

NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Alison Jeffers

doi:10.1017/S0266464X15000081

Judith Rudakoff, ed.

**TRANS(per)FORMING Nina Arsenault:
an Unreasonable Body of Work**

Bristol: Intellect, 2012. 272 p. £20.00.

ISBN: 978-1-84150-571-8.

The cross-disciplinary work of Nina Arsenault is relatively unfamiliar to individuals outside her native Canada; Judith Rudakoff's edited collection therefore acts as a critical corrective by introducing the artist's idiosyncratic practice to a wider audience. Arsenault is a transgender artist who has undergone over sixty surgeries in order to feminize her originally male body with a 'fake plastic aesthetic'. At a cost of \$200,000, her multiple surgeries include both those necessary for her transition and other cosmetic procedures that have honed her body into an unconventional, hyper-feminine emulation of Western culture's beauty ideals.

Arsenault's body is the subject of her work; using performance, film, and photography, her queer anatomy (and its construction) ruptures the binary of 'real' and 'fake'. Her decision to undergo surgical castration yet maintain her penis further challenges conceptions of authenticity, artifice and femaleness; and these notions are discussed extensively throughout this collection. The book comprises thirteen chapters that take the form of personal anecdotes and critical analyses from a variety of scholars and artists. These chapters include conceptualizations of Arsenault's practice as self-portraiture, burlesque sex parody, 'fast feminism', and cyborg. Other contributions focus on her sex work, voice, genitals, spirituality, and acting methodology.

Two noteworthy inclusions are Sky Gilbert's polemic essay highlighting the continued importance of identity politics by positing that Arsenault's transition illustrates the fixedness of identity, and Benjamin Gillespie's consideration of Arsenault's surgically enhanced body within a framework of Baudrillard's notion of the hyper-real. The perhaps enviable parallel to French performance artist Orlan is most extensively detailed in Alistair Newton's contribution on beauty, but there are more links to be drawn between these two performers. The inclusion of a piece by Arsenault herself and performance documentation (thirty-five colour photographs and the script of Arsenault's autobiographical stage play *The Silicone Diaries*) offer a valuable foundation for readers new to her work.

Overall, this book is a useful overview of Arsenault's work, and the polemics it contains provide starting points from which to consider the relationship of her practice to other artists and critical areas. Due to the disparate nature of the chapter concerns, however, this book will be primarily of interest to scholars working in LGBT, gender, and queer theatre and performance studies. While I sympathize with Rudakoff's desire to edit a collection that refuses to focus on a 'single preconception', the lack of thematic curation tends to obscure this collection's important interventions into areas of post-humanism and identity politics, and in this way occludes a wider readership.

SARAH MULLAN

doi:10.1017/S0266464X15000093

Atay Citron, Sharon Aronson-Lehavi, and David Zerbib, ed.

**Performance Studies in Motion:
International Perspectives and Practices
in the Twenty-First Century**

London; New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014. 416 p. £22.99.

ISBN: 978-1-408-1407-3.

Stimulated by the pioneering work of Richard Schechner, this book does, as the saying goes, 'exactly what it says on the tin'. Emerging from an international conference involving twelve countries from which scholars of performance studies discussed current issues in the field, the book manifestly evidences the multidisciplinary nature and ephemerality of the phenomenon of performance. The dynamic title of the book captures the protean landscape of performance and paves the way to a critical multi-perspective analysis that sets in motion a meta-examination of both theory and praxis from the performative turn of the 1960s to the aesthetic turn of the noughties.

Each of the twenty-four essays offers a creative vision and re-imagination of the purpose and function of performance as captured in Schechner's 'broad spectrum' approach, reflecting the shift in perspective from mimetic to poetic understandings of artistic performance. In doing so, this book should appeal to a wide audience of undergraduate and postgraduate readers, particularly researchers and teachers of performance studies, whose academic palate savours the varied taste of international research cuisine, captured in a stimulating menu of 'real world' case studies.

