

# NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Alison Jeffers

doi:10.1017/S0266464X14000293

S. E. Wilmer and Androne Zukauskaitė, ed.

## **Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism**

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. 429 p. £84. ISBN: 978-0-19-955921-3.

This is a study of Antigone the character and *Antigone* the play. Lacan is surely right to point out that the potency of the Antigone myth has much to do with the chthonic nature of the heroine's character and the manner in which it rivals the Oedipal myth (with which, of course, it is incestuously bound up). The editors have assembled an impressive cast of contributors under four headings: 'Philosophy and Politics', 'Psychoanalysis and the Law', 'Gender and Kinship', and 'Adaptations and Performance'. High-profile names among the contributors are: Terry Eagleton, Tina Chanter, Luce Irigaray – though contributions by the less stellar are invariably better. References include Hegel, Lacan, Butler, Steiner, and Žižek.

Two difficulties confront this book. It is by no means clear that the Greeks had the same sense of self that we have; nor is it at all clear that the play's so-called political resonances – its 'meta-theatrical valences' (Liz Appel) – are not in danger of being over-extended. These valences range from Nigeria to Northern Ireland; hence the problems involved in viewing the Greeks too easily in terms of our own image. We are on much safer ground when we try to look at Antigone in context, as, for example, Martina Meyer and Mark Griffith try to do. Luce Irigaray – one of our stars – unblushingly lets us know that she shares Antigone's tragic fate.

Sokal-like caution is urged in the case of Ahuvia Kahane, unless one is a specialist in Set Theory; likewise Bracha Ettinger's contribution should be scanned for abstruseness. This need not inhibit contemporary productions of Sophocles' play once we avoid treating it exclusively as a 'potent trope in an Irish as well as a classical context' or 'at an almost allegorical level of connection between classical Greece and contemporary Northern Ireland' (Eugene O'Brien).

*Antigone* is best seen as representing the clash between family and state with Antigone herself in the role of a feminist icon marking the transition from matriarchy to a male-dominated society. Even-handedly introduced by Steve Wilmer and Androne Zukauskaitė, *Interrogating Antigone* has

the immense merit of probing on a number of different levels the reasons why Antigone the character and *Antigone* the play continue to haunt us down the ages. Analysis of the status of myth in Ancient Greece, following Jean-Pierre Vernant, might go some way to enhancing our understanding both of the character and of the play.

T. N. F. MURTAGH

doi:10.1017/S0266464X1400030X

Laura Cull

## **Theatres of Immanence:**

### **Deleuze and the Ethics of Performance**

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 291 p. £55.00.

ISBN: 978-0-230-31952-3.

Given Deleuze's growing prominence in performance analysis, this rigorous study of his philosophical notion of immanence is timely and valuable to the discipline. Cull's study is undertaken via a detailed examination of how certain performance practices from the historical avant-garde to the current day have explored philosophical notions of immanence. In addition to Cull's, often revisionary, analyses of the theatre practices themselves, which are valuable contributions to avant-garde scholarship in their own right, this is also an account of how performance can sometimes 'think' philosophically for itself, as Cull describes it, in addition to its capacity to draw on and exemplify existing theories.

The opening chapter on immanent authorship examines the notions of collaboration and indeterminacy, focusing on the Living Theatre, John Cage, and Goat Island, to unsettle orthodox assumptions around collectives, improvisation, and authority. Chapter Two offers a new perspective on the work of Artaud, alongside Carmelo Bene, Robert Wilson, and Georges Lavaudant, in relation to their uses of what Cull terms the 'destratified (or disordered) voice'.

The third chapter focuses on human encounters with animals through an investigation of how the work of Hijikata Tatsumi and Marcus Coates, along with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming-animal', are mutually illuminating in their endeavours to find a 'zone of proximity' where the human and the animal can be truly co-present. The fourth chapter examines the art/life relationship in the work of Allan Kaprow and Lygia Clark, and Chapter Five returns to Goat

Island and Robert Wilson to explore their use of temporality and duration. This, along with the final chapter, also addresses the wider ethics in relation to the work and philosophies discussed, asking specifically 'whether and why theatres that tend the furthest towards immanence might be of value, and to whom or what'.

