
Daniel Sack’s well-organized book has a beginning, middle, and an end. As in Aristotle’s Poetics, the beginning is not in itself necessarily after anything else, but it has naturally something else after it. After Live begins with the vanishing point of military intelligence according to Donald Rumsfeld, whose foreclosed epistemology of the Iraq War has been adapted into free verse by Hart Seely: “But there are also unknown unknowns, / The ones we don’t know / We don’t know” (2). Starting with Rumsfeld’s evacuated ground zero, which Sack later confesses partakes of a “deeply conservative and authoritarian potentiality” (189), stimulates his appetite for the imaginative excitement of unlimited potentiality itself, however nihilistic, un-disappointed by the buzzkill of mere possibility. After Live perforce ends with that which is itself naturally after something else, as its necessary or usual Aristotelian consequent, but which has nothing else after it: “the Last Frontier,” Sack sums up, is the empty landscape in which Franz Kafka’s unfinished novel, Amerika: The Missing Person, ends with its narrator’s clairvoyant vision, hallucinated in the heart of the badlands, of “a poster announcing that a mysterious enterprise, the The Nature Theater of Oklahoma (sic.),” is seeking a Vegas-like glitz-blemish on the cratered face of the state that Kafka names but cannot spell (196). But then at the very end of After Live, an apocalyptic tornado, caught on video, sweeps even that all away: “Here is a performance,” Sack concludes, “of pure expenditure and absolute renewal, where the potentiality of a means is fully taken up and fully exhausted with every step” (200).

The heart of After Live is in the middle—that which comes naturally after something and before something else. While Samuel Beckett makes obligatory appearances, the real Muse of naysaying potentiality in this book at its most brilliant is Herman Melville’s Bartleby the Scrivener. By saying that he prefers not to do certain things, tasks that he will not name, Bartleby forecloses possibility but affirms potentiality. Sack gives Melville’s passive-aggressive protagonist a grand role in his scheme, while reserving an even grander one for himself. Bartleby “emerges as a kind of Virgil,” guiding Sack’s Dante “through the abysses of potentiality” (18). The artworks that Bartleby leads Sack to behold and contemplate represent many media and genres, but they have one thing in common. They all try to hold still as objects but succumb to the “embodied potentiality” of motion, even when movement is “gagged,” because, as Sack sees things, “performance thinks differently than philosophy and literature” (19). In the five chapters that follow from the usefully schematized introduction, Sack turns first to “Dramatic Possibility” in the plays of Caryl Churchill and Will Eno and theories of action and character from Aristotle to Konstantin Stanislavski. As theatre and drama give way to performance art, however, possibility, which by nature narrows down to specific psychological choices (ask any acting teacher), yields to potentiality, which opens wide to embrace metaphysical abstractions. Giving Sack an instance
of open-ended potentiality in performance— as his touchstone Bartleby does repeatedly and the artists he chooses to present do singly and cumulatively—is like giving a Greek a right angle. He devotes the first of the central chapters of After Live to “Withholding Potentiality,” with the eponymous scrivener morphing from Melville’s narrated character into dancer-choreographer Didier Théron’s Bartleby (2006), which Sack evokes in a passage of exceptionally precise beauty and kinesthetic sensibility (74–76). From withholding he moves to “Beholding Potentiality,” making a thoughtful excavation of Minimalism in which he buries Michael Fried, and then, at last, to “Actualizing Potentiality,” which begins with a surprising but illuminating account of Edward Gordon Craig’s scenic art as prolegomenon to a sustained reading of Romeo Castellucci and the Societas Raffaello Sanzio. Like Raphael’s Transfiguration, which After Live reproduces on a full page and reads closely as an iconic index to the aesthetic of the company that bears the artist’s name, the figures in Sack’s composition stand in varied postures, and he renders them compellingly in situ; but he is most faithful to them when he shows them as if in motion, as if in making gestures, and as if in the act of speaking. The most puzzling feature of this otherwise lucid book is its title. For Sack, mediation documents actions and events; it is not an end in itself. He throws the principal instigator of the now decades-old “liveness debate” in performance studies, namely Philip Auslander, under the bus on page 11, so there is no score left for him to worry about settling. Why then after live? Is this just apocalypse-chic? Or is it rather apocalypse now? The answer depends on how literally the reader is being asked to understand the end-of-days imagery of the final pages in the concluding chapter, “Preferring Not to End.” The late-breaking giveaway is in the wistful sigh of the historian of performance, a historian “in the temporal sense as one who always comes after” (200), preferring not to end (who doesn’t?), but able to get started only after it’s all over.

After Live: Possibility, Potentiality, and the Future of Performance makes a worthy contribution to what might be called the philosophical turn in dramatic criticism and performance theory. What the philosophical turn suggests is that poststructuralist principles have become so deeply assimilated into critical thinking and artistic practices that theory need no longer be applied, like a coat of paint, over the surface of our experiences; rather, now the experiences themselves are made from it. Putting Sack’s book alongside Martin Harries’s Forgetting Lot’s Wife: On Destructive Spectatorship (2007), for instance, shows how both authors similarly work through—and Harries, in a harrowing “Coda” about apocalyptic violence, lives through—the abiding, even primordial fear of coming after, which is the fear of looking back. Given the catastrophic persistence of “unknown unknowns,” to fear looking back is really the darkest way to fear the future, or, as Sack puts it, in the unsettling question that ends his book, but not his anxious bargaining with potentiality, “to sight another storm on the horizon and to begin again, the same but differently?” (200).

— Joseph Roach

Reference


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Hans-Thies Lehmann’s *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre*, published in German in 2014 and now available in English translation, is a magisterial work: addressing the scope of a distinctive European genre of dramatic writing, it treats major theoretical figures from Aristotle to Nietzsche, major moments in the development of tragedy as a literary and theatrical form, and the writing of several major playwrights. Taking issue with Walter Kauffman’s sense that tragedy is “a form of literature that [...] presents a symbolic action as performed by actors” (2), Lehmann argues that “tragic experience is tied to the theatre” (8), proposing an experience unachievable and unimaginable without theatrical performance.

*Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre* is critically dependent on the claims of Lehmann’s *Postdramatic Theatre*, which argues that the contemporary theatre has changed, at least as far as European theatre is concerned, from a theatre asserting the “declamation and illustration of written drama” (2006:21), to a theatre in which the text is one of many factors working to constitute a uniquely theatrical event. The epochal character of Lehmann’s postdramatic theatre is widely familiar, but hardly unexceptionable; theatres historically have had extraordinarily different ways of conceiving the dramatic script, delivering it to the performers, implementing it in performance, and relating its work to other signifying formations, often at least as important to audiences as receiving “the drama.” Even today, one might wonder about the impact of “restored” venues like Shakespeare’s Globe and the Wanamaker theatre in London, or the vogue for “original” performance practices that claim to recreate an emulated mode of past experience on the horizon of contemporary performance. Since Lehmann brings “the perspective derived from investigating the ‘postdramatic’ character of contemporary theatre in the broadest sense to bear on the ‘dramatic’ tradition of tragedy” (3), tragedy emerges, not surprisingly, as postdramatic avant la lettre: a genre defined as experiential in contrast to the text-dependent theatre of the era intervening between the “predramatic” classical period, and the postdramatic present, the era of a capitalist and bourgeois European theatre preoccupied with representing “the play” as a figure for the ideological coherence of the world it reflects and enables.

From Aristotle onward, tragedy has been understood to arise from the formal logic of the playwright’s text; given Aristotle’s segregation of *opsis* from the essential elements of tragedy, tragic theatre is understood as infected by the senses, offering a disqualifying, “deceptive appearance of thinking” even when, properly understood, it might call “one to think about the deception it practices” (25). To render this experience tragic, Lehmann ascribes to it a thematic unity replacing the formal unity attributed to tragedy as a literary genre. That experience is not the tragic hero’s, but “the experience of those who witness—or, as the case may be, ‘live through’—the tragic process as spectators and observers, or even as participants of the event” (10). In the very different dramaturgy explored by Sophocles, Jean Racine, or Sarah Kane, tragedy consistently involves “the articulation of excess, transgression and self-loss” (299), so that within “this framework, the constitutive features of tragic experience are caesura and taking distance, catharsis, shame, anger and, finally, anagnorisis: understanding non-understanding” (168). Tragic experience must break “through the prison of cultural intelligibility,” involve “self-confrontation and self-foreignness,” mediated through a process of observation in which the “realities” at issue—the canonical reactions of terror, pity and/or sorrow—are given form through a ‘staging’ that activates affective potential,” in which an “individually experienced” situation is “determined by a situation that is not experienced individually” but addressed to “a public” (168).
Although the book’s 11 chapters proceed more or less chronologically, the argument has a
topical logic, pausing for a history of Antigone’s reception in philosophy, and to comment on
the relation between revenge and tragedy, on neoclassicism, on Racine and Jacques Lacan, and
on various engagements with the possibility of a postdramatic tragedy. The writing is deter-
mined, dense, occasionally abrupt. Peter Szondi is a presiding figure, alongside Bertolt Brecht;
Terry Eagleton and Raymond Williams are briskly dismissed. But perhaps the most arresting
element of this book is that, in ways reminiscent of a book Lehmann approves, Samuel Weber’s
Teatricality as Medium (2004), it conceives theatrical experience largely in relation to dramatic
writing. Lehmann’s engagement with writing is often luminous: the sense that Oedipus the King
produces a spectatorial recognition (anagnorisis) of nonunderstanding, or that neoclassical act-
ing in the status-driven theatre of 17th-century Paris focused on an “intersubjective” interplay
of gazes rendered tragic through the designs of Racine’s writing. But while Lehmann com-
ments suggestively on the general importance of dance in understanding Greek performance,
perhaps less persuasively on the movement from masked to unmasked acting, and shrewdly on
the demands of modern symbolism in the theatre, there is only passing discussion of the mate-
rial theatre and practical activities framing the tragic experience: architecture, acting practices,
the disposition of audiences, and so on. It may well be that “the connection between the tragic
and the theatre always takes shape in a different way” (411), but Lehmann’s ferocious atten-
tion to the rhetoric of tragedy might particularize and materialize that experience, recalling
for instance the structuring interplay of nascent capitalism and nationalism in the early mod-
ern experience of Hamlet or Otello sustaining the “sterile promontory” of London’s wooden
“O”; or the “aristocratic” intimacy choreographed by the drawing room performances imagined
by W.B. Yeats (who, notably, saw his innovations in movement, gesture, and vocal technique
precisely as means to foreground the poetic text); even the production decisions made around
Kane’s 4:48 Psychosis (2000), which have typically domesticated the resistant mise-en-page of
Kane’s drama. Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre already delivers much more than it promises, but
the impulse to ask for more arises from the informing structure of Lehmann’s argument. For
although there was a predramatic tragedy, and now a postdramatic tragedy, this book is preoc-
cupied by tragic experience that can be known by its texts, the tragedy of that necessary spectre
of Lehmann’s perspective on performance, the “dramatic theatre.”

—W.B. Worthen

Reference


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Moving Together: Theorizing and Making Contemporary Dance. By Rudi

In Moving Together: Theorizing and Making Contemporary Dance, Rudi Laermans offers a defin-
tion of contemporary dance, and analyzes how it’s made. The book gives a discerning account
of “dance beyond ballet” made in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, between 1982
Laermans highlights circumstances that fostered the “Flemish wave,” and that currently sustain Brussels as a principal center of dance in Europe and the international circuit. These circumstances include substantial governmental funding; theatres such as Kaaitheater in Brussels and Vooruit in Ghent; the biennial Klapstuk (now operating as STUK), which began presenting both Flemish and international artists in 1983; and Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker’s establishment of P.A.R.T.S. (Performing Arts Research and Training Studios) in 1995, which continues to populate the Flemish scene with graduates who become esteemed dancers and choreographers.

