Christopher Balme begins his introduction by suggesting that contemporary theatre, especially the subsidized repertoire of Western Europe, “has little engagement with the public sphere” because it takes place in a society in which “innovative, taboo-breaking, and transgressive” artistic practice is received with “aesthetic absorption” rather than violent outrage (3), and speaks to a specialized audience in a space more private than truly public (23). He thus implies, perhaps ironically, that the properly theatrical public sphere may not exist. Nonetheless, the book goes on to demonstrate that controversies on the stage and in the house in the modern period, which Balme understands in a broad sense as stretching from the Elizabethan era to the present, have indeed “spilled out” of the auditorium into streets, newspapers, and most recently the blogosphere; they have influenced debates about social and political conduct and priorities in the wider public sphere (15). Balme’s title, introduction, and chapters one and two suggest that public debates provoked by theatrical performances should be understood as instances of a specialized theatrical public sphere, but the discussion in later chapters offers a more complex account of theatre’s participation in a broader public sphere, as only one site among others in which social controversies and political conflicts are played out. This broader claim is in my view more compelling, but it may burst the narrower bounds implied by Balme’s title.

In the first chapter, Balme grounds his definition of the public sphere squarely in the field delineated by Jürgen Habermas, whose *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962; 1989) analyzed the “structural transformation” of bourgeois society in 18th-century Europe that enabled the open exchange of ideas and thus challenged the concentration of power in the absolute monarchy. Habermas defines Öffentlichkeit as a concept, public-ness, and as the institutionalized and informal ensemble of social formations and cultural conventions that enable this exchange rather than particular sites where exchange takes place. Balme acknowledges the potency of face-to-face exchange in theatre foyers and in the streets but focuses on the circulation in print of information about theatre, whether promotional, such as playbills advertising theatre in the 18th and 19th centuries; or controversial, such as a Puritan pamphlet attacking theatre in the 17th century; or newspaper debates about social conflicts raised by theatre from the 18th century to the present. Although Balme supplements Habermas with more recent theories, especially Chantal Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism (2013), his focus on print might have more fully engaged other key theorists, in particular: Peter Hohendahl (1992), whose name appears only in two footnotes but not in the bibliography, despite his role in introducing Habermas to English-language readers and his own studies of the public sphere in Germany and elsewhere; and Nancy Fraser (1989), whose critique of the gendered character of the bourgeois public sphere
and whose discussion of the intersections of intimate and public spheres influences critics that Balme does discuss, such as Michael Warner (2002).

The strongest chapter in the book examines the controversy around Mahomet (1888) by the French Arabist Henri de Bornier, which was to be performed by the Comédie Française but, because the play had Muhammad on his deathbed forsake Islam for faith in Jesus in the final lines, provoked consternation in the Muslim world, from Algiers to Istanbul and in the Ottoman court, which demanded its cancelation. Balme tracks the controversy to India and elsewhere in the British Empire, once Henry Irving acquired the English rights, and concludes the chapter with the case of a “post-Orientalist” production in Berlin of Mozart’s Idomeneo in 2006, whose stage effigies of the severed heads of prophets including Muhammad incited rumors of Islamist retaliation while hardening the defense of artistic freedom by both politicians and cultural elites in Germany. While acknowledging the force of this defense, Balme notes the elite’s disingenuous avoidance of the critical fault line between freedom and license that hides the persistence of “latent Orientalism” (136), citing Edward Said’s phrase, in the assertion of “Western” artistic freedom against alleged Islamist intolerance, despite the concerns of Germany’s Muslim minority.

Indeed Balme suggests that, contrary to European cultural brokers’ insistence on artistic autonomy, theatre institutions are shaped by society at large. As Pierre Bourdieu argued about cultural institutions broadly defined (1993), and, as I and others such as Shannon Jackson have argued about theatre and performance specifically (1992; 2011), theatre institutions can only be relatively autonomous from social and political conflicts and from general modes of economic production. Bourdieu’s reminder of the economic determination, even in the last instance, of cultural production might illuminate Balme’s suggestive final chapter on the “distributive aesthetics” of performance on the borders between theatrical fiction and social action, mediated by the electronic exchanges promoted by their marketers as “social networks.” While Balme asserts in chapter one that his focus on theatre excludes socially critical performers, such as the Yes Men and the Church of Stop Shopping, and other “informal protest practices” (40) attempting to open up corporatized space in the United States, chapter five nonetheless investigates the “subversive mimicry” (180) of state and corporate speech by European artists such as Christoph Schlingensief, especially Please Love Austria (2000), and Rimini Protokoll, especially Call Cutta (2005). These works invite attention in the first instance because they combine public performance with mediated participation via telephone or digital networks, and thus instantiate a “distributed” public sphere. More broadly, as Jackson writes of Rimini Protokoll, this performance on the border between work and play demonstrates the unequal distribution of wealth that enables large-scale artistic work in Western Europe while exploiting outsiders, whether those supposed asylum seekers occupying Schlingensief’s container outside the Vienna State Opera or the actual call-center operators recruited for Call Cutta’s performances in cities from Kolkata to Paris.

What emerges from Balme’s analysis is less a “global public sphere” (175) than transnational but unevenly distributed networks of resources. While the public sphere in general and the combination of ludic and agonistic elements in its theatrical form in particular may characterize “modern democratic societies,” the works discussed in chapter five highlight gaps between the privileged minority and the marginalized majority. Balme’s final sentence recalls the Athenian model of democracy, but his caution that “one can remove so many rights before the public sphere withers” (202) reminds us that even those states that promote their openness have become increasingly unwilling to share their bounty in an environment shaped by talk not of democracy but of fortress Europe. In this environment, “transnationalizing the public sphere” (Fraser et al. 2014) may be a worthy goal but it is far from realized. Although not able realistically to cover all of these issues fully, this book raises these and many other important topics and should prompt ongoing lively exchange in and on the public sphere.

—Loren Kruger
References


Loren Kruger is the author of several books, including Imagining the Edgy City: Writing, Performing and Building Johannesburg (Oxford University Press, 2013) and the award-winning Post-Imperial Brecht: Politics and Performance East and South (Cambridge University Press, 2004). She is Professor of Comparative and English Literatures and Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Chicago.

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Moreover, the Companion is a welcome and timely addition to the growing theoretical discourse on materiality and object-oriented criticism in theatre and performance scholarship. As Claudia Orenstein argues in the book’s introduction, material performance is especially relevant in contemporary society, where “human flesh and material constructs intermingle in an endless array of configurations” (3). Positioned within material performance, puppetry can potentially destabilize conventional distinctions between the human and nonhuman, allowing scholars and artists to imagine forms of interdependency and agency outside the subject-object binary. Viewed through the lens of new materialism and Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory, the age-old understanding of puppetry as “the human infusion of independent life into lifeless, but not agentless, objects in performance” takes on new meaning (5).

