
Sometimes, sitting in a darkened auditorium, I would drift into a reverie, wondering what the director or designer or playwright or actor would do if they could do anything. Or, when at an academic conference listening to scholars present their research, I would sense some underlying impulse at the root of their inquiry. I would dream of interrupting, asking to hear of their imagined theatres. (8)

So begins Daniel Sack’s introduction to his expansive project, which seeks to collect and document such daydreams about the potentialities of theatre. The resulting short texts are as diverse and vibrant as the hundreds of artists, educators, and researchers who have responded to Sack’s call. A handful read like conventional dramas, but many others adopt the form of poetry, short story, memoir, editorial, theoretical essay, and, at least in one case (#24), the grant proposal. Each of these 121 imagined theatres, numbered and ordered alphabetically by title, is set on a two-page spread in the anthology *Imagined Theatres: Writing for a Theoretical Stage*. The volume, which won the 2018 Excellence in Editing Award from the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, also kicks off a digital journal (imaginedtheatres.com) with an open submission policy and themed issues curated by guest editors.

Many readers will be familiar with Sack’s initial impulse; teachers (including myself) often encourage this kind of thinking when they have their students write their own manifestos modeled on the historical avantgarde or collaborate on a season proposal. The difference is that these fantasies are framed by Sack’s theoretical approach to potentiality. Sack writes in the introduction that each piece “is a thought experiment about the expectations of the theatre, a parable or paradox that touches upon its nature and elaborates on the many ways in which that nature might be conceived” (2). As such, *Imagined Theatres* continues and realizes the thematics explored in Sack’s earlier book, *After Live: Possibility, Potentiality, and the Future of Performance* (2015), crowdsourcing ideas from countless talented artist-scholars. Sack has also devised an ingenious platform to stimulate critical discourse on these reveries. Each imagined theatre is followed by what Sack calls a “gloss,” a more theoretical response by the creator herself or another contributor asked to respond to the piece. Thus, every spread in the book rehearses a dialogue between theatre and theory — often demonstrating that the two are indistinguishable.

Each piece is a self-contained theatrical world, but the book also invites readers to traverse among the stars — the index, grouping pieces by common subject or theme, is renamed “Constellations.” Of the infinite pathways that one could follow, I will recount two from my own experience reading the volume to illustrate the ways in which *Imagined Theatres* brings fresh perspectives to familiar questions in theatre and performance.
While many of the pieces essay a utopian futurity, some choose to restage the past in a more beautiful light to mourn loss and imagine a better present. (Both approaches are equally indebted to Jill Dolan and José Esteban Muñoz.) Cherríe Moraga’s Ancestor Call—Guerrero (#6) dwells on Gonzalo Guerrero, the 16th-century Spanish sailor who became “the first recorded father of American mestizos not conceived in rape,” via the writings of her dead friend, the poet Alfred Arteaga (22). Broderick Chow’s A Chinese Actor’s Late Style (#14) envisions Lee Jun-Fan, also known as Bruce Lee, playing Macbeth in his final performance before retirement. In this alternate history, Lee quit working in Hollywood (instead of dying at the age of 32) but returned to stage acting in his late years, starring in productions of Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, and William Shakespeare. Chow explains in his own gloss that he wants to “put pressure on the idea of ‘good acting’ and its intersection with race, class, gender, and nation” (39). His lucid description of Lee’s imagined physicality, the subtle movement of his abdominal muscles as he silently processes the news of Lady Macbeth’s suicide, brings to mind Elizabeth Freeman’s argument that the body “is the means for and effect of convoluting time, and consequently the smooth machinery of political power, or the mode of the state’s reproduction” (2010:14).

Other imagined theatres mediate on the implied contract with the audience, acting on spectators in ways that violate their comfort, safety, and even ontological stability: Actors set the theatre on fire (a recurring motif) behind the audience’s backs (#17); a train dashes full speed into the house (#86); or the audience sits within the event horizon of a black hole (#82). A walking performance turns into a confrontation with riot police at the border (#118). And in Rachel Joseph’s Dreams on Screens (#28), “Everyone in the audience is submerged in goo with wires protruding from their bodies as they are connected to the theatre, feeding insatiably, mothered in a liquid cocoon” (66). Here and throughout the volume, the audience is not a fortuitous assemblage of individuals who may or may not engage with the work and will disperse once the performance ends. The imagined audience is physically and conceptually “connected to the theatre,” an integrated part of the metaphysical stage machinery.

The volume’s greatest strength is its immense breadth of perspectives and theoretical frames, utilizing the theatrical medium to devise thought experiments in issues of ecology, race, decolonization, gender, queerness, transhumanism, and every branch of philosophy. The stage is infinite, the book tells us. It encourages more theatre and performance scholars to initiate artistic projects as an extension of their thinking, rather than wait for the right experimental performance to appear as their case study. It challenges more artists to embrace impracticality and even impossibility as a creative principle. Finally, despite the sense of calm meditation that the term “thought experiment” evokes, Imagined Theatres is a provocation, an ardent demand for a more stimulating, rigorous, and non-normative theatre.

— Kee-Yoon Nahm

References


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Before and during World War II, the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy forced approximately 200,000 “comfort women”—girls and young women, mostly of Korean descent—into the unthinkable suffering of sexual slavery. It would be many years before these atrocities faced concentrated public scrutiny; but in the 1990s, those who survived their sexual servitude, along with their supporters, initiated a movement that, to this day, seeks justice for those victimized by state-imposed sexual violence. In Embodied Reckonings: “Comfort Women,” Performance, and Transpacific Redress, Elizabeth W. Son argues that performance has played a leading role in this movement. Son writes about such performance as a collection of “redressive acts,” or “embodied practices that involve multiple audiences in actively reengaging traumatic pasts to work toward social, political, cultural, and epistemological change” (3). Redress, Son argues, is not limited to what the Japanese state can provide (but hasn’t and likely won’t) in apologetic response to its own perpetration of sexual violence. Redress is also that which performative action provides for survivors of sexual violence in the form of “the restoration of their social status, affirmation of ownership over self-narratives, production of knowledge, community formation, and commemoration of the women’s history” (3). Gathered together, the redressive acts Son describes amount to “a transpacific redressive repertoire”—a new and capacious critical category that invokes the work of Diana Taylor, frequently cited in this book for her writing on the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo, redressive actors very similar to those that interest Son (4). By bringing a thinker like Taylor into contact with scholars of the transpacific such as Lisa Yoneyama and Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, Embodied Reckonings stages a much-needed encounter between the field of theatre and performance studies and that of a transnational Asian American studies, an encounter of urgent relevance to artists, activists, and academics alike.

Son’s first two chapters lead readers through the performatic strategies that survivors and activists have employed in their quest for reparation from the Japanese government. Chapter 1 focuses on the Wednesday Demonstrations, weekly protests staged outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul since 1992. Drawing on archival documentation, interviews, and her own participant observation as a fellow protester, Son details the ways that survivors have utilized dress, signage, and their own elderly bodies to produce “somatic disruptions” powerful enough to induce the possibility of redress (48). Chapter 2 analyzes the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery as performance. The tribunal gathered 64 survivors in Tokyo during the winter of 2000 to testify against the Japanese government. In this chapter, Son shows how survivors have utilized performance as a means of “challenging legal protocol and asserting their personhood” (101). In doing so, she contributes to a growing body of scholarship at the intersection of the law and performance—we can think here of work by Catherine Cole (2009) and Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson (2013).

