**Performing Proximity: Curious Intimacies.** By Leslie Hill and Helen Paris. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; 223 pp.; illustrations. $96.00 cloth, $31.00 paper.

Artist-scholars Leslie Hill and Helen Paris are Curious. They are the inquisitive codirectors of Curious, a company whose intimately scaled performances in lifeboats, on country buses, and by seashores might seem odd to conventional theatrical spectators. Yet, that curiosity fuels their performances as well as their analyses; and they are particularly curious about how closeness impacts the audience/performer relationship. *Performing Proximity* offers an in-depth look into this encounter developed through research that ranges from the molecular to astronautical, including exchanges with scientists, civil servants, and sex workers.

The study is situated within the growing field of scholarship on immersive theatre and at the intersections of scientific and performance-based studies of the body. Drawing on these studies, with particular attention to “proxemic zones,” the authors theorize how closeness in performance activates sensory relationships and experiences of intimate encounters. The book thus serves as both a study of performance proxemics as well as an “insider’s” guide to intimate performance creation.

The book’s organizational logic animates this oscillation between analytic reflection and poiesis. Part One focuses on four case studies: two rooted in interior investigations of domestic spaces and bodies (“Interior I: On the Scent” and “Interior II: the moment I saw you I knew I could love you”) and two focused on landscape performances (“Landscape I: Out of Water” and “Landscape II: Lost & Found.”) Part Two explores the autobiological performance-making process in the “laboratory” (with scientists and shift workers), the studio, and in the field.

The authors internally organize case study chapters to enable readers’ shifts in perspective and perception. The chapter exploring *On the Scent* (2003), for example, offers a sensuously detailed journey through the production, a discussion of the neurobiology of smell, and a collage of perception theories and audience responses. I experienced the performance through evocative descriptions of rose cream chocolates, burning pork chops, hairspray, and musky, stale shaving lotion. Black-and-white close-up photos provide another archival medium of sensuous performance moments: Hill sniffing lines of chili or burning a clump of her hair. The chapter’s analysis also works via proximity, with theoretical citations and audience responses placed near each other, thus inviting the reader to make connections. While appreciative of the experimentation with form and voice, I found myself wishing for a stronger analytic guide towards the latter part of the chapter.

Yet, that kind of haptic disorientation is key to how Paris and Hill work as sensuous scholars. They are deeply curious about how human beings operate through impulse and intuition as well as cognition. To investigate the phenomenon of “gut feeling,” for example, they shared uncensored images and ideas with each other through email exchanges while also conducting experiential research in a neurogastroenterologist “gut” lab. The resultant performance, *the*...
moment I saw you I knew I could love you (2009), explored and evoked gut feelings while attending to the experience of “close-ups.” Audience members sat on a stage confined in one of three life rafts, encountering technological perspective shifts including the projection of a tiny filmic scenario onto a packet of seasickness pills and the reading of an audience member’s “entrails” viewed through an ultrasound. The analytics here focus, in part, on comparative assessment of audience experiences suggesting how “intimate” social relationships shifted to more distanced “public” relationships when the life rafts filled beyond eight audience members.

The authors’ inquiries into the poetics of intimacy extend to their reading audience. I found myself addressed as an unknowable subject, a composite “you,” a “dear reader”—engaging another kind of curious intimacy. While reading the chapters on interiors and landscapes I noted myself attending to internal bodily processes and proximal surroundings. Sitting on the bank of the Mississippi River, I alternately paused to take in the expanse before me and concentrate on swallowing. I also made associative links, recalling environmental scientist Rachel Carson’s writings on seascapes as “edges” as I read about Out of Water (2012), a performance that invited audiences at the PSi 19 (Performance Studies International) conference to encounter each other at dawn, traveling to the ocean shore to walk a mile towards approaching performers.

In addition to provoking this movement of thought through shifts in address and analytic registers, the book’s illustrations subtly emphasize changes in perspective. The “interior” chapters include sharp contrast close-ups of sensuous moments while wide-angle shots accompany the “landscape” chapters. Chapters on process offer medium-shot contextual frames: co-author Paris departing from the London Lost Properties Department or a montage of laboratory instruments. A fieldwork chapter includes community collaborators photographed at a distance. The study’s more conventional scholarly introduction features a graph of proxemic zones, detailing the senses engaged at different distances, while a chapter on studio work includes a poetic photographic composition of Paris’s face emerging through her own gut as well as documents of the studio process, such as lists and notes.

The notion of “shift work” is addressed as a material as well as a rhetorical practice. Paris and Hill use this term to describe their performance labor, which often repeats or takes place over eight-hour time frames. Research also occurs as a process of exchange encountered through various kinds of “lab work.” Paris takes on a temporary position in a London Lost Properties Department translating her experience through the lenses of cultural anthropology and dramaturgy, closely attending to gestural vocabulary, the everyday poetry of emotional inquiry, and ways of cataloging loss. Paris and Hill also detail the painful practices of their autobiographical research process, including getting a balloon shoved down a nasal passage for a gastrointestinal experiment. Mutual exchanges with researchers include sharing “smell memory” databases with the National Centre for Biological Sciences in Bangalore, leading in turn to new research directions for the lab. Exchanges also occur “in the field” with inquiries making visible the gap between what others want to know about sex workers and their own concerns.

Through a variety of shifting registers and intimate explorations Performing Proximity offers a prismatic study of close encounters. From physiological to phenomenological, Paris and Hill invite us to continuously reexamine our perspectives on proximity through performance.

— Sonja Arsham Kuftinec

This ambitious book examines two areas that are sadly underrepresented in English-language theatre scholarship: theatre architecture (and scenography more broadly) and 18th-century French theatre. But Pannill Camp’s impressive study goes well beyond the confines of either discipline, situating its subject in a wide-ranging examination of Enlightenment philosophy, architectural theory, and natural sciences. It is not, states the author, a “descriptive history of French theatre architecture,” but rather “an interpretation of the evolving spatial ideology beneath a profound mutation in theatrical aesthetics” (6).

The theatres of 18th-century France were, by and large, poorly designed and equipped, many of them housed, as they had been since the days of Pierre Corneille, in converted tennis courts. A movement arose in the 1740s, however, to reform the physical theatre, and over the next half-century more than 100 new theatres were constructed throughout the country. This unprecedented development was distinguished not merely by the magnitude of the undertaking—probably unmatched anywhere in Europe—but by the theoretical underpinnings that accompanied the project. Theatre was understood as having the potential to intersect with the moral, social, and intellectual life of the nation and it was believed that the theatrical space, both stage and auditorium, were inextricably bound up in the creation and reception of the theatrical event and thus its role in society. Camp begins with the famous etching of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux’s 1784 theatre at Besançon as seen through a human eye. This allows Camp to establish the connection between architectural framing and optics. The title of the book comes from Ledoux’s contention that “the first frame was without a doubt that which you see; it receives the divine influences that inflame our senses and reflects the worlds that surround us” (2). It also allows Camp to establish his major themes of reflection and transparency as well as organic modes of perception as a basis for the acquisition of human knowledge.

