
In this absorbing study, Marla Carlson brings together the overlapping critical frameworks of performance studies and affect theory to critique humanist ideologies underlying theatrical representation and reception. Her richly detailed analyses—ranging from scripted drama to improvisational dance—confirm the view that many contemporary works engaging head-on with animals and autism in seemingly novel ways are, in fact, “built upon a solid foundation of avant-garde theatrical experiment” (41), developed decades before the rise of critical animal studies, disability studies, and the neurodiversity movement.

Chapter one, “Locating the Human in Performance,” lays the groundwork for Carlson’s claim that “theatre and related forms of performance constitute exemplary affect workshops” (1), incorporating the contagious intensity of shared sensation into the public sphere, where it operates as a form of collective cognition. This chapter presents numerous theories of affect (from Silvan Tomkins to Gilles Deleuze), distinguishing autonomic energy and circulation from conscious emotions and feelings and explaining the political implications of both. Drawing on these concepts throughout, Carlson examines “the ways in which specific performances elicit categorical affects to manipulate their audiences, whether to affirm, expand, or obliterate the boundaries of the human” (13).

Chapter two, “Performing as Animals,” tracks the affective flows in The Lion King (1997) and War Horse (2007), plays whose animal characters—created through magnificent puppets and masks—reliably produce awe and wonder, opening up possibilities for cross-species identifications that challenge “anthropocentric viewing positions” (22). But instead of reaching toward the sublime, with its attendant feelings of precarity and insignificance, affect is channeled into tenderness and care as the plays’ sentimental plots “focus [on] human social concerns and celebrate human achievement” (22), allowing viewers to emerge from the theatre with a sense of their own benevolence and power while “foreclos[ing] any challenge to familiar structures of feeling” (23).

More ambiguous animal dramas, such as Deke Weaver’s ELEPHANT (2010), interrupt the mechanisms that reproduce humanist ideologies via affective control. Staged in the University of Illinois’s massive Stock Pavilion, ELEPHANT brings documentary elements into contact with imaginative, layered storytelling, creating an event that is similarly monumental and compelling in its use of puppets and technology. But rather than sublimating awe into prepackaged emotions, Weaver unsettles the assumed passivity of spectators by involving them in shared sensory actions that spur “olfactory and tactile appeal” (45). He troubles their connection to knowledge and status (their own and the elephants’); interrupts narrative flow with episodic, disorienting, contradictory, and generically unstable narrative techniques that “provoke unease rather than
comfort” (42); and produces lingering questions that challenge participants’ ethical relations with living animals and their environments.

The divergent approaches established in the second chapter are revisited in the third, “Performing as Autists,” which opens with a comprehensive analysis of The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (2012). Using this play as her model, Carlson identifies a new genre she calls the “autism family drama,” a form that “elicits affective investment in the neoliberal happy family and cruel optimism with respect to the stated goals of its protagonist” (51). In her critiques of this and other, less didactic works—such as Mike Leigh’s Two Thousand Years (2005) and Annie Baker’s Body Awareness (2008)—Carlson is adept at deconstructing the narrative logic that reproduces the “gendered stock character” of the (white, male) “Aspie-geek” (61), whose purported “mindblindness” and “obstructed empathy” (67) exemplify “the prosthetic function of disability,” in which “stories center on a deviance that they identify, explain, and either purge or remedy” (54). Catering to the fictional ideal of a normate reader or spectator who is implicitly invoked and addressed by these dramas, Carlson argues, counters the fear and anxiety produced by representations of otherness in autism family dramas.

By contrast, the unmoored affect of fractured and plural characters in Elevator Repair Service’s The Sound and the Fury and Pig Iron’s Chekhov Lizardbrain (both 2008) actively courts narrative incoherence and blocks spectatorial mastery, producing “an experience of autism for the audience” (89). And yet, the stereotypical figures around whom these affective possibilities circulate “point back to the fundamental shortcoming of autism tropes” (89) so common in popular culture. By forestalling “any sort of ethical engagement with autism,” these otherwise daring plays reflect “a stasis in critical response to disability” (89) that obscures the realities of autistic lifeworlds. Deanna Jent’s Falling (2011) faces these realities head-on by refusing to reproduce the “sentimental savant” (67) and “hero-mother” (61). The drama offers neither “redemption for its neurotypicals” nor reassurance that the family will persevere,” frustrating calls for “private solutions to social problems such as autism” (76) that are typical in autism family dramas.

These formal and ethical concerns are taken up with renewed fervor in chapters four and five, “Performing with Animals” and “Performing with Autists.” As Carlson moves beyond the proximate demands of character into the ethical spaces of copresence, living animals replace puppets and autists take center stage. It is not surprising that these chapters begin with a body count, as the corpses of dogs, cats, lambs, and goats in dramatic tales of transgression and loss, from Sam Shepard to Martin McDonagh, accumulate. But Carlson’s project takes on renewed intellectual vigor when she addresses the controversies generated by ritualized massacres in the performance art of Viennese Aktionists Otto Muehl and Hermann Nitsch, whose animal sacrifices demonstrate Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “bare life,” prompting readers to connect her earlier comments on the symbolic consumption of “stock characters” with the literal ingestion and digestion of livestock. Carlson’s ensuing meditations on the visceral nature of disgust as both repellant and attractant help to unpack the shifting affective alliances that these events, by turns violent and ecstatic, realize.

Turning away from bloody attempts to épater la bourgeoisie, Carlson arrives at the sensory pleasures of looking and feeling, where “fascinating, liminal pigs” feature in a handful of intimate performances, largely by women, whose cheek-to-cheek (and cheek-by-jowl) interfaces generate affective “zone[s] of indistinction where species blur” (106) and gazes proliferate. Calling upon Agamben’s notion of “the open” and Donna Haraway’s relational practice of “becoming-with” (116), Carlson lingers with obvious delight on the interspecies dance performances in Ann Carlson’s Animals series (begun in 1986) and the “Embodied Horsemanship” (119) of Paula Josa-Jones’s ongoing equine choreography. Their pursuits, spanning decades of dedicated work, refuse the cynical commodification of affect by focusing on the slow development of, in Carlson’s words, a “gentle internal audience” that, in turn, conjures “the keen and loving attention, as opposed to critical judgment” (118) of outside spectators.
Carlson identifies a corresponding investment in the collaborations of Christopher Knowles and Robert Wilson, whose performances occupy the majority of her fifth chapter, “Performing with Autists,” though it ends with a rousing appreciation for the metatheatrical complexity of Back to Back Theatre’s *Ganesh Versus the Third Reich* (2011), which places disability and spectatorship into productive conflict, and a (much too) short section on “autie-face performance” (158), self-representation, and advocacy.

Drawing on the diagnostic history of autism outlined earlier in the book, Carlson digs deeply into Knowles’s and Wilson’s biographies, identifying the therapies that aided their respective struggles with sensory processing disorders in childhood, and noting that the communicative difficulties normally associated with autism are secondary effects caused by neurological differences, rather than primary features of the condition. By emphasizing the connections between neurodiverse modes of attention and patterning as they intersect with technological mediation and the “cultural reworking that all of our arts and entertainments practice to some degree” (139), Carlson claims an etiological (and ethical) dimension to abstraction at the same time that she “abrade[s] the edges of autism as a meaningful category” (129). These perspectives help neurotypical readers grasp the affective frameworks through which autists create, expanding receptiveness to wonder and discovery while bringing greater comprehension and clarity to performances, such as Knowles’s *The Sundance Kid is Beautiful* (2012), that are often deemed impenetrable.

The concluding chapter, “Mimetic Mixing and Technologies for Becoming” moves away from the linguistic realms of mimesis that Carlson addressed in the first half of the book and lingers instead on the imperatives of “Authentic Movement and Deep Listening” (169) that structure performances such as Josa-Jones’s 2016 trilogy *Of This Body, Mammal, and Speak*; and Jennifer Monson’s *Bird Brain* (2000–2005), in which “the authenticity of movement [shifts] away from an occult inner being and toward cumulative affect as the dancers experience becoming-bird through human rather than avian bodies” (177). Monson returns to this work in her current project, *Live Dancing Archive* (begun in 2012), which “proposes that choreography itself is an archival practice for environmental phenomena” (iLand 2019). Carlson devotes extended descriptive passages to this culminating vision, arguing that “improvisational practices such as Monson’s access [an] ‘unconscious’ space of sensory and affective experience” with concrete “activist potential” (185).

What is missing from the serious and sensitive readings in the “Performing with” chapters is critical attention to the ways in which gender operates intersectionally with species along a continuum of care that is based in affect, especially given the marked differences among the artists Carlson examines in chapter four, who are almost cleanly split along gender lines when it comes to animal death, dismemberment, and sacrifice on the one hand, and respect, engagement, and agency on the other. Likewise, racial identity — so often linked with species difference and discourses of ability — simmers under the surface of the book, but never breaks through, as the overwhelming whiteness of the individual performers Carlson engages with is left unmarked. The “prosthetic function” she rightly observes at work in narratives that feature animals and autists is, of course, common in representations of racial, ethnic, and class-based otherness as well. Overt acknowledgment that these differences function together — at times interchangeably — would strengthen Carlson’s overarching points about the limits that humanist assumptions of bodily form and function impose on the transformative powers of affect.

— Erika Rundle

Reference

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Foregrounding “our” experience, Philip Auslander’s Reactivations: Essays on Performance and Its Documentation incisively argues that documents are not secondary to the objects they re/present, but are in themselves sites of performance. Taking issue with Diana Taylor’s sense that “the allegedly ephemeral aspects of performance can only be reproduced through performance rather than documentation” (2), Auslander hews to Rebecca Schneider’s resistance to this “bifurcation of the way performance remains into the two categories of the artificial (the archive) and the corporeal (the repertoire)” (3). For Auslander, when “we” encounter a performance document, “we” reactivate the performance the document assembles, “reproduce for ourselves the thing reproduced [...] so as to be able to experience it in our present moment” (97–98). And since “our” perception is bound to embodied selves, evolving across and being in time and place, the complex constellation of performance, document, and document-performance is—like performance itself—always differential, new.

Building on his influential 1999 book Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture and reengaging writings published over the last decade, Reactivations’s succinct three chapters, framed by an introduction and a conclusion, are illustrated with examples from the New York performance art scene from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. Turning away from the focus on the performance and its documentation to attend instead to the rapport between the document and its audience, the first chapter, “The Performativity of Performance Documentation,” utilizes J.L. Austin’s speech-act theory to go beyond the “traditional perspective” subordinating the purchase of the document to live performance, to “an event that has its own prior integrity” (24, 28). The ideological distinction between “theatrical” records (such as Cindy Sherman’s 1989 Untitled #199) or “documentary” records (such as Chris Burden’s 1971 Shoot) finally makes little difference, Auslander concludes, for at the phenomenal level, “our” sense of the performance’s “presence, power, and authenticity” results from “perceiving the document itself as a performance that directly reflects an artist’s aesthetic project or sensibility and for which we are the present audience” (40).

“Reactivation: The Complex Temporality of Performance Documentation” then rereads Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” considering Benjamin’s sense of the “reactivation” of the original mediated by reproduction, and rethinking
it through Hans-Georg Gadamer’s understanding of the interpretation of texts in *Truth and Method* (1960), not as an act of historical recovery but as a “conversation” enacting a “fusion” of temporal horizons in the “contemporaneity” of the encounter between the beholder and the document. To reexamine the dichotomy between the aural original and its reproduction, Auslander draws attention to Benjamin’s claim that “reproduction ‘enables the original to meet the beholder halfway’” (46; Benjamin [1935] 1969:220). Putting pressure on that “halfway,” Auslander sees the original to be “reactivated through interaction with the beholder” mediated by the reproduction (47); in conversation, so to speak, “the reproduction discloses the original as an event occurring in the here and now” (48). Reproduction is neither a prosthetic, a replica, nor a substitute for the original; as a “conduit,” the reproduced image has, nesting within it, its own gesture toward the future, summoning “our” desire to experience, to know, its object as “real and present” (47, 53). Benjamin here anticipates “the temporal complexities” Auslander finds in performance documentation via Gadamer: “performances are documented in their present, with an eye toward the future that becomes the present of the beholder who reactivates the performance from its documentation, thus experiencing it in the present while acknowledging its connection to the past” (101). The question, for Auslander as much as for Gadamer, has to do with what that acknowledgement entails.

The third chapter, “Surrogate Performances: Performance Documentation and the New York Avant-garde, circa 1964–74,” expanding Austin via John R. Searle’s revision of illocution as a world-making act, traces a history of the self-conscious practice of performance documentation largely to Michael Kirby’s requirement for an “accurate and objective” record, envisioned as guaranteeing future access to the performance it documents. Kirby’s multiplex authority—as an artist, editor at *TDR*, professor at NYU—enabled his insights to gain performative leverage, a *doing* that influenced how the photographers Peter Moore and Babette Mangolte and the anthologist Ursula Meyer, among others, came to understand the purpose of the performance documentation they produced. Kirby’s sense of the document as a “version of surrogacy” (77; Kirby 1974:66) participates in a 1960s resistance to “evaluative” criticism pertinently captured in Susan Sontag’s *Against Interpretation* (1966) and cognate with Ronald Argelander’s preference for “photo-documentarians” over “photo-critics” in the 1970s; performance photography should “produce a record of the event as untainted as possible by personal biases or preferences.” Ironically, as Auslander keenly shows, the aura of original intention is difficult to displace: while photographers worked to erase the imprint of their subjectivity from the photograph, “to capture as much of the performance as possible and to remain faithful to a spectator’s visual perspective,” they often, like Moore, remained committed to framing the artist’s subjective intention (82; Argelander 1974:54).

The conclusion refines Auslander’s notion of “the essence of corporeal reactivation” (99), mainly by contrasting Schneider’s theorization of “performance remains,” notably her reading of Civil War reenactments, to his modeling of performance as karaoke. To Schneider, reenactments present an “effort to play one time in another time”; their authenticity for the reenactors is measured in terms of historical fidelity. Karaoke, on the other hand, “is measured by the energy, enthusiasm, originality, and commitment of the performers,” without concern for whether “the song as a specifically historical object” is “performed correctly or incorrectly” (102; Schneider 2011:10). The goal of karaoke is not to reproduce the original but to make the song one’s own through performance. Karaoke articulates reactivation as “something the audience for a reproduced artwork or performance does” (98): the document may record a performance, but it is a performance, and as a performance it provokes reactivation in performance.

At barely 100 pages, *Reactivations* is itself a provocation, not least for its re/frameing of Gadamer, enacting its own commitment to the contemporaneity of the materials of history. Even though explicitly drawing from “the historicity of understanding’ [...] rather than from his aesthetics” (55; Gadamer 2006:268), Auslander’s argument is nonetheless empowered, at
least intermittently, by Gadamer’s aestheticization of “our” desire as “a return to ourselves” (Gadamer 2006:127). For as Auslander suggests, “we” are “interested in reenacting” an artwork—here Allan Kaprow’s 1959 18 Happenings in 6 Parts—“not to find out what it was but because we already know what it is”; the “other presents itself so much in terms of our own selves that there is no longer a question of self and other” (61; Gadamer 2006:300). Setting aside the tension of shedding “some light” (57) on Benjamin (who died in his wartime flight from the Nazis) through Gadamer (whose concept of tradition as an assertion of the same veils its implication in National Socialist cultural rationality), by constantly identifying its readership as “we,” “us,” Reactivations implicitly absorbs the reader into the inscription of an aestheti-
cized humanity, a “metaphysical order of being that is true for all,” much as Gadamer’s theatre of tradition—all animated in Truth and Method by the Third Reich’s maintenance of people’s community—casts its spectator as recognizing only “himself and his own finiteness in the face of the power of fate” (Gadamer 2006:128). In this regard, and appreciative of Auslander’s accent on “acquiring the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition” (Gadamer 2006:302), Reactivations nevertheless leaves me questioning the recognition of alterity relativized in the conception of performance that arises throughout this book. Must I be the we that Reactivations imagines?

—Hana Worthen

References


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While research on the cultural phenomenon of K-pop (“Korean popular music”) exploded in the past decade through the efforts of cultural anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, and media scholars, *K-pop Live: Fans, Idols, and Multimedia Performances* situates K-pop within performance studies through a timely reconsideration of liveness in the age of global media. Unfettering K-pop from its default definition as a music genre attributed to South Korea, in her introduction Kim playfully reimagines “K” into a cornucopia of attributes: “Kaleidoscopic (multimedial),” “Keyboard/Keypad (digital),” “Kleenex (highly disposable),” “Ketchup (premade and formulaic),” and “Korporate (highly commercial)” pop. Such prismatic aspects of K-pop, she argues, demonstrate the cultural phenomenon to be much more than music alone, but a synesthetic “total performance” of haptic illusions and affective encounters: for the stars, K-pop consists of a lifetime of training to cultivate the looks, moves, and mannerisms that makes the idol; for the fans, it is a way of life, replete with affective labor, financial investment, and time commitment. Delineating K-pop as an ecosystem in the age of digital media, Kim states: “K-pop is an animal that thrives on excess” (6).

In five chapters, often with black-and-white photographs taken by Kim herself, *K-pop Live* journeys to several spatiotemporal sites of K-pop liveness; namely, the TV show, the music video, the live concert, and finally, the KCON — a multiday international convention of “all things hallyu (Korean Wave)” (180). At each locale, Kim reconsiders liveness and its derivative semantics as “live,” “alive,” “life,” and so on. Looking at the intricate ways in which “live” and “technologically mediatized” co-constitute the K-pop ecosystem, Kim explores how the “ideological, technological, and affective workings” of liveness in K-pop can “make, fake, and break sociality and community” (205). Situating liveness at the heart of K-pop performance, Kim brings back the familiar “live versus mediatized” discussion within performance studies, including Peggy Phelan’s purist ontology of live performance; Philip Auslander’s provocation to see liveness as historical and contingent; and Shannon Jackson and Marianne Weems’s claim that the history of technological mediation has always been embedded in the history of theatre. Revisiting this conversation by construing liveness as an inherently medium-specific notion, Kim establishes “K-pop liveness” as a new performance paradigm necessary to interpret this inherently multimedial phenomenon born from an interdependence, rather than polar opposition, of the live and the mediated.

*K-pop Live* begins by reconstruing the television as a medium akin to live theatre, arguing that television performances of K-pop have continually reinvented cadences of liveness through its evolution. Analyzing the different intermedial strategies with which television embraces various social media to maintain its relevance, Kim expands liveness from the ontological presence (“real-time”) or authenticity (“improvised”) into a spatiotemporal hyperpresence that materializes through the community of global fandom. Next, she parses out the intricate relationship between liveness and mediatization by analyzing the music video, K-pop’s central medium. Noting how TaéTiSeo’s “Twinkle” and G-Dragon’s “Who You?” mobilize the notion of authenticity by respectively invoking the music hall revues of the Ziegfeld Follies and Urban Dream Capsule’s performance art, Kim notes how liveness becomes reimagined as interactive-ness with the virtual audience. Kim then explores the K-pop hologram musical, a show made up entirely of holograms of real-life K-pop stars and designed as a “digital performance” for “live audiences”; a mutual profit-driven collaboration of K-pop agencies and the South Korean gov-
ernment under the initiative to foster a symbiosis of technology and the arts. Pointing to a conspicuous lack of attendance, however, while noting the rather unconvincing technology itself she describes as “hollow-looking,” Kim turns to perhaps the most critical element of K-pop liveness: a communally shared phenomenological experience.

The final chapter, “Live K-pop Concerts and Their Digital Doubles,” is perhaps the heart of this book. A narrative account of BIGBANG’s “Made” tour in Seoul, Kim’s prose encapsulates how the State-sponsored K-pop industry mobilizes “liveness” as a high commercial value on a spectacular scale. Witnessing various digital technologies—expensive camera systems, recorded video projected onto screens, an ocean of cell phones—augmenting the experience of liveness in the Olympic Gymnastics Stadium that accommodated 15,000 fans from all over the world, Kim ruminates on the ontological value of liveness being split between “live performance” and “feeling alive,” witnessing the sensorial synesthesia that makes such live concerts akin to a kind of group ritual. Liveness, integral to this critical K-pop experience of being present in the sea of fans, becomes synonymous with “aliveness.”

What undergirds the critical analyses of *K-pop Live* is Kim’s own bodily presence. *K-pop Live* weaves K-pop’s evolution over the past four decades into the embodied presence of the writer at each defining moment, growing up as a member of the very generation she claims mobilized this cultural phenomenon (“live” as “life lived”). As such, Kim’s ethnography becomes as multimodal and transmedial as her object itself; as a participant in the production of its cultural ecosystem, Kim invites her reader to vicariously witness each colorful, at times otherworldly, “K-pop live” event. While the temporal scope of the book may be no more than three decades, it is always already looking toward the future, with a deep appreciation for the “K-pop live(-d experience)” much entangled with the writer’s own life—and the lives of future generations.

Such personal and affective dimensions of the book do leave me wanting to read more about the “darker” and more ghostly undertones of K-pop’s systematic manifestation of liveness, one that, through its media outlets, immortalizes the idol star that has passed away. In the tragic wake of Kim Jong-hyun’s (former member of boyband SHINEE) suicide in 2017 that Kim mentions only in passing, his ghostly multimodal presence—augmented by various fan tributes—strongly attests to the K-pop liveness as “afterlife.” Tellingly, the very speed of K-pop multimedia eludes the printed book, as Kim herself acknowledges.

Nonetheless, the ultimate “star” of the book seems to be Kim’s witty and contemplative prose that takes on another extended definition of liveness as “liveliness” through a dexterous weaving of critical theory and original arguments. The book’s delivery on the paradoxical performance industry of K-pop—simultaneously glamorous and coveted, yet cutthroat and hypercommercial—satisfies the critical lacuna of K-pop scholarship from a performance studies perspective. With its well-organized index and extensive list of references, *K-pop Live: Fans, Idols, and Multimedia Performances* is a welcome companion for educators of performance studies, media and visual culture, and Korean studies alike.

—So-Rim Lee

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The companion volumes The Freedom Theatre: Performing Cultural Resistance in Palestine, edited by Ola Johansson and Johanna Wallin, and Rehearsing Freedom: The Story of a Theatre in Palestine, edited by Johanna Wallin, set out to tell the story of The Freedom Theatre in their own words (The Freedom Theatre, 11) and to look back on the work of the theatre in order to think critically towards the future. Yet, the statement, “in our own words” (11) presents a question as to who is implied by “our own?” Popularized by the film Arna’s Children (2004), The Freedom Theatre (TFT) grew to be recognized worldwide as synonymous with Juliano Mer Khamis and the Palestinian youth with whom he worked in the theatre, resisting Israeli occupation with drama and song. However, tragically, Mer Khamis was shot by an unknown assailant in April 2011.

While much of the content, particularly in the first part of The Freedom Theatre, focuses on Mer Khamis’s strategic and artistic vision for the theatre, Wallin lets the reader know early in her introduction to the book that “The Freedom Theatre was never a one-man show. It was and is a collective effort of many voices and experiences, most of them born as refugees in Jenin refugee camp” (19). It is through these collective experiences then, particularly those of refugees from the Jenin camp, that one would expect the story of TFT to be told. Unfortunately, these are not the voices that are strongest in the two texts.

Though Wallin intended these books to be complementary volumes, one textual and one visual (11), this bifurcation creates enormous iniquity in terms of power and representation: In The Freedom Theatre, the mostly international artistic and administrative leaders of TFT represent themselves through self-authored chapters, whereas in Rehearsing Freedom, Palestinians from Jenin are primarily represented as visual objects through photographs, in roles in which they are being directed or taught or performing for others. Further, there is very little Arabic in either book. Particularly notable in Rehearsing Freedom are English scripts alongside images of seminal productions, performed originally in Arabic, with no mention of translation. What this ultimately does is perform an erasure of Arab identity by portraying TFT’s work as international rather than Palestinian.

To be fair, Wallin and Johansson took great care to include many Palestinian refugees’ voices in both books. However, the texts featuring Palestinian refugees are not usually self-authored pieces intended for these collections, but rather reprinted materials compiled from other sources, annotated second-hand stories, or interviews led by international TFT staff. In addition, other than Wallin’s acknowledgement that she was a bit hesitant to edit these works because “I am and will always be a foreigner in Jenin” (TFT 12), the books never again mention the ways in which subjectivity and positionality factor into the international staff and artists’ relationships with Palestinians and the work of TFT, nor do the editors discuss the ways in which their subjectivity affects the editorial choices and framing of Palestinians’ voices and bodies. What this does overall is allow international voices to construct the narrative and speak with authority through academic essays and in-depth firsthand accounts, while Palestinian refugees’ voices and images are inserted to support a narrative and representation that is not of their own making.
This critique is not meant to take away from the remarkable work and impact of The Freedom Theatre, which these volumes brilliantly highlight. In fact, it is because these texts are so thoughtful, self-reflective, and critical about the work of the theatre and its role in Palestinian society, that the failure to consider and articulate a politics and methodology of representation is so obviously apparent.

*The Freedom Theatre* is divided into five sections. The first and last are chronological, commencing with the story of Arna Mer Khamis’s Care and Learning project, which initiated her work with the children of the Jenin refugee camp in 1988 during the first intifada, and ending with a compilation of interviews and conversations about the future direction of the theatre. Chapters 2 through 4 are organized thematically. The second section, “Cultural Resistance,” presents the central foundation and rationale for the theatre and its work. In a chapter coauthored by Jonatan Stanczak, one of the cofounders of TFT, and Wallin, the authors interrogate the meaning of the term “cultural resistance” and take an academic approach to outlining and specifying the particular process by which TFT puts cultural resistance into practice. The third section of the book, “Performing Arts,” recounts the wide-reaching and varied creative activities of The Freedom Theatre. Longtime Freedom Theatre movement trainer and theatre director, Micaela Miranda, foregrounds the three-year actor training program, established to develop the nascent skills of Palestinian actors. This section also includes Ben Rivers’s chapter on the Freedom Bus, a major Freedom Theatre initiative that brought international journalists, scholars, and activists to remote villages in the West Bank to listen to residents’ stories of occupation, utilizing Playback Theatre. The section ends by describing four seminal theatrical productions produced by TFT between the years 2009 and 2015 that correlate with the four levels of occupation articulated in an earlier chapter by Wallin and Stanczak: *Animal Farm* (2009; oppression by Palestinian governments); *Alice in Wonderland* (2011; neoliberalism and economic dependency); *Suicide Note from Palestine* (2013; internalized oppression); and *The Siege* (2015; physical and psychological oppression from Israeli occupation). The fourth section, “International Perspectives,” comprises chapters written by artists and donors living abroad who were affiliated with the theatre at a key moment or who currently play an instrumental role in the theatre. The chapters together are effective in conveying practical knowledge about the way in which a small, local theatre can maintain and build upon its own initiatives and agenda, without compromising its integrity while seeking the support of international donors. It also foregrounds Mer Khamis as influential in bringing international artists to TFT and his ability to inspire and challenge them artistically. One chapter that stands out from the others is “Solidarity is Not a One-Way Street” by Sudhanva Deshpande. This piece depicts a South-South collaboration, in contrast to the other North-South collaborations included in this section. Deshpande describes a joint production created with TFT and his New Delhi–based street theatre troupe, Jana Natya Manch, which toured 11 cities in India and then performed for Palestinians in the West Bank. Deshpande emphasizes the importance of building coalitional solidarity among theatre groups of the global South and the particular goals and achievements reached through this exchange.

The second book, *Rehearsing Freedom: The Story of a Theatre in Palestine*, unlike the first, distinctly features Palestinians (albeit through archival images, brief quotations, and second-hand accounts in English). This publication is a stunning sensorial experience in the form of an enlarged book that feels like a political pamphlet-cum–family photo album or scrapbook. The book is arranged somewhat chronologically, adding further dimensions to *The Freedom Theatre’s* textual descriptions with inspired images of TFT projects. The volume includes journalistic images of the Jenin refugee camp, expertly shot production photos, playscripts, press releases, Palestinian accounts
and testimony of Israeli violence, and other personal statements: some are featured on “tipped-in” sheets of pale yellow paper. At the center of the book, several pages are framed in black, the blackness filling most of the space, broken up by a pale whisper of gray text chronicling Mer Khamis’s murder and funeral.

Overall, these books will appeal to theatre practitioners and scholars as well as activists working on issues related to Palestinian human rights and resistance. The story of TFT is an important case study of how to catapult local struggles into the international arena using theatre and art. Unfortunately for theatre practitioners, The Freedom Theatre does not reveal much about the company’s rehearsal and workshop practices or Mer Khamis’s artistic process or aesthetics. This is disappointing, particularly because TFT is recognized as an artistic exemplar known for its theatrical skills as well as its mission. But readers will find rich images and accompanying scripts and reviews in Rehearsing Freedom, allowing a glimpse into the beautifully provocative and boundary-breaking work of this impactful theatre.

— Hilary Cooperman

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On 9 August 2018, an Israeli airstrike leveled the Said al-Mishal Center, destroying the heart of Gaza City’s theatre and dance world. The bombing was one of many outrages that upended the life of Palestinians following the start of the 2018 Great March of Return. Prominent voices in theatre from around the world swiftly condemned the attack; meanwhile, the Israeli Defense Forces justified their assault by erroneously claiming the building was a terrorist headquarters used by Hamas “for military purposes” (in Balousha and Holmes 2018). For most people, a theatre would seem a surprising military target; but for Palestinians, no infrastructure that supports their lives and livelihoods is beyond the threat of ruin. The Said al-Mishal Center’s destruction is just one example of the violent proximity between war and performance today.

To track other such relations of war to performance is the shared project of Lindsey Mantoan’s War as Performance and the collection of essays Mantoan has edited together with Sara Brady, Performance in a Militarized Culture. Some of the connections between war and performance these books trace are expected, such as how artists make theatre in response to war or how ensembles cope when displaced by war. The books tackle a wide range of other concerns as well, from the performance metaphors that hawkish politicians deploy when waging war to the
military technologies, like drones, that theatre artists increasingly use. But whereas Mantoan’s monograph concentrates almost exclusively on the most recent Iraq War, the 20 chapters that comprise Performance in a Militarized Culture cover an international assortment of conflicts, regions, and histories, using diverse methodologies including ethnography, archival work, and live performance analysis. Despite their differences, both books understand war to be simultaneously a performative process that shapes our world in globally uneven ways, as well as a performance in itself that relies on tactics of summoning and witnessing indebted to theatre.

Mantoan’s War as Performance emphasizes this claim nowhere more so than in her opening chapter on “the dramaturgy of the [Iraq] war” (20). Here she examines the public performances that US politicians devised to rouse the world to war and the actions that millions of people around the world performed to protest the invasion. The fact that the start of the Iraq War was not inaugurated by a performative declaration of war made it necessary, Mantoan argues, for George W. Bush’s government to find other ways of staging its launch. Colin Powell’s infamous presentation before the United Nations in February 2003 about Saddam Hussein’s elusive weapons of mass destruction exemplifies the theatrical lengths the Bush regime went to when making (up) the case for invasion, all of which required “careful attention to costuming, blocking, and the mise-en-scène” (30). According to Mantoan, Powell was a “method actor” directed by the Bush administration to follow a script he himself knew was full of “plot holes” and which demanded international audiences suspend their “disbelief” (36, 37). At times Mantoan stretches “the metaphor of theatre” (30) to the point where theatrical punning risks compromising analytical clarity. And yet, her commitment to a theatrical lens for studying war allows her to copiously map how the US government deployed artifice to make the war real. The Bush administration had every aspect of the dramatic setup for invading Iraq covered: “All that was missing was a resolution” (30).

Mantoan turns in her next two chapters to the ways that theatre responded to this war. Like scholars such as James Harding (2007) and Richard Schechner (2009), she insists that the Iraq War prompted nothing like the “aesthetic revolution” in theatre that the Vietnam War ostensibly did; instead, artists relied on “recycled forms” (6). But Mantoan extends this formalist critique into an exacting account of what two recycled theatrical forms — adaptations of Greek tragedy and documentary theatre — actually accomplished during the war. She applauds classical adaptations such as Ajax in Iraq (2009) by Ellen McLaughlin and An Iliad (2012) by Lisa Peterson and Denis O’Hare for championing “universal humanism” (66) in a war that dehumanized enemies and allies alike. Likewise, Mantoan’s discussion of documentary work, such as Heather Raffo’s 9 Parts of Desire (2006) and Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen’s Aftermath (2009), yields a startling vision of how theatre engaged with those directly involved in and affected by the war. Unlike conventional documentary approaches, productions like these drew on real events to “transform the public understanding of the war from factual to affective” (94).

There have been several useful monographs covering theatre and the Iraq War (see, for example, Hughes 2011 and Rowe 2013), but Mantoan’s approach stands out for the attention she pays both to plays that engage Iraqi experience and to the fate of Iraqi theatre itself. Her performance analysis is especially attuned to the gendered consequences of the war and how rampant sexual assault within the US military made a mockery of the already dubious claim that the Coalition of the Willing sought to “liberate” women in Iraq.

Ultimately, Mantoan’s strongest critique of Iraq War theatre rests on its limited ability to attract audiences — a fact that speaks more to the fading cultural significance of theatre in general than any lack of formal innovation. Sensibly then, her final two chapters move readers from theatre into the popular realm of film and television. Mantoan begins with a refreshingly nuanced critique of two satirical news programs revered by liberals, The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and its spinoff The Colbert Report, both of which Mantoan describes as “covering the coverage of the war” (135). She embraces how these shows galvanized a viewing community against the war, but argues that neither did much to spur their massive audiences to act; instead
The Daily Show and The Colbert Report cultivated a smug and self-satisfied affect among viewers towards the conflict and its belligerents. Mantoan contrasts the reactive approach of these satiric shows with the forward-looking narrative structures of the postapocalyptic films, novels, and television series that proliferated during the war. According to Mantoan, books and films like The Hunger Games trilogy or shows such as Battlestar Galactica and The 100 reveal much about “American anxieties wrought by 9/11, the United States’s invasion of Iraq, and the rise of Daesh” (165). At the same time, they also engage in “imaginative practices” that, she insists, are instructive models for finding “non-violent ways forward” (216). Mantoan’s emphasis on the need to envision tactics for avoiding war in the future is welcomed, but exactly what she means by nonviolence goes under-theorized throughout the book. This does not take anything away from the impressive analytical work Mantoan accomplishes in her monograph, but it is difficult to fully appreciate Mantoan’s concluding insight that a film like The Hunger Games provides a sense of how we should organize ourselves against future wars.

Unlike Mantoan’s monograph, Performance in a Militarized Culture does not focus on a specific war; instead it examines “militarization”: how life in civil society is shaped by warlike considerations and imperatives over time. As an “iterative process,” Brady and Mantoan argue, militarization has deep links to performance: “we are not born militarized, but through performances we repeat daily, we become militarized through a slow process” (3). Together, the four sections of Performance in a Militarized Culture make a robust case for how performance abets and contests the militarization of everyday life.

The first half of the book scrutinizes militarization in terms of space and history. The opening section, “Sites of Conflict,” includes contributions that study how people in specific locales negotiate the effects of militarization, such as Katherine Zien’s chapter on attempts to reuse decommissioned military installations along the Panama Canal; and chapters by Alexis Bushnell, Justin Nakase, and Elin Nicholson on the performative tactics of those living in refugee camps in Jordan and the West Bank. The book’s second section, “Militarized History and Memory,” foregrounds how legacies of war impact present experience. Jessica Nakamura, for instance, considers how installation art contributes to ongoing mobilizations against US military presence in Okinawa. Other authors take strikingly different approaches to this theme: Áine Sheil examines Richard Wagner’s popular reception in Weimar-era Germany while Solveig Gade studies how Danish museums are reinvigorating the country’s tradition of battle painting.

Following the historically and geographically expansive scope of the book’s first half, the third section zooms in to concentrate on the experience of soldiers. Chapters from Cami Rowe and Michael St. Clair, for example, explore the role that games and theatre play in the recruitment, training, and subsequent healing of soldiers. Other authors in this section examine the kinds of performance that the Iraq war required of its soldiers, like Mantoan’s analysis of masculine displays of heroism and Tyler Boudreau’s critical reflection on the jarring improvisations soldiers rely on during counterinsurgency campaigns.

The collection ends, appropriately, with a section on the militarization of everyday life, paying careful attention to what happens when military technologies come home to roost. The chapters by Lindsay Adamson Livingston and Kashif Jerome Powell examine the racialized politics of gun violence and policing, with special emphasis on the uneven ways that militarized technologies are used for repressive ends in (so-called) peace time. Asher Warren’s study of drones in live art and Jacqueline Viskup’s chapter on “surveillance tragedies” resonate with
Sarah Bey-Cheng’s preface and Wendy S. Hesford’s afterword; each asks urgent questions about the usefulness and dangers of artists engaging with military technologies in performance.

Despite the breadth of these two books, neither claims to be the definitive statement on war in performance studies. But when considered alongside other defining works by Tracy Davis (2007) and James Thompson, Jenny Hughes, and Michael Balfour (2009), War as Performance and Performance in a Militarized Culture demonstrate that war has become one of the most significant and pressing areas of research in our field.

— Michael Shane Boyle

References


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More Books


A vital contribution to both critical Indigenous studies and performance studies, Stephanie Nohelani Tēves’s monograph argues for indigeneity as a performative act, rather than a static identity as defined by colonial metrics of authenticity. In the opening chapter, theorizing aloha (meaning welcome or love) as a capacious yet ambivalent term allows Tēves to scale an impressive breadth of performance media that demonstrate the diversity of Kanaka Maoli life and resistance to colonialism. Across four case studies, she advances the act of “defiant indigeneity”
to describe performative moments of cultural and social redefinition through the music of hip hop artist Krystilez, the fashion and choreography of drag star Cocoa Chandelier, the haunting ephemera of Hawaiian matriarchy in the figure of Princess Ka‘iulani, and the relationships to home among Kanaka Maoli diasporas. While the case studies do not directly address questions of nationhood, the conclusion argues for the ability of aloha to suture and sustain Indigenous community in the wake of divisiveness within the contemporary sovereignty movement.


In 2008, 14-year-old Brandon McInerny entered his middle school, E.O. Greene in Oxnard, California, with a concealed gun and shot his 15-year-old classmate, Latisha King, whose given name was Larry King, twice in the head. Gayle Salamon gives form to a critical phenomenology of transphobia through her meticulous, sensorial reading of the murder trial, in which school administrators, teachers, and prosecutors, among others, participated in the deadnaming and misgendering of Latisha. Building on the work of phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the author saliently argues that gender identity itself was perceived, by the defense, as an aggressive sexual act. Through four thematic chapters on comportment, movement, anonymity, and objects, Salamon demonstrates how nonbinary gender expression was understood as sexual aggression. The court hearings made clear that Latisha’s choices of self-expression had high social stakes, wherein her dress was “asking something of others in asserting something about herself” (30). Although the author’s primary focus is to carefully study the perception of a brown trans body, delicate passages describing testimonies of Latisha’s skill and confidence while gliding in high-heeled boots or a supportive teacher gifting her a green prom dress conjure the child’s stunning personhood in a visual field beyond the court proceedings.