Moving Together has three main subjects of study: dances made between 1982 and 2006; a collaborative dance-making process led by De Keersmaeker with her company, Rosas, in 1995; and conversations and interviews conducted between 2008 and 2011 with dance artists involved in the transnational Brussels dance community. Laermans is a sociologist whose perspectives on dances, the field of dance, and the activities of dance-making are informed by German social theorist Niklas Luhmann and his systems theory, which holds that social systems, such as the world of contemporary dance, are systems of communication. This influence is evident throughout Laermans’s analysis and in statements such as: “Viewed through a sociological lens, one never is a tremendous choreographer but one endlessly becomes one through repeatedly being named as such by a plethora of individual actors” (77). Laermans also engages theories from Giorgio Agamben, Roland Barthes, Howard Becker, Walter Benjamin, Judith Butler, and Michel de Certeau. He includes voices from dance studies, such as Sally Banes, Ramsay Burt, Susan Foster, and chiefly André Lepecki. Additionally, he frequently references modern and postmodern dance artists, especially the Judson Dance Theatre, and he occasionally discusses the history of contemporary dance in relation to that of the visual arts. At over 400 pages, the book allows Laermans to consider contemporary dance, particular dances, and the dance-making process through multiple lenses.

The book is divided into two parts. In part 1, Laermans describes, historicizes, and theorizes contemporary dance and specific works presented in Flanders, and, in part 2, he analyzes a contemporary choreographic process, focusing on a “semi-directive mode of participative collaboration” (294). Each part contains sections that are divided into a “First Movement” and “Second Movement.” Inserted at various points throughout this structure are intermezzi, where Laermans develops lines of thinking about various topics, such as “The Temporalities of Dance,” “Reconsidering Conceptual Art,” and “Defining ‘The Choreographic,” a term he conceives (without reference to Jenn Joy’s project [2014]) as “the space in which dance is written” (195). Beginning in the first section’s First Movement, Laermans frames much of his thinking in terms of opposites, paradoxes, and “unity of differences,” such as when he posits, “the medium of dance is a merely virtual potential consisting of all possible movements and non-movements” (53). Also in this first section, Laermans discusses Jérôme Bel’s Le Denier Spectacle (1998) in order to introduce a main assertion of the book: what distinguishes contemporary dance from modern dance, “pure dance,” or theatre dance is its reflexivity. Contemporary dance is a critical practice that mediates on and questions dance’s material elements and discourses (46–50, 208–12).

Throughout part 1, Laermans offers a “thick description” of and theorizes pieces by reflexive dance makers, including Bel, De Keersmaeker, Vincent Dunoyer, Jan Fabre, Etienne Guilloteau, and Meg Stuart, with full sections devoted to work by De Keersmaeker and Stuart. Laermans argues that De Keersmaeker and the Rosas company complicate minimalist and “pure” dance by permitting performers’ individuality and agency in their recitation of repetitive phrases, and...
through gestures that lay bare cultural conditions of spectatorship. Regarding Stuart’s work, Laermans argues the overall result is multiple representations of the body as both subject to and capable of intervening on structuring forces. For Laermans, “This re-framing of the legitimate dancing body evidently re-articulates the practice of choreography” (181). In addition to the choreographic analysis of dances that question the nature of dance, Laermans develops ideas on “potentiality and impotentiality,” the “danceable,” modes of viewing dance, and the trajectory from postmodernist to contemporary dance.

Seemingly a distinct project from part 1, though no less theoretical, part 2 analyzes the making of contemporary dances, and puts forth a theory of “the collaboratory.” Laermans identifies collaboration as a defining feature of contemporary dance, and he (along with the dancers he interviews) critiques the “regime of singularity,” rooted in Romantic notions of the genius-artist and carried through modernism. Yet he concentrates on a “semi-directive” model of collaboration, which can have many different hierarchical arrangements but “does not relinquish the principal power of difference between a deciding subject and those subjected to its decisions” (354). Near the end of the book, Laermans broadens his focus to include a brief but fruitful discussion of “non-directive” or “flat” collaboration, which is characterized by peer-to-peer cooperation, and which “quasi-automatically invites to speak in terms of ‘we’” (387). His mention of two artists’ works—Xavier Le Roy’s E.X.T.E.N.T.I.O.N.S. (1999–2002), followed by Project (2003), and deufert&plischke’s Tentative Assembly (the tent piece) (2012)—invites further research and ethnographic study of collaborative dance-making networks and processes.

Laermans’s sociological perspective on contemporary dance and dance-making offers a systems-based view of this particular world and its practices. What does collaboration look like after Laermans’s project—after 2006, the end point of his deeper analysis, and 2015, when the book was published? Noyale Colin and Stefanie Sachsenmaier’s collection, Collaboration in Performance Practice: Premises, Workings and Failures (2016) puts forward examples and ideas. Expanding on Laermans, if “the medium of dance is a merely virtual potential consisting of all possible movements and non-movements” (53), can collaboration be thought of as a virtual potential consisting of all possible relations and non-relations, ways of relating and co-making? And in what ways will contemporary dance artists become conceptual and reflexive in their collaborations? Laermans presents collaboration as a rich territory for dancers and scholars to explore further, perhaps moving together.

—Amanda Hamp

Reference


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Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism exceeds the limitations of framing masochism solely as a formal and instrumental bodily practice. Instead, Amber Jamilla Musser pursues a tactical account of masochism as an assemblage in which an array of histories, figures, practices, and relationships interanimate to provide a critical space for investigating how the power structures of race are mediated through the physical and affective sensations of pain, suffering, sympathy, empathy, and guilt. Musser resists the commonplace assumptions that have attended SM scholarship, offering a unique approach foregrounding questions of race and sex and turning to sensation in order to account for difference without relying on the reification of identity.

The introductory chapter, “Theory, Flesh, Practice,” traces masochism’s theoretical, discursive, and historical trajectories with rigor. Musser narrates the scientific emergence of masochism in sexology under Richard von Krafft-Ebing and in psychoanalysis under Sigmund Freud, as well as its subsequent uptake by Michel Foucault and in queer theory. Musser devotes careful attention to the significant differences in each of these discursive formations—and what such distinctions have done to shape the critical deployments of masochism—but argues that they are fundamentally congruous. Musser highlights the shared attachment to framing masochism as an exceptional and subversive practice “that creates an outside to modernity” (17) while serving a crucial role in the production of an implicitly white and male liberal modern subjectivity it purports to oppose. Musser’s refusal to ascribe inherent subversiveness to masochism, and her investment in demystifying the ways that its dominant readings reify sexist and racist power relations, is a radical intervention that enables a profound reframing of what masochism might do politically. She asks, “What would it mean to see masochism not as a practice of exceptionalism or subversion but as an analytic space where difference is revealed?” (19).