In the first chapter Camp sets up the challenges and contradictions that architects and theoreticians faced in the process of reform. He proceeds from the proposition that “all theatre space in some fashion fuses space that is a symbolic referent with another kind of space that is somatic and not restricted by a representation boundary” (28). Such a statement is based on certain debatable assumptions, but is probably a fair assessment of the situation confronting theatre architects and theoreticians of the 18th century. He traces the abandonment of perspective scenery as a visual organizing principle that allowed architects to explore stage configurations that did not necessarily require great depth. And in one of the more surprising theses of his book Camp offers the ubiquitous tennis court theatre, which he acknowledges had come to be a metonymic referent for poorly designed playhouses—condemned even by the chemist Antoine Lavoisier as barbaric—as a synthesizing environment for the development of a new visual vocabulary. The association of these problematic theatres with “disorder and violence” (51) even provided a moral basis for the theatre reform movement. Stepping back to the 17th century, Camp points out that René Descartes used the tennis court structures as a graphic means to explain the mechanics of optics. This latter example, however, also reveals Camp’s occasional tendency to go beyond what the material may support. After declaring that “the space of Cartesian optics is imbued with qualities that correspond with seventeenth-century playhouse architectonics” (56), he then admits that Descartes’s references to the tennis courts were not intended as a reference to theatre space, though Camp nonetheless maintains that given Descartes’s influence, “it is not unreasonable to surmise that his optical theory informed Enlightenment theatre architecture reformers” (57).
Starting in the second chapter Camp delves into the heart of his thesis by examining the divide between the imaginary world of the stage and the experiential world of the spectators, and the need to come to terms with the actuality of the three-dimensional space of the stage regardless of what it represented. “Theatrical presentations came to be seen as minor worlds separate from the plane of existence to which actors and spectators belong as such” (63), he explains. This led to the prevailing conception of theatre-as-mirror. The chapter, and indeed much of the middle of the book, moves into a deep exploration of philosophical ideas from a range of theoreticians, some dealing specifically with theatre, some whose ideas are more generally applicable. A few, such as D’Aubignac, are fairly well known while others may be revelations to the general theatre scholar. I will admit to having little familiarity with Jean-Baptiste Dubos who, Camp argues, was the pivotal figure in turning away from a rationalist ideology and positing “psychology in a Lockean mold” (79).

Chapter 3 turns to the spectator and situates theatre in the context of experimental sciences that were coming to the fore in the 18th century. This sets the stage, in the following chapter, to place the spectator at the center of the theatrical reform. Spectatorship, Camp declares, “had come to signify such an expansive category of experience that it came close to encompassing consciousness itself” (130–31). He concludes the book by situating the new architecture within the new science of optics, thus bringing us back to Ledoux’s etching. There is also a useful appendix with a list of all the theatres actually constructed throughout France during the second half of the 18th century.

Camp manages with great success to encompass much of 18th-century French philosophy and scientific investigation along with dramatic and architectural theory. Ultimately he makes clear how crucial theatre architecture and the articulation of stage space is to the reception of the theatrical event, a lesson that modern architects and scholars would do well to absorb.

Camp does an admirable job of synthesizing complex and dense material, but he is not the most elegant writer. It is hard not to think of how Joseph Roach so gracefully expounds on many of the same philosophers in The Player’s Passion. Finally, there is one infuriating aspect of this book. For a work that is dealing with optics and visuality, the quality of the illustrations is inexcusable, often so dark and muddy as to be unreadable. That aside, it is an important and valuable contribution to theatre studies.

—Arnold Aronson

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A Race So Different: Performance and Law in Asian America begins and closes with performances that make palpable the force of the law and its suspension in the “Global War on Terror.” In Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig’s play Lidless (2011), a former Guantánamo detainee confronts his interrogator and adopts the abject poses of his interrogation to stimulate her memory of their encounters. In Tracking Transience (2002), multimedia artist Hasan M. Elahi offers an extravagant performance of submission to the ubiquitous surveillance of brown bodies by recording
and sharing his every movement with the FBI — and the public — through a website.

Situated temporally at one end of a study that extends from the late 19th century to the present, these performances encapsulate A Race So Different’s key concerns: the intersection of racialization and the state of exception; the demand made on bodies caught at this intersection to present themselves as proper subjects of the law and the nation; and the productive engagements of law and performance. Tracing these engagements across five chapters and a conclusion, Joshua Chambers-Letson resists favoring the legal over the aesthetic, or the aesthetic over the legal, showing instead that “there is an aesthetics to the law, including performance conventions and theatricality” and that “performance, theater, and art often function as agents of the law” (5). The result is an impressive work that integrates a careful analysis of theatre, music, literature, photography, and legal archives with a clear call to seek social justice beyond what might seem possible. Among the most compelling aspects of the book are the moments when it pauses on an image, a sound, a question, or a gesture that might provide a flicker of this “beyond.”

In developing a theory of Asian American “racial exception,” Chambers-Letson draws from important scholarship by David Palumbo-Liu, Karen Shimakawa, and others, which has established the simultaneity of inclusion and exclusion as characteristic of Asian American racialization. Highlighting the force of legal subjection in this dynamic, Chambers-Letson usefully connects work on Asian American racial formation with Carl Schmitt’s theory of the state of exception and Walter Benjamin’s argument that the “state of emergency” is the abiding condition of the oppressed. Attentive to transnational and relational formations of racial difference, the chapters build connections across time and space, such that we see the giant American flag on a mosque after 9/11 as kin to an equally large “I Am an American” sign on a Japanese American grocery store in 1942, and hear echoes of Lily Chin’s calls for justice for her son, Vincent Chin, after his brutal murder in 1982, in the appeals by the parents of Emmett Till, Matthew Shepard, Sakia Gunn, Danny Chen, and Trayvon Martin.

Mother and child — namely, Madame Butterfly and her son Trouble — stand at the center of Chapter 1, one of the richest sections of the book. The chapter attends not only to Puccini’s popular opera about a Japanese woman abandoned by her unscrupulous American husband, but also to its less-known precursors: the novella by John Luther Long, which was published in 1898, and the dramatic adaptation by David Belasco, which was first staged in 1900. Chambers-Letson skillfully shows the prominence of legal discourse across these three works. A scene in which Madame Butterfly imagines going before an American judge provides a compelling example of how subjects excluded by American law come to perform for it. Whereas Madame Butterfly’s suicide “resolves the question of her impossible national and racial subjectivity” (58), Trouble’s ambiguous status and uncertain future constitute a crisis of legal subjectivity. As Chambers-Letson demonstrates, this crisis continues to be played out in contemporary productions of the opera as well as in the Supreme Court. In cases such as Miller v. Albright (1998) and Nguyen v. INS (2001), for example, the court has had to assess the legal status of those who, like Trouble, were born of an American parent outside US borders.

Chapter 2 turns to Chinoiserie (1995), a performance by Ping Chong and Company that (much like A Race So Different) moves between historical moments to reveal important resonances and presents the possibility of reparative justice. Although the performance focuses on Chinese American history and diplomatic relations between the United States and China, it also encourages making associations among differently racialized bodies through cross-racial casting.
Such casting practices have an opposite function in the student plays and pageants described in chapter 3, the first of two chapters that explore the Japanese American internment camp as a stage for performances of patriotism and resistance. Moving away from arguments that emphasize the “spectacular singularity” (98) of the camps, Chambers-Letson stresses instead that they compelled performances of “national identification from the very space that negates one’s position in the body politic” (97). Chapter 3 sets these exhibitions of allegiance, which include the mimicry of African American and Native American bodies, against hearings in which members of the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee were able to produce performances exposing the injustice of internment, with camp administrators as unwitting costars.

