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Book Review of Emergency INDEX 2011

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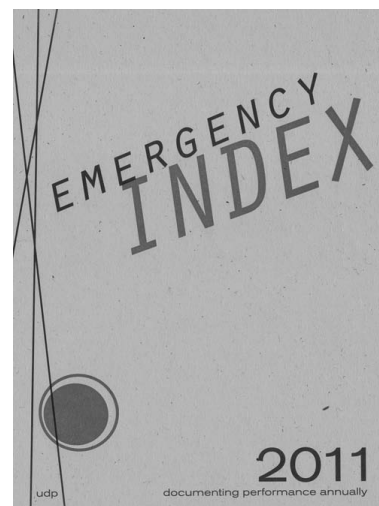
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Emergency INDEX 2011. Edited by Yelena Gluzman and Matvei Yankelevich. New York: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012; 560 pp.; illustrations. \$40.00 paper (\$35.00 direct from publisher).

Emergency INDEX is a book of wonders, a kind of bestiary. Open it to any page and you will find something worth thinking about: a performance that “brings the internal sounds of the human body to our ears” (171); a cultic dance/theater experiment choreographed around an enormous plastic “sac” (90); a “performative” lecture on UFOs, ley lines, and visionary architecture (312); a display of public/private breakdown in a Brooklyn IKEA (338); a restaging, with child performers, of Peter Handke’s 1966 play *Offending the Audience* (112); a Twitter-fed simultaneous “group walk” through multiple cities (16); and much, much more. The venues are equally wide-ranging, from Jay Scheib at the Kitchen in New York City (22) and XXXY / Yehuda Duenyas at Rensselaer’s Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (168) to Annette Arlander’s stark environmental work on Harakka Island, Finland (64) and Felipe Faúndez Fúntes’s milk action staged “alone outside of a gallery in the streets of Belfast” (407). One performance took place at the banyan tree gates outside the Sultan’s Palace in Yogyakarta, Indonesia (431).

The *INDEX* is a new annual periodical from Ugly Duckling Presse. Dedicated to “documenting performance annually,” the 2011 *INDEX* collects photographic and textual evidence for 249 performances that took place during that year. Each performance receives a two-page spread, with image and vital stats (title, date, location, creator, and contact information) on the left and a written account on the right. The *INDEX* is a hefty, solid-feeling book, printed on matte paper and pleasing to hold. Entries are arranged in chronological order, from David Ford’s *Maximon* (first performed in 1999 and only most recently in 2011) to Bridge of Fire Dance Troupe and Eliza Swann’s *The Struggle of the Magicians*, which took place on 31 December 2011. Apart from a brief introductory essay from editors Gluzman and Yankelevich, there is little in the way of commentary or framing.

I am a “contributing editor” to *Emergency INDEX*, but my relationship to its panoply of performances is no different than that of any other reader. This is because, inspired by the “Artist’s Chronicle” section of the magazine *High Performance* (edited from 1978 to 1997 by Linda Frye Burnham and Steven Durland), the editors of *Emergency INDEX* have taken a “non-curatorial approach” to documenting performance. Neither they nor any of the contributing editors exercised any curatorial power over the inclusion of performances in the *INDEX*. All photographic and textual documentation was provided directly by the creator(s) of each performance, so that “famous works appear alongside one-offs, celebrated artists next to unknowns.” The goal of the *INDEX* is not to capture the best or most important works of 2011 but to offer a “snapshot” panoramic view of performance, a “democratic hodgepodge” that showcases the variety of what constitutes performance today. Performance, the editors suggest, can only be defined through its extraordinary breadth. This volume includes: “dance, therapy, poetry, protest, rehabilitation, scholarly research, theater, conceptual art, advertising, and many other fields utilizing performance” (vii).



Beyond its kaleidoscopic survey of contemporary performance, the most interesting part of the *INDEX* is its index. Painstakingly compiled by Gluzman, Yankelevich, and the Ugly Duckling Presse team, it allows the reader to gain a sense of which terms artists are currently using to describe and contextualize their own work. From *abjection* to *Zuccotti Park*, these run the gamut of today's political and intellectual language. Among the most popular: *animal*, *art*, *body*, *culture*, *experience*, *language*, *participation*, *text*. A few unique but intriguing entries: *Cuban Missile Crisis*, *Gurdjieff*, *Bruno Latour*, *Mad Libs*, *Tiresias*. The index makes the *INDEX* invaluable as a resource for analyzing trends. Any scholar can look up their current pet concept and see if and where it appears. (In this context, absence can be just as interesting as presence: I note plenty of entries for *technology* but none for *technique*.) Other kinds of statistical data could be extracted from the volume as well, such as: How many of these performances were done only once? How many were performed "365 times in 2011"—that is, every day? This kind of bulk analysis will become exponentially more significant if, as hoped, *Emergency INDEX* continues as an annual publication, documenting shifts in the field of performance over time. Which new words will appear and which will disappear, from year to year? Will *Zuccotti Park* still be in the index for 2012?

Also included are an index to contributors and an index to places. The former allows one to look up specific artists, since the volume itself is organized chronologically rather than alphabetically. The latter is crucial insofar as it reveals both the achievements and the limitations of the project's geographic scope. It is great to see Mumbai, Dubai, and Santiago listed here. Nevertheless, the overwhelming predominance of projects in the United States, and New York in particular, underscores the undeniable fact that the *INDEX* indexes not the whole field of performance but just the portion that the editors were able to reach with their call for submissions. As always, online submission processes face insurmountable limitations of access and privilege even as they strive to realize democracy through technological means. In this context, claims to document "the field of performance" must be tempered by a critical awareness of global inequalities. There are no entries for Africa.

Quite apart from such analytical uses, *Emergency INDEX* is also a fine sourcebook for performative ideas. Open it up to a random page and be inspired. Read it through from cover to cover and prepare to design your own artistic intervention. Steal themes, images, propositions, technical solutions, or even venues from the works documented here. And ask yourself: What is the "emergency" documented in this *INDEX*? It is not that of ambulances and triage but a very different kind of emergent urgency: the continual making and remaking of performance in every passing moment.

—Ben Spatz

Ben Spatz is Artistic Director of Urban Research Theater in New York City. His work has been seen at the Abrons Arts Center, Movement Research/Judson Church, Lincoln Center Rubenstein Atrium, Living Theatre, United Solo Festival, Earthdance, and elsewhere. He is an advanced doctoral candidate at the City University of New York, where he teaches acting, theatre, and performance. He is a resident artist at CAVE-LEIMAY, with publications in both academic and artistic journals (www.urbanresearchtheater.com). ben@urbanresearchtheater.com

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