madison moore offers the concept of fabulous as a critical resource for imaginative self-fashioning among the poor, destitute, and those precluded from heteronormative life. Unique to moore’s project are interspersed interviews with queer artists such as Alok Veid Menon, Shaun J. Wright, and Lasseindra Ninja. In modeling poly-authorship, moore wields the monograph as a platform for the lived experiences of black, brown, trans, and queer voices as they define what fabulous means. moore shares authorship, inviting the reader to engage in intimate dialogues. For example, Wright describes fabulous as a giving of life as opposed to narcissistic personal curation. Being fabulous is not only a resource for aesthetic embodiment wielded by marginalized subjects, but it is a multidimensional verb; fabulous is an act of generosity; it offers luxury despite the capitalist conditions that make queer life unlivable. Readers will find this generosity in the cinematic descriptions of clubs and nightlife scenes. At times we are running with moore through the Berlin exclusive cultural venue, Berghain, or strutting an impromptu catwalk on the dance floor. moore’s writerly decisions fold readers into the gossip of something we cannot entirely experience or know, yet we feel we are there. Moving between New York, Berlin, and Los Angeles, the author invites comparative thinking across global metropoles indexing how city-space can both threaten and support fabulous queer life. A final dedication to Prince as an androgynous star who gave permission for moore to survive and be fabulous underscores the urgency for living personal truths out loud.
**In Search of Our Warrior Mothers: Women Dramatists of the Black Arts Movement.** By La Donna L. Forsgren. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018; 216 pp.; illustrations. $99.95 cloth, $34.95 paper.

Between the years 1965 and 1976, politically minded poets and artists created a new aesthetic for black liberation that came to be known as the Black Arts Movement. La Donna L. Forsgren intervenes in this male-dominated periodization with an intimate excavation of four under-theorized womanist philosophers and dramatists: Barbara Ann Teer, Martie Evans-Charles, Sonia Sanchez, and J.E. Franklin, each of whom is profiled in a separate chapter. These artists centered their work around “warrior mothers,” a cognate to the “Black Arts warrior.” Forsgren’s phrase intentionally juxtaposes ferocity and softness to reflect the multidimensionality of black womanhood, embracing the vulnerability and strength of the warrior mothers. Through extensive research, including artist interviews and readings of unpublished plays and poems, Forsgren shows how these creative luminaries curated experiences for audience transformation. Forsgren critically links the form and content of these dramatists whose messages were delivered to audiences through a culturally specific transformation: Teer, founder of the National Black Theatre, referred to her performers as Liberators and used ritualistic revival and African deities to free audiences; Sanchez employed chants and championed the solo performer as a theatrical shape-shifter; Evans-Charles used church revivals; and Franklin captured audiences through her lyricism and musicality, writing entirely in rhyming couples. An epilogue calls for further scholarship on the unpublished and personally archived writing of black women artists central to revolutionary movements.


Within the past 40 years, Chinese performance cultures have witnessed an uptake in reimagining spectacles centered on the male leaders of the Cultural Revolution, collectively organized into a theatrical and sentimental genre that Xiaomei Chen refers to as “propaganda memory.” An opening case study on the revitalization of the lesser known party leader Chen Duxiu through theatre and film lays out a field of melodramatic heroes and villains within popular culture, particularly in the form of morality plays. Next, Chen turns to the plethora of television, film, and theatre on Mao Zedong that has sought to construct a harmonious depiction of the revolutionary leader among contesting representations. Chapter 3 centers on representations of Deng Xiaoping to show how popular media worked through binary oppositions of socialism-capitalism in the theatricalization of the relationship between Deng and Mao. Continuing in this vein, the final case study examines music and dance performances, *The Song of the Chinese Revolution* and *The Road to Revival*, that dramatized China’s transition from socialism to capitalism as personified in the dualism between Mao and Deng. The writing shines most in the nuanced critical examinations of the expansive archive of cultural material on the Chinese Communist Party and its afterlife. Chen concludes with an invitation to reconsider the founding mothers of the Chinese Revolution, gesturing towards a forthcoming book.


Informed by the political and religious historical legacies of British colonialism, Thatcherism, and contemporary neoliberalism, *Staging Trauma* details performances that query violent encounters and their psychosocial aftermath in the collective imagination. Miriam Haughton deftly links intimate traumatic violence performed onstage to Irish and British institutions that
perpetuate victims in the shadows, particularly the overwhelming influence of the Catholic Church. Four plays, each the focus of a different chapter—thematic title “Violation” (chapter 2), “Loss” (chapter 3), “Containment” (chapter 4), and “Exile” (chapter 5)—take the reader to the injury of trauma as lived and experienced within the female body. Chapter 2 addresses the staging of incest in Marina Carr’s *On Raftery’s Hill* (2000) as a production confronting the integrity of the Irish family. “Loss,” a chapter centered on the death of a family member by cancer in Laura Wade’s *Colder Than Here* (2005), intersects ecological violence with terminal illness. Moving from the family structure to the state, Haughton’s chapter 4 on “Containment” addresses the history of the Magdalene Laundries, church-run confinements for socially outcast women and rejected children as dramatized in the immersive production of *Laundry* (2011). In 2013, the Irish state recognized the traumatic history of the laundries and the intergenerational violence it inflicted on vulnerable populations. Here, Haughton’s concept of bodies in shadow gains traction within the context of the Rule of Silence in convents, barring women and children from speaking their abuses. Finally, she ends with a case study on the performance of *Sanctuary* (2013), a testimonial production that profiles stories of global exile. Throughout the monograph, Haughton argues that the staging of trauma through immersive productions that require an audience to bear witness and participate in transformation offers necessary relationality and collective catharsis.

—Lilian Mengesha

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