

World of Dissocia, Realism, Narrative), Neilson has crafted a series of performance texts that are impossible to predict. It is a measure of the atmosphere created in his productions that the second act of *Dissocia*, which is scrupulously realistic (almost to the point of dramatic inertia), feels as uncanny as the dream logic of the play's first act.

In this, the first full-length monograph devoted to Neilson's work, Trish Reid succeeds in providing a context for perhaps the most protean playwright on the contemporary stage. The book follows a very rough chronology, from Neilson's early, tense explorations of power, sexuality, and trauma in *Penetrator*, *The Censor*, and *Stitching* through to the complex interrogations of the nature of performance in recent plays such as *Narrative* and *Unreachable*. In doing so, she remains alive to the theoretical and cultural questions that Neilson's work poses. As she points out, he interrogates certain key assumptions that audiences, critics, and academics make about performance.

She argues that the central fact of Neilson's texts is that they simply will not settle – that they aim to disrupt a simple mapping of the events staged on to contemporary debates about identity. It is this, Reid argues, that makes Neilson's work political, at least in its effects. The characters in his work can't be read; they do not yield up any fixed meanings; and as such this implicitly argues for an idea of identity which is radically fluid (even for characters who seem rooted firmly in quotidian reality, such as Stuart in *Realism*).

Reid's discussion is well supported by short essays from Gary Cassidy (on Neilson's working practices), Anna Harpin on the complex relation between theatricality and realism in the plays, Mark Brown on Neilson the Scottish theatre maker, and by an interview with Neilson himself. This is a very strong, comprehensive introduction to Neilson's work, and a thought-provoking examination of a playwright whose place in discussions of contemporary performance should, by rights, be far more secure than it currently is.

DAVID PATTIE

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Alison Jeffers and Gerri Moriarty, ed.

Culture, Democracy, and the Right to Make Art

London: Bloomsbury, 2017. 280 p. £75.

ISBN: 978-1-474-25835-7.

This is a vital collection for those among us undertaking, teaching, and researching a whole range of practices that are descended – directly or indirectly – from the community arts movement. It offers welcome reminders of what motivated a key period of innovation – ideas of how art could stand for things by standing *with* people, in their communities. For those, like myself, who started

out inspired by these practices but arrived too late, it clarifies what changed and how.

It's a tale of highly committed people, excited by the potential of a new way for art to play its part in political change, discovering allies within and between the communities they invested themselves in, and becoming a movement. The movement writes its manifestos and has its disputes, formalizes and improvizes, and gleefully bites the hands that feed it. The Arts Councils of England, Wales, and Northern Ireland step in and out, out and in, until ultimately it's Thatcherism that does for the resources that have allowed community arts to grow.

The unresolved issue of the book, and the field of practice, is the mutation from commitment to professionalism, the changed basis on which artists, in most cases, now create work with non-artists. Work is now led by the priorities of funders, enlightened or otherwise, but susceptible to impact-focus and target-chasing, and organizations whose priorities lie in more conservative aesthetics take a share of the work and the money that comes its way.

The mood is often melancholy about the drift away from explicit political commitment under multiple political and cultural pressures, and about the move from *cultural democracy* to the less radical *democratization of culture*. The distinction is made, quite forcefully, between community arts and participatory arts, on the basis of the key principle of shared authorship. The later chapters hold intriguing theoretical interventions – Sophie Hope on the 'aesthetic third', for example, the object that takes the space between artists and people they work with, and Owen Kelly on the 'dividuality' (as opposed to individuality) of the human subject, as a conceptual basis for the interdependence that community arts sought to celebrate and stimulate. In the conclusion the editors offer hope that the revolutionary impetus of community arts has not been lost, but lives on in a persistent spirit of dissent.

GARETH WHITE

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Tony Fisher

Theatre and Governance in Britain, 1500–1900: Democracy, Disorder, and the State

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

282 p. £75.

ISBN: 978-1-107-18215-8.

Fisher seeks here to 'describe a discourse on the theatre that began to emerge in the early modern period and whose aim was nothing less than to bring the stage within the orbit and sphere of government'. His argument astutely observes the gradual formation of the (modern) practices of governance from the 'theatre of the multitude' of

the sixteenth-century playhouses to the vigorous public debates that underscore the reforms that sought to regulate the nineteenth-century stage.