The editors have organized the essays into three clearly defined parts, each of which consists of a brief preface and two sections. Part 1, “Theory and Practice,” prefigures the book’s overarching editorial goals by fostering dialogue between those who witness puppets and those who make and operate them. Notably, “Perspectives from Practitioners” is the largest of the book’s six sections with eight essays, forming a solid backbone of firsthand experiences and accounts that inform processes and productions described in other chapters.

In many of the articles included in part 2, “New Dialogues with History and Tradition,” artists and scholars attempt to think beyond the rigid framework of tradition in response to pressing factors such as late-20th-century multiculturalism, government policy, tourism industries, and UNESCO’s problematic Intangible Cultural Heritage designation. Although they are somewhat disconnected from the predominantly aesthetic and philosophical concerns of the rest of the book, the essays in part 2 rehearse an important and ongoing discussion on how repertoires and cultural heritages negotiate change, drawing from a rich selection of historical and contemporary performance forms for its case studies.

The influence of postdramatic theatre is most evident in part 3, “Contemporary Investigations and Hybridizations.” The essays under “Material Performance in Contemporary Theatre” provide readers with a sense of how artists have innovatively approached puppetry and object-based performance in recent years, while the final section, “New Directions and Hybrid Forms,” documents groundbreaking experiments beyond the conventional stage, in which the principles of illusionistic puppetry merge with new technologies in robotics, motion-capture digital animation, and automated puppeteering systems. In offering a glimpse of puppetry’s future, the final chapters question the introduction’s invocation of the presumption that puppets rely on the “human infusion” of lifelikeness. Interestingly, while the most striking examples of contemporary material performance openly highlight the interaction and interdependency between human and nonhuman agency (what Paul Piris, in one of the volume’s earliest essays, calls “co-presence” [30]), the cutting-edge “hybrid forms” of section 4 return to an older idea of puppetry in which the “puppeteer” (in this case, motors, sensors, and computer algorithms) remains out of view.

A number of essays cite Hans-Thies Lehmann’s Postdramatic Theatre, employing the postdramatic to recast puppetry as a vanguard performance form that challenges dramatic theatre and psychology-based character. However, most of the references to postdramatic theatre read as perfunctory nods rather than critical engagements, borrowing freely from the postdramatic lexicon without offering much in return; in a footnote to the introduction, the editors sum up a central premise of the 2011 conference where the idea for the book emerged—the overly simplistic claim that “puppetry has always been ‘postdramatic’” (12). Regrettably, to merely translate puppetry into postdramatic terms is a missed opportunity to expand and complicate Lehmann’s theories or pinpoint where the similarities end and irreconcilable differences begin. For example, how could the puppet’s material “body” challenge and recontextualize Lehmann’s writings on “auto-sufficient physicality” and the possibility of “overcoming the semantic body” ([1999] 2006:95, 162)?
In the end, the volume demonstrates that puppetry does not have to rely on the postdramatic to be interesting. In fact, what makes puppetry so intellectually appealing is its temporal reach; to label it as “post-” anything would be a disservice to its archetypal significance. For instance, it is because of puppetry’s historical ubiquity that entirely different definitions of the uncanny can coexist and speak to one another across chapters. The uncanny performing object mediates modernist art’s “doubt about our mastery of the material world” (50) in John Bell’s essay, while in chapters by Cody Poulton and Colette Searls, it is posed as a practical problem (by way of Masahiro Mori’s “uncanny valley”) that improvements in android design and digital animation may potentially solve. The puppet inhabits this tension. Rather than merely replace the well-worn, often marginalized category of puppetry with the topical concept of material performance, the volume successfully balances the old and the new, and proves that the idea of puppetry—with all its mimetic baggage—can still impact emerging theories on materiality and objects in performance. The Companion attests: while the performance form is as ancient as the theatre itself, now is an exciting time to be interested in puppets.

— Kee-Yoon Nahm

Reference


Kee-Yoon Nahm is a DFA candidate at the Yale School of Drama. His essays have appeared in Theater, The Journal of American Drama and Theatre, and the anthology Performing Objects and Theatrical Things (eds. Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy; Palgrave, 2014). He also works as a translator and dramaturg. kee-yoon.nahm@yale.edu.

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The Choreographic is a journey. Flying, falling, and all the while desiring, Joy weaves a complex landscape of philosophy, critical theory, and contemporary art landmarks that extend beyond her anchors in dance and sculpture. Reception is at the heart of this book, as is the further travelling it stimulates. Artworks serve less to foster debate on disciplinary boundaries than as approaches to experience, and encounters with them inspire embodied thinking, a phenomenon that is a part of what Joy means by “the choreographic.” The proposition is that we do not just look at art, it also looks back, and by recognizing art’s “sensual address” (1), we open a space for dialogue where we might see, organize, and write our experiences differently. This proposal is an important one not just for art history but also for dance studies. Indeed while Joy’s writing traverses discourses in both fields, dance is where this book makes its strongest contribution. The Choreographic poses a “different economy of attention” (168), to use Joy’s words, one that reveals the often intangible but nonetheless felt register of the movement of thought.
The text opens with a question: “Why choreography now?” (1). What might it offer as concept and practice in a historical moment marked by wars, natural disasters, and political and economic crises? Joy seeks answers in the invisible, irrational forces that accompany responses, despite our conscious intentions, such as laughter and violence. The ability of uncontrolled physical eruptions to seep between and stall the progression of logical thought is another aspect of the choreographic, which is understood to work “against linguistic signification and virtuosic representation; it is about contact that touches even across distance” (1). This distance is crucial to the cerebral and corporeal project that Joy undertakes. The choreographic moves into spaces of longed-for connection where language cannot go, yet language also continually reveals itself in its own beauty, necessity, and disappointment. Likewise, the choreographic is a felt sense of “something else,” not dance but of dance in the ways it charts a profound course of poetic human experience. By bringing these realms together, Joy is able to bridge the ongoing challenge in dance scholarship between the kinesthetic and its written articulation.

