
The question of how art relates to politics has been staged a thousand times. A healthy question it is, as it shows no sign of abatement. Its life resides in a delicate balance between posing the question anew and posing it again. Within the framework of modernity, with its emphasis on making the self and the world, form reigns supreme. The language of form implies the art of making legible, tangible, and material that which is implicit all around us. As a genre, this work of negotiating aesthetic and worldly poesis is borne by the manifesto. That, at least, is Martin Puchner’s elegant formulation, one that he pursues with remarkable erudition and toward very productive ends. Puchner takes his title and lead from Marx’s genre-making text, the Communist Manifesto (1848), which teaches us that it is manifestos’ “form, not their particular complaints and demands, that articulates most succinctly the desires and hopes, maneuvers and strategies of modernity: to create points of no return; to make history; to fashion the future” (2).

Puchner is interested in the ways in which the Communist Manifesto proliferates over time and space, accumulating a transnational audience along the way that it imagines can actually change the world by means of its own distinctive “form of literary agency” (32). This political-aesthetic agency is in turn animated by a productive entanglement of key terms of performance studies—performativity and theatricality. Puchner’s book is at once an intricately wrought mapping of the manifesto’s trajectories and an invitation to think the collaboration between art and politics generally in the register of performance studies. His temperament is never shy of generous as he tracks the manner in which the manifesto braids a politics of means and ends, words and deeds, theory and practice, tradition and innovation. These resources of creative possibility he locates in Marx’s own poetic address, a speech act that poses as its own authority, in a manner that violates the linguistic philosopher J.L. Austin’s claim that the theatrical mode disallows the performative. (Austin’s example argues that saying “I do” onstage does not a marriage make [1962]). Instead, Puchner insists that the Manifesto constitutes its political efficacy (socialism) and historical agency (the proletariat) by means of a polyvalent bond. “The Manifesto speaks for the proletariat; it creates—makes in the sense of a performative poesis—the proletariat; and it theatrically enacts its future” (31). In this display of self-generating prophetics, performative means are entwined with theatrical ends.

The body of the book takes stock of the manifesto’s manifold expressions. After showing us how the Communist Manifesto works, Puchner documents how the tract was put to work as an instance of globalization avant la lettre. Through the first part of the 20th century, the artistic and political avantgardes huddled closely together and nestled in the manifesto. Puchner illustrates this with respect to the Italian and Soviet Futurists, whose art will come to mark a form that, while ever variant, is aggressive rather than introverted and collective rather than individual (6). The movement of the manifesto is crucial to Puchner’s account, for while it proclaims a future anterior, its political inflection is never singular, as British rear-guardists Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis make evident. Transnational movement
is part and parcel of the Dadaist and Surrealist incarnations of “manifesto art.” Yet, in this movement, Puchner wisely refuses a simple diffusionist model of the advanced or developed forms traveling to the world’s hinterlands. In contrast, he considers the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro’s global impact to observe the multidirectional feedback loop between Europe and the Americas (175). Rather than a simple displacement from center to periphery, Puchner considers that the most radical modernities appeared where the force of modernization violently confronted older forms of life. The (then) unexpected revolutions of Italy, Russia, and Latin America could open still-Eurocentric eyes to the emergent radicalism of China or India today.

Poetry of the Revolution also considers Artaud’s manifestos that serve as ends in themselves, his anti-theatre as the mid-century expression of artistic and political avantgardes becoming unmoored. But he concludes his study with the manifesto movements of the 1960s, such as the Situationists and lastly this very journal, TDR, both sites where he sees the artistic and the political rejoined. For Puchner, theatre like revolution requires repetition (a persistent series of breaks) to enact its novelty. Ultimately, he sees performance studies’ refusal of canonization as a resource to “make the new once more.” Let us hope that the future, as we now find it, can repay his confidence.

—Randy Martin

Reference

Austin, J.L.

Randy Martin is Professor of Art and Public Policy and Director of the graduate program in Arts Politics at Tisch School of the Arts/NYU. He is author, most recently, of An Empire of Indifference (Duke University Press, forthcoming) and coeditor of Artistic Citizenship with Mary Schmidt Campbell (Routledge, 2006) and Returns of Alwin Nikolais with Claudia Gitelman (Wesleyan University Press, forthcoming).


