Allen S. Weiss once relayed an anecdote about misspeaking the title of John Cage’s 1961 book *Silence* as “Silences,” a slip that revealed the inherent impossibility of conflating all possible forms of silence into one idea. At the core of *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance* is this same impossibility in regard to criticism, and with it, experience, narrative, and history.

Gavin Butt introduces his book by stating that criticism is “in trouble” (1). Constricted by capitalistic economies of epistemic reproduction, undermined by poststructuralist eradication of an authoritative position, and entangled in postmodernism’s “warp and weft of the cultural text” (3), the critic finds herself against a wall of hermeneutic practices “operating as an authorizing meta-discourse for contemporary critical maneuvers, whilst simultaneously working to constrain the production of new concepts and/or methods of critical procedure” (4). Or, as David Joselit suggests in the roundtable discussion in *October*’s 100th issue (to which Butt refers), critical discourse has become, not necessarily to its detriment, a mode of interpretation rather than a “mode of judgment that carries weight” (2002:203). Ultimately, Butt wants to enable a “going beyond” of criticism through a “concern with the processes of aesthetic creation and interpretation,” “an abandonment to the act of criticism itself […] with a view to opening up the possible futures of criticism by actualizing them in the present-ness of the critical operation itself” (17).

The three sections of the book—Performing Art’s Histories, Distracted and Bored: The Critic Looks Elsewhere, and Critical Responses/Performative Processes—each reflect a departure from “constative” description, to conjure J.L. Austin, of the artwork toward criticism as an “embodied—and *performative*—condit[ion] of production” (10). Rebecca Schneider’s “Solo Solo Solo,” in Performing Art’s Histories, engages black cultural heritage, art criticism, and the paradox of how to define “solo” performance, a “uniquely 20th-century term” (27), to argue that the performer-audience relationship is always inherently collective. Schneider’s processual “cuts,” “leaps,” and “riffs” between performance histories, and her own present-ness in the act of writing, works in thematic and structural conjunction with John Seth’s “Iterant Improvisations” in Critical Responses/Performative Processes, a completely navigable stream of consciousness that runs from *The Sound of Music* to John Coltrane to Gabriel Orozco, and further.

In “This is I,” from Performing Art’s Histories, Niru Ratnam discusses the problems of claiming one’s subject position via artist Francis Newton Souza’s move from Bombay to London to New York in (unsuccessful) pursuit of a place in the Western canon. Alluding to Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of cultural mimicry, Ratnam writes, “The staking of the claim […] lies in working from the inside of a number of narratives to produce something momentarily new” (73). Through this, Ratnam offers a neat counterpoint to José Esteban Muñoz’s “Utopia’s Seating Chart,” a cultural mapping of pre-Stonewall queer (dis)identification through the work of the New York Correspondence School in the Distracted and Bored section.
Between these two essays is Jennifer Doyle’s “The Trouble with Men, or, Sex, Boredom, and the Work of Vaginal Davis.” In Davis’s 2000 Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Care, the performance artist impersonated art-world It Girl Vanessa Beecroft, who was invited to that year’s Whitney Biennial. The audience’s confusion of the two artists, believing that Davis was Beecroft, allowed for the momentary possibility that “a Los Angeles–based Amazonian black drag queen with solid welfare class roots had been officially sanctioned by a major museum as a representative of contemporary American art” (94). Misrecognition becomes a method for critiquing the inequity of representation, and Davis’s “dialectical relation to the institution of the art world […] expressed through Beecroft’s work” grounds Doyle’s argument that the “dialectical is always already a little bit queer” (83).

In Critical Responses/Performative Practices, Kate Love’s “The Experience of Art as a Living Through of Language” suggests that “we don’t have to bring words to art but rather that we can use the experience of art as a form of criticism itself” (157). Love seeks to “re-work a critical interpretation of experience […] which might not lead straight back to the promise of self-presence” (167), and thereby suggests a different understanding of the “present-ness” offered in Butt’s introduction.

