
In the summer of 2017, nearly two and a half millennia after Plato banished players from his Republic, a kerfuffle over a familiarly coiffured Julius Caesar in New York’s Central Park reminded us that performance can still pose a threat to the public. In her dazzlingly ambitious and meticulously researched second book, Lisa A. Freeman gives us the historical context and methodological tools to understand why. The Public Theater’s production of Julius Caesar—which angered conservatives in featuring the assassination of a sovereign who bore a striking resemblance to Donald Trump (see Paulson and Deb 2017)—debuted after Antitheatricality and the Body Public was already in print (though Freeman has written about the incident elsewhere—see Freeman [2017]). Yet it is a testament to the perspicacity of Freeman’s thought that her ideas shed light not only on the theatre as a key to understanding how societies have defined and debated their constituents in the near and distant past, but also on how we might use the theatre to think through the constitutional crises of the present and the future.

Freeman opens the book by questioning an underlying assumption made by previous scholars of antitheatricality, from Jonas Barish to Martin Puchner—that is, that antitheatricality is as “endemic” to Western culture as theatricality, a natural reaction to “a fundamental distrust of representation and an equally strong discomfiture with the bodies that lend themselves to the art of performance” (1). “To construe the antitheatrical prejudice simply as a natural or ontological condition,” Freeman counters, “occludes our ability to elucidate the ways in which antitheatrical discourse has been historically leveraged and antitheatrical campaigns often waged for political purposes” (3). Antitheatrical discourse isn’t constant throughout Anglo-American thought, she notes; historically, it has intensified in the very moments in which the relationship between the sovereign (head of church or of state) and the individual subject is being radically rethought. Analyzing a variety of legal, philosophical, and literary texts as well as legal, social, and theatrical performances, Freeman brilliantly illuminates “the particular ways that the theater as both physical space and metaphorical realm has been taken up repeatedly as a site of contestation for positing and projecting publics” and how “competing groups” have used the theatre “to define themselves as representatives not simply of ‘a public’ but of ‘the public’” (5).

This is not only a book about the theatre, then; it is a book about how societies decide who possesses the bodies that make up the body politic or whom the US Constitution means by “We the People”—and it is a book about how, at crucial junctions in history, the theatre has been the most incisive tool for thinking through the contexts and the consequences of such decisions. The theatre is threatening to its detractors, Freeman reasons, because it gathers together the individuated bodies whose differences are elided by vague phrases like “the American people” or “the public sphere” and forces us to consider which bodies and what kinds of bodies, exactly,
such phrases describe. It is these visible and individuated bodies that Freeman evokes in the “body public” of her title, a term meant to counter not only the seeming homogeneity of a metaphor like “body politic” but also the disembodiedness of Jürgen Habermas’s public sphere. In positing the individuated bodies of the theatre rather than the standardized print of the page as the best encapsulation of the nation’s publics, Freeman makes a strong case for the centrality of the theatre to 18th-century studies, a field long dominated by poetry and the novel but recently (with the establishment of a theatre and performance studies caucus within the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies and with special issues on performance by several leading journals) turning more and more to the stage.

Yet Freeman doesn’t limit herself to the long—or even to the very long—18th century, and the book (whose case studies span from 1633 to 1990) has important implications for any scholar interested in antitheatricality, the public sphere, or performance and the law. In the first and lengthiest of her chapters, Freeman uses both the close-reading methodologies of literary analysis and the attention to bodies, settings, and costumes borrowed from theatre history and performance studies, to examine William Prynne’s voluminous 1633 antitheatrical tract *Histrio-Mastix* as well as the court and courtroom performances that surrounded its publication. She situates Prynne’s manuscript within “a period of transition” in England, “when the term publick was beginning to be applied to the communal endeavors of the broader populous but which still referred in its strictest sense only to those official actions taken by the state” (30) and exposes Prynne’s work as “a critical element in bridging the gap between these two bodies—public and politic” struggling for sovereignty. Focusing on three objects of analysis—Prynne’s attempts in his tract to “call into being” a “constituency of the godly” (31, 32); a masque performed for the court and proclaiming the king’s sovereignty against Prynne’s alleged attempts to undermine it; and a theatrical procession by which the king’s lawyers, “acting as a body public [...] demarcated powers and cultivated interests that were distinct from, and even at odds with, those of the sovereign body politic” (17)—Freeman introduces her combined methodology of literary and legal analysis and performance studies. She also introduces the three institutions—the Church, the State, and the “body public” made most visible in the theatre—that structure her discussions of sovereignty throughout the rest of the book.

Later chapters suggest ways that we might read antitheatrical controversies throughout the 18th century and even into the 20th as clashes between these three institutions. Chapter two uses the doctrinal debates of the 1690s, the political upheavals of the English Civil War, and the Glorious Revolution to contextualize Jeremy Collier’s *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) as “attending to the ways that the plays themselves encouraged audiences in their capacity as a body public to form their own opinions rather than rely on the judgments of hierarchical authority” (105). Chapter three reads the controversy around John Home’s tragedy *Douglas* (staged in Edinburgh in 1756) as “a point of culmination in a decades-long struggle between orthodox factions of the Scottish kirk and the secular and secularizing forces of the Scottish Enlightenment” (151). Chapter four moves across the Atlantic to examine how sermons and periodicals reacting to a fatal fire in a Virginia theatre in 1811 leveraged gothic imagery and racial prejudices “to call upon Americans to form themselves into a body public that would be dedicated to a reinvigoration of Christian religion in the nation” (191). The final chapter emphasizes how such debates from the long 18th century continue to shape how we think about sovereignty, publics, and which bodies should and should not be counted today. Freeman turns to the 1990 Supreme Court decision that denied NEA grants to four performance artists (with special attention to Karen Finley and Tim Miller), arguing that the decision “not only gave the lie to the abstract, rhetorical ideal of an inclusive body politic, but it also provided for a practice whereby various bodies public might be differently valued according to the whims of a government acting in the capacity of” a private patron (290–91).

Here as throughout her work, Freeman combines nuanced close readings of the laws and courtroom proceedings with insightful analyses of the performances that inspired them. One
of the most interesting points that her readings reveal is the extent to which the antitheatricalists adopt the language of the stage—turning their treatises into performances-in-print that call together a public in much the same way as the theatres they so virulently oppose. In highlighting this language, Freeman suggests, profoundly, that theatre is not merely a possible strategy for gathering together a body public; it is the most powerful one.

It is almost too perfect for Freeman’s argument, then, that the theatre that staged the offending performance of *Julius Caesar* in our own day was called the Public. The brilliant and nuanced readings of Anglo-American theatres and publics throughout this book give us deft tools for examining what “public” means in such a context: Who does it include and who does it exclude? What viewpoint or viewpoints—that of the majority, or those of all political subjects—must it give voice to? And how might the ghosts of theatres past help us understand what is contained in a term like “the American people” today?

— *Julia H. Fawcett*

**References**


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Like Penelope herself, who fends off a house full of suitors by daily weaving and nightly unraveling a funeral shroud, *The Penelope Project* is wisely deceptive. Its accessible language and seemingly conventional dramaturgy of process, even its use of weaving as a structural and thematic trope, conceals layers of un-doing: of assumptions about aging, temporality, dramaturgy, and the space of performance. Thus, like Penelope, this multivoctal anthology, centered on a long-term performance project, both weaves and undoes.

Editors Anne Basting, Maureen Towey, and Ellie Rose index the distinct yet overlapping disciplinary perspectives that structure the book. The Penelope project brought together university students, professional theatre artists, staff, and residents at
the Luther Manor elder care facility in Milwaukee for a two-year collaboration that included storytelling workshops, proliferating art projects, and a site-specific immersive performance, *Finding Penelope* (2011). Basting, a theatre professor and 2016 MacArthur “genius,” served as project visionary and playwright. As well as these contributions, Basting oversees chapters in the anthology that discuss associated University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee theatre courses—in which students conducted research on Penelope and created a performance piece based on stories shared by Luther Manor residents—and a chapter on evaluative mechanisms that assessed the project as a whole. Towey, a member of the Portland-based Sojourn Theatre company, renowned for its publicly engaged performances, directed *Finding Penelope* and curates chapters from participating artists (including Luther Manor residents). Rose, a visual artist working with Luther Manor, brings together voices from this institutional strand of the project, focused on the shifting culture of patient-centered elder care.