My father calls, an excited voice. Leaves a message. He’s never called me before, ever. I’m shocked and call him right back. “How did it go?” he asks.

—Ralph Lemon (258)

Ralph Lemon’s manuscript takes the form of a documentary album about the making of the second installation of the Geography Trilogy, Tree, commissioned by Yale Repertory Theatre for its inaugural 2000 performance in New Haven. Album is the choice term here, as the volume records Lemon’s photographs, drawings, love letters, dreams, correspondences, journal entries, travel itineraries, weather reports, working notes, interviews, and poignant reflections on sound—focusing especially on

1. Lemon’s collaborating Tree dancers: Bijaya Barik (India), Carlos Funn (USA), Djédjé Djédjé Gervais (Cote d’Ivoire), Wen Hui (China), Yeko Ladzekpo-Cole (Ghana/USA), Manoranjan Pradhan (India), Asako Takami (Japan), David Thomson (USA), Wang Liliang (Yunnan, China), Li Wenn Yi (Yunnan, China), Cheng-Chieh Yu (Taiwan/USA), “and all our teachers” (273). Lemon’s other collaborators, especially Katherine Profeta (USA), also make appearances in the work.
the relationship between meditation’s stillnesses and the relentless noise of everyday industrial and postindustrial life, a theme that is powerfully felt in the sonic performances of Tree. Lemon’s album, then, is an elaborate travelogue, documenting as dance research select events and collaborative creative processes that launched the work. Tree emphasizes artistic production as an exercise of oral history: differently documentable, definitively informal, and made up of the everyday speaking voices of those working “from below,” rather than the highbrow discourse of seamlessly institutionalized logos.

For readers, the book also lever dance scholarship at the tripartite borders of thinking globalization, national configurations of race and ethnic studies (sometimes multiculturalism, here “African American dance” [see Gottschild 2003]), and the enduring imprint of area studies methodologies. Whereas Geography I (1996) focused on ideas of Africa—“My body had not learned that much,” he reflects (107)—Tree tours the fabled Easts of India, China, Japan, and Hong Kong in what could be seen as another, redoubling quest for what Brecht called “the Asiatic” in performance or modes of materialist thinking that might amplify an aesthetics of resistance to world conditions of capitalism, in what Lemon calls acts of everyday and especially spiritual “suspension” (197): “The search for race instead found spirit, and inscrutable prayers” (256). Here Lemon’s astute Orientalism (a Marxian Tao?; see Jameson 1998) need not suffer from the suppression of the role of capital in cultural production, as theorists have charged the literariness of postcolonial studies after Edward Said (1978). Nor does it exactly repeat the constraints of area studies as a predetermined geography of cultural knowing because, as Lemon notes, to ask the question of where people “dance from” (105) is not quite the same as asking to know where people are from, on the map.

The “being there” of travel research and documentation defines the methods of area studies as well as ethnography, in what Rey Chow calls a “condemnation of ‘third world’ cultural production [...] to a kind of realism with functions of authenticity, didacticism, and deep meaning” (1995:56). Lemon’s approach slips oral history between the paradigms to study sites of pleasure and subjection in global/local spaces. His studious deferral of form is what makes the intimacy of the album both rewarding and difficult to follow, and with sometimes chilling arrest. Swatting a fat mosquito in his Indian bedroom, only to find himself unbitten by it (“it was not my blood,” he says) Lemon meditates on the uncanny nearness and alienation of others in the everyday of global living (130). In swatting the thing, Lemon realizes that he has not only killed, but he has touched the blood of someone else, someone unknown to him. In an otherwise ordinary routine in the protection of one’s own body and blood, Lemon finds himself splattered with the remains of another body, and with someone else’s blood. Such banal, intimate, and variously intentional connections define the everyday life of the global.

