Theatre Survey 53:1 (April 2012)
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doi:10.1017/S0040557411000998

WHAT ARE YOU READING?
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The three books that have recently been traveling between my desk and an airplane seat are placed by their respective publishers into the following categories: "business/marketing," "economics & finance," and "popular culture/American anthropology." Yet each of these recent publications has something to say to and about our field as well; the authors engage with theatre, theatricality, and performance as crucial to their interrogations of the contemporary world.

The first of these books is B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore's 2011 edition of their 1999 book *The Experience Economy*, puffed on the front cover of this iteration by Tom Kelley, general manager of IDEO (a Palo Alto, CA, global design firm), as "one of the best business books of the twentieth century, now renewed for the challenges of the twenty-first." Many of us have already read Pine and Gilmore's best-selling first edition, startled by chapter titles predicated on a theatrical turn: "Setting the Stage," "The Show Must Go On," "Get Your Act Together," and "Work Is Theatre." We gnashed our collective teeth about their appropriation of theatre language to promote the need for corporations to become "experience stagers," an apparently surefire way to "earn a place in the hearts of consumers but also capture their hard-earned dollars—and harder-earned time."[1]

In this updated version the authors chide the more than three hundred thousand people worldwide who bought that earlier edition for not having sufficiently grasped its concept. They insist that "to realize revenue growth and increased employment, the staging of experiences must be pursued as a distinct form of economic output. Indeed, in a world saturated with largely undifferentiated goods and services the greatest opportunity for value creation resides in staging experiences" (ix). Pine and Gilmore make their case for this animated salesmanship with case studies of companies such as American Girl, Apple, and Geek

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040557411000998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Squad, demonstrating, by their account, that the best companies offer their customers not just an experience, but an experience that leads to transformation—something we usually think of in the context of politically engaged theatre practices. And the authors have done some homework in our field: among the sources they cite are Aristotle's *Poetics*, Peter Brook's *The Empty Space*, Michael Chekhov's *On the Technique of Acting*, and Richard Schechner's *Performance Theory.*

What is particularly important for theatre studies in Gilmore and Pine's work is not their co-optation of a theatre-based vocabulary (and, in any case, they now bat aside such criticism, noting it as an "objection" that "truly annoys" them—"Some readers balk at our use of theatre 'as a metaphor' when we could not be clearer: it's not a metaphor but a *model* for human performance in staging experiences," xviii). Rather, we might engage their promotion of business practices as contemporary theatre. In this sense, their book legitimately occupies a place on the spectrum of entertainment we study.

It is entertainment as one of the many strategies of global economics that provokes J. P. Singh's altogether richer and more thought-provoking *Globalized Arts: The Entertainment Economy and Cultural Identity.* A professor in communication, culture, and technology at Georgetown University, Singh explores "how creative expressions from the arts and entertainment industries—now estimated to be over $1.7 trillion in world output—become the vessels of collective cultural identities."[2] His is a compelling argument about "the ways in which an artist's expression or a creative industry's output becomes a purveyor of cultural identity or a way of life for a group" (xxii). Singh's elaborately evidenced discussion tackles the complexities of cultural policies and creative industries in global flows of people and money, looking specifically at "patronage versus market-network systems, to argue that the latter are slowly but surely supplanting the former" (20).

For those of us less expert in the scope of international cultural policies and their implications, one of the strengths of Singh's book is the clarity with which he works through relevant documents originating in agencies such as the European Commission, UNESCO, the OECD, and the International Network on Cultural Policy. He analyzes the effects of such policies on artists as well as the conflicts, potential and actual, among the local, regional, and national identities in which a creative work is created and subsequently circulated worldwide. In other words, Singh is consistently attentive to frameworks of production and reception and the manipulation of both in service of the market—a source, he argues, of growing cultural anxiety. While he rarely draws specific examples from theatre—more typically Singh cites films (from Hollywood and Bollywood especially), music, opera, and museums—his book addresses matters of policy, intellectual property, creativity, and preservation that relate to our own favored art form and suggests ways we might further investigate models of artistic creation and distribution that are determined by these matters. Singh is not altogether pessimistic in his evaluation of creative practice and cultural policy, suggesting that policies can "carefully encourage local production and distribution as well as participation in creative and aesthetic activities" (151).