Chapter 4’s meditation on internee Moriyuki Shimada’s scrapbook exemplifies the notion, drawn from Roland Barthes, that photographs are “scenes of encounter” between the photographer and the eventual viewer (137). Weaving personal recollections and affective responses into his analysis, Chambers-Letson shows us how the touch of two internees’ hands and the flutter of a carp windsock over the camp barracks might anticipate a reparative future. He thus helps us see not only the faint traces of a guard tower lurking in the background as internees assume the innocuous poses of tourists, chorus line girls, and basketball players, but also the gestures of care and subtle images of hope that hint at other stories and possibilities. These materialize in chapter 5 in sonic form, namely in the voice of Chhom Nimol, the Cambodian American lead singer of indie rock group Dengue Fever. Reflecting on the impact of post-9/11 policies on immigrants and the history of US involvement in Southeast Asia, the chapter contends that Nimol and Dengue Fever, who take inspiration from Cambodian rock, contest the illegality attached to the bodies of Cambodian immigrants.

A Race So Different will appeal to scholars of American studies, Asian American studies, and performance studies, as well as those interested in the intersections of law and performance, and the relationship between cultural production and social justice. The evocative images and sounds of bodies responding to the law’s call linger after the book’s final pages. As Chambers-Letson eloquently puts it, “when we perform as properly situated subjects in order to be recognizable as such by the law, we run the risk of transforming our bodies into prisons” (19). He also shows us, however, how we might begin to imagine transformation from within those prisons.

—Ju Yon Kim


Faedra Chatard Carpenter’s Coloring Whiteness: Acts of Critique in Black Performance brings a wide-ranging lens—crossing theatre, visual art, and popular culture (television comedy, advertisements, pop icons)—to the whiteface performance strategies of African American performers. Whiteface is a subject of study that receives less attention than blackface performance and has been approached largely in opposition to blackface, through analyses of minstrelsy and its residues in theatre. Mary F. Brewer’s Staging Whiteness (2005) and Marvin McAllister’s Whiting Up: Whiteface Minstrels and Stage Europeans in African American Performance (2011),
relatively recent tomes on whiteness and whiteface from minstrelsy through 20th-century theatre and popular performance, are foundational texts for Carpenter’s project. Like McAllister’s book, Susan Gruber’s *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (1997), which focuses largely on white imaginations of blackness, provides precedence for Carpenter’s research with its breadth of case studies surpassing the theatrical stage. But Carpenter brings her strongly dramaturgical perspective to bear on both live and mediated sites such as Jefferson Pinder’s short film *Afro-Cosmonaut/Alien (White Noise)* #7 (2008); Michael Jackson’s corporeal transformations in both real life and the *Black or White* music video (1991); Dave Chappelle’s “Clayton Bigsby” (2003) and “Racial Draft” (2004) comedy skits; Daniel Tisdale’s *Post Plantation Pop* series (1988) and *Transitions, Inc.* project (1992); and the experiences of African American voiceover actors.

This broader set of sites, along with the dramaturgical analyses of Adrienne Kennedy’s play *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1969) and a dedicated chapter each on Douglas Turner Ward’s *The Day of Absence* (1964) and Lydia Diamond’s stage adaptation of Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (2007), allows Carpenter to characterize whiteface as a strategy linked not solely to the history of the minstrel stage, but rather to the necessity for black cultural producers to reveal and recalibrate simple readings of race on either side of the black/white binary. In doing so, she is able to delineate several varieties of whiteface performance, providing useful terminological tools for future research and analysis in her much-needed archive across genres.

If blackface traffics in appropriative dispersions and distortions of blackness (or perceptions of it), whiteface is likewise an appropriative performance tactic, but one that interrogates whiteness’s usual normalization and impermeability. Carpenter veers away from solely theatrical works just as she avoids a reading of whiteface as a simple reversal of or reaction against blackface’s usual “deploy[ment] to comment on the quality and value of differing bodies” (11). In her examples, whiteface is used to comment upon the differing *experiences* of bodies under racialization. Viewing whiteface performances as making “strategic use” of symbolic, abstracted whiteness — making whiteness “strange” where it usually functions as neutral, unracialized, normalized, and privileged — Carpenter is clear about her desire to explicate not whiteness itself but rather the ways in which black performers have made use of its ability to function as a “fluctuating abstraction” with material and discursive impact on the lived experiences of black Americans (225, 3, 8–9).

While the diverse scope of the project is largely a boon, Carpenter’s deeper analyses of certain sites — discussions that are warranted and often the most invigorated writing — occasionally feel like divergences from the text’s overarching agenda. Her elaborations on well-rehearsed notions of black (and white) “absence-presence” and “(in)visibility” in translating *The Bluest Eye* from text to embodied performance, for example, raise complicated questions beyond the frame of whiteface (81–83). In that chapter and the one on *The Day of Absence* especially, Carpenter’s dramaturgical eye, a strength throughout, allows her to examine her objects in detail alongside the sociopolitical circumstances of their production. That same eye occasionally glosses over points that might deserve more complex readings: the use of tableaus in Walter Dallas’s 2010 iteration of *The Bluest Eye* only hints at its choreographic potency (110); the gender distinctions in Michael Jackson’s *Black or White* video might be considered not so much “e-raced” (146), as limited to facial cues, precisely those that remain key in visual rhetorics of racialization. But these moments feel less like missed opportunities than fodder for research beyond the purview of the book. That same chapter offers some stand-out descriptive revelations: Jackson as
an “embodiment of a personified hyphen” as he moves between the “sutured space[s]” of each shifting frame in the *Black or White* video (144); both Jackson and Daniel Tisdale’s emphases on racial transformations as productively intimating that not only can blackness be whitened, but that whiteness can be blackened.

The book’s same vast scope provides crucial scaffolding for further studies into each of the several performative functions of whiteface Carpenter identifies: “tinted whiteface,” “optic whiteface,” “nonconforming whiteface,” “naturalized whiteface,” “linguistic whiteface,” and “presumed aural whiteness.” These terms do not necessarily function as discrete modes of performance, and must be understood, as any good dramaturg might argue, through both artistic intent and audience reception. That same complicated terrain makes both Tisdale’s *Transitions, Inc.* street performances—in which his (invented) company sells “whitening” products to passersby, provoking everything from indignant disbelief to honest interest—and Dave Chappelle’s “Racial Draft” skit—premised on the malleability of racial and cultural affiliation, while revealing the oversimplicity of the codes used to keep groups differentiated—seem to manufacture the very problematic systems of racial legibility they also disrupt.

Carpenter’s own strategic arsenal centers—like the performers she describes—on a signifyin(g) practice of repeating and extending the analyses of her predecessors to define new terms, or contribute her particular angle to already well-investigated sites. Her body of research, beyond relevant African American and critical race studies texts, relies strongly on foundational performance and cultural theorists (Althusser, Austin, Bhabha, Bourdieu, Butler, Muñoz, Phelan, Schneider), moving swiftly between that theoretical canon and close readings of popular news items (like the spectacular 2001 case of Leo V. Felton, a neo-nazi skinhead of African descent [177–81]) or anecdotal descriptions (her riff on Michael Jackson’s postmortem popularity with her own children or her experience being heard as white in a phone conversation with a black playwright [154–56, 194–95]).