“I’m working with found information,” Lemon says (143), and because he is traveling, this is a recording of information for foreigners (Gambaro 1992) that is not fully curated either by the regulatory language of the state, nor by “art,” but rather by Giorgio Agamben’s whatever that is the everyday: the everything that matters (1993). Yet Lemon notices that recognition also doubles as deception and coercion. When an excited radio host suggests equivalency between a Mali string instrument and the American banjo, Lemon deadpans: “[T]his project brings out a certain betrayal in all of us all the time” (241), as if to reassert that the foreign is not to be rendered familiar—as well as the persistence of the traveler’s burnout amidst the speed of global dissemination. “I’ve become passive to information around me. An interesting problem” (167).

Tree reverberates with an idea of location that is always defined by transit: a “split between body and presence,” which André Lepecki persuades is the uncanny of dance performance (2004:3). “I left for India, in search of L’s nightgown,” Lemon writes from the beginning,
coding this album in the language of loss and theft (23). From Minneapolis to New York City’s East Village, and from China to Chennai, India, it is tender reading to see how Lemon returns now and again to the regularity of baseball’s gestures, to Sammy Sosa’s and Mark McGwire’s 1998 home-run chase, as if to anchor the routines of his unknowing movements around the world to an epistemological root of that game’s movement. Route/root: this is the play of Tree, in which Lemon finds the incommensurability of difference. “There are five too many worlds in the space. No obvious links / There are moments in the drive where I can’t decipher where I am / I cannot translate their sex / Today I don’t want to be a tourist” (148).

It is in the insistent mapping of Frantz Fanon’s “fact of blackness” (1967) that some of Lemon’s most powerful language comes through in this album, as he remembers Jackie Robinson, dreams of Kobe Bryant, and witnesses the everyday life of hard labor, slavery, and ghettos for translation into globalizing and “Asiatic” suspensions in dance. Remembering Indian saltmakers, Lemon notes “I hear the sound, ‘niggra!’ I’m called that once. From one of the field hands. An ancient pronunciation” (138). The sounds of recognition, deception, coercion play out again in China, “a place where I could not possibly be from [...] But I think: I might know the Chinese that they are poor people, brilliant, could be ‘niggers.’ I have seen nappy hair. And menthol cigarettes are popular. I saw ghettos and inner inner inner cities” (66). Back in New Haven, Lemon records his decision to “put Mr. Wang and Li in blackface” (264), a performance technique that the Chinese and American dancers resisted in this work. Lemon prevailed, whereupon “Mr. Wang immediately runs next to David, black, black David, put his arm around David’s shoulder and gleefully announces ‘Now I’m an American’” (205). The dismemberments stun, demonstrating how language dis/members gesture and vice versa. In the performance, blues music follows, as if together sound and sight might further proletarianize an image of what it means to “dance from” China, the U.S., and ideas of African genealogies alike. This album of Lemon’s keen global/local dance thinking asks the question: “what shall we call this new thing?” (106).

—Lara D. Nielsen

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Merce Cunningham: The Modernizing of Modern Dance.

From the outset, Roger Copeland contends that his book, Merce Cunningham, is not a conventional biography of the choreographer but rather more of “a cultural history of that moment when American art moved beyond the ethos of Abstract Expressionism” (11). Copeland describes his approach as “interpretive,” as opposed to “descriptive” (19). The ostensible reason for not adopting a traditional dance criticism approach rests on the fact that Copeland wants his book to appeal to the “generalist reader” (21). At the same time, he does not offer a “close reading” of particular works and here, as in other aspects of the book, he is setting out his stall in relation to certain tendencies in recent dance criticism and scholarship. Copeland focuses on “an accumulation of precisely described moments” (21) from a variety of works over a 50-year period; from major early works based on chance operations designed to remove choreographic determination, to Cunningham’s more recent technological interventions utilizing “life forms” and “motion capture.” Copeland does not discuss Cunningham’s personal life nor his sexual preferences, as he considers recent attempts to analyze how Cunningham and John Cage’s long-term partnership impacted upon their respective work “woefully misguided” (19). Instead, Copeland begins from the position that for the most part, Cunningham’s “life is his work” (257) and, in chapter 12, “Modernism, Postmodernism and Cunningham,” he takes issue with the exponents of “identity politics” (artists and theorists) who would generally view Cunningham’s and Cage’s lack of direct engagement with the politics of difference as an escape from or a concealment of their homosexuality.

