

**Rebecca M. Brown.** *Displaying Time: The Many Temporalities of the Festival of India.* Global South Asia Series. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017. Illustrations. xvi + 211 pp. \$30.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-295-74198-7.

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During the last decade, festivals have become a considerable public attraction even if their abilities to stimulate, stage, and evolve cultural practice and experience have not changed. The usual rubrics about festivals are condensed into such statements as festivals are “cultural performances,” “a time out,” or “complex phenomena.” While these rubrics could be valid, current research on festivals seeks theoretical and methodological tools for the study of their nature and, above all, urges substantial contributions in their hermeneutics. Rebecca M. Brown’s *Displaying Time: The Many Temporalities of the Festival of India* launches a productive way of understanding and interpreting festivals and contributes to South East Asian studies, especially Indian art in North America in the twentieth century.

Brown begins her book with a short foreword, in which she describes her writing process, referring to her past status as an adjunct academic who had to snatch moments between research and semesters to write and acknowledging the growing number of colleagues who operate in this temporality. She mentions a number of situations along with individuals who helped her to the realization of this book. This section is usually passed by when discussing a book, but it is a candid per-

sonal deposit and a treasure of the efforts and struggles for a manuscript to get completed.

Brown then introduces her first chapter by presenting an astonishing concept: the use of the tent at the exhibitions. She uses the shelter of fabric as a metaphor for her research on the Festival of India and her exploration of its structures and experiences during its realization. Her ability to capture such a metaphor and use it throughout the book is part of her unique skill to visualize culture and further pass onto the reader the chance to temporarily acquire this skill too. Through this visualization, readers can relocate themselves back to the 1980s and take part in one of the exhibitions during the festival or follow their preparations. The Festival of India that she discusses took place in the United States from June 1985 to the end of 1986, framed by Cold War politics, neoliberal economics, and postmodern culture, during the diplomatic exchanges that were developed between the governments of Ronald Reagan and Indira Gandhi. It hosted multiple events across the states—the state of New York alone hosted fifty-four events—and particularly seventy-seven art exhibitions.

After presenting the context, next Brown places an artificial unnumbered chapter titled “Interruption.” Following the tent metaphor, through

the construction of this “interruption” she elaborates on her second major concept, “temporality” as an apparatus to understand the festival. The appearance of this section, of this interruption, signals the Derridean understanding of presence that Brown incorporates in her study. It is also placed there as if it was an invitation for practice. It prompts us to understand, focus, and refocus our temporal lenses on the minutes, the small durations, the moments, and consequently the photographs, the installations, the exhibitions, or the performances and their complexities while mixed in a festival. These moments comprise the exhibitionary fabric of the tent. Therefore, the tent and temporality shape the two core ideas that run through the whole book. The author’s insights, which embroider the conceptual fabric of the aforementioned tent, can be traced in the Derridean way of thinking, Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* (1980), Michel Foucault’s understanding of power and history, Paul Virilio and Marc Auge’s rethinking of postmodernity and time, Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, Jacques Ranciere’s understanding of the interruptive potential of the sensory experience, Johannes Fabian’s theorization of co-evalness, and Timothy Mitchell’s understanding of the exhibitionary Other and the spectacle. The reader is clearly introduced to Brown’s theoretical and methodological tools and considerations in the first parts of the book and is able to follow her quite reflexive work afterward.

In her second chapter, Brown sheds light on the few exhibitions—in Brooklyn, San Diego, and Washington, DC—devoted to clay during the Festival of India. This material highlights the processes of transformation, from shaping to displaying, that can take place in an exhibition. It also carries strong connotations of time: the time needed to make an object; the duration of waiting for the making; the uncertainty of the process; the time of demonstration, recording, and performance; the time for materials to decay; and the gallery presentation time. Brown writes, “the small moments I am working with here might better be

thought of as intimate and malleable durations that shape relations among things in the world” (p. 29). During the exhibition, visitors watch clay become terracotta or observe photographs of it, and they not only follow a historical narrative but also bring along their own current historical, political, and cultural milieus. These various faces and phases of the same material in different exhibitions form the dynamic interrelations of multiple, repeated, and overlapping presences. While analyzing the contexts of these three exhibitions, Brown scrutinizes different textures and uses of time during them, transforming materials to either a historical narrative or a narrative of living arts. We follow the objectification of clay along with its participation to a staged live encounter with the environment, just as what happened with the artist Nek Chand and his presence at the Fantasy Garden exhibition in Washington, DC, a stirring case study that Brown illuminates.