Joy enters the conversation on art as critical encounter at the mid-‘60s moment when minimal sculpture elicited a visceral viewer response, postmodern dance overturned the rules of choreography, and arts writing engaged these conceptual shifts in heated critique. Importantly, the role of the viewer was at stake, as Michael Fried’s charged response to sculpture’s durational theatricality (1967) and Yvonne Rainer’s assertion that “dance is hard to see” (1966:271) made clear. Joy identifies such spaces of discomfort as generative of new ways of thinking and ultimately writing. This opening chapter, titled “Precarious Rupture: Lessons from the Landscape,” gains further traction from Georges Didi-Huberman’s counter to 19th-century art-historical assumptions that visible representation is legible. Instead, he poses that there are gaps in the image where other forces enter. Joy adopts a similar approach to history as a kind of philosophical wandering. She employs the refrain, “Come. Walk with me. Let’s get lost,” which serves to both interrupt the text’s linear control and also to tell the reader how to receive the text—as a kind of dis- and re-orientation through art discourses and projects critically engaging the natural landscape, such as those by Francis Alÿs and Robert Smithson.

Subsequent chapters extend this nonlinear thought landscape to explore affective phenomena in dance performance. Joy identifies the choreographic in works by contemporary experimental choreographers working between New York and Europe, which she further explicates via the thinking of Henri Bergson, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Georges Bataille, Walter Benjamin, Jean-Luc Nancy, Gilles Deleuze, and many others. The number of sources can be dizzying at times, until the reader realizes the task is less about grasping each idea than witnessing how the temporary encounters allow Joy to traverse visual, felt, and thought registers. “Violent Desire: Writing Laughing” engages the work of La Ribot, DD Dorvillier, Luciana achugar, and Heather Kravis to address how experimental dance unsettles language and writing. The spasms of uncontrolled bodily experience in their works are, for Joy, moments of intimacy and desire that cut through a text’s distance and may speak to ways of existing outside language. “Ecstatic Community” considers communicative vibration across uncertainty, illegibility, and failure as a kind of queer ethics in the work of Miguel Gutierrez and Jeremy Wade. Drawing on José Muñoz’s queer temporal visioning as a movement toward and way of being together, the proposition here recognizes that choreographic labor produces not just dances but an excess of sensation, which is another way of connecting and forming social bonds and modes of being. The final chapter, “Outer Spaces: To Write, To Dance,” attempts to move toward a speculative future, bringing together Ralph Lemon and Meg Stuart with art projects by Marianne Vitale and Janet Cardiff. This chapter, particularly given Joy’s opening question, importantly gestures to an ethics and mode of action in the world. However, like much philosophical writing, it does not extend far enough to address concrete concerns, even as the choreographic may be our key to survival.

The book is strongest in the earlier chapters, where historical fragments are debated and released, allowing the landscape metaphor to form a new ground. Subsequent chapters become
increasingly more difficult to follow, in part because the messiness of human interactions rises to the fore amidst the overall quest for connection, both to one’s self and to others. The stability of the writing then lies in Joy’s expertise in articulating complex theory through her own analysis of it, further punctuated by extensive footnotes that expand her points and create a second narrative voice. The footnotes are helpful since the text can be disorienting, yet even with their assistance it is not intended for those new to theory, or dance and sculpture for that matter. Some background on the artists and philosophers presented is advised, particularly given the evasive concept of the choreographic itself. While Joy employs constructions like “as [insert theorist] reminds,” an implied “we” that draws the reader into her thinking, in many ways this is Joy’s personal journey, even as there is also room for the reader to have thoughtful responses. The text works against more standard argumentative approaches that are often a one-way street of persuasion within a certain economy of academic discourse. Instead, the writing opens spaces for dialogue where thoughts can take multiple directions, all within a rigorous theoretical framework.

For these reasons, *The Choreographic* is not easy to position in the field—which might be a good thing. Like Erin Manning’s philosophical dance writing, it is slippery and hard to pin down. It sits most easily alongside other MIT Press volumes that challenge visual modes of reception in dance specifically, including Carrie Lambert-Beatty’s *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s* (2008). *The Choreographic* also takes a Euro-centric perspective on seeing that, while open to certain philosophical possibilities, forecloses others. Missing is engagement with the body of critical dance scholarship that addresses viewing and reading across cultures, and more current discourses on spectatorship. See for example works by Susan Manning (2004), Thomas de Frantz (2004), and Ananya Chatterjea (2004) who consider how ways of viewing actually create a felt awareness with significant social meaning. While Joy’s project is somewhat different, an engagement with the politics of sight, particularly as a mode of being and ethics in the world, would be useful.

*The Choreographic* works against form and into imagination, perception, and the future, albeit a precarious one, and the book’s objecthood reinforces this terrain. It is a beautiful large-format paperback with color illustrations and text spaciously laid out, which supports how the work is to be read—slowly, with consideration, and tangibly felt. While Joy may not be a choreographer in the traditional sense, her dramaturgical dialogues with dance artists DD Dorvillier, Jeremy Wade, and Tere O’Connor certainly place her in this shared province. Her movements define an important new territory for how dance can be experienced, written, and extended toward new ways of seeing and being in the world.

—Megan V. Nicely

**References**


Megan V. Nicely is an artist-scholar working within contemporary choreography and Japanese butoh. Her performances have been produced in the US, UK, and Europe, and she has published in TDR, Performance Research, and other journals. She is currently co-editor of the Critical Acts section of TDR and Assistant Professor of Dance at University of San Francisco, whose program focuses on the arts and social change.


Gender, race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability—after a generation of identity studies, critics can enumerate classifications of performance without pausing to take a breath. Seldom has age been on that list, and while scholars in other humanities and arts fields have been rectifying that situation, few in performance studies have turned attention toward aging. Michael Mangan, professor of drama at Loughborough University in the United Kingdom, offers a much-needed monograph on performance and age studies, following on The Stages of Age (Anne Davis Basting, 1998) and Staging Age, the 2010 essay collection I edited with Leni Marshall. (Clearly, it is time for a different kind of book title.) His purpose is to examine how drama, theatre, and performance engage with old age as a sociocultural category, an experience, or an idea (175), and the wide-ranging study is particularly useful to theatre and performance scholars as an introduction to that intersection. Mangan demonstrates a solid research base in both camps; in addition to making a valuable contribution to this interdisciplinary field, he points toward directions for further scholarship.

As this subject is so ripe for the picking, Staging Ageing tends toward breadth; Mangan summarizes that he addresses “a variety of performances, ranging from the very complex to the very simple, from the highly artificial to the quotidian, from the emotionally empathic to the coldly exploitative, from the scripted to the improvised, from the inspirational to the depressing” (242). He gathers numerous modes of performance, some that consciously revolve around older age, but more often those that have not yet attracted explicit attention regarding age. From radio drama to Beckett, reminiscence theatre to sitcoms, Staging Ageing explores performances of aging and the aged, noting ageism as well as resistance to what has come to be known as the master narrative of decline.