In her influential and controversial 1993 essay “The Ontology of Performance,” Peggy Phelan defined a new mode of critical discourse predicated on the act of “writing toward disappearance, rather than the act of writing toward preservation” as “the experience of subjectivity itself” (148). After Criticism’s most significant contribution—to performance studies, visual culture studies, and theatre studies—is that it foregrounds the “experience of subjectivity” and does indeed, as Phelan directs, “re-mark” writing’s “performative possibilities” (1993:148) while going beyond the operative of disappearance. Rather, it is the simultaneity of artistic, critical, and spectatorial presences and subjectivities that creates the critical act.

This book embraces the paradox endemic to a collection of self-consciously critical essays devoted to what the title After Criticism suggests, and offers this paradox, like Doyle’s “misrecognition,” as an efficacious methodology for critiquing discursive hierarchies. By building on crucial performances and theoretical writing in performance studies’ history, After Criticism not only “open[s] up the possible futures of criticism” but also the possible futures of performance studies itself.

—T. Nikki Cesare

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October

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Censorship of the American Theatre in the Twentieth Century, by John H. Houchin, comes at a critical time in U.S. history, when the National Endowment for the Arts’ (NEA) long-range future is tenuous, and the congressional conservatives’ attempts at cutting arts funding in order to stifle controversial productions and artworks sees no end in sight. Since the conservative agenda of the current Bush administration seems to have set the “moral tone” for the present, and there are very few books dedicated to the subject of the workings of censorship, an examination of the social and political forces in this country that have created and perpetuated it seems more than merited.

In this thorough survey, Houchin explores the links between performance and culture in the 20th century. Viewing the century as a series of political and social shifts, he adeptly shows the relationship between theatre and the culture in which it is located. In his Introduction, Houchin defines the reasons for the censorship of theatre, showing how the conservative culture attempts to maintain the religious, political, social, economic, sexual, and moral structures that create the mythology of their society. He suggests that the conservative spirit seeks direction from the past and fears change, and artists who represent that change challenge those traditions and rituals, “playing” with them without respect for their continuance (2). Furthermore, these artists—who represent passion, vivacity, and dynamism—are the ones responsible for debunking the traditional beliefs in which conservatives find meaning (2). Here Houchin’s argument fails to acknowledge that rituals are not only fixed, but can be flexible, interactive, and transformative.

Out of fear that artists’ work may succeed in overhauling and refurbishing the core beliefs of U.S. culture, conservatives seek to prevent it through censorship. Throughout the 20th century, this censorship has been evident in a multitude of ways that include outright banning of artistic productions, arresting the participants, cutting funding, accusing the participants of disloyalty to the country, blacklisting, boycotts, and a plethora of other no less devious means used to prevent a performance.

Before examining the complexities of censorship in the 20th century, though, Houchin summarizes the late 18th and the 19th centuries, showing the roots of Puritan and Victorian morality as well as American commercial and political interests as they existed in those centuries, and how those influences affected the development of theatre in the United States. Houchin’s analysis begins with the Massachusetts Bay Colony, moves through the Quaker opposition to theatre, and settles into a discussion of the professional theatre of William Hallam and David Douglass and their successors. Covering such diverse topics as the Astor Place Riot, the Bowery Boys, P.T. Barnum’s Lecture Room series, as well as the plays The Drunkard (n.d.) and Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852), the book focuses on the notorious events and productions that shaped the culture of early America. Furthermore, he explores other popular entertainments such as burlesque and the Follies, and their opponents, including lawmakers.
and feminists. Finally, he concludes with a discussion of the evolution of the first duly appointed censor in this country, Arthur Comstock.