While the entire book is nimbly conversant with the theoretical contributions of theatre studies, chapter 3 is the only chapter in which Son takes up specific stage plays and productions. Those four works are Chungmi Kim’s Comfort Women (2004); that play’s Korean translation, Nabi (2005–2009); director Aida Karic’s The Trojan Women: An Asian Story (2007); and Bongeonbua (2013, 2014) by the Korean playwright Yoon Jung-mo. Across her analyses of these productions, Son attends to the relationship between theatre and activism. The plays, Son convincingly demonstrates, thicken the narratives surrounding the “comfort women” by bringing attention to the ways that the gendered trauma attached to sexual slavery is lived not only by survivors, but by those intimately connected to them. For example, through careful close reading of Kim’s Comfort
Women, the context of its production, and its reception—a methodology common to Son’s treatment of each of the plays—Son shows how theatrical performance can yield a feeling of “transpacific affinity” across multiple continents and generations of Korean women (111).

Son’s last full chapter examines memorialization and the performances of care that certain memorials invite. Specifically, she draws on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews in relation to three memorials to the “comfort women”: one in Seoul, Korea; another in Palisades Park, NJ; and the last in Glendale, CA. Borrowing a term from Robin Bernstein, Son teaches us that these memorials function as “scriptive things” (2011:12): like playscripts, the memorials structure performances of care, while allowing those performances a range of variable interpretive shapes (149). In this context, performances of care are “sartorial and horticultural”: a woman wraps a bronze statue of a young girl (a “comfort woman”) in a coat for warmth; a man tends to the bushes and trees surrounding a statue and plaque. Though Son’s theory of “care” might have been bolstered by an engagement with theories of care emerging out of feminist philosophy and queer theory, by speaking of care in the language of performance studies Son submits a valuable, alternative view of care to the field of Asian Americanist critique where the study of care is usually limited in scope to that performed by Asian caretakers caught up within a global economy of reproductive labor.

Throughout Embodied Reckonings, Son gives a palpable sense of the ethical concern she carries in relation to her own appropriation of activist activity for academic advancement. At one point in the book’s epilogue, for example, she writes about the uneasiness she feels recording one of her interviewees. She worries about contributing to “the commodification of survivors’ narratives” before ultimately asserting the importance of recording the words of survivors and relaying their stories (180). This concern is understandable as there is no doubt that Embodied Reckonings speaks in the language desired by an academic audience. And, indeed, the book will prove very useful for scholars seeking a transpacific view of state violence and politically engaged performance. Still, I get the feeling that this achievement is a secondary one for Son. First and foremost, the ambition of this book seems to be the amplification of activist effort. Admirably, Son, like the activists and theatre artists about, for, and with whom she writes, seeks to memorialize—to construct and proliferate memory. In the absence of hope for adequate state recognition and reparation, it is as if Son, through her writing, aims to incite and inspire her readers to perform as the subjects of her epilogue perform: as embodied reminders of living history, at the side of survivors or in their stead, reckoning with what it means to seek redress from a recalcitrant state, and, as importantly, from each other for each other.

—James McMaster

References


James McMaster is completing his PhD in Performance Studies at New York University. His work examines the ways that Asian Americans multiply-marginalized by gender, sexuality, and (dis)ability have endured racial capitalism in the early 21st century by engaging aesthetic work as a form of care work. He will join the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies and the Asian American Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison as Assistant Professor in Fall 2019.

Ezili’s Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders.

Ezili, as Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley notes, is “the name given to a pantheon of Iwa [spirit forces in Haitian Vodou] who represent divine forces of love, sexuality, prosperity, pleasure, maternity, creativity, and fertility” (4). The book, Ezili’s Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders, is in turn a multitempered exploration of black genders. Ezili are traditionally associated with queerness as they are the multiplicity of forces who protect *madivin* and *masisis* (transmasculine and transfeminine Haitians). Tinsley overlaps three voices—scholarly, spiritual, and historical—to produce a rich tapestry of various manifestations of the multiple Ezili. These Ezili are found in literature, song, dance, film, and all manner of performance, attaching themselves to black feminist ancestors and a range of spiritual practices. Tinsley’s work illustrates how spirituality and gender can be imagined together by drawing on black feminist praxes of making possible, surviving, and theorizing.

Ezili Freda, Tinsley argues, takes up the black femme function, which is to say she shows the power and resistance in making oneself look good: “so look, making yourself into a black cisfemme—making yourself beautiful, and doing it to light another woman’s fire—isn’t just a frivolous Saturday afternoon. For a long, long time it’s been an act of resistance and rebirth” (57). Analyzing performances, parsing interviews, and searching the archive, Tinsley locates Ezili Freda in dancer and choreographer Adia Whitaker’s video Ezili (2010), the performance artist MilDred’s show *I, Transcender: The Gender Expression of Haitian Gods and Goddesses* (2010), and in Janet Collins, the first black prima ballerina in the United States.

Ezili Danto is the manifestation that illuminates the importance of the work of social justice and the work of sisterhood. Angie Xtravaganzza, founder of the House of Xtravanganza featured in Jennie Livingston’s film *Paris Is Burning* (1990), anchors the historical aspect of this form of mothering labor. The documentary *Poto Mitan* (2009) fleshes out the importance of speaking out against the exploitation of female laborers in factories as “political and spiritual work” (85), while *Of Men and Gods* (*Des hommes et dieux*, 2002), directed by Anne Lescot and Laurence Magloire, focuses on masisi forms of labor: “forging commonality not through gender, sexuality, or other identities but through walking together, through shared activity, experience, and support” (90).

Ezili Je Wouj, meanwhile, is the “cosmic tantrum [...] of some cosmic innocence that cannot understand—and will not understand—why accident would ever befall what is cherished, or why death should ever come to the beloved” (116). These Ezili frolic in the blood and golden showers that Domina Erzulie, a dominatrix from the Antilles, extracts from her clients; the filth and kink of Nalo Hopkinson’s imagined life for Jeanne Duval, Charles Baudelaire’s love; and the play of domination and comfort that Mary Ellen Pleasant, a wealthy black abolitionist, enacts in 19th-century San Francisco. These Ezili draw out pleasures from topping white men and women and playing with the relationship between blackness and filth—even if this power inversion is momentary.

Lasirenn, “Ezili of the waters,” is tied to altered consciousness, addiction, and expansive loving: “what if black women just need oceans of loving—from parents, friends, coworkers, selves, women, men—in order to unlock all of who we are, and some of that loving comes to us through sex?” (155). Whitney Houston, who swam extensively but also drowned, sings the historical note; the rapper Azealia Banks and her Mermaid Balls hold down the spiritual; and Sharon Bridgforth’s *dat Black Mermaid Man Lady* (2018; first workshopped in 2013) is the
scholarly anchor. This is about trying to survive amidst much marginality: “So this, finally, *this* is how you learn to breathe underwater when you’re black and queer. You let yourself fall under the sea [...] You reach for ancestors around you and ask how to make a workable present out of a painful past [...] You come up and down and up and down” (166).

Tinsley ends the book with a Dominican Ezili, Anaisa, who represents carefree black girlhood, who is “everyone’s girl but only when she wants to be” (179). Rihanna, Arties Philips (who is Tinsley’s great-grandmother), and Micaela (the protagonist of Ana-Maurine Lara’s 2006 book *Erzulie’s Skirt*) are the figures who illuminate the power of creative mothering and powerful sexual loving on one’s own terms.

