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Jayne Wark, *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America*. Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006, 304 pp., 78 illus., $32.95 paper, $80 cloth

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Wales suggests ca. 1200. The ruins of Pill Priory are relatively obscure and, given the doubts over its foundation date, its omission is understandable. It is more difficult to account for the omission of Talley Abbey, a major house of Premonstratensian canons, which like Strata Florida was also patronized by Lord Rhys. Like the church at Pill, the architecture of Talley is extremely austere, but in that respect it could have been included to show that Romanesque architecture could be austere and minimalist. Ornamentation depended on funds available for building and also on the attitude to architecture of the religious order involved. At St Davids the canons and bishop obviously wanted a building extensively decorated with sumptuous Romanesque ornament, but this excess was virtually unthinkable at the Cistercian houses (though some chevron is known from Margam, Strata Florida, and Whitland). This variation in ornamentation perhaps also shows that Romanesque or Gothic classifications are sometimes very blurred and uncertain distinctions in the late twelfth century. Romanesque and Gothic are after all modern conceptions and classifications of twelfth-century style in architecture. Contemporary patrons of architecture obviously saw things differently than we do today. Perhaps it may well be that the author discounted both Pill and Talley because of their relatively late or uncertain foundation dates (Talley dates from the mid-1180s, but nevertheless is contemporary with St Davids), and thus he did not regard them as Romanesque. Possibly both these important monuments will be included in a second edition. The author does point out in his preface that however comprehensive he has tried to be some monuments have inevitably escaped notice. Where does one draw that rather blurred Romanesque to Gothic line?

One also wishes for some basic maps to show the locations of all the buildings mentioned in the text. This would not only locate them for readers who may be inspired enough to go and look at the monuments but would also help in giving an overall geographical perspective. In this respect it would perhaps be relevant to also include a map showing the relative geographical distinction between those areas under Norman and Welsh control in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Unaccountably, but surely the fault of the printer, some of the colour plates are missing from my copy of the book. A few typos have also escaped editing. Thurlby is an excellent photographer and, having photographed some of the same monuments, one must inevitably admire his skill (the former gatehouse tower at Ludlow, for instance, is a veritable black hole). A minority of photographs are a little too dark, and one suspects that this is actually the fault of the printer, as this reviewer has also suffered in the past from the apparent inability of modern printing techniques to reproduce good quality black-and-white images. That said, on the whole the photographs are good and intelligible, and their placements follow the flow of the text – full marks here to Andy Johnson for his layout.

As with Thurlby's earlier work, *The Herefordshire School of Romanesque Sculpture*, this book is surely destined to become the standard reference work for Romanesque architecture and sculpture in Wales, and deservedly so. One must congratulate the author on his energy and staying power in producing such a work – especially, as he explains in the preface, in the face of almost incessant rain on a one-month-long field trip to Wales. Many others would have given up and gone home (as apparently Henry II once did). The book sets Welsh Romanesque in perspective and shows the extent and diversity of the surviving material very well. For those with a specific interest in Romanesque architecture this book is a must-have and for those with a more casual interest it is an invaluable guide for forays around Wales (possibly read in conjunction with the *Buildings of Wales* series). Moreover it is also extremely good value for money.

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While performance art has traditionally prided itself on being a fringe aesthetic – defying conceptual categorization and giving voice to marginalized subjectivities – study of this medium has, by now, grown into an established and methodologically coherent scholarly field. The books that have been instrumental in defining this maverick genre, such as Amelia Jones' *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (1998) or Rebecca Schneider's *Explicit Body in Performance* (1997), are primarily theoretical in their focus, offering complex readings of performance art through sophisticated blends of post-structuralism, phenomenology, and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Often composed in an improvisational style that, following J.L. Austin's definition of "performative," treats speech as embodied and socially contingent action, these authors take care to foreground the partiality of their critical and historical accounts. In the words of Meiling Cheng, performance art theorists stage "*individual performance[s]* that address both the *exigency of naming* (the edge) and the *ineluctable partiality of the thing named* (the center)."[1]

Given this affinity for theoretically inflected close readings, and writing that problematizes historical documentation (for

Peggy Phelan, "the act of writing towards disappearance, rather than the act of writing towards preservation"[2]), it is not surprising that few comprehensive histories of performance art have been written to date. This poses problems for newcomers to the field, and students in particular, who do not yet have the requisite background in Lacan or Merleau-Ponty, and who are looking for a clear introduction to the principal characters, aesthetic forms, and theoretical debates that have animated the medium's history. From this perspective, Jayne Wark's new book, *Radical Gestures*, which attempts to trace the history of feminist performance art in North America since the 1960s, is an extremely welcome addition to the field, promising to serve as an important resource for those who teach and study performance art.