The second through sixth chapters not only provide a chronological investigation of each of the major plays that provoked controversy or outright censorship, but they also divide the 20th century into discrete cultural movements, many of which have fueled the opposition to free speech and freedom of expression in the U.S. Chapter two, “Bad Girls, Tough Guys and the Changing of the Guard,” which covers the period up to 1920, pits the Moral Reform Movement, the Drama League of America, and Catholicism against such productions as Sapbo (by Clyde Fitch, adapted from the novel by Alphonse Daudet, 1900), Mrs. Warren's Profession (George Bernard Shaw, 1902), and Damaged Goods (Eugene Brieux, 1913), all of which challenged the concept of gender as merely a social construct and led to the introduction of laws against “white slavery.” The ensuing chapters take the reader through the Roaring Twenties, the Depression, World War II, and the wars in Korea and Vietnam, to the end of the millennium—covering every major controversy. From Mae West's battles with the censors in the 1920s, through Hallie Flanagan's arguments with Congress over the Federal Theatre Project in the 1930s, to the formation of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in 1938, to the reactionary antitheatre of the 1960s, Houchin illustrates the progression from one era to another. His topics range from West's racy film Diamond Lil (1928), Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour (1934), the Living Newspaper, and the Red Scare of the 1950s, to the rise of Off-Off Broadway, the Black Power movement, and the Living Theatre in the 1960s. In the final chapter, “The Past is Prologue”—covering the period from 1972 to the end of the century—the discourse focuses upon the development of the “Moral Majority” and the New Right, which were largely responsible for the attack on the NEA, and sent a chill through the collective spine of the arts community, instigating furious legal battles. Piss Christ (1987), by visual artist Andreas Serrano, and the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe, together with the theatrical productions of Tony Kushner’s Angels in America (1993), Larry Kramer's The Normal Heart (1985), and Terrence McNally’s Corpus Christi (1998; staged at the Manhattan Theatre Club), are only some of the well-known examples that the author uses to show the attacks on artistic freedoms in recent years. Houchin's cases in point are well-researched and felicitously written, with humorous observations that keep the reader entertained.

In Theatre, Society and the Nation, S.E. Wilmer explores the relationship between theatrical performance and concepts of national identity. Specifically, he focuses on the influence of performance in the process of presenting or challenging the collective sense of national values and goals. As a prelude, Wilmer discusses the function of theatre as a microcosm of communal identity, through which spectators may pass judgment on the theatrical images presented to them. Some of these images are meant to destabilize the preconceived ideas of national identity that have been foisted upon the populace, and some are intended to insidiously support the dominant culture. Wilmer's premise is intriguing, if sometimes a bit too all-encompassing, but overall his argument works to illuminate the role of performance in expressing or debunking hegemonic values as they relate to American national identity.

The book encompasses the periods from British colonial entertainments to the postcolonial, multicultural theatre of the present. Wilmer begins his exploration of the uses of theatrical performance as it affects national identity with the period of early U.S. history, when the colonies moved away from British rule toward becoming an autonomous country. Reactions to such perceived indignities as the Stamp Act separated the Patriots from the Loyalists and helped to create Mercy Otis Warren's “pamphlet plays” (which were not necessarily performed but widely distributed), as well as assisted in the development of the American Company, a decidedly clever name change by British performers who curried the favor of their Patriot audiences. Immediately following the formation of the nation, the Federalist-versus-Democrat/Republican debate led to the creation of plays, which shaped
typical American archetypal characters such as the Yankee, as well as the African American and the Noble Savage, often in an unflattering manner. Wilmer interjects an analysis of ritual performance with a discussion of the efficacy of the American Indian Ghost Dance as a reaction to the white government’s imperialist policies, which were designed to coercively assimilate Native American cultures. Notably, he cites a performance studies framework for the examination of this Lakota ritual. To this end, the author approaches his analysis with the theories of leading performance studies scholars such as Richard Schechner, and the cultural anthropologists Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz, that frame the performance as a mode of behavior, social drama, and symbolic action in the context of its social and historical conditions. As well, Wilmer adeptly shows the function of the Chautauqua touring circuit in forging dominant American values throughout the nation.