It is important that these Ezili come together in ways that are at times at odds with each other. They represent different imaginative paths for survival, paths that are often ignored in favor of rationality and respectability, norms that seem to promise personal uplift and narrative coherence. Instead, Tinsley weaves feeling and sensation through her words. The three voices, distinguishable by font, meet but do not overlap—leaving spaces (within and between case studies) for readers to feel their own way toward connections. This means that readers experience (rather than read about) the creativity of gender through performing spirituality, pleasure, and connection. These are the key interventions that *Ezili’s Mirrors* make. By showing gender not through the matrix of heteronormativity but through performances of attachment to things not seen, especially the spiritual and the ancestral, Tinsley makes gender an extension of black diasporic practices of survival. Explicitly ignoring shame and focusing on multiple forms of pleasure and connection, Tinsley shows how creative gender-making can be a site of healing and black feminist theorizing.

— Amber Jamilla Musser

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What acts of black women’s “will” are legible in the historical archive? This inquiry has haunted and driven scholars to contest historical erasure by searching for evidence regarding the motives and desires of black historical figures. What would it mean, however, to imagine these archival absences not as gaps to be filled—the act of projecting some semblance of agency onto unknowable subjects as a means of redressing irreparable wounds, a futile gesture? Instead, what other forms of knowledge production could be considered by directly engaging those absences? In what ways, in other words, can we critically engage the archive to unsettle liberal notions of will and agency, coercion, and consent deployed in capitalist regimes of colonialism, slavery, and the “free” market? This is precisely Hershini
Bhana Young’s speculative challenge in *Illegible Will: Coercive Spectacles of Labor in South Africa and the Diaspora*.

Drawing mostly from primary histories and shedding (an)other light on recognizable material, Young insists “that the illegibility of (black) will within the historical archive requires performative critical engagement with absence” (23). Rather than reading the archive for lost or new evidence, Young “conjures” the ghostly afterlife of black historical figures that resonate in contemporary cultural productions such as performances, novels, and photography. Navigating across disciplines to do this, Young applies a methodology that moves adroitly between black performance studies, contemporary African diasporic literature, and queer and critical disability theory. Emphasizing material bodies through their enactments of coercive labor practices, Young’s study is situated in South Africa, yet also expands to examine the transatlantic and, the much less theorized, trans-Indian and intracontinental circuits through which the construction of the commodified, raced, and gendered spectacle traveled.

Covering a sweeping range of time (the beginning of the 18th century to the early 21st century) and geographies, the book begins with the repatriation of Sarah Baartman’s remains to South Africa in 2002. Young, however, does not focus for long on Baartman’s exhaustively explored body and instead meditates on Baartman’s labor, an analytic shift that puts liberal notions of agency and free will on display. Here courtroom deliberations over the contractual “agreement” between Baartman and her London exhibitors are read alongside staged performances of enslaved Africans on North American auction blocks. These deliberations provide Young an opportunity to cross-examine the distinction between capitalist “free” labor and colonial “slave” labor as the commodified black body in both labor systems obfuscates choice (the legibility of will in the archive) while solidifying the legacy of racial capitalism.

Records from the 1713 Council of Justice exhibit how the kidnapped and subsequently enslaved Tryntjie from Madagascar is sentenced to public execution in South Africa for killing her child after poisoning her white mistress. Intervening in historical narratives of romantic love between Tryntjie and her mistress’s husband, Young disrupts those readings by examining the indistinguishability between coerced submission and compliance in a slave system that obscures Tryntjie’s motives for killing her “bastard” son. In this chapter, the illegibility of Tryntjie’s “will” and desire in historical narratives puts definitions of consent and love into crisis.

Furthering her argument about the limits of agency understood as acts of self-determination, Young delves into how race and disability have been transformed into spectacles and “conditions” in need of rehabilitation. By introducing Joice Heth, whose fragile aging body became one of the first attractions put on display by P.T. Barnum, Young facilitates a contemporary reading of the 2008 Miss Landmine Angola pageant, a beauty competition in which landmine victims win a prosthetic limb. As this chapter traces a genealogy of freak show performances and beauty pageants, Young questions whether Heth or the unemployed Angolan women’s willingness to participate in these spectacles is legible. Here Young underscores how focusing on individual compliance overlooks discourses and decisions based on the collective needs of family and community.

Uncovering diasporic arrivals omitted from historical records and or forgotten in the social imaginary, chapter four complicates stories of how and when Indian indentured servants settled in South Africa. Young considers the high rate of suicides amongst these workers by probing how coercive labor practices contributed to a “slow death,” a mode in which exploited bodies are already rapidly in decay. Young pairs these cases with Agnes Sam’s *Jesus Is Indian and Other Stories* ([1989] 2011) and Gloria Wekker’s study of *mati work* in *The Politics of Passion: Women’s Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* (2006)—two texts that exhibit queer sensibilities about desires and rituals that are hidden from oppressive regimes. While continuing to move the concept of “will” beyond the liberal realm, this chapter stretches the furthest to connect how queer acts of care can provide other readings for the “slow death” of Indian indentured servitude.
That leap comes much more into focus as Young continues to theorize will as a queer relational practice in the final chapter and epilogue. Young expounds on Yvette Christiansë’s historical novel *Unconfessed* (2006), which picks up the story of the enslaved and disabled Sila van der Kapp who was imprisoned for life for the murder of her son Baro in 1823. Emphasizing acts of shared vulnerability and care between the women and children who inhabit the “slow death” of prison, Christiansë shows how Sila comes undone to be remade relationally.

Throughout the book, Young provides a way to think through the relationship between performance, document, and archival remainders by meticulously mapping a journey into the silent corridors where the “illegible will” is engaged through critical speculation and historical evidence. In the introduction Young admits, “this book is a choreography of vulnerability and exhaustion as I struggle and fail to grasp the meaning of various historic characters” (24). As a reader, I was at times also left trying to grasp some of the author’s care-filled theoretical attempts at engaging those illegible “wills.” However, what does remain is the radical potential of continuing to retheorize will and agency as relational and historically contingent. By excavating willful acts not as individual ontologies, but as shared impulses based on mutual needs, Young contributes to performative methodologies for reading and writing against the grain, in the margins, and through the voids of “those illegible moments of will in the archive that are never empty” (212).

