

## Theatre Research in Canada Recherches théâtrales au Canada

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**Laura Levin and Marlis Schweitzer, eds. Performance Studies in Canada. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017, 464 pp.**

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**LAURA LEVIN AND MARLIS SCHWEITZER, eds.**  
***Performance Studies in Canada.***

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KELSEY BLAIR

From fields of study to areas of interest, spatial metaphors are commonly used to describe academic disciplines. It is fitting, then, that the sub-title of the introductory chapter of *Performance Studies in Canada*, edited by Laura Levin and Marlis Schweitzer, is "Mapping Genealogies and Geographies of Performance Cultures." The volume, which utilizes cartography as a central organizing principle, offers a sketch of the disciplinary, intellectual, and artistic landscape of performance studies in the territory currently known as Canada in the early twenty-first century. While the scope of such a project necessarily leaves certain areas under-charted, the book offers its readers—both those encountering the topic for the first time and those already familiar with the terrain—an essential pathway for navigating the field.

Co-written by Levin and Schweitzer, the first chapter begins with three scenes involving one of Canada's idealized performance studies subjects: current prime minister Justin Trudeau. The hashtags that conclude the third of these scenes—"#GenerationTrudeau #teamtrudeau #daddytrudeau" (6)—playfully situate the collection as both Canadian and thoroughly contemporary. As is the case in many other academic disciplines, international trends strongly influence Canadian performance studies scholars, and, as Levin and Schweitzer candidly note, this influence does not necessarily flow in both directions. The stakes of field-definition are, therefore, pressing for Canadian researchers. Moving swiftly, Levin and Schweitzer summarize the emergence of performance studies in Canada and compellingly articulate the collection's aims to both reflect and "help build a critical discourse about performance studies in Canada" (12). Of course, in the early twenty-first century, what "Canada" means is actively being unsettled. How/can an academic discipline situated within the borders of the nation-state of Canada define itself without reifying colonial narratives and operations of power? As the authors suggest, "trying to insert Indigenous practices into the frame of performance studies also runs the risk of reinforcing the very colonial epistemologies these works critique" (26). While the observation that "what is often swallowed by an omnivorous performance studies is the cultural specificity of Indigenous actions" (ibid) gestures towards, and participates in, an on-going conversation in the field of international performance studies, Levin and Schweitzer's eloquent and concise articulation of the importance of this observation, and its concrete manifestations, in the territory now known as Canada makes a significant contribution to the field in this territory and beyond.

The book distinguishes itself from other disciplinary surveys in both structure and content. Performance studies anthologies often organize essays in relation to chronology or key

theoretical terms. Levin and Schweitzer take a different approach, grouping the essays into four thematic clusters: performative geographies; spectacles of nation; reframing political resistance; and practicing research. These groupings accurately represent the broad research interests of Canadian performance studies scholars and subtly subvert international trends: in form, as well as content, performance studies in Canada is distinct from other national contexts. Critically, these groupings also function to subtly orient the reader away from well-trodden disciplinary genealogies and toward current applications of core concepts. To this end, unlike many introductory texts, the collection does not include field-defining works. Rather, the essays extend Levin and Schweitzer's emphasis on the contemporary, offering new texts by many of Canada's leading performance studies scholars. This includes chapters by Susan Bennett, who introduces the term "cultural topography" to investigate how Canadian cities "perform" in a global environment; Peter Dickinson, who uses performance ethnography to examine site-specific dance and the performance of public in Vancouver; Heather Davis-Fisch, who explores settler and Indigenous place naming in British Columbia; Natalie Alvarez, who queries performance and intimacy in strategic simulations of war; Erin Hurley, who draws from a Canadian genealogy of materialism and from theories of new materialism to analyze performances by Leslie Baker and Andréane Leclerc; and Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson, who reflects on affect, politics, and the Idle No More movement. Alongside the book's other pieces, these texts—which predominantly investigate twenty-first century case studies—reflect the complex, present-oriented, shape of the Canadian performance studies landscape.

Individual essays in the collection are uniformly strong. I was particularly taken by Naila Keleta-Mae's essay, which uses autoethnography to trace her experience teaching her performance piece *on love*. Identifying as a body that reads as female and Black in Canada, Keleta-Mae explains that her "use of autoethnography in academic settings like this book is[...]about a political goal of engaging with power as an individual and as a collective" (319). The chapter describes the process of creating *on love* in the context of an undergraduate course comprised of predominantly non-Black students. She includes several photographs and concludes with an excerpt from the beginning of *on love*, both of which help illuminate the performance, the pedagogical process, and the significance of the autoethnographic form as a means of engaging with power. Dylan Robinson also contributes a standout piece in "Enchantment's Irreconcilable Connection: Listening to Anger, Being Idle No More." In the chapter, Robinson refuses to use the Idle No More movement "as a resource for enriching the discourse of performance studies" (212). Instead, he, examines three Idle No More gatherings, and considers "how sensory and affective politics are materialized in public space" (213). In doing so, he compellingly demonstrates why "productive oscillations, admixtures, and orchestrations of affirmative anger, of playful rage, and of enchanted resentment" (231) are essential for sustaining colonial resistance. Read alongside the other essays, Robinson's piece evinces the collection's commitment to scholarship that analyzes and enacts processes of decolonization.

As with any project of *Performance Studies in Canada's* scope, some areas of the intellectual landscape are more fleshed out than others, and there is little in-depth engagement with the intersections between performance and queer theory or performance and disability in

Canada. As the editors make clear, however, such omissions gesture toward the places not yet widely known and function as provocations for future work. Indeed, one of the collection's primary strengths is that it facilitates new research directions for theatre and performance studies in Canada, making it a significant contribution to both fields.