

Ariane de Waal. *Theatre on Terror: Subject Positions in British Drama*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017, viii + 297 pp., €99.95 (hardback), €99.95 (PDF ebook).

Clare Finburgh. *Watching War on the Twenty-First Century Stage: Spectacles of Conflict*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017, xv + 355 pp., £75 (hardback), £81 (EPUB/MOBI ebook), £81 (PDF ebook), £28.99 (paperback).

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The representation of recent wars and acts of terror(ism) on stage, as well as the relationship between theatre and the aftermath of 9/11 have been the subject of several publications in the last few years. While it might still be early to speak about the birth of a distinctive field of study, Ariane de Waal's and Claire Finburgh's respective monographs are welcome additions to the growing body of literature on this topic.

Ariane de Waal's *Theatre on Terror: Subject Positions in British Drama*, a revised version of her PhD thesis that received the CDE Award in 2016, combines cultural studies and poststructuralist theories to address the role of drama in the (re)production of subject positions in theatre that engages with the 'war on terror.' By focusing mainly on the analysis of plays that fit Aleks Sierz's definition of "new writing" (Sierz 63), she wishes to fill an existing gap in theatre scholarship by applying Michel Foucault's theorisations on discourse formation. Drawing on poststructuralist vocabulary and discussing the plays through Foucault's concept of subject positions, as well as approaching the 'war on terror' as a "discursive formation in the Foucauldian sense" (2), she contends that theatre events that engage with the 'war on terror' are as likely to challenge hegemonic representations as they are to contribute to their validation. This refreshing view purposefully departs from positions that take for granted the subversive or resistant position of theatre and reject the dichotomy of dominant vs. counter-discourse. As she highlights, "theatrical events have to be situated within – not outside of, or opposed to – the discursive formation of the 'war on terror'" (21). Her rigorously researched volume, and, most importantly, her methodological development of a theory of subject positioning in performance, offers a productive and applicable

theoretical framework that will be valuable to scholars interested in subject positions in drama, as well as to those working on the intersections of theatre and terror.

Chapter two presents a thoroughly researched theoretical framework in which de Waal develops the key elements that will form the basis of her analysis. With reference to Foucault, she draws on Baz Kershaw's idea of 'radical performance' to propose a view of theatre's critical potential that can function within the Foucauldian parameters and carries further the conceptual framework proposed by Jenny Hughes in *Performance in a Time of Terror: Critical Mimesis and the Age of Uncertainty* (2011). In particular, de Waal engages with Hughes's central concept of critical mimesis which asks how theatre can display dominant values without replicating them. De Waal's notion of the subject is based on Foucault, Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe as well as on Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation. Central to de Waal's analysis is what she sees as a productive friction between the two modes of subject constitution proposed by Foucault: subjection (processes of subjugation) and subjectivation (processes of self-formation/ technologies of the self). De Waal herself adds the concept of subject formation/constitution (the general process of becoming a subject). To further develop her theorization of the construction of the subject, de Waal draws on the genesis of the modern subject as proposed by Andreas Reckwitz, in particular the five elements of cultural transformation of the subject in modernity: the inevitable plurality of subject orders, subject forms, hegemonic subject cultures, the cultural logic of hybridity, and intertextual constellations.

The last two parts of the chapter are centred on theorising and performing subject positions. Here de Waal links the poststructuralist approach to the subject with an analysis of theatrical character. She positions herself in line with Cristina Delgado-García in her "critique of the somewhat premature dismissal of the term character" (42) and highlights the productivity of Delgado-García's claim that we should read as characters "any figuration of subjectivity in theatre, regardless of how individuated or, conversely, how unmarked its contours might be" (Delgado-García 14). However, de Waal wishes to focus on developing "a progressive notion of subject position in order to proffer a politically salient discussion of theatrical character that reaches beyond formal and aesthetic concerns" (42). She finishes the chapter with a proposal on where to

locate theatre's resistant potential, namely in productive fissures that "can be produced between contradictory positions that derive from various discourses or within singular positions that cannot be fully sutured" (46). Although her confident navigation of theory can feel a bit overwhelming for readers who are not familiar with poststructuralist philosophy, the analyses of the plays clearly illuminate her thesis.

Chapters three and four focus on the analysis of selected case studies, which she divides, following spatial theory, into "home-front plays" and "front-line plays." Although her structure could be mistaken as reproducing wartime binaries, what emerges instead is a "dialectics of home and front" (14) reinforced by the fact that some plays feature in both categories, such as Mark Ravenhill's cycle *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat* (2008). This division is interrupted by what de Waal has called, following Deleuze, "lines of flight" (14). These are analyses of plays which "are situated in-between, whose setting transcends geopolitical boundaries or conveys a sense of spatial indeterminacy" and which "capture those deterritorialising movements which systematically disrupt the clear demarcation of 'home' and 'front' territories and subjectivities" (14).