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In *The Ethics of Sightseeing*, Dean MacCannell, author of the landmark text *The Tourist* (1976, 1999), explores much the same vista as Singh: cultural anxiety, global flows of people, and creative voices. MacCannell's motivation for exploring the ethical implications of sightseeing comes from what he suggests is a widespread belief about tourism, "that it is beneficial to character and social relations: that is, educational, enlightening, horizon expanding, stereotype dispelling, leading to peace and understanding, et cetera."[3] To test this proposition, he focuses on practices of sightseeing in order to pursue a "more intense, creative, and ethical engagement" with this fundamental tourist performance (xi). Thus he returns to the problematic of "staged authenticity" with the bold claim that "Tourism is the beta test version of emerging world culture" (13). MacCannell examines generally ignored ideas of pleasure, and he draws on theorists from Lacan to Goffman to ask, "What do we really enjoy? What *good* are our tourist and other leisure experiences? And are they actual sources of pleasure?" (53). His description of the experience of sightseeing might equally describe acts of theatregoing: anxiety ("that they did not see what they were supposed to see, or only saw what they were supposed to see, that they did not quite 'get it,' or might forget it"), desire, intent, and the fact the experience generally "begins and ends at home" (63).

For MacCannell, ethical tourists are the ones who "benefit from mistakes" they inevitably make: "When tourists commit gaffes they position themselves to learn about the local normative order in fine-grained detail. They are no longer 'innocent bystanders.' They learn something about the ways visitors' deviations are or are not tolerated, and . . . how the tourist is seen by the other" (219). He concludes that "the nature of the tourist experience will be to *witness* difference" (228). This investigation of how an ethical sightseeing might be practiced not only opens up new ways to think through the kinds of entertainment that draw in tourist (or, at least, nonlocal) audiences but also sharpens some of the questions that theatre and performance studies scholars have asked about the critical practices of Western audiences viewing performances from elsewhere in the world.

Notions of staged authenticity and encounters with difference also underlie *The Edward Curtis Project: A Modern Picture Story*, a volume that brings together a play by Marie Clements, a Métis dramatist whose work deserves to be better known outside Canada, and Rita Leistner, a photojournalist.[4] Their collaboration originated in a commission by Presentation House Theatre in Vancouver for Clements to revisit Curtis's 1930 photographic record of the "vanishing Indian" and create new work for the Cultural Olympiad, staged parallel to the city's hosting of the 2010 Winter Olympics. Clements and Leistner spent two years retracing the earlier photographer's footsteps across North American indigenous communities, and the play and the photographs they created are now recorded in this beautifully produced volume.

The play's lead character, Angeline (a contemporary aboriginal journalist who has recently covered the tragic deaths of three small children in an Arctic community), finds herself in conversation with Edward Curtis after her psychiatrist sister gives her a copy of his book, one element in a deftly wrought series of engagements that cross between Curtis's and Angeline's worlds to show the contingent nature of history and a persistent struggle for self-determination.

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A reenactment of Curtis's 1911 performance at Carnegie Hall instructs the audience, "let us close our eyes for an instant, and in a flash of time span the gulf between today's turmoil and the far away enchanted realm of primitive man," suggesting how Curtis sought to record the lives of aboriginal peoples before, he assumed, they would be lost forever—victims of deadly diseases or "just" assimilation (17). But in her artist statement, Clements writes: "there is no Vanishing Indian, never was, but for a convenient thought. We are everywhere and it is beautiful" (n.p.). The play and the photographs powerfully claim space for North America's indigenous population. The book is witness to that presence.

I thought about *The Edward Curtis Project* often while reading the first three books, since Clements and Leistner have realized work that insists on the kind of ethical sightseeing by audiences and readers that MacCannell strains to discover. Indeed, a common ground among Singh, MacCannell, and Clements and Leistner might well be their faith in the power of the local. But it is significant, too, that the commission for *The Edward Curtis Project* came in the context of Vancouver's Winter Olympics, one of those supersized entertainment events designed to boost a city's global brand and an example of the "experience staging" that Gilmore and Pine describe. In other words, while these four books target apparently different readerships, together they suggest a pressing need for us to calibrate better how contemporary creative practices are produced in increasingly complex networks of circulation across global entertainment economies.

ENDNOTES

1. B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy, Updated Edition* (Boston: Harvard Business Press Books, 2011), 18, 19, 38. Subsequent citations are given parenthetically in the text.

2. J. P. Singh, *Globalized Arts: The Entertainment Economy and Cultural Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), xxi. Subsequent citation are given parenthetically in the text.

3. Dean MacCannell, *The Ethics of Sightseeing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), ix. Subsequent citation are given parenthetically in the text (all emphases in the original).

4. Marie Clements and Rita Leistner, *The Edward Curtis Project: A Modern Picture Story* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2010).

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