The final chapter and the “Coda,” on aural whiteface and postraciality, respectively, bring some refreshing complications to her preceding deductions and the study of whiteface writ large. The first befuddles the simplistic reliance of much performance analysis on visual regimes of perception as a means of unsettling racial structures, pointing instead to the presumptions of racial authenticity in “audible gestures,” evidenced not only in linguistic differences and manipulations, but also in assumptions about timbre: Carpenter urges that further attention be paid to the *sensational* ways we perceive difference and the *affective* responses that produce racialized readings of vocal sound (194; 210). The chapter ends with a useful reminder of the artistic potential in challenging expectations of difference (across the color line) as they are perpetuated in the blurring of aural and visual perception—learning to see race is learning a kind of blindness, just as “learning to hear is training in careful deafness” (224). The “Coda” on Jefferson Pinder, an apparently distant landing place from the interrogation of binaristic racial imaginaries at work in Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse*, attends to the contemporary imaginary of postracialism: Pinder’s whiting up in *Afrocomonaut/Alien (White Noise)* makes whiteness strange and otherworldly, but confounds easy readings of that act, as the largely formal reasoning and the material process behind the video produce sociopolitical meanings beyond themselves and raise more open-ended questions than answers about racial meaning-making (232).

Carpenter’s practice of dramaturgy intersects with her study of whiteness such that the text “dramaturgs whiteness,” showing how whiteface performance is itself a signifyin(g) act that “underscore[s] the constructed nature of all racial identities” by referring to and then troubling whiteness’s usually invisible machinations (14, 12). Carpenter’s contribution provides, as do the performances she analyzes, an opening for further conversation beyond the binaries it necessarily works through and with.

— Tara Aisha Willis

This formidable volume edited by Amal Allana and published by the National School of Drama (NSD) in association with Niyogi Books covers the vast expanse of contemporary Indian theatre, “across a span of some 150 years” from the dawn of realism in the 1850s to the early 2000s (xviii). As if to represent the immense trajectory that she is covering, the editor includes a vast range of materials to weave the narrative of the act of becoming. For Allana, firsthand accounts from actors are the foundation for further scholarship on Indian theatre. The accounts collated in this volume, according to Allana, “carry the amazing, bristling energy of people who are in the ‘act’ of creating something, making history, so that the story of contemporary Indian theatre then is seen to be in a constant state of ‘becoming’” (xviii). Reflective essays, memoirs, autobiographical writings, interviews, and critical essays all find their place within the covers of this impressively designed and lavishly produced volume with its glossy pages and multiple reproductions of photos and paintings.

Allana attempts to elucidate the sociohistorical “imperatives that have driven and had a bearing on the contemporary theatre movement” (xvii). Focusing on actors, according to Allana, allows history to come alive, since the words of actors “are laden with layers of felt and lived experience” (xvii). Allana divides the volume into three sections: “Staging Desire,” “Staging the Nation,” and “Staging Hybridities.” These correspond with three of the most definitive moments in the history of modern Indian theatre: the introduction of European realism and the beginning of modern Indian theatre, the rise of communism and a people’s theatre movement immediately before and after Indian independence in 1947, and finally the consolidation of a contemporary Indian theatre. Each segment is preceded by an introductory chapter that explains the sociocultural and political climate of the time period. The depth of Allana’s research and her lucid writing style are clearly demonstrated in these introductory essays.

The first section celebrates the erstwhile greats of modern Indian theatre. Allana tells us that, “Theatre, like the newspaper, became a forum where controversial, social, and national issues of import could be played out in materialised form” during the middle of the 19th century after the British had consolidated their rule over much of the Indian subcontinent (11). The eclectic selection that follows introduces the reader to a variety of influences and styles, which resulted in the eventual hybrid modern Indian theatre.

The second section of the book, “Staging the Nation,” picks up the narrative of Indian theatre around and immediately after Indian independence. In the introduction to this section, Allana reminds us of the dominant trends in Indian performance: Rabindranath Tagore’s nritiya natyas (dance-dramas) and the contemporary dance practice of Uday Shankar and his collabor-
tor Zohra Segal. Allana finds echoes of Tagore’s theatre work in Shankar’s contemporary dance practice, which strove “to create a new dance form that would draw substantially from Indian tradition, but one that would be modern in its sensibility and contemporary in its themes” (88).

Allana also chronicles the foundation of the Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA), the staging of IPTA’s iconic Nabanna (New Harvest) in 1944, and the play’s ability to effectively, “touch on an actual contemporary event” (89): the Bengal famine of 1943. Nabanna replaced the glitz and glamor of the royalty and gentry who populated the plays of the early 20th-century Bengali commercial theatre with the suffering, starving masses of rural areas, dressed in their everyday tattered clothing. The play showed the landed gentry for what it truly was—a class of ruthless oppressors—and exposed the public to the reality that the famine was orchestrated by an unholy collusion between the Indian landlords and the British government.

The third and final section of the book, “Staging Hybridities” is the tour de force unit of the volume. This period (1950 onwards) also coincides with Allana’s own theatrical journey as a student at the National School of Drama, a trainee at the erstwhile GDR at the Berliner Ensemble, and, finally, as chair of the NSD and one of contemporary India’s most potent directorial voices. The editor is a much more active presence in this section, contributing six of the eleven entries.

In her introduction, titled “Post-Independence Enactment,” Allana aptly captures the mood among Indian actors following the bloodbath of the Indian partition, which heralded the foundation of modern India. She appropriately chronicles defining moments during this time of the nation’s cultural history: the foundation of new theatre groups, the emergence of strong regional theatre centers in Maharashtra and West Bengal, the introduction of Stanislavskian and Brechtian styles in contemporary Indian performance, and the emergence of a political theatre culture. The centerpiece of Allana’s narrative for this period is the foundation of the NSD (1959) and the significant overhauling of its curriculum under the stewardship of Ebrahim Alkazi (b. 1925), who joined as the institute’s director in 1962 and remained in the post until 1977.

Besides the sections mentioned above, the book also includes a foreword by Richard Schechner, a preface by Allana’s mentor and father Ebrahim Alkazi, and a separate introduction by Allana. The editor includes detailed biographies of each actor included in the book, a comprehensive play list (compiled ably by Amitabh Srivastava), short histories of major theatre companies, a thorough bibliography, a useful glossary, and an index for easy navigation through the monumental volume. The book also includes some very rare photographs.

The final section of the book is the most engaging, although it shows a clear bias towards the NSD and its alumni. Most of the actors interviewed or included in this section have had a significant association with the institute. The interviews with Allana, however, are a treasure trove since she brings her own experience of being a student, teacher, director, and administrator at NSD to inform the observations made by her respondents.

Allana writes, “In a rather bleak archival scenario where no substantial national or private holding [sic] on theatre are currently available, the process of documenting any aspect of performance is a Herculean task” (xvii). While Allana does deserve accolades for accomplishing this task, the book suffers from some significant shortcomings. Namely, the volume could have been more useful if Allana had streamlined her focus rather than undertaking the expansive project of narrating the story of all of modern Indian theatre. The first two parts of the book include mostly reproductions and re-prints of previously published and anthologized material. Though these sections provide the context that leads up to the final and most intriguing part of the book, Allana’s comprehensive introductions could have done the job just as well. Second, at Rs.3000 (the list price for the volume in the Indian market) the book is most likely to gather dust at libraries outside of the reach of scores of actors and their audiences. The editor would have served the volume and its agenda better if she had not spent so much time dwelling in the
past, left her NSD moorings, and had spoken to actors across the country who are engaged in the act of becoming. That would have given this book the depth and expanse that it aspires to but never ends up achieving.