Musser answers this question by assembling a wide-ranging archive of theoretical perspectives, historical sites, textual and aesthetic objects, and sexual practices that have more and less obvious relationships to her driving signifier. Many will be familiar to scholars working at the nexus of gender, sexuality, critical race, and performance studies, but Musser offers unique readings of and new relations amongst her objects through their unexpected pairings and placements and through the deployment of a methodological approach she names “empathetic reading” (19). Drawing from Gilles Deleuze’s “reading with love” (1995:9), Elizabeth Freeman’s concept of erotohistoriography (24), and Carolyn Dinshaw’s “touch across time” (24), Musser’s embodied methodology dwells in the intimate, sensational connections between reader, text, and object. Musser asserts that her goal of prioritizing sensation as a way to understand power structures “at a level beyond the discursive” (23) requires such a method. The result is an exceptionally constructive scholarship that avoids establishing for-or-against binaries even while enmeshed in long polarizing debates.

Chapter 2, “Specters of Domination,” begins the work of establishing masochism as “a symptom of the normative” (26). Musser sets up an unexpected analogy between the figure of the black butch within feminist debates about sexuality in the 1980s and the figure of the black man under colonialism in Frantz Fanon’s work, arguing that these two victims of white heteropatriarchy are nonetheless forced to serve as fear-mongering specters of domination within a white imaginary that disavows its own power by dwelling in the fantasy of a masochistic position. The third chapter uses The Story of O (1954) to ask after the structures of feeling that attend subjectivity within conditions of complicity and precarity. Musser focuses on the sensation of
coldness—a materialization of affective withholding—as one such strategy of feminine subject formation within conditions of constraint.

In the following chapter, Musser argues that “black subjectivity has been ignored in favor of the signifying power of the black body in pain” (113). Musser tracks the reduction of blackness to the biological in Fanon’s work and delivers a stunning psychoanalytic account of the formation of white guilt via black pain. She counters her reading of Fanon’s black body in pain by turning to Glenn Ligon’s conceptual painting Untitled (I Feel Most Colored When I Am Thrown Against a Sharp White Background) (1990–91). Representing race while avoiding figural representation, Ligon’s work removes voyeurism from the equation, momentarily relieving the black body from the burden of signification.

In “Lacerated Breasts: Medicine, Autonomy, Pain,” Musser’s fifth chapter, she reads Bob Flanagan’s SM practice and Audre Lorde’s The Cancer Journals as parallel narratives in order to ask what affective and subjective transformations are made possible by pain. In the former, she emphasizes “the importance of a discourse on pain for the production of white masculinity” (122), while the latter offers “insight into the ways that objectification of pain and illness is compounded by racism and sexism” (133). Flanagan is able to use pain for self-mastery, but this path is not available to Lorde due to the structural marginalization that attends black womanhood.

Given Musser’s titular framework, her emphasis on visuality is surprising. Yet through her attention to aesthetics and objectification, the politics of the gaze, the practices of witnessing, and the affective structures of recognition, Musser offers a haptic account of the visual in which it is the feelings of sight that matter most.

In the conclusion, “Making Flesh Matter,” Musser presents the stakes of her project with an arresting clarity. Kara Walker’s The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven (1995) serves as the anchor through which Musser returns to her investment in positing the flatness of flesh as a way to unpack the foreclosure of sexuality for black women within hierarchies of domination. She unhesitatingly explores what others might consider dangerous territory, turning to the troubling erotics of Walker’s silhouettes and the practice of SM race play to investigate the possibilities of seeking pleasure in scenes of abjection and histories of oppression.

Thanks to its conceptual and archival range and its methodological care, Sensational Flesh is an exemplary resource for a broad set of scholars committed to theorizing embodiment within the constraints of minoritarian subjectivity.

—E. Hella Tsaconas

Reference

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This book centers on what Julia Fawcett terms “overexpression,” or the idea that during the long 18th century, Britain’s celebrities strategically invited and disrupted the public gaze “by enhancing or exaggerating the features through which they might be recognized and evaluated by their spectators” until they seem so “impossibly excessive and spectacular” that the initial promise of intimacy afforded by such detail is overturned (3, 4). In essence, a blaze of excessive self-representation creates a blind spot of privacy, or at least unknowability, for celebrities who deploy “spectacular disappearances.”

The book begins with a look at actor, manager, and author Colley Cibber, “the first celebrity to have produced his own autobiography” (4). Fawcett argues for Cibber’s primacy in the history of celebrity, defining a celebrity as “a person as famous for what he performed in his private life as for what he performed on the public stage” (26). Rather than revealing an authentic private self, Cibber’s autobiography, An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber (1740), and his depiction of Richard III (in his own long-lived adaptation of Shakespeare’s play) formed “part of the strategy he developed to frustrate his spectators’ attempts to glean his private life from his public performances” (24).

The study then pursues Cibber’s legacies of overexpression in print and performance in case studies of Charlotte Charke, Laurence Sterne, David Garrick, George Anne Bellamy, and Mary Robinson. Among the strategies of overexpression Fawcett identifies, beginning with Cibber, are self-representation by means of costume (wigs especially), by gesture, or by language and other textual apparatuses that draw attention to their own excesses and frustrate spectators’ ability to interpret them. Each chapter is structured around the particular prop that was crucial to that celebrity’s autobiographical performances, and each considers ways in which gender, genre, and individual circumstance influence the ways that subsequent celebrities adapt Cibber’s techniques of overexpression.