Taking as point of departure Plato's 'theatocratic metaphor' whereby theatre 'denotes the scandal of democracy itself', this is an ambitious project that carefully develops a complex and robust argument accounting for the multifaceted history of the anti-theatocratic prejudice by the beginning of the twentieth century: it is through the regulation of the modern state, and theatre's acceptance of its 'fundamental responsibility to government, that the long-sought-after recognition' of the stage was realized; it was by embracing the government's deontic power, Fisher continues, that the 'legitimate theatre had earned the "right" . . . to be treated quite differently from common forms of entertainment' – the privilege, that is, to criticize and unsettle the very deontic power that had moulded its subjectivity, thereby claiming its paradoxical autonomy.

Fisher's fascinating discussion unfolds methodically in the three parts of the book: the first part traces the origins of this discourse in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century playhouses; the second explores the importance of the anti-theatocratic metaphor in the formation of the bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth century; and the third part examines the governmentalization of the nineteenth-century stage as reflected in various debates and discourses framing theatre's legality, legitimacy, and legibility. Fisher presents his key arguments and extensive research in an accessible and compelling way, enabling the reader to navigate the book's complex conceptual backbone with ease.

This impressive endeavour delivers a remarkable piece of scholarship that is in dialogue with, and contributes to, theatre and performance studies as well as history, philosophy, and politics. Fisher provides not only a new insightful way of looking at the particular histories (of theatre and government), but a valuable methodological approach to the politics and history of the stage.

PHILIP HAGER

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Andy Lavender

**Performance in the Twenty-First Century:
Theatres of Engagement**

London; New York: Routledge, 2016. 236 p. £26.99.
ISBN: 978-0-4155-9235-2.

Lavender's monograph begins with an important premise: that performance in the early twenty-first century has moved beyond the tropes of 'classic postmodernism' – such as the 'cool fun' of ironic detachment and the subversive but possibly inconsequential play of contingent meaning – towards a new emphasis on engagement. And

throughout the book he draws a full spectrum of what these new theatres of engagement encompass, spanning forms that engage their audience in the live event through 'co-presence, corporeality, and embodied sensation' to performances that break with the postmodernist credo of the end of history to (re)engage with the movement of history and political reality.

A diverse set of case studies – among others, experimental verbatim performances by Dries Verhoeven, Rabih Mroué, and Rimini Protokoll, immersive performances by dreamthinkspeak, Zecora Ura Theatre and Punchdrunk, as well as non-theatrical performances like technologically mediated sports matches and theme parks – are explored across nine relatively independent essays grouped into five thematic clusters: 'Scenes of Engagement', 'On Mediating Performance', 'On (Not) Being an Actor', 'On (Not) Being a Spectator', and 'Theatre Beyond Theatre'.

Some of the terms that Lavender finds to conceptualize these engaged theatres particularly stand out, such as his notion of the *mise en sensibilité*, a supplement to the *mise en scène* that signals a move from 'scenic presentation to eventual experience'. His coining of transferable analytical terms such as this, coupled with clear, jargon-free prose, make many of the essays in the book excellent materials for teaching contemporary theatre and performance at undergraduate level. An essay on the performer in the age of YouTube videos – 'Me Singing and Dancing: YouTube's Performing Bodies' – which is available as an e-resource on Routledge's home page complete with links to the relevant videos, will thus make a valuable addition to many theatre and performance studies curricula.

A particularly provocative idea that emerges across the book is the suggestion that a process of commercialization and recuperation of radical theatre forms, as well as the attendant theoretical discourses, such as Jacques Rancière's much-cited emancipated spectator, in the context of our current experience economy, is now discernible. When Lavender analyzes how a regular event for high-earning 'city influencers' and 'urbanites' at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago relies on performative techniques of engagement and participation more commonly associated with experimental performance, he warns us that not all engaged spectating is emancipatory. Given this, it is very fitting that the book ends on Banksy's *Dismaland*, an apocalyptic theme park that satirizes our desire for engagement and experience through the use of these very techniques.

In Lavender's reading, engagement is, then, not always radical, resistant, or liberating but a fundamental mode of being in the twenty-first century, making his attention to its delights and pitfalls timely and relevant.

CARA BERGER