The unambiguously political focus of the book helps to redress the shortcomings of the other major historical work of this kind, RoseLee Goldberg's *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (1979, 1988). Although Goldberg can be usefully read alongside Wark to help fill out a discussion of the origins of performance art (for Goldberg, it all begins with the Futurists), she presents the history of this controversial medium in a largely depoliticized manner. Goldberg focuses mainly on celebrating the experiments of male artist-geniuses and provides little analysis of the ways that performance has fiercely grappled with issues or race, class, gender, and sexuality. As a result, a narrative emerges that flattens out social difference and cannot come to grips with the blatant sexism and racism of much early performance art work.[3]

Rather than treating performance art as a series of formalist experiments – with time, space, shape, dimension, etc. – Wark carefully draws out the political implications and aspirations of the medium. She lays down the groundwork for this kind of analysis in her insightful first chapter, "Art, Politics, and Feminism in the 1960s." Here, she offers a fascinating discussion of the emergence of performance art in the political climate of the late 1960s, when the New Left was growing disillusioned in the wake of failed antiwar movements. Increasingly, the Left was forced to consider the limits of American democracy, the irreconcilability of intellectual and working class interests, and the glaring corruption of a political system where, to quote Robert Smithson, "[d]irect political action [became] a matter of trying to pick poison out of the boiling stew."[4] In this atmosphere of extreme distrust, Wark suggests, artists were forced to renegotiate their relationship to political responsibility, often through strategies of "refusal and negation."[5] The industrial, elemental, and serial forms of the minimalists, who Wark reads as performance art's immediate ancestors, thus emerge as "critical refusals of the aesthetic ideals of postwar Modernism" and, correspondingly, as attacks on the elitist values of originality, superiority, and contextual autonomy that fueled modernist aesthetics. The problem with this tactic, a problem minimalism shared with conceptual art, was that its contestation came as formally opaque negations of art and its institutions, without elaborating its connection to the larger world of the social in a publicly legible way.

Using this history as background and foil, Wark makes a compelling argument that women artists of the period, galvanized by feminist and civil rights movements, developed a much less ambivalent relationship to the political. Unlike their male peers who frequently saw art as being "compromised by, or in conflict with, their political goals," they saw it as a viable site for transforming political structures, for realizing what Peter Bürger has identified as the central goal of the historical avant-garde: organizing "a new life praxis from a basis in art."[6] Moreover, feminist performance artists endeavoured to rupture the art/life divide by moving beyond the self-referential terms of minimalist and conceptual art. Unlike male artists in the 1960s and '70s, who were starting to feature quotidian domestic practices such as sweeping and scrubbing in their work, women artists approached "the merging of art and life in performance not as a way to expand the aesthetic terrain of art,"[7] but rather as a powerful critique of the division of private and public realms and as a means of actively transforming the terrain of the social.

Wark's clever resituating of feminist performance within the context of larger and ostensibly apolitical art movements is one of the book's greatest strengths and recalls similar groundbreaking projects of alternative genealogy found in recent histories of performance art. I am thinking here of Rebecca Schneider's reading of contemporary feminist performance as a restaging of the "savage" female found in early avant-garde art and Amelia Jones' reading of Shigeko Kubata's vagina paintings as an ironic rehearsal of the "Pollockian performative."[8] Wark offers another telling take on these "unladylike" practices by reading Carolee Schneeman's and Yoko Ono's performances next to their contemporaries in the Fluxus movement. Wark wittily reminds us that while Yves Klein made his career out of dipping women in blue paint (*Anthropometries*) and Ben Patterson had a woman "licked clean by men" (*Lick Piece*), Schneeman was "rewarded by being kicked out Fluxus because her work was too 'messy'."[9]

While Wark returns to many familiar moments of performance art history in her book, suggesting that her target audience may not be seasoned historians of this medium, her descriptions of literally dozens of feminist performances come together to form a clear and accessible primer for beginning students. While more advanced scholars may find some of the descriptions of individual artists too brief or simplistic, other kinds of interventions here will be of strong interest, such as the weaving of oft-ignored Canadian artists into a traditionally U.S.-centered performance art tapestry. For example, in her fascinating chapter "Roles and Transformations," Wark reconstructs a history of

female impersonation (women playing women *and* women playing men) that includes Martha Wilson's Duchampian Rose Sélavy, Tanya Mars' Elizabeth I, Eleanor Antin's Ballerina, and the Clichettes' satirical boy bands. While deploying this larger North American frame undoubtedly breaks new ground in thinking beyond the nation as an organizing entity, it feels as though the stakes of putting American and Canadian work in dialogue could sometimes be articulated more clearly. What does it mean methodologically to trace the routes of artists like Martha Wilson from Nova Scotia to New York, or to define Montreal's Galerie Powerhouse, situated in francophone Quebec, as the "Canadian counterpart"[10] to New York's woman-centered A.I.R. Gallery? What can these connections tell us about the cross-border circulation of ideas and artists, and its production of urban centres and peripheries, artistic differences and affinities?

