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*Grotowski's Bridge Made of Memory: Embodied Memory,
Witnessing and Transmission in the Grotowski Work* by
Dominika Laster (review)

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but on the whole Juntunen's retelling of the events poignantly illustrates theatre's political potential.

In the third and strongest chapter he scrutinizes the commercial viability of the Broadway production of *Angels in America* through an in-depth materialist analysis of the universalist discourse, found in its ads, program notes, theatre architecture, consumerist-Brechtian aesthetic, and its countless awards. Ultimately, the production used messages similar to Bill Clinton's assimilationist promises during his first presidential campaign about a united national community. Juntunen illustrates how the scope of Clinton's campaign "to save the United States of America" is mirrored in the play's subtitle: "A Gay Fantasia on National Themes." Juntunen's approach to the assimilationist discourse surrounding this play is particularly complex and nuanced: he lays bare the play's underlying misogyny and racism and shows how these structures, together with its assimilation of middle-class, white gay men, likely contributed to its canonization.

In his chapter on *Rent* Juntunen argues that while the musical has a happy ending for the straight, white male protagonist at the expense of the queer "other," the success of the musical's Broadway production in 1996 was a sign that the dominant ideology was changing; in part through previous HIV/AIDS plays, the mainstream had been prepared to assimilate people with HIV/AIDS beyond the middle-class, white gay man. Importantly, the production had repercussions far beyond Broadway. Because of its commercial success, Juntunen argues, *Rent* was "allowed to thrive in even conservative U.S. theatre ecologies" (118). He discusses the musical's political potency in Charlotte, North Carolina, where arguments for the production's commercial value lent a perhaps unexpected helping hand to LGBT civil rights: Conservative politicians attempted to close an engagement of a touring production of *Rent*, but the city's chamber of commerce argued for its importance on the grounds of its popular and commercial success. During the following year most of these conservative politicians were not reelected, which Juntunen argues was a consequence, at least partially, of the debacle around *Rent*.

In the final chapter he shows how the reviews of the original Broadway production of *The Laramie Project* understood the play's protagonist as the town of Laramie, Wyoming. Juntunen reads the town as a synecdoche for the nation in its subsequent rejection of the gay panic defense and normalization of HIV/AIDS. He argues that the production, presented as a docudrama that ideologically and aesthetically appealed to its mainstream audiences, was able to introduce its politics by relying upon a heavily Catholic symbolism and ideology, which emphasized forgiveness over condemnation.

The chapters function as good primers on the plays' original productions. Over the course of the book Juntunen convincingly demonstrates how mainstream theatre can bring about liberal political change through its power as a negotiating force between emergent and dominant ideologies, making ostensibly radical political projects (such as visibility of LGBT people) palatable to heteronormative mainstream audiences. He accepts that the increasing visibility of gay men is an important first step towards recognition—a view that could have been productively challenged and complicated by engaging a range of scholarly work that focuses on how performance engages in dissensual politics (for example, that of José Esteban Muñoz, Tavia Nyong'o, or Jack Halberstam). It is also important to mention that Juntunen's book contains an incredibly hopeful, almost utopian sense of optimism and progress, written before the current US presidency. His arguments about continual progress must overlook that the crisis of HIV/AIDS in both the United States and globally is still ongoing, with disproportionately declining numbers of infection due to poverty, lack of access to care, and lack of information in certain communities and countries.

These issues aside, artists, activists, and academics interested in the theatre's ability to change dominant ideologies may find here an important reminder: that we should not be so quick to dismiss the influence of the mainstream on societal changes and dominant ideologies. Often in our field, there is an urgency to write about, critically examine, or laud the most avant-garde or radical performance artist. Juntunen prompts us to stay with those performances that we intentionally or unintentionally describe as "pandering to the elite." That "powerful elite of this country" (7) makes up the dominant culture, and in his estimation fills the seats of mainstream theatres. Changing their beliefs about who makes up this nation's imagined community has ultimately contributed to how gay men have become increasingly included into the nation's rule of law. Juntunen helps us to understand the importance of continually expanding that imagined community in theatre and performance.

