

Talkers, and THEATREclub, and is sustained by the majority of contributors.

The notion of devising with text is explored further by Noelia Ruiz's thought-provoking chapter, which offers a robust examination of Pan Pan Theatre's work through a heavily contested post-dramatic lens. Ruiz returns to the contested position of the term 'devising' as understood by a European audience and Irish artists working in the field. Associated complications from a UK perspective indicate an Irish theatrical landscape conflicted by its cultural heritage and political struggles. Ruiz develops a detailed discussion on categorization, cultural contexts, and expanded terminologies and the following interview with Gavin Quinn provides an articulate artist's response and reflections.

The final section of the book deals with approaches to Northern Ireland and its conflicts. Eleanor Owicki's investigations into the site-specific work of Kabosh illustrate the desire to move beyond a 'legacy of conflict' and create a positive response to contemporary Belfast within an international marketplace. Owicki highlights the commercial impact of a focus on more positive narratives, but firmly identifies the combined responsibility not to ignore the divisive ones. This is a valuable book for the student, academic, or practitioner interested in devised theatre and/or Irish Theatre practice. Offering as much to the field of Irish and cultural studies as it does to theatre and performance studies, it initiates a number of important conversations to develop further research in this area.

DARREN DALY

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Sabine Breitwieser, ed.

**Simone Forti: Thinking with the Body**

München: Hirmer Verlag, 2014. 304 p. £32.00.  
ISBN 978-3-7774-2278-7.

Published to accompany a retrospective at Museum der Moderne in Salzburg, July–November 2014, this is a comprehensive catalogue of work by Simone Forti, a prominent figure within the postmodern and minimalist dance movement since the mid-1950s. Forti developed her methods and philosophy of movement alongside prominent experimental artists such as Robert Dunn, Peter Van Riper, and Charlemagne Palestine, and was influenced by leading exponents of performance in the era such as Anna Halprin, Merce Cunningham, and John Cage.

This publication provides a biographical and contextual background to an *oeuvre* that continues to have significant influence on contemporary dance, and is accompanied by numerous photographic reproductions of performance, personal photographs, sketches, movement, and scores. So

improvisation, for which she is well known, is the undertow of explorations with diverse media, from graphic (*Illuminations*, 1972) to holographic (*Angel*, 1976) to sculpting, articulating, and 'thinking with the body'.

Forti's work is distinguished by an intuitive and often humorous approach. *Dance Constructions* (1961) involves simple objects and tasks that 'interfere' with movement: two boxes from within which two people whistle a delicate 'conversation', a dialogue across a see-saw, or movement through twisting rope-swings or over bodies, as in *Huddle* (1961). By Forti's own account in an interview with the exhibition curator Sabine Breitwieser, these works are informed by profound shifts in her own personal situation as much as by abstract concepts.

One particular experience that influences her work is her family's escape from Mussolini's Italy in 1939, to which she returns in *News Animations* (mid-1980s) in homage to her father's careful attention to breaking news. Here, she researches news coverage thoroughly before embodying news topics, and global concerns as performance. Forti takes an osmotic approach to close observation which could be most inspiring for those of us teaching movement. Referring to *Jackdaw Songs* (1981), she comments, 'I'm trying to avoid definitions, to recognize the limits of my vision, to take each gesture at face value in an open space where tomorrow remains unknown.'

An easily overlooked aspect of Forti's work is her sustained innovation with sound. Collaborations with musicians are discussed here in detail by Liz Kotz and Tashi Wada. Further essays by Julia Bryan-Wilson, Fred Dewey, Robert Morris, Steve Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer reveal a prolific teacher, movement improviser, visual artist, and musician. This timely volume adds the fascinating perspective of collaborators to Forti's own accounts in *Handbook in Motion* (2000), *Oh Tongue* (2003), and numerous articles. It will be of value to students and practitioners especially of dance, movement, and physical theatre.

RICHARD TALBOT

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James Moran

**The Theatre of Seán O'Casey**

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2013.  
314 p. £16.99.  
ISBN: 978-1-4081-7535-4.

At the beginning of this book, James Moran draws attention to the uneven and protean nature of Seán O'Casey's work and beliefs. He expertly navigates the inherent inconsistencies, thereby providing a coherent framework with which to assess the plays. However, his highlighting the fundamental imbalance in the playwright's

*oeuvre* led me to feeling that Moran was drawing attention to a similar flaw in his own volume.