— Arnab Banerji

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The Columbia Anthology of Yuan Drama. C.T. Hsia, Wai-ye Li, and George Kao, eds. Columbia University Press, 2014; 409 pp. $120.00 cloth, $40.00 paper, e-book available.

Yuan drama—or more precisely, song-drama—has long occupied a privileged place in Western translations of Chinese literature. In the early decades of the 18th century, the Eurasian print networks of the Jesuit order propelled one particular play, The Orphan of Zhao, to the forefront of a dialogue between playmakers of the East and West. Seduced by the beauty of Chinese literature to the point of heralding it as an early, albeit unrecognized Christian revelation, a Jesuit father in Macau excerpted lines of dialogue from Orphan in an attempt to help his fellow missionaries master the intricacies of the spoken language. Meanwhile, one of his confrères in Paris announced the imminent appearance of a “Chinese tragedy” in a pamphlet designed to attract subscriptions for the grand apotheosis of the Jesuit project in China, The Universal History of China (1735–36), easily one of the most influential Western works on China ever compiled. Having been denuded of its literary core—the lyrical arias written from the point of view of a single protagonist—the skeletal playtext of Orphan nevertheless inspired actors, impresarios, and playwrights, including Voltaire (1694–1778) and Arthur Murphy (1727–1805), to mobilize China, Chinese characters, and Tartar figures on the European stage as an alternately edifying and entertaining spectacle for urban theatergoers. It is this same play that the Royal Shakespeare Company chose to make the basis for a first foray into the world of Chinese theatre in its 2013/14 season, and it is also the play that opens The Columbia Anthology of Yuan Drama (hereafter Anthology).

Despite this semblance of historical continuity, the Anthology marks something of a watershed in the modern reception of Chinese plays in the West. To be sure, Yuan drama constituted the bulk of the numerous 19th-century translations from the Chinese dramatic corpus, including for example, the famed Chalk Circle (1832); however, in the 20th century, living Chinese operatic traditions—most notably Beijing opera, Yue opera, and Kun opera—reinvented themselves as international cultural commodities and eventually eclipsed prior Western interest in the purely textually transmitted Yuan plays. In the People’s Republic of China, Yuan plays came to be constituted as part of a genealogy of anti-imperialist world literature, but reliable and readily accessible translations of the Yuan corpus in English or any other European language for that matter remained rare. More recently, however, growing out of an overall reassessment of the late imperial era as a period of great cultural creativity, the scholarly community has begun
to revisit the first great flowering of theatre in urban China and the Anthology crystallizes such findings in an interesting and reader-friendly fashion.

What in Mongol-ruled Yuan China (1260–1368) enabled the first flourishing of theatre as a pansocial, transregional, and literary form that generated thousands of written texts and drew thousands of spectators to permanent theatres in the then-largest cities in the world? The Introduction succinctly and authoritatively reviews some of the prevailing scholarly paradigms. While not dismissing the dominant Chinese interpretation of the plays as a form of protest against the depredations of Mongol rule, the Introduction gravitates to the more recent understanding of these song-dramas as a cultural expression of a happy and unprecedented symbiosis between rural opera, urban entertainment culture, literati talent, and court patronage. This was a world powered by the performances of famous, often female stars whose performances of lyrical and earthy plays proved to be so seductive and artistically thrilling as to draw the court and the literati into the ambit of urban entertainment despite whatever moral misgivings these elites may previously have had about the mixing of high and low or male and female in such public spaces. And while the playwrights — quite possibly China’s first professional writers — for the most part belonged to the classically literate, albeit officially uncredentialed elite, the plays — at least the 160 or so that survive — portray not only a social panorama ranging from emperors to beggars, but more importantly, they frequently frame this world from the vantage point of the traditional “underdogs” to both comic and serious effect.

At the heart of the Anthology are 10 plays. Each play is preceded by a short but informative and interpretive introduction that, together with explanatory footnotes, provides relevant historical background, cultural knowledge, and thematic comparisons across the Yuan drama corpus. While a list of dramatis personae for each play indicates both role type and character, the translations — in contrast to the originals — consistently refer to characters by name rather than by role type in an effort to enhance readability for readers unfamiliar with Chinese role designations. For the specialist, both the introductions and detailed footnotes delineate major textual variants from the editors’ base text: the highly influential, albeit idiosyncratic and hence perpetually controversial Yuanqu xuan (Selection of Yuan Plays, 1615/16), the landmark collection edited by Zang Maoxun (1550–1620), a disaffected, but well-connected Ming-dynasty ex-official. A mix of iconic and previously untranslated song-dramas, the Anthology succeeds in giving a taste of the richness of the ways in which Yuan plays — even in their heavily redacted Ming forms — interrogated, mocked, and renegotiated the familiar tropes of Confucian moralizing in the familial, legal, and political spheres, while simultaneously casting a sentimental and sometimes acerbic eye on the promises, pleasures, and delusions of romance. For instance, by juxtaposing two versions of The Orphan of Zhao — one a surviving Yuan version, the other Zang’s late-Ming redaction — the Anthology enables the reader to grasp something of the dynamic fluidity of Chinese song-drama, forestalling any notions of fixed cultural essences. Hence, amidst a spate of new translations of Yuan plays now appearing in English, this beautifully translated Anthology hopefully will supersede the woefully truncated adaptations collected in Penguin Classics’ decades-old Six Yuan Plays and find its way into classrooms and libraries alike to introduce new generations of readers to one of the world’s great dramatic traditions.

— Patricia Sieber

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In the shared preface that launches both Encounters in Performance Philosophy and Adorno and Performance, the Performance Philosophy series editors Laura Cull, Alice Lagaay, and Freddie Rokem announce that its volumes work to establish both the scope of the project and a self-reflexive space "to ask again and again: 'What is Performance Philosophy?' and ‘What might Performance Philosophy become?'" (vii in Encounters, ix in Adorno). It is possible to glean from these volumes a relatively clear sense of what constitutes Performance Philosophy today, at least in the terms laid out by those who identify their work under that heading. In part a professional association that boasts a robust website, an annual conference, a journal, and now a book series through Palgrave Macmillan, Performance Philosophy also positions itself as an emergent field of research, irreducible to either performance studies or philosophy. The extent to which the “performance philosophy” in these texts is distinct from more theory-driven forms of performance studies scholarship is not always clear. But, rather than measure the success of either text in the limited terms of academic novelty, it would be more productive to push the second line of inquiry, the one that asks what Performance Philosophy might yet become. (A third collection titled Žižek and Performance, edited by Broderick Chow and Alex Mangold [2014], is also part of this launch, but it is not under review here.) Any answers to the question of what Performance Philosophy can become will have to consider what neither the editors nor the contributors consider very extensively in either volume: that is, the historical and material conditions that make such a project seem at once possible and necessary. And to understand that requires us to formulate some alternative questions. Here is one that is not broached in either volume but can tell us just as much about the objects and analytical protocols that orient such work: “What (and how) does Performance Philosophy desire?” I cannot exhaust this question, but I will comment on what I sense some of the answers to it might be (and can become).

