

the insights of dramaturgs Katherine Profeta and Marianne van Kerkhoven as she explores “the increasing overlap in both training and devising for theatre and dance, and how these processes impact the work” (37). Hopping from Pina Bausch to Judson Memorial Church back to Wilson, Elswit usefully summarizes this network’s theory that “a form is more than a collection of technical skills” (39). Elswit also marks the rise of devising, referring to SITI Company, Viewpoints, and Action Theatre as employing processes that both “lend themselves to promiscuous formal developments” and also acknowledge the habits of technical training that participants may likely fall back upon in “the continual need to produce new material” (41). By way of Elinor Fuchs’s “small planet” (44), Elswit concludes the section by turning to aesthetic legibility and the challenges to spectatorship that expanding forms present, arguing for a model of spectatorship “that is not about knowing in advance, but instead about observing and finding out” (44).

“Overlapping Methods” is the final section and the one most concerned with the academic institutionalization of theatre and dance. Elswit offers the long overdue caution to “consider disciplines not as absolute, but rather as defined by who was in the room at any given time, much like artistic practices” (52). Practice-as-research has gained in popularity and saturation in the past decade. Elswit demonstrates a complementary and highly effective tactic for the shared aim of minimizing polarity between research and practice by emphasizing developments in scholarly criticism as both in tandem and in conversation with developments in artistic practice. Her approach is not dismissive, however, of the ways in which capital and cultural prestige affect disciplinary formations, and her readings of significant theoretical developments, particularly of Hans-Thies Lehmann’s postdramatic theatre, are sharply attentive to the often hierarchical power dynamics between theatre and dance. Elswit concludes with a call for readers to generate their own lists of what she terms “ampersand performances” (70). I hope such future lists, focused on practices, performances, and ideas that do not congeal theatre and dance but rather “reveal the entanglements that have been going on between them all along” (67) expand the geographical scope of Elswit’s timely exploration.

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Women, Collective Creation, and Devised Performance: The Rise of Women Theatre Artists in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries. Edited by Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016; pp. xx + 348, 21 illustrations. \$139.99 cloth, \$139.99 paper, \$109.00 e-book.

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Reviewed by Lisa Brenner, *Drew University*

Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit’s *Women, Collective Creation, and Devised Performance* admirably demonstrates the centrality of women to an essential theatre-making methodology. Standing on its own merit, this collection of essays also expands on the editors’ 2013 *A History of Collective Creation* and *Collective Creation in the Contemporary Performance*.

Whereas those volumes showcased male practitioners such as Copeau, Barba, and Grotowski, this one seeks to “historicize the enormous, ongoing contribution of women to collective creation; and to investigate questions about the relationship between gender and collaboration, authority, authorship, and attribution” (4).

Several essays bring long-overdue exposure to lesser-known artists. Authors Jane Baldwin, Virginie Magnat, and Adam Ledger respectively unearth Suzanne Bing and the significant female teachers and collaborators of the Laboratory Theatre and the Odin Teatret. Likewise, Andrei Malaev-Babel revisits the history of the Vakhtangov Theatre in Russia to highlight Alexandra Remizova, even as Siobhán O’Gorman lauds Carolyn Swift of Dublin’s Pike Theatre Club. Women’s work, the book contends, has been neglected because of a catch-22: When women artists emerge as strong leaders and take credit for their achievements, as David Calder shows Ariane Mnouchkine did, they are frequently charged with betraying the egalitarian spirit of collective creation; at the same time, women’s commitment to the group can erase their authorship. Jessica Silsby Brater, for instance, notes that the popular press has repeatedly singled out Lee Breuer as Mabou Mines’s defining voice, dismissing cofounding members Ruth Maleczek and JoAnne Akalaitis (117).

