

Transatlantic Broadway: The Infrastructural Politics of Global Performance.

By Marlis Schweitzer. *Transnational Theatre Histories*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; pp. xix + 246, 25 illustrations. \$95 cloth, \$90 paper, \$69.99 e-book.

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Reviewed by Nicole Berkin, *Stanford University*

In *Transatlantic Broadway: The Infrastructural Politics of Global Performance*, Marlis Schweitzer traces the transnational networks of people, objects, and ideas that facilitated the globalization of theatre culture, and specifically the production of Broadway, prior to World War I (1893–1914). Employing Margaret Werry’s definition of theatre as “a machine that produces global imaginaries” (4), Schweitzer contends that “Broadway, the street itself and the fantasy it inspired, was produced through the transatlantic flow of goods, ideas, performers, agents, impresarios, and photographs via ocean liners, telegraph cables, and the like” (6). Inspired by Shannon Jackson’s work on the infrastructural politics of performance, this engaging, effective study examines subordinate and marginalized elements of the theatre business, particularly “managerial dependency on machines or other objects” (17), and calls attention to the interaction between nonhuman objects and human labor that are often invisible in studies of early American theatre culture.

To conduct this ambitious project, Schweitzer situates her book in multiple fields of scholarship and draws on many methodologies. She extends current work on transnational performance by focusing on commercial theatre and by drawing on theories of posthumanism. Studies that position theatre in the capitalist context support her examination of the circulation of theatrical commodities and the interplay between impresarios’ aesthetic choices and their commercial pursuits. To show these circulations, Schweitzer expands beyond theatre and performance studies to deploy methodologies from cultural geography and sociology (particularly theories of space and mobility by Doreen Massey and Tim Cresswell) as well as new materialist studies (particularly those of Robin Bernstein, Jane Bennett, and others) and the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour.

Interweaving an impressive array of archival materials, many of which are underutilized by theatre scholars, each chapter in *Transatlantic Broadway* examines a different scale of networked people and objects that expanded the transnational movement of theatrical commodities. Chapter 1 explores how ocean liners both accelerated the pace of movement between the US and Europe and operated as sites of performance. Against the backdrop of the “machinic dramaturgy” (43) of competing British, American, and German steamer companies, along with the looming threat of war, Broadway managers entertained imperialist fantasies and capitalized on the speed and democratization of travel. Broadway professionals such as agent Elisabeth Marbury and impresario Charles Frohman fashioned themselves as “transnational subject[s]” (51) who could move between American and European markets and import entertainment from abroad. Ocean liners, harbors, and piers were performative spaces where theatre professionals conducted

business and courted publicity, and performances onboard—from attempted full-scale productions to impromptu performances by passengers—“functioned as a site for reproducing commercial theatre culture and exploring social mobility” (56).

Chapter 2 examines how the telegraph supported Broadway’s geographic expansion both “as a vehicle for transmitting information rapidly across national borders and as an actor in its own right that encouraged different forms of communion and new modes of performance” (72). Schweitzer shows how telegraphic performances promoted perceptions of immateriality while in fact encouraging specific practices on the ground: early twentieth-century managers, agents, and performers used the telegraph to participate, negotiate with, and even control plays and acts in Europe. In doing so, they “defied the limitations of physical geography and made their presence known in multiple locations without ‘being there’ in the flesh” (84). Chapter 3 turns to the assemblages of people and objects that occupied Broadway managers’ offices, exploring the interplay among human bodies, machines, and furniture. Superbly analyzing a series of photographs and published accounts of theatrical offices, Schweitzer investigates how these spaces operated as “centralized hubs in transnational actor-networks” (105) that promoted standardization, efficiency, and the collaboration between and among managers, agents, and theatrical services. Importantly, Schweitzer shows how the offices of Frohman, Henry W. Savage, and Marbury affirmed social hierarchies while also allowing for moments of progressiveness or rupture. For example, Schweitzer argues that agent Marbury’s office, located within Frohman’s Empire Theatre, operated as “a site of gendered anxiety,” that “challeng[ed] straightforward assumptions about femininity and imperial ambition” (117–18). Schweitzer’s rigorous research on Peter Mason and John Ryland, two African American men who moved through the ranks of Frohman’s enterprise, shows the interracial dynamics, marginalized labor, and changing social mobility within Broadway theatre offices.

The final chapter of Schweitzer’s book focuses on the role of print media in the promotion of foreign plays and performers. Schweitzer examines how the circulation of postcards, posters, and newspapers shaped the way US audiences viewed performers and plays from abroad. Drawing on Erin Hurley’s concept of “feeling-technologies,” (149) Schweitzer argues that print culture further extended Broadway’s “theatrical public sphere” (151) through the production of shared feeling. Schweitzer offers close readings of several print artifacts: a poster for a play featuring the controversial Salomé dance; postcards for an opera production that supported orientalist fantasies; and rival promotional campaigns for a Hungarian play that employed sensational journalism and invoked perceptions of authenticity. Through these examples, Schweitzer demonstrates that, like ocean liners, telegrams, and office furniture, print media scripted the way consumers encountered Broadway theatre culture, and specifically foreign performers, plays, music, and images.

By mapping the interrelationships between humans and objects and foregrounding the politics of infrastructure and space, Schweitzer’s interdisciplinary study offers a different model of theatre history and, specifically, a revisionist

history of Broadway. Examining the engines of commodity circulation within Broadway's early theatre culture, *Transatlantic Broadway* makes an important contribution to theatre and performance studies, American cultural history, histories of capitalism, and studies of print and material culture. By demonstrating that certain behaviors associated with the 24/7 digital age were in place in the pre-World War I era, Schweitzer also offers new perspectives on histories of technology and communication. Essential for scholars and teachers of theatre history, Schweitzer's study prompts readers to envision historiography as competing and overlapping threads or networks. Carefully researched and skillfully theorized, *Transatlantic Broadway* attends to performers, spaces, and archives that have been neglected in previous studies of the theatre, thus encouraging scholars to rethink the literal and disciplinary borders of US theatre history.

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Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki Theater. By Maki Isaka. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2016; pp. xvi + 256, \$50 cloth, \$50 e-book.

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Maki Isaka's *Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki Theater* approaches the world of Japanese *kabuki* theatre from the perspective of gender studies. The author focuses on *onnagata*—the *kabuki* actors responsible for playing female roles who are often, though not always, men. The book's conclusion is that *onnagata*, male and female alike, construct a version of femininity that is "intricate yet porous, precarious but binding, and codependent on the labyrinths of others" (ix). In short, their act of gendering follows the same logic as pedestrian performances in everyday life. As the author acknowledges in the introduction, such an investigation of *kabuki*'s gender impersonation is well-trod analytical ground in the years since the publication of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*. However, Isaka makes a number of important interventions in understanding how femininity is constructed and presented on the Japanese stage as well as in society as a whole.

First, Isaka intentionally wrestles with well-entrenched academic ideas about *kabuki* theatre's development that, as she argues, are often incorrect, simplified, or based on false premises. For example, she points out that there is no consensus among scholars on the oft-referenced "three-stage trajectory" (17) of *kabuki* history, in which female roles were first played by adult women, then young boys (*wakashu*), and ultimately adult men. Isaka argues that this narrative of evolution—which centers around the question of imitation and the debate about whether biological woman and their femininity are relevant to the *onnagata*'s art—has "misinformed our understanding of *onnagata* artistry and helped thwart career building in this vocation by women" (18) by distancing *kabuki* from the imitation of women. Isaka, uniquely and importantly, goes against such readings by