Encounters in Performance Philosophy features 14 texts, in addition to a brief introduction by editors Laura Cull and Alice Lagaay, that range in form from standard scholarly essays to one transcript of an exchange between a theorist and an artist, a tract-like and aphoristic text, and a translated talk. The 14 essays are organized under 8 separate themes, but maintain a relatively consistent focus on and approach to what Laura Cull, in her overview essay, names the “reciprocal (in)determination or mutual transformation” that the pivot of performance-as-philosophy and philosophy-as-performance is designed to enact (22). Phenomenology is represented strongly throughout the collection, with several contributions that meditate on Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s fleshy constitution of the visible, on Heidegger’s philosophy of the ground, or on this body of thought’s demolition and reassembly through figures like Jean-Luc Nancy and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. As the philosophical tradition that works through concepts that are most intimately related to the processual focus of theatrical performance and spectatorship, it seems appropriate that the languages of phenomenological thought make such a showing. Indeed, although it is not named directly, this focus discloses what is perhaps the essays’ primary concern: a clear interest in the various scales of the processes of performance and philosophy — from the embodiment of roles, to the raising of the stage, to the social collaborations of rehearsal and training.
However, given that “performance” almost always means “theatre” in this collection, the ambitions of this emergent field tend to far outpace its current execution. If Performance Philosophy is to be more than the sum of its parts, if it seeks to support new forms of thinking rather than transport the extant examples and methods of one discipline to the other, then it must at some point account for the singularity and variations—social, epistemological, and material—among modes of performance, and not simply on the theatrical stage. For instance, “form” and “pressure,” two terms that are central to Freddie Rokem’s close readings of Plato and Shakespeare, will operate quite differently in performances where “acting” is not a going concern. To be clear, it is less important that the volume is not comprehensive than that some of its articles display an inadequate theory of their own contingency. The consequence is that it proves difficult to shake the sense that Performance Philosophy’s trumpeting of its own innovation is much more than a retreat into the most conservative forms and genealogies of theatre studies.

There are notable exceptions to this tendency. Alice Lagaay and Alice Koubová’s exchange on the neutral and the impossible, among other topics, suggests some intriguing ways these philosophical concepts might offer new approaches to the social or “participatory” turn in art and performance theory. Martin Puchner’s analysis of site-specificity discloses not only the problem of the ground in theatrical and Heideggerian thought, but briefly brushes it against the histories of colonization and class difference (i.e., “the groundlings”) that shape the ground as a problem. Emmanuel Alloa’s careful analysis of the virtual in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty concludes with a suggestive meditation that turns virtuality into the sensible connection between the theatrical stage and politics as such. Katja Rothe’s discussion of female gymnasts in early 20th-century Germany draws on the language of networks in order to conceptualize the transmissions of bodily movement and technique, and in so doing makes a strong case for alternative epistemologies and histories of performance in the face of a dispersed paper trail. These and other texts demonstrate that Performance Philosophy is most promising when speculation and enactment are entangled with each other—or, put otherwise, when the very problems that compel the analyst also afford a way to understand such scenes and objects anew.

The 13 essays that make up *Adorno and Performance* are likewise deeply concerned with theatrical performance in particular, but also feature texts that address music, performance art, and writing. This volume aims at the difficult but admirable goal of articulating the relation of performance to a critical theorist whose own work has not been widely applied within the field of performance studies. Rather than position the volume as a sort of recovery act (filling the gap that separates Adorno and performance), coeditors Will Daddario and Karoline Gritzner instead pose their project as the exploration of the “intermittence”—or that which lies between, separates, and structures the encounter—of “Adorno” and “performance” (1, 3, 15). The approaches to this intermittence can be grouped under three broad, overlapping headings: applications and extensions of Adorno’s work to contemporary performance; investigations of the analytical terms and grammar shared (if not always recognized) between Adorno and performance studies, and specifically how this perspective yields new insights into Adorno’s critical theory; and efforts to rework Adorno’s terms to analyze contemporary material conditions. Readers who expect to find a direct correspondence between the philosophical thought of Adorno and the artistic and social *doing* that is performance will no doubt be frustrated. But this collection will prove valuable to those interested in how to apprehend philosophical problems as formal problems: how form becomes the sedimentation of a historical situation; how the conceptual and material dimensions of a work remain *in suspense*—unresolved but coconstitutive.
On the topic of form, however, it is somewhat peculiar (given Adorno’s own extensive meditations on how one conducts critical inquiry) that, as opposed to Encounters, the contributions to Adorno and Performance primarily take the form of the scholarly essay. No doubt, the essays all demonstrate a significant amount of variation within this form, but except for a few cases where authors deal directly with this issue, it strikes me that the pressure to explain or perform readings of Adorno obscures one of the most important dimensions of his critical theory: namely, that the form of thought is as much shaped by as alienated from the historical and material conditions with which it grapples. That is to say: fidelity to Adorno might look less like the adequate use of his concepts—negative dialectics, aesthetic semblance, non-identical thinking, among others that come up in the volume—than the development of an immanent critique of the early 21st century’s political conjunctures. What does an immanent critique of debt and austerity look like? Of antiblackness, settler-colonialism, and advanced marginality? Of the politics of knowledge production that structure the university today?

I do not ask these questions to pick on the project of Adorno and Performance (from which, I should note, I learned a great deal) but to circle back around to the question of Performance Philosophy’s desire, and especially the relationship of this desire to the historical and material conditions that determine it. Despite Laura Cull’s claim that we needn’t “allow institutional formations to inform or even determine our thinking” (21), I’d note that Performance Philosophy has yet to get very far away from the university and its uneven distribution of resources: that, effectively, the institution remains the horizon and object of its desire; that its claimed status as an emergent field can only be surveyed from within and in service to the university. Compared with a book like Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s The Undercommons (2013), with its insurgent, cacophonous modes of thinking that so strain against the common sense of the present that I do not know what else to call it than “performance philosophy,” these volumes tend to look a little too recognizable within received styles of disciplinary intervention.

This is not necessarily a problem in and of itself, and far be it from me to speak badly of efforts to support speculative, critical thought. But I raise this as an issue for Performance Philosophy, since, if we are to see it as an emergent field, then we must also ask what populates that field and constitutes its genealogy. As of now, unfortunately, neither volume gives much attention to the question of social difference as itself a matter of philosophical thought. To be clear, the issue for me upon finishing these texts is not the liberal complaint that this emergent field must strive to be more inclusive and diverse; rather, it is that when, say, race and sexuality hardly emerge as areas of critical inquiry and speculation, the institutional desires that underwrite Performance Philosophy begin to look less “new” and more like the institution we already know. Certainly there are plenty of models of what we might broadly describe as “performance philosophy” that deal extensively with difference as a resource for critical thinking—not only Moten and Harney come to mind, but so do all of José Esteban Muñoz’s works, especially his work on sense, brownness, and the commons (2013); Sarah Jane Cervenak’s Wandering (2014); and “The Haptic,” a special issue of Women & Performance edited by Rizvana Bradley (2014). I hope that as Performance Philosophy continues to ask what it is and what it might yet become, it will continue to build on the formidable and compelling work it has already done, and perhaps even consider letting the ground on which it currently stands slip away.