The book’s dozen chapters are grouped in four thematic sections. The introduction leads into two chapters that frame the overall inquiry: a brief survey of aging studies and a consideration of consciousness, appropriate to the book’s placement in the publisher’s Theatre and Consciousness series. He links theatre with consciousness studies through their shared question, “What is it like to be…?” and specific to this study, “What is it like to be old?” (35). Mangan conflates the myriad terms now in use for nonmedical inquiry into aging under the term “gerontology,” but his overview of the cultural study of aging is especially helpful to theatre scholars who are new to the topic. The second section, Tragedy and Comedy, proceeds in a loosely chronological fashion. It addresses Oedipus at Colonus as an example of late style, as well as the ageist stereotypes of the senex, the stock old man character central from the time of classical drama through Restoration comedy. Noting the recent work of drama scholars such as
Christopher Martin and the late Anthony Ellis on older age during the early modern period, Mangan eschews comprehensive chronology, leaping to contemporary television sitcoms to analyze the older character as trickster. Mangan draws examples from British television and stage that are likely to be unfamiliar to US critics, but his points are clear and transferable even without exposure to the specific shows he includes.

Mangan’s insights are particularly strong in the third section of Staging Ageing. The chapters on memory and reminiscence move conversations forward in both performance studies and age studies. He applies age-studies theories classifying types of narrative reminiscence to a number of texts “which address issues of coming to terms with the past in old age” (127), such as Krapp’s Last Tape (1958), and studies stage performances of dementia to challenge the notion that acting is defined as remembering. He then explores the tensions between the aesthetic and therapeutic values of reminiscence theatre, which is based on the memories of older people and often performed initially for those subjects. That mode of performance seldom has been dissected for its artistic worth, but Mangan is able to place it among related models of documentary and verbatim theatre. At its best, he asserts, reminiscence theatre empowers not only the subject, but also the audience, to achieve an integrated sense of worth in regards to aging. This portion of the book also incorporates the important work of Helga Noice and Tony Noice, who research the application of professional actor-training techniques in assisted-living settings.

The last section addresses aging first on a more abstract level, analyzing the concept of extreme longevity in such works as Shaw’s Back to Methuselah (1921), then moves to the very concrete consideration of the nursing home as a dramatic setting. Mangan interprets plays and television series from 1960 to 2010, drawing on Erving Goffman’s theories as well as the history of the British health system. The valuation of youth is particularly interesting in the treatment of Juliet and Her Romeo (2010), Sean O’Connor and Tom Morris’s adaptation of Shakespeare that casts the lovers as octogenarians. Mangan scrutinizes musical and dance performances in the final chapter, demonstrating that performances that uphold ageist stereotypes are just as popular as those that challenge ageist assumptions; anti-ageist activism still faces an uphill climb. As Staging Ageing successfully limits its scope to the intersection of age studies and performance studies, the reference list and index are comprehensive at that joinder, whether the reader hails primarily from the theatre wing or the age-studies sector.

Staging Ageing deftly investigates performance through the lens of age studies. On the theatre side of the inquiry, Mangan could have provided more explanation of his criteria for selecting the performances he includes. On the aging side, he often cites notions of “successful” or “positive” aging without explaining how age-studies scholars have problematized those terms. These are minor issues in light of the book’s foundational contribution to this burgeoning field; theatre scholars will find Mangan’s work a highly valuable foray into age studies from a theatre studies base.

—Valerie Barnes Lipscomb

Valerie Barnes Lipscomb is Associate Professor of English at the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee, and Vice-Chair of the North American Network in Aging Studies. With Leni Marshall, she edited Staging Age: The Performance of Age in Theatre, Dance, and Film (2010). Her monograph on the performance of age in modern drama is forthcoming from Palgrave Macmillan. lipscomb@sar.usf.edu

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Dance scholar Erin Manning and philosopher Brian Massumi commence their collaboratively composed volume Thought in the Act by illustrating the superposition principle. “A stone dropped into a pond produces a ripple pattern. Two stones dropped into the same pond produce two ripple patterns. Where the ripples intersect, a new and complex pattern emerges, reducible to neither one nor the other” (viii). The principle resonates through the book in many registers, including its first person plural voice, undifferentiated between the two authors. “One never writes alone. As Deleuze and Guattari say, one writing alone is always a crowd” (viii). The line embeds a reference to the famous second sentence of A Thousand Plateaus, “Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:3). Massumi translated that landmark work from French into English in 1987, and Thought in the Act echoes its fused voice as well its stylistic brilliance. Manning and Massumi, however, depart from the vast scope of their predecessors, limiting their sources to a narrow range, predominantly William James and Alfred North Whitehead, engaged as much for their poetics as for their ideas. Yet these two authors acknowledge that the imagined stones could refer to their two stubborn dispositions: “In our writing together, we have had to learn how to ripple the difference between two stone-hard heads” (viii). Their conflicting differences never become apparent except as an advantage, reflected in the volume’s virtuoso range and contrasts.

Superposition illuminates their aim “to open philosophy to its outside” by “composing across the breach between philosophy and art” (vii) as they aspire to write the “conceptual interference pattern” (viii) between each pairing. They have considered the volume’s formal construction as a step in this pursuit, organizing it into two parts. Part 1, “Passages,” traces four modes of creative production: writing, architecture, dance, and visual art. These chapters, each with a narrow focus on one precisely chosen case study, offer less an analysis than a philosophical occupation of the subject, unfolding from the inside, not foreclosing through interpretation or historicizing, and following the occasional associative tangent, to “endeavor to make felt how philosophy can co-compose with other creative practices” (ix). This technique presents itself most thoroughly in the third chapter that attends to William Forsythe’s Woolf Phrase, the 2001 dance work that followed a “motional-relational” (43) path through Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway. The writing feels most at home in considering this performance’s fused movement and language.

The first chapter works through a profoundly fruitful pairing of Whitehead’s philosophy of the event as that which takes a “subjective form” (14) in a process-based environmental field, with the emergent ideas of autism poetics. Invoking Amanda (now Mel) Baggs’s militant calls for the recognition of neurodiversity, and drawing extracts from the resonant writing of Tito Mukhopadhyay, the chapter proposes that “the field can be cured—of the neurotypical devaluing of autistic experience” (22).

In the brief second chapter, the authors dispense with description and plunge the reader directly into an immersive rumination on the rhythms and environments of Arakawa and Gins’s conceptual/architectural projects as understood through Whitehead’s reading of a passage from Francis Bacon’s Natural History (c. 1620). Any reader lacking previous knowledge of the work of Arakawa and Gins will need to seek it elsewhere. The invitation, liberating in its incompleteness, to escape the burdens of academic comprehensivity, can lend the writing an ungrounded feeling. Yet the recognition of any volume as a porous construct, always already open to other necessary texts, remains disarmingly honest even when taken to an unorthodox extreme. The
fourth chapter concludes these phase-shifting varieties of thought, viewing painting as philosophy’s outside and “intercessor” (64), and regarding Bracha Ettinger’s photo-reproduced anti-images as classical compositions and vibrant retinal experiences on recording surfaces.