The scope and direction of Copeland’s book are set out in his introduction. The 12 chapters that follow expand and explain Copeland’s central thesis—how and why Merce Cunningham may be viewed as the modernizer of modern dance—by examining his work in relation to “composers and visual artists with whom he worked” (18). Thus, the author draws on a range of artistic practices and media to marshal his argument, and concludes that despite a number of correspondences between Cunningham’s choreographic practices and the aesthetics of postmodernism, the artist’s work is ultimately situated at the interface between postmodernism and modernism.

There are several key themes that run through the book, including the reconfiguring of the mind/body relation in dance. Copeland argues that the “ethos” that underpins Abstract
Expressionism, which emphasizes the “full participation of the artist’s body” (18), was not only to be found in fine art practices of the 1940s and 1950s, but also in the theatre, film, and dance of that period. For Copeland, the clearest example of this ethos in dance is in the work of Martha Graham. Her famous statement that “bodies never lie” underpins her belief in the “wisdom of the body” (12) and her concern to reveal through modern dance the universal, mythic forces that are lurking underneath the face of contemporary culture.

Copeland’s study seeks to examine how Cunningham broke the mold of this ethos in dance by adopting a decidedly “un-Dionysian movement” that entailed imbuing modern dance with “the cool detached, impersonal sensibility” (12) that had also come to characterize the work of painters such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg and directly challenged the fundamentals of the Abstract Expressionist movement. The repudiation of Abstract Expressionism in favor of an “aesthetics of indifference”—a phrase that was coined by Moira Roth to describe the work of Cunningham, Cage, Rauschenberg, and Johns—forms the core of the book. The chapters (4, 5, and 8) where Copeland examines in some detail the synergies between Cunningham’s approach to dance and that of the other three aforementioned groundbreaking artists are the highlights of the book. Here, he weaves a convincing story of “collaboration at a distance” among this group of likeminded artistic producers (270). As Copeland notes, this is in contrast to dance criticism where it has become commonplace to compare Cunningham’s approach with that of Abstract Expressionist artist Jackson Pollock, “the painter with whom he has the least in common” (85), rather than Rauschenberg.

Another theme that runs through the book is Cunningham’s repudiation of what Copeland sees as the “primitivist” streak that haunted mainstream modern dance. While modern dance was concerned with delving into the roots of culture and getting back to the origins of movement—exemplified perhaps by Graham’s famous early group work from 1931, Primitive Mysteries (and the title of chapter 6)—Cunningham’s modernizing project entailed a rejection of the primitivist ethos embedded in modern dance. Cunningham used past discourses such as the I Ching for his distinctly Western modern and urban dance form. Although there are no “stories” in Cunningham’s work, Copeland argues that evidence of city life abounds in his dances. Thus, the notion of the city emerges as a corollary theme of the book. This of course could also be said of Graham who, when she started out on her own in the late 1920s, was concerned to reflect the sharp, jagged edges of the city and the modernist industrial landscape. Copeland tends to juxtapose the particular, Cunningham, with the general, “primitivism,” using Graham’s work as the principal referent. In so doing, Copeland does not attend to nuances and differences within pre-Cunningham modern dance, which challenge his blanket negative labeling of the form as excessively “primitivist.” Rather, Copeland seeks to show that Cunningham is to Graham as Rauschenberg is to Pollock.

There are 15 photographs placed together in the center of the book, which do not appear to add significantly to the commentary, although it is always nice to have images where dance is concerned. The index is excellent, comprehensive and detailed, and the bibliography covers a range of artistic discourse and criticism, although it is not necessarily extensive.

