



# **Cutting Performances: Collage Events, Feminist Artists, and the American Avant-Garde (Theater: Theory/Text/Performance)**

*James M. Harding*

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"A thoughtful and engaging contribution to the field that will have a sustained and lasting impact on the way feminist performance is defined and understood, as well as on how feminist histories and historiographies continue to challenge and transform the larger field of performance."

---Charlotte Canning, The University of Texas at Austin

"Harding forcefully challenges and destabilizes the male-centered Eurocentric genealogy of the avant-garde, which he claims is an uncontested, linear, positivistic history, unproblematic by theory. Then he argues that this gendered biased version of the European avant-garde is carried over into American historiography . . . A forceful case for a revisionist history."

---Daniel Gerould, The City University of New York Graduate Center

*Cutting Performances* challenges four decades' worth of scholarship on the American avant-garde by offering a provocative reconceptualization of the history of avant-garde performance along feminist lines. Focusing on five women artists (Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Gertrude Stein, Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneemann, and Valerie Solanas) whose performance aesthetics made prominent use of collage techniques, James M. Harding sheds light on the cultural history of the avant-garde and the role that experimental women artists played in that history. He investigates the prominent position that collage technique occupied within the artists' performance aesthetic, and the decisively feminist inflection that their work gives to collage as a mode of avant-garde expression. The radical juxtapositions in their works produce the powerful effects of making the familiar strange and establishing contexts from which new understandings may emerge.

Harding examines the performative dimensions of collage in experimental, feminist redefinitions of the literary, graphic, and theatrical arts, filling a void in a scholarly discourse that, while ostensibly about the vanguard, has lagged well behind other significant theoretical and historiographical currents. *Cutting Performances* not only challenges assumptions that have governed scholarship on the American avant-garde

but also establishes a context to rethink the history of American avant-garde performance along feminist lines. It will appeal to audiences interested in theater history and performance studies as well as those interested in the cultural history of the avant-garde and the role that feminist experimental artists have played in it.

James M. Harding is Professor of English at the University of Mary Washington. His other books include *Not the Other Avant-Garde: Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance* (with John Rouse); *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies* (with Cindy Rosenthal); and *Contours of the Theatrical Avant-Garde: Performance and Textuality*.

Illustration: Carolee Schneemann in *Eye Body-36 Transformative Actions* (1963) Action for camera (Photograph by Erró). Reproduced by permission of Carolee Schneemann.

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