Both *Finding Penelope* and *The Penelope Project* are structured as double weaves housed in distinctive frames. The anthology interlaces dramatic text and images from the project within a five-part structure that loosely maps onto Richard Schechner’s dramaturgical model of the performance process—with sections on institutional frames, building partnerships, challenges, rewards, and impacts. This structure is bookended by two forewords, an appendix (including course syllabi, funding partners, and evaluative survey questions), and an index. Chronologically progressive, yet interrupted by interstitials, this organizational structure also interweaves conventional academic and theatrical frames while undoing both. For example, the first foreword situates *The Penelope Project* within the University of Iowa Press series Humanities as Public Life, an endeavor figured as a “third space” of collaborative scholarship (xi) that does something visible in civic life while undoing disciplinary and academic divisions. Thus, academic scholarship is both marked and queried. A second foreword does similar work for the project as performance—accounted for as striking beyond “a mere theatrical experience” (xix). Drama scholar and witness Elinor Fuchs struggles with words to account for her experience noting, “We had been through something together” (xix).

The journey that Fuchs alludes to occurs in three overlapping realms: the *Finding Penelope* playscript (which we, as readers, access through excerpted scenes), the site-specific processional performance (that readers can conjure up through testimonies, maps, and photos), and the journey of aging itself—which the anthology, play, and production all work to illuminate and deconstruct. This undoing of assumptions about aging and its complement, memory, emerges in part through a feminist dramaturgy focused on the act and art of waiting and of what it means to make a home.

The dramaturgical structure of *Finding Penelope* complements *The Penelope Project*’s organization and thematics. The play interweaves the story of Penelope’s 20 years of waiting for Odysseus with that of a “bad daughter” who has neglected to visit her mother for as long a time. While Odysseus’s journey is figured as that of a mythic male hero, “driven time and again off course,” the Nurse in Basting’s play sings also of Penelope, the woman, “driven time and again to forget the forward movement of time” (7). Penelope’s story, like that of the project, and of aging itself, is iterative and cyclical rather than strictly linear. While aging might seem chronologically progressive, when coupled with long-term memory loss, life narratives become fragmented. It is this existential fragmentation that Basting and the project pick up on—not as deficits, but as alternative iterations of the experience of time and of conventional storytelling. The play and project confront the fear of aging and the perception of aging as loss and decay, and refigure the “story” of waiting and of elders themselves as active and engaged.

*Finding Penelope*’s journey through these tropes and themes is physicalized by the audience’s journey through Luther Manor, where they encounter residents in situ who later reappear in a final stage moment as a chorus of Penelopes. The audience, positioned as both Odysseus and the “bad daughter,” sees these Penelope-elders as holistic fragments of themselves-in-action, as full “beings” even after death:
You are the one that made a cake shaped like a castle [...] 
You are the one that dances with your walker [...] 
You are the one that passed away last Tuesday. (125)

While revising images of aging as progressive deterioration, the project additionally animates institutional revisions: of elder care, theatre training, and humanities scholarship, each of which informs the other. This revisioning occurs in large-scale partnerships that undo institutional rituals and hierarchies, and in such everyday transactions as having actors and students eat with residents or rehearse with residents in dining halls.

The Penelope Project frames its revisions of The Odyssey and of aging as confrontations with the blind spots of who or what is remembered and how. The project and its documentation has a few blind spots of its own. I would have liked, for example, for the editors to discuss not only the changes in elder care culture, but also the social and economic forces that structure the emergence of such facilities and how they map onto dynamics of race, class, labor, and capital. When did elders get spatially as well as experientially separated? Are there alternative familial or economic narratives to this separation? Yet these blind spots emerge for me next to moments of astounding beauty. Arguments about community-engaged performance, the culture of aging, and the production of memory appear not only through vivid and theoretically informed prose, but also through elegiac memoirs, poems that evoke intimate observation of participants, a ceiling painted by custodial staff to evoke the sky. The anthology that brings these moments and memories together attests to the possibilities of similar collaborations and revisions elsewhere.

— Sonja Arsham Kuftinec

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Blacktino Queer Performance collects the scripts of nine black and Latina/o queer playwrights and performance artists, following each with both a critical essay and an interview with the playwright. These essays and interviews are written and conducted by leading scholars of black, Latina/o, and queer expressive practices, or by scholar-artists who collaborated in the production of the works. As such, this volume puts in conversation a diversity of voices around performances that have recently engaged the notions of blackness, Latinidad, queerness, and performance itself—particularly as it pertains to these subjectivities and their expressions onstage and in life, now and historically.
In their introduction, the editors aptly describe “this ‘ unholy’ trinity [...] of blacktino, queer, and performance” that together serves both as the title and as an analytic frame in the collection of these nine works (7). They write: “Blacktino as a designation recognizes a history of cohabitation between African American and Latina/o communities, animates black and brown sexual and social intimacies in the present, and centers cultural and political desires that might yield more solidary futures” (4). These authors and artists together activate “blacktino” in this way, alongside queerness and performance, “not simply as an assumed continuum of identity but, perhaps more significantly, as purposeful practice,” suggesting that it is the actual doing, making, and indeed, performing of interracial intimacy — understood broadly — that grounds this effort and its goal of queer-of-color cultural critique (7).

Blacktino Queer Performance thus serves as a timely consideration of the work of contemporary artists identifying as interracial and as queer, and as an interdisciplinary, lyrical imagining of the very notion of intersectionality. While the editors perhaps too frequently eroticize the idea of “blacktino” throughout their introduction, readers across fields will see that this collection productively intervenes in the history of “stubborn elisions of gender, sexuality, and performance in the case of black and Latina/o studies, and race in the case of queer and performance studies” (3). They will also notice the care with which these editors avoid the “troublesome collapse of difference” that their project might occasion in drawing together such a multiplicity of perspectives of color and queerness (5). Instead, one senses throughout a commitment to the work of “comparative interarticulation” — a rigorous exploration of the times, places, and ways in which marginalized peoples have mixed and moved alongside each other, whether erotically, politically, or in performance, and often in resistance of the heteronormative, racist culture that surrounds them (3).

The artists considered in this collection are Sharon Bridgforth, Coya Paz (representing the group Teatro Luna, which she cofounded and directs), E. Patrick Johnson, Javier Cardona, Jeffrey Q. McCune Jr., Cedric Brown, Pamela Booker, Paul Outlaw, and Charles Rice-González. The works are quite diverse aesthetically. Readers will delight in finding a range of experimental approaches to staging narrative; to incorporating media and technologies; and to conceiving of text, character, and performer in contemporary performance work. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are Sharon Bridgforth’s The love conjure/blues Text Installation and Javier Cardona’s Ab mén (translated by Andreea Micu and Ramón H. Rivera-Servera), both first performed in 2004. Bridgforth’s work also includes a line that perhaps best captures the collection’s lyrical and critical commitment to interracial and queer intimacy, and its world-making potential:

yes sir / i saw it.
i saw the damn break i saw the love flow i saw the stars sparkle i saw the light shift
that night i saw / wasn’t nothing the same
all because the dust got stirred / by change. (38)

Furthermore, many works in the collection engage a variety of approaches to creating performance from ethnographic, autoethnographic, and autobiographical writing and research practices. Those with an interest in scripts produced from alternative dramaturgical research methods will find a wealth of resources in Blacktino Queer Performance. John Keene’s interview with Jeffrey Q. McCune Jr. is particularly elucidating on this topic, with its discussion of the ways in which McCune’s Dancin’ the Down Low was developed based on interviews conducted with black men who secretly have sex with other black men, and the ways in which the play was then consciously crafted “to perform activism” (335).

