
In performance studies, particular methods have become associated with national, or even continental, traditions. Usually, such traditions are in fact institutional, which is not the same as national (except in very small countries). This collection of essays about Canadian performance studies is methodologically inclusive, and addresses themes widely taken up in the discipline, particularly locatedness, political resistance, and practice-derived theorization. Deep engagement with the legacies and ongoing reverberations of colonialism as marked on the landscape and cityscape, emergent in protest and subversive art, and tracked across historical time make this collection specifically Canadian in focus while also singularly germane to conversations about performance studies everywhere. Authors document a great breadth of political practices, such as specific decolonizing frameworks in performance, blatant seduction by neoliberal marketing, projects that capture local performative idioms, and incorporation of First Nations peoples’ ritual protocols into exhibitions, to name but a few. As Ric Knowles notes in the “Afterword,” the essays point to the artificiality of “Canada” in the manufacture of a unified identity, and to the state’s complicity in erasures born of convenient myth-making. At the same time, however, they also show the power of performance to change the discourse.

The editors argue that indigenous practices are missing from “global performance studies,” which is true, but rather than just taking an additive approach, this collection importantly mounts an allied, self-reflexive critique against performance studies’ complicity in the recolonization of indigenous peoples through nationalized claims. We are familiar with the conscription of indigenous peoples and indigenous motifs in spectacles associated with the Olympic Games, and not just in Canada. Claiming everything as performance, according to the editors, is yet another disavowed manifestation of colonialism, exoticizing a broad-spectrum approach (26). Dylan Robinson (Stó:lo nation) radically eschews iconic trappings of indigeneity to show First Nations protestors’ capacity to “reorchestrate activism across sensory and artistic registers [...] to disrupt marginalization of Indigenous activism as being ‘just angry’” (231), in a strategy to de-essentialize readings of affect. Likewise, Heather Fisch-Davis (a descendent of European settlers) foregrounds the consequences of settler-derived worldviews in “positional, transparent, intertextual, and imaginative” (70) criticism of geological palimpsest-building. Through exceptionally nuanced claim-making, case studies show the stakes of performative behavior and performance-based analysis that seriously reckons with histories, current contingencies, and the prospective acts of signaling futurity.

The 14 chapters do not specifically provide “coverage” to regions (though the essays address performances from the Pacific to Atlantic coasts) or homage to theoretical guiding
lights (though Marshall McLuhan, Josette Féral, and Keith Johnstone all get a nod), but demonstrate some of the insecurities—or “performance stumblings” (23)—that ensue in de-essentializing the claims to performance as well as debunking performance-based claims to Canadian exceptionalism. Pam Hall’s chapter on The Encyclopedia of Local Knowledge (http://encyclopediaoflocalknowledge.com/), a web-based project to collect vanishing practices of maritime-based fishing cultures of Newfoundland, invokes ways to slow down thinking to ask what informants and scholars do vis-à-vis knowledge-making. Examples of mitten knitting, cod salting, woodfinding (recognizing the potential for boats in living trees), and rope splicing emerge persuasively as “both an act of valuation and preservation” (370). This is performance at the brink of extinction, transferred intelligibly into an archive of practice through ethnography. In a different vein, Julie Nagam describes the traveling exhibition Walking with Our Sisters’ (http://walkingwithoursisters.ca/) arrangement of vamps (the decorated upper portion of moc-casins) to mark the absence of disappeared indigenous women, and the gentle instruction of visitors that brings them toward an encounter with the synecdoche of murdered and missing women. Natalie Alvarez observes military training at Canadian Forces Base Camp Wainwright, where a mise-en-scène of aluminum trailers, skeletal wooden structures, and burnt-out vehicles stand in, like pageant wagons, for an Afghan village. During exercises, the village is populated with Afghan emigrés who wait for scenarios to unfold amidst a “conflict ethnography” totalizing the cultural other (176).

Laura Levin takes seriously the blundering misfires of Toronto’s notorious late mayor Rob Ford as a performer, even a performance artist, revealing politicians’ need to repress what seems to be performance in order for politics to seem to be politics. Susan Bennett traces the history of downtown development in Calgary; over little more than a century, the paradigm shifts from buildings that enabled performances in their interiors to grand aspirational architectural destinations that build opportunities for experience to encapsulate the everyday, for example by walking across a bridge or around sculptural installations. This economic exegesis on city planning allied with changing concepts of what performance matters (and what is monetized) is one of many worthy models for readers to take up.

Performance Studies in Canada’s strength is not just in the excellence of individual contributions—they all measure up to an impressive standard—or in the sense of plurality that builds across the whole. The compelling engagements with performance-as-theory (not theory a priori) reach out simultaneously to curatorial studies, communication studies, and media practices. These facets augment the legibility of the scholarship as well as the capaciousness of the cases under investigation.

—Tracy C. Davis

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TDR: The Drama Review 62:3 (T239) Fall 2018. ©2018
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Like most good writers, Ronald Grimes takes the playfulness of words seriously. Theories of ritual, he tells us, are constructed from words (183). Sometimes these words are based on actual rites and experiences but often they are built on the words and theories of other writers. Metaphors ground method but, like a bike, we can only ride them so far. As a singer, I am particularly interested in the sounds of words. I am drawn to homophones: words that sound the same but mean different things. Homophones are the stuff of puns, crossword puzzles, and poetry. They are used to fool us, throw us off the scent, or provide a cryptic clue. Homophones remind us that words have accents (“pen” can sound very like “pin” in the Southern States of the US, just as “boy” can sound like “buy” or “by” in parts of Ireland). In music, a homophone is also the same sound produced in two different ways, such as the same note played on different strings of a violin.

The Craft of Ritual Studies is a book anchored by four homophones. Grimes previously alluded to the wordplay between “rite” and “right” in his earlier publication, Rite Out of Place (2006). Like all homophones, these words are not necessarily related etymologically or semantically. Their kinship is sonic. In this publication, we also find reflections related to “write” and “wright.” He describes The Craft of Ritual Studies as “a book for the hand” (3): a handbook for scholars and practitioners of ritual studies. It is divided into three parts: method, case, and theory, which “play off each other” (3) in an interactive, nonhierarchical dance.

The first section, “Method,” is rooted in an ethnographic approach to studying ritual. While it contains useful introductions to the ritual field, participant observation, and conducting interviews, its core discussion revolves around the place of writing in these processes. Academic, descriptive, narrative, dialogic, argumentative, and interpretive modes of writing are presented as necessary textual approaches for students of ritual engaging with different “communities of discourse: that of the community they study, that of the scholarly community, and increasingly that of educated nonspecialist readers” (68). “Method” encompasses being in the field of ritual, writing and evoking the field, as well as disseminating these experiences through publication. Grimes argues for ritual criticism as an important aspect of ritual interpretation. It involves “the documentation and analysis of negative and positive evaluative claims” (71). In this sense, the “rights” (or “wrongs”) of ritual may be critically appraised on, for example, aesthetic, pastoral, ethical, or performative grounds. While this section offers a comprehensive overview of method in ritual studies, the only surprise for me was the relative lack of discussion concerning “the ritual lab.” An approach to studying ritual pioneered by Grimes and one of the more important methods for investigating nascent aspects of ritual experience, it was somewhat underplayed in this section in preference of a more ethnographic discussion.

The second section, “Case,” revisits the site of Grimes’s first ritual fieldwork in 1973: the Santa Fe Fiesta. In an academic world where the pressure of publication often results in shorter and shorter fieldwork-to-publication timelines, it is rare to find a longitudinal revisiting of the field, reminiscent of Anya Peterson Royce’s lifelong cultural and ritual engagement with the Zapotec of Juchitan, Mexico. The case study reminds us that ritual is always culturally and historically framed, both in its performance and its interpretation. Grimes also notes that the cultural frame of the scholar changes over time, an aspect less often observed but equally important. Looking specifically at technology, he revisits the field with both notebook and camera. While ritual representation usually involves a written description, sometimes supplemented by photographs, Grimes proposes an approach that “leads with video and follows with writing”
(96). Reminding us that the performative character of ritual renders “capture” an elusive sport, the movement between film and text is proposed as a way of harnessing the potential of audio-visual representation for enhancing theoretical and methodological reflection. In doing so, Grimes adds his voice to a growing number of somatic scholars (Gallagher 2005; Johnson 2007; Shusterman 2008) arguing for the importance of addressing the ephemeral, performative, gestural, and sonic dimensions of human experience.