This book, as Copeland notes in the acknowledgements page, has been a long time in the gestation process. Given this, the question we might want to ask of the book is, was it worth the 25-year wait? The quotes from eminent scholars and practitioners on the back cover more than suggest that it was. My own response, however, is both “yes” and “no.” There are elements of the book that are truly insightful. As indicated above, Copeland manages to pull together the synergies and differences between the approach to choreography that Cunningham developed and the approaches to music and art generated respectively by Cage and Rauschenberg in particular to support the book’s main contention regarding Cunningham’s pivotal role in the “modernizing of modern dance.” Yet there are one or two limited, and I would suggest limiting, themes that run through the book, particularly the capturing of all pre-Cunningham modern dance under the catchall negative (modern)ism of primitivism on the one hand, and, on the other, the repeated stance taken against engaging with recent dance theories of the postmodern or poststructuralist variety, which are also
largely criticized unconstructively, with little rigorous justification on Copeland's part. This is a pity because Copeland could have so easily marshalled his discussion of how Brecht’s ideals of the separation of artistic elements and the alienation effect (chapter 6) influenced the work of Cage and Cunningham toward what Copeland terms their “politics of perception” into a critical reflection of, for example, the politics of the gaze in dance theory. Moreover, despite Copeland’s criticisms of the opacity of postmodern and poststructuralist theories, he is not averse to drawing on the ideas of the most recent “hot” French social theorists making an impact on cultural criticism in the U.S., Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, to support his analysis of Cunningham’s rejection of wholeness and unity in modern dance as yet another instance of his antiprimitivist aesthetic.

—Helen Thomas

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As the popularity of manga in the West increases—U.S. newspapers such as the Los Angeles Times and the Seattle Post-Intelligencer are carrying a manga strip in their Sunday comic sections—Yoshiko Fukushima’s Manga Discourse in Japanese Theatre offers a timely investigation into manga’s broader impact and significance for popular culture, especially theatre. Fukushima’s analysis of manga’s relationship with shogekijō (Japanese little theatre) from the 1960s to the 1980s focuses on the work of Noda Hideki and his Yume no Yuminsha troupe. While the book principally deals with Japanese theatre, it is Fukushima’s use of “manga discourse” to express the shared motifs of shogekijō and manga that is most innovative. Fukushima’s exploration of the five key qualities of manga discourse—playfulness and seriousness, copresence of visual and verbal texts, absorbent nature of stories, codification and codified realism, and closeness of reader/audience to text/performance—sets up a richly contextualized insight into Japanese aesthetics. With manga discourse Fukushima explains both the form of manga and the relationship between the audience and the text, setting up a template that can then be applied to other forms, such as drama. With this laid out, Fukushima is able to mine the ideological background of postwar and contemporary Japanese aesthetics. Noda’s Yume no Yuminsha troupe, with its avantgarde-meets–popular culture aesthetic, provides Fukushima with the perfect case study to explore the postmodern issues raised by the ludic and infantile yet ideological and serious elements of manga.

The central question of Fukushima’s book addresses how Noda and his Yume no Yuminsha troupe became so popular and came to represent its time and audience—particularly the youth of Japan’s 1980s “bubble” economy. Arguing that the impact of manga extends beyond the popular appeal of comics in Japan, Fukushima points out that by the height of manga’s popularity in the mid-1980s, it had become a powerfully expressive and well-known language for a postwar generation. That is, comic books had come to express the dominant language for Japanese youth—one that privileges “seeing images and listening to sounds” (42) rather than reading words. Noda’s work shared this new dominant language and was able to articulate the desires and imaginings of a generation through it.
The book is divided into five chapters: The first two discuss aspects of manga and shōgekijo in terms of common social and artistic motifs; the last three review the history of Japanese theatre from premodern times to modernization and Westernization, to conclude with the shōgekijo movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Chapters 4 and 5 offer an analysis of Noda’s Yume no Yūminsha troupe and its significance within modern Japanese theatre through discussions of its audience, management, and Noda’s performance theory.

One of the major achievements of Fukushima’s book is the justice it does to the complexity of Noda’s work through careful use of primary and secondary sources as well as relevant theories within postmodernism and semiotics. Fukushima’s interviews with Noda himself and actors in his troupe provide a substantial insight into key events in Yume no Yūminsha history. Fukushima’s reading of the continuities, influences, and differences between various performance traditions and pop-cultural influences reveals an analysis that is sensitive to the whole fabric of Japanese arts. In particular, she maps out a number of key tensions within contemporary theatre: the struggles between the experimental and the commercial, the serious and playful, and the avantgarde and popular. The solutions Noda develops out of his negotiation of these tensions provides an informative and inspiring end to Fukushima’s book.