— Sarah Lewis-Cappellari

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In our culture of constant revelation, confession has become both a ubiquitous and an abstract concept. The attention economy of social media produces an abundant supply of deeply personal confessions, while at the same time the practice of confessing has become so embroidered in the everyday that it no longer seems extraordinary, or even recognizable as confession. It is precisely this essential and ephemeral position that Christopher Grobe’s new book, *The Art of Confession: The Performance of Self from Robert Lowell to Reality TV*, attributes to the work of key performance artists of the second half of the 20th century and the early 21st century. In his compelling and comprehensive analysis of what he terms “confessionalism,” Grobe explores how confession became a powerful tool for performance artists while also becoming central to ideas of selfhood in the postwar era in the United States.
Reading confessionalism as a “stylized doing,” Grobe curates a pleasantly surprising archive that combines canonical figures and understudied performances, bringing to both a theoretical freshness (viii). His genealogy begins at the end of the 1950s with the familiar faces of the confessional poets, such as Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton, but rather than focusing simply on the confessional nature of the poems, Grobe examines the concurrent rise in the popularity of poetry readings, both live and recorded, which contributed to the understanding of confessional poetry as autobiographical performance. The second chapter turns to female performance artists of the 1970s with a particularly in-depth reading of Eleanor Antin, an artist whose large oeuvre has garnered far less scholarly attention than her contemporaries. Grobe revisits the relationship between consciousness raising and selfhood in key performances by Antin and Linda Montano and argues that these artists utilize a form of camp sincerity to critique the kind of easy intimacy confession can foster, a performance he describes as “confessional drag” (102). The monologue work of Spalding Gray in the 1980s is the focus of the third chapter, in which Grobe thoughtfully unpacks the relationship between the talk performance and the written texts necessary to produce such seemingly off-the-cuff confessional explorations. Such an approach is a real strength of the book, which foregrounds the unseen and often mundane forms of production texts to read the spaces between text and performance to consider how confessionalism emerges precisely from these spaces. True to this approach, the final chapter focuses on reality television at the end of the 20th century through the lens of MTV’s groundbreaking series, *The Real World*. While the analysis considers the significant role of confession to the narrative and temporal structure of the series, the close readings again turn our attention to the context surrounding performance and examines the production notes and para-texts of the series, such as *The Real World Diaries*, to illustrate how the performers deploy confession as a rhetoric of intimacy that does not originate in selfhood, but in the structures of performance itself. Season one cast member Eric began his confessional with, “So you guys probably want to know what happened this week,” an unnecessary address that the producers read as technical naivété but that Grobe reframes as Eric’s knowing method of invoking a viewing public to accurately calibrate his narrative for the camera (218). The “Coda” jumps to the present day with an analysis of media artist Natalie Bookchin’s provocative digital work, and closes with a personal reflection on the shifting role of confessionalism in a recent protest on his own campus, Amherst College.

Each chapter is followed by an “Interlude,” a punctuating analysis that creates a historical or contextual bridge between the longer close readings, illustrating the strong web of connections between these texts and artists. This rhythmic structure mirrors Grobe’s authorial voice, which remains a strong presence throughout the text and helps maintain the quick pace and light touch that makes the text a pleasure to read. Grobe regularly interrupts the flow of narrative with imagined scenarios or quick parenthetical asides such as, “ending with a sad laugh (or is it a sob?)” that remind the reader that the text is both a construction and a performance, creating the kind of disrupted, conscious confessional practice that the book is exploring (89). These moments playfully evoke Oscar Wilde’s assertion that the highest (and lowest) form of criticism is a mode of autobiography. And just as Grobe argues that confessionalism is a performance that reimagines the possibilities of form, these confessional interruptions make visible the scholar as interlocutor, working to mediate the relationship between self, subject, and reader. In so doing, he offers an example of how a text can skillfully satisfy the autobiographical impulse without losing its critical edge.

Tracing out a long archive across a range of performances, media, and texts—including his own—allows Grobe to make a significant claim about the cultural centrality of confessionalism. This is a convincing argument that also illustrates how the boundaries and scope of performance studies is expanding because, in the right hands, it has the power to bring important insights to seemingly familiar texts. By framing confessionalism as styled media ecologies Grobe grants himself the room to roam into literary and media studies, and his theoretical heterodoxy marks an important intervention in an era in which performance, text, and everyday life overlap.
in messy and fascinating ways. It is precisely from this space in between one thing and the next that, Grobe argues, confessionalism emerges. What his book demonstrates is that innovative analysis and inventive scholarly forms have the potential to emerge from these spaces as well.

— Kimberly A. Hall

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András Visky’s Barrack Dramaturgy: Memories of the Body, edited by Jozefina Komporaly, is the first English-language anthology of the Hungarian-Romanian playwright, dramaturg, theatre aesthete, and Artistic Director of the Hungarian Theatre of Cluj. The three performance texts included in the volume, Juliet: A Dialogue about Love (2002), I Killed My Mother (2006), and Porn (2009), are all reflections of Visky’s complex national and cultural background and historical experiences: growing up in an ethnically minoritarian and politically persecuted family under the oppression of the totalitarian communist state of Romania. A wide variety of essays accompany the three plays: the introductory texts, both to the book and to each of the plays, written by Eastern European theatre scholars Jozefina Komporaly and Ileana Alexandra Orlich, as well as directors Karin Coonrod, Jeremy D. Knapp, and András Visky himself; and related interviews, production histories, and photographs attached to each script. These provide an impressively detailed and insightful description of the complex, and to most readers unfamiliar, sociopolitical context of the plays and offer a comprehensive overview of the local and regional theatrical histories and legacies.

The trauma of humiliation, repression, and confinement, Visky’s most defining “memories of the body,” inform both the form and the content of his works. In his theatre of memory, the closed, intimate space, which locks the performers and the audiences in together, evokes the experience of captivity, in the broadest interpretation of the word, as Komporaly describes, quoting Visky: “‘captivity is a state of being in which we are dislocated from our bodies,’ and through which we are invited to explore the potential participatory understanding” (13). Visky names his aesthetics “Barrack Dramaturgy,” and proposes that the shared, embodied experience, the heightened “perception of the performance as an event in the present” allows participants, performers, and members of the audience alike to access and (re)experience the past and bring to the present the repressed memories of both the individual and the social body (13). Visky’s conceptualization of the “memory of the body” does not explicitly build on Jerzy Grotowski’s “body-memory” or Tadeusz Kantor’s “theatre of memory-image,” at least in the excerpts included in this volume, although Komporaly, in her introduction, emphasizes the evident connection among these Eastern European theatrical traditions. Visky relates the memories of the body to the trauma of losing one’s freedom or the experience of a lack of freedom, both of which “alienate us from
our own body” (28). In Barrack Dramaturgy, however, “[l]anguage comes into being as a ma-
terial of the body”; it “regains its meanings” by retrieving the memories of the body (28). In other
words, Barrack Dramaturgy allows the participants, both performers and audience members, to
access the repressed body memories of historical traumas, which they can then verbalize, narrate,
and put into discourse. The visceral confrontation of the traumatic past in this intimate though
enclosed space “finishes with an equally shared exit or liberation,” Komporaly argues optimisti-
cally, that is “also symbolic of an act of doing justice” (13).

Each play included in the anthology is inspired by real life events and evokes a dramatic
setting that, literally or metaphorically, is characterized by confinement. Further, while Visky
writes in a distinctive, fragmentary style with “compulsive repetitions,” prolonged silences, and
“circular monologues” (xvi) that defy realistic representation and interpretation, each play has
an underlying narrative arc that the audience members can piece together as the performance
progresses. Juliet: A Dialogue about Love is based on the playwright’s own early childhood expe-
riences: after his father, a minister of a protestant church, was sentenced to 22 years of forced
labor for allegedly plotting against the communist regime, his mother along with her seven
children—András being the youngest—were also deported to a Romanian gulag. The text of
Juliet is based on the mother’s death throes after contracting angina pectoris in the camp. The
protagonist, though alone on the stage, does not speak to herself; through her delirious exclama-
tions and appeals to her husband, God, and “The Maiden of Death”—in a sequence of lyrical
intertextual speeches that cite a few allegorical and literary works, including the book of Job
and Romeo and Juliet—she recollects fragments of the family’s past, seemingly to accept suffer-
ing and let go, but in reality to hold on to faith and choose life in the end.

I Killed My Mother and Porn also center on vulnerable female characters, the abjected subjects
of an oppressive state, who inhabit strength and determination under the most dire circum-
stances. The protagonist of I Killed My Mother is a half-Roma girl, Bernadette, who, abandoned
by her mother, spends her childhood in a provincial Romanian orphanage. After her best friend,
Clip (the only other character in the play), dies in a failed attempt to hijack a bus and drive “to
the West,” Bernadette is left in a nihilistic vacuum. The imagined symbolic act of “killing her
mother,” or at least their familial bond, allows her to overcome the internalized stigma of race
and poverty, and to reclaim her identity as “a stranger, a wanderer, and an orphan,” which she
“will always be, until the end of time” (188).