The collection also highlights how such erasures overlook women’s legacies. In their respective chapters, Scott Proudfit traces a lineage from Neva Boyd to Viola Spolin, and Elizabeth A. Osborne connects Hallie Flanagan’s experiments at Vassar College with the Federal Theatre Project. Other influential artists given their due include Judith Malina (studied by Cindy Rosenthal); Bryony Lavery (examined by Karen Morash); and Jo Ann Schmidman, Megan Terry, and Sora Kimberlain of the Omaha Magic Theatre (analyzed by Anne Fletcher). The women described in these pages are committed to mentorship, polyvocality, and attention to the body—leading to new techniques and experimentation with form. Moreover, female devisers frequently make work that emphasizes untold stories and features female characters.

Additional chapters reveal challenges female collaborators face, even when working with other women. Michelle MacArthur’s nuanced discussion of feminist theatre companies in Canada and Sarah Sigal’s investigation of the Monstrous Regiment both address issues of authorship. Chapters by Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart and by Rachel Anderson-Rabern offer complementary surveys of female collective creation in the UK and the US. The former questions the “natural” relationship between women and devising yet suggests that devising provides opportunities for self-representation and leadership. Anderson-Rabern, however, warns that such opportunities are often commercially limited, resulting in financial hardship.

The definition of “collective creation” becomes murky at times. To maintain a “multiplicity of practices” without collapsing “into relativism” (6), the editors suggest the following:

[A] group chooses—or, conversely, a leader within the group proposes—to make theatre using a process which places conscious emphasis on the *groupness* of that process, on some possible collaborative mode between members of the

group, which is, typically, viewed as being in some manner *more collaborative* than members of the group have previously experienced. (6)

Under this wide umbrella, the editors include performance artists Pussy Riot (as discussed by Julia Listengarten) and Hallie Flanagan, who didn't collectively generate scripts as much as forge a path for "future models of collective process" (77). The vagueness of this definition may leave some readers perplexed. Doesn't this describe any kind of nonautocratic theatre making? Moreover, its vastness invites speculation as to who and what remain outside the tent. For instance, although this collection was published before the #MeToo movement, there is no discussion of sexual harassment/abuse, even as collective creation often fosters intimate relationships and complicated power dynamics. (A 2015 *New York Times* article exposed these tensions within the Wooster Group and others.)

The anthology is also out of step with contemporary discourse on feminism and performance in its lack of intersectional considerations. The practitioners featured are predominantly cisgender, straight, white, able-bodied women from the US, Canada, and Europe. Two notable exceptions are Victoria Lewis's depiction of disabled-women-only companies and Nia O. Witherspoon's analysis of Sharon Bridgforth's performance installation *River See*. These studies offer valuable perspectives yet appear as outside the central narrative. Not only is Witherspoon's the only chapter to discuss the work of a woman of color, it is also the only one explicitly addressing queer identity.

Just as the first two volumes, viewed retroactively, reveal a blind spot, a similar pattern emerges here: the contributions of such women become the exception and not the rule. The collection implicitly discounts the impact of Ntozake Shange, Spiderwoman Theater, Urban Bush Women, Young Jean Lee, Cherríe Moraga, Coya Paz, Split Britches, Five Lesbian Brothers, and Half Straddle Theatre Company, among ample possibilities. The editors are "painfully aware of the limited global scope" and "predominantly Caucasian" emphasis that they claim result from the "current state of English-language scholarship in collective creation and devising practice" (11). This anthology, however, could further challenge that discourse, as scholars like Jimmy A. Noriega (in *Theatre Topics*, 2016) have done in documenting *creación colectiva* in Latin America and its effect on US and European theatre.

It's not merely a question of inclusivity. If "[o]ne of the central goals of this project was to trace undiscovered genealogies of mentorship between women theatre artists working collaboratively" (23), it is worth noting instances of cross-fertilization. For instance, just as Viola Spolin inspired generations of actors, María Irene Fornés's playwriting workshops mentored significant Latinx writers. One of these was Caridad Svich, who launched various collective theatre actions, such as the Gun Control Theatre Action and After Orlando, that united artists of multiple backgrounds. The editors "hope" to move beyond the "cultures represented herein" in "our next phase of investigation" (11). A holistic approach integrating diverse perspectives from the outset would have made this project more beneficial, but the current volume will be valuable to students, scholars, and practitioners for its useful insight into how gender informs collective creation historically and today.