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GROTOWSKI'S BRIDGE MADE OF MEMORY: EMBODIED MEMORY, WITNESSING AND TRANSMISSION IN THE GROTOWSKI WORK. By Dominika Laster. Enactments series. Chicago: Seagull Books, 2016; pp. 212.

Each of the four chapters of Dominika Laster's *Grotowski's Bridge Made of Memory* is dedicated to

examining a key facet of Grotowski's work in assisting the actor in a practice of self-development. The first chapter is concerned with "embodied memory" and its relationship to the notion of *essence*; the second with the theme of "vigilance and witnessing"; the third chapter is concerned with "vertical connection"; and the fourth focuses on the question of "transmission." The discussion of each of these themes offers a way into exploring what Laster considers to be at the heart of Grotowski's work: the "intricate and multifaceted" process of "coming into (one's own being)." The work on oneself, however, takes place "with and through the other" (1) and is not self-centered or narcissistic.

The book does not aim to provide a genealogy of the four key terms: *essence*, *transmission*, *witnessing*, and *verticality*. Instead, Laster critically examines how these concepts and phenomena were developed and refined in the Grotowski work, leading to a more intricate, technical understanding and usage of the terms themselves. Given the intricacy of craft language and practice, Laster elects not to impose an external critical frame from the outset, but attempts to establish exegeses of the key elements of the work before putting these into relationship with other theoretical and disciplinary frameworks.

The heart of *Grotowski's Bridge Made of Memory* is an attempt to unfold both a coherent perspective on the Grotowski work that is grounded in the work itself, as well as reflections on the work provided through formal interviews, conversations, public documents, and even private archival materials and translations of texts not yet available in English. For example, in the second chapter, titled "Czuwaj (Be Vigilant): Vigilance and Witnessing in the Grotowski Work," the concept and practice of *vigilance* is explored, with a particular emphasis on two projects from the late 1970s: *Night Vigil* (1976–77) and *Vigil* (1978–79). Laster notes the paucity of documentary materials relating to these projects, listing only outlines, letters of application (sometimes simply postcards), and testimonies from project participants. The latter reveal that details have faded from memory, even where the participants acknowledged the impact of the projects on them. From the available information Laster constructs a narrative that locates the vigils within Grotowski's attempts to disrupt the actor/spectator relationship, and to create a more active role for those attending the works. In the sessions that comprised *Night Vigil*, audiences were required to actively participate in them, whereas in *Vigil* this was relaxed and attendees were allowed to witness the work through "vigilance." Laster locates *vigilance* within Christian, Jewish, and Islamic ritual traditions, and she employs the term in the sense of "keeping a vigil." It is this process of mindful attention that transforms the

spectator into a witness and transforms the actor/spectator relationship without turning all attendees into doers. This chapter is particularly successful in providing a bridge between the earlier and later phases of Grotowski's work.

Laster opens the book with a preface in which she establishes her relationship to the subject. Her earliest encounters with members of his Laboratory Theatre were through her family, only later becoming aware of Grotowski's work, participating in workshops and other events at the Grotowski Centre in Wrocław. In 1995 Laster, while a student at the University of Kraków, decided to hitchhike across the Alps to join Grotowski in Pontedera. However, the book is not a personal account of her time with Grotowski and others within his circle, nor is it a first-person account of the experience of her training and self-development as both an artist and human being through the work. But eager to avoid the accusation of being too close to the work, she errs on the side of caution and, to my mind, separates herself from her own experience. This means that her account lacks the balance between the first- and third-person positions, such as to be found in Lisa Wolford's *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research* (1996). While this does not undermine the excellent and original scholarly research that is amply evident in Laster's book, it does raise a question about the place of the personal voice in discussing the process of working on oneself, which she acknowledges as an "ethical and political practice" (14).

Throughout *Grotowski's Bridge Made of Memory*, Laster reflects on the ethics and politics of his work. She is particularly concerned about correcting a perception of Grotowski's work as being apolitical, and several pages of her introduction discuss his involvement in politics. While this is useful, Laster does not dig deeply into aspects of Grotowski's work that raise political and ethical questions, such as the politics of race and gender. That said, *Grotowski's Bridge Made of Memory* is well-researched, thoughtful, and engaging; it provides additional insights into the work and is a valuable addition to the literature.

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