

Alternative Art Scholarship



By Amelia Jones, author

Intellect Books is a premier site for the nurturing of innovative scholarship in the arts and humanities. There is no better or more sympathetic editorial support for books that do not ‘fit’ the often-formulaic models of academic publishing; no press does a better job with high production values combined with reasonable pricing, which makes the books available to those otherwise unable to justify the expense of critical works on the visual and performing arts. Intellect has thus been a crucial force in nurturing the development of alternative scholarship across art, performance and cultural studies.

Photography:
Ken Gonzales-Day

As a multi-disciplinary scholar of culture, visual art, performance and feminist/queer theory, I have continued to gravitate towards Intellect since my first – excellent – experience with them between 2010 and 2012. At that time, I was shopping around a book project addressing the historicization of performance art, a topic of frequent academic and art world conversations at the time. I invited Adrian Heathfield to join me as co-editor so that the book would offer dual perspectives – my own, stemming from art history training, and Heathfield’s, whose background was in performance studies. Intellect embraced our approach from the outset and, throughout the process of producing this anthology, was not only supportive, but totally ‘got’ the project – working with us on the complicated design needs of this alternative academic book. The final product – *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* – turned out even better than I imagined. It is informative, useful and beautifully designed. *Perform, Repeat, Record* exemplifies the fact that Intellect also manages to make their books, even those with more

than one hundred images, relatively affordable – a politically significant mission as art books in particular become increasingly expensive.

With this project a huge success, I began referring the publisher to others. When maverick feminist artist Faith Wilding came to me for advice on a book project she was planning with Shannon Stratton, I immediately suggested Intellect – who went on to publish the lovely and informative *Faith Wilding's Fearful Symmetries* (2019).

Intellect has nurtured a host of other powerful books for which I have written essays – including Dominic Johnson's edited book, *Pleading in the Blood: The Art and Performances of Ron Athey* (2013) and Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason's *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices* (2012). It was the gorgeous and smart *Pleading in the Blood*, along with my experience working with Intellect for *Perform, Repeat, Record*, that made the press my first choice for *Queer Communion: Ron Athey* (2020). This latter project my co-editor (Andy Campbell) and I asked the press to produce as a pendant to *Pleading*, rather than positioning our book as competing with Johnson's edited volume. Once again, Intellect embraced our concept, and completely supported Campbell and me in developing and producing the extremely complex and image-heavy *Queer Communion* volume. It is a gorgeous and weighty book, which also includes (per our concept) a section of facsimiles of Athey's sketchbooks and diaries. Intellect never wavered in their support during this project.

The fact that my next edited volume is currently awaiting an Intellect contract is proof of my absolute trust in Intellect as the most exciting place for art and performance-related scholarship, as well as writing that defies the now-entrenched business models guiding most academic presses. I believe in what Intellect does 100%, just as they have repeatedly supported my oddball takes on art and performance that would otherwise struggle to find a home. ●