The writing in each case study is well wrought and stylish. This is no mere collection of articles: there is a convincing through narrative, which even manages to integrate Sterne, the sole nonactor considered in the book, deftly: “In revealing so much about their inner lives that they reveal nothing at all, Sterne’s hobbyhorsical characters betray a debt to [...] celebrity autobiographies” (110). The argument, however, sometimes stumbles on the issue of intent: to suppose that certain actions comprise a celebrity’s conscious strategy of concealment, one must demonstrate that the celebrity intended those actions, and intended them to operate in the manner described. For instance, in the chapter concerning Mary Robinson, a fascinating figure of stage and scandal who has received much critical treatment of late, Fawcett argues that Robinson stages her “autobiographical performances as fashion plates” (200), onto which the viewer might project herself, in the manner of the fashion magazines then becoming popular. Fawcett writes, “in encouraging her readers to approach these passages [in her memoirs] as ‘figures’ they might ‘dress by’ rather than as spectacles they should judge, Robinson reconceives the relationship between a celebrity and her public until they want no longer to own or to contain her but rather to be her” (201). This is intriguing and plausible, but undersupported: one reference to Oliver Goldsmith’s description of “figures” of fashion in the Lady’s Magazine is the occasion for a close reading of the word “figure” in Robinson’s memoirs, and the question of how much of her autobiography Robinson wrote (her daughter completed the memoir after Robinson’s
death) leaves Robinson’s intent to represent herself as such a “figure” uncertain. Further, to suggest that this representation had an effect on readers without showing how readers’ reception of the memoirs manifested that effect, as Fawcett does when she states that “Robinson’s spectators slowly acquired and began to adopt the self-protective strategies that allowed them to live in a modern world where every life had the potential to be made public” (203), is unsatisfying. How did the memoirs’ readers try to “be” Robinson? The author does claim that magazines “tracked [Robinson’s] style choices and reported them to an eager public” (199); perhaps showing or discussing some Robinsonian fashions drawn from the detailed descriptions in her memoirs would offer convincing proof.

There are some errors in fact that mar the elegant interpretations on offer in this volume. David Garrick’s London debut in October 1741 was at the theatre in Goodman’s Fields, not at Drury Lane (136); likewise, Garrick’s continental tour did not simply occupy the summer of 1765 (141), but extended from 1763 to 1765. Occasionally, the argument overreaches the available evidence. The interpretation of Francis Garden’s print, “An Exact Representation of Mrs. Charke Walking in the Ditch at Four Years of Age” (1755) shows the future actress dressed in her father Colley Cibber’s bushy wig, as well as an outsized hat, coat, and sword, hoping to pass as her father by concealing her true height and her “Girl’s Shoes” by walking up and down in a “dry Ditch,” “and, in this Grotesque Pigmy-State, [...] bowing to all who came by me” (92). Fawcett suggests that by “[d]escribing herself as a ‘Pigmy,’ Charke compares her dirt-encrusted face to the dark skin of an unreadable racial Other” (92). This is a stretch, given that the print shows no dirt-encrusted face that might be read as a racial signifier, nor does Charke’s narrative mention dirt or substantiate such a reading of the word “Pigmy,” a word which seems to refer only, in this context, to the four-year-old’s diminutive height. Yet much of the remainder of this chapter’s reading of Charke’s cross-dressed performances as “designed to resist rather than to construct a gender identity” (96) is novel and revelatory.

The idea of overexpression predicated here is this book’s strongest contribution to the growing field of celebrity studies, a field perhaps begun with the work of Leo Braudy, with more recent contributions by Marvin Carlson, Fred Inglis, and Graeme Turner, and (with particular relevance to 18th-century theatre studies) by Cheryl Wanko, Mary Luckhurst, Jane Moody, David Worrall, and Joseph Roach. Fawcett’s concept of overexpression is both insightful and deserving of further exploration. At what point does celebrity’s promise of intimacy, one of Roach’s defining conditions for determining celebrity, tip over into overexpression? How might we judge celebrities’ success in maintaining a private, essential self? For the idea of overexpression does seem to posit the existence of such a self, held in reserve, behind the pyrotechnics of autobiographical print and performance.

— Leslie Ritchie

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Resounding Afro Asia focuses on the interminority politics of music and interrogates how contemporary Afro Asian performance ensembles create “physical and/or sonic spaces in which blackness and Asianness coincide within a juxtaposition of musical traditions, visual representations, and the identities of the artists that perform them” (3). Using a synthesis of ethnographic and archival research, Roberts develops a theory of the “sono-racial” in order to make legible the process through which music becomes raced. In the case of “sono-racialization” music becomes “black” or “Asian” based on an organization of sounds that attach themselves to taxonomies of racialized conceptions of bodies—a process which, in turn, produces racial hierarchy (4). However, not unlike Gaye Johnson’s concept of “spatial entitlements,” (2013:x) in which “reclamations of space occur through the formation of interracial political and artistic coalitions,” (11) the “sono-racial” can also be a possibility for developing coalitional politics through Afro Asian music, “in which artists employ racialized sound to form and perform interracial rapport” (6). It is the possibility of a coalitional politics through sound with which Roberts’s project seems most acutely concerned.

In foregrounding a multiplicity of raced bodies and sounds, Afro Asian ensembles perform group identities and aesthetic utterances that enact a politics of disruption because these utterances and identities cannot be collapsed into one racial category. In this context, Roberts argues, Afro Asian performance (explicitly political or otherwise) is a constant historical reference to the Bandung Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference held in Indonesia in 1955 during which 29 newly formed African and Asian nations met to forge a path free from imperialism (51). Yet, in acknowledging Claire Jean Kim’s work on “racial triangulation” (1999) Roberts also demonstrates how sono-racialization can reify essentialist understandings of identity formation wherein constructions of whiteness (neutral and universal), blackness (superior/inferior), and Asianness (insider/foreigner) maintain a cultural hegemony that is adherent to neoliberal multiculturalism.