Nontraditional theatrical forms such as the pageant are investigated through the Paterson Strike presentation, which utilized actual strikers to challenge capitalist America in an epic performance at New York’s Madison Square Garden in 1913. Workers’ theatre is included in the discussion, as is the Federal Theatre Project during the Depression. The social rebellions of the 1960s—with its antiwar, civil rights, and free speech movements, as well as the Black Power, Latino, American Indian, Women’s and Gay Liberation movements and their relationship to theatre—are shown to challenge and overthrow the status quo and offer new paradigms for national identity. Luis Valdez of El Teatro Campesino, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and the plays of Amiri Baraka are featured in this chapter. The book covers feminist theatre from the suffrage movement in the early 20th century, through Women’s Lib of the 1970s with its liberal, radical, and materialist approaches, to the third wave of feminism in the 1990s—using as examples the diverse works of Eve Ensler, Paula Vogel, and Spiderwoman Theatre. Finally, Wilmer ends his book with a discussion of the images and deconstruction of the multicultural nation in the work of such radical reformers as Anna Deavere Smith and Tony Kushner, and such performers as Velina Hasu Houston, Brenda Wong Aoki, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña—all of whom, rather than “celebrate diversity,” attempt to blend multiple cultures into the hybridity of a new transnational identity.

Both books are worthy additions to the scholarship that illuminates the collision between supposedly dominant national values and marginalized or minority ones. Houchin’s work thoroughly describes occurrences of censorship, its sources, and the dilemma of consistently defining obscenity. More discussion on the concept of “institutionalized censorship”—an a priori censorship embedded into political systems and structures, as Noam Chomsky (1988) has suggested in his theories—would benefit Houchin’s work. In Wilmer’s book, the focus is on the process of imaging national identity through theatrical and ritual performance and its requisite cultural challenges. Wilmer’s work is impressive in its breadth and approach, yet it is sometimes overwritten with redundancies, especially in each chapter’s summary, which relentlessly reiterates previously made points. Neither book really delves deeply into the changing aesthetics of theatrical production, except through inference while describing different approaches to production. Nevertheless, the strength of these works is that they cover new material and connect performative responses to the social and political forces that have shaped the United States throughout its history.

—Tom Mikotowicz

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Chomsky, Noam, and Edward S. Herman

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The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre is long overdue. Although encyclopedias of world theatre have recently begun to include sections on India, those sections are very short; the research is often out of date; and they ignore recent theatre, recent debates, and recent scholarship in the field. In contrast, The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre has 750 entries covering all 28 states, illustrated by 270 excellent photographs. The up-to-date entries are written by local experts. For example, noted scholar and director Lokendra Arambam writes about Manipuri performance; Shanta Gokhale, author of one of the best books on modern Marathi theatre, Playwright at the Centre: Marathi Drama from 1843 to the Present (2000), writes on that subject here; playwright/director Kavalam Narayana Panikkar writes about patayani, teyyam, mutiyettu, kathakali, and other Kerala performance genres he has spent a lifetime studying; and the renowned Sanskrit scholar Kamalesh Datta Tripathi writes on Sanskrit theatre, Sanskrit playwrights, and The Natyasastra.

The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre does not distinguish between the useless—but nonetheless entrenched—“categories” of so-called folk theatre, so-called modern theatre, and so-called classical theatre. Entries are divided into four main categories: overviews/brief histories of all regional- and major-language theatres, including Kashmiri, Sindhi, Maithili, Nepali, and Assamese, many of which are usually ignored; companies and institutions; and genres of theatre from chavittunatakam, thang-ta, and Naqal to productions of both modern and classical plays all around the country.

The fourth category of entries deals with people. While all the usual suspects such as Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, and Habib Tanvir are there, equal attention is paid to the members of Tanvir’s company, who are usually ignored in critical writing about Tanvir’s work. There are also entries on four individual nautanki artists. This reverses an odd trend: While most writing on modern theatre acknowledges the contributions of individual artists, most of the writing on genres such as nautanki does not, focusing rather on the form itself and tending to erase the way the genre is shaped by individual artists. Performers of genres such as nautanki, tamasha, and natcha are, with rare exceptions, treated like craftspeople rather than artists. Here, they are treated as artists.

