

performance cultures to form a grid that alters and affects the way the city knows itself.

The spring 1998 "Out of Actions" retrospective exhibition of performance art from 1949–1979 at Museum of Contemporary Art is identified and examined as an event of significance. Cheng questions why Judy Chicago's 1979 "Dinner Party" was left out of the exhibition. She asks why there was "not even a single photograph" of this milestone piece (83). Perhaps she herself could offer redress for the legion of L.A. performers admittedly excluded from mention in her book. She can't write about everybody, but doesn't the uninformed reader deserve at least a list and/or brief summation of what's missing? "Multicentricity," a word she uses frequently, is her approach, but the identification of a limited number of "centers" implies that the ones mentioned are the main trees in the forest.

Suzanne Lacy is spotlighted artistically highlighting her woman's body, despite implied essentialism. Lacy's collaborative work builds a frame and structure that accommodates many voices and even allows for controversy. Elia Arce is an example of "transculturation" (xxviii), Cheng's term for the phenomenon of two cultures—one dominant, the other subjected—intermingling to form a third. Arce, an immigrant from Central America, is concerned with inter-minority tension, xenophobia, and racism. Arce evolved from a socially conscious Marxist who literally ran away in disgust from her first viewing of self performance. Soon, however, she was employing its usual tropes: childhood memoirs complete with photos of marginalized proto-matriarchs. Arce says she performs mainly to achieve her own catharsis. Cheng's comment that "Arce's art exceeds what can be theorized properly" (173) is, however, a disappointing cop-out; Cheng is too formidable a theorist to let herself off the hook by abandoning any attempt at theory.

In the chapter about self performance at Highways, Cheng cites the importance of Guillermo Gómez-Peña's work but challenges his sucker-punch performance ethics. To Cheng, Highways is a "hetero-locus, a site where, through an inversion of normative ideology, multifarious signatures of otherness are minted as cultural currencies among performers and spectators" (190). Community building among marginalized groups is one of Highways' greatest achievements. It's home to a classic American bootstrap ethic where a beginning solo performer can start out in a workshop and evolve to take stage as a featured, paid performer.

In discussing performance guru Tim Miller's "My Queer Body" Cheng quibbles with Miller's

focus on his penis, linking it with straight white male dominance and calling it problematic as an emblem of queerness because it excludes lesbians. Cheng is impressed with Danielle Brazell's artistry more than with her polemics, which Cheng sees as a discursive *deus ex machina*, unearned and inappropriately placed.

The now-defunct Sacred Naked Nature Girls (SNNG) appear as an almost utopian model of inclusiveness and the embrace of differences within the gendered class of women. Johanna Went is presented as a refreshingly free, entertainment-oriented master/mistress of grotesque carnality. Many other artists are discussed, notably osseus labyrinth, a movement duo who perform naked and with all their body hair shaved off and whose mission statement characterizes their work as "a laboratory of random mutations" (335).

An informed reader might not accept every one of Cheng's ideas. But despite its sometimes daunting complexity, *In Other Los Angeleses* is a must-read for those seriously interested in performance theory, especially as applied to the cultural life of Los Angeles.

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SIDESHOW U.S.A.: FREAKS AND THE AMERICAN CULTURAL IMAGINATION.

By Rachel Adams. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001; pp. 289. \$19.00 paper.

At a typical sideshow, barkers offered the "ten in one" that provided ten extraordinary attractions for the price of one ticket. Following this tradition, Rachel Adams offers an analogous way into the sideshow phenomenon. The reader is met with such disparate figures as "the wild man," Toni Morrison's ghostly incarnate "Beloved," and the eroticized and exoticized subjects captured through the photographic lens of Diane Arbus. *Sideshow U.S.A.* argues the importance of the "freak" in America's cultural imagination and material reality, and its author recognizes that "freak is not an inherent quality but an identity realized through gesture, costume, and staging" (6). By reclaiming "freak" as a performative identity vis-à-vis Judith Butler's seminal notion of iteration and repetition, Adams lifts the figure of the freak out of the ghettoized history of popular entertainment culture to invest it with social, aesthetic, and political implications.