Fukushima’s meticulous translation of sections from Noda’s scripts effectively conveys the complexity of Noda’s wordplay to a non-Japanese audience. Each chapter includes well-chosen photographs from various plays and extensive endnotes providing further depth to Fukushima’s analysis. Overall, this work is a significant contribution to our understanding of Japanese theatre between the 1960s and 1980s, and it establishes new ground for performance theory and popular culture through the analysis of “manga discourse.”

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As I was strolling through a park in Minneapolis on a radiant spring afternoon, I noticed a large envelope taped to the leg of a park bench. Inside, there was a piece of cardboard in the shape of an irregular trapezoid with the following message screaming at the reader: “YOUR NEXT PLACE TO STOP IS A BANG AND A BOOM, BUT DON’T GET ON THE BOAT OR YOUR TOUR WILL END TOO SOON.” By the time I got to the “too soon,” it was already too late: I had intruded on a game in progress. At any given time a number of similar games, some of them almost impossible to detect to the outsider, are being staged across the country. They may take as a game board several city blocks, a campus, or an entire city, and seamlessly intersect with ongoing urban activities, including other games. However imaginative, these old-fashioned games are now overwhelmingly outnumbered by games based on digital technology. Over the past three decades, video games have advanced steadily from arcades and dark corners of neighborhood bars to conquer...
all available digital “real estate”: from cell phone displays, to portable game platforms, to home computers and the internet.1 And then, there are the early attempts to reconcile these two kinds of games—online and off. In the fall of 2003, the city-wide Big Urban Game (B.U.G.), designed by Katie Salen, Frank Lantz, and Nick Fortugno, was staged in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota. It involved thousands of online and offline participants and audience members. Similar hybrid games were staged in downtown New York and in London.

Interactive-entertainment industry insiders argue that we are in the middle of the golden age of gaming, unprecedented in human history. The newly emerging genre of digital/real-world games—which is also a new performance form in its own right—is one outcome of this game boom. Another one is the growing body of game literature. B.U.G designer Salen and Eric Zimmerman—who is, among other things, a CEO of the game-design studio gameLab—have authored one of the most accomplished works in recent game literature, Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals. The title is somewhat misleading in that it seems to suggest yet another video games how-to book. Rules of Play is everything but that. Salen and Zimmerman’s ambitions go far beyond a mere manual for game designers or a survey of current information about game development. Nor is it a report on the interactive entertainment industry. One of the most arresting aspects of this book is the rare amalgam of authors’ confidence, ambition, and fervor that exudes from every page. Already on the first page, they state the goal of “helping to establish a field of game design proper” (1). Some 600 pages later, the reader is convinced of the necessity for such a field. Furthermore, the book provides not only a conceptual basis for the field, but is in itself a communal effort. Beyond the fact that it was coauthored by two game designers/theorists, it features a foreword by B.U.G. designer Lantz, a commissioned essay by the designer of the “Lord of the Rings” board game, Reiner Knizia, and four games commissioned especially for this volume, which literally bring into play the issues discussed in each unit.

So, what is game design? First of all, Salen and Zimmerman are very much aware of the limitations imposed upon the popular idea about the game by the very same revolution that made games ubiquitous and astonishingly profitable. They are adamant about not leaving out of their discussion all kinds of games, from simple play with toys, to board games, to competitive sports, to gambling. This openness goes as far as placing the concept of design on the same level of importance as the concept of game. The authors define design in general as “the process by which a designer creates a context to be encountered by a participant, from which a meaning emerges,” and game design as “the process by which a game designer creates a game, to be encountered by a player, from which a meaningful play emerges” (41, 80).

Rules of Play is both well written and carefully designed. It consists of four units, which outline general ideas necessary for the understanding of games: Core Concepts, Rules, Play, and Culture. Each unit is further broken down into a number of short chapters that perform a double function: On the one hand, they address the core ideas of game design; on the other hand, they lead the reader to the next level in understanding the book’s main subject. The authors not only talk about game design, but in the organization of their material they adopt the narrative techniques used in game design. What makes this book so extraordinary is the interplay between its stated and unstated goals. That is, between the establishment of the new field’s metalanguage and metonymic relation with its very subject. The commissioned games, which use the very volume in which they are printed as a game board, constitute an important part of the book’s argument—I can’t imagine any other book review in which I will write about the book that I not only read, but also played.