The opening chapter begins with a reading of Billy Johnson and Bob Cole’s song “The Wedding of the Chinee and the Coon” (1898). The piece is a confluence of sonic and visual racial stereotypes drawn from the 19th-century blackface and yellowface minstrel show, A Trip to Coontown (1898). The production was the first full-length musical written by African Americans and was performed, produced, and directed by black artists. Roberts’s analysis demonstrates how sono-racialization operated to suture sound into singular racial meaning and how sono-racial triangulation created varying forms of racial hierarchy. In contrast, Roberts offers Paul Robeson’s global anti-imperialist Afro Asian performances on his album Chee Lai: Songs of New China (1941) in collaboration with Chinese conductor and composer Liu Liangmo as evidence of a sono-racial resistance against dominant sounds of the culture industry. The Afro Asian collaboration on “Chee Lai (March of the Volunteers)” fulfilled “a growing cross-racial and transnational political consciousness that fomented in the early twentieth century” (30). Roberts then links this early transnationalism to a “music of color” embodied in the work of the Bay Area Asian American jazz scene, Sun Ra’s “India” (1956), Duke Ellington’s The Afro Eurasian Eclipse (1971), and more contemporary Afro Asian performances represented in the music of Wu Tang Clan.

Chapter 2 examines Afro Asian performance as sono-racial collaboration through the music of contemporary musician Yoko Noge and her bands Japanesque and Jazz Me Blues Band.
While acknowledging the manner in which Noge’s appropriation of the jazz/blues tradition can be problematic, Roberts’s analysis of Noge’s work further expands the concept of “music of color” as a possibility for “cross-racial nonwhite access to a shared body of mixed cultural material” (61). Noge’s work demonstrates not only sono-racial collaboration in the US, but how, as Shannon Steen has discussed in *Racial Geometries of the Black Atlantic, Asian Pacific and American Theatre* (2010), the African American diaspora moved through the soundscapes of jazz and blues during the 1920s and 1930s and helped catalyze the emergence of a Japanese modernity. Originally from Osaka and a stalwart of the Chicago blues scene, Noge positions herself as a “sidewoman,” who, like the sideman, is an important figure that supports the entire musical process. Noge’s role within otherwise all-male interracial bands bends the contours of both raced and gendered expectations “of black Japanese musicality” (69). The cultural aesthetic produced through Noge’s Afro Asian collaborations reveal how diasporas vary and intersect in multiple locations, how cultural knowledge is not a natural consequence of nationality or race, and how symbolic longing for home can be a shared space among diasporic people (87).

Focusing on the Chicago-based band Funkadesi, the third chapter illuminates the ways in which Afro Asian artists merge traditions, communities, and components of the culture industry in ways that disrupt mono-racial or mono-cultural understandings of identity formation. Founded by Rahul Sharma in 1996, Funkadesi’s Afro Asian performances are grounded in an experimental mixing of North Indian classical music with African American and Afro-Caribbean popular forms in which Hindi lyrics are intertwined with Jamaican Patwa alongside reggae keyboard beats in conjunction with timbales or a sitar. Funkadesi’s sono-racial collaborations take place within a diverse, but highly racially segregated Chicago and promote the formation of interracial communities through their music, audiences, and performative discourse that espouse unity-through-diversity.

The fourth chapter addresses Afro Asian performance in the work of Chinese American baritone saxophonist Fred Ho, and takes aim at what Roberts refers to as “sonic identity politics” in which interracial ensembles have been simplified and conventionalized by the marginalizing discourses of neoliberal multiculturalism. As Roberts states, “‘hegemonic’ (liberal and corporate) multiculturalism became a problematic rallying point for people of color because it works against coalition building, ascribes too close a correlation between race and culture, and can present marginalized identities—rather than actions—as automatically radical” (123). Roberts focuses not only on Ho’s Afro Asian Music Ensemble, which merges Asian instruments such as the erhu and koto with the black jazz aesthetic, but also on his Afro Asian jazz martial arts performance pieces such as *Deadly She-Wolf Assassin at Armageddon* (2006) as evidence of Ho’s counternarrative of sono-racialization.

The last chapter departs from live performance and shifts its focus to Afro Asian pop cultural representation and production by focusing on Truth Hurts’s 2003 hip hop– and Bollywood-inspired hit “Addictive” from the album *Truthfully Speaking*. Released on Dr. Dre’s Aftermath label, the album was created by a pantheon of contemporary black musicians, but also included a sample of “Thoda Resham Lagta Hai” written by composer Bappa Lahiri and sung by veteran Bollywood singer Lata Mangeshkar. While “Addictive” was representative of a possible sono-racial collaboration, producer DJ Quik sampled “Thoda” without permission. Lahiri sued Dr. Dre and Aftermath, accusing them of practicing “cultural imperialism” (155). Roberts’s analysis explores the ways in which discourses of sono-racial triangulation generated in the US operate in a global context and how the case of “Addictive” reveals much about the cosmopolitan connections between black and Southeast Asian artists and cultural workers.

*Resounding Afro Asia: Interracial Music and the Politics of Collaboration* sits at the nexus of performance studies, Asian American studies, popular music studies, black studies, and cultural studies. The text is an important intervention and pedagogical tool for those within the academy and without who take seriously the politics of collaboration and comparative ethnic relations. The project challenges its reader to rethink identity formation through the process of
sound production and reception and carves out new possibilities for doing and understanding multiple layers of the sono-racial across varying diasporas, temporalities, and locations.

— Zachary Price

References


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I write this review a month after the US election of Donald Trump, a couple of weeks after brutal attacks on water protectors at Standing Rock, some months after the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, and a few days after the subsequent initiation of a new austerity plan there. It would be easy, given these circumstances, to retreat from art, to bandy the word spectacle, theatricality, or even performance around as enmity—a departure from authenticity, truth, or even justice (post-truth being the OED word of the year for 2016; post-dictatorship perhaps being a misnomer). Yet, this is exactly the time in which I feel most invested in thinking about many of the performances contained within Diana Taylor’s _Performance_. Right now, this book is less an essay about performance studies than an operations manual for times to come.

_Performance_, while not a history of performance art in the Americas under hemispheric neoliberalism, does its theoretical work through and between those performances. Broken into nine chapters or sections, with striking images, _Performance_ begins by defining the term “performance,” then continues on to chapters on performance histories, spect-actors, new uses of performance, performance and performativity, scenarios and simulations, artistists, the future(s) of performance, and performance studies. While some of these short chapters break down into sections based on keywords (such as “scenario”), others offer case studies. For example, the chapter on artistists features work by H.I.J.O.S, Regina José Galindo, Fulana, and the Yes Men.