Adams honors the sideshow history by first establishing its entertainment and social value in American culture. She employs the history of the sideshow to demonstrate the location of the freak's origins in popular culture as well as to provide an understanding of the performative dynamic between performer and spectator. Adams posits that the insights into structure, reception, and performance of the freak within the sideshow are most productively understood when "supplemented by information about what it meant to audiences and the performers themselves" (4). This attention to the relationship fostered between spectator and performer allows Adams to depart from a linear, historical agenda and to engage with a variety of provocative issues that thread their way through the ensuing chapters.

For example, Adams uses two different chapters to set up a discussion of racial performance located in and circulated through the body of the freak. In "Freaks of Culture: Institutions, Publics, and the Subjects of Ethnographic Knowledge," she looks beyond the dramatic (re)presentation of race to take into account the presence of the scientific community that created its own frame around the racialized freak. Here Adams effectively demonstrates how the authorial specter of anthropology, medicine, and museum studies capitalized on America's desire to legitimate racial deviance while the sideshow simultaneously offered an illusion of proximity and fantastic "knowledge" of this threatening body. This relationship is revisited and further complicated in a later chapter that examines "wildness" and race in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Similarly, Adams unearths a correlation between the freak and a queer identity in Carson McCullers's fiction. These connections are expanded upon in a section that discusses the reclamation of the term freak as a subversive signifier by way of the 1960s counterculture. What this strategy affords Adams is an opportunity to manufacture various theoretical and conceptual throughlines emanating from the iconic status of the freak. Adams liberates this figure from its confinement as a nostalgic product of an entertainment tradition to prove its cultural importance as contributing to a more sophisticated and innovative understanding of various personal, social, and political identities.

Though each chapter has the strength to stand independently and contribute significant insights across a number of disciplines, the work that addresses film and performance is particularly valuable for scholars of dramatic and performance studies. Because the freak was created out of a dramatic/popular entertainment medium, it is crucial to understand the performative aspects of this

identity that have allowed its resilience in American culture. Adams successfully connects this figure across varied cultural and historical contexts while emphasizing its construction born of costume and staging. She succinctly demonstrates the process inherent in theatre that creates the possibility for a fluid identity prone to performative alterations.

The issue of performance and dramatic conventions is addressed in the chapter entitled "Sideshow Cinema" where Adams focuses her discussion on Tod Browning's film *Freaks*. Departing slightly from other theorists who have given attention to the portrayal and representation of freaks through the cinematic tradition, Adams resituates her analysis to take into account the performative and dramatic stylings of these physically extraordinary performers. However, her interest extends beyond the cinematic frame to take into account the public reception of the film's stars, who were authentic sideshow performers. Adams writes, "Stage and screen identities are blurred as each character goes by the same name they use in their live performances. Many of the early scenes were added to the original script as Browning became fascinated with the performers' remarkable abilities and sought excuses for working them into the diegesis" (65). This protean reciprocity between character and performer and, essentially, physically or mentally disabled individuals reinvigorates Adams' discussion of *Freaks*; it not only foregrounds the significance of cinema in creating a freak identity, but contributes merit to theoretical and material complexities of performance.

The subtle reiteration and reinforcement of performance becomes productively explicit as *Sideshow U.S.A.* closes with an exploration of performance artist Jennifer Miller. A self-proclaimed "woman with a beard" (220), Miller is founder and performer of Circus Amok, a postmodern sideshow that honors its theatrical heritage while advancing an overt political and social agenda. Here the threads of Adams's carefully created theoretical and historical fabric coalesce to embody and play out the preceding exploration of our contention, fascination, and perhaps productive ambiguity toward this haunting figure of corporeal difference. What emerges through the bracketing of Miller's unique status as both freak and politically engaged performer allows the spectator (in this case reader) to bridge the distance between self and other. This dual positionality calls attention to what Adams demonstrates through every chapter. Her insistence on the freak's crucial presence in American culture underscores the idea that a process is always occurring whenever we confront alterity. In her introduction she describes the

dynamic inside the sideshow: "The price of admission buys permission to gaze at another's body with the expectation that the look of curiosity will be met by the blank, unseeing stare" (7). By situating Miller as the finale to *Sideshow U.S.A.* we are reminded of the book's lasting ideological effects. Simply put, Adams underscores the notion that the opportunity always exists to subvert the expectation of the encounter between freak and spectator. The freak is always looking back; *Sideshow U.S.A.* challenges our privileged position as spectators to look away.

