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Reviews

The Routledge International Handbook of Spirituality in Society and the Professions. Edited by Laszlo Zsolnai and Bernadette Flanagan. London and New York: Routledge, 2019, xxiii + 457 pp. \$250.00 hardback. ISBN: 978-1-138-21467-5. \$52.95 paperback. ISBN: 978-1-138-21467-5. \$47.65 ebook. ISBN: 978-1-315-44548-9.

Were the *Routledge International Handbook of Spirituality in Society and the Professions* written and published in 2020 and not 2019, I have little doubt the editors would have added a forward addressing the current global pandemic and its transformative effect on all aspects of our lives. The tragic death toll, economic devastation, shelter in place orders, and the move toward remote learning, working, and socializing have forced a radical reassessment of what it means to be truly connected human beings. The definition of spirituality offered by the editors as “a multiform search for a transcendent meaning of life that connects them to all living beings and brings them in touch with God or ‘Ultimate Reality’” (i) is particularly resonant as I read this work in the fall of 2020, searching for a satisfying and ennobling way to engage fully (though remotely) with many of my students, colleagues, friends, and family. At a time when so many of us remain separated from each other, our work, and places of worship, and issues of income, environmental, and social inequality have been made ever more apparent, millions of people worldwide are searching for ways to access and enact spiritual practices in their lives in order to envision and create a more empathetic and just future.

But even without COVID-19, the argument of this ambitious, interdisciplinary collection of essays convinces the reader of its importance. Introspective spiritual engagement and a spiritually based practice across professions is both necessary and vital to addressing our current national and global challenges. As the editors write, “professions [. . .] are beginning to articulate within their own ranks the need to

embrace spirituality and develop practices based on a less materialistic, more holistic worldview” (3). This work, they concede, may take time, and will require new methodologies “to capture the phenomenon of spirituality, as it manifests itself on new frontiers so as to refine and test emerging insights” (447). Thus, this collection of fifty-one essays is a valuable, important contribution to this interdisciplinary field of study.

The work is organized into eight parts, beginning with a brief introduction, followed by seven sections on different subjects discussed in relation to spirituality. These are: Facets of spirituality; Nature; Home and community; Healing; Economy, politics and law; and Knowledge and education. Specific essays follow under each section’s broader theme. For example, under “Spirituality and Healing” there are essays on spirituality and medicine, nursing, mental health, dementia, and addiction. “Home and Community” includes essays on spirituality and birth, gender, aging, sport, disability, and homelessness, among others. Each essay begins with an introduction to the subject and an explication of the current field of research before examining how spiritually engaged praxis is being incorporated into said field, transforming the ways communities govern, teach, police, care, create culture, and plan. In addition, writers suggest new ways spirituality might be employed in the professions and asks how a spiritually informed approach might generate new findings or performance practices. At times the breadth and scope of the work is inspiring as well as intimidating, and while one can read sections out of order, one is repeatedly struck by the contrapuntal discourse generated between and among the different essays. As Sandhya Chandramohan and Raisuyah Bhagwan note in “Spirituality and Nursing,” contemporary nursing has only recently “acknowledged the salience of spirituality and spiritual care. There is a broadening of the traditional focus of nursing from the physical to include spirituality in a more holistic approach to care” (206). Rachel J. Cullinan and Christopher C.H. Cook’s essay on “Spirituality in Mental Health” notes the same paradigm shift that Chandramohan and Bhagwan do and asks how the study of spirituality might allow for a reconsideration of the patient (213). Similarly, Peter Kevern asks in “Spirituality and Dementia” if dementia is “capable of stripping away everything that makes us human – our personality, our rationality and our relationships as well as our memories” then should we consider people with dementia as spiritual beings? (223) These questions about identity and individual agency intersect nicely with Elizabeth Allison’s essay “Spirituality and Ecology,” which argues that collective environmental activism grounded in spiritual values “shows the power of spiritual ecology to contribute to changes in values and behavior” to sustain life on this planet (64). The study of human behavior and performance is also examined by Edmund Ligan in his essay, “Spirituality and Theatre.” Ligan traces the history of spirituality in European and American theatre, from the symbolist movement and occult revival of the 19th century, and examines contemporary theatre practices designed to represent as well as “induce spiritual experiences within participants” (388). The last section is titled, “Way Forward” and looks to identify ways spirituality might be incorporated more fully into different professions, and how that might inspire personal, practical, and institutional change.