Part 2, “Propositions,” documents in 20 sections the work of the SenseLab, an “event-generating machine” (151) founded by Manning in 2004 in Montreal, dedicated “to a practice of the event,” and “conceived as a flexible meeting ground whose organizational form would arise as a function of its projects, and change as the projects evolved” (90). This second half details SenseLab’s unconventional symposia. Concentrating on organizational praxis (including funding structures, participant involvement, and the problematic “economization of creative activity” [86]), it frames its approach with the operative hybrid term “research-creation.” The authors argue for the hyphen, against practices of enforced separation, in which research precedes and is applied to creation. Pursuing research-creation “as a mode of activity all its own,” (89) they “redefine how research and creation practice modalities of intertwinement that give us new ways of conceiving both” (163).

SenseLab’s first event, Dancing the Virtual in 2005, “grew from a challenge arising from discussions with Isabelle Stengers, who expressed a criterion for her participation in an academic event that it be just that: an event” (90).

The idea was that there are “techniques of relation”—devices for catalyzing and modulating interaction—and that these comprise a domain of practice in their own right. It would be the work of the event organizers to experiment with inventing techniques of relation for research-creation, not only as part of a practice of event-design, but as part of a larger “ethics of engagement.” (91–92)

This ethics of engagement abstracts techniques into propositions to apply to future events. One such proposition, “Design Enabling Constraints,” for example, prohibited the presentation of “already-completed work of whatever kind,” requiring participants “to read the same selection of philosophical texts in advance of the event,” in order to activate “ideas on site […] performed in connection with texts everyone had read” (95–96).

The second event, Housing the Body, Dressing the Environment in 2007, convened around concepts of metamodeling, “an incipient assemblage (a platform for relation)” (116) rendering lines of formation not from one model but from “the plurality of models vying for fulfillment” (115). The event took as its refrain “a phrase borrowed from the architects/conceptual artists Arakawa and Madeline Gins: ‘What emanates from the body and what emanates from the architectural surround internixes’” (100–01). This reference loops back to part 1, as the book’s composition strategy accomplishes its own act of metamodeling, performing one of many complex, resonant juxtapositions. The two parts talk to one another like simultaneous sources of superposition patterns, as if neither precedes the other. By part 2’s conclusion, one has been thoroughly convinced by the adventurous work the volume has set for itself and accomplished: to free thought and event from restraining forms and forces, to rethink the possibilities of institutions, to navigate pathways of communal engagement, and to offer recorded diagrams as guidance, as instruction and direction for bringing a creative future into being.

—Matthew Goulish

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Situating their work within what they describe as “a chorus of ecological voices,” the editors position this volume as the first examination of the interconnections between ecocritical methodologies and Indigenous performance in North America, Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands. In his 2012 revised edition of Ecocriticism, considered by the editors as an important reference, author Greg Garrard observes that whereas the field of ecocriticism is inclusive of diverse methodological orientations, deep ecology constitutes the “explicit or implicit perspective of ecocritics,” who distinguish themselves from environmentalists by advocating a shift from a human-centered to a nature-centered system of values (Garrard [2004] 2012:23–24). Yet major objections have been raised to this model of deep ecology: its potentially misanthropic and apolitical ecocentrism as well as its affiliation with “modern reconstructions of North American Indian, pre-Christian Wiccan, shamanistic and other ‘primal’ religions” (Garrard 2012:25). Since Enacting Nature focuses on the two interrelated themes of ecojustice and ecospirituality, it appears to align itself most closely with ecofeminism, which engages with environmental justice issues and opposes all forms of domination and violence, thereby potentially bridging the ethical and spiritual orientations of deep ecology with social ecology’s political commitment to sustainable living and participatory democracy (Garrard 2012:29–30). Birgit Däwes and Marc Maufort specify, however, that this edited collection “does not purport to offer a definitive theoretical model through which ecological Indigenous performance must be examined” but instead explores “the multi-faceted languages of ecology on the contemporary Indigenous stage” (13).

Most of the contributions nevertheless share a common research agenda as they build upon postcolonial analyses of “ecological imperialism, environmental racism, and the ecological implications of cultural diversity and mobility” to confront tenacious Eurocentric constructions of “the eco-Indian or eco-Aboriginal” (12), which the editors cite Garrard as tracing to 16th-century representations of “‘primitive’ people [...] dwelling in harmony with nature, sustaining one of the most widespread and seductive myths of the non-European ‘Other’” (14).

In her opening essay, Däwes reads The Edward Curtis Project (2010) by Marie Clements and The Unplugging (2012) by Yvette Nolan as “cultural ecosystems” (23) that account for the long-term political, social, cultural, and economic effects of colonialism through an engagement with “space and land, as well as time and temporality, as crucial constituents of their plays’ encoded environments” (25). Ric Knowles extends this perspective to the culturally encoded landscapes of ancient Indigenous mounds and earthworks, which in North America can be traced to 4000 BCE. He observes that these mounds “functioned not to dominate the land [but as] focal points for trade, economic, and artistic exchange” as well as “sites for intellectual and spiritual practice” (49). Having worked as a dramaturg on the project Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns with artists Monique Mojica and LeAnne Howe, Knowles considers the embodied relationship they developed with the architecture of these earthworks. This model of Indigenous ecocritical performance leads him to identify alternative dramaturgical principles supporting a type of dramatic action that relies “less on conflict and domination” and embodies “the patience of the mounds,” which he evocatively envisions as operating at a deep level in a “negotiated harmony with the ecosphere, with the universe” (57).

Domination, conflict, and the drive to turn Indigenous land into profit are central to Drew Hayden Taylor’s play The Berlin Blues. Maryann Henck demonstrates that Taylor’s
strategic use of humor becomes a powerful form of criticism raising very serious questions about eco-, community-based, and pro-poor tourism. In the play, the grotesque German curators of the theme park Ojibway World are not only “guilty of sensationalizing and exoticizing Native culture,” Henck argues, but are also the agents of “environmental imperialism” (92). Yet the destruction of the park by its imported herd of buffalo reveals that even the most enterprising German imperialists can be forced by nature to take their relationship to the environment seriously.