Chapter three "Home-Front Plays: Subject Positions in the British Terror City," analyses how British plays which focus on the effects of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars on British society negotiate subjectivity "within and against this 'landscape of urban fear'" (49). By building her argument around the British "terror city" (13), de Waal makes the case for treating the city as a central unit of analysis, against, or in addition to, Agamben's claim that "the camp is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West" (Agamben qtd. in de Waal 48). The chapter asks how different plays deal with the antagonistic opposition of patriot and terrorist subject positions through farcical subversion or the exploration of affective investments. She looks at how British Muslim subjectivities are negotiated, how post-9/11 citizenship is articulated, how female grief is traumatised and what the role of traumatic masculinities is. Some of the plays discussed include Alia Bano's *Shades* (2009), Atiha Sen Gupta's *What Fatima Did...* (2009), Mark Ravenhill's *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat* (2008) or Chris Goode's *Men in Cities* (2014) as well as two "lines of flight" (70): Robin Soan's *Talking to Terrorists* (2005) and David Hare's *Stuff Happens* (2004).

Chapter four, "Front-Line Plays: Positioning 'Self,' 'Other' and Other Selves in Iraq and Afghanistan," is centred on figurations of "racialized masculinities and femininities along the lines dividing 'self' and 'other,' heteronormative and queer, heroic and victimised subjectivities" (13) in plays that take place on the battle front. De Waal productively draws on the work of human geographer Derek Gregory to interrogate the spatial construction of subjectivity as well as the role of British drama with the hegemonic geographies of the 'war on terror.' The questions that underlie the whole chapter are "to what extent [...] the plays contest, reinforce, or rechart the neo-imperial mapping of 'their' spaces as uncivilised, wild chaotic, dangerous, threatening" (161-2) as well as how they "navigate the spatial, semantic, and ideological them/us binary" (162). In particular, de Waal focuses on the construction of the enemy in the context of the 'war on terror,' the figure of the Afghan woman in need of liberation, the trope of the white man saviour, articulations of mourning, and masculine subjectivities. Some of the plays analysed include Roy Williams's *Days of Significance* (2009), DC Moore's *The Empire* (2009), Abi Morgan's *The Night is Darkest Before the Dawn* (2009) or Adam Brace's *Stovepipe* (2009).

De Waal's monograph is inherently queer in its approach to the construction of subjectivity in the context of the 'war on terror.' Considering the role of queer studies in the twenty-first century, Jasbir Puar declared that these are queer times indeed and stated that

[t]he war on terror is an assemblage hooked into an array of enduring modernist paradigms (civilising teleologies, orientalisms, xenophobia, militarization, border anxieties) and postmodernist eruptions (suicide bombers, biometric surveillance strategies, emergent corporealities, counterterrorism gone overboard. (Puar 121)

De Waal's exciting monograph has taken Puar's cue and cleverly applied her approach to the analysis of drama. After her detailed analysis, she concludes that there are very few attempts in the plays analysed to "render precarious subjects intelligible and recognisable" (267). In the texts discussed, the 'war on terror' is approached from a predominantly Western perspective. Therefore, she invites us to adopt "a more sceptical stance towards post-9/11 drama's potential to reposition the 'other'" (267).

Published almost simultaneously, Clare Finburgh's volume *Watching War on the Twenty-First Century Stage* thoroughly interrogates the role of theatre in staging and challenging the spectacle in contemporary warfare. Finburgh builds her argument on the basis of the work of the literary scholar Jan Mieszkowski, who traces the spectacularization of war back to the nineteenth century and connects it to the shift that has taken place in human consciousness since 9/11, the most mass-spectated event in history. Her solid study defends theatre's capacity to take us away from the position of passive consumers, as she unapologetically states:

Theatre, I argue, can offer this opportunity perhaps better than any other medium, by creating possibilities for a more informed, reasoned engagement with the hegemony of meaning-making, since theatre can overtly expose fabrication by creating images and stories in a space and time shared with spectators. (8)

This premise permeates a book that is grounded solidly in a strong critique of capitalism's commodification of human interaction, especially "the ways that wars are fought via images" (7-8).

