

Reviews





**ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE
PERFORMING ARTS: ARTISTRY,
VIRTUOSITY, AND INTERPRETATION IN A
CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

by Anya Peterson Royce. 2004. New York:
Altamira Press. 239 pp., photographs, bibliog-
raphy, index. \$24.95 paper.

Anya Peterson Royce is most often noted for her pivotal book *The Anthropology of Dance* (1977), which provides an in-depth account of the theoretical frameworks and research methods of dance anthropology. In her most recent book, *Anthropology of the Performing Arts: Artistry, Virtuosity, and Interpretation in a Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Royce seeks to distinguish artistry from virtuosity through a cross-cultural examination of performance, art, and artists. In this quest she is inspired by contemporary discourses in dance studies that refer to dance, and performance in general, as embodied knowledge. Specifically, she acknowledges being influenced by the writing of such dance scholars as Sally Ann Ness, Barbara Browning, Yvonne Daniel, Julie Taylor, and Marta Savigliano (4). While Royce focuses heavily on ballet with artists from Fokine to Baryshnikov, she also references dances of the Tewa Indians, dance and theater of Japan and Bali, as well as the art of Marcel Marceau. Her interest is not limited to defining artistry and virtuosity. Her deliberation on performance extends beyond these topics to questions concerning audience reception, innovation, and altered states of performance. In the size of her aspirations, Royce's project is similar to that of Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese's work *Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer* (1991), which attempts to define a transnational vocabulary of performance. In style of presentation, Royce's work is more closely allied with the aesthetic contemplations of Susan Sontag (2001).

The strength of Royce's book is its description of virtuosity as related to "a submission to a particular kind of order" that culminates in a sense of awakening that lasts past the moment (24). This definition allows her to formulate a set of premises and related comparative method that she articulates in the first four chapters of the book: "Toward an Anthropology of Performing Arts," "Virtuosity: The Masque of Nonchalance," "Technique and Style: Conservatism and Change: Michel Fokine and the Ballets Russes," and "Artistry: The Embodiment of the Transparency." These chapters are followed by specific case studies that implicitly compare ballet, Native American, and contemporary music in chapters titled "Codified and Metaphorical Vocabularies: The Creative Artistry of Vaslav Nijinsky and Marcel Marceau," "Tewa Indian Ritual: Native Aesthetics," and "Artistic Performances: Janos Starker Crafts the Inevitable." She further expands on aspects of virtuosity and its relationship both to the individual performer and the audience in "Silence and Stillness in Music and Dance," "The Audience as Creator and Interpreter," "Performers and Genres: The Form and Meaning of Innovation," and "Artistry and Altered States." In the final chapter, "Afterthoughts," Royce provides information on her personal background, specifically her study of ballet, which has influenced the scope and direction of her thinking.

While the book's breadth of scope is its strength, it is also at times its weakness. The text sometimes suffers from a perspective that causes Royce to make statements about a form without enough contextual depth. For example, in her discussion of Fokine she suggests that breath was a primary component of his technique—"Breathing was intimately related to impulse, beginning movements and extending them" (47)—but does not provide a detailed discussion of how Fokine used breath. She returns to breath as an element of

silence and stillness in the short, eleven-page chapter titled "Silence and Stillness in Music and Dance." In this chapter Royce defines breath in relationship to sound and silence, stating "While there is breath, this is sound and there is movement" (141). Ultimately, she includes breath in performers' interpretations of time and space in a variety of forms, including ballet, kabuki, butoh, bharatnatyam, flamenco, mime, shamanism, and the writings of Dante. However, each form's inclusion of breath, time, and space in relationship to silence and stillness is written with a quick brush stroke that does not provide the reader with links between breath, time, space, silence, and stillness. For instance, in the case of Butoh, there is no definitive discussion of the distinctiveness of the stylistic choices of Kazuo Ohno and Ushio Amagatsu, or more problematically of their integration of breath, time, and space into their technical method or choreographic viewpoint. A more comprehensive consideration of the social and historical context of each performer (or each form in the case of the other forms previously mentioned), would provide the reader with a more complete understanding of each. Additionally, it would lend insight into the ways in which breath affects time and space—becoming an aspect of a performer's inclusion of silence and stillness and/or an idiom's technique—something that affects artistry and virtuosity.

