

expressing the high of falling in love. Although interesting, it also contains some broad generalizations that many theatre and performance studies scholars would contest, such as the idea that “the most important things we do as humans ... [are] reproducing and nurturing” (180). Chapter 9, “Dreaming in Dance: Astaire, Minnelli, Kelly, and Donen,” exhibits fewer of these issues as it returns to in-depth aesthetic analysis. This chapter takes on the dream ballet, an extended sequence in a film in which a dance “tells a story or develops a character” (193). It includes excellent analysis of how director Vincente Minnelli’s use of camerawork, lighting, and sound played an important part in shaping how the dances communicated with audiences.

Finally, “Making Film Dance” is the third and shortest part of Genné’s book and comprises only two chapters. Chapter 10 offers an interesting perspective on how Minnelli and others used the idea of choreography to shape how they made musical films. Genné coins the term “musical montage” to describe a device that these directors used that resembles dance: a “succession of moving images” but with shots of longer duration than would appear in a typical montage and full of action coordinated with music that “pushes the plot forward” (243). The final chapter on the legacy of film musicals explains how the demise of the studio system led to the decline of film musicals as well as how their impact is felt widely today: in the work of Michael Jackson and other music videos, in postmodern dance, in Bollywood, and in the film industry in general. This final chapter reminds readers that even though film musicals are less popular today, their influence is still palpable and thus worthy of consideration.

Overall, Genné’s book will be a welcome volume for scholars interested in the aesthetics of film dance and popular culture, and, in particular, fans of Astaire, Balanchine, and Kelly will enjoy its many wonderful descriptive details. Steichen’s and Harris’s books are essential reading for anyone studying ballet in the twentieth century, Americanism in dance, and the institutional structures that have shaped the concert dance world to this day. These three monographs together make an important contribution to dance studies literature. Theatre and performance studies scholars will find useful as well the books’ central concerns regarding nationalism, embodiment, and the defining of performance genres and styles.

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Building Character: The Art and Science of Casting

By Amy Cook. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018; pp. x +188. \$65 cloth, \$24.95 paper, \$24.95 e-book.

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In *Building Character: The Art and Science of Casting*, Amy Cook investigates the practices and parameters of interpreting characters and the bodies cast to play them. The word “cast” encompasses not just staging but also brain functions integral to social interactions yet fundamentally misunderstood or unacknowledged. Cook seeks to address this gap in stating, “I want cognitive scientists to understand and address the questions we are asking and answering in the humanities, and I want scholars in the humanities to explore and probe the research being done in the sciences” (25). In doing so, she reveals how performance analyses and cognitive theories are intertwined in ways that are affective rather than teleological. Dispersed, connected, compressed, and compared, but not below the surface, meaning is interpreted via shared affective experiences. Cook advocates forgoing the hermeneutics of suspicion in the default interpretive mode of performance studies. Rather, she employs cognitive scholarship to account for the networks and processes that shape characters populating, narrating, and creating the world for and with us.

The introduction offers an expansive consideration of “character” in representation and embedded in everyday use: “To refer to a ‘character’ in daily life or in fiction is to integrate narrative (a presumption of past and future action) into a perception of another person” (9). Here, Cook highlights her methodology of merging critical theory and scientific research, with the larger goal of inspiring theatre and performance scholars to “extend and complicate what cognitive scientists started” (117).

The first three chapters apply recent findings in category construction, compression theory, embodied cognition, and dispersal practices to the examination of what we do as producers and consumers of performance. Chapter 1, “Building Titus,” explores “how we compress what is complicated and diffuse into what is focused and essential in order to decrease cognitive load, increase associations, and facilitate memory” (38). The author evokes Hollywood trailers, face recognition psychology, theories of naming, and the narratives underlying character to investigate how people manage stimuli and make decisions. Narratives condense, project, and connect in powerful ways. In Chapter 2, “Building Characters,” Cook interrogates the complex deployment of embodied cognition—for instance, in the concept of celebrity—as a form of condensed characterization relevant to our understanding of race and gender. Building on the scholarship in color-blind casting, she questions the racialization of stage and film aesthetics. This is an important chapter to consider for twenty-first-century debates about diversity and the theatrical practices that provide “the opportunity for a wider variety of stories told by a wider variety of bodies” (89). Chapter 3, “Multicasting,” investigates distributed cognition when “the cognitive load of the event is spread over and through the people, the environment, and the system” (102). Cook draws from a range of examples in theatre and art—such as Michelangelo’s *Pietà* and Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More*—with particular emphasis on the creative potential of miscasting and other disruptions to theatrical expectation.

After making apparent the mental processes that condense, categorize, disperse, compress, and counter experiential data, Cook’s next two chapters consider their relevance for social identity and the metaphysics of selfhood. Chapter 4 brings the findings and examples from theatrical experiences to sociopolitical arenas,

arguing that “understanding how ... [casting] shapes our everyday life grants us an indirect way of thinking about our thinking and the opportunity—perhaps our responsibility—to change what we think” (123). Entitled “Casting and Performance of Everyday Life,” this chapter employs a compelling analysis of political candidate selections, referencing previous chapters’ development of face recognition, compression theory, category confusion, environmental ecology, and affective networking in order to explain why voters choose candidates based not on provable ability and morality but on celebrity status and other fictive factors. Cook provides as convincing an explanation for Trump’s presidency as one is likely to hear. Successfully arguing that collective change starts with an awareness of how casting has the potential to enable and curtail social justice, she uses the next chapter to intervene. Chapter 5, “Counter Casting,” attends to the possibilities of challenging “the parameters of self and how casting might provide a way of refusing the roles we are given, the stories we are told” (135). Cook proposes theatre as a potentially revolutionary site for enhancing our connectedness to community and as an alternative to the dominant model of compartmentalized individuality. We think by connecting, not by cutting; by accumulation and association, not by isolation. How we have thoughts *about* thoughts can ground a new metaphysics. This has implications for conceiving a dynamic, communal experience of selfhood as a network of characters that are “coexistent rather than independent beings” (148).

Cook embeds her analyses in the contemporary and contentious examples of public performance and everyday life. In doing so, she invites examination of the connections among brain processes, affective networking, and the graver sociopolitical implications for racialized bodies. At times, however, she evokes black lived experiences to convey their usefulness for extrapolating the cognitive work of character formation—references to the death of Trayvon Martin, comments on Leslie Jones’s body, and various citations about or from Barack Obama to name a few—without exploring the ways in which the consequences of casting are, indeed, more dire for some than for others. In the cognitive turn of the humanities, it would be beneficial to explain racism beyond being a product of automated category confusion and, instead, to engage fruitfully both the sciences and the arts in combating the oppression and abuse of people of color. Certainly, Cook’s research encourages future conversations about these issues.

In her expert interweaving of performance studies and cognitive theory, Cook deserves the attention of students and researchers in both fields, with particularly important implications for producers and patrons of theatre and film. *Building Character* is an innovative and important interdisciplinary project that challenges old ways of interpreting theatre history and social performance, interweaves contemporary social debates into critical humanities inquiry, pursues implications of cognitive scholarship in identity politics, and argues for nuanced attentiveness to the affective experiences of networked environments. In doing so, Cook provides new ways to think about and experience our communities, while offering tools for future inquiry.