The encyclopedia does have several problems, including transliteration. I almost missed the entry on shumang lila because it is often spelled “sumang lila,” and anyone looking for teyyam will have to know to check under “teyyam”; and anyone looking for kuttiyattam or koodiyattam will only find it under “kutiyattam.” Indexing variant spellings would be a solution (i.e., mudiyettu, see “mutiyettu”).

Other problems are more serious. Although most regional entries place regional performance in social, political, and historical context, some are context-free laundry lists of plays and playwrights. Entries about individuals occasionally suffer from a similar lack of contextual information. For example, the entry on Dinabandhu Mitra, which centers on his most famous play, Nil Darpan (The Mirror of Indigo Planters, 1860), says nothing of what the play was about, why it was so important, the controversy it raised, the other plays it influenced, and its association with the Dramatic Performances and Control Act of 1876. The entry on Kavalam Narayana Panikkar is biographically correct, but doesn’t say anything about the issues that consume him as a playwright. Similarly, the entry on Mahesh Dattani leaves out key information—he is India’s first modern playwright to deal sympathetically with issues surrounding homosexuality, a fact that is not even mentioned. Other omissions are equally
glaring: Why is there no entry on Dalit theatre when there are entries on street theatre, children’s theatre, and theatre for development? Further, why are there no entries on Datta Bhagat, Texas Gaekwad, and Premanand Gajvi—three Dalit playwrights whose work is widely published and known in India? Obviously no encyclopedia will be able to include every single individual who writes a play, but in this case, an entire branch of theatre that is both politically and socially significant has been overlooked. Finally, there should be suggestions for further reading to accompany each entry.

In spite of these lacunae, the Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre is an essential addition to the personal collection of any Indian theatre scholar, as well as to university libraries.

—Erin B. Mee

1. Nil Darpan (The Mirror of Indigo Planters, 1860), the most famous example of an anticolonial play, is about the ruthless exploitation of indigo cultivators who were forced into this labor by British indigo planters. Nil Darpan caused riots at one of its performances in Lucknow, because the British audience objected to the way the planters were portrayed in a scene in which a white planter rapes an Indian peasant. On the grounds that the play gave them a bad name, British indigo planters sued James Long, the English translator. Long’s trial generated a great deal of publicity for both the play and the issue it portrayed, and established Nil Darpan as the first nationalist drama in India. It also marked the moment where both British and Bengali audiences became acutely aware of the power of theatre as a tool for resistance in the struggle for independence.

Theatre was deemed dangerous enough to prompt the Dramatic Performances and Control Act of 1876, which empowered the colonial government of Bengal to prohibit dramatic performances that were “scandalous, defamatory, seditious, obscene or otherwise prejudicial to the public interest” (Bhatia 1996:249; see also Pandhe 1978, and Rao 1992).

2. “Dalit” literally means “ground down” or “depressed” in Marathi, and is the term used by politicized exUntouchables to describe themselves with respect to the oppression they have endured. Dalit theatre is closely connected to the Dalit political movement, which began as a political movement among the Mahars, a caste of Untouchables in Maharashtra. The Mahars traditionally worked in their villages as watchmen and messengers, and as the people responsible for removing dead cattle and other animals. They could not eat with members of a higher caste or drink water from the same well; they were prevented from entering temples at all and from entering certain other buildings through the front door; and they were denied access to education. However, the Mahars were the singers, dancers, comedians, and drummers of tamasha. As such, they have their own oral tradition of stories and songs.

3. Bhagat’s play Wata Palwata (Routes and Escape Routes, 1994) has been published in the journal Yatra (1994) and in DramaContemporary: India (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001; and Oxford University Press, 2001).
4. Gaekwad’s most famous play is Thamba Ramrajya Yet Ahe (Wait, Rama’s Reign Is On Its Way).
5. Gajvi’s play Ghotbhar Pani (A Sip of Water, 1977) about the politics of drinking water has been performed over a thousand times in villages all over Maharashtra. Excerpts of Gajvi’s plays have been published in Seagull Theatre Quarterly.