— Alex Pittman

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In 2012, I was invited to take part in a concert of music by an Argentinian composer, Ellen C. Covito. For one of the pieces, called “Composed Improvisation T,” I was asked to get a blank T-shirt and write musical phrases of a measure or two on the front and back. For the performance, for which we had no rehearsal, 13 of us roamed around the performance space in our T-shirts, performing the musical phrases that momentarily came into our field of vision as we passed each other in our individual circuitous rambles. The movement of our bodies was made equivalent with the form of the music, both in how we moved our scores for others to read and how we read others’ scores for our own performances. The actual scored musical phrases that we performed were rendered secondary to the movement of our bodies, realigning our attention to music’s inherent physical qualities and how they play out in the dynamics of improvisation and composition.

Covito is a little-known contemporary composer whose influence has yet to be established. Charlotte Moorman, on the other hand, is an American avantgarde legend whose performances and festivals left an indelible mark on art and performance in the 1960s and ’70s. Moorman is known for taking part in some of the American avantgarde’s most memorable and spectacular performances, and her work was often accompanied by her image, both in performance and in the advertising for the performances. By contrast, Covito, whose compositions begin in 2009, is an enigmatic figure. Rather than making a name performing her own work, her prose scores continue the techniques of mid-20th century conceptual composition and have inspired an international cast of musicians to venture into new territory. Both women illustrate the experimental spirit of the avantgarde in different ways and in different time periods. Though in some ways the two books examined here are far afield from one another—one, a riveting and expertly researched biography of Moorman by Joan Rothfuss, and the other a playful documentation of select performances of Covito’s scores by the No Collective—both volumes exhibit methodologies for navigating the dynamics of performance in terms of ownership, interpretation, improvisation, the visual, embodiment, and sonic materiality, specifically within the frameworks of the experimental music tradition.

Moorman was a controversial figure both to the larger public—for her use of nudity and her 1967 mid-performance arrest for “indecent exposure”—and within smaller inner circles of the art and music worlds that have wondered if she was more of an exhibitionist than an accomplished cellist. *Topless Cellist* skillfully parses out the many facets of Moorman’s complicated
personality and New York–based career to articulate Moorman’s substantial artistic vision and great accomplishments, as both a musician and the producer of festivals, within their historical and theoretical contexts in experimental music and performance art.

After two chapters outlining her childhood and education as a classical cellist, the book focuses on the organic development and solidification of Moorman’s career in the avantgarde, with the bulk of the book focusing on the 1960s. Rothfuss’s portrait of Moorman reveals that part of Moorman’s power as both a performer and a producer was her charisma. While she never composed her own music, her interpretations were very much her own. She understood the power of the visual (from the spectacle of nudity to costumes made of televisions to playing from a hot air balloon) working in tandem with the sonic and her most successful collaborations were with artists who brought the action and spectacle to the forefront and relied on Moorman’s unique style and charm. John Cage hated the way she performed his work and, alongside his close collaborators Jasper Johns and Merce Cunningham, found that the sonic elements were overshadowed by her presence (76–77). Meanwhile, Nam June Paik—her long-time and perhaps most important collaborator—found that her willingness to expose herself during performance allowed him to most fully further his objective of bringing the issue of sex into classical music performance. Her large and gutsy personality, concludes Rothfuss, made Moorman the perfect interpreter of his composition.

Moorman supported her multisensory vision of art, in which all performance disciplines and all modes of perception are engaged, most fully in the festivals she produced—in which she did, of course, also perform. From 1963 to 1980, Moorman produced 15 festivals—which eventually became known as the “Annual New York Avant Garde Festival”—in such varied settings as Central Park, a Staten Island ferry, Grand Central Terminal, Shea Stadium, and the World Trade Center. (An appendix lists the dates and places of all festivals, reviews, and the artists and performed works for the festivals from 1963–67, offering a glance at their impressive breadth). The festivals were a stunning who’s who of the avantgarde: from John Cage and Morton Feldman to David Behrman and Robert Ashley, Lucinda Childs and Carolee Schneemann, Jackson Mac Low and Allan Kaprow, Dick Higgins, Yoko Ono, on and on... In fact Ono offers a touching “Foreword” to the volume with a salute to how fun it was for her and Moorman in the ’60s before they “became such Queens” (x), and how significant Moorman’s festivals were for artists in the era, both for their large scale and their impressive rosters. Though the festivals, like Moorman’s career, began with a focus on music, by the mid-’60s they also included a roster of mixed-media artists, dancers, filmmakers, and poets. Moorman made a point of bringing contemporary music out of concert halls and into the streets of New York for the masses. Her ambition was to make experimental art a popular pastime rather than an elitist one. For instance, the 1967 festival took place on a Staten Island ferry, which took 20 trips in 24 hours, with approximately 300,000 people experiencing the work of 150 artists, including the music of Sun Ra and Michael Snow’s first showing of his renowned Wavelength. As Rothfuss puts it, “with the festival Moorman became the matchmaker, the networker, the knitter of the avantgarde” (211) and unlike other contemporary performance curators like George Maciunas and Dick Higgins who argued about the theoretical framework around the artwork they produced, Moorman just wanted the work to reach a larger audience.

Rothfuss does a particularly good job of teasing out Moorman’s relationship to feminism, a political movement for which the artist, according to Rothfuss, showed no interest. Yet her art invariably affected and was affected by feminism. Rothfuss describes the sexual dynamics both in Moorman’s performances of Giuseppe Chiari’s Per Arco (For the Bow) (1963), which was a response to the Vietnam War, and in her many years of collaboration with Nam June Paik, from

1. This is also discussed at length in Benjamin Piekut’s Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits in the chapter “Murder by Cello.”
his *Pop Sonata* (1964) to *Opera Sextronique* (1967) to the *TV Bra* (1969). This book documents and acknowledges Moorman’s labor as a performer as part of an integral aspect of the artworks she performed — rather than dismissing her performances as mere interpretations of secondary importance — in a refreshing understanding of the collaborative nature of the avantgarde.

It is in this same vein that *Ellen C. Covito: Works After Weather* pays homage to Covito’s oeuvre with copious pictures of her compositions being put into action in concerts in New York City and Tokyo from 2012 to 2014. Though not as sleek as the Moorman biography, which includes copious historic photographs and archival materials, *Works After Weather* captures the spirit of Covito’s music and communicates it to a readership that most likely has not seen her work performed. In fact, most of the book consists of translations of her prose scores (musical scores written in prose rather than musical notation), which will hopefully encourage more performances of the work. However, as the editors wisely explain, Covito’s compositions are not so much instructions for making specific sounds, but inquiries into “how to treat a score” (9). The pieces are philosophical investigations comprehensible on different levels when read and when performed. For instance, only after performing “Composed Improvisation T” did the nuanced effects of movement on the musical form become evident to me.

A majority of the scores are collected under the headings “Composed Improvisations” or “Improvised Compositions.” For instance, the above-mentioned “Composed Improvisation T,” or “Composed Improvisation E,” which involves a score being made in the form of an eye chart with performers standing 20 feet away from it and dropping out when they can no longer read the music. “Improvised Composition M,” on the other hand, involves a group of composers writing musical phrases in front of an audience, which are then performed immediately by on-hand performers. The works not only create musical textures but also investigate the conditions of musical creation.

