

Theatre Research in Canada Recherches théâtrales au Canada

SOLGA, KIM, *Theory for Theatre Studies: Space*. London: Methuen Drama, 2019, 184 pp.

BENNETT, SUSAN, *Theory for Theatre Studies: Sound*. London: Methuen Drama, 2019, 151 pp.

Roberta Mock

Volume 41, Number 2, 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1074802ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3138/tric.41.2.r01>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

University of Toronto Press

ISSN

1196-1198 (print)

1913-9101 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Mock, R. (2020). Review of [SOLGA, KIM, *Theory for Theatre Studies: Space*. London: Methuen Drama, 2019, 184 pp. / BENNETT, SUSAN, *Theory for Theatre Studies: Sound*. London: Methuen Drama, 2019, 151 pp.] *Theatre Research in Canada / Recherches théâtrales au Canada*, 41(2), 318–320.
<https://doi.org/10.3138/tric.41.2.r01>

SOLGA, KIM

Theory for Theatre Studies: Space.

London: Methuen Drama, 2019, 184 pp.

BENNETT, SUSAN

Theory for Theatre Studies: Sound.

London: Methuen Drama, 2019, 151 pp.

ROBERTA MOCK

University of Plymouth, Plymouth, UK

The first two volumes of Methuen Drama's Theory for Theatre Studies series, *Space* and *Sound*, have been written by its co-editors, Kim Solga and Susan Bennett, respectively. Produced primarily for undergraduate students, each exudes the confidence and skilled clarity of expert teