

generation of actresses including Mrs Dora Jordan and Mrs Sarah Siddons.

In some ways it is difficult to add to a field of study that has been so well developed since the 1990s, but Brooks bring to it a contemporary approach to the reading of professional practice informed by social history and aspects of social philosophy. Her study offers much to those working on the theatrical texts of the period with her seamless shifts from the analysis of the contexts of performance and the texts performed. It is also an invaluable read for anyone interested in the ways in which we might develop models for the analysis of women's professional contributions to the theatre industry beyond the eighteenth century.

MAGGIE B. GALE

doi:10.1017/S0266464X16000683

*George Home-Cook*

**Theatre and Aural Attention:  
Stretching Ourselves**

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. ix, 229 p.  
£55.

ISBN: 978-1-137-39368-5.

The practice of listening in theatre has become a subject of critical attention, in part prompted by recent interest in the twentieth-century philosophical turn towards the ear, as, for example, in Jean-Luc Nancy's *Listening* (2007), but also because there is a surge of contemporary theatre which is made expressly for it, including Theatre-in-the-Dark and Headphone Theatre.

Some of these new forms of theatre are the subject of George Home-Cook's *Theatre and Aural Attention*, which makes a significant contribution to the theoretical field of theatre sound and audience perception. Listening in the theatre is often seen as a battle between attention and distraction. Home-Cook demonstrates how aural attention is more than a matter of paying it or not; listening is conceived as an act, a movement of stretching and attention is particularly enactive, which makes a very persuasive case for attention as generative of the theatre experience.

Adopting a phenomenological model (and developing Don Ihde and Sven P. Arvidson's work in relation to theatre analysis) the aim of this book is to explore how theatre perception takes place within 'sound as intended by design and the actualities of sound as attended', which Home-Cook explores as a process (through navigating theatre noise and designed sound in Chapters 1 and 2) which is intersubjective (for instance amidst silence, as in Chapter 3) and is dynamic and embodied (through the sensing of atmospheres in Chapter 4). Though the emphasis is on aural attention, Home-Cook advises caution when pursuing the ear instead of the eye and he opts for the more democratic listener-spectator. In doing

so he repeatedly draws attention to the futility of sensory divides, exposing the fault lines of 'sound versus sight, hearing versus vision and spectating versus audiencing'; rather, following Arvidson, he explores attention as something which takes place within a sphere of experience which is intersensorial.

Home-Cook describes attending theatre as a form of practice-based research, but states that his endeavour doesn't draw on the 'wider socio-cultural significance of these performances' in order to maintain focus on the phenomenology of listening in theatre – though I wonder what would have been at stake (to use his term) if the sociocultural contexts of these performances and of the performance of listening, were considered? That said, this is an important study that presents a number of phenomenological manoeuvres amidst theatre sound and in doing so offers a new critical language for analysis of immersive theatre practices and for articulating the audience experience.

LYNNE KENDRICK

doi:10.1017/S0266464X16000695

*Kirsty Johnston*

**Disability Theatre and Modern Drama:  
Recasting Modernism**

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016,  
240 p. £21.99.

ISBN: 978-1-408-18478-3.

The field of Disability Studies is currently enjoying a highly productive phase as the relaxing of earlier certainties and increasing engagement with other disciplines yield new critical directions. This volume emerges from these developments, reconsidering representations of disabled characters in modernist drama beyond the usual objections that such figures are one-dimensional villains or victims rather than fully realized individuals. Drawing particular influence from Tobin Siebers's observation that disability is a central aesthetic value in modern art rather than an incidental theme or trope, the essays here bring contemporary perspectives, informed by disability experience and scholarship, seminal playwrights and texts. The result is a volume that is richly provocative, and confronts directly the complex layers of both disability and aesthetics.

The book is divided into two sections. In the first, Kirsty Johnston offers an overview of key theoretical ideas and practical concerns that circulate through Disability Theatre, from definitions of the field, through the complexities of casting and staging, and finally on to the effects of disabled performers taking on 'iconic' roles from modern drama. In the second, scholars and disabled artists offer their own reflections on particular works. There is, curiously, a narrow range of

authors addressed throughout, with Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* being the most prominent text (the contributors are mostly American) along with further discussion of Beckett, Brecht, and Lorca.

In her introductory sections, Johnston appropriately resists any temptation to foreground her own critical perspective, and neatly brings together the significant strands of each topic. She sets out a rigorous but accessible overview that opens out the field effectively for those with little previous engagement. In doing so, she brings the reader fully up to date, and carefully lays the groundwork for the subsequent sections.

These are varied in form as well as ideas. Michael Davidson and Ann M. Fox each contribute an essay, providing fresh perspectives on Beckett and Williams respectively. The linking theme is an approach that understands the protagonists' disabilities as real rather than symbolic. These are followed by Johnston's interview with Graeae's Artistic Director, Jenny Sealey, which brings a refreshing and resolutely non-academic set of artistic insights into play. Finally the text of a 2003 multimedia performance art piece by Terry Galloway, M. Shane Grant, Ben Gunter, and Carrie Sandahl allows the writer-performers, particularly Galloway and Sandahl, to wrestle with their love-hate responses to *The Glass Menagerie*. This enjoyably provocative chapter exemplifies the contradictory perspectives and approaches that course through the whole book, and evidences its timely value for today's students and scholars of performance.

DAVE CALVERT

doi:10.1017/S0266464X16000701

*Sophie Quirk*

### **Why Stand-Up Matters:**

#### **How Comedians Manipulate and Influence**

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015.

256 p. £21.99.

ISBN: 978-1-4725-7892-1.

This book is insulated from some of the accusations of pointless research into frivolity that often dog those working in the growing field of comedy studies, because Quirk researches comedy's political and social effects. Her book gives many powerful illustrations of how and why stand-up should be taken more seriously. She examines the way comedians achieve comic licence and – from the left-wing activist comedy of Mark Thomas to the racist comedy of Kevin Bloody Wilson – use the bonding power of laughter to manipulate an audience into a comedic consensus which can then influence hearts and minds.

As well as clear and compelling descriptions of comedy performances, Quirk has interviewed several comedians about their persuasive tech-

niques. This is still an under-documented field, as she points out, and comedians' vast knowledge about their craft is a valuable resource. Perhaps the balance is tipped to interviews with consciously innovative comedians like Stewart Lee and Mark Thomas away from the resistant possibilities in the mainstream of comedy. Stewart Lee is quoted as saying: 'I think most people, sadly, like to see their own opinions bounced back at them, and that's why people like [Michael] McIntyre do so well.'

There is not necessarily an unbreachable gap between the political and the popular, and I would argue that it would be a mistake to underestimate the resistant possibilities of, for example, Sarah Millican, who is explicitly challenging dominant narratives around what women should be and look like, as much as more 'alternative' comics like Josie Long whose routine where she draws a sea scene on her stomach is described in the book as an example of positive challenge through joking.

Quirk concludes that comedians can act as 'change agents' who confirm or disrupt stereotypes, disseminate information, and alter opinions, and that 'The contribution of any one gig or any one comedian, may be subtle and incremental but this is not the same as being trivial.' As modern comedy and humour studies build on the legacies of Aristotle and Freud, there is a need for approaches such as Quirk's. It takes a wide-ranging socio-psychological approach, which is nonetheless firmly rooted in a drama and performance perspective. Hopefully this too may have a subtle and incremental, but not trivial, impact on academic research and teaching which will see the fascinating art of stand-up finally being taken more seriously.

KATE FOX

doi:10.1017/S0266464X16000713

*Carrie J. Preston*

### **Learning to Kneel: Noh, Modernism, and Journeys in Teaching**

New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

352 p. £26.

ISBN 978-0-231-54429-0.

Carrie J. Preston has produced a book on an ostensibly niche topic – Japanese Noh theatre – that in fact should be required reading for a very broad range of students and scholars. Preston traces the influence of Noh theatre on some of European modernism's most prominent names: Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats, Bertolt Brecht, Benjamin Britten, and Samuel Beckett. Along the way she recovers less familiar names – Itō Michio, Ozu Yasujir, and William Plomer – and makes a strong case for their relevance to our understanding of transnational modernism.