Wark's chapters also thoughtfully disrupt traditional chronological approaches to the avant-garde by organizing her analyses according to feminist strategies that cut across the 1970s, '80s, and '90s. These include cultural feminism, autobiography and narrative, roles and transformations, and embodiment and representation. This is part of Wark's larger and quite convincing critique of the problems of "generational periodizing" in studies of feminist performance. As Wark notes, this work is usually "framed within a generational model in which 1970s feminists' supposedly naïve and 'essentialist' ideas about the body and sexuality were displaced by the 'anti-essentialist' discourse analysis of 1980s feminists, who in turn have been criticized by 'third-generation' feminists for failing to address the primacy of the 'real' physical body and for thus causing the denigration and subsequent neglect of early feminist art."[11] This common periodizing impulse can be seen in Tanya Mars' recent description of early feminist performance as individually oriented ordeal art and later feminist performance as a communally oriented satire, or to use Wark's example, in Miwon Kwon's genealogy of site-specific art as moving from essentialist phenomenology to anti-essentialist constructivism.[12]

Wark seems to work against this rigid historical frame in at least two ways: first, by reminding us that decidedly anti-essentialist artists (e.g., Martha Rosler) can be found in the 1970s, the so-called age of essentialism; and second, by reminding us, as does Naomi Schor, in her powerful rereading of Luce Irigaray, that this "essentialism is not one."[13] At crucial moments of the book, Wark offers astute summaries of those complex debates that have surrounded multiple definitions of essentialism and other models of gendered and sexed identity, telescoping pivotal conversations that have taken place in feminism around language, experience, embodiment, and performativity. I might add that Wark's graceful review of these sometimes thorny debates will be tremendously valuable to students, especially in their early encounters with philosophical heavyweights like Irigaray and Judith Butler. What emerges from this book, where distilled theory seesaws with and informs performance art analysis, is a fuller understanding of *how* performance art signifies. In fact, as the book implicitly tells us, the meaning of this medium might inhere less in what performances say than in how feminist theorists at various historical moments make them speak. In other words, the book foregrounds the performative role that theory has played in shaping performance art, moving beyond mere description to produce the thing that it names.

As a book that promotes meta-consciousness about historical framing, *Radical Gestures* naturally invites interesting questions about the inclusions and exclusions produced by some its genealogical gestures. For example, Wark tells us that she has limited her study to considering performance as a visual art practice, since "most artists who do performance also produce other kinds of visual art and identify themselves as visual artists."[14] Correspondingly, she excludes those works that have been of interest to scholars in the field of performance studies, which she sees as synonymous with "experimental theatre, especially in New York." Certainly, one could point out that this reveals a somewhat limited attention to more recent performance studies writing that approaches performance art from a more expansive interdisciplinary and geographical perspective (the writings of José Muñoz, Meiling Cheng, and Adrian Heathfield come to mind), but it is perhaps more interesting to note the blind spots that this particular exclusion highlights within Wark's book.

It seems an odd move, for example, to claim that performance art is the proper object of the visual arts, given that the medium has long prided itself on transgressing disciplinary boundaries. Indeed, while the performances that Wark chooses to study demonstrate an awareness of the influence of other media like video, these introductory claims of disciplinary priority subtly threaten to reinscribe the anti-theatricality of modernist critics that early performance artists rebelled against and that sought to preserve the autonomy and special character of the visual arts. More importantly, Wark's decision to sideline performance studies genealogies is somewhat counterintuitive given the overwhelming amount of space that she devotes to performance theory coming out of this field, and particularly the writings of theatre theorists like Sue-Ellen Case, Rebecca Schneider, and Jill Dolan. These theories, coupled with the text-driven performance pieces that they were formulated to describe (e.g., solo shows produced in theatres, which were often based on the artists' life stories), could go a long way towards supporting one of Wark's central arguments: that our privileging of the body in analyses of performance art has overshadowed an attention to "narrative and autobiography"[15] as constitutive features of the medium.