Then another “interruption” arrives. “Time, Interrupted: People in the Gallery” is the third chapter, which also supports the articulation of the attempt to read the Festival of India through temporality, through perception of time and the journey of the craft material to performance and demonstration. Subsequently, while the writer explores clay exhibitions focusing on the *Aditi* and *Mela!* ones, she moves away from discussing galleries as space-centered and approaches them as people-centered. This transition brings to the forefront the discussion of exhibitions and festivals as total phenomena that accumulate multiple temporalities. So where does the Festival of India stand in cultural performance genealogies? Brown follows a shift from the nineteenth-century human-on-display exhibitions, finds traces of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ objectifications and zoomorphizations, locates doses of spectacle—since it was the touchstone of Reagan’s America—and ends up intensifying a quest for determining the characteristics of a festival. In this pursuit and while trying to reflect the temporalities’ concept, Brown processes festival as an inter-

ruption of a community's rhythm. This argument is widespread but sometimes factitious—depending on the case study—since festivals quite often reflect the community in which they are realized. It is too difficult and risky to nuance—without ethnographic work during the realization of a festival and based on the ephemerality of papers and archives—its impact for past audiences and take also into consideration totally dissimilar festivals, like Mardi Gras or Holi, as indicative to what happens during a festival. It is what the writer already notes in the beginning of the book: “All the exhibitions are ghostly and difficult to grasp through the photographs, reconstructions, archival records, and remembrances of curators and artists” (p. 18). One might argue that festivals persist today because they are themselves an appealing performance: of tradition, art, community, innovation, people, space, and time.

Since the discussion moves to festival as a total phenomenon, politics of participation and organization come to the foreground in chapter 4, “Enterpreneurial Exhibits.” While describing the articulation of the Golden Eye exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt in New York, Brown presents it as something different from nineteenth-century Orientalism and 1980s postmodernism. European and American designers gathered to work with selected craftspeople in India on new design projects and a few craftspeople came to New York to demonstrate their techniques and cooperate with the designers. They all contributed in creating the fantasy world of the Golden Eye. The addition of design as a form of art at that time marks the strong influence of curators as mediators of the work exhibited. The author emphasizes the interruption of the celebration of the past as a developing stage of the nature of exhibitions with the study of another triplet of exhibitions, adducing the overlap of the terms “contemporary,” “post-modern,” and “postcolonial.” By constantly questioning the ways materials and people are used and presented, the book shows what the organizers and participants perceived as “Indian cul-

ture” under different circumstances and why curators eventually made those specific choices.

The book closes with the tent, the big tent of the festival, which includes a large set of overlapping tents. Brown describes the tent that Frei Otto made, a tent that operated like an umbrella, for which he also designed furniture and objects to be placed under it. A metaphor again! The tent appears as a visual and spatial anchor with different conceptual faces: as a dialogue or as craft, related to the past and vernacular cultures and reworking old sources. All these temporalities sheltered under the tent remind me of Erving Goffman's frames I used to interpret a festival in northeastern Greece.[1] All the small-scale temporalities producing the multifaceted exhibition are like the many “photographs” Goffman takes, the many frames he uses to grasp a scene, but here they are defined through time. Brown reads the durations of these temporalities and deconstructs demonstration, exhibition, festival, and the making of them in order to follow the modernist art onto gallery walls.

#### Note

[1]. Sirakouli Vasiliki, “Music at Xanthi's Carnival” (PhD diss., National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, 2011).

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