The power of the book is to be found in the creative and contemporary insights captured in the versatility of these case studies and the attention to detail paid to the dynamic relations between topics in both the social and pure sciences as well as the humanities, ranging from the postdramatic performance aspects of war to life-science laboratory games in a 'theatre lab' – 'a hub of research at the meeting point of science and performing arts', bringing scientists and performance artists into a performative space of synchronized togetherness in 'performing science'.

In its topicality and diversity of authorial approach and content the book liberates the reader from the confines of ontological and epistemological understandings that Western cultural centrisms impose upon us. Sharon Aronson-Lehavi, for example, in her essay on 'Re: location', shows how the spatiality concept of performance helps to desensitize the binary opposition of art *v.* reality, shifting 'the location of performance from the fiction realm to the real happening'. In asking the aesthetically inviting question of 'What is the location of a performance?', she draws the reader into a discussion of liminality, that threshold-crossing space of social interplay so pivotal to performance because of its 'susceptibility to change and its sensitivity to human encounters and interactions'. In this respect, aesthetics is at the heart of Schechner's proposed 'Third World of Performance' built around a positive promise of the capacity of performance to reshape the world.

DEBORAH NEWTON

doi:10.1017/S0266464X1500010X

Jackie Snow

Movement Training for Actors

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2012.

224 p. with DVD. £22.05.

ISBN: 978-1-408-12857-8.

Movement exercises are a fundamental part of actor training. Actors get more in touch with their emotions through participating in movement exercises and learning to be in their body, they learn to use the body in developing a character, and they can use the movement training in plays or films that utilize dance. In Helen Edmundson's adaptation of *Anna Karenina*, for example, staged at the Arcola in 2011, dance is not used *qua* dance, but instead as a mimic for the bustle of a Moscow street, to demarcate social and class lines, and to be a metaphor for the blossoming of a doomed love affair in a snowy winter.

Choreographer, movement director, and teacher Jackie Snow points out many of the advantages of movement training for actors in her superbly organized book. She takes the reader through not just the reasoning behind movement training, but also a wide range of movement exercises that will

be very useful both for budding actors, and for the seasoned teacher at a conservatoire or theatre studies course. Snow brings together techniques and principles from movement teachers Litz Pisk and Trish Arnold, voice teacher Kristin Linklater, Rudolph Laban, the mask work of Jacques Lecoq, Feldenkrais and Alexander techniques, period dance, and more.

She says that the main reasons to employ this training are to loosen and strengthen the body, express imagination, and explore physicality. The method takes a release-based approach, with its swings, breath work, ability to fall into the floor and release held tension, and the encouragement to take risks and break with ingrained postural and movement habits. It is an excellent resource for practitioners looking for a store of movement exercises.

As a critical dance studies researcher, though, I can't help but squirm when writers use terms like 'universal movement' or 'natural body'. This way of speaking about the training suggests that we all come from a universal body-knowledge, and that release-technique can strip away years of habit and take us back to our 'roots' – that there is a 'natural' body lurking under all the posturing, so to speak. This approach ignores that movement and bodily principles such as yoga, tai-chi, pilates, and release technique have history and politics embedded in them which can limit their accessibility for culturally driven actor training and create a hegemonic 'natural' body that tends to exclude other bodies.

AMITA NIJHAWAN

doi:10.1017/S0266464X15000111

Peter Billingham

Edward Bond: A Critical Study

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 182 p.

£55.00.

ISBN: 978-0-230-36739-5.

In this new study Peter Billingham charts Edward Bond's career from the young, socially positive playwright of the 1960s, to the iconoclastic elder statesman of the present century. Billingham notes three phases in Bond's writing career to date. In the introduction, we are shown the young Bond, notorious for the perceived violence of his plays, railing against the establishment and displaying the iniquities of society as he saw it. In this section, Billingham looks at formative experiences in the life of the young playwright and how his career developed.

Next is a close examination of the period from 1970 to 1981, grouping together plays that sought to reimagine characters from literary history from *Lear* to *Restoration*. Finally, the author looks at Bond's later work from *Crime of the Twenty-First Century* onwards. The comparison between these