

The Only Way Home Is through the Show: Performance Work of Lois Weaver.

Edited by Jen Harvie and Lois Weaver. Bristol: LADA and Intellect, 2015. Pp. 320 + illus. £24.50 Pb.

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The Only Way Home is an account of the performance work of Lois Weaver, ‘simply one of the most important feminist artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries,’ as Jen Harvie writes (p. 8). Weaver was a central player in a number of experimental feminist lesbian theatre productions beginning with Spiderwoman Theater, which she co-founded with Muriel Miguel in 1976, and continuing with the WOW Café (founded with her partner Peggy Shaw); the collective Split Britches (Weaver, Shaw and Deb Margolin); through her stint as co-director of Gay Sweatshop, professor at Queen Mary, University of London; collaborative performances with Stacey Makishi; and solo work as her alter ego Tammy Whynot, a country star turned lesbian performance artist. The book is organized loosely chronologically, beginning with Weaver’s childhood and college years in rural Virginia and concluding with Weaver’s current Tammy Whynot performances on ageing and sex. Harvie has wisely allowed for some overlap and repetition, while providing an overview for each chapter.

Weaver’s NYC brand of lesbian feminist activism was literally and metaphorically miles away from the earnest and asexual (although lesbian-inflected) feminist activist art and performance (most of which was grounded in studio art, rather than theatre) that was being shown on the West Coast in the 1970s, and her work was eagerly embraced by up-and-coming feminist critics, including Jill Dolan, co-editor along with Holly Hughes and Carmelita Tropicana of *Memories of the Revolution: The First Ten Years of the WOW Café Theater* (2015). Dolan, along with a number of other well-known critical theorists who have written on the intersection of feminism, lesbianism and theatre, such as Elin Diamond, Sue-Ellen Case, Lisa Duggan, Peggy Phelan, Diana Taylor, Kim Solga and Deirdre Heddon, have essays in this book, allowing for a multiplicity of perspectives. My two favourites were those of Phelan, who in a moment of extreme jet lag was pulled into an impromptu performance playing the straight academic to Weaver’s extravagant and naked femme, and a flattered but befuddled Case, who recalled her sheer panic when called up to the stage at WOW having met Weaver a few days earlier on a plane after refusing to give up her aisle seat to Shaw.

The personal accounts of these writers, better known for their more academic publications, alone make this book worth reading. But there is much more. First and foremost is Weaver’s own voice in a multiplicity of formats, such as an interview with Miguel and Tammy Whynot; excerpts from Weaver’s performances *Faith and Dancing* and *Miss America* and Tammy Whynot performances; and instructions for performances that are generous, non-judgemental and inclusive, such as *The Long Table* and *Porch Sitting*. There are full-colour photographs, many taken by David Caines for this book, of Weaver’s props, along with documentary photographs of past performances. Many of Weaver’s collaborators and students, including Moe Angelos and Holly Hughes (WOW), Deb Margolin (Split Britches), Makishi and Curious (Leslie Hill and Helen Paris) have

contributed essays about the collaborative period that fill out the role that Weaver has played as director, producer, actor and femme first at WOW Café and then in the United Kingdom and indeed all over the world. Peggy Shaw's foreword sums it up:

"In shows, you have to do it. You can't call in sick . . ." The only way home is through the show!' (p. 7).

Theatre Research International 43.1 doi: [10.1017/S0307883318000184](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0307883318000184)

Performing the Digital: Performativity and Performance Studies in Digital

Cultures. Edited by Martina Leeker, Imanuel Schipper, and Timon Beyes.

Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016. Pp. 304. €29.99 Pb; free Ebook.

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Performing the Digital brings together fourteen essays on digital culture and performance studies from scholars and practitioners across a wide range of disciplines, such as theatre, media studies, the fine arts, digital cultures and even business and management studies. The result is a rich, if sometimes sprawling, exploration of the many points of connection between digital experience and performance practice in the twenty-first century.

The collection begins with a co-authored introduction by the editors, which briefly outlines the field and identifies the broad questions that unite the subsequent chapters: 'How is performativity shaped by contemporary technological conditions? And how do performative practices reflect and alter techno-social formations?' (p. 9). A 'performative turn' is identified in cultural studies and the social sciences, alongside a digital revolution in all aspects of contemporary life, not least the performing arts. The result is the possibility that all aspects of human interaction can be considered performance, and furthermore that 'today's technological condition' (p. 13) is constantly shaping what such performances of everyday life look like.

Such a proposition is helpful in that it acknowledges the porous boundaries between 'real life' and 'art', as well as the 'actual' and the 'virtual'. But it also casts the net of discussion very widely, creating a challenge for the coherence of the collection as a whole. The editors forgo attempting to group the essays thematically, opting instead for what they call 'a non-hierarchical and "flat"' way of ordering the chapters (p. 14). Within this model, each essay becomes a stand-alone section in and of itself, preceded by a verb in its present progressive tense ('Historicizing', 'Encrypting', 'Co-producing'). In this way, the unfolding nature of both digital culture and performance is emphasized, alongside the spreadable, summary-defying experience of networked life.

This means that the very fine series of essays that follow do feel like thirteen individual studies rather than a joined-up investigation. The brevity of the introduction, the lack of a conclusion, and most noticeably the absence of an index add to this impression. However, once this is accepted, a wealth of exciting and provocative case studies are to be found. Many of the chapters mix theorization with practice-oriented research, illustrating how individual and often very localized arts projects contribute to the wider theorization of the field. Imanuel Schipper's chapter on 'The Performative Spectator', for instance, in which he links the nineteenth-century *flâneur* to the