Thematically, the collection takes a notable interest in theorizing black and Latino masculinity. The majority of the performance works collected here focus on male, cisgender characters of color; indeed, several of the critical essays in the text comment on the somewhat narrow focus of these plays on the male experience. On this topic, the collection’s essay “Voicing Masculinity” by Tamara Roberts, in response to Machos, directed/developed by Coya Paz and
created by Teatro Luna, provides the most insight, crucially reminding that “while masculinity is hard on men, it is still overall harder on women and other genders” (158). Unfortunately, this critique of Machos stands somewhat alone in a collection full of stories about men.

However, the editors do interestingly draw together a range of salient, political comments on the topic of “misperformance,” first introduced as a concept in the collection by Jennifer DeVere Brody as she discusses E. Patrick Johnson’s Strange Fruit: A Performance about Identity Politics. She comments on Johnson’s use of the term, offering that it suggests that “all performance is a reaction to certain regulations which are therefore subject to failure and perhaps born of fear” (223). Later, Lisa B. Thompson comments along similar lines on Jeffrey Q. McCune Jr.’s Dancin’ the Down Low: “I am particularly interested in the ways McCune’s play explores pressures, expectations, and subsequent performances of black masculinity and how they form a vice that helps shape performances of black males’ sexuality in the public sphere as well as in private lives” (321). Along these lines, Blacktino Queer Performance brings together several works that attest to performance as a powerful opportunity to “misperform”—to disrupt, to fail expectations, to productively employ the fears that marginalized peoples inevitably face in contemporary culture. Among others in the collection, this metaphor-concept—of queer people of color somehow performing wrongly, but with intention—shines for its radical potential in our chaotic times.

—Nevarez Encinias

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In her 2005 volume of letters, Linda Montano suggests that we should look not just at the aesthetics and technology of performance art, but also at the psychological reasons artists create the work that they do. Karen Gonzalez Rice answers this call in Long Suffering: American Endurance Art as Prophetic Witness by bringing together religious studies, psychology, art history, and ethnography to analyze works by Montano, as well as Ron Athey and John Duncan. While other performance art scholars, such as Kathy O’Dell (1998) and Meiling Cheng (2002) have labeled works in the same lineage as “masochistic” or “extreme,” respectively, Gonzalez Rice introduces instead the terms “disciplined hardship” and “enactments of survival” to emphasize the subjecthood of these artists. Her focus is on how these individuals use art processes to intervene in or manage the way power operates on their bodies and minds. By examining specifically how trauma and religion inform their work, she hopes to “recuperate religion as a crucial area of contemporary art historical concern” (10) and destigmatize trauma
as the “foundational human experience” that it is (4). In this way, Gonzalez Rice positions endurance art as a logical personal response to suffering that also offers opportunities for communal acts of ethical witnessing.

The self-professed daughter of a research psychologist, Gonzalez Rice explains that she also wishes to move away from the Freudian analysis Kathy O’Dell presented in Contract with the Skin (1998) towards privileging psychological and psychiatric views that are more rooted in lived experiences of trauma (12). Each chapter is therefore a “spiritual biography” of a particular artist that focuses on one or more works that Gonzalez Rice analyzes as representative of a specific post-trauma response: Montano — dissociation; Athey — Non-Suicidal Self Injury (NSSI); and John Duncan — cyclical victimization.

The links Gonzalez Rice draws between religion, spirit, trauma, and artmaking are organized around her claim that all three artists offer us the opportunity for prophetic witnessing in the tradition begun by 18th-century American religious reformers. Here, witnessing consists of an encounter or observation, and a testifying to or protest against injustice that demands an ethical response. Gonzalez Rice offers us several examples of American radical movements that were led or supported by faith-based activism, ranging from abolition to the New Sanctuary movement, to the work of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. She then draws a parallel with endurance artists, explaining that they are testifying “to real conditions of life and raising moral consciousness by also demanding an ethical response” (7). This idea is a repetition — with a religious studies variation — on a theme presented before by scholars such as Amelia Jones, Jennifer Doyle, Antonio Viejo, and others: that endurance art demands ethical reflection by forcing viewers to contend with how to look, our ability to look, and how we may be complicit in causing the artists’ suffering. What Gonzalez Rice adds to the existing scholarship is a detailed study of how religion and trauma shape the why and how of these artists’ acts.

Gonzalez Rice draws a connection between Athey and Montano by highlighting how both artists felt betrayed or disappointed by their families and their families’ religions (Catholicism for Montano and Pentecostalism for Athey), and how they both continue to use tools and images from these practices in order to consciously seek healing. For example, Gonzalez Rice points out that Athey’s Torture Trilogy (1992–1997) begins with the question “what is healing?” and is a conscious “homage to and reconsideration of the Pentecostal healing revival movement of 1960s and 1970s Southern California” (60). She also cites cultural psychiatrist Armando Favazza to explain how NSSI can be seen as a form of self-care, and a strategy for the integration and healing of trauma (72). In the case of Montano, Gonzalez Rice narrates an evolution from: using religion as a way to escape from the trauma of sexual abuse; to using performance art and other religious practices as alternative ways to seek purity; to finally re-envisioning Catholicism in a way that supports her wellbeing.

In other words, the Athey and Montano chapters, which precede the chapter on Duncan’s work, establish a theme of healing and transcendence. Duncan, however, according to Gonzalez Rice, “remains caught in patterns of cyclical victimization” (124). This conclusion flows quite reasonably from her choice to focus on pieces that express his rage against patriarchal violence, especially his most notorious work Blind Date (1980), in which Duncan had sex with a corpse followed by a vasectomy. While he may have intended for this piece to function as a Calvinist jeremiad against patriarchal violence, Gonzalez Rice concludes that it simply marks his “suicidal inability to imagine the future” (121).

The choice to associate Duncan’s work with cyclical victimization is well supported by Gonzalez Rice, but it precludes the possibility of any integrative or transcendent potential. I wonder, however, if this possibility might exist in Duncan’s most recent ventures in sound art? Gonzalez Rice gives a brief nod to this body of work on the last page of the chapter, but I would have liked to have seen more. The Duncan chapter also leaves me questioning what it means in the framework of American prophetic witnessing that Duncan was ultimately ostracized by the
American art community and forced to pursue his subsequent work in Japan and Europe. What are the ethics and implications of this total turning away by US audiences?

In the end, the cross-disciplinary approach and the questions that this text raises are its most compelling features. The way in which Gonzalez Rice connects different fields and concepts opens the door to readers from various disciplines to see the humanity that artists so bravely share when they make themselves vulnerable. Long Suffering: American Endurance Art as Prophetic Witness helps us to see artists as emotional and spiritual activists who practice a radical humanity in order to call for a more just society.

—Joyce Lu

References


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Debt to Society: Accounting for Life under Capitalism. By Miranda Joseph. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014; 240 pp. $75.00 cloth, $25.00 paper.


When the news broke in September 2017 of the insolvency of Documenta 14, the world-renowned art exhibition that takes place in Germany every five years, the story quickly assumed the familiar dimensions of a morality tale, with the fiscally responsible Germany bailing out the overspending of yet another Schuldenland (an offensive term for “debtor country”). Under the leadership of Polish artistic director Adam Szymczyk, Documenta 14 had expanded from its traditional small-town location in Kassel, Germany, to Athens, Greece, a move blamed for leaving the exhibition nearly $8.3 million in the red and almost forcing an early shutdown. While German media bemoaned this profligacy, and urged the return of the festival to its former status as a driver of tourism to regional Germany, the curators and artists who participated in Documenta 14 (full disclosure, I was among the signatories of a letter in defense of the curators) quickly hit back, pointing out how the media framing of the budget scandal ironically proved one of the major goals of an exhibition titled Learning...
that a morality-infused language of debt inhibits politics through a calculus of accounting and accountability, and reduces the social function of art to a tourist production subject to expectations for constant economic growth.

This sordid episode of “shaming through debt” (Schuld means both “blame” and “debt” in German) provides a vivid example of the topical relevance of two books in performance studies: Knowledge Ltd: Toward a Social Logic of the Derivative by the late Randy Martin, and Debt to Society: Accounting for Life under Capitalism by Miranda Joseph. They both appear in the wake of David Graeber’s swashbuckling bestseller, Debt: The First 5,000 Years (2011), a book that forcefully disrupted the just-so stories that neoliberal apologists love to tell about the origins of capitalism in virtuous market exchange (rather than the horrors of debt, slavery, and accumulation through dispossession). Fans of Graeber’s committed prose, not to mention participants in the Occupy Wall Street and Strike Debt campaigns he is widely credited with inspiring, would do well to also immerse themselves in these two, perhaps less populist, but ultimately, imaginative and hopeful works of leftist thinking. Those looking for a more robust intersection between performance and politics than either the protest rally or occupation camp (however needed such tactics are now and will be in the future) will also find in these books a rewarding set of provocations.

Joseph in particular has offered a persuasive sympathetic critique of Graeber in her opening chapter, “Toward a Methodology of Critical Abstraction,” one so lucid that it should by all rights be assigned as required reading alongside Graeber’s Debt, in the same way as her earlier essay, “The Performance of Production and Consumption” (1998), has become a necessary text to be taught alongside Peggy Phelan’s “The Ontology of Performance” (1993). In both cases, Joseph restores dialectical thinking through her reading of a radical text that strives to glamorize an outside of capital relations (local knowledge for Graeber, the “live” for Phelan), without acknowledging how that idealized outside term exists in supplementary relation to terms of the hegemonic order (debt for Graeber, social reproduction for Phelan). Deeply sympathetic to these styles of radical will, Joseph is nevertheless dedicated to a queer feminist materialist practice of “critical abstraction,” one that does not celebrate the local, the live, or the unmediated for its own sake. She instead lays the groundwork for the conceptual and ethical imperative of a performance studies that can operate at either end of the spectrum, in terms of scale, complexity, and abstraction.

In a text that mirrors the systematic rigor and sobriety of the discipline (accounting) whose codes and norms it seeks to contest and interrupt, Debt to Society is an ideal primer for those who remain convinced that theory’s vocation remains that of a hand-to-hand combat with the knowledge regimes that naturalize and mystify our repression, exploitation, accumulation, and fungibility. By her own accounting, the project began as a contribution to an abolitionist critique of the prison-industrial complex, before veering through her own experience of administrative labor in the neoliberal university to land in what it became: a vivid exposé of how the “debt to society” determine life chances in excareral spaces as well. Having never aspired to read a contribution to “critical accounting studies” in my short time on earth, I found myself enthralled and persuaded. Joseph’s exegesis of accounting and accountability helps give us warrant for a revived systems aesthetics: Jack Burnham’s name for the tactical intervention within a system by improper actors who reveal or express its workings, rather than simply protesting them (1968).

Both of the books under review then, take “finance as a performative practice,” as Marieke de Goede terms it (2009:298). As a system of writing, finance is susceptible to deconstruction;
as ideology, it is vulnerable to critique. Both authors assume that their deconstructive critique must be an informed one, and state of the art. The system aesthetician cannot simply dismiss financialization and quantification, but must instead work through their operative literature in search of a set of levers through which to render them inoperative. We live in a world, after all, in which a finance bro of my acquaintance could find his hobby of men’s style blogging so unexpectedly lucrative that he could actually quit his Wall Street job and support his family on selfies. In such a topsy-turvy world of “men reading fashion magazines [...] straight men” as Rufus Wainwright once sardonically marveled (2003), a careful study of the social logic of derivatives, risk, and arbitrage may yet reward the many, and not just the few. Fully automated luxury communism here we come!

While the financial crisis of 2008 brought the language of debt, risk, accounting, and arbitrage onto the front page, even as the engineers of disaster mostly got off scot-free (while millions of ordinary workers suffered), we continue to experience a deficit of critical theory adequate to the task of challenging the global 1% on its own terrain. Knowledge, LTD fills this gap with dizzying virtuosity, demonstrating how the “grand trinity of economy, polity, and culture” (217) has come undone in recent decades, and with it, any hope of reconstituting the bourgeois disciplines of academic study as we once thought we knew them. Aptly described by Patricia Clough on the book jacket as a “summa” of the enormous knowledge that Martin bequeathed to the field of “arts politics” he founded, Knowledge, LTD will remain a touchstone and a magic “Bag of Holding” for subversive intellectuals who find themselves unexpectedly on social science terrain. The footnotes alone make mincemeat of respectable economic analysis, and of the bourgeois moralism that lies occulted under its pretensions of objective neutrality. In the place of neoliberal cant, Martin invents a once-and-future social theory built around the skill, risk, volatility, and arbitrage of black social dance and expressive culture. Students of hip hop will want to visit his chapter on “De-centered Social Kinesthetics” for its subtle corroboration of the corporeal intelligence of black dance and song. As Martin writes there:

Finance is indeed all about compulsory movement, the obligation to keep going at all costs, to go forward into the future unencumbered by historical claims. But while finance spreads movement everywhere, it generates no language of movement, no sensibility regarding how we are disposed to go one way and not another [...]. This silence and stillness at the heart of finance stages the turn to dance, a jubilee of practices that sing the praises of bodily indebtedness and provide flight patterns by which friendly skies might be known. (147)

At the same time as he says this, Martin voices a closing note of caution against his own idealization of movement and mobility (a perennial tendency in a prose style that can find in its own exuberant erudition a form of eupraxia). In what can only be described as a closing queering of the derivative, Martin offers his readers a “critique of mobilization” that echoes “the contemporary critique of representation [that] emerged in alignment with movements of decolonization, not only of the Third World but also of the private sphere, of the unconscious and desire associated especially with queer studies” (224). In this more contemplative and nonrepresentational mode, Martin champions the derivative as “a sensibility and a figure for reassessing value” rather than “a unitary method for how to move otherwise” (224). In parallel fashion, Joseph issues her own caution against populist slogans such as “You Are Not A Loan,” “Maybe ‘you’ are a loan after all,” she provocatively suggests, “or at least a debtor, as you might once have been a consumer, or a worker” (2). Affirming our mutual and constitutive indebtedness could be the launching point for a different mode of militant accountability.

Agreeing with the thesis of both books under review—what Joseph calls “critical abstraction” and what Martin terms “a social logic of the derivative”—I will not attempt to subject the complexity of the staging of either argument to a reductive summary here. Both texts will reward the slow and careful reading that their idiom demands. Of the two, Joseph’s ought to be
read first, simply on grounds of its clarity of exposition and a devotion to a tangible through-
line of accounting and accountability; financial discourses, practices, and norms with which
nearly every adult is familiar by necessity. She even brilliantly weaves into her analysis the polit-
ically reactionary consequences of the gendering and racializing of accounting (the manner in
which for example women, African Americans, and even entire nations like Greece are figured
as prone to debt, compulsive and frivolous with spending, and confused and irresponsible with
counting and numbers). Martin’s deployment of the financial derivative is by contrast more
metaphorical and thus perhaps more speculative. It is a bit harder to bring the derivative down
to earth. But between the green-visored accountants and the globe-trotting speculative huck-
sters, Martin and Joseph have financial capitalism dead to rights.

Taken together, Martin and Joseph lay out an agenda of difficulties for performance stud-
ies of financial performativity, or for that matter, any interdisciplinary knowledge project that
aspires to resist its real subsumption into the protocols of the imperial university: (1) While pas-
sionately decolonial, neither book looks to the autochthonous, local, or small-scale as a stand-
point from which to perform authentic resistance. (2) While deeply invested in knowledge from
below, neither assumes that the social wreckage exerted by experts and their discourses will dis-
appear or be healed if we simply ignore those discourses. (3) Conversely, both books are surpris-
ingly optimistic about the prospects for a performance analysis and a critical theory that take it
as axiomatic that derivative economies of debt and dispossession are constitutive of the social.

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References

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It is a fitting tribute that Jonas Salz’s new history of Japanese theatre is dedicated to the late James Brandon and begins with a foreword he penned shortly before his death in 2015. Bringing together the work of nearly 60 scholars of Japanese theatre from Japan and the West—many of them mentored, trained, or otherwise inspired by Brandon—A History of Japanese Theatre carries forward his tireless efforts to bring the full richness and variety of Japanese theatre to readers and audiences outside Japan.

Brandon concludes his foreword with the observation that it has been more than two decades since the single previous effort at a comprehensive history of Japanese theatre in English. Although not identified by name, this predecessor is Benito Ortolani’s Japanese Theatre: From Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism ([1990] 1995). Ortolani’s volume has served admirably for many years (not just by virtue of its monopoly on the market) and will surely retain its appeal as a coherent, manageably sized overview of the grand progression and diversity of Japanese theatre. Nevertheless, as the work of a single scholar, as well as for its self-acknowledged imbalances—often stemming from a desire to shore up areas of neglect in earlier English-language scholarship—it has its limitations.

A History of Japanese Theatre for the most part overcomes such problems. It surpasses its predecessor in depth and detail, in breadth and diversity of perspectives, and in its inclusion of images, up-to-date bibliographies, and other reference material. One key element of the volume’s approach is to move beyond Eurocentric (pre)conceptions and seek an inclusive perspective that encompasses “the full range of musical, dance, and dramatic genres” in Japan (xxxvii). In addition to the major forms of traditional and modern theatre, then, readers are also introduced to the ancient continental forms of gigaku, sangaku, and bugaku; ritual forms such as kagura and rice-planting performance; traveling entertainments including shibarabyōshi, kusemai, and kugatsu; storytelling ranging from the chanting of bijin bōshi and joruri to rakugo and kami-shibai; classical dance and avantgarde butoh; carnivalesque misemono sideshows and manzai comedy duos; postwar angura (underground), multimedia, and postdramatic performance; and contemporary commercial theatre from Western-style musicals to the Takarazuka revue.

The boundaries of “Japanese theatre” are stretched and reconfigured in other ways, too. A broad geographic perspective leads to the inclusion of Okinawa’s hybrid kumiodori, as well as the theatre of colonial and wartime China, Korea, and Indonesia. Japanese theatre’s mutually constructive relationship with the West is a recurring theme, with sections devoted, for instance, to the adaptation of Shakespeare into traditional forms and early European and American encounters with noh and kabuki. Japan’s domestic peripheries receive their share of attention, too—not just rural performance traditions, but also spaces and practices where urban and rural come into contact, such as regional kabuki (ji-kabuki) and traveling theatre troupes (tabi-shibai). Many of these “marginal” topics are explored, appropriately enough, in short sections that stand apart from the main text. Titled “Spotlight,” “Focus,” or “Interlude” (depending on length and subject matter), these sections give space not only to less familiar forms of performance, but also
to significant individuals, famous productions, and topics ranging from costuming and theatre music to pedagogy, training, and government funding.

In turning to the modern and contemporary periods, Salz uses the metaphor of “strata” (xxxiv), borrowed from Donald Richie (1992), to highlight the ways in which successive generations build upon the layers of the past. Brandon, for his part, characterizes the 21st century as “a kind of living museum of theatrical culture” (xviii). This attunement to historical layering and simultaneity informs much of what follows, while the desire to cut across boundaries of form and time period is reflected in the volume’s very structure, with four of its six “parts” devoted to topics or themes—including playwriting, architecture, connoisseurship, criticism, and cross-cultural influences—that transcend such divisions.

For all it offers that is new, A History of Japanese Theatre does not neglect its core mission to provide a broad overview of the major traditions and their historical development. One useful feature for newcomers is a timeline charting the development, consolidation, and preservation of theatrical forms from the eighth century to the present. Parts I and II adopt an approach that is largely historical, but tempered by thematic concerns and attention to religious, social, and cultural contexts. Subsections titled “Elements of Performance” and “Representative Plays” afford readers opportunities to step outside the historical narrative and delve into the aesthetic pleasures of dramatic texts and performance. For those desiring to explore a given topic in greater depth, each chapter includes suggestions for further reading.

All in all, Salz has succeeded in choreographing a delicate balance between scholarly innovation and sophistication on the one hand, and convenient structure and accessibility on the other. Of course, a book this ambitious is bound to include a few infelicities. One problem is the occasional tendency to present historical material through the lens of current practice. Bunraku, for example, is initially described as a form of puppetry performed by teams of three puppeteers. Only after proceeding through the early history of Japanese puppetry and the plays of Chikamatsu do readers learn that the three-man puppet was not developed until 1734, a decade after Chikamatsu’s death. Aside from giving a false impression of how his plays were originally performed, such treatment ignores the processes of revival and reconstruction through which they came to exist in their modern stage versions. The assertion that “new plays ceased to be written” after Chikamatsu Hanji and Suga Sensuke (174) is also puzzling, especially in light of the inclusion of a welcome, if short, discussion of puppet theatre in the city of Edo. Although it cannot be denied that the theatre’s heyday lay behind it, new plays continued to be written in Edo even into the 1800s.

The chapter on kabuki affords the opportunity to delve further into the sorts of imbalances and idiosyncrasies that arise in a project of this nature. It is not my intention to suggest that the chapter is deserving of particular criticism. On the contrary, its primary author, Julie Iezzi, has done a fine job producing a readable overview of a complex, multifaceted form of theatre. Rather, the choice of focus is for the simple reason that it is kabuki that provides the common thread with the other two books under consideration here.

Let us begin with what is not included. For one, only brief mention is made of kabuki’s most prolific playwright, Kawatake Mokuami (1816–1893), who helped usher the form into the modern age and whose 360 plays account for an outsized portion of the current repertoire. (It has been estimated that one in four kabuki performances in the 20th century was of a play by Mokuami.) More importantly, short shrift is given to features of kabuki that are central to understanding what sets it apart from other forms. While the very first sentence characterizes kabuki acting as “presentational,” this key concept is scarcely elaborated elsewhere in the chapter. The use of fixed patterns (kata) and the centrality of the actors themselves are touched on in passing, and kabuki’s reliance on bravura, spectacle, and stage tricks is duly stressed. Yet other elements that might contribute to an understanding of kabuki as presentational theatre are largely neglected. What of the rich tradition of actor-audience interaction? What of the meta-theatricality of onstage costume changes, or of actors stepping out of character? Through these
and other conventions, kabuki continually foregrounds its theatricality and subverts straightforward representation.

What is chosen for emphasis is as important as what is omitted. Puzzlingly, the chapter’s subtitle singles out the “femme fatale” (along with the “superhero”) as one of two key kabuki archetypes. Although this choice is not elaborated in the body text, where the phrase “femme fatale” nowhere appears, the selection of Tsuruya Nanboku’s *Sakura-hime azuma bunshō* (Scarlet Princess of Edo, 1817) as one of the chapter’s “representative plays” points to Princess Sakura (Sakura-hime), the play’s heroine, as the presumed exemplar. Sakura, however, is more sexual victim than seductress, and is only pushed into the latter role through circumstance at the play’s very end. If we are to insist on the femme fatale over other more common female character types, such as the dutiful wife or the love-struck courtesan, a more apt example might be Kiyo-hime in kabuki’s *Dōjōji*-derived repertoire — an example that reminds us of the long history of such characters onstage prior to kabuki.

Satoko Shimazaki’s *Edo Kabuki in Transition* explores what is arguably a more significant female kabuki archetype, one identified in the book’s very subtitle: the vengeful female ghost. This rich and stimulating monograph centers around Nanboku’s most famous play, *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* (Ghost Stories at Yotsuya on the Tōkaidō Highway, 1825). In the second (and largest) of the volume’s three parts, Shimazaki uses the character of Oiwa — the play’s spurned wife who is driven to her death and reemerges as a gruesome, vindictive ghost — to trace a fundamental transformation in the imagination of the female body on the kabuki stage. Although Oiwa’s ghost briefly assumes the role of the seductive femme fatale in a dreamlike encounter in the play’s final act, she is by and large the opposite of the erotically charged female. Indeed, the famous scene in which she grooms herself in front of her mirror constitutes a grotesque parody of what is usually a moment of heightened eroticism. Black dye smears across her lips, the hair rips from her scalp in large clumps, and blood streams through her fingers.

Shimazaki adroitly excavates the layers of meaning and association beneath each element of Nanboku’s vision. Into the Edo period (1600–1868), mandalas and legends were filled with images of women transformed into serpents through lust, jealousy, and resentment. Gradually, however, the serpent gave way to the figure of the vengeful female ghost. In some sense, the retention of human form made female transformation less obvious. Yet Nanboku chose to assign the parts of Oiwa and others like her not to *onnagata* female-role specialists but to actors of male roles. In so doing, he avoided any hint of the eroticism and physical appeal of the onnagata, presenting instead a vision of unrelenting ugliness and abjection. Internal emotion remained very much bound up in the visible exterior. Nanboku further modeled aspects of Oiwa’s appearance on the figure of the *ubume* — ghosts of women who died during childbirth. Earlier onstage depictions of the ubume had tended to portray them as noble, selfless figures who die that their lineages might be preserved. Nanboku unmoored the ubume from these associations. His female ghosts are selfish, not selfless, and this emphasis of personal desire over social obligation was, Shimazaki argues, a key part of what allowed Nanboku to escape the grasp of conventional historical settings and build a theatre grounded in the present.

Implicit in much of this analysis is the question of the playwright’s role in shaping a script and its production and, more fundamentally, of what exactly constitutes a kabuki play in the first place. In Parts I and III, Shimazaki grapples with these questions directly. Only in the Meiji period (1868–1912), under the influence of Western notions of the script as constituting a play’s literary essence, do we see the location of authority shift from actors to the playwright. The
vision of kabuki scripts as rigid and inviolable is a modern creation. Through much of the Edo period, plays were fluid things that evolved from performance to performance, with the playwright producing not a finished product, but a provisional edifice. Meaning lay less in the text than in actors and their embodied practices.

Of course, the transmission of practice remains central to kabuki today, perhaps nowhere attracting greater attention than in the art of the onnagata, the subject of the last of the three books considered here. Conventional accounts of the onnagata tend to fall into two camps. One view is encapsulated by an often-cited passage, attributed to the onnagata Yoshizawa Ayame (1673–1729), that appears in Earle Ernst’s formative study of kabuki: “If an actress were to appear on the stage she could not express ideal feminine beauty, for she would rely only on the exploitation of her physical characteristics, and therefore not express the synthetic ideal. The ideal woman can be expressed only by an actor” (1956:195). In other words, the male specialist in female roles is seen to create something more feminine than a biological woman could achieve precisely because of his reliance on abstraction, convention, and distillation. By contrast, others, like Katherine Mezur, have resisted such claims of a transcendent feminine essence, arguing that spectators are always fully aware of the male body beneath the surface, and that this tension is key to understanding the aesthetic of female-likeness (2005).

Implicit in both views, however, is the assumption that onnagata performance is the exclusive province of men. Maki Isaka’s Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki Theater provocatively sets out to challenge this assumption. If onnagata femininity is already an abstraction divorced from biological sex, Isaka asks, why must it reside only in male actors? The effort to construct an alternative understanding leads in various directions. Not surprisingly, a chapter is devoted to the phenomenon of the okyōgenshi—women who taught and performed kabuki privately for wealthy samurai patrons in the Edo period—as well as their short-lived Meiji successors, female kabuki actors. Ichikawa Kumehachi I (1847–1913), who performed both male and female roles, is presented as a real-life example of a “female onnagata.” Here and elsewhere in the volume, theoretical ruminations on the meaning of imitation and the construction of femininity lead to important insights and corrections of enduring misperceptions. Ernst’s quotation from Ayame, for example—subsequently reproduced by many others, including Donald Keene and at least one Japanese critic—turns out to be completely absent in the primary source to which it is attributed (see Ernst 1956:195).

Still, the reality remains that the history of the onnagata is, by and large, a history of male actors. If recognition of the modern “abjection” of the female onnagata is, as Isaka would have it, central to an understanding of onnagata femininity, then why is only a single chapter devoted to the subject, and why is Kumehachi—a relatively well-known figure who is also the subject of a “Focus” section in Salz’s history—the only significant example that can be mustered? For these and other reasons, the book struggles to move beyond the hypothetical and polemical. The choice of sources is a further limiting factor. Opting to focus on discourses about and around the onnagata, Isaka intentionally avoids reference to visual depictions, the unpersuasive rationale being that “the grammar of the images (such as painting with no vanishing point) would have demanded substantial argument so that we would not be misled by our own sense of ‘naturalness’” (xiii). Sure enough, the volume includes not a single image. Isaka also shies away from the discussion of individual performances. The aim is to understand how the onnagata was “understood, conceptualized, and theorized” (15) in actors’ writings, criticism, and interviews, not how it existed in specific instances or in visual representations. The problem,
however, is that Isaka’s preferred sources do not exist in a vacuum of pure abstraction. Rather, like Isaka herself, they make constant reference to individual actors and their performances. As such, there is little to be gained and much to be lost by the refusal to engage with entire bodies of material.

There are other puzzling choices of emphasis. The book’s introduction positions kabuki as “queer” theatre, both in terms of gender and in the literal etymology of the word “kabuki” (which derives from the verb kabuku, meaning literally “to lean,” but also suggesting, more abstractly, a departure from accepted norms of dress and behavior). Yet there is little further attempt at the excavation of meaning in the short account of kabuki’s early history that appears a few pages later. The cross-gender performances of early women’s kabuki are mentioned only in passing, while the name Okuni appears just once (in an endnote). Surely a volume that aims to complicate the gender dynamics of the onnagata would benefit from greater engagement with the historical layers that underlie the emergence of constructed femininity. Then again, the central metaphor of the volume, per its subtitle, is not an archaeological one such as layering, strata, or the palimpsest, but rather the labyrinth. Where an archaeological metaphor might foster the expectation of methodical progress, as layers are cut through or peeled away, the labyrinth suggests a different trajectory: one of dead-ends, mis-starts, and circuitous detours. Indeed, there are large portions of the book (such as the sixth chapter, devoted to “human locomotion” and featuring the inscrutable subtitle—not atypical of the volume’s prose style—“Moving Real on Procrustean Beds”) that, however thought-provoking they may be, ultimately lead nowhere in particular where the central argument is concerned.

Reservations aside, Isaka’s book, like the others considered here, points to the considerable breadth and theoretical sophistication of current scholarly engagement with Japanese theatre in the West. In their different ways, all three volumes will be of interest to broad swaths of readers—not just Japan specialists or theatre scholars, but also those with interests in social and cultural history, religious studies, and gender studies. They will also lend themselves, whether in part or in whole, to adoption in undergraduate surveys of Japanese theatre.

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References

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Since the publication of Jonathan Sterne’s *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (2003), the field of sound studies has increasingly foregrounded the materiality of sound. Vivified by cultural histories, ethnographies, and aesthetic critique, among other approaches, this multifaceted field focuses on sound in part to destabilize and complicate the visual episteme of Enlightenment culture. Scholars frame sonic phenomena as a vital dimension of sensory studies in order to revise the “history of the senses,” and to offer new ways of knowing and perceiving lifeworlds in ways that both integrate and challenge our understanding of aurality. The two books addressed in this review are a major step forward in this direction. Both pivot around listening as a sensory mode of perception that shapes the experience and objecthood of sound. Though they take strikingly different approaches to listening, each of these studies presents sonic ways of being-in-the-world that set forth a rich and complex terrain for future efforts in theorizing embodiment and selfhood. While performance studies has historically tended to focus on orality, movement, and related embodied modalities of self-presentation, less attention has been dedicated to the role of aurality, listening, and hearing in shaping relations between self and society. These books engage with sonic phenomena in ways that will undoubtedly enrich the field’s debates about aesthetic praxis and embodied communicative processes.

Michel Chion is highly regarded for his lifelong work in film studies, in particular, his argument that the cinematic experience depends more on the effects of audio perception than visual media. In *Sound: An Acoulogical Treatise*, he generally does not rehearse this debate (though he does gesture to his extensive work on cinema), but presses onward to cover the sweeping plateaus of sound. Originally published in French in 1998, revised in 2010, and translated into English by James A. Steintrager in 2016, this set of intertextual essays is a broad exploration of what is constituted by and through the perception of acoustic phenomena. Chion pushes back against “general” and “abstract” qualities of sound, instead recognizing that sonic experiences are at once partial and paradoxical. Sound, he declares, is “often associated with something lost—with something that fails at the same time that it is captured, and yet is always there” (3). Organized into five parts, each of which is comprised of several thematic essays, Chion takes readers on a journey in which he explores multitudinous frameworks for theorizing sound before settling on that which informed his work from the beginning of his career: tutelage under Pierre Schaeffer, musique concrète, and acousmatics. What informs his broad musings about sound—and its translation into verse, drama, cinematic design, and music—is praxis. An established composer of musique concrète, the forerunner of electronic music and contemporary composition, Chion’s forays into film were informed by his work as a recordist and composer. Chion also brings his lifelong experience as a pedagogue to bear on *Sound*.

This work is at heart an effort to map out “acoulogy” as a domain of auditory experience that accounts for listening and listeners. The first four parts of his opus rehearse debates in literary theory, (post)structural linguistic theory, and film theory to carve a space for acoulogy that relates to but is distinct from these fields. More specifically, in both chapters one and
four, Chion traces the use of sound in language from prelinguistic infancy to the acquisition of language, a process that he disparages as the “scotomization of the voice” which “transforms how the subject hears himself” (15). Here, he identifies a gap between what we perceive as verbal linguistic idioms that communicate semantic meaning, and embodied sounds that we tend not to hear because they are outside of language. In his words, sound is “language’s remainder, a remainder shaped by music and that so-called shapeless zone that we call noise” (15).

In addition to addressing discursive and ontological debates on sound, Chion is interested in the affective zones that sound engenders. In particular, he draws our attention to what he calls the “Shining effect,” a reference to a scene in Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980), in which Danny rides his tricycle down the hallway, first on a hardwood floor and then on a rug. As the tricycle makes contact with different surfaces, the listener experiences the “delight of rediscovering systematic noncorrespondences between action and effect, sound and cause” (97). The relationship of the listener to the causal properties of sound, that is, the purported origins of that which is heard, undergirds what Chion terms an “ergo-auditory loop.” Though “banal,” the shift in perspective gained through listening to distinctions between sonic phenomena is central to Chion’s treatise. The fact that we are delighted by noncorrespondences between cause and effect suggests that audition itself is “egocentric and centripetal” (11). Here, Chion demystifies the “fantasy” that a listener can be at the center of sound. Rather, he argues, the listening subject emerges through how one perceives what he terms the “auditum,” or that which is heard, in relation to what we project as the source of that sound. This process of localizing sound tends to occur both through sight and through audition, even though these two localizations “do not always match” (25). From here, it is a short step into his well-known theory of the *acousmêtre*, or the cinematic relationship between voice and body in which there is a productive contradiction between the framed image and the unframed sound, a contradiction that fundamentally conditions the cinematic experience.

In the closing part of his treatise, titled “listening, expressing,” Chion promotes Schaeffer’s acousmatic listening as the theoretical and methodological solution, albeit imperfect, to the issue of what is perceived as sound. Chion details the “morphological criterion” laid out by Schaeffer through which a listener records observations of the sound object in and of itself, separated from its source. He distances himself from Schaeffer’s methodology by arguing that this theory fails to account for the reverberations of sound across space, and for how “the apparent distance from the real or imaginary sound source” (185) might affect the listening experience. By privileging that which is “constant” about a sound, Chion argues that Schaeffer both idealizes and naturalizes the sound object as that “of good form” which is “outside of space” (186). Rather than reify the sound object, Chion argues that “sound as perceived” (193) is indeterminate. The terrain of acoulogy explores that which is a medium for listening and how listening is a site for epistemological inquiry.

Chion’s opus is itself a delight to read. For those familiar with his schematic modes of listening (causal, figurative, semantic, and reduced), he both touches upon these and surrounds them with an abundance of texts and critical readings that extend their efficacy. He not only attests to the constructivism of sound, he articulates the effects of sonic experiences in everyday life as well as the canon of Western art. His writing miraculously foregrounds sound without fixating upon its objecthood. Organizationally, he provides clarity through schematic listings of key points throughout the essays and a helpful glossary of terms that he has generated throughout his career. My main critique of *Sound* lies in the question of what exactly does his work, as a piece of writing, mediate? In what ways does writing about sound perform acoulogy? Chion provides extensive examples of the effects of listening, and how to deconstruct the representation of sound within written texts and as cinematic experience, but does not engage with the act of writing as an effort that, to recapitulate with his words, captures and loses the sonic experience.
In *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice*, Nina Sun Eidsheim critically expands on Chion’s theory (published in various essays prior to the English-language publication of *Sound*) to formulate her own multisensorial approach to sound-making and listening. She aims to unpack a concept that she calls the “figure of sound,” in short, the sonic tropes that constitute musical experience. Eidsheim casts pitch, duration, form, genre, and other concepts germane to Western art music as restricted and fixed notions that constrain sonic experience as always-already signified. Rather, Eidsheim proposes that we consider the materiality of sound through sonic vibrations—unbounded, yet situated by bodies that produce and receive—in order to decouple the sonic object from the sonic event. By engaging with both the ephemerality and materiality of sonic phenomena, her work stands in contrast to Chion’s emphasis on sound’s objecthood.

Much of *Sensing Sound* is committed to denaturalizing three key components of the figure of sound: air is not the only element that propagates vibrations; acoustics are not necessarily experienced as frontal, two-dimensional, and static spatial conditions; and music-making comprises more than the production of sound. She addresses each of these axioms throughout the narrative arc of the book, examining case studies in experimental music and sound art in each chapter that themselves explore these components, and weaving them together into her broader theory of vibrational practice. For instance, she examines Juliana Snapper’s underwater opera, *You Who Will Emerge from the Flood* (2008), and finds that under conditions of water submersion, sound-based vibrations are experienced as tactile phenomena conducted through bone and flesh. This insight not only demonstrates the multisensoriality of sonic experience, it also attests to the role of audiences as resonating bodies in the performance space. Overall, her theory focuses on that which vibrates, as opposed to vibrations in and of themselves, to postulate that acts of vibration transmit and transduce material in ways that bring humans into ethical relations with “intermaterial vibrational phenomena” (151).

Later chapters consider the role of embodied actions in producing the musical work and vocalized sounds, respectively. Drawing extensively on Jackson Pollock’s action painting, in which the work of art includes what happens prior to the arrival of paint on the canvas, Eidsheim demonstrates that singing is an “action that produces sound” (130) even before a sound is produced from a singing body. To reduce singing to timbrally distinct sounds is akin to reducing painting to visual traces on canvas. Eidsheim arrives at the proposition that sound is a consequence of movement through her work as a performer in works including *Noisy Clothes* (2000, collaboration with Elodie Blanchard) and *Body Music* (2012, collaboration with Alba Feranda Triana). She also advocates for singing as an action-based process rather than a sound-focused musical practice in her decades-long work as a vocal teacher. To this end, she has developed a vocal pedagogy in which students discover vocality through play and movement techniques that distract them from the desire to correct or judge the sounds they produce.

Eidsheim’s vibrational theory of singing and listening pivots around her reinterpretation of the “thick event” of listening. Rather than hearing the proverbial tree fall in the forest, Eidsheim suggests that we expand our interpretative frameworks to include multisensorial interactions with vibratory phenomena, that is, to thicken the complex experience of the sound event. This perspective, and its implications, is best mapped out when she revisits the myth of Odysseus and the Sirens. Following Franz Kafka’s rereading of the myth, Eidsheim postulates that the Sirens were silent rather than songful. If the Sirens had sung, she posits, the bone and flesh of the sailors would have conducted tactile vibrations and produced a collective listening experience. Though Odysseus heard only the Sirens’ silence, he believed that he heard more...
because he was caught in the sonic paradigm in which sound is only experienced as hearing. Eidsheim contends that this myth is a metaphor for what we as scholars might miss about sonic experience and its performative effects if and when we fail to consider senses other than hearing. Singing and listening, therefore, are means for relating to other bodies that participate in the “thick event” that constitutes the experience of complex sonic phenomena.

The ethical motivations that guide Eidsheim’s project are admirable, if lofty. She seeks to emancipate sonic experiences from their “a priori identifications” and, in so doing, depart from the world of signs and signification that tend to shape what sound means. Acknowledging but distancing herself from critical discourses of race and gender, particularly those espoused by Stuart Hall and José Esteban Muñoz, respectively, she aspires for a “porous and unbounded place, unattached to and thus released from identification and its ramifications” (185). Her vibrational theory of practice eschews debates on sound, sociality, and culture in favor of political ecology. “Vibrations,” she pleads, “are under our stewardship,” but, like land, we are “entrusted with its stewardship as long as we are part of [its] field of transmission” (22). The fallacy of these aspirations is somewhat captured by Chion when he regales, in Sound, against those who would mythologize “vibratory phenomena.” He warns against considering sound as “representative of another vibratory reality that would be much loftier, of a music without sound and beyond sounds, of a voice without a voice and beyond voices” (124). Therein lies part of the tension within sound studies to define its object(s) of study and the significance of its line(s) of critique. Like performance studies, this is a productive tension that, at least between Chion and Eidsheim, shuffles between objecthood and eventhood as the primary object of inquiry.

Ultimately, both authors attest to the constructivism of sound and identify gaps between what listeners do and do not perceive in relation to social conventions, relations, and structures. Their work is in some ways indicative of the emergent status of the field in that both projects are quite strident in their theoretical ambit, that is, their attempts to position sound as that which unsettles axiomatic frameworks of critical theory. Yet what weakens their ambitious projects is the universalism inherent to their respective approaches. Both Chion and Eidsheim fail to account for ways of being, and relating, beyond the Enlightenment self that they seek to critique. Without positioning their projects in relation to scholars whose work acknowledges the range of human experiences, Chion and Eidsheim reproduce the false notion of selfhood as a universalizable phenomenon. Together, these two books offer exciting new theoretical pathways that open our sensibilities to sonic ways of being, thinking, and creating.

— Shayna Silverstein

Reference


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Writing for “practitioners and practical theorists,” Natasha Lushetich proposes interdisciplinary performances as places to refigure socially constituted reality and initiate new and alternative realities (8). She focuses on a diverse series of examples between 1910 and 2010, including Futurism and Dadaism, action painting, feminine writing, and (h)activism. Lushetich’s theoretical framework divides her century into three movements: “The Dynamic Turn,” where artists searched for new techniques and forms of aesthetic authenticity; “The Deconstructive Turn,” where shifting understandings of identity, difference, and the body helped them resist modes of categorization and interpretation; and “The Digital Turn,” where they embraced multiple and mixed realities, questioned notions of originality and artistic autonomy, and moved past the divide between humans and nonhumans. Chapters end with unique “scores”: prompts, provocations, and propositions for writing, staging, and designing experiences and happenings that might birth new realities. This book’s synthesis of theory, performance analysis, and artistic pedagogy makes it useful for students, teachers, and practitioners of theatre, performance, and visual arts.


Engaging with local, national, and diasporic cultural and theatrical traditions, William Peterson positions community-based performances as a central component of how Filipinos construct identities and fulfill their need for happiness. The introductory chapter tracks metrics and theoretical treatments of happiness and argues that the “places” of his title are not just physical, but also internal and psychological for audiences and performers alike. Three chapters on the sinakullos, or Holy Week pageant plays, explore regional particularities and experiences of participation, wondering “What rewards are so great as to make the participants in this event give up weeks or even months of productive labor and place this activity as the most important or central one in their lives every year?” (7). The next three chapters on massive line dances during street festivals argue that individuals construct notions of self and nation through physical movement. The concluding analysis proposes People’s Educational Theatre Association (PETA) activist Mae Paner and her satirical character “Juana Change” as a model for progressive politics and hope in the Philippines through artistic means. Peterson’s years of fieldwork and introduction of Filipino anthropologists, sociologists, and historians to an English-speaking audience make this book useful to a wide range of theatre and performance studies scholars.


Augusto Corrieri demands a critical consideration of dormant, repurposed, and surviving théâtre à l’italienne (or “Italianate stage”), arguing that the persistence of the spaces invites theatre scholars to consider and reemphasize nonhuman and overlooked theatrical phenomena. His four memorable case studies include Munich’s Cuvilliés-Theater, which was miraculously
disassembled, hidden, and reconstructed to avoid Allied bombing runs; London’s Dalston Theatre, refigured variously as a cinema, reggae venue, automobile auction house, and rave club before it was demolished in 2007; Vincenza’s Teatro Olympico, a museum and tourist attraction featuring an indoor Roman amphitheater; and Manaus’s Teatro Amazonas, built when the contemporary Brazilian city, which now has over three million residents, had less than 3,000 people. Corriere’s writing moves seamlessly through instances of performance philosophy, theatre history, visual analysis, and travel blogging. His unique perspective and methodology offer new connections between history, theory, and scholarship of recent site-based and immersive theatre practices.


Sheldon Pollock assembles prominent Indian texts on aesthetic theory, playwriting, poetry, and dramaturgy spanning 15 centuries, many of them rendered into English for the first time. Beginning with Bharata’s *Treatise on Drama*, the collection moves chronologically from the third century to the Early Modern Period. In his thorough critical introduction, Pollock draws connections between Sanskrit scholars and Western aesthetic theory, offering a detailed history of the ways many writers have deployed “rasa” as a concept. Though it is most commonly translated as “taste,” Pollock wisely chooses not to render the Sanskrit word in his translations, allowing readers to consider the various ways each author invokes it. Complete with a detailed glossary of Sanskrit terms and extensive notes, Pollock’s volume invites Western scholars into the world of classical Indian aesthetic thought, beginning with texts focused on drama and poetry and expanding into the fields of music, painting, and architecture.


Focusing on the moment in Samuel Beckett’s life and work where understandings of humanity and human relationships began to break down, this study considers the narrators and central characters in his plays and prose as creatures, trapped between humanity and inhumanity and forced to endure the existential crisis of survival. In his introduction, Joseph Anderton tracks and interconnects the histories of Beckett criticism, literary theory, and theorizations of the creature as a post–World War II concept. Four chapters are devoted to major themes in Beckett’s work: testimony, power, humor, and survival. Anderton sees Beckett’s creaturely author-narrators as vehicles of a new form of witnessing in the aftermath of Auschwitz, arguing that “fiction itself figures as a mode of testimony” (31). Power, in *Waiting for Godot* (1953) in particular, inevitably backfires for the supposedly dominant creature in Beckett: by making his partner subservient and subhuman, the master highlights his own dependence upon the servant. Beckett’s humor in *Endgame* (1957), for Anderton, devalues language and reason and returns attention to the bodies of his creatures. Finally, Anderton explores the possibility of survival for Beckett’s creatures in the posthuman world: the stasis and repetition they find are themselves useless performances of dead human structures.

The year 1616 saw the deaths of Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu as well as the publications of Ben Jonson’s first folio edition and Zang Maoxun’s first collection of plays from the Yuan dynasty. This edited collection prints 10 pairs of essays from a 2014 London conference contextualizing the playwrights’ works as the 400th anniversary of their deaths approached. Although each writer explores only Shakespeare or Tang, the sets of essays invite the reader to make connections on a common theme, including the relationship between the state and the theatre, the restaging of history in the playwrights’ work, and audiences’ contemporaneous reception of the plays. The dialogue created between the essays illuminates both Shakespeare’s and Tang’s plays and their cultural contexts and offers a unique methodology that others might follow. 1616 contributes to the limited English-language scholarship on Tang and Ming Dynasty drama and approaches Shakespeare by looking at one particular turning point, much in the style of James Shapiro’s 1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare.

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