Despite her emphasis on the historical avant-garde and contemporary work that is experimental in form, Cull is not proposing a model of 'immanent theatre' but that the notion of immanence can be useful to our understanding of an infinitely wide range of theatre and performance practice. The philosophical thinking here is certainly sufficiently rigorous to satisfy those already well versed in the field; Cull not only presents her own interpretation of Deleuze, but also highlights alternative readings to offer a strongly discursive strand on the notion of immanence as it is variously understood in the field of philosophy.

For the less initiated, the very clear studies of theatre and performance will offer a useful and accessible grounding in which the concept of immanence can be broadly and pragmatically understood, even if the finer details of the philosophical subtleties that Cull interrogates along the way might sometimes prove more difficult for those less versed in philosophy.

LIZ TOMLIN

doi:10.1017/S0266464X14000311

Mike Sell

**The Avant-Garde: Race, Religion, and War**

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. 355 p. £16.00.

ISBN: 978-1-90649-799-6.

This book opens by taking as a given the assertion that 9/11 signalled a seismic shift in world order and in our subsequent perceptions and behaviours. For British readers of the Mary Beard school, this is a bracing and salutary reminder of difference, and it continues with a breadth and reach which continues to remind us of the easy global nature of a North American perspective.

Practitioners and scholars of practice in fine art and performance have for many years restricted the use of the term 'avant-garde' to a historical context. Mike Sell's ambitious agenda is to reposition it to represent what he takes to be its *ur-meaning* – everything which actively opposes the status quo and draws its vital principle from such an opposition, existing in a state of permanent dialectic excitation – using three broad areas of examination and running a thread of references to the performing arts throughout his argument. What Sell does is to suggest that an avant-garde, military or otherwise, becomes by its very nature,

through its very purpose, 'other' – oppositional, irredentist. Hence, to take one example, the fascinating section in which he describes the Green Berets not as an elite of killers, but as readers, thinkers, linguists, political philosophers. These are not the Green Berets that John Wayne commanded.

Consequently, the avant-garde is to be described in whatever situations meet such criteria. Sell's erudition in support of his thesis is awesome, yet even when referring to the military origins of the term, he both romanticizes the role and skews its meaning. An 'advance guard' prepares the ground for and signals the subsequent arrival of a major force whose intention is to achieve victory for whatever cause it fights. An advance guard does not fight for a different cause. If it does, it will be a lost one – as democratically inclined soldiers discovered after the end of the English Civil War. Sell tells us that the cry in the British Army in the nineteenth century was 'Follow the sapper!' He does not go on to tell us that the name for the advance guard in an assault was 'the forlorn hope'. Nor does he mention that the advance guards in the Soviet armies in the Second World War were normally made up of expendable political prisoners (cheaper to use German bullets) – although, ironically, they were in absolute opposition to the philosophy of the state they represented. But that the thesis is 'non-proven' means that its development with such a range and depth of discursive evidence makes it the more valuable and interesting.

NICHOLAS ARNOLD

doi:10.1017/S0266464X14000323

Margaret Leask

**Lena Ashwell: Actress, Patriot, Pioneer**

Herts: University of Hertfordshire Press, with the Society for Theatre Research, 2013. 320 p. £14.99.

ISBN: 978-1-907396-65-6.

Meticulously researched and richly detailed, this a welcome addition to the Society for Theatre Research's growing number of publications on women theatre practitioners. Leask takes us through Lena Ashwell's professional development from leading actress to dedicated manager and director over a period of some four decades.

While the beginnings of Ashwell's career were not particularly unconventional, she chased roles that challenged the normative social frameworks of femininity prevalent in Victorian and Edwardian society, and moved into theatre management during the period in which she was also involved in the work of the Actresses' Franchise League, and so can be contextualized by a move towards a kind of liberal radicalism among middle-class