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Book Review of Theatre and Performance in the Neoliberal University: Responses to an Academy in Crisis

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Theatre and Performance in the Neoliberal University: Responses to an Academy in Crisis.**Edited by Kim Solga. Routledge, 2020. Pp i+240. \$160.00 cloth and \$44.05 eBook.**

The shift away from a model of public knowledge creation toward a consumer model based on perceived capital is not new to those working within the academy. The systems in which we operate are embedded within neoliberal policies asking us to produce deliverables in our research, classrooms, and performances. In *Theatre and Performance in the Neoliberal University*, Kim Solga strategically brings together over twenty-five scholars, professors, and graduate students to discuss and document models of research, performance, and pedagogy operating alongside but not necessarily within this neoliberal paradigm. Framing the collection not as a way to join but as a mode of operating within its rules for functional outcomes, Solga asks, “Can theatre and performance find ways to be *instrumental* to the neo-liberal university, without fully becoming *instrumentalized* by it?” (2, emphasis original). Performance becomes the critical tool that Solga sees as a way for scholars to adapt, not as a subservice to other fields, but as a method for organizing human experience and making knowledge more accessible.

Consistent with the stated goal of not being instrumentalized, Solga separates the collection into two distinct sections. Section one, “Face the Steamroller,” brings together six essays focused on utilizing performance as a data creation tool. Section two, “Trust the Work,” uses twelve case studies documenting how scholars have used performance across disciplines and in the community. The combination of these two sections provides a diverse set of experiences to scholars, artists, and teachers to interact both within and beyond their department in a way that fits their paradigm of performance work.

To help us face the steamroller of data-driven deliverables, Asif Majid provides a detailed discussion of how neoliberalism operates within many western universities in “Power and Privilege in a Neoliberal Perspective: The Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics at Georgetown University.” Majid's experience creating performances with international artists demonstrates the dilemma that limited funding places on scholars that inevitably asks others' work to meet the university's desires as opposed to a partnership. His essay serves as a useful lens for the collection, helping to decenter western views and focus on honest evaluations of our projects, faults included. Richard C. Windeyer's intriguing “Faces Between Numbers: Reimagining Theatre

and Performance as Instruments of Critical Data Studies Within a Liberal Arts Education” examines the usage of PAR techniques in two performances helping to both visualize and humanize data. In “Masihambisane [Let’s Walk]: Walking the City as an Interdisciplinary Pedagogical Experiment in Durban, South Africa,” Miranda Young-Jahangeer and Bridget Horner demonstrate creative and engaging pedagogy by asking their architectural students to walk the streets of the city to repurpose “left-over” spaces into temporary venues for performance. Their work embeds their students deeply into the local community while learning to center cultural needs and desires into their future designs.

In “Trust the Work,” case studies provide a selection of routes scholars and artists have explored to operate within the university environment. Susanne Shawyer provides a useful framework to encourage students to critically question drama, performance, and student reactions in “Emancipated Spectators in the Theatre History Classroom.” Kirsten Sadeghi-Yekta demonstrates the value of performance and storytelling in reclaiming Coast Salish peoples' culture and language in “Hul’q’umi’num’ Language Heroes: A Successful Collaboration Between Elders, Community Organizations, and Canadian West Coast Universities.” Yasmin Kandil and Hannah te Bokkel’s “Celebratory Theatre: A Response to Neoliberalism in the Arts” explores how a failed applied theatre project was revamped successfully after realizing the original project, while useful to students, failed to meet the needs of their immigrant and refugee community. These case studies provide a practical collection of ideas and speak to the diverse ways that performance provides deliverables to a university, perhaps different from our STEM colleagues only in appearance.

This collection, expertly arranged by Kim Solga, will prove useful to anyone working within the academy, including graduate students, adjuncts, guest artists, and tenure-track faculty. With ample case studies, it is easy to find one, if not several, to implement or spark your creativity. While I question the instrumentalization of performance in some individual articles, this collection successfully provides viable performance options with demonstrable outcomes requested by administrators. As a whole, Solga's collection of scholarly essays helps us to “work through the feelings of anxiety, isolation, fiscal stress, and institutional abandonment” placed on us by the neoliberal institution (231). By no means does this collection solve our frustrations, but it does bring together various voices that make our navigation less lonely and more hopeful.