In his forward, Lantz likens Rules of Play to a manifesto. I would disagree. Its contagious enthusiasm aside, the main accomplishment of this book is not the assertion of new, bold
ideas but a massive work of synthesis. Bringing classics of game theory—such as Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* (1938) and Roger Caillois’ *Man, Play, and Games* (1958)—into the context of the most recent scholarship on digital games and sports is refreshing, to say the least. Even more important, this broad and accessible approach to the subject makes the notion of game design relevant and useful to other fields. Salen and Zimmerman are aware of that, and they mention media studies, sociology, and cultural studies, but curiously leave out theatre and performance studies. Not only practice, but the very purpose of theatre and performance has been affected by the same social forces that fashioned the culture of games. This culture, as Salen and Zimmerman correctly recognize, privileges experience, which is always contextual. As tradition would have it, the work of art is experienced through distance that is established between the work and the beholder. That distance is the primary element in the creation of the context of the work of art. The games thrive precisely on the overcoming of that distance and on dynamization of the context. As the director Peter Sellars recently observed, “[A]s artists, we have to spend as much time creating context as creating the work [...] That will be our work in the 21st century” (2005:38). I can easily see a book such as *Rules of Play* used in theatre directing or performance design classes.

While focusing on the formal and experiential approach to game design—what they call “the player-centric account” of games (67)—the authors of *Rules of Play* are very much aware of ideological questions that inform their subject. They not only account for and valorize the existing practices of game design, but openly challenge game designers to take into consideration the vast potential of games for cultural impact, specifically for honing ethical values and subverting social stereotypes (522). Still, the reach of their critique is intentionally curtailed, and they never engage in an investigation of the interactive entertainment industry. Nevertheless, their book invites both creative and critical responses, some of which will, I hope, engage in rigorous analysis of the ideological ramifications of this fast-growing industry.

In one of the carefully selected epigrams that head each chapter, Brian Sutton-Smith writes of the video game as “the most complex toy ever built [...] vastly more responsive than any other toy ever invented” (85). It makes me wonder what kind of philosophical toy the video game can be. Can video games become what 18th-century automatons were to the reawakened philosophical materialists? Or what 19th-century mass-produced toys were for Baudelaire? One of the few works on the subject not mentioned by Salen and Zimmerman is the French poet’s short text “A Philosophy of Toys” in which he unerringly relates toys to the notion of gift: the act of giving is inseparable from the freedom that the player has with the toy. The video game is not only “the most complex toy ever built,” but also the commodity that has the power to harness economically the freedom associated with playing and toys: freedom of imagination, but also freedom of inefficiency and nonproductive expenditure.

—Branislav Jakovljevic

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More Books


The Handbook is a comprehensive anthology presenting a wide variety of essays on many topics of interest to performance studies scholars. The contributors’ list is a roll call of PS standard-bearers representing both the New York University and the Northwestern University cohorts from Rebecca Schneider, Barbara Browning, José Muñoz, Jill Dolan, and Jon McKenzie, to Dwight Conquergood, Nathan Stuckey, Shannon Jackson, Sandra L. Richards, Bruce Henderson, and Tracy C. Davis; and more. The Handbook is a bold attempt to bridge the supposed gap between the Northwestern University approach to performance studies and the New York University approach. As might be expected in a project of this kind, the essays taken as a whole deal with the broadest range of subjects—including Jackson’s overview of performance studies as an academic discipline, Dolan on the tensions between theatre studies and performance studies, McKenzie on globalization, Conquergood and Browning each on performance ethnography, E. Patrick Johnson on “Black Performance Studies,” Muñoz on queer performance, and Stuckey on fieldwork.

The Handbook is divided into six sections: “Performance Trouble,” “Performing History,” Performance Of and Beyond Literature,” “Performance and Pedagogy,” “Performance and Ethnography, and “Performance and Politics.” This is a big book both in page length and scope but still lots more compact than the four volume anthology, Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies edited by Philip Auslander (Routledge, 2004; $1070 cloth). The Handbook’s selection of essays is excellent with the multiple approaches represented in the volume tightly intertwined. Overall, this is an excellent text for introductory courses in performance studies.