Chapter one, "An Introduction to War and/as Spectacle," sets the tone of the volume and defines the core concepts that dominate the study: conflict and spectacle. Finburgh draws on continental philosophy for this aim, especially Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard as well as Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. In this sense, her work can be linked to Sara Soncini's *Forms of Conflict: Contemporary Wars on the British Stage* (2015), although Finburgh carries her study further by specifically engaging with the spectacularization of war. She uses the term conflict to refer to "the many manifestations of aggression that have beset the twenty-first century, from violent attacks on civilians by insurgent groups, to military invasion and occupation" (18) and affirms, via Nicholas Mirzoeff, that "the two most urgent issues to emerge over the past decade are the globalization of war and the globalization of images" (18). Her take on spectacle emerges from a productive critique of Debord and problematizes the ostensible binary between spectacle and reality. Ultimately, the dialogue she establishes between Debord's theories on spectacle and the work of Marie-José Mondzain on

“iconophilia” is probably the most suggestive element of the chapter, as it clearly illuminates how images become a weapon of mass persuasion and paves the way for the analysis of the plays in the subsequent chapters.

Finburgh cleverly organises her analysis around the charged images of the helmet, the headscarf and the hood to discuss plays that engage with representations of the army, terrorism and human rights abuse respectively. Chapter two, “Helmets – Soldiering as Spectacle,” focuses on the role of the army in the mobilisation of spectacle, and looks at how plays such as Howard Barker’s *The Dying of Today* (2008), Hayley Squires’s *Vera Vera Vera* (2012) or George Brant’s *Grounded* (2013) replicate or else challenge spectacularisation as a means of patriotic propaganda. The analysis includes a brief – perhaps unnecessary – flashback to Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* (1995) in a wish to exemplify how the media commodifies war into a spectacle to be consumed. The chapter concludes with a critique on the plays’ lack of ability to show the constructedness of spectacle through their aesthetics.

Chapter three, “Headscarves – Terrorism as Spectacle,” highlights the contradictions inherent in the attempt to distinguish between war and terrorism and draws on Mondzain, Susan L. Carruthers, Terry Eagleton, Henri Giroux and Samuel Weber to argue that

if ‘terrorist attacks’ tend to be defined – rather rudimentarily – as strikes on civilians, then the examples of present-day urban warfare, or indeed of drone warfare, testify to the fact that mass terror and random casualties are inevitabilities of both ‘terrorism’ and of internationally sanctioned war. (9)

Finburgh successfully outlines different attempts to define ‘terrorism’ and ‘war’ to conclude that the difference has to do with perspective and looks at how this is explored in Mark Ravenhill’s *Product* (2005), Simon Stephen’s *Pornography* (2008) and Lone Twin’s devised piece *Alice Bell* (2006). She resolves that the specific mediality of theatre can “enable a dynamic which, rather than replicat[e] the violence of an act of terror, might promote, however ephemerally and temporarily, a sense of commonality, mutuality and affinity” (132).

Chapter four, “Hoods – Human Rights Abuses Omitted from Spectacle,” considers the different international human rights conventions drawn up since the aftermath of the Second World War to highlight how these have been violated since

9/11. The chapter is centred around the ethical debate on the representation of victims of torture on stage, and by drawing on Christian Biet, Judith Butler, Paul Rae, Elaine Scarry, Marina Warner and Slavoj Žižek, questions how to avoid replicating a relationship in which the torturer is superior and the tortured is humiliated. The final question the chapter leaves us with is whether these plays, among which Richard Norton-Taylor's *Tactical Questioning: The Baha Mousa Enquiry* (2011) and Dennis Kelly's *Osama the Hero* (2005), can, in any way, contribute towards the restitution of dignity for victims.

The concluding chapter ties the argument together by looking at the recent production of Lola Arias' *MINEFIELD*, which opened at the Royal Court in 2016 and which contains most of the themes discussed in the book. Concluding with this analysis is not only refreshing, but also serves to show how Finburgh's work on spectacle and conflict is part of a wider interest that seeks to find an answer to the pressing question of the role of theatre in our contemporary, extremely mediatised, conflict-ridden society. Ultimately, Finburgh invites us to watch with resistance in order to demilitarize images, ideally as a first step towards real demilitarization.

De Waal and Finburgh's monographs differ substantially in their approach to the role of theatre in the construction of the discourse of terror. Finburgh's optimistic approach posits theatre as a site of resistance against the spectacularisation of conflict, following the path of previous publications such as the aforementioned text by Soncini, or Jeanne Colleran's *Theatre and War: Theatrical Responses since 1991* (2012). De Waal, instead, interrupts this dynamic by highlighting that theatrical events cannot be separated from this discursive formation or automatically pitted against the media. This difference notwithstanding, both texts offer complementary views, especially in relation to spectatorship, and are both set to become fundamental reading for scholars interested in this field of study.

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