Although a significant portion of the work looks at canonical keywords in performance studies, _Performance_ looks newly at spectatorship as an active practice, by reconsidering the
spect-actor post–Augusto Boal in relation to theorizations by Jacques Rancière and others; the volume also considers scenarios and simulations together as interrelated modes of performance because of the integration of scenarios of trauma within immersive digital media simulations, often sponsored by the state (such as those offered by the Israel Center for Medical Simulation). Taylor takes time to counter J.L. Austin’s conception of the authoritative performative with “animatives,” a concept she articulates as “the inappropriate response to performative utterances,” which challenge or exceed discursive formations (127). These revisions reveal a still-present distrust of the performance of the state itself, perceptible in Taylor’s earliest work and perhaps advisable in current times.

The book is performative and multivocal, combining images of performances in the Americas, Taylor’s narrative essays, and important excerpts from key texts on performance by academics, activists, and artists. The placement of “Performance Studies,” the chapter that assesses the field at the book’s end, removes academic self-reflection from the introduction, breaking with a long tradition. The result is a work that gives ample space to artists/artivists as the creators of tactics rather than to performance studies scholars who analyze nonperformance phenomena as performance. The cumulative effect of Performance is less a coherent argument as would be found in a traditional textbook than a text that is “part introduction and part reflection on some of the uses of performance that interest me most—the power of performance to enable individuals and collectives to reimagine and restage the social rules, codes, and conventions that prove most oppressive and damaging” (xiv).

What Is Performance Studies?, in contrast, is a clearer reflection on the discipline of performance studies. Though recently published, this is a digital and durational project that includes 30 interviews completed over a dozen years by scholars throughout the Americas, often through the auspices of the Hemispheric Institute of Politics and Performance. Although still freighted by US-based scholars, the book’s trilingualism (English, Portuguese, Spanish) offers readers throughout the hemisphere access to a body of scholarship primarily written in English. And, the Scalar platform ameliorates the difficulty of acquiring print books in Latin America, whose cost puts them outside the reach of many.

Five short essays anchor the book: An introduction by Diana Taylor and Marcos Steuernagel, an essay on translation by Steuernagel, an essay on protest and performance by Marcela Fuentes, a reprinting of Taylor’s “Acts of Transfer” chapter from her 2003 book The Archive and Repertoire, and an essay on technology and performance by Tavia Nyong’o. Most of these essays are a response to the interviews themselves, seemingly composed in relation to their review. The result is a cogent, though not comprehensive, map through this archive.

All of the essay’s authors are or have been based at NYU, and thus owe their theoretical orientations to a brand of performance studies that often looks to the avantgarde, overtly political art, and/or performance art as a place from which to draw inspiration. Yet, Nyong’o’s historiographical orientation and training in American Studies under Joseph Roach contrasts with Fuentes and Steuernagel’s training under Taylor herself. That Nyong’o’s essay is on technology is fascinating given his own research on the 19th century and plumbing of many traditional archives. Steuernagel’s essay on translation is enriched by his situatedness as scholar of Brazil, a country whose subject matter often functions as exception within the Americas context, primarily for linguistic reasons. His essay explores the competing colonialities behind differential attitudes to performance studies and their links to particular practices throughout the Americas. Offering the project as a Foucauldian genealogy, with no singular origin, he replaces a US-based patriarchal narrative with one that privileges the voices of Latin American feminist,
and often female, theorists of performance. Fuentes thinks around and through the immediacy of the Chilean student movement and their important protests in 2011; she most explicitly draws attention to the actual case studies from which performance studies scholars draw their inspiration, arguing against the fungibility of performance theory as a universalizing discourse that can travel to widely divergent political and economic situations. Retaining the corporeal and spatial specificity of artists’ and activists’ interventions weighs against performance studies methods that act imperially in classifying modes of performance under seemingly “neutral” terminologies and rubrics. In combination, the five essays point to but do not fully explore how indigenous performance functions as a mode of rethinking performance. Nonetheless, the juxtaposition of Taylor’s “Acts of Transfer” essay and an interview of Antonio Prieto Stambaugh points productively in that direction.

The short interviews that live alongside the essays chronicle a variety of ways in which scholars turned to performance studies as a mode of doing something they could not do in other disciplines. Daphne Brooks, for example, states that “performance studies is a discipline that enables you to radically contextualize how we think about the production of culture and, as a Black feminist scholar, it enables me to think about the body and the corporeal as being central to our understanding of cultural production.” Patrick Anderson, relating the importance of his mentor Dwight Conquergood, discusses the ethics of following through on embodied research in performance studies, “so that it does not remain housed in libraries, and university offices and so on.” Roach discusses the importance of performance studies as a means to understand the “persistance of the past” and performance as “the way in which you see it.” He characterizes performance: “It’s vivid, it’s tangible, it’s real, it’s touchable, and knowable through the senses.” Jesús Martín-Barbero concurs that the corporeal is important to his analysis of the conditions of late capitalism, in the first interview that was conducted for the book. (That said, the book interviews are not organized chronologically even though they are clearly dated. They are a mosaic, meant to be clicked on by interest without regard to chronology, country of origin, or even research area.) That so many young scholars have turned back to Martín-Barbero is not surprising given his thinking about performance studies and media. Rossana Reguillo, a Mexican social scientist, sees the promise of performance studies in its capacity to help us understand what “the contribution of the performative dimension is to the construction or the consolidation of situations or of political and public scenes.” Reguillo speaks openly about femicide and the representational modes of addressing it in her interview, making her thoughts a meditation on violence under neoliberalism. Alongside Diamela Eltit, she makes clear the political stakes of naming a phenomenon as performance in the contemporary Americas, given that violence against women works as a communicative, and often performative language in many contexts.

Pedagogically, *What Is Performance Studies?* could function as a textbook for Introduction to Performance Studies classes as well as more focused seminars at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The keyword tagging system supports the reader’s use of *What Is Performance Studies?* as a reference guide. The bibliography makes it an excellent resource for future study. *Performance* meanwhile feels more like a provocation; a first book of introduction that one might return to differently at the end of the term, to review, engage, and challenge after a semester learning from its archive.