The third section, “Theory,” moves from Grimes’s deep experiential knowledge of ritual and ritual studies, to a lifelong engagement with the world of theory-building. His mastery of this hotly debated space of definition, classification, utility, and performance is presented as an invitation to join the conversation, challenge a position, or propose a new one. It is here that Grimes the pedagogue is most strongly present. He acquiesces to the desire for definition in providing what will surely become a new touchstone for ritual definitions: “[R]itual is embodied, condensed and prescribed enactment” (196). Whether we are building theory or momentum, he understands the value of being able to bounce off something. It is an act of generosity to provide this, despite his own misgivings around the usefulness of definitions.

It is in this third section that Grimes makes one of his most important claims for the craft of ritual studies and the embodied nature of research: “[N]o matter how heady, theorizing, like ritualizing, is a personal, bodily action” (334). In this sense, a ritual scholar is a “wright”: a maker in the tradition of a cartwright, a playwright, or a shipwright. Blurring the boundaries between the theory and practice of ritual and ritual studies, he argues for a reevaluation of the relationship between doing and thinking as orders of knowledge; between episteme and techné as it were, while also insisting on the ethical imperative of phronesis. In this redress, I would only caution against an overemphasis on the difference between art and craft. I am not convinced that craft is, as Grimes suggests, “art’s practical minded, hands-on, manual labour cousin” (4); the insistence on the difference has led to centuries of vexed relationships between so-called “high art” practices and variously named (folk, popular, indigenous, traditional) “poorer” relations. This notwithstanding, by naming the study of ritual as a “craft,” Grimes positions research squarely in the order of “doing,” albeit epistemic and reflexive. There is an Irish proverb I frequently quote in this regard: “Ni dhéanfaidh smaoineamh an treabhadh duit.” It means, “You’ll never plow a field by turning it over in your mind.” It reminds me of Grimes’s reference to the Apache saying, “Wisdom sits in places” (334). Whether sitting at our desks or working in the ritual field, students of ritual are always “doing” ritual. Rite, write, right, and wright combine in our search for and experience of the craft of ritual studies.

—Helen Phelan

References


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TDR: The Drama Review 62:3 (T239) Fall 2018. ©2018
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Casual readers of *TDR* would probably identify Guillermo Gómez-Peña as a performance artist and writer, in that order. Subscribers might note his service as a contributing editor. But even those whose shelves hold all 10 of Gómez-Peña’s published collections of performance texts, poems, essays, pedagogical exercises, and interviews may not think of him as especially invested in producing printed matter *per se*. His appropriations of electronic media—video, audio, and digital—have generated much more scholarly commentary than his publications, even taking into account his widely read *The New World Border* (1996). In addition to garnering Gómez-Peña an American Book Award, that book inaugurated a significant collaboration between Gómez-Peña and City Lights that also produced *Codex Espangliensis: From Columbus to the Border Patrol* (2000). A sequel of sorts to that extraordinary volume, *DOC/UNDOC: Documentado/Undocumented Ars Shamánica Performática* constitutes a more thoroughgoing effort to “re/imagine the future of bookmaking” (15) as a collaborative process that encompasses multiple media (“old” and “new”) and makers.

Both projects first manifested as artists’ books created by Gómez-Peña and collaborators including printer-publisher Felicia Rice, and were issued by Rice’s Moving Parts Press in editions of 50. Copies are expensive enough that most people interested in Gómez-Peña’s artists’ books will encounter the limited-edition *Codex Espangliensis* (1998) and *DOC/UNDOC* (2014) only in museum and university rare book collections. If, like me, you happen to work in or near an institution that holds copies, you too can experience them in all their intermedial splendor. You can unfold each letterpress-printed book, bound accordion-style in the manner of the códices painted by preconquest Mesoamerican scribes, to its full length of 31 feet, 6 inches. You can see and feel the texture of the handmade papers on which Rice printed the collages she composed by combining drawn, painted, engraved, and photographed images with Gómez-Peña’s performance texts. If you can procure one of the 15 deluxe copies of *DOC/UNDOC*, you can lift the book out of its decorated aluminum case, hear the audio files resounding from the built-in speakers, and watch the videos on an enclosed DVD. If you are fortunate enough to own one, you can do as Gómez-Peña and colleagues generously suggest in one of the audio pieces: “consider yourself a Chicano performance artist [...] for a few hours,” fashioning personae with the luchador mask, makeup, and assorted “ritual objects” arranged in a tray beneath the book.

Whether or not your location, credentials, or bank accounts afford you that experience, the new edition of *DOC/UNDOC* more than merits a reading. As they did with its predecessor, Gómez-Peña, Rice, and City Lights editor Elaine Katzenberger have reconceived *DOC/UNDOC* as a trade edition, with the admirable intention of making the artists’ book and its collaborative production process accessible to a larger audience. The oversize volume commences with striking, high-resolution color photographs of the case opened to display the objects packed inside, as well as the mirrors affixed to its lid. Though you won’t see yourself or your masked personae in these images of mirrors, the edition does elicit less literal forms of reflection—personal and political—facilitated by the bookwork, which takes the pains and pleasures of identity formation and transformation as its major subject.

“Bookwork,” a term advanced by the late artist-archivist Ulises Carrión, describes the project better than the more widely used “artists’ book,” which may unduly emphasize the printed component. As the copious introductory texts and images detail, the project actually began
as a video series (accessed in this edition via USB key) made by Gómez-Peña and Vázquez, who invited Rice to make a book “in response.” The title of the sequence, Documentado/Undocumented, recalls Gómez-Peña’s earlier series of performances, writings, and videos, including “Border Brujo: A Performance Poem” published in TDR (1991). The series designation serves to place any number of discrete works in close relation, but without amalgamating them. Had Rice designed and printed a solo “response” to the videos, they might well have designated that edition as an installment of “Documented/Undocumented,” which is directly referenced in the DOC/UNDOC audio, and which has always been a collaborative endeavor despite Gómez-Peña’s public prominence. As it happened, Rice made an installment with Gómez-Peña, Vázquez, sound artist Watkins, and art historian González, and another with Katzenberger. Each new component and participant proceeds from an invitation extended by an expanding group of collaborators, a process Rice describes as transformative for her own artistic practice, which now includes live performance. Her essay’s title, “Collaboration and Metamorphosis: An Invitation,” is one of many explicit indications that the edition’s creators encourage readers to create responsive yet distinctive installments of their own—to “join in” the interdisciplinary transnational collective’s effort to perform and “embrace difference” (12) at a moment in US history when this relatively modest request sounds not just radical but utopian.

Readers of this edition cannot respond by performing difference for the audience of one reflected in the case’s mirrors, using its objects in “rituals” intended to “heal” and to ward off “paranoia, racism, cultural loneliness, formalist aesthetics, and political despair” (3). The case—which González’s informative essay confirms is meant to evoke medieval religious art, early modern cabinets of curiosities, modernist artworks like Marcel Duchamp’s Boîte-en-valise (1935–41), and contemporary Mexican and Chicano home altars—obviously offers modes of engagement the paperback edition cannot. The editions also differ in the reading practices they afford. Because this book is formatted as a Western codex, readers can maintain the sedentary, linear, left-to-right, page-turning practice disoriented by the more blatantly three-dimensional preconquest-style códices, which unfold from right to left. Scholars including Diana Taylor, Walter Mignolo, and Miguel León-Portilla have shown that what historians know about the códices suggests very different relations between inscription and performance than those that emerged in word-worshipping Europe and its colonies. That is why the indigenous American codex, as format and as metaphor, has been taken up to such vital effect by Latinx artists, including painter and printmaker Enrique Chagoya (whose images inhabit Espangliensis), intermedia artist Felipe Ehrenberg (a mentor of Gómez-Peña’s), writer Cherrie Moraga, and members of the Royal Chicano Airforce collective. The paperback’s format does not demand an embodied, performance-oriented reading practice with the insistence of the limited edition. That said, the photographs of Rice’s densely overprinted spreads do transgress the conventional boundaries of the Western printed page to great visual impact. For example, her collage for Gómez-Peña’s “Tired of Walking North”—which layers his text, her own ghostly sketches, and reproductions of Artemio Rodriguez’s El Muertorider print—rolls into the margins and right through the gutter.