At his best, and this is frequently the case, he provides clear and thoughtful contextualization beyond what would be expected in a general survey of an author's complete canon. The complicated relationship between the Irish theatre-goer and the plays is drawn with knowledgeable nuance, and the perseverance of the original Dublin trilogy is well described as representing an entity which has transcended its form as theatrical artefact to become a socio-political touchstone for the nation.

The volume is augmented with two contemporary critiques of O'Casey and an interview with Garry Hynes of Druid Theatre in Galway. Particularly rewarding is the survey of the critical history of the plays and the competing political analyses endured by the works in the time of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland. Yet, for a volume which forms part of Methuen Drama's 'Critical Companions' series, I was uneasy that so much space was afforded to O'Casey's *Autobiographies* (1939–54). Biographical detail should of course be present as a context but I would suggest that the amount provided here is disproportionate.

There is also an issue with the source from which Moran draws. Christopher Murray's full biography *Seán O'Casey: Writer at Work* (2004) more than covers the terrain, yet Moran prefers to rely heavily on O'Casey's memoirs whose factual reliability Murray suggests may not be the best. Moran agrees with this caveat before seemingly ignoring it.

Moran is most convincing when assigning influences to O'Casey's work. He is novel and illuminating in demonstrating the impact of a forgotten music-hall act, Ferguson and Mack, as a source for the knockabout violent slapstick which appears on occasion. His argument for Dion Boucicault as an inspiration is also thorough. However, considering that he attributes an influence to the singular plays of James Connolly and Maurice Dalton, it seems an omission to overlook the case for *Blight: The Tragedy of Dublin* (1917) by Oliver St John Gogarty and Joseph O'Connor. This play bears more resemblance to the Dublin plays of O'Casey through its setting in the Dublin tenements and its mixture of music hall, melodrama, social commentary, and political polemic than any other of the time. While it is true that in his later years O'Casey denied he had been influenced by the play, his companion at its opening night recalled the playwright's declaration that it was this performance which convinced him to write for the theatre. O'Casey, as Moran properly and frequently points out elsewhere, is at least consistent in his own inconsistency.

Particularly useful is the review of those frequently neglected plays of the canon beyond the Dublin trilogy. Moran thoroughly assesses each

and provides excellent context and international production histories.

FEARGAL WHELAN

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Royona Mitra

**Akram Khan: Dancing New Interculturalism**

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. xviii,

197 p. £55.00.

ISBN: 978-1-137-39365-4.

Insightful and intelligently written, this book skilfully weaves together detailed choreographic analyses, postcolonial, and globalization theories, and in-depth interviews to illustrate how Akram Khan's work embodies his multiple and fragmented identity positions as a second-generation, male, British Bangladeshi dancer and choreographer.

Organized around seven major works from Khan's repertoire, each chapter functions as a case study in which Mitra carefully unpacks Khan's choreography in relation to larger theoretical frameworks of corporeality, auto-ethnography, hybridity, mobility, and normativity. Throughout, Mitra convincingly argues for viewing Khan's work as a new kind of interculturalism rather than the more common 'contemporary *kathak*'. This latter label, which the author rightly problematizes, presupposes the merging of two stable and mutually exclusive forms, and implies that in order for South Asian dance to be contemporary it must first be westernized. Khan's new interculturalism, on the other hand, is multidisciplinary, multicultural, and multilingual. This, Mitra argues, lends his choreography an unstable and unpredictable quality that defies facile categorizations – 'confusion not fusion', as Khan himself has described his approach to making work.

What makes this book essential reading is not just Mitra's novel perspective on interculturalism, which upends practices of othering in Western intercultural theatre, but a nuanced appreciation of the way in which Khan draws on South Asian dramaturgical principles of *abhinaya* and *rasa* to reshape and rewrite Western aesthetics, ultimately to transform contemporary British dance from within. In this regard, Khan's interculturalism is not simply a new performance aesthetic but, more importantly, an embodied postcolonial tactic that pierces the heart of Britain's imperial legacy. This, in the final analysis, is the book's most radical and lasting contribution.

The first of its kind to investigate the breadth of Khan's *oeuvre*, this book offers a much-needed intervention in the growing field of contemporary British dance and theatre studies, and is an excellent resource for students, scholars, and practitioners alike – a rich and nuanced choreographic