Together these works provide scholarly guidance as well as political inspiration at a difficult time. As a scholar who has always preferred the long timeline and painstaking genealogies that exposed differences in the political landscapes of the Americas, I find it ironic that I am so given to advocate these works that use associative modes to connect very different geopolitical conditions and tactics, often without explicit historiographical signposting. Yet, as modes of antidemocratic practices continue to multiply throughout the Americas at ever accelerating speeds and with increasingly recursive movements, the exigency of the moment suggests we must move fast, and follow the tags, even as we often look nervously backward.

— Patricia Ybarra
More Books


In *Sex Museums*, Jennifer Tyburczy argues that museums, in their opaque and obvious displays of sex, function as venues for debating the limits of sexuality’s status quo in the public sphere. Moreover, she suggests that the display of sex in museums, sites traditionally read as arbiters of Western knowledge and culture, acts as a ledger to the historical development of sexuality. This interdisciplinary work, spanning the fields of performance studies, art history/visual culture, queer theory, critical race studies, and ethnography, incorporates archival research, exhibit analysis, and participation observation, as well as queer curatorial praxis. Performance theory is crucial to Tyburczy’s book — she reads museums as sites where bodies are asked to performatively move with objects on display, a form of “display choreography” embedded in queer praxis of the everyday. The first two chapters examine the exhibition and performance of sex in 19th-/early 20th-century museums to query the public control of sexuality through controlled displays of heteronormativity. The latter chapters look to the formation of more explicit sex museums, tracing their formation across various geographic locales in the late 20th and early 21st centuries to understand the form and function of more illicit forms of sexuality and queerness for the neoliberal subject. *Sex Museums* is a highly creative text whose theoretically rigorous, historically grounded, and ethnographically rich prose is accessible to academic and nonacademic audiences alike.


In *Motion and Representation*, Nicolás Salazar Sutil examines how movement, despite its function as a quotidian phenomenon, is deeply entrenched in social processes and human relations on multiple registers. He argues that movement is not just natural, but rather embedded in and dictated by “different historical conditions of technical and technological representation” (1). This book is structured by a two-part thesis: that the intervention of technology subverts movement’s representation, and that the representation informs our sense of and the doing of movement.
Salazar Sutil emphasizes “kinetic formalism,” or the representations of bodily movement structured by external units of categorization. Moreover, he incorporates the choreographic notion of a “language machine” to underscore the relationship between language and movement, or more precisely, between the concrete and abstract elements of kinetic action (e.g., the embodiment of a formal structure versus the logics and frameworks themselves). Methodologically, the book draws from media and cultural studies, visual studies, linguistics, and dance studies, offering a transdisciplinary cultural theory with unprecedented emphasis on notation, animation, and motion (5). The book is conceptually organized by frames reminiscent of animation technique: eidesis, analysis, and synthesis. Eidesis is preoccupied with the representation of movement, analysis with the materialization of concrete movement, and synthesis as a combination of the first two elements through mainly technological practices. All in all, *Motion and Representation* offers a wide-ranging theoretical intervention in studies of movement, signaling its dependency on formal codes of organization in an increasingly technological world.


In the edited collection *Theatre as Voyeurism,* George Rodosthenous assembles a collection of essays reimagining theatre as a voyeuristic exchange between audience and performer that broadens its dubious connotations to larger utilizations. His introduction, “Staring at the Forbidden: Legitimizing Voyeurism,” outlines this paradigmatic shift through an extensive review of voyeurism in three main sections: theatrical voyeurism, visuality and spectatorship, and the pleasure (and guilt) of looking. The book argues for the interconnected nature of theatre and voyeurism, and that the theatre is a permissible place to engage with voyeuristic tendencies. Moreover, it suggests that voyeurism in the theatre is not just about hedonistic pleasure, but also a longing for connection, exploration, and understanding (17). Exploring plays from a variety of time periods, the essays are divided into five thematic sections exploring voyeurism in relation to the gaze, space, acts of watching, exhibiting the body, and naked bodies. *Theatre as Voyeurism* is useful for theatre and performance studies as a synthesis of pre-existing discourse on theatrical voyeurism and a signal of new directions for future works.


In *Queer Philologies,* literary critic Jeffrey Masten argues that the history of sexuality and the history of language are necessarily intertwined. Performing a reading of canonical texts across the early modern English period, he pushes for a more philologically “detailed study of the terms and related rhetorics” in historically situated studies of gender and sexuality (15). Focusing on key terms allows for better recognition of how words obtain and dislocate from discourses of gender and sexuality of the early modern period into the contemporary moment. The book is divided into five parts: the introduction and chapter 1 focus on the elastic linguistic situation in the early modern period, while the final section, “Editing Philologies,” calls for a more pronounced editorial practice within philologies of sexuality and gender. The three sections composing the body are organized by three main lexicons—friendship, boy-desire, and sodomy—honoring in on common phrases for scholars of sexuality (especially those of the Foucaultian strain) and key texts from authors such as Marlowe and Shakespeare. In the spirit
of the book’s philology of sexuality, the sections are also organized as a glossary, with each chapter containing and defining a set of key terms such as queue, perversion, amorous, and stranger. As a methodologically oriented study, *Queer Philologies* has manifold applications for the fields of literary studies, theatre studies, gender/sexuality studies, and queer history across multiple time periods.


In *French Visual Culture and the Making of Medieval Theater*, art historian Laura Weigert explores the visual culture of 16th-century France that depicted the contemporaneous medieval stage. She argues that these materials, instead of simply mimicking what happened on the stage, in actuality shaped the nature of late medieval performance culture. These representational pieces embraced the distance of the observer’s everyday life from the theatre, and relied on their spectacular qualities (in contrast to a more devotional depiction and usage by the image’s beholder) (5). Her book expands existing scholarship on late medieval theatre and visual culture, advocating for their synergetic relationship in dismantling a presumed realist aesthetic endemic to dramatic works of the period. Methodologically, her work merges visual culture studies and theatre history of the late medieval period, utilizing quotidian archival materials such as tapestries, painted clothes, and ephemeral constructions. Her book, an archivally rich and theoretically smart study, has widespread appeal for scholars of medieval culture, as well as for theatre and performance historians more broadly.

— Christofer A. Rodelo

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