Nevertheless, if these problems surrounding the conceptual ownership and definition of performance stick out in *Radical Gestures*, this is an inevitable result of the questions about genealogy that Wark eloquently raises, and as such, they ultimately can be seen as adding to the strength of the book. Wark's commitment to teasing out the political legacies and limitations of feminist performance art persists until the book's final pages, where she asks us to consider the challenges posed by the growing twenty-first-century commodification of performance art and adoption of a girls-gone-wild post-feminism, which equates oppositional feminism with the hyper-sexualization of the female body (strippercize is perhaps the latest incarnation). *Radical Gestures* is vital for those invested in teaching performance art as a laboratory where representations of women can be examined and contested, and where productive tensions within feminism can be interrogated in a critically responsive and embodied form. As Wark concludes, it is precisely in these passionate conversations and debates about the "radical" in performance that its history "lives on in the present."[16]

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Notes

1 Meiling Cheng, *In Other Los Angeleses: Multicentric Performance Art* (Berkeley, 2002), 20.
2 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London, 1993), 165.
3 See Goldberg's reading of Oscar Kokoschka's *Murderer, Hope of Women* on p. 53, which neutrally describes misogyny as an affront to the conservative tastes of the Viennese public.
4 Robert Smithson, quoted in Jayne Wark, *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America* (Montreal and Kingston, 2006), 16.
5 Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 16.
6 Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 123.
7 Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 56.
8 See Rebecca Schneider, "After us the Savage Goddess," *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London, 1997), 126–52; and Amelia Jones, "The 'Pollockian Performative' and the Revision of the Modernist Subject," *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis and London, 1998), 53.
9 Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 40.
10 Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 50.
11 Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 168.
12 See Tanya Mars, "Not Just for Laughs: Women, Performance, and Humour," *Caught in the Act: An Anthology of Performance Art by Canadian Women* (Toronto, 2004), 20–40; and Miwon Kwon, "Genealogy of Site-Specificity," *One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), 11–32.
13 Naomi Schor, "This Essentialism Which is not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray," *Engaging with Irigaray*, eds Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Witford (New York, 1994), 57–78. Here, Schor is playing with the title of Irigiray's book, *This Sex Which is Not One*, which has come to define debates around essentialism and anti-essentialism in feminist theory.
14 Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 10.
15 Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 31.
16 Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 210.

Laurier Lacroix, *Suzor-Coté, lumière et matière*, catalogue d'exposition, Ottawa, Musée des beaux-arts du Canada ; Québec, Musée du Québec. Montréal, Les Éditions de l'Homme, 2002, 383 p. Traduction anglaise par Neil MacMillan sous le titre *Suzor-Coté: Light and Matter*.

Ce livre, publié en 2002, est la première monographie sur Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté en trente-cinq ans, soit depuis la publication du *Suzor-Coté* de Hugues de Jouvancourt en 1967. Entre ces deux dates, alors que tout le domaine des études en art canadien se transformait, profitant à la fois de l'implantation progressive de réseaux universitaires et de la diversité des champs de recherche, Suzor-Coté était ailleurs. Seules quelques œuvres, isolées au rang d'icônes, profitaient de l'habitude des présentations de collections permanentes dans les musées d'art au Canada. En même temps et plus qu'aucun autre artiste de la même époque, Suzor-Coté est entré dans un système de comparaisons muséographiques, pensées rapidement pour s'offrir au visiteur. Laurier Lacroix rappelle celle de 1987 à la McMichael Art Gallery opposant Suzor-Coté et Clarence Gagnon comme illustrateurs de Maria Chapdelaine, suivie en 1991 d'une confrontation avec Maurice Cullen à la Maison des arts de Laval. On ajoutera un « face-à-face » entre Suzor-Coté et Alfred Laliberté au Musée du Québec en 1993. L'espace public est donc un seuil obligé pour approcher l'artiste et Laurier Lacroix inscrit sa propre réflexion dans cette continuité, qui possède d'ailleurs de forts ancrages historiques. Très tôt, l'artiste a construit sa carrière par l'exposition de ses œuvres et cette stratégie lui a permis de mettre en place une puissante dynamique d'affirmation de soi. C'est le marché de l'art montréalais – la galerie William Scott & Sons – qui lui offre, en 1901, un premier espace de visibilité conséquente. L'artiste fera d'ailleurs le voyage de Paris à Montréal pour l'occasion. C'est l'École des beaux-arts de Montréal qui monte la première rétrospective de son œuvre en 1929. S'il ne fut jamais vraiment absent de la scène après cette date, il est vrai de dire qu'une redécouverte s'effectue au milieu des années 1970. Là encore, elle se réalise grâce au marché de l'art. L'institution prend le relais pour