Yvette Nolan further examines this relationship in her essay on Laura Shamas’s play Chasing Honey, where the disappearance of bees from the hive parallels the collapse of the Indigenous family and the loss of Native American identity. Nolan makes clear that Shamas is not suggesting that Indigenous people must forsake tradition if they are to survive modern life—epitomized by cell phones, pesticides, and global warming—but asserts instead that the survival of both humans and bees crucially depends on the ongoing transmission of traditional knowledge. Stressing that “beeckeeping in Indigenous America is one of the oldest traditional practices,” Nolan argues that forgetting this knowledge means “forgetting who you are” (107). Nicholle Dragone also addresses knowledge transmission in her analysis of the ecology of Haudenosaunee cultural traditions within Eric Gansworth’s metatheatrical text Re-Creation Story. This play features a discriminating Indigenous audience determined to reclaim its active involvement “in the ongoing process of creation and re-creation” (125), a process that Dragone defines as uniquely dependent on a reciprocal relationship between the storyteller and the audience.

Rachael Swain considers the far-reaching consequences of the genocidal policies that forcibly removed Aboriginal Australian children from their families and communities between 1910 and 1970, resulting in the loss of traditional songs, dances, and stories that had been integral to Indigenous knowledge systems. Swain, who discusses four devised performances, suggests that Indigenous ecocritical performance in Australia requires a deep engagement with traditional knowledge systems and the development of an intercultural performance language and dramaturgy “where dispossession/possession of place and belonging are interrogated without resolution in an easy ecology” (181). The enduring environmental impact of colonization and globalization is examined by Diana Looser, who situates the work of New Caledonian Kanak playwright Pierre Wakaw Gope within “the broader genre of postcolonial Pacific Island performances” (184), a genre that raises provocative questions about the relationship between colonial histories and current political realities. Employing the lens of the Indigenous epistemological system matauranga Māori, Hilary Halba proposes a powerful counterperspective by showing that for Māori playwrights, “the history of the human subject interweaves with the world of nature, inextricably linking people with other forces in the ecosystem” (220), so that nature is not perceived as “a metaphor for human experience” but conceived as “sibling to humanity and culture” (231).

Having highlighted the shape-shifting diversity of Indigenous ecological aesthetics and the cultural specificity of their distinct cosmologies, Maufort suggests in the closing essay that future comparative scholarly endeavors will be needed to further explore the role of Indigenous artists in the preservation of local knowledge systems in the age of globalization. Yet given the explicit commitment of the editors to linking postcolonial and ecocritical perspectives when analyzing the work of Indigenous artists, it is surprising to find only two self-identified Indigenous authors among the 14 invited contributors, namely, Nolan and Dragone. Nolan’s self-reflexive examination of her contribution is of particular significance since she openly addresses “the pressure of serving as a cultural informant, a guide to the Indigenous worldview for the non-Native traveler” (111). Although the non-Native travelers featured in this volume are legitimized by the respectable academic positions they hold in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States, Austria, Germany, and Belgium, this chorus of ecocritical scholars is much less balanced than one might have hoped for, and the reader is left to wonder whether
including a greater number of Indigenous voices might have helped to decolonize ecocriticism by creating perspectives on Indigenous performance that are truly polyphonic.

While Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies would have substantially enriched the theoretical framework of this edited collection, further consideration could have also been given to the influence of ecofeminists such as Vandana Shiva, who links the violent history of European colonialism to the current neocolonial appropriation of the traditional biological knowledge of Indigenous peoples by biotechnology companies protected by the World Trade Organization (Garrard [2004] 2012:179). The lack of inclusion of such perspectives in this volume hence raises important questions about the relationship of ecocritical research with both colonialism and globalization, and calls for more culturally diverse articulations of ecocriticism, which, along with performance studies, would surely benefit from more sustained collaborations with Indigenous scholars and artists.

— Virginie Magnat

Reference

Virginie Magnat is Associate Professor at the University of British Columbia. Her monograph *Grotowski, Women, and Contemporary Performance: Meetings with Remarkable Women* (Routledge, 2014) received the Canadian Association for Theatre Research Ann Saddlemyer Book Award Honorable Mention, and the companion documentary film series is featured on the Routledge Performance Archive (http://www.routledgeperformancearchive.com). virginie.magnat@ubc.ca


**The Captive Stage: Performance and the Proslavery Imagination of the Antebellum North.**


For the past couple of decades, scholars of early US drama have been organizing a stealth campaign to change how we look at the culture of 18th and 19th century America. Bruce McConachie (1992), Heather Nathans (2003), and Jeffrey H. Richards (2005), among others, have all argued that the stage, rather than the parlor or the literary magazine, is the place to examine early American culture, politics, aesthetics, and class formation. This claim runs counter to a long-running trend in US literary studies, which has looked to prose—especially the novel—for insight into American national and cultural formation. As scholars have shown, the novel was a formational genre especially for the American middle class, particularly but not exclusively women (see for example Kelley 1984; Davidson 1986; Tompkins 1986; Hendler 2001). The novel schooled its readers in appropriate domestic behavior, affective relations, and the interactions between social classes, races, and genders.
Arguments around canonicity, literary and cultural history, and indeed, the meanings of US culture, have looked to the novel as an explanatory technology and have charted generic developments alongside national changes.

But the novel can only take us so far, especially since the printed word was hardly accessible to the majority of the population, even as the theatre was available to almost everyone. While literacy rates in some parts of the country, especially New England, were fairly high even among working-class people, the Mid-Atlantic states (where the theatre dominated) lagged behind. The numbers in the Southern states were even lower (Moran and Vinoskis 1992:293).

By contrast, the theatre required no reading, and offered a full evening of entertainment, from tragedies and melodramas to farces, songs, dancing, and even animal acts. From the Revolution to the end of the century, ticket prices plummeted from the equivalent of a day’s pay for an artisan to a third of that (Butsch 2000:33). By the 1830s, ticket prices were half of what they had been at the beginning of the century (40). Before changes in print technology in the 1840s the entire run of a moderately successful novel rarely topped 3,000 copies. By contrast, a large theatre like the Bowery held up to 3,500 people a night over the course of a season that ran for months.

Theatrical space is public space, in contrast to the private space of the novel. Moreover, as Elizabeth Maddock Dillon argues in her striking new book *New World Drama*, the space of performance became increasingly important at the same time that actual, physical shared spaces—land held in common by the people, for example—were privatized and fenced off from the working classes. For Dillon, modernity is defined trans-Atlantically by the formation of a different kind of shared experience: what she calls the “performative commons.” Unlike the Habermasian concept of the public sphere, which has literacy at its core, the performative commons operates beyond print (especially important for enslaved people, whose distance from literacy was often enforced by violence). While in many ways much more abstract than the material fact of common lands, the performative commons is profoundly embodied, “embedded within the physical movement or presence of a body or object on stage” (51).