Further, Rice’s typographic interpretations of Gómez-Peña’s scripts not only eschew expectations of strict linearity, but also visually signify the in-progress status he ascribes to all his performance writing in a DOC/UNDOC audio file. Wary of the cultural connotations printed matter carries—fixity, durability, and authority—Gómez-Peña pointedly pronounces the texts “tentative.” Rice has rendered this trait by digitally composing the text, setting individual letters slightly above and below one another. The words waver across the lines, suggesting not only the script’s flexibility but also the uncertainty and exhaustion of the performance artist, who is impelled to traverse national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries while confronting the physical, psychological, and economic violence the United States inflicts upon people of color.

Mexico City–born and California-based, a transnational subject by necessity and inclination, Gómez-Peña wrote initial versions of most of these texts in previous decades. At no point
did he experience a reprieve from the racist and imperialist aggressors to whom he talks back in “We Are Here Because You Were There” and “Border Interrogation.” In recent years, he has performed such scripts to test their contemporary relevance. If DOC/UNDOC constitutes a similar test in a different medium, the scripts’ salience is agonizingly apparent upon this edition’s publication, which occurs one year after the US Electoral College granted the presidency to a candidate who stoked white racial resentment and demonized immigrants, especially those of Mexican, Central and South American, and Middle Eastern origin. The “painful dichotomy” Rice identifies in the first two terms in the subtitle—the Spanish documentado (“being informed”) and the English “undocumented”—is now an excruciating one for US residents who lack legal status (10).

The photographs of the trenchant text-image collages and the case, and the illuminating essays by the creators, constitute the core of this edition, which less comprehensively “re/ imagine[s]” the book than does DOC/UNDOC’s 2014 installment. That said, the paperback also innovates in its combination of printed codex and digital audio and video files, which readers access through the flash drive inserted in an envelope glued to the inside back cover. Each video performance stages Gómez-Peña’s encounter with another—with one of the well-known performance artists to whose work he responds in humorous (Stelarc) or meditative (James Luna) homenaje; with the Others inhabiting his psyche; or with Vazquez, on whom the performer turns the camera in a sharply funny duelo. The videos foreground the fact that no medium merely documents a performance; the camera’s lens, like the screen watched by viewers, serves as an interface between systems, one or more of which may be human. (A USB “thumb drive” makes this point more clearly than does a DVD.) The same is true of the paperback edition, which the colaboradores have subtitled “a traveling case for apprentice shamans.” It is their frankly utopian hope that readers who actively interface with the bookwork will, like shamans, learn to inhabit the interstices of our dangerously polarized world.

—Jennifer Buckley

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TDR: The Drama Review 62:3 (T239) Fall 2018. ©2018 New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology


From revelations of the documents leaked by Edward Snowden in 2013 to the recent Cambridge Analytica data breach, the public has become increasingly enlightened about the everyday surveillance of citizens. We use ubiquitous GPS tracking systems through Google Maps and location-specific filters on Instagram. In every corner of our urban spaces, we encounter CCTV cameras. Using social media, perhaps our concern is not as much with being watched as not being seen enough. In this climate, Elise Morrison’s Discipline and Desire and Simone Browne’s Dark Matters both remind us of important questions specific to theatre and
Both authors look closely at the productive forces of surveillance in our contemporary and historical models of citizenship, as well as the way that surveillance permeates our lives and, importantly, enables creative responses that generate alternative ways of existing in the world. Both of them also deal with the dark moment of 9/11 and its enduring aftermath. However, although they both point out the transnational or global reach of historical and contemporary surveillance, Morrison’s and Browne’s examples are remarkably often from the US, Great Britain, Canada, and to some extent the Caribbean.

Morrison focuses on what she calls “surveillance art and performance” and her examples are primarily performances and traditional dramatic theatrical productions. She theorizes surveillance as an altogether theatrical or narrative medium for storytelling, and further argues that the dynamic through which we create our identities is strongly linked to that of surveillance: certain bodies watch other bodies—a logic that determines what is rendered visible and invisible allows for them to exist and perform in whichever ways they desire. This is an idea that greatly permeates Dark Matters as well.

Morrison displays a fundamental knowledge of theories of the theatrical avantgarde that she applies to the examples: antibiometric artworks are simultaneously contextualized as antinaturalist in the fifth chapter, for instance. She also firmly commands second- and third-wave feminisms as a theoretical framework with which to understand surveillance practices—to counter what she calls an undertheorization of gender in surveillance studies. The mission of her volume succeeds in that many of the examples in the book challenge explicitly gendered experiences of surveillance. That said, Morrison still does not lose focus of an intersectional critique of the particularly materialist and psychoanalytic feminist theorists she deploys in her analyses. There is some emphasis on recent developments such as the Black Lives Matter movement.

Morrison has organized her chapters spatially—an interesting choice to escape temporal linearity or a sense of progress between them—as we move from performances taking place on stages, in streets, on screens, in our bodies, on our skins, and in the skies. In her discussion of feminist waves of theorization, Morrison writes that she prefers the metaphor of wavelengths: depending on where we tune in, we can listen to different strands of ongoing feminist theorization and activism. The same metaphor applies to her discussions of artist strategies and tactics. They all communicate across the chapters and should not be considered in isolation.

Among the strategies that Morrison identifies across the case studies is above all remediation. It functions in many of the performances by placing surveillance in a more recognizable form of representation. Morrison’s theorizing and contextualization of these performances illustrates how the critical lens of performance helps us learn about “emergent visual technologies of capture and evidence” (34).

Particularly useful in Morrison’s survey-like study is the way she shows how some of her examples make our norms feel “productively queasy” through their use of Brechtian alienation effects or Situationist strategies of détournement. If fully successful, the performances, Morrison shows, will help us shed our cultural habituations.

Not only will Discipline and Desire be useful for students of theatre and performance studies but it is also a welcome addition to the scholarship on digital theatre and performance as well as (new) media. Morrison guides us clearly through her moments of spectatorship yet leaves us with more questions than answers. She also eminently sets up conceptual frames that help us
categorize and understand the performances. As such, the book can be a useful tool in the classroom where it would quickly spur many conversations both about the methodologies used and the role of spectatorship.

Dark Matters, more so than Discipline and Desire, is squarely located in the field of surveillance studies. Browne makes clear connections between terms in this area with the surveillance and control of slaves in 17th-century North America, such as Charles Williams Tait’s managerial control, runaway slave advertisements, and racial inscriptions in the federal census. As such, Dark Matters has a narrower focus than Discipline and Desire. Consequently, Browne makes use of fewer examples from performance art and theatre. These appear alongside visual art and film as creative responses to the more sociological history of surveillance and its connection to anti-black racism in the US, detailed by Browne in her introduction and first chapter.

Browne spends many pages tracking the etymology and context of terms such as surveillance and ideas such as the panopticon. Indeed, Browne’s strongest contribution is the coining of new and useful terms. She uses “racializing surveillance” to describe the moment when certain bodies are rendered marked or racialized and often discriminated against by the very surveillance itself. Her term “dark sousveillance” names the tactics that enable a critique of racializing surveillance when discriminated subjects or artists attempt to render themselves out of (white) sight, either by coping, resisting, or critiquing. Examples of sousveillance range from advertisements describing Seth, a runaway slave passing as white by performing whiteness, to Adrian Piper’s video installation What It’s Like, What It Is #3 (1991) in which the usual suspect/object of anti-black surveillance speaks back against objecthood and subjectification.