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This book is an ethnographic portrait of the lives of actors of Special Drama, a popular form of musical drama (icai nāṭakam) that developed at the turn of the 20th century in the state of Tamil Nadu, South India. Commencing with bawdy comedy and shifting to mythological scenes, the all-night performances feature freelance artists “specially” contracted for the event. The Indian middle class, as well as scholars of Indian theatre, have long ostracized this performance genre out of both belief in the inherent social inferiority of its participants and a contempt for the supposed vulgarity of popular cultural forms. Anthropologist Susan Seizer, on the other hand, takes the form and artists seriously, focusing on the onstage and offstage strategies that actors, particularly women, adopt to resist and deflect the stigma associated with their profession. Based on extensive fieldwork, Seizer’s well-written text, accompanied by photographs, gives a detailed sense of the history, performance modes, and social relations of production that shape this unique art form.

In looking at Special Drama, Seizer divides her subject into three parts: Part One, The History and Organization of Special Drama; Part Two, Comedy; and Part Three, Lives. Beginning with an examination of the history and organization of the art, Seizer complicates the “rural-to-urban” and “folk/traditional-to-modern” scenarios that have dominated scholarly narratives about Indian theatre. Building upon Hanne de Bruin’s work on “hybrid theatre” (2001), she traces how Tamil drama companies were inspired by touring Parsi companies that had borrowed stage conventions and production methods from British companies. By the late 1940s, financial constraints and competition from cinema caused popular drama to move out to rural areas and smaller towns, where it morphed into “regionally attuned” forms informed by ritual performance (62). Today, Special Drama is neither purely commercial nor strictly ritual, and is both urban and rural.

One of the great strengths of this book is the insightful way in which Seizer explores the social relations that shape the production of Special Drama. In looking at the paper notices that advertise shows (Chapter 2) and the organization of actor unions (Chapter 3), Seizer paints a portrait of the wider cultural world to which the art belongs. Her rich ethnographic focus truly gives the reader a sense of Special Drama in relation to the everyday lives of large numbers of people in Tamil Nadu. The productive union she forms between sociopolitical-economic and performance analysis is a model for the kind of work performance studies could do more often.

Equally skillful is Seizer’s analysis of the comedic portions of Special Drama. She is particularly interested in comedy since it draws audiences and also allows actors to address the
problems of stigma. In Part Two of the book, Seizer examines the content of humor, its staging, and the responses of both performers and audience members. Her creative and exhaustive modes of analysis demonstrate the kind of detailed examination a scholar must do in order to understand the appeal and contradictions of highly context-specific forms of comedy. Throughout this section, Seizer develops a sophisticated approach to the relationship between humor and resistance. For example, she sees the jokes and the slapstick of the two characters who typically appear in Special Drama—the raucous Buffoon and his lady friend the Dancer—as affirmations of gender conventions, even as they might seem to be transgressive.

The real “punch line” arises, however, when Seizer confronts her own feelings of horror at seeing people laugh about an abusive relationship between a man and a woman depicted in the dramas. In her fascinating analysis of the “Aṭipiṭi” scene, she raises the provocative question of why laughter is generally so hard to analyze. At this point, in thinking about what audiences find funny onstage, it might have been useful to offer some more observation of what is found funny at other times, as in films or everyday life.

To analyze stage material, as well as audience responses, Seizer ties together various theories regarding Western and Indian spectatorship. This move allows her to consider Special Drama from several angles. Seizer could, however, have problematized her application of the Indian concept of rasa a bit more. She emphasizes the collective nature of the Special Drama spectatorial experience, whereas rasa seems to be a highly individualized attainment. Moreover, it would seem debatable as to whether the “tasting” of aesthetic pleasure and the extra-daily consciousness it is intended to induce is similar to the “critical distance of moral judgment” that Seizer identifies in the Special Drama audience (267).