—Richard Schechner


Theatre Histories is an ambitious attempt to decolonize theatre history and the teaching of theatre history in English speaking higher education. The authors’ opening proclamation: “Theatre Histories attempts to take a fresh approach to the historical study of world performance. It is designed to provide a global perspective that allows the performances of many cultures to be considered, not in the margins of western theatre but in and of themselves, and as they illuminate each other and our understanding of human expressiveness at large. To do this, our narrative is organized unlike that of any other theatre history text. We relate the histories of performance and theatre throughout the world to the key developments in modes of human communication that have reshaped human perception” (xvii).

This is worth quoting at length because Theatre Histories both accomplishes and falls short of its announced goals. The book shuttles between brief descriptions of “cultural performances” plus more standard (for theatre histories) accounts of particular theatres and historical periods—the French neoclassic stage with an emphasis on Moliere, the rise of naturalism and avantgarde countermovements, etc.—and a brave attempt to integrate much broader perspectives by writing about a significant number of non-Western performance genres. There are sections comparing ritual dramas in ancient Egypt with medieval Christian liturgical performances and the ta’ziyeh of Iran; discussing the parallels among Roman, early Japanese, early Chinese, and Sanskrit kutiyattam theatres. There is a section dealing with orature—especially African ritual performance—alongside “late neolithic ritual landscapes and pilgrimage in England” and Korean shamanism. Theatre Histories is ecstatically hybrid. This
is its strong point and its weakness. It is written by four authors with a number of chapters noted as “edited by” one or the other author. Theatre Histories is not an anthology; nor does it satisfactorily accomplish a unified overall approach. Its reach far exceeds its grasp. Yet the book points in a crucial direction: toward the need for courses teaching many more traditions of theatre and genres of performance than can be addressed in any “From the Greeks to the Moderns” approach. What finally will be needed is a thorough revamping of curriculums—with many courses, each dealing with specific genres, historical periods, and geocultural areas. As an introduction, Theatre Histories takes a big step in the right direction.

—Richard Schechner

Acting Jewish: Negotiating Ethnicity on the American Stage and Screen.  

Although Jews have been a strong presence in American performing arts at least from the start of the 20th century, Bial focuses on the period from 1947 onward. After an introductory overview, each of the book’s remaining five chapters deals with the recurrent theme of the tensions and complexities of projecting/hiding/transforming Jewish identity within an assimilationist American context during successive periods: 1947 to 1955, 1964 to 1971, 1989 to 1997, and the new millennium. Bial uses iconic film, stage, and television works such as Gentleman’s Agreement, The Goldbergs, Woody Allen’s movies, Death of a Salesman, Fiddler on the Roof, the Seinfeld show, and Angels in America as his examples. He traces developments from a period when Jews were still regarded as outsiders in America to a period when, on the surface at least, Jews and Jewish cultural habits were almost but not really assimilated into the mainstream. “Boundaries are drawn and then erased,” Bial writes. “Quotation marks around Jewish problematize and provoke” (156).

—Richard Schechner

Butting Out: Reading Resistive Choreographies through Works by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha.  
By Ananya Chatterjea. Wesleyan University Press, 2004; 377 pp. $29.95 paper.

Ananya Chatterjea offers the first sustained historical reading of the corpus of choreographic works created from the 1960s to the present by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, of Urban Bush Women (United States), and Chandralekha, her eponymous group (India). Chatterjea’s analysis is firmly embedded within feminist and postcolonial frameworks and is notable for its radical departure from a conventional approach to dance history. She refuses to privilege the “auteur” and avoids the hagiography route, even as she assembles her narrative around the contributions of these dancers to the world of movement, while also rejecting the notion that a national or racial sensibility should overdetermine her comparative analysis. Bringing together two artists who have little in common on the surface, she elucidates how the politics of exoticization tend to inform the mainstream Western reception of their work. Yet her insights are nuanced; instead of resorting to a strategy of underscoring pure difference, or trying to find an essence of Indian or American dance that transcends a specific temporality, she usefully traces the ways in which both artists were inspired by particular political moments; their choreographies cannot be read as universal in nature, but as richly and contextually bound. Chatterjea’s project offers a key model for conceiving of comparative narratives on dance.

—Anurima Banerji