Finally, unlike the novel, which was explicitly identified with national formation, plays and the actors who performed them traveled throughout the Atlantic world, changing meaning with each new context. As Dillon points out, turning our eyes to the stage helps us see how profoundly transnational early performance culture was. In the now-dominant argument made by Benedict Anderson and Michael Warner, print culture was a primary technology for modern national self-recognition (see for example Anderson 1991; Warner 1992). But, in Dillon’s elegant formulation, the nations along the English-speaking Atlantic coasts were formed by the dual forces of settler colonialism and race slavery; as she puts it, modernity is brought into being by “the racial segmentation of labor and a differential distribution of humanness” (30). Dividing her analysis by location—London, Charleston, Kingston, New York, and the transportations voluntary and forced among and between these sites—Dillon moves much as these performances did: temporally, yes, but primarily spatially.

The development of political popular sovereignty at “home” (in this case Britain) that characterized the colonial period and extended into US independence, is, in Dillon’s telling, constituted by the immiseration, enslavement, and destruction of racialized populations abroad, in the North American and Caribbean colonies. Indeed, in one of her many reworkings of the données of modernity, Dillon offers a corrective to Michel Foucault’s argument in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) that violent public punishment as a reconstitution of the sovereign body disappears in the modern era. Not at all. Rather, the performance of violence as revenge for challenges to
sovereignty is outsourced to the colonies: there is no shortage of public torture and death visited upon indigenous and enslaved people in Charleston, South Carolina, or Kingston, Jamaica.

And while this violence almost never finds its way onto the pages of Anglophone fiction, it is everywhere in the plays and street performances of the Atlantic world. Often, it’s as an alibi: for example, British and American obsession with Spanish cruelty against indigenous Americans (William D’Avenant’s 1658 opera The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru is Dillon’s prime piece of evidence here) can displace unspoken accusations of British kidnapping, enslaving, and working to death of Africans in the cane fields of Jamaica or, a little later, the rice plantations of the Carolinas.

Dillon does not just focus on the ruling class, however. Some of the most eye-opening parts of the book take the reader to the multilingual, multiracial milieu of Charleston, a major port for refugees from the Haitian revolution, and, most importantly, to the enslaved communities of Kingston. Jamaica’s status as the British empire’s money-making machine depended upon a vast workforce of enslaved people who outnumbered their white owners nine-to-one.

Jamaica was certainly far more brutal than the North American slave economies, but it was also more volatile, characterized by frequent uprisings, and more heavily influenced by African cultures. While the white creole class struggled to maintain status as British subjects, insisting on their kinship to whites back “home,” enslaved Africans created a performative commons that emphasized what Dillon calls “mimetic kinship”—the creation and acting out of newly formed family relations. In the most impressive part of her analysis of Jamaica, Dillon focuses on the Christmastime festival of Jonkonnu, which featured dancing, singing, dressing up, and “speaks of the extraordinary liberatory force of the aesthetic—the power of culture itself—to emerge from the scene of social death and negation” characterized by plantation slavery (210).

Dillon’s final chapter on the New York theatrical scene leading up to the Astor Place Riots of 1843 comprised, for me at least, more familiar material, ranging from the violent suppression of the African Theatre in the early 1820s through the fashion for “Indian plays” in the same decade, and ending with minstrelsy. At the core of the chapter is a question: Why did the theatre of the first third of the 19th century generate so many riots? Dillon’s answer is striking: like the phenomenon of minstrelsy, theatre riots remind us of “the violence of settler colonialism that remains embedded in racial nationalism” as practiced by the white working class of the Jacksonian era.

Douglas A. Jones, Jr., would certainly agree. While not as wide-ranging as Dillon’s book, The Captive Stage also works to unsettle received wisdom about the role of the theatre in American history. However, Jones has more contemporary historiography in his sights—specifically, the field-changing revisions of blackface minstrelsy by Eric Lott (1993), Dale Cockrell (1997), and W.T. Lhamon (2003). While free blacks throughout the Northeast declared their fitness for civic engagement and their oratorical eloquence, white Americans drew on the dominant strain of proslavery thought to dismiss, ridicule, and violently attack black communities and performances. Contra Lott et al., who see minstrelsy as an active engagement by white workingmen with African American culture, Jones argues that, “with early minstrelsy, white working-class northerners expropriated black performance culture and developed a distinct strand of proslavery thought with which to bring about their socio-economic betterment at the expense of African Americans” (51).

After all, Jones points out, why would Northern white performers construct inaccurate, slanderous versions of black expression when many of them had access to actual black dancers, storytellers, and singers at locations such as New York’s Catherine Market? At the same time that minstrelsy was gelling as a theatrical phenomenon, a vibrant mixed-race working-class performance scene flourished by the New York docks. But white working-class nostalgia for the certainties of African (American) slavery militated against that kind of popular entertainment exploding in the way that minstrelsy did. Instead, “minstrelsy became a sort of aesthetic surro-
gate for the loss of slavery in the north [...It] functioned simultaneously as a conduit of white assertion and a buffer against black protest” (57).

It was not just that bourgeois reformers, in Jones’s argument, scapegoated white workers as racists in order to let themselves off the hook (although they did that as well—Jones is exorciating on the proslavery roots of white Northern antislavery); rather, white workers did not want to acknowledge the possibilities of class solidarity with their black counterparts. In fact, minstrelsy was, in Jones’s eyes, one example of “an explosion of discourses that questioned a shared humanity between the races and positioned African Americans as the (inherently) inferior race” (71).

White Northerners reconciled their commitment to national liberty and their belief in black inferiority through surrogates like blackface minstrels and Joice Heth, the elderly black woman whom P.T. Barnum passed off as George Washington’s 161-year-old nurse, a handy symbol of the inoffensiveness of American slavery. They mocked black political activity at every turn, with satirical “Bobalition” broadsides that lampooned black oratory, or Aunt Dinah’s Pledge, an 1850 temperance play that represents the eponymous Dinah and her children as harmless, childlike—although pious—buffoons. While “abolition, education, and temperance were the main pillars of antebellum black activism,” minstrel stump speeches and printed “Ethiopian joke books” rife with misspellings and malapropisms, worked to delegitimize black political and intellectual achievements (131).

As Jones shows, though, those achievements were few. In the first half of the 19th century, as white men gained an almost universal franchise, black men were thrown out of the electoral process state by state. One of the strengths of The Captive Stage is Jones’s careful linkage between black performative culture (the sermon, the song, the speech) and the development of African American political radicalism. Starting with the black working-class activist Peter Paul Simons, who condemned white racism on the one hand and black bourgeois respectability on the other, Jones assembles a pantheon of antebellum black political thinkers and writers—William Wells Brown and Henry Highland Garnet are two paradigmatic examples—who took on the cross-class white campaign to subjugate African American Northerners.