Time does not permit me to discuss every essay, but the *Handbook* is an impressive collection of essays grounded in historical research, conversant with current scholarship, and innovative in arguing for meaningful change. Given the scope

of the work, I would recommend, after reading the introduction, that readers begin with part two (“Facets of Spirituality”) before reading sections of their choice. This section provides essays on the history of the development of spirituality as a discipline separate from religion, as well as essays that consider spirituality’s intersection and integral relationship with philosophy and theology (among other subjects). For those scholars not grounded in the history of religion and/or religion as a discipline, this approach is most beneficial.

The editors close their collection with the observation that spirituality “is understood as a personal and collective experience and value orientation, prioritizing happiness, compassion, self-realization, and inter-connectedness over materialism and ego” (452). The essays, written by international scholars and practitioners across a variety of fields, offer an insightful discourse on the pedagogical study of spirituality across multiple disciplines, identifying the present work being done to assert a spiritual recognition to professions, and theorizing future directions this work might take. The *Handbook* will be an asset to undergraduate and graduate students in the arts, sciences, and humanities, as well as to scholars and practitioners.

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The Challenge of World Theatre History by Steve Tillis. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 337 pp. \$119.99 hardcover. ISBN: 978-3-030-48342-5. \$89.00 ebook. ISBN: 978-3-030-48343-2.

In *The Challenge of World Theatre History*, Steve Tillis addresses the fallacies undergirding the Eurocentric approach that presently dominates theatre historiography and theatre history pedagogy in Europe and the United States. Encouraging theatre historians to rethink what he terms the “Standard Western Approach,” Tillis calls on scholars to radically reimagine the ways in which we organize and communicate knowledge about world theatre history. Tillis advocates for an understanding of theatre history capable of both expanding and contracting according to the needs of new geographic and temporal frameworks. In eight chapters, Tillis offers flexible possibilities rather than absolute solutions; his book provides a timely and illuminating overture for a sorely needed intervention.

Tillis’s critique of the status quo in theatre history and historiography proceeds from a frank analysis of the leading university-level theatre history textbooks and many of the courses that require them. While he acknowledges that such texts and courses have in the past two decades shown an increased interest in the history of theatre beyond Eurocentric traditions, Tillis finds that a significant majority still engage the Standard Western Approach. In this model, even those texts and courses that include forms and traditions from outside of Europe do so only in the most perfunctory and disconnected of ways, rarely disrupting the progressivist trajectory that leads from ancient Greece to contemporary Europe and the United States.

Tillis’s work in *The Challenge of World Theatre History* is twofold. First, he identifies and analyzes what he considers fallacies within this primarily Eurocentric approach; second, he highlights methodologies common in the fields of world history, sociology, and geography that theatre historians and pedagogues might use to

reorganize theatre history narratives in ways that give more equitable consideration to the rich theatre history of the world's various regions.

As Tillis tells it, understandings of geography and time lie at the center of both the challenges inherent in and the potential solutions to the problem of reconceiving the study of world theatre history. His third chapter deals primarily with what he calls the fallacies of the Standard Western Approach. Here, he argues that the ethnocentric privileging of Europe in theatre history grows from a reliance on the outdated concept of the East-West dichotomy. This, coupled with a progressivist and presentist narrative that insists on depicting theatre history as a linear evolution, has tended to center what Tillis calls European spoken theatre, relegating to the margins most theatrical forms and events that do not support an imagined trajectory from Greek ritual to the types of spoken dramatic performances that dominate in Europe and the US today. Thus, when theatrical traditions from outside of Europe are included in accounts of world theatre history, they often appear as addenda that seem to detour from what is presented as the telling's central (European) narrative spine. Additionally, such explorations tend towards brevity and lack the depth of diversity typically afforded to those forms and traditions seen as directly contributing to the development of European spoken drama.