These small matters aside, one of the greatest strengths of this book is that the material will appeal to a much wider range of readers than those just interested in performance per se. This is particularly true of the final section of the book, Lives, which focuses on the everyday lives of Special Drama actors and the strategies they must adopt to work in and around their status as “orderless” Others. The material concerning the argot that actors use to create some sense of privacy for themselves when in the company of others will be of interest even to linguists and scholars of the Tamil language, while the examination of actor kinship and the public lives of women makes a strong contribution to ongoing conversations about gender in South India. Seizer gives an even broader relevance to her work by taking a strong theoretical stance throughout this section. She cautions against blindly celebrating “resistance” without an eye to its inherent contradictions, and points out how private places and selves are informed by public counterparts.

Through Stigmas of the Tamil Stage: An Ethnography of Special Drama Artists in South India, Seizer makes a substantial contribution to performance studies and South Asian studies. With respect to the former, the book offers methodological insights into ways of thinking about the wider world in which theatres operate, and the implications that performance and spectatorship have for everyday life. Moreover, many parts of the book are fine resources for teaching about Indian theatre, since Seizer’s descriptions are vivid and would make accessible reading for undergraduates.

—Shanti Pillai

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Bruin, Hanne de

New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology
**From Inner Worlds to Outer Space.** By Dan Kwong. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004; 280 pp.; 6 black-and-white illustrations. $55.00 cloth; $22.95 paper.


Krystyn Moon’s *Yellowface* and Dan Kwong’s *From Inner Worlds to Outer Space* share an investment in archiving Asian American performance: the former is a critical history of a wide array of performers and records across a comparatively large timeframe; the latter a collection of and commentary about the author’s solo work over the last decade of the 20th century. Despite their generic and temporal distinctions, both texts provide useful documentation of, and raise pertinent questions about, the intersecting fields of Asian American, theatre, and performance studies.

Moon focuses on music but includes some discussion of spectacle in terms of songbook design and musical transcription as well as live performance. The first chapter, “Imagining China: Early Nineteenth-Century Writings and Musical Productions,” deals with the antecedents of the book’s titular time period. The author locates aural signifiers of Chineseness, such as a singer’s “high, drawling, falsetto tone” (13), through and alongside European traditions of Chinoiserie, including the songs “Moo-Lee-Chwa” and “The Peyho Boatmen,” that the U.S. imported with an understanding of Chinese music and theatre as “noise”; she carefully notes here, as she does throughout, departures from this motif—in this case, Christian missionaries’ praise of Chinese hymnal singing.

Chapter two, “Toward Exclusion: American Popular Songs on Chinese Immigration, 1850–1882,” traces the emergence of stereotypical representations of Chineseness in U.S. music and theatre from the period of early Chinese immigration until the Chinese Exclusion Act. In “Chinese and Chinese Immigrant Performers on the American Stage, 1830s-1920s,” (chapter three), Moon surveys performances by Chinese and Chinese Americans in venues ranging from circuses to funeral marches, theatres to world expositions. In chapters four and five, “The Sounds of Chinese Otherness and American Popular Music, 1880s-1920s,” and “From Aversion to Fascination: New Lyrics and Voices, 1880s–1920s,” respectively, Moon argues that sound contributed substantively to the processes of racializing Chinese/Americans from the last decades of the 19th century onward, as transcriptions of Chinese music and aural cues connoting Chineseness became more available, and as lyricists and performers began to create more work on purportedly Chinese subjects, including J. Henry Benrimo and George Hazelton’s *The Yellow Jacket* (1913). Moon concludes *Yellowface* by examining the contradictions engendered by Chinese and Chinese American vaudeville acts in the first two decades of the 20th century.

