performance Study Network (*Esitustutkimuksen verkosto*) between 2011 and 2014.

The book is divided into three sections. The first part consists of the above-mentioned peer-reviewed articles chosen from the network's connections. Four of the articles fall under the heading 'Ethnographies of a Performance' (*Esituksen etnografiat*), two under the heading 'Art Performances' (*Taitteen esitykset*) and three under the heading 'Performing' (*Esittäminen*). The topics are diverse, ranging from popular dances on pavilion floors, celebrating Saint Lucy's Day and young Somalis in Finland, to keeping a blog and oral agitations of the early 20th century in Finland. One of the core principles of the book is that each writer introduces readers to some of

the prominent figures in performance studies via various key concepts. Hence, Helena Saarikoski discusses vernacular writings about popular Finnish couple's dances using the concepts 'liminal' and 'liminoid' adopted from Victor Turner. Anette Arlander sees her auto-ethnographic writing of blogs as twice-behaved behaviour and discusses the phenomenon through restored behaviour, with the latter concept have been adopted from Richard Schechner.

In order to introduce the field of Finnish performance studies, the editors invited six shorter pieces from distinguished scholars. This second part of the book is called 'Tulokulmia', and it introduces readers to different perspectives in performance studies. In the first article, Jaana Parviainen presents bodily performances of work through professional bodybuilding. She discusses gender and gender roles and performing a profession with respect to Judith Butler's notion performativity, and she sees such bodily performances as a metastructure that categorises us according to sex, skin colour, body shape, age, ethnic background or spoken language. According to her concept of 'physical bodily', performativity can be seen as being constructed from the stereotypes and attitudes of the surrounding environment. Similar issues are discussed in Annamari Vänskä's text about performativity in fashion. In her article, she scrutinises how one can communicate and modify performances of sex and sexuality with clothes and how one can read clothing as a performance of gender. For this purpose, she takes several examples from history, such as dandys and Macaronies as well as the recent Eurovision Song Contest winner Conchita Wurst.

When it comes to studying performances, one could assume that music performances are widely studied using the method in question. However, as Pirkko Moisala points out in her text about ethnography, bodily practices and culture in live music performances, the field of musicology has only recently adopted the perspective of performance studies, even though the sub-discipline of ethnomusicology has been a pioneer in the field. In her own study, she finds music performances a fruitful lens through which to analyse culture.

One of the interesting concepts she uses is that of 'musicking', which embodies how music is not only a product of action, like composition or song, but also a social process wherein all the participants, from the performer to the audience and even persons making coffee for the audience, are part of the process.

The most exceptional text of the book comes from Marjukka Lampo and Marleena Huuhka, whose article discusses games through the lens of performance study. They construct the text itself as a game: all the sections can be read in any order. You may continue from each section in almost any direction following different paths of the game. Each section explores different concepts of performance study, such as 'game', 'ritual', 'mimesis', 'play', 'role play', 'live role play', and so forth. With this peculiar structure, they construct a performance as such. The approach also brings to my mind the publishing seminar editors organised for this book, where the articles were introduced by other authors of the same book. Additionally, it was an excellent idea for bringing new angles and perspectives to texts, being also a kind of performance in and of itself.

The final part of the book includes two articles translated from reputable professors Peggy Phelan and Della Pollock. Phelan's article, 'The Ontology of Performance', was published already in 1993, while Pollock's article, 'Making History Go', was published in 1998. Both of the articles can be considered as central texts on performance studies.

For the reader, *Esitystutkimus* provides a wide-ranging viewpoint into the theory and methodology of performance studies. Even though a certain level of anxiety could be detected in the publishing seminar towards the lack of renewal in performance theory worldwide, and a fear of Finns only copying Anglo-American perspectives was expressed, the book represents an important starting point for the state of the field in Finland. The book manages to convey the fact that the field is not at all homogenous or predefined – or at least to give its own interpretation of the field, and therefore it has its place in the Finnish multidisciplinary scene of cultural studies. It is the first publication introducing the Finnish contributions to performance studies, and as such, it succeeds

in exhibiting the field in an excellent manner. The ways in which it does so are manifold, and the many different examples provided will certainly help readers understand how to proceed with and analyse their own subjects from the perspective of performance. As Inka Juslin points out in her article on a historical movie, the ethnographic re-

search method is an essential part of performance studies and is not far removed from the classical idea of thick description first introduced by Clifford Geertz.

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