In Chapters 5 through 8, Tillis explores the ways in which theatre historians might reimagine the geographic and temporal structuring practices that guide the organization of theatre history. Calling into question the common practice of studying theatrical tradition by continent and/or nation, he suggests in Chapter 5 the theatrical form as the basic unit of study and notes that forms can provide a new conception not only of world regions, but of what he calls "theatre regions." His geographic divisions, then, are based not solely on political activity, but on theatrical activity; a region is defined under his model by a sameness or similarity of theatrical practice. He offers seventeen such regions in a move that notably and productively separates the previously monolithically treated Asia to allow for deeper consideration of its many varied cultures. Tillis also shrewdly identifies "neo-European regions" (including North America, South and Central America, Northern Asia, and Australasia) to acknowledge the impact of colonization, along with "border regions," which he describes as areas that have experienced significant intermixing of theatrical forms.

By his own admission, Tillis constructs his theatre regions based primarily on theatrical forms beginning in the nineteenth century, a move that might have been easier to accept had he reordered his chapters so that his discussion of time and what he calls "the long view" of theatre history came first. It is not until Chapter 6 that Tillis begins to advocate for a different understanding of time scales in theatre history. Relying heavily on the work of both theatre history scholar Thomas Postlewait and French historian Fernand Braudel, he argues against the value of strict chronologies of fact and in favor of practices that search for patterns across longer swaths of history. While not eschewing the importance of individual persons and actions, Tillis suggests that such a "long view" of theatre history can reveal structures and patterns that might better explain why and how certain theatrical forms move in and out of practice precisely when and where they do so, thus allowing historians and students alike a more contextual understanding of theatrical developments within and across regions and periods.

By the time he reaches Chapter 8, Tillis's decision to frame his geographic regions beginning only in the 19th century in Chapter 5 begins to make sense. The long view he promotes in Chapter 6 encourages a revised understanding of periodicity in world theatre history in Chapter 8. Having proposed the theatrical form as the basic unit of study, Tillis argues that world theatre history periods can be defined primarily by the segments of time in which theatrical forms have tended to change not just in one geographical or theatrical region, but across them. Citing, in part, the paucity of earlier recorded data, Tillis sees the first major "rising tide" of theatrical change coming over Eurasia beginning in about 900 CE, followed by a "Eurasian wave of change" starting in 1500 CE. He proposes another major wave of change beginning in about 1850 CE. In doing so, he calls into question the standard and somewhat arbitrary practice of bisecting theatre history at around the beginning of the eighteenth century. Though he does not directly say so, Tillis essentially encourages a tripartite organization of theatre history that potentially clears up the confusion he notes with standard and incohesive units of theatre history that might at one moment be founded on nations, at another on religions, at yet a third on political regimes, and so on.

Tillis presents many of these organizing principles as possibilities rather than as definitive solutions. Indeed, he goes to great lengths to emphasize scalability when he discusses both world theatre regions and the temporal long view, suggesting that these approaches can be broadened or narrowed as needed. It is perhaps unfortunate that Tillis does not explore approaches to theatre history among non-Eurocentric cultures; such exploration might provide additional insights. One might also note that his advocacy for exploring moments of cultural contact and interaction as inflection points can at times overemphasize the theatrical hegemony that often results from European colonization. Still, *The Challenge of World Theatre History* is more a call to action than an exact prescriptive remedy. What Tillis offers is a viable springboard for European and neo-European theatre historians wishing to reconsider the ways in which they approach and organize theatre history. It is up to the reader to make the jump.

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Over the Threshold, Into the World: Experiences of Transcendence in the Context of Staged Events by Kim Skjoldager-Nielsen. Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2018. 395 pp. Free ebook. ISBN: 978-9-186-43455-7.

Kim Skjoldager-Nielsen's book *Over the Threshold, Into the World: Experiences of Transcendence in the Context of Staged Events* is an impressive theoretical and analytical exploration of transcendence: an experience so subjective and ineffable that one could be forgiven for doubting any scholar bold enough to tackle this a target for performance analysis. Skjoldager-Nielsen ably demonstrates that not only is such a project possible, but also that, in engaging something as personally subjective as the experience of transcendence, the radical subjectivity of all performance is similarly highlighted and made more accessible as a site of analysis. Skjoldager-Nielsen's contribution is the kind of piece that might raise skeptical eyebrows when you first encounter it, yet it feels almost essential in its importance by the end.