Bernadette’s prison is the margins of society in communist Romania, a country that does not
allow for social mobility. The dissident heroine of Porn is also a captive of the communist dic-
tatorship, but her marginalization is the result of her commitment to freedom, creativity, and
love. The Romanian state security, the Securitate’s surveillance, gradually destroys the Girl, as
depicted in the docu-fictional informant reports inserted in-between the scenes: first, as a result
of the persecutions, her partner commits suicide; then her unborn child dies, causing the death
of the Girl, too, as any form of abortion is strictly prohibited in Nicolae Ceauşescu’s Romania.

The distinctive features of the dramatic texts in András Visky’s Barrack Dramaturgy, includ-
ing the forceful repetitive and fragmented lines, the overt intertextuality, the monological struc-
ture, the emphatic role of musicality and physicality in the performance, and the presentness of
the event, are all important attributes of postdramatic theatre. Still, these plays, as other Visky
dramas (such as Born for Never, or Backborn [2002], and The Unburied: The Saint of Darkness
[2017]) elude any categorization: each is a singular theatrical event. They are simultaneously
transnational and distinctively Eastern European—that is, based on reality, even though the
author questions if reality is “actually based on a true story” (xi), and, to use Visky’s term, “text-
in-action,” first confining the audience in captivity only to set them free in the end by working
through past traumas. Thus, Barrack Dramaturgy, at its best, carries the promise of Aristotelian
catharsis, the true transformative experience for the audience, though the fulfillment of this
promise depends on the creators of the performance. For, as Visky establishes on the first page
of the volume that is dedicated to his work: “the dramatic text goes out from under its writer’s
control very swiftly,” and “starts writing itself” (ix) in the acoustic space, through the ritualistic, embodied encounter between performers and spectators.

András Visky’s Barrack Dramaturgy: Memories of the Body, like Visky’s plays, is a multilayered work that brings together multiple genres and points of view. It is both an anthology of drama and a survey that focuses on Visky’s oeuvre, written by theatre historians, artistic collaborators, and the playwright himself. The only voices missing are the ones who have firsthand experience with Visky’s unique theatrical world in the Hungarian language. The artistic commentaries are written by the playwright’s US-American and Korean directors, Karin Coonrod and Jeremy Knapp, respectively. The inclusion of reflections by some of Visky’s Transylvanian, Hungarian-speaking colleagues, who share the same complex cultural and ethnic background, could have highlighted the importance and influence of Visky’s art in his homeland, or multiple homelands. Furthermore, it would have also allowed for an intriguing comparative discussion about the ways in which these dramatic texts generate distinctive affects and construct diverse meanings in regions with radically different historical and political legacies. Regardless, András Visky’s Barrack Dramaturgy: Memories of the Body is an exceptionally informative and enjoyable book for students and scholars studying Central Eastern European theatre, and actors and directors in search of captivating—pun intended—monologues and plays.

—Aniko Szucs

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We who study performance don’t speak often about pleasure, but pleasure matters, perhaps more than anything else, to our work. There’s the pleasure of walking to a theatre down avenues and stairwells we know or those we don’t; the pleasure of discovering a document, whether secreted in a mold-speckled shoebox or meticulously wrapped in acid-free tissue paper, that confirms a hunch or takes us by surprise; the pleasure of helping our students, readers, and friends understand the affection we have for a particular performance or the reasons we find it despicable. There are the pleasures of companionship, of wrestling over an armrest with a friend, of debating the quality or meaning of what we’ve witnessed. And there are the pleasures, the powerful pleasures, of remembering performance.

Reading and rereading Marvin Carlson’s 10,000 Nights: Highlights from 50 Years of Theatre-Going and Cindy Rosenthal’s Ellen Stewart Presents: Fifty Years of La MaMa Experimental Theatre (both published by the University of Michigan Press under the aegis of longtime UMich Press editor LeAnn Fields), my thoughts often turned to the pleasures of performance and the
pleasures of remembering it. Though both texts are, strictly speaking, works of theatre history, they are unconventional in their approach. Their authors call them “memoirs,” attesting to the personal, positioned, partial stories they tell. Not coincidentally, both books are about singular individuals and the abundance of theatrical pleasures they’ve enjoyed and enabled others to enjoy.

For the singular Marvin Carlson, that abundance is five decades of spectatorship, some 10,000 performances by his rough count. Carlson, as readers of TDR will know, is the author of a wide-ranging, meticulously researched and written body of work on the theory and history of theatre and performance. Despite that expertise, Carlson admits to the challenge of the project: “I am almost overwhelmed by the range and richness of theatre it has been my privilege to experience. When I decided to put together some kind of memoir of this experience, I cast about for some time for an approach that would provide some sense of the richness, without becoming overwhelmed by the potential size of the project” (3). His “solution” is the tried-and-true historian’s tool of synecdoche. Each of the book’s 52 chapters focuses on a single performance that represents, in some fashion or other, its moment. “I have not always picked my ‘favorite’ show of a particular year,” he explains, “nor the best-known or most awarded production, but have instead picked productions that have remained in my memory and that I think reveal important aspects of the theatrical culture of their time” (3).

The stories Carlson tells are of theatre-going in the most literal sense. We follow him as he weaves his way through the streets of New York and London and Cairo and Paris, hopping on and off trains and taxis and buses, stopping for a bite to eat or a cappuccino at a favorite café, eyes alighting on a detail of architecture or discomfiting evidence of the social dislocations of the contemporary urban space. But first and foremost, these are stories about spectating—the intelligent, historically informed, critically minded, aesthetically sensitive work of watching, listening, and connecting. In his account of Karen Beier’s 1995 production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream, for example, Carlson touches on Beier’s prior and subsequent work; recalls the founding of the Union of European Theatres and its promotion of international festivals; and scans the Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus’s curvilinear facade, marveling at the way it blurs the boundaries between interior and exterior space. And, of course, he recalls details of the performance itself: the striking advent of Josette Bushell-Mingo as Hippolyta and Titania; the transformation of Philostrate as he trades boots for high silver shoes, fedora for bouffant; the over-the-top, hilarious gore of Bottom’s stage death; the symphonic effect of the multilingual cast echoing Puck’s final address in their many languages. Not incidentally, 10,000 Nights also tells the story of the expanding gambit of that experience, as told from the vantage of an elite US academic. As we move into the 1980s and 1990s, the chapters focus more on international directors: Peter Brook, Giorgio Strehler, Tadeusz Kantor, Tadashi Suzuki. And more and more women and artists of color move to the fore of Carlson’s memory.

Carlson’s essays remind me more than a little of the restaurant reviews of the late Jonathan Gold. In the same way that Gold articulated the pleasures of the palate with the particular cultural currents coalescing around his plate, Carlson crystallizes the intellectual, emotional, social, geographical, and historical textures of this theatre at this time with this community. It is, in sum, a deeply pleasurable book.

If 10,000 Nights approaches its multiplicitous subject from the perspective of a uniquely sensitive and stalwart spectator, Cindy Rosenthal’s Ellen Stewart Presents approaches her singular topic from a multiplicitous perspective, constructing “an assemblage of perspectives and imagery” to capture the first 50 years of La MaMa Experimental Theatre and its resident genius,
Ellen Stewart. Among the pleasures of Rosenthal’s book is the simple fact that it exists. As she explains, while Stewart “could be a great storyteller in person, she tightly controlled what was written about her” (2). To the horror of historians, “Stewart insisted loudly and definitively that she did not want a book on her life or her theaters” (2). But somehow, Rosenthal made it happen. If Carlson’s book could only have been written by an indefatigable peripatetic, *Ellen Stewart Presents* could only have been written by someone deeply in love with— and dedicated to—a single place, a singular person, and the family that person gathered around her. It is the outcome of a decade’s work, hundreds of performances, dozens of interviews, and, most surprisingly and delightfully, endless hours in La MaMa’s archive.

Never averse to telling all the truth, but telling it slant, Stewart authorized a book on her life and work, but only if it focused not on her, but the posters created to publicize La MaMa’s shows and the voices and stories of the network of creators that comprise the La MaMa family. The text features over 100 color reproductions of posters arranged chronologically, nested in theatre-historical narrative composed by Rosenthal and extended quotations from writers, designers, and performers. The effect is rather like delving into an archive. As Rosenthal notes, “Stewart was virtually unique in New York experimental theater in the 1960s and 1970s in prioritizing the preservation of materials that documented the work of Off-Off-Broadway artists, collecting posters, programs, play lists, photographs, scripts, and often props, puppets, set pieces, and costumes” (3).

*Ellen Stewart Presents* is testament not only to Rosenthal’s dedication, but to the labors of those who worked with her to create it: La MaMa archivist Ozzie Rodriguez, photographer Carol Rosegg, and art historian Elise LaPaix. It has the heft and gloss of a coffee-table book. It’s a pleasure to hold and, despite its chronological structure, a lot of fun to simply dive into. We might turn to J. Wu’s poster for the Pan Asian Repertory’s 1978 production of Ernest H. Abuba’s *The Dowager*, ponder its vivid yellows and reds and learn a bit about the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, a federal jobs program that provided opportunity to underemployed artists and artistically underserved communities. Or, a bit further on, a two-page spread with, on the left, the poster for Split Britches and Boolips’ 1991 production of *Belle Reprieve* and, on the right, the production of Robert Patrick’s pioneering gay drama *The Haunted Host* (1991), starring Harvey Fierstein and Jason Workman. There’s a lot to discover in these pages.

Does the collage-like approach serve its subject perfectly? No. Rosenthal provides a brief, but helpful overview of the role and provenance of the posters she’s selected and of US theatre posters generally, but the text that accompanies individual posters often does little more than describe the poster. Useful art historical connections sometimes go unnoticed. For example, Robert U. Taylor’s poster for the 1969 production of Sam Shepard’s *The Unseen Hand* and *Forensic and the Navigators* could be more appropriately linked to the underground comix scene than the pop art of Lichtenstein. M. Illic and N. Lindeman are clearly appropriating the style of John Heartfield’s Dada collages of the 1930s in their poster for the 1986 production of Fernando Arrabal’s *The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria*. But if I have qualms about the book as an art historical resource, I am thoroughly humbled by how well it tells the interlaced story of 50 years of audacious, edge-bending theatre and performance, an ever-growing family of creators, the growing diversity of the New York theatre scene (especially in terms of international artists), the shifting fortunes of the East Village, and of Ellen Stewart herself, sorely missed, but ever-present in spirit.
Taken as a pair, Carlson and Rosenthal’s books provide a richly textured perspective on the last half-century of theatre and performance and vital lessons in how to do theatre history. Yes, it is incumbent upon us to theorize our methods and perceptions, to consider carefully our historical and geopolitical positions, to recognize how our identities and experiences shape our perceptions of the spaces, bodies, sounds, and words we perceive in the places of performance. But the preeminent principle is the simplest and the most pleasurable to fulfill: Be there.

— Mike Sell


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In his 1994 talk, later published as “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” Jacques Derrida named the archive as a place of “commencement” and “commandment” where “[...] documents [...] are only kept and classified under the title of the archive by virtue of a privileged topology” ([1995] 1998:1, 3). Forming the critical baseline for archive theory, this poststructuralist view of official archives, as formed by governance, upholds the power to dictate what constitutes history. As such, the archive discloses an ideological position dominated by Western, patriarchal, heteronormative, colonial values. In 2003, Diana Taylor responded with her companion theory of the “repertoire” wherein corporeal knowledge forms the oftentimes nonmaterial repository that must necessarily accompany our decolonial picture of a global past. In 2010, Taylor further asserted that digital technology is irrevocably intertwining embodiment with its electronic media in such complex ways that subjectivity at the site of its virtual interface becomes barely visible and even more difficult to track (see Taylor 2010). Although Derrida retreated from examining this realm of “science fiction” (16), as we approach the third decade of the 21st century, three scholars—Abigail De Kosnik, Gabriella Giannachi, and Toni Sant—have published two book-length studies and one edited anthology, respectively, that amply fulfill the call of both these foundational theorists. Building upon Jon Ippolito and Richard Rinehart’s theory of formal and informal memory as equally substantial realities in a mediated world (2014), these three volumes demonstrate the now explosive range of public as well as less official, but
nevertheless prescient, collections of records and objects, immersive artworks, web affiliates, and multimedia performances that preoccupy current archival scholarship (14–15).

In their address to performance theory, a third consideration runs through these rich publications recognizing the digital archive's multitemporal and user-driven ontologies. As initiated by Peggy Phelan ([1993] 2006) and countered by Philip Auslander ([1999] 2005), the debate qualifying performance's ephemerality versus its liveness haunts any study addressing the curation of culturally significant objects, much less what constitutes the care of live performance. While Ippolito and Rinehart take a pragmatic approach to the lifespan of works of media art, asking, “How many ways are there to die?” (2014:22), Phelan's updated notion of “the photographic effect” concedes coexisting interior experiences across time and space in the encounter with camera images (2010:51). In establishing that photographs and other performance documents mark their own presence alongside a live event, she positions “two nows”—the moment of making and the moment of seeing—as simultaneous occurrences (51). For performance studies, this suite of books further details the archive's mixed site of temporality, its capture of more than singular pasts, and how planning for death insures the future life of performance.

Through their embrace of the digital archive's mediated universes, its oftentimes self-aware knowledge production, and the possibility of alternate truths, these authors specify their stake in archive theory through a dense array of examples. Ranging from Sosolimited's live televisual remix of the 2004, 2008, and 2012 US presidential debates to Boris Charmatz's 10-hour performance of a museum collection in *If Tate Modern was Musée de la Danse* (2015) in Giannachi's account; to the near countless internet-based fan archives dedicated to *Star Trek, Harry Potter, or* a queer feminist multifan base such as the Archive of Our Own (AO3) explored by De Kosnik, these works constitute a sampling of the layered realities and archivally embedded practices at work in the research of these scholars. Art historian Giannachi positions the archive as a state of being, a sociopolitical condition that is capable of world-making and defining the state of consciousness by which we construct an archival present. Media studies scholar De Kosnik demarcates online fan communities, generated by a self-organized virtual labor force of cyber-elves, as carving outcast havens and preserving missing alternative histories within a homogenous technological landscape. Performance researcher Sant tracks how documentation, as its own ontological act, is a studied practice needing attention by professional curators today in order to care for the tomorrow of performance. Each book addresses the question of what records or memories might be saved from a significant life wherein social technologies bring us into a performance of cross-chronologies, a chorus of vocalities, dispersed yet specific locales, and most importantly, still uncertain futures.

In *Mapping the Everyday*, Giannachi's conception of the Agambian archive apparatus is one that “produce[s] their subjects” (xv). Arguing that “the archive nowadays [...] encompasses life itself captured, increasingly, in its presentness” (xx), Giannachi has organized the book into six aesthetic categories chosen to show the infiltration, power, and possibilities of relational interarchival production: architecture, dance/performance, visual art, cabinets of curiosity, and diasporic cultures. The opening chapter provides a productive overview of the archive's material development from simple iterative notes to a fully reproductive digital organism. The “prearchival” (archive 0.0) began as lists found in ancient archaeological cultures, progressing by the 21st century to 4.0 status capable of networked and regulatory interactive states that can engage distant users in the creation of knowledge such as the Tate Museum's *Artmap* (2). She cites the September 11 Digital Archive as an important 2.0 example that actively seeks independent outside contributions (xvi, 12–13; www.911digitalarchive.org) as well as Lynn Hershmann Leeson's *Life Squared* (2007) in its 3.0 functionality that allows users to manipulate an immersive interface and embark upon a simulated journey-space (16; http://www.lynnhershman.com/life-squared). The aforementioned Tate/Charmatz performance takes the archive off the screen back into a dancer's body. Staged within a public institution, this performance work presents how the body's “will to archive” has become a choreopolitical prerogative. As cited by Giannachi, dance theo-
rist André Lepecki (2010, 2013) poses that the cataloguing discipline of the archive has entered social patterns. The choreography of public routine now constructs itself as a self-cataloguing performance machine. We archive as we move. Equally, we are being archived as we are being seen and heard (154, 158–59). Giannachi’s view counters the Rinehardt/Ippolito question about recurring death in the digital world as one rather focused on an extended life within the discipline of the archive machine. As she sees it, the archive is a mode of biopolitical existence that cannot be escaped but that can also be reimagined.

In *Documenting Performance*, Sant gathers a largely UK—and European—based group of research-practitioners who approach performance documentation and the formation of archives as a necessary second concurrent action born along with performance to await their future rebirth. Documenting and archiving are active verbs in the present tense signifying an action rather than simply the production of immobile object-nouns (xxi, 1). Sant’s compilation provides a detailed selection of research-based projects that unpack the sensitivity needed for the care of a live art that is unique, ephemeral, contextual, relational, experienced through several vantages, and evasive of total capture through any technological means other than the human body itself. Organized into four sections with helpful introductions, this anthology features 19 essays oriented around a case study approach and collaboratively written by 27 authors. For instance, Jeanine Rizzo’s essay on “Intellectual Property Matters for Documenting Performance: Challenges and Current Trends” delves into the complex ownership of participatory performances and their record-keeping as experienced from diverse sources including the creators, technologists, and viewers (47–60). Sarah Whatley’s “Documenting Dance: Tools, Frameworks and Digital Transformation Today” encompasses the different methodologies available to dance documentation—scripts, notation, photography, film/video, audio, motion capture, animation—to underscore the difficulty of maintaining dance’s complex, immaterial, and imaginative nature with ever more sensitive recording tools, countered by enduring oral traditions (283–303). Rather than recommending any set of methods or tools for performance documentation over another—all which bear verisimilitude to live performance yet flatten some part of its embodied presence—Sant looks toward memory studies to join information science and performance studies for the future of performance archiving.

De Kosnik’s *Rogue Archives* merits praise for constructing a fresh politics around “rogue” enablers who activate internet tools distributed as items of capitalist consumption to form safe virtual communities while preserving the histories of marginalized subjects. She defines a rogue archive as one which provides content for no payment, having no barrier to access for anyone with an internet connection, 24/7 constancy, no copyright issues, and containing what would not otherwise be held in traditional public collections (2). In making her critical intervention, De Kosnik wishes to “fill in some of the blanks that persist in new media studies around the activity of nonwhite, non-male, non-heteronormative individuals and collectives on digital networks” (11). Taking a dualistic approach of populating the traditional house of academia (the archive) with heretofore unnamed acts by a virtual populace (the repertoire), De Kosnik organizes *Rogue Archives* into seven scholarly chapters followed by seven
chapter “breaks” wherein she assumes a more experimental voice across performance/gender theory, underrecognized labor, and the geopolitics of online communities. With a glossary of terms, an appendix, and 15 pages of fan-based web screenshots, this polyvocal book sustains a vibrant example of the power of the archive and the activism of a repertoire working together. *Rogue Archives* deftly marks a fragile, often short-lived virtual world of visual, textual, and social performance in an interdisciplinary framework collected for academic study. Bolstered by De Kosnik’s nearly year-long oral history project of over 50 online fan producers, *Rogue Archives* provides a substantial 40 pages of bibliographic sources including separate lists of media texts, web-based fanfic sites, websites, and blogs (349–65, 367–407).

Inasmuch as we remain within a largely invisible digital culture of unseen archival discipline and technological control, these authors make explicit critical interventions amidst the conversation of how Derrida’s science fiction has become today’s social reality. Taken together, these books rethink the archive’s power stakes and advance the ways in which living and dying can be assessed and must be thought of together. Faced with the apparatus of self-archiving bodies, Giannachi returns to Derrida’s etymological view by reclaiming the “house of the archon” as one to be managed in the creative present (184). Questioning Sant’s assertion that “performance documentation becomes most useful when handled in the context of library and information science” (15), I wonder if all cultural practitioners can afford such best practices of the digital first world when performing a social practice remains ever precarious. Perhaps in asserting the nimble sensibility of rogue archivists, De Kosnik presents the most sustainable and revolutionary attitude in the face of digital technology’s postneoliberal times. Returning to Phelan’s provocation of multiple temporalities, each of these authors recognizes the importance of marking cultural memory by giving timely attention to our present futurity. Accepting that “fixity equals death” (7), Rinehart and Ippolito advocate an approach that integrates change into the estate planning for our digital performance such that variability insures (re)birth. What combinations of virtual ghosts, cyber-animals, nonhuman hybrid bodies, and zombie artificial intelligences are yet to be imagined and lost? How many brave new worlds will be made only to disappear and saved to await a return? Would we call this an “archival effect” that reaches across time, space, and personhood? Similar to performance, is the archive the complete totality—both the inside and the outside—built to hold the past and future within the making of our present day?

—Christina Yang

References


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More Books


In *Viral Performance*, Miriam Felton-Dansky develops a dramaturgy of the viral, grounding the contagious spread, now infamous in digital media, in live performance practices from the Living Theatre's Antonin Artaud–inspired work in the 1960s through early 21st-century theatre-makers and artists. She persuasively argues that the roots of “going viral” can be found in performance practices that have been viral (in the sense of contagious) from the start, and that a dramaturgical lexicon of mimesis, affective transmission, and an expanded view of “communicability” has much to offer contemporary thinking on virality. The book chronologically illustrates this theatrical contagion, but crucially braids case studies across temporal separations, exploring these viral dramaturgies not as theatrical movements, but historicized instances in a far-reaching web of viral practice and theory. Bringing together key focus areas within theatre and performance studies today, the work particularly uses media studies, dramaturgy, art history, and performance studies concepts (though well-explored theories of contagious dance are notably absent) to methodically demonstrate viral practices across over a dozen theatre and performance artists. Felton-Dansky’s experience as a *Village Voice* critic poetically guides her pointed analysis of a range of artistic works: Artaud’s theories of the Plague and the Living Theatre’s performative disjuncture; forms of audience-involved infection in the work of Marc Estrin, Augusto Boal, and General Idea; an innovative mingling of parafiction with ideas of copying and “germ theater”; and a gesture toward new theatrical ground in the “viral performance network,” seen in mid-2000s works such as The Lysistrata Project. This text breaks important new ground at a key intersection of performance and new media.


Bree Hadley surveys the use of social media in theatre practice, including the activity of audiences, companies, and individual artists in the interactions actively shifting systems of exchange in theatre-making communities. The rapid adoption and spread of social media technologies requires artists and their audiences to adapt to new ways of making and talking about theatre, and this study draws broadly from UK, Australian, and United States examples to note possibilities and challenges for theatre makers. In particular, Hadley concentrates on moments of tension, controversy, or complication between theatre makers and audiences, showing how the two-way communication social media demands pushes boundaries of place, meaning, and
control over artistic work. The book also expands definitions of social media in theatre, moving beyond the limited scope of advertising and promotion to account for the role of conversation with and about theatre making more generally. While the definition is sometimes difficult to pin down, “meaning-making” in this text usefully draws the common goals of spectators, creators, critics, and theatre generally and activates key debates in audience theory toward the context of new media tools. Hadley also consistently calls for more research on the use of social media in theatre and in communication about the arts more broadly, and makes a case for the importance of social media tools in reorienting key relationships between audiences, creators, and the construction of meaning through artistic practice.

**Struggling for Ordinary: Media and Transgender Belonging in Everyday Life.** By Andre Cavalcante. New York: New York University Press, 2018; 224 pp.; illustrations. $89.00 cloth, $27.00 paper, e-book available.

This qualitative study of transgender people’s relationship with media focuses on individual stories to create a unique vision of “queerly ordinary” life. Situated in the early 21st century, a period of rapid change not only for transgender visibility but for popular culture in general, *Struggling for Ordinary* directly connects the two to show how media’s—particularly television and the early internet’s—depictions of trans people in everyday life impacted transgender individuals’ understanding of themselves in “ordinary life.” Cavalcante makes a crucial intervention in both media and queer theory by emphasizing ordinariness, which he distinguishes from “normalcy” as a sense of transgender belonging created in everyday life (Lefebvre) and reflected through media that portrays transgender life as quotidian, and therefore possible for those often set apart and continually rendered marginal. As one interview participant puts it, “ordinary life means not having to worry” (148). Interview subjects demonstrate a complicated and shifting relationship with media that moves through *The Jerry Springer Show* and *Jem and the Holograms* through *Orange Is the New Black* and contemporary LGBTQ film, challenging both the opportunities of representation and its ability to foreclose possible lived experiences in relation to both resilience and resistance. Through in-depth interviews with a variety of individuals, as well as media analysis that contextualizes recent breakthroughs in TV and film in a longer, more complex history of representation onscreen and in media discourse, *Struggling for Ordinary* demonstrates vital connections between the possibilities of life offered in popular storytelling and those that transgender individuals imagine and create for themselves.

**Art as a Political Witness.** Edited by Kia Lindroos and Frank Möller. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018; 239 pp.; illustrations. $63.00 paper, e-book available.

This edited collection seeks to consider political acts of witnessing through a variety of artistic projects across global contexts and mediums. Expansive in scope, the collected essays imagine the politics of witnessing through art as both an archival and active practice, drawing on art’s ability not only to represent but to actively interrogate political narratives and demand more from acts of looking. Operating across multiple disciplines, *Art as a Political Witness* functions partially as a taxonomy of witnessing in various artistic mediums, including photography, film, performance art, theatre, dance, and poetry, and extends artistic practice beyond narrow definitions to include urban exploration and political discourse. While some essays focus explicitly on theatre and performance—Dana Mills’s essay “The Body Remembers: Dance, Discourses of Citizenship, Phenomenology and Memory” notably extends performance studies theories of embodied memory to read citizenship as a form of witnessing; Sally Butler and Roland Bleiker address Indigenous performance art as political dissent in Australia; and Susanna Hast records children performing witness to war through theatrical production—many of the works in this volume address ideas important to performance, particularly the transmission of feeling and...
archival memory prompted by questions of who can, and does, bear witness to violence and political dissent.


Part of the *In Between States* series from Performance Studies international, *The Dumb Type Reader* compiles an expertly curated variety of essays on the Japanese art group dumb type, whose groundbreaking intermedia work from the 1980s–2000s remains highly relevant today. Like dumb type themselves, *The Dumb Type Reader* intersects performance, dance, installation art, technology, queer and critical theory, and a wide range of technical objects, and pays particular attention to the company’s major works and themes. Editors Peter Eckersall, Edward Scheer, and Fujii Shintaro collected the essays with an eye toward what they call “new media dramaturgy,” seeking to rethink both dumb type’s role in performance history and the hidden complexity of digital and media artistic practice. Focused on the legacy of the group, the reader is comprised of six major sections, which demonstrate both the diversity and the careful attention paid to developing the book. “Movements” discusses the choreographic life of dumb type, weaving gestural and machinic embodiment, political and gender belonging, with what Katherine Mezur calls “media terror” underscoring the precarity surrounding dumb type’s performance work. “S/N” reconsiders perhaps the company’s most important work, moving through the sound and aesthetic work toward the piece’s groundbreaking commentary on HIV/AIDS in the mid-1990s. The volume then delves further into the group’s technical and activist projects in “Bridges,” its fourth section. The third chapter, “New Media Dramaturgy,” focuses on dumb type’s position in the larger field and argues compellingly for the need to further develop this category in considering intermedia performance history. The volume also offers valuable materials to scholars of dumb type, including two interviews with group members, full-color performance photos, and reflections by members and collaborators, completing a valuable and unique accounting of dumb type’s legacy.

*Moving Scenes: the circulation of music and theatre in Europe, 1700–1815.*

This collection of over 20 essays closely considers the circulation of theatre, music, and opera in post-Enlightenment 18th-century Europe, bringing new insights to the interplay of national and cultural identities in the wake of revolution and rapid sociocultural change. The volume looks specifically toward music and theatre to explore the movement of ideas during this period, emphasizing circulation rather than cultural transfer as these mediums’ emphasis on appropriation, interpretation, and mobility foregrounds both border-crossing and the expression of identity (national and otherwise) in performance. The result of numerous collaborations among its many authors, *Moving Scenes* is both deeply embedded in its subject matter and offers highly connected conversations in the field, while broadening the scope of a topic that, as the volume’s editors’ note, is often oversimplified with an emphasis on French cultural dominance. Instead, the book’s three parts use music and theatre to rapidly complicate European cultural histories. Part one negotiates nationalism and crossing as a circulation principle in music and theatre, demonstrating how nationalism and cosmopolitanism—“French taste” in particular—worked in tension with foreign performers, object acquisitions, and as propaganda and occupation tools in the Napoleonic era. Part two dives deeply into specific sources of circulation, including news media and prominent patrons. It also covers systems of distribution such as translation, production, and capital; class and social hierarchies and relationships beyond and between
borders (including Freemasonry and aristocratic circles alike); and even the movement of physical objects such as dance masters’ archives. Part three addresses dimensions of translation, from the role of publishers in taste-making through translation to the uses of theatre to both protest and reinforce political ideologies, and ideas of “foreignness” in staging. *Moving Scenes* uncovers new connections between national taste and identity-making and the politics of crossing, translating, appropriating, and melding.

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