*Works After Weather* contains a few thoughtful essays by performers and scholars who have spent time with Covito’s work, as well as a wonderful interview with Covito herself. The composer proves to be rigorously articulate about the conceptual nature of her work and her role as a composer: “The role I play in my works differs greatly from what composers are usually expected to do. I don’t write scores, I give instructions, and I use other people’s works in the form of ‘found scores.’ In the past, people have criticized me for being a ‘parasite.’ But for me, any kind of work must be built on the platform provided by other people. The whole notion of scores being determinate, for example, was not established by a single composer overnight” (154). Like Moorman, Covito outlines methodologies relying on collaboration and elements of fuzzy authorship to examine the boundaries of musical form. Though Covito’s work could be viewed as merely derivative of mid-century conceptual performance art and Fluxus prose scores, the precision of her ideas and the experience of performing her work reveals that she has mastered the compositional techniques developed in Moorman’s era — a simultaneous emphasis on action and sound — and given them space to mature. As a rising star in the radical musical traditions championed by Moorman 50 years ago, Covito continues the necessary investigation of the conditions of art — reversing the tactics used by Moorman and allowing her words rather than her image to take center stage.

— Gelsey Bell

Reference


In spring 2015, the Irish Times marked International Women’s Day by questioning the iconic “Irish Writers” poster that has long adorned Irish pubs, student dorms, and gift shops. The poster features 12 authors, most of them playwrights, all of whom are male. The Irish Times has now produced a new female-only version, although this in turn opened up a new line of questioning. Today, Dublin has a significant black community, so why did the 25 faces on the posters remain exclusively white? After all, the 2011 census revealed 17 percent of the nation had been born outside Ireland, an increase of 240 percent since 1996.

Several new books about Irish theatre tackle these issues of Ireland’s changing sense of national identity. Staging Intercultural Ireland is a valuable compendium of plays and interviews, highlighting how the Irish stage has responded to inward migration. Particularly good is the focus on versatile actor-playwright Donal O’Kelly, whose scripts have been largely unprinted until now. The editors also include work by the Nigerian-born theatre maker Bisi Adigun, although they acknowledge that Staging Intercultural Ireland is dominated by white, Irish-born dramatists. Readers may also feel disappointed that Adigun’s best-known work remains unavailable: due to a legal dispute with coauthor Roddy Doyle, there is still no published version of the Adigun-Doyle Playboy staged at the Abbey Theatre between 2007 and 2009.

Another important new resource is the play collection, Irish Women Dramatists 1908–2001. The editors include out-of-print work including Jennifer Johnston’s brilliant monologue (and excellent audition piece) Twinkletoes, which reveals the intersection of personal and political oppressions during the “Troubles,” that period of unrest and conflict that primarily took place...
in Northern Ireland between 1968–1998. The editors also publish, for the first time, Dolores Walshe’s *The Stranded Hours Between*, a wonderful piece (which frequently recalls Brian Friel’s *Translations*) that is set in apartheid South Africa and depicts the liberation that a white woman might gain through contact with a Xhosa refugee from Mozambique. The editors’ decision to include Walshe’s drama reveals the potential power of transnational engagement, with the Irish female dramatist exploring a South African–Mozambican context in order to raise resonant issues of patriarchal control, racism, and civil violence. On the downside, however, the introduction to *Irish Women Dramatists* does not always dovetail neatly with the rest of this volume. Although the editors detail the richness of early- and mid-20th-century women’s playwriting, and although they praise Marina Carr and Marie Jones as “two shining stars” (18), there are only two scripts included in the volume that date from before 1984, and none by those particular “stars.”

Kathleen Gough’s *Kinship and Performance* is a further attempt to restore the female to Irish theatrical-historical thinking. Her sophisticated study relies on a range of theoretical ideas, reworking, for example, Richard Schechner’s “restoration of behavior” in order to rethink both the *telos* that Schechner implies, and his primary focus on the social actor, with Gough emphasizing instead that restoration of behavior “*moves* backward and forward in the archive” (17). This leads Gough to draw comparisons between the lives of contemporaneous black American and Irish women, such as Ida B. Wells and Maud Gonne. Gough includes fictional meetings between these characters, drafted as short stage pieces, in order to highlight the affinities she finds. These moments are engaging, although the study could perhaps have been bolstered at times by more telling archival illustrations. For example, Gough makes much of the way Maud Gonne was “ubiquitously” labeled “The Irish Joan of Arc” (24). But where exactly was this label used? And when? Gough declines to mention it, but, according to Gonne’s son-in-law, Gonne’s French lover requested sex in church before a statue of Joan in order to engender “an Irish patriot hero.”

Something of Ireland’s neglect of female playwrights may relate to the fact that, as the introduction to *Irish Women Dramatists* puts it “Women have always spoken within domestic spheres” (2), and influential criticism of Irish drama by Raymond Williams and Seamus Deane has described domestic drama as entirely inadequate to the country’s political situation. But Nicholas Grene’s *Home on the Stage* highlights the possibilities of domestic drama from the 1870s to the present in the hands of writers who have sought to “adapt it, deconstruct it or play games with it” (205). Grene’s discussion ranges from Ibsen to Suzan-Lori Parks, but, as always, has fascinating things to say about Ireland, including how the Irish setting of recent Beckett productions may work against the playwright’s specific intentions. As Grene points out, Beckett “was quite prepared to let Irishisms into his English, but not as any sort of consistent medium” and thus the text of a play like *Endgame* does not make the characters “clearly Irish any more than the odd Hiberno-English turn of phrase in *Godot* turns Didi and Gogo into Irish tramps” (140–41).

Patrick Lonergan’s edited volume, *Contemporary Irish Plays*, reveals further how today’s Irish dramatists are willing to challenge, provoke, and discuss social problems. Pleasingly, although Lonergan includes Abbey Theatre drama, he also represents the site-specific work of ANU, a company founded only in 2009 but whose four-part “Monto Cycle,” exploring the social history of north inner-city Dublin, has since been a real highlight of Dublin’s Theatre Festival, and bears international comparison with the best work by Grid Iron and Punchdrunk. Lonergan includes the third part of the “Monto Cycle” in his book, and here the ANU company focuses on the deprivation, addiction, and violence of Dublin during the late-1970s and early 1980s. Such immersive work can only really have a shadowy half-life when represented on the page, but the inclusion in *Contemporary Irish Plays* does allow access to the material for those who could not join the very restricted audiences at the live event, and Lonergan’s introduction helps
to highlight the key issue of audience complicity that ANU performances so compellingly, and problematically, seek to raise.

In recent years, Ireland’s economic collapse of 2008 has increasingly been related to the “groupthink” of a cabal of white men (a TASC report of 2010 revealed how, at the height of the boom, a “golden circle” existed at the top of Irish business and public organizations: with just 39 powerful individuals occupying multiple directorships and leadership positions). Irish cultural life has scarcely remained free from comparable networks of patronage, and has, at times, suffered a similar humbling. Indeed, Lonergan suggestively points out that in 2004 the Abbey Theatre was the first major Irish institution deemed “too big to fail” and bailed out by the state. Overall, then, the volumes under review here give one final kick to the damaging “group-think” of Celtic-Tiger Ireland, and seek to promote instead an Irish culture of diversity, dissent, and experiment.

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