Browne’s third chapter, which is perhaps her strongest, makes apparent another big difference between the affective language of Dark Matters and the comprehensive approach of Discipline and Desire. At times, Browne inserts sentences that move the reader out of complacency and into the materiality of the histories, making us aware of the painful, racist history she’s describing. An example can be found in Browne’s discussion of a worn-down branding iron: “Think here of what it means for a branding iron, used to mark humans as property, to be worn down” (100).

However, sometimes she tends to leave some thoughts unfinished, almost teasing the reader with more provocations than answers to complex questions about agency and subjectivity under racialized surveillance. Some transitions between the more theoretical passages and the examples would have been useful at times.

Ultimately, both volumes frame everyday experiences in such a way that our perspective and perhaps even our very behavior might change as a result. They both remind us about the invisible ordering, prioritizing, and privileging structures that govern us and that discipline us as differently gendered and racialized, often in unrecognized ways or ways that we forget. Morrison explicitly refers to this forgetting by referencing James Harding’s “new amnesia,” a “process by which we might choose to forget about data doubles that we cannot see or control” (229).

Recently, the European Union agreed upon the General Data Protection Regulation, which will be enforced mid-2018. The initiative is designed to protect the data doubles described by Harding. While it is unclear to what extent the regulations will affect corporate and government surveillance in the US, it is important to note here that we are not facing a hopeless future. Similarly, neither of the books described here are conclusively dystopic. Rather, they offer us glimpses into — more or less — recent history to suggest a hopeful futurity. Browne
points out that “cultural production, expressive acts, and everyday practices offer moments of living with, refusals, and alternatives to routinized, racializing surveillance” (82). As Morrison reminds us, there is a great deal more work to be done by artists to model alternative ways for us to exist, physically and digitally, in the world.

— Kalle Westerling

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Dancing Age(ing): Rethinking Age(ing) in and through Improvisation Practice and Performance. By Susanne Martin. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2017; 192 pp.; illustrations. $35.00 paper.

Dance, according to recent neuroscience research, is “the number one exercise for slowing down the aging process” because, in addition to its obvious physical benefits, it is “the most effective exercise for the brain” (Brown 2017). This is not exactly breaking news to those who practice dance, yet this article and others like it (Frontiers 2017) are just further examples of Western culture’s lack of understanding about the bodymind concept. Further compounding the issue is that the field of Western concert dance with its related techniques (ballet, modern, contemporary, and now hip hop) is one of the least hospitable to aging bodies. We remain a youth-oriented culture drawn to spectacular displays of particular kinds of virtuosity, even as on the whole we are living longer and might benefit from a greater diversity of bodily perspectives and role models.

For a professional dancer, the aging process is one of the most profound in a career, alongside injury. Coming to terms with change in relation to a fixed ideal has yielded some remarkable stage works, from Remy Charlip/Lucas Hoving’s Growing Up in Public (1984) and Keith Hennessey/Sara Shelton Mann’s related Sara the Smuggler (2015), to Miguel Gutierrez’s Age and Beauty series (2014–15) and David Gordon’s Live Archiveography (2016–17). Virtuosos such as Mikhail Baryshnikov and Wendy Whelan have explored new possibilities since retiring their former dance selves, and performers such as Simone Forti, Gus Solomons Jr., and Eiko Otake are just a few who have sustained their dance careers into their 60s, 70s, and even 80s. The host of books on dancer self-care, including Daniel Nagrin’s seminal How to Dance Forever: Surviving Against the Odds (1988) indicates that, indeed, there is a desire to continue dancing throughout a lifetime, further evidenced in the intergenerational Liz Lerman Dance Exchange and the
former Nederlands Dans Theater 3 comprised of artists over 40. It is thus well past due that the field of Western dance embraces the knowledge and wisdom found in its living traditions.

Two recent books make important contributions to age as it pertains to dance, albeit via different forms and approaches. *The Aging Body in Dance: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, edited by Nanako Nakajima and Gabriele Brandstetter, is an edited volume of short essays written by scholars and artist-scholars from the US, Europe, and Japan. *Dancing Age(ing): Rethinking Age(ing) in and through Improvisation Practice and Performance* by Susanne Martin is a single-authored practice-based monograph. However, both texts notably agree that dancers themselves need to become more aware of their changing bodies and update their expectations and approaches to their craft. Equally, as each text also stresses in various ways, audiences might begin to expand their viewing and sensorial expectations and experiences beyond the kinesthetics of youthful virtuosity.

The texts similarly recognize postmodern dance pioneers such as Anna Halprin, Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, and Simone Forti, and the techniques and choreographic structures they forged—often based in improvisation—as touchstones. The ongoing careers of these artists collectively gesture to a larger topic of inquiry within dance studies that moves beyond any one artist biography. Many of these artists are still performing (see Danspace Project 2017), a testament to the multiple ways each has contended with the condition of ongoing bodily change in ways that redefine the profession.

*The Aging Body in Dance* developed from two symposia held in Berlin, Germany (2012), and Tokyo, Japan (2014). The series of essays address the themes of biological aging and cross-cultural aesthetics of aging, as outlined in the “Introduction” by Nakajima, a lecturer, scholar, and dramaturg working in Germany and Japan, and Brandstetter, a senior professor at Freie Universität in Berlin. The slim text hosts a range of esteemed authors familiar to dance studies, including Rainer, Ramsay Burt, Ann Cooper Albright, Susanne Foellmer, Petra Kuppers, Janice Ross, and Mark Franko. They are joined by the voices of European and Japanese scholars such as Johannes Odenthal, Kikuko Toyama, and Tomotsu Watanabe, some of whose essays appear in translation. The book’s four sections are prefaced by a theoretical “Overview” essay by Nakajima that attempts to weave together the impressively wide-ranging theoretical threads that address gender, politics, and culture, all to argue that, “Aging is the continuous updating of one’s identity” (11).

The book’s essay selection and organization are best understood through Nakajima’s “Overview” critique of ageist Euro-American dance structures by way of Japanese traditions. As she notes, “For dancers in Japan, aging is considered a progression to a higher level of ability” (22). Importantly, in professional dance this is not just any aging body but rather one that has remained practicing in a particular tradition—and not all Japanese artistic forms are as accessible as those in the West (the iemoto or “family” system, in which teachings are passed down from masters to select students, is strictly regulated). Still, Nakajima does not reduce her argument to mere comparison. Beginning with the observation that there is a “schism between a dancer’s feeling and a viewer’s reception” (11), she explores the complexities of “what one thinks one can do and what one can really do” (12). Tracing theoretical discourses on biopolitics, aesthetic surgery, and gender construction, ultimately the message is that we all want to belong rather than stand apart as different, and in the West we go to great lengths to meet youthful cultural norms of belonging. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben to understand the aging person as an “enhanced corporeal subject: bare life” (14), Nakajima concludes with the suggestion that “radical cross-cultural juxtaposition of dance aesthetics and its politics, through the visibility of the aesthetically valued aging body in Japanese dance, unsettles the negative valuation” of Euro-American perspectives (25). While the writing in both the “Introduction” and “Overview” is at times awkwardly phrased, clouding some of the complexities of the nuanced topics in these sections, both are clear in their argument that Japanese dance stands less as an object of study than as a counterpoint for a reconsideration of Euro-American values and beliefs.
In comparison to the “Overview,” the subsequent essays are quite short and at times feel incomplete as research studies, which may be due in part to their origination as symposia contributions. Collectively, however, they pose a rich range of questions for further research. The first section addresses issues of choreographic experimentation in the face of physical limitation, which highlights but is not limited to age. From Rainer to Zeami, the essays call for an updated understanding of virtuosity across US, German, and Japanese dance that is no less rigorous as a body changes. The second section addresses alternate modes of mobility based in dis/ability studies and recognizes the need for new choreographic processes. Artist-scholar Jess Curtis’s essay in particular chronicles how “peeling back” expectations of normalcy allows for “a broader diversity of possible expressions of the human body” (74). Kaite O’Reilly’s chilling and powerful “Silent Rhythm” upends fantasies of avoiding death when she writes, “I’m so, so sorry. It will happen to you. [...] It will. I’m sorry. It will happen” (78–79). The third section returns to aging as a politics of energy and critiques the value that equates hypermobility with dance itself. This concern continues in the final section’s essays on hand movement as where dance resides once the rest of the body has ceased to be mobile, sensitively told in Nakajima’s final essay on butoh artist Kazuo Ohno.

