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Altered States: Phenomenology and Performance Criticism after Husserl

Bert O. States' epoch-forming *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms* provided a model for scholars who wished to ground their experience of performance events in a critical discourse that transcended semiotic analysis. By wholly adopting Husserl's phenomenological reduction, however, States lashed his methodology to a philosophy that itself recapitulated spectatorial practices and techniques that came to prominence in the Enlightenment. Thus Husserlian phenomenology and the performance scholarship that relies on it not only uncritically embodies the metaphysics of presence, it is also exposed to a critique of instrumental reason: such approaches methodically constitute discrete objects according to the same protocols that guide Enlightenment studies of the natural world. In my paper, I will sketch the historical justification for this critique of Husserlian performance criticism, and propose that a phenomenological criticism grounded in Merleau-Ponty's notion of chiasm and Levinas' face to face encounter may offer theatre and performance studies the theoretical means to avoid the pitfalls linked to Enlightenment spectatorial practices while opening up an analysis of the spatial architectonics of the spectator's encounter with performance.