Despite the latter limitation, there are throughout the book moments of inspiration and insight that can only come at the moment in someone's career when he or she has the perspective of personal performance experience and years of performance observation and scholarly study. Consider Royce's statement on transparency:

Transparency is the ultimate characteristic of great performers, including ethnographers. It is that requisite state of detach-

ment from a process that has consumed you all your career. It requires you to hand over to a public a work that you have fashioned out of all your intelligence, body, and passion, and to disappear. You must care with all your being for your art and care nothing for yourself. (138)

In this definition of transparency, Royce acknowledges the depth of commitment necessary in the pursuit of artistry and virtuosity, whether one's aspiration is to be an artist, a scholar, or a combination of both. In similar inspirational and insightful moments of the text, Royce points toward a perspective that similarly unites theory and practice.

This unification of artist/scholar is the latent subject of her last chapter, "Afterthoughts." In these pages the act of interpretation becomes the connecting link between Royce's personal life as a student of ballet and cello and as an academic. As part of the enterprise of interpretation, Royce includes the embodiment of a discipline that is without ego and consistently evolves to embrace purity, simplicity, and economy in order to share an artistic vision or academic perspective with an audience. Interpretation is thus the meeting place between practice and theory, artist and scholar. As she states, "I know the great demands, physical and mental of performance from the inside out. Perhaps this book puts me in the role of interpreter of the interpreters for a public of which I am also an integral part" (237). Whether or not one agrees with the form and content of Royce's interpretations, the book provides a viewpoint on how a dance anthropologist interprets her experience both as a performer and as an anthropologist. In this regard, the book provides insight into the thinking process of one of the primary contributors to dance ethnology.

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Works Cited

- Barba, Eugenio, and Nicola Savarese. 1991. *Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*. New York: Routledge.
- Royce, Anya Peterson. 1977. *The Anthropology of Dance*. Indiana: University of Illinois Press.
- Sontag, Susan. 2001. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Picador.

OF THE PRESENCE OF THE BODY: ESSAYS ON DANCE AND PERFORMANCE THEORY

edited by André Lepecki. 2004. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press. vii + 184 pp., notes, index. \$24.95 paper.

EXHAUSTING DANCE: PERFORMANCE AND THE POLITICS OF MOVEMENT

by André Lepecki. 2006. New York and London: Routledge. x + 150 pp., notes, bibliography, index. \$35.95 paper.

Since the early to mid-1990s, dance scholars have made great strides in applying theories and methods from a variety of disciplines and schools of thought to dance studies, and in demonstrating the value of dance studies to other fields of inquiry. Building off the foundation of visionary publications such as Susan Foster's *Choreographing History* (1995) and *Corporealities* (1996) and Randy Martin's *Critical Moves* (1998), André Lepecki's two recent books, the anthology *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory* (2004) and the monograph *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (2006), seek to examine how critical theory influences dancing bodies and, more intriguingly, how dancing bodies affect critical theory. While each book has its merits, *Of the Presence of the Body* serves as a useful introduction to some of the themes and questions underlying *Exhausting Dance* and therefore prepares the reader to better negotiate both the com-

plexity of Lepecki's ideas and the intricacy of his writing style.

The anthology's title comes from the opening page of Raoul Ager Feuillet's seminal *Chorégraphie ou l'art d'écrire la danse* (1699), in which, according to Lepecki, a "conglomerate of traces" (representing the body) is situated in a square (representing the theater space). The page is captioned with the phrase "De la présence du corps" ("Of the presence of the body"). Lepecki argues that this phrase and the accompanying notations constitute the first articulation of the separation of body and presence into distinct entities and the emergence of choreography (dance writing) as a method that aimed to inscribe and discipline the body and its motions. For Lepecki, Feuillet's text conveys an elemental concept that still informs how we view, experience, and write about dance: the body's presence is always predicated by absence (3). After all, what kind of trace does the dancing body leave? How can one grasp, remember, record, analyze, or write dance when the dancing body is so elusive, when it exceeds words, when what has happened has already disappeared? And what is this mysterious force called "presence"? Does presence outlast or surpass the material body, or is it even more unfathomable and transitory than the body? Lepecki sees dance's ephemerality as a "major premise" of contemporary dance studies that must be scrutinized historically.

Lepecki undertakes this task in his own contribution to the collection, "Inscribing Dance," wherein he examines the interconnectedness of dance, writing, and gender. He begins by looking at the works of Jean-Georges Noverre, who in the late eighteenth century categorized dance as "the fleeting trace of an always irretrievable, never fully translatable motion: neither into notation, nor into writing" (127). Lepecki contends that methods for writing dance (whether