Surprisingly, Jones doesn’t address the phenomenon that was Master Juba: a virtuosic black dancer who flourished at the height of antebellum minstrelsy and was memorably described by Charles Dickens in American Notes. Master Juba toured with an all-white minstrel troupe, making it as far as London on the basis of Dickens’s praise. Neither quite of the minstrel scene, nor a political activist per se, Master Juba can be better understood through Dillon’s idea of the performative commons: a place where, if you’re willing to be counted as one of the troupe, you belong.

—Sarah E. Chinn

References


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**More Books**


In her new book, anthropologist Judith Lynne Hanna—author of *To Dance Is Human* (1979), *The Audience-Performer Connection* (1983), *Dance Sex, and Gender* (1988), and *Naked Truth* (2012)—continues her exploration of dance as part of the broad spectrum of performance. In *Dancing to Learn*, Hanna argues for dance as a powerful learning tool. Hanna’s book is both a scholarly study and a manifesto. Drawing on a wide range of recent neurological research, she advocates for dancing as not only or even mostly a physical, emotive art but a cognitive process that can help everyone from business people, surgeons, and lawyers to professors, athletes, and artists to think more clearly. Hanna writes about how the “brain choreographs” thought. “Learning to dance contributes to brain development, knowledge, mental and physical health, and fun. Integrally laced with other aspects of human life, dance both reflects and influences culture and society” (172).

—Richard Schechner

Through three sartorial icons, Sean Metzger examines the construction and dissemination of Chinese identity within a transnational network that he identifies as the “Sino/American interface.” Metzger traces the queue (the long braid worn by men), the qipao (a traditional patterned dress), and the Mao suit over the past 150 years of performance history in order to “think anew about the epistemology and ontology of bodily performance, on both stage and screen” (6). Broken into three sections with a total of eight chapters, Metzger’s investigation ranges from 19th-century yellowface performance and the work of filmmaker D.W. Griffith to the plays of Edward Albee and Jackie Chan movies. Yet Metzger avoids creating a survey by focusing on particular case studies such as the costuming of the actresses Anna May Wong and Maggie Cheung to discuss the progression of the qipao from an item of racial fetishism to a signifier of economic colonization. Cultivating both a careful examination of cinematic technique and a broad theoretical understanding of global cultural exchange, Metzger does an especially good job of putting the cultural industries of China and North America into conversation.


The 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) sparked widespread protests in the United States by groups as disparate as Missouri sharecroppers and Michigan housewives. Ann Folino White examines the performative nature of these protests through careful historical contextualization, solid theoretical grounding, and revelatory archival work. White demonstrates how the AAA protests embodied a national discourse on the nature of citizenship and the “right to food” (3). She sets the stage for her analysis by detailing the dominant narrative of the AAA, as supplied by the US government, through public exhibits at Chicago’s World’s Fair. The remaining chapters reveal the subversion of that narrative through a number of protests, each with its own character. Particularly fascinating is White’s discussion of the violent “Milk Pool” strike in Wisconsin which “resonated with the reminders of the Great War” (68), recasting the protesters as soldiers. In her final chapter, she turns to the Federal Theatre Project’s living newspaper production, *Triple-A Plowed Under* (1936), which featured scenes based on anti-AAA protests. Breaking down the play’s many scenes, White examines the work’s political effectiveness and its inherent commentary on theatrical production. Her epilogue serves as a reflection on modern day food policy and the politics of hunger.


Linking disparate figures such as Benjamin Franklin and Andy Kaufman, Kembrew McLeod’s *Pranksters* is a compendium of tricksters that is impressive in its breadth. Written in easy prose with a popular audience in mind, the book lacks the substantial interrogation of P.T. Barnum, ACT UP, and the Yippies that scholars might want. However, McLeod presents an intriguing vision of the way that “chicanery and irrationality” have helped formulate central tenets of modernity such as critical thinking, skepticism, and public discourse (4). Spanning four centuries, the book is at its best in examining the way pranks evolve from their original contexts, taking on new meaning and surprising legacies. Perhaps most thought provoking for scholars and practitioners of pranks and agitprop alike is McLeod’s examination of “prank blowback,” in which a stunt triggers severe responses from targets that upend the (often progressive)
platforms of the pranksters. McLeod also asserts provocative claims regarding the media’s part in amplifying some hoaxes into cultural phenomena (a 1600 anti-papist prank that contributes to Cold War paranoia!). Suffering slightly from a chronological structure that leads to repetition, the work is, at its heart, a loving paean to revolutionaries and countercultural thinkers, written with care and insight.


Craig J. Peariso’s work challenges traditional narratives regarding some of North America’s most significant political iconoclasts of the 1960s. His three chapters do heavy lifting by focusing on Abbie Hoffman, the Gay Activist Alliance, and Eldridge Cleaver of the Black Panthers. To Peariso, it was a period not of endless radical possibility, but a time at which there was a foreclosure on political antagonism that neutralized most efforts for change. Peariso argues for the surprising effectiveness of his subjects by recategorizing their work as “put-ons” or “a mode of inauthentic self-presentation based in the performance of stereotypical identities” (8). He finds endless depth in this notion, especially regarding the way his subjects use the media in efforts to undermine expectations, offer commentary, and self-construct. Peariso also cultivates the philosophical implications of the “put-on,” pairing analysis of the aesthetics of protest with the work of thinkers like Herbert Marcuse and Susan Sontag. Perhaps most unexpected are his incisive arguments regarding the highly controversial Cleaver. Peariso reveals subtle commentary on black masculinity that is embedded in Cleaver’s oft-dismissed macho militancy. The work’s Afterword brings the argument into the present by examining the Yes Men and the Occupy Movement.

**Performing Ground: Space, Camouflage, and the Art of Blending In.**


Providing a new and fascinating theoretical approach, Laura Levin rethinks the political potency of the act of camouflage as a contemporary performance technique. Examining a range of forms—performative photography, environmental and immersive theatre, site specific performance, and activist infiltration—she explores the exchanges of power, the expressions of subjectivities, and the challenges to material boundaries that contemporary artists enact when they blend in. Especially strong are her examinations of the work of photographers like Janieta Eyre and solo performers like Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Levin’s analysis demonstrates the way the female body can draw attention to its marginalized status through interaction with the environment and a “feminist reworking of physical space” (55). Levin extends her investigation to concerns over modern surveillance, embedded journalism, and the politically savvy pranks of Sacha Baron Cohen and the Yes Men. Additionally, she offers a fresh look at Richard Schechner’s environmental theatre and the famed Dionysus in ’69, which leads her to more recent performances such as Sleep No More. Performing Ground will be of great value to a range of scholars, and has wide applications especially in its investigation of gendered assumptions regarding setting, mise-en-scène, and performative environments.

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