Much of Skjoldager-Nielsen's theoretical apparatus emerges from a modification of Erika Fischer-Lichte's theory of performance analysis, which he sees as somewhat restricted by Fischer-Lichte's more "rationalistic and materialistic point of view." In Skjoldager-Nielsen's analysis, this leads to a view of the performance event as something "whose exact impact on the audience is unpredictable." Skjoldager-Nielsen builds upon Fischer-Lichte's performance analysis primarily by weaving in ideas from theologian Dorthe Jørgensen's "metaphysics of experience" to open an avenue for the analysis of moments of individual spectatorship in which the transcendent "appears as a trace in the immanence to the one who is receptive and believes."

Skjoldager-Nielsen's introduction does a fine job of articulating the need for the work to come and provides an enticing preview of his process through his description and analysis of Olafur Eliasson's art installation *Your Blind Passenger*. Throughout the book, the experience of the transcendence takes many different forms, often in a single event. In this case, Skjoldager-Nielsen describes imaginative encounters with the atmosphere of Titan, as well as brushes with feelings of mortality and resurrection arising from the physical sensations of the event's use of thick fog and colorful lighting. Thus, a single event can allow for experiences of transcendence that might vary from the quotidian to the profound. The more materialist approach to performance analysis, which Skjoldager-Nielsen is proposing an alternative to, often focuses on the performance as an independent object, with the spectator carefully sidestepped as an unpredictable and unknowable problem. Skjoldager-Nielsen's blending of Fischer-Lichte and Jørgensen's ideas opens a valuable avenue for productively exploring the idiosyncrasies of spectatorship.

The book's epic first chapter, which runs more than 150 pages, reads a bit like an academic exercise. Skjoldager-Nielsen carefully works through a review of the relevant literature from several different fields and meticulously plucks out the threads that he later weaves together into his own theoretical model. The sections where Skjoldager-Nielsen carves out a space for the analysis of transcendence within Erika Fischer-Lichte's theory of performance analysis, and the ways that he uses Dorthe Jørgensen's "metaphysics of experience" in order to grasp transcendence a bit more securely (from an analytical perspective anyway), are impressive highlights of this chapter. His explorations of the multi-dimensional views of religion and spirituality are similarly impressive, and they are also key to a full understanding of the value of his larger project. Simplistic notions of the role of religion and spirituality in modern society do a disservice both to the heterogeneity of our audiences, as well as to the works that are being studied as well. Skjoldager-Nielsen ably demonstrates how a multidimensional approach to these notions can help us to better understand how spectatorship actually happens outside the limited confines of the ideal spectator.

Equally impressive is simply the scope of the ideas explored in this first chapter. Skjoldager-Nielsen's catlike ability to move gracefully through an interdisciplinary landscape that includes not only performance studies, but also theology, philosophy, sociology, and cognitive studies is noteworthy. This chapter provides a worthy roadmap to others looking to follow Skjoldager-Nielsen's analytical path.

Chapters 2-4 revolve around analytical explorations of the cultural events themselves. The book's six primary examples cover a great deal of cultural territory, from contemporary liturgical dramas in Sweden to Māori rituals in New Zealand, and these chapters give Skjoldager-Nielsen the opportunity to explore how his model

functions in contexts where his personal relationship with the events can range from the familiar to the exotic, and from the decidedly secular to the overtly religious. Each of these have different implications in terms of the opportunities for transcendence, and Skjoldager-Nielsen's discussion of each is consistently fascinating. Skjoldager-Nielsen's first-person descriptions of these events are the most engaging parts of the book and read like a high-quality travelogue. These chapters stand as models of high-quality performance analysis, worthy of emulation by others.

Skjoldager-Nielsen's fifth and final chapter is one of the strongest, although in many respects it is simply a shorter, tighter draft of Chapter 1. (Perhaps there is a 30-40 page version of this final chapter that could simply replace the current Chapter 1?) Here Skjoldager-Nielsen presents an elegant graphic model of his analytical model that would make any sociologist proud. This graphic model does a marvelous job of articulating the interrelated components of Skjoldager-Nielsen's theoretical apparatus, and it demonstrates how transcendent experiences emerge from individual encounters with these events.

Over the Threshold, Into the World is a deeply impressive book, and one that has the potential to change how one thinks about spectatorship in significant ways, particularly, though not exclusively, for those events where spirituality and/or religion play significant roles.

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