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EAST OF WEST: CROSS-CULTURAL PERFORMANCE AND THE STAGING OF DIFFERENCE. Edited by Claire Sponsler and Xiaomei Chen. New York: Palgrave, 2000; pp. x + 230. \$49.95.

At the beginning of their eclectic anthology, *East of West: Cross-Cultural Performance and the Staging of Difference*, Claire Sponsler and Xiaomei Chen distance themselves from a "mere" textual exegesis of intercultural performance forms and transfer the spotlight of critical attention to social contexts in which such performances are produced. To the editors, it is important to look at "intercultural performance as a social act, examining what happens when performances and performers are transported from their 'native' lands to new locales" (1). Drawing on recent work in cultural studies, the editors argue that the world's cultures are in constant flux, persistently crossing boundaries that are ideological as much as geographic. While, as Michel de Certeau says, they "poach" each other's legacies, they do so not necessarily to co-opt what is alien but to modify what constitutes the self, with its conglomerate of ethnic, national, racial, or gender characteristics. The essays in Sponsler and Chen's anthology, much like Anthony Tatlow's recent *Shakespeare, Brecht, and the Intercultural Sign*, impressively rise above fashionable discussions of negative cultural appropriation and examine other meanings that cultural "poaching" acquires in specific socio-historical contexts.

East of West analyzes the consumption as well as the production of cultural meanings in order to assess performance as a socially-embedded phenomenon. Consumption is seen as a creative act—

whether on the part of producers who "consume" borrowed cultural goods while integrating them in their performances or on the part of audiences that "consume" finished performances—since it "appropriates and reshapes the cultural goods and attendant ideological baggage handed to them by the producers of power" (2). Sponsler and Chen's anthology illustrates acts of consumption that are at the same time acts of resistance and re-production, processes which effectively blur boundaries between authors, performers, and audiences. This is where the titular East and West come into play: by presenting studies that span six hundred years of cultural borrowing across what Sponsler and Chen see as a fundamental ideological divide, the essays aim to subvert the notion of Western culture as dominant and aggressive and Eastern as pliant and passive.

The essays for the most part bear out editorial intentions by highlighting the power of creative consumption and complicating readings that reduce cultural borrowing to simple co-optation. But this is not the only success of the anthology—indeed, the essays blur the boundaries not only between producers and audiences but also between traditionally separated artistic forms. Positioning "performance" as a common denominator, they bring together such disparate artistic expressions as concrete poetry (a 1950s phenomenon involving a small number of words arranged on a page in patterns of repetition), hagiography, film, and theatre. More provocatively, by covering a six hundred-year period, they suggest that we have been living in a global cultural village far longer than we suppose.

Part I, "Textual Border Crossing: Linguistic, Semiotic, Performative," examines performances with multiple, contending meanings whose ultimate "victory" depends on the audience's active engagement. Marvin Carlson argues that the Western theatrical stage has long been a playground for contending languages, but that the intensification of cross-linguism in contemporary theatre increases its dependence on the audience's ability to comprehend the linguistic *mélange*. Claus Clüver examines concrete poetry as a semiotically overdetermined cultural form whose visual, verbal, and performance aspects make it accessible to readers from different linguistic and cultural traditions. Thus, the meaning of a concrete poem is never fixed; instead, it is continually reshaped via the reader's individual background. Karen Winstead examines the clash between Eastern and Western notions of "performing" Christian belief through Gregory of Tours' hagiographic writings. Winstead argues that Gregory's seeming promotion of a