While Moon draws on the scholarship of noted historians of Asian American performance such as James Moy and John Tchen, she also contributes provocative analyses of relatively unknown archival material. For example, Moon probes racial intersections, like

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her fascinating—albeit brief—examination of African American renditions of yellowface in chapter five. Unfortunately, while rich in archival material, Moon’s text is comparatively weak in discussions of the performances she identifies. She writes of the ways in which musical and stage depictions reinscribe Chinese “inferiority” in chapter two, but she offers little sustained explanation of how (e.g., mechanisms of distribution) and for whom (particular audiences, consumers, or producers) a specific cultural production reinforces or contests dominant images of Chineseness. To be fair, such lack of engagement may have everything to do with the extant materials available or unavailable for study. If this were the case, however, Moon might still have launched an explicit investigation of the process of constituting the archive in the first place.

Nevertheless, Moon is one of the few scholars to engage Asian American performance in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Her appendix of songs with Chinese subjects or themes, and that of musicals, revues, and plays will undoubtedly facilitate further research to supplement the task of history-making that she has begun—the greatest contribution of Yellowface perhaps being its suggestion of how many performances remain to be heard.

Dan Kwong in some ways continues the tradition of the Asian American vaudevillian that Moon discusses in her last chapter. Indeed, juxtaposing the texts reveals an alternative genealogy to Kwong’s solo performance than that which theatre scholar Robert Vorlicky highlights in *From Inner Worlds to Outer Space*’s introduction. Whereas Vorlicky emphasizes Kwong’s links to a tradition of soloists from the 1970s onward, one might also consider the legacy of earlier Asian American entertainers in whose path Kwong follows, from Lee Tung Foo (the vaudevillian with whom Moon begins and ends *Yellowface*) through Anna May Wong (screen star, theatre actress, and vaudevillian) and Pat Suzuki (the singer and actor of *Flower Drum Song* fame [1958]). Either contextualization of Kwong’s art reveals the ways in which *From Inner Worlds to Outer Space* reveals the ways in which Asian American aesthetic practices demand an integrated study of race and performance. Moon’s and Kwong’s books intersect by offering specific case studies that illustrate this conjunction.

Both books also offer transfigurations of multimedia to print. Structured chronologically from earliest to most recent, Kwong’s collection provides six text versions of full-length “autoperformances” created between 1989 and 1999 as well as a section of three shorter pieces. Supplementing Kwong’s material are the aforementioned introduction, three incisive critical commentaries, an informative compilation of interview material, a performance history, and a bibliography of works by and about Kwong, all written by or assembled in collaboration with Vorlicky. A small selection of photographs and often-elaborate stage directions convey the spectacular elements of Kwong’s pieces. Certainly Kwong’s book will help students and fans—some of whom may not have the opportunity to see a particular show—visualize the performance event. Vorlicky’s insistence on how the staging of performances contributes to and shapes the personal, national, and global narratives that Kwong weaves further stimulates the reader’s imaginative abilities.

This publication joins a growing number of textual representations of performance, including Denise Uyehara’s *Maps of City and Body* (2002), Ping Chong’s *The East/ West Quartet* (2004), and Justin Chin’s *Attack of the Man-Eating Lotus Blossoms* (2005). Like these other collections, *From Inner Worlds to Outer Space* implicitly asks how the printed page might function to document multimedia performance and how it works as a kind of performance in itself. But I wonder, given the emphasis on media on Kwong’s work, why he chose to anthologize his work in this form. Certainly a CD-ROM or other digital media would provide greater flexibility in constructing Kwong’s spectacular performances for new audiences.

Both Moon’s and Kwong’s books are symptomatic of the tension between what Diana Taylor has called the “archive” and the “repertoire” (2003). As the authors analyze and attempt to record the rather elusive Asian American presence on U.S. stages and in other venues, each implicitly illustrates the tension between action and inscription that brings many
of us back to the theatre. Readers will come away from these texts with insights into how race and gender have shaped—and continue to inform—our lived experience, and they also provide us with a glimpse of hope that resistance to the dominant is possible.

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