_Dancing Age(ing)_ addresses aging in dance through a combination of scholarly and embodied research, practice, reflection, and critical analysis. Coincidentally, Martin was part of the conference that spawned the first book, and she helpfully brings what the first lacks—a focus on aging as a sustained process coupled with an extended discussion of specific artistic strategies within a certain cultural context—in this case the UK. As a choreographer, performer, and scholar, Martin has keen insight into the gaps and spaces of negotiation between what are commonly viewed as dualistic and fixed positions—youth and old age. Borrowing from German age researcher Miriam Haller, Martin employs parentheses in “age(ing)” as a grammatical disruption and tool for understanding age as a social marker of difference alongside class, race, and gender. She also deploys the phrase “age critical dance practice” as a way to deconstruct the notion that “age” refers to old age, when in fact age is an ongoing process we experience throughout our lives that in and of itself does not have a universal value.

This text’s age studies scholarship provides helpful frameworks for looking at dance. K. Woodward’s categories—“chronological age,” “biological or functional age,” “social age,” “cultural age,” “psychological age,” and “statistical age” (59)—offer a range of under-researched areas within dance studies scholarship. Yet while diversity and inclusion are important to Martin’s project, her main agenda is “to acknowledge and further dance’s potential as a creative, reflective and somatically intelligent embodied practice that can influence how we conceptualize age(ing) more generally” (171). The Nakajima/Brandstetter anthology anchors its discussion in mid-20th-century dance experiments, and Martin similarly situates her own evolving contemporary dance practice within the context of ’60s postmodern improvisation and its rethinking of virtuosity. She discusses how expert improvisers deal with physical constraints, rethink dialog and support structures, and build “microstructures for sustained artistic practice in a youth-oriented professional field” (89)—topics that extend well beyond the boundaries of ’60s postmodern dance.

In addition to a broader lens on postmodern dance, what distinguishes this text is the meeting of scholarship and self-reflexive practice, or as Martin puts it, the fluid process of inquiry between researcher and researched (47). Utilizing a “practice-as-research” method of inquiry, she productively lays out in her chapters a scholarly research foundation, presents a particular
choreographic work or process, and then engages in self-reflective analysis. That the author and her work are also the objects of study could in less skillful hands result in naval-gazing, but that is not the case here. The writing is clear and accessible, and the content provides insight into both Martin’s personal values and larger concepts for performance. For instance, her notion of “hosting an audience” speaks both to her particular approach to the performer-audience relationship—one of “reciprocity and complicity” akin to a host-guest situation at a dinner party (43)—as well as to larger discourses on spectatorship.

The topic of aging cuts across dance studies in multiple ways, making the exact interventions of each text hard to place. The Aging Body in Dance is both more difficult and more useful in that it poses numerous avenues for future research. While the subtitle, “a cross-cultural perspective,” is somewhat misleading, suggesting multiple points of geographic and social inquiry when in fact the critique is of Western dance in the US and Europe (by way of Germany), Japan stands as a productive non-Western but Western-related cultural reference and counter example that prevents the volume from speaking in generalizations. The limited scope serves to frame rather than fall short of a promised comprehensive study, and while the relations between the essays in each section might be tighter, the gaps do allow—and indeed call for—further inquiry.

If the larger concern of both texts is that cultural understandings of lifelong changes in mobility deserve careful attention, then questions of which bodies can move freely, and where and when, are also of central importance, particularly at the current moment of increased racial and ethnic tensions, global migrations, and digital surveillance. While these issues are unaddressed in the works, the ground has been laid for linkages to be forged. There is thus much to be applauded in the two contributions, both separately and together. Living life is surely a creative and often improvised act. Age discrimination exists in all aspects of our culture, from the workplace to urban planning to family and friendship relations. Dance alone cannot solve these issues, but it can reveal ways to practice questioning, challenging, and re-envisioning the worlds in which bodies think and move.

—Megan V. Nicely

References


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TDR: The Drama Review 62:3 (T239) Fall 2018. ©2018
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In January of 2017, the University of California at Santa Barbara inaugurated an extensive exhibition titled Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955–1972, tracing the shared lineages of these three formidable women artists throughout this nascent period on the cusp between modern and postmodern experimentation. Consisting of photographs, drawings, paintings, scores, films and video, correspondence, and scenic and sculptural objects, the collection of artifacts told the story of three interconnected, feminist, embodied researchers and performance makers who were highly influential on the artistic innovations—visual, literary, choreographic, performance—historically associated with 1960s New York City, and specifically Judson Dance Theatre. While both Yvonne Rainer and Simone Forti did have ties to the East Coast, Radical Bodies argues that their significant relationships to Marin County–based choreographer Anna Halprin shifts the “geographical and genealogical origin story” of postmodern dance by constellating artistic movements in the West—a move replete with its own contemporaneous politics and symbolic history (29). Making my way through the exhibition upon its relocation to the Vincent Astor Gallery at the New York City Library of the Performing Arts in the summer of 2017, I encountered artifacts both familiar and rarely seen from these artists’ substantial archives. Installed in relation, they wove together uncanny conversations and stories, creating their own new environment for discovery...for the body, with the body, and of the body. The NYPL, “a library dedicated to the temporally tangled activity of preserving for now the live art of what-has-been,” as Carrie Lambert-Beatty has written in relation to Rainer’s 1968 piece, Performance Documentation, set in its galleries, provides a notable setting for the exhibition (2008:125). Underscoring each artist’s distinct incorporation of writing, drawing, and recording in their creative process, it is also an institution committed to negotiating the paradoxes, contingencies, and potential absences in archiving performance. As Radical Bodies (both exhibition and text) evidences, each of these artists, in their varied modes of embodied research, forged her own astute, rigorous relationship to image, document, and mediation; each sought a means by which to detangle the materiality and ephemerality of the body and its timely import—social, political, aesthetic—through choreographic practice.

More than an exhibition catalogue, the text, populated by images of the exhibit’s artifacts, offers an absorptive record that celebrates Halprin, Forti, and Rainer’s historical oeuvres. While maintaining a critical, discursive perspective, especially in the three grounding essays by the book’s editors, the text additionally weaves together artist writings, critical reflection, and personal anecdotes by Forti, John Rockwell, and Morton Subotnick. These supplementary pieces invite the voices of the artist, critic, and collaborator, respectively, giving the book a diverse stylistic ethos that performatively addresses the intangible aspects of its subjects: the body, performance, and time-based materials. Taking a cue from its title, the text lithely wrestles with locating this radical body in history and tracking its lineage into the present. Given dance’s primary mode of transmission—through filiation—evidencing this lineage in the archival document reveals the trickiness of recording the corporeal and the subjective fluctuations of memory. Such fidelity to lineage might at times hinder the text, which could have done more
to redress history by situating the work in relation to feminist movements in visual art of the time.1

Each of the Radical Bodies editors offers a close perspective on one of the three artists. For Ninotchka Bennahum, Halprin’s dance deck, a large, outdoor platform suspended amongst the redwoods of Northern California and designed by her husband, landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, offers a “stage open to the natural world” (76–78). This post-studio site sets the scene for Radical Bodies’ environmental score, which both de-centers New York City as a nexus of artist innovation and cites Halprin’s “intertextual couplings” between dance, the body, and an open landscape, a context critical to the elements of play that run through Halprin, Forti, and Rainer’s aesthetic innovations (63). Discussing Halprin’s philosophic interlocutors (ranging from Isadora Duncan to Rabbi Max Kadushin to John Dewey) and influential choreographic achievements (from Parades and Changes [1965] to the present-day enactments of her participatory ritual Planetary Dance [1987]), Bennahum writes:

Her transformation of the lithe dancer into an empathic body resonated deeply with Americans trying to survive. [...] Placing the radical body at the center of public life, she taught Americans to conceive of the body as an agent of social change. (84) Rich with descriptions of Forti’s brazen, “undomesticated” imagination (99), Wendy Perron’s contribution to the volume offers a keen, firsthand vantage point into this community of artists, filling out the tapestry of relationships and cast of characters with extensive interviews and the nuanced ear of a writer/practitioner. At times the balance between familiarity and objectivity falters, threatening to narrow the subjective aperture and highlighting the unreliability of recollection in the valuation of legacy (114–15). Ultimately, Perron generously extends her insights and provides a thoughtful, cohesive portrait of Forti.

Bruce Robertson effectively utilizes the uncanny poetics of the personal to theoretically map intersections between dance and sculpture in his investigation of Yvonne Rainer’s The Bells (1961) and Robert Morris’s Columns (1961), providing insight into the oft-discussed minimalist climate of the time. Addressing the intersection of body and artwork with humorous undertones, he demonstrates the reaches of Radical Bodies’ art historical project, to “bring both works back into proper relationship with each other historically [...] as codependent, mutually co-formative, and productive” (133). Robertson’s essay clearly and gracefully narrates how dance and sculpture mutually influence one another during this time. Especially relevant in our contemporary context of dance in the museum, Robertson notes tangible differences in the way each artform is inflected differently by gender, economics, authorship, and venue, and negotiates the blur between dance and visual art’s corresponding epistemological, ontological, and aesthetic traditions.

Elise Archias’s The Concrete Body: Yvonne Rainer, Carolee Schneemann, Vito Acconci also affirms the prominence and profound impact of embodied agency and the agency of embodiment as it intersects visual art and dance during the rebellious, paradigm-shifting 1960s. Meticulously researched and replete with photographs of performances, as well as other forms of documentation, including notes and scores, Archias’s book attunes the performance work, collaborations, and adjacent mediums (film, painting, and writing, respectively) of each artist to intersect with her theoretical axis of the “concrete body.” With an art-historical eagle eye, Archias invigorates modernism’s predilection towards abstraction, rerouting its focus from universal form to material concreteness and locates it choreographically on the vulnerable (Rainer), sexualized

1. For instance, Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro’s Los Angeles–based Womanhouse project (1972) or Linda Nochlin’s important call to the art world in 1971, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” (in Reilly 2015).
(Schneemann), and desiring (Acconci) body. Her vision of this work sees the concrete body intervening between “the structure of the medium” and the “physicality of its materials,” demonstrating possible routes into “contemporary feeling” and the democratic “extra-artistic realm of everyday life” (1, 3). With aesthetic simplification, excess, or limitation, Rainer, Schneemann, and Acconci articulate through their work the productive tensions between immediate physicality and the abstractions of language and representation. They do this, according to Archias, by presenting “bodies at the extremes of the code-versus-concrete-substance dyad in one moment mundanely recognizable, in the next ambiguous and hard to read” (94). Within the broader context of each artist’s oeuvre, the performance work features a specific period of experimentation centered on the body and physicalized action. As Rainer notes, “My body remains an enduring reality” (30), and Archias’s theorization of the concrete points to “a more broadly embracing collectivizing notion of the human,” where “culture and physicality are intertwined and in constant negotiation for everyone” (114). The body’s materiality, as concrete, requires immediate and continuous engagement, and for Archias this reality is both a connective tissue between art-making practices and broader cultural, collective movements.

In comparison to Radical Bodies’ strategic attention to potential dissymmetry between (dance’s) subjective and (visual art’s) objective epistemological production, Archias’s writing at times feels slightly opaque, tightly bound as it is to its analytic theses, yet still raising “concrete” questions about actual bodies, their excess, unruliness, and sensorial responsiveness. For example, of Schneemann’s 1964 seminal work, Meat Joy (1964), Archias writes, “Overwhelming the body with sensation in order to break it free from its habits of control serves, quite simply, to align the body with physical matter” (114). Her argument adheres to conclusions based on the artists’ discussion of their work during this period and aligns with Schneemann’s categoriological assessment of the concrete: “What was at issue was ‘not about the self,’ she insisted in arch modernist fashion; ‘it’s about what the materials can do. It’s about these forms’” (88). It would be interesting to consider how such a reading of the concrete might be complicated within a contemporary context, where the stakes of one’s identity and agential self might be thought differently. Forcing the concrete into “existing tropes” and “cultural expectation,” could be misconstrued as a coldly objective, analytic, and problematic mode of address (119–21). While valuing the theatrical aspects of Rainer’s task-like deliveries, the body’s materiality theorized as such echoes the sentiments of early Contact Improvisation practitioners, who focused on the body as mass, volume, density, etc., ignoring the effects of social inscription and identity markers (see Novack 1990:68). The importance of each of these artist’s subject-oriented agency and privilege, including the capacity for their work and bodies to be read through the lens of historical record, is crucial to situate and analyze their artistic output. In what might be interpreted as a classically modernist fashion, Archias tends to stay away from social and political markers of identity. Nonetheless, The Concrete Body underscores the importance and influence of action, performance, and choreographic practice in relation to an expanded field of artistic practice in the 1960s, asserting this body’s positioning alongside major trends led by Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, Pop Art, and Conceptual Art. Each of these books offers important contributions to performance’s historiography, drawing critical visibility to the artists’ archives and successfully locating the body in this contingent, complex space, with all its rigor, physicality, and play.

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At age 83, the artist Simone Forti is finally hitting an apex of critical attention, with a 2014 solo show at the Museum der Moderne Salzburg and the 2017 bicoastal exhibition Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955–1972, curated by Ninotchka Bennahum, Wendy Perron, and Bruce Robertson, and catalogues and critical essays that accompanied both; a series of high-profile performances at the Museum of Modern Art and the Louvre; and now a scholarly monograph, Meredith Morse’s Soft Is Fast: Simone Forti in the 1960s and After.

Witnessing even one of Forti’s performances reveals the elusiveness of Morse’s subject. At the University of California Santa Barbara in January 2017, Forti opened an evening linked to the Radical Bodies exhibition with a solo improvisation. I watched her from backstage, while waiting to perform Rainer’s Trio A. We had spent the morning over breakfast at the hotel anxiously caught up in Donald Trump’s ban on immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries. Peggy Phelan launched her lecture that afternoon with a photo that had appeared in the New York Times the day before: half a dozen men in suits in the Oval office, signing away women’s rights over their bodies. The question hovered in the air — what does this art do, if anything, in relation to this political-historical moment? “Are you going to deal with all this in your dance tonight?” Yvonne asked Simone. She said it might come up.

Forti’s improvisation intertwined spoken words and kinesthetic storytelling to deal with current politics both directly and obliquely. She began by wondering aloud how many stars you could see from Australia — dislodging our northern hemispheric centricity. She arrived at current events through fragmented images that intensified the details, as a poet will do: “A signature, a signature, just a signature,” she said while indicating writing, dissolving the power of an executive order through pure gesture. A black snake appeared, as did Benito Mussolini’s jawline, which she evoked by jutting out her chin. As I watched her trembling hands and head,
enfeebled by Parkinson’s, sculpt these stories, I realized she was cracking the patriarchy, entirely on her own terms. The world went in and spiraled back out in Forti form. She received a standing ovation.

Later that evening, the New York Times online edition posted the headline: “JUDGE STAYS TRUMP BAN.” As Halprin had said on a panel earlier, concerning a different situation in which a dance of hers had coincided with a political breakthrough, “We didn’t say we did it, but we didn’t say we didn’t do it, either [...]” Forti’s art influences, with tremendous subtlety, the web of social and political forces that bind us together.

Forti’s power lies in her contradictions. She appears fragile yet steely, outward-gazing yet totally introspective, whimsical yet utterly serious. Her body of work, spanning 50 years and multiple mediums, seems impossible to pin down, as if contextualizing it would somehow be akin to nailing a butterfly to the wall. Its protean quality is its strength, but also potentially the reason her entire oeuvre has largely been untouched in academic scholarship, until recently.

Morse’s starting point is the lack of scholarly attention to Forti’s work. Her task is to contain and classify a practice that has wiggled in and around the discourses of its day: Forti’s sui generis-ness is the most difficult, and most generative, to theorize. Morse joins a growing collection of art historians writing about 1960s postmodern dance, including Susan Rosenberg, Elise Archias, Julia Bryan-Wilson, and the trailblazer Carrie Lambert-Beatty, who have all creatively inserted dance into art historical discourse. The field of dance studies benefits from their rigorous efforts to extend the influence of dance artists into visual culture more broadly.

Morse approaches her subject in a pointillist fashion by applying many different theoretical frameworks, in a book that is divided into two parts. Part one deals with Forti’s 1960s work, especially her dance constructions and dance texts, situated in relation to the influence of artists Margaret H’Doubler, Ann Halprin, John Cage, Robert Whitman, and La Monte Young. Part two deals with Forti’s post-1960s work with improvisation, discussed in connection to her earlier practice. Morse argues for the dance construction Huddle (1961)—her most frequently performed and critically assessed work—as a “bridging piece” between these two periods in Forti’s artistic practice, due to the “radically embodied form of vision” that it proposes (9–10). She relates Forti’s work to process art and “the personal” in minimalist abstraction, and interweaves theoretical discussions that attempt to account for Forti’s distinct use of time and affect.

Frequently, Morse must parse out multiple influences at once. Forti extends Cage’s use of the score, for instance, by essentially “Cageifying” the lessons of Halprin, and via Halprin, H’Doubler, on anatomical awareness, using more improvisation than Cage had ever preferred. Morse is good at returning to the physical interior of Forti’s work, to the deep knowledge of human anatomy that shapes her movement images.

One unexpected pleasure in the book is getting to know Forti’s lesser known pieces, such as Cloths (1967). Morse crafts a compelling analysis of Robert Whitman’s influence upon Forti’s ideas of “the image,” especially through Forti’s extension of painting into live action in Cloths. In arguing that Cloths creates a “picture-plane-cum-object,” like that in Robert Rauschenberg’s work, this chapter beautifully positions Forti not only in dialogue with visual art, but as an innovative visual artist in her own right (61). (Forti also has a body of drawings, which Morse neglects to analyze. This is an oversight, granting that it is an entirely other can of worms.)

By the book’s midpoint, we understand the far-reaching, intermedia scope of Forti’s practice. In chapter 3, Morse analyzes Forti’s five text works, published in An Anthology of Chance Operations (1963), edited by La Monte Young. Forti’s texts are brilliant little dances—if dance is defined as scrutinized movement—enacted in words. The texts differ in their treatment of time and, Morse argues, display “an increasing proximity to the moving body”: from a sprouting onion falling off the lip of a bottle that begins the texts, to the unusual fifth entry that sets up a physical, masochistic conflict in which one man tries repeatedly to tie another to a wall (72). Morse convincingly reads the organization of Forti’s text works as traveling from the distant to...
the intimate, an arc that moves progressively into the thicket of human relations that character-izes much of Forti’s group works.

Insights such as this one reward wading through Morse’s own organization, which can be confusing. Characters and their ideas skate across chapters. Morse deals with Forti’s use of sound and voice in chapters two, four, and five, mobilizing it to support everything from Forti’s relationship to Cage and Young to her incorporation of the personal and her use of time. One begins to wish for a chapter dedicated to Forti’s use of the voice, rather than this fracturing to support theoretical points. The fragmented organization might be purposeful—unravelling a multilayered artistic practice, using a nonlinear rhetorical form. But Forti’s work tends to get chopped up and buried under the labyrinthine discussions about other artists and aesthetic movements.

Two things rescue the book from clouding Forti’s work under its analysis. The first is Morse, who in the finest passages presses theory against practice to radiant effect. In her discussion of Forti’s dance constructions of 1961, for instance, she suggests that Forti and Young’s treatment of time shared a sensibility that evokes Brian Massumi’s notion of an “intensity,” or intense perceptual engagement, as a “temporal sink, a hole in time” (99). In extending “task time into a slowed, interior sense of time,” Forti achieved a “temporality beyond the ostensible time of the task” (99, 102). Morse’s analysis here gives us a way to think about the originality in Forti’s work, which shared overlapping concerns with her Judson Dance Theater peers and the live art of the ‘60s while nonetheless pushing firmly into unique territory.

The other and the most important standout in the book is Forti herself, who is her own strongest interlocutor and theorist. The quotations from her writing consistently display analytic and poetic depth. On composition, Forti writes: “Realizing that one could choose the distance from the point of control and the final movement performed, I came to see control as being a matter of placement of an effective act within the interplay of many forces, and of the selection of the effective vantage points” (50). If you have ever seen Huddle or dived into a walking score like Scramble (1970), as I have, you will understand what she means. Her words describe the political engagement, at once unassuming and forceful, that characterizes the scope of her career, right up to her improvisation in 2017.

It feels unfair to review Rhythm Field, edited by Ann Murphy and Molissa Fenley, in the same space as Soft Is Fast, because although they are different projects, the task invites comparison. Morse’s in-depth scholarly effort makes everything that is missing from the anthology of writings on Fenley’s work readily apparent.

Fenley rose to prominence in the 1980s, when she joined Laurie Anderson and Cindy Sherman as a top marquee name (150). Her relentlessly energetic compositions led critics to project onto her work the decade’s fitness and aerobic frenzy. One revelation in the book is the sharp divide between this critical reception and her choreographic inspiration: where critics saw Jane Fonda, she was thinking the rhythms of Yoruba culture.

Fenley’s central essay, “Intuition and Magic,” elucidates her creative process. She threads through the cultural forms that have inspired her, from Yoruba rituals to Haniwa figurines (50–51). Starting with her upbringing in Nigeria, exposure to non-American and non-Western cultures ignited her choreographic imagination. Source material is everywhere, including the ghost of Vaslav Nijinsky himself showing up in the studio to tell her he, too, had wished to compose a solo Rite of Spring (57). Fenley’s studio is for her a sacred and metaphoric space (49–50), much as Twyla Tharp describes her studio in The Creative Habit (2003).
Few of the other contributions to the anthology add significant critical heft. The reflections from Bill T. Jones and Elizabeth Streb and the interview with Peter Boal are eloquent but also feel gratuitous, like celebrity testimonials. Richard Move, in an academic turn, piles a who's who of scholarly quotes into his essay on the “exceptional labour” in Fenley’s seminal 1988 solo State of Darkness. I would have been curious about his interpretation of her androgynous body, which is so very different from his own cross-dressing in his performance of Martha Graham, but shares the transgendering impulse, toward different ends.

The weakest writing veers into hagiography. Inflated language permeates the collection: “Each moment of Fenley’s work seems to bring exhilarating news of uncharted depths, unmap-pable reaches—like the moments of consciousness that gurus say are the entry points to in-finity” (153). We are even given a “Praise Poem for Molissa Fenley” by Bob Holman (79).

These gushing contributions feel suspiciously empty of substance. Fortunately, Tere O’Connor’s conversation with Fenley stays focused on choreographic practice. Together, they indulge in the details of craft: their exquisite exchange allows readers to listen in on a dying language, spoken by only a rare few. And Ann Murphy’s essay alone grounds Fenley’s work in substantive critical and historical contexts. By delving into both the hyped and the critiqued aspects of Fenley’s work, Murphy offers a multifaceted portrait of the artist.

Here are the important details that surface about Fenley’s work: she has remained devoted to her art for four decades, in the face of bodily injury, shifting fads, and the general hustle that characterizes living and working within a field of scarce resources. Her solo State of Darkness, performed to Igor Stravinsky’s The Rite of Spring, is a seminal work in American modern dance history. She sits within a line of white female soloists— including Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis— who borrow from centuries-old and non-Western cultural sources. She presented a queered, androgynous female body onstage well before the terminology of transgendering entered common usage. The infamy of her 1995 injury— onstage, at the Joyce Theater in New York City— reflects her warrior-like approach to dancing. Her work ethic, her drive, her untrammeled life force...

I am certain there is more to say about Fenley’s body of work. As much as I think dance artists need to write, in order to imprint their voices in the archive, I am suspicious of self-edited festschrifts. Molissa Fenley deserves to be recognized for her sustained career and unique contribution to dance. I hope a talented young scholar in the next few years will feature Fenley’s innovations in a dissertation on experimental dance of the 1980s, just as Morse has done for Forti in the 1960s.

— Emily Coates

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TDR: The Drama Review 62:3 (T239) Fall 2018. ©2018
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In this highly readable volume, Kirsty Johnston takes seriously the central place of disability within modern theatre. Johnston draws together important theoretical and theatrical insights into the complex commingling of disability and modern drama, powerful moving beyond reductive approaches that read disability as a metaphor or evaluate representations of disability within a narrow progressive or regressive framework. This critical project of “recasting modernism” is detailed in an inventive two-part structure. In the first part of the book, Johnston’s clear introduction and four chapters provide a synthesis of key terms and debates, a brief history of disability activism and art, and an introduction to disability theatre companies in the US, UK, Canada, and Australia that are taking innovative approaches to modernist plays. The second part includes compelling essays, interviews, and performance texts by theorists and artists who think anew disability and/in modern drama. The result is an excellent, widely applicable work that “recasts” modern drama through creative and contradictory readings of disability history in plays such as Samuel Beckett’s Endgame and Tennessee Williams’s The Glass Menagerie, as well as through analyses of inclusive practices of casting, training, dramaturgy, and design in contemporary theatre productions that engage with accessibility as not only an ethic but as a generative aesthetic.


In a moment in which theatre scholars are turning to neuroscience as an explanatory model, Jonathan W. Marshall offers a welcome and necessary historiographic intervention through this study of the fraught place of theatre in Jean-Martin Charcot’s neurological work. Drawing on a range of textual, artistic, architectural, and photographic materials, Marshall offers a vivid analysis of Charcot’s neurological dramaturgy from the laboratory to the lecture hall. In so doing, Marshall demonstrates how Charcot managed theatricality as both a resource and a threat in his diagnostic and pedagogical practices of neuropathology at the Parisian hospital-asylum, the Salpêtrière. He shows, for example, how Charcot’s calculated juxtaposition of his own monotonous speech with a patient’s performative excesses in the lecture theatre worked to consolidate his expertise and to manifest his nosology. Yet, Marshall demonstrates how Charcot’s performative staging of clinical pathology also risked undermining his authority and pathologizing his medical practice. This reversal was most spectacularly realized in the carnivalesque inversions of doctor and patient, normal and monstrous, and expertise and excess in grotesque medical scenarios played out by Charcot’s former student Alfred Binet in the horror theatre of Grand Guignol. Marshall’s compelling study troubles neat distinctions between theatre and medicine, knower and known, rational and irrational, and pathology and health in and beyond the space of Salpêtrière, as theatricality moves center stage in this rich archaeology of neurological practice.

Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr’s most recent work on the relation between science and the stage maps a heterogeneous history of roughly 150 years of evolutionary theory in the theatre. Shepherd-Barr explores the exchanges unfolding between scientific and theatrical approaches to evolution, while also attending to each field’s internal inconsistencies and disputes, situating them both within their broader cultural and historical contexts. Through an extensive treatment of theatrical engagements with evolutionary themes such as sexual selection, competition, adaptation, and species relation, Charles Darwin’s work emerges as one among several other theories playing out on the stage, including Lamarkism and Spencerism. Similarly, the range of theatrical works showcased in the book illuminate the diverse ways in which “theatrical encounters with evolution resist, challenge, and ultimately transform the ideas at their core” (4). Through antagonistic readings, energetic misinterpretations, anachronistic adherence to outmoded theories, ethical inquiries, and prescient imaginings, dramatists emerge as engaged coproducers of evolutionary knowledges and scientific cultures in this timely and informative study of the mutual influence of theatre and science.

**Stanislavsky and Yoga.** By Sergei Tcherkasski. London: Routledge, 2016; 126 pp. $95.00 cloth, $24.95 paper, e-book available.

Sergei Tcherkasski offers persuasive evidence that close to half of the Stanislavsky System of actor training is directly drawn from yogic teachings and techniques. Through a close analysis of the writings and letters of Konstantin Stanislavsky and his students, the first chapter delineates how Stanislavsky came to study and apply yoga in the First and Second Studios of the Moscow Art Theatre, and continued into the Opera Studio as well as his late period in the 1930s. The second chapter examines the historical context and literary content of Stanislavsky’s main influence — Ramacharaka — by reading numerous overlaps between his *Hatha Yoga* and *Raja Yoga* and Stanislavsky’s *Collected Works*. One of the most interesting insights from this chapter is that Ramacharaka was the American William Atkinson, whose work was part of the secular technique-based “Modern Yoga” for Western readers. The final chapter explores the broader correspondences and divergences between the System and core elements of yoga. In this careful study, Tcherkasski makes a strong case for the continuity, rather than the oft-cited break, between old and new Stanislavsky, and illuminates the significance of yoga to modern actor training in and beyond Stanislavsky’s works.


This edited volume frames repetition as a fundamental and dynamic dimension of Western cultural production. In 11 essays that engage with white Euro-American theatre, dance, performance art, stand-up comedy, visual art, craft, film, and poetry, contributors differently explore and enact the enduring tensions that mark repetition as a de/stabilizing force in the constitution of art, subjectivity, and social life. A unifying theme is the pleasure and difficulty of repetition’s returns. For example, Emma Bennett engages with repetition as a methodology to read and re-read the tension of waiting again and again for the punchline in Stewart Lee’s rambling, repetitive joke “The Rap Singers”; Alice Barnaby demonstrates that the repetitive, seemingly “pointless” domestic pastime of copying images through pin-pricking was a creative and critical practice of empiricism; and editor Eirini Kartsaki’s contribution ruminates on three examples of
subjects who repeatedly return to the same event, even as they enact a desire for and fear of the end of this return. These pieces point to the formal strength of this work: each chapter repeats and revises repetition as a concept and method, performatively undoing the reader’s attempts to resolve the question of repetition with each iteration.


The philosophy and practice of internationally acclaimed German theatre director Thomas Ostermeier are gathered together in this English-language assemblage of essays, interviews, images, and case studies of the director’s work. The volume opens with Peter Boenisch’s introduction, followed by first-time English translations of two important essays in which Ostermeier outlines his new approach to realism. Chapter 3 brings together essays by a stage designer (Jan Pappelbaum), an actor (Lars Eidinger), and a video artist (Sébastien Dupouey), all of whom work closely with Ostermeier at the Schaubühne in Berlin. Chapter 4 includes an interview and essay on Henrik Ibsen by Ostermeier, which sets up the first case study in chapter 5—his 2012 production of An Enemy of the People—told from the perspectives of the dramaturg, actors, visual artist, and assistant director. The subsequent two chapters provide insights into Ostermeier’s Regie method of inductively working from the Stoff (material) of a traditional play text, situating its story within the context of the production and the contemporary social world, and effectively communicating its message to an audience. This process is detailed through an overview of Ostermeier’s method in chapter 6 and an in-depth case study of his 2015 production of Richard III written from his perspective, including a diary from the formal rehearsal period. The volume concludes with an interview and essay by Ostermeier on the politics and future of theatre. In addition to these lively and instructive essays, the book is filled with rich visual materials such as color photos, diagrams, and drawings, as well as an appendix listing all of Ostermeier’s works. This volume will no doubt be a tremendous resource to theatre scholars and practitioners in and beyond the contemporary European context.

—Coleman Nye

Coleman Nye is Assistant Professor of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University. Her publications include the graphic ethnography Lissa: A Story of Friendship, Medical Promise, and Revolution (University of Toronto Press, 2017), as well as articles in TDR, Women & Performance, and Performance Matters. She holds a PhD in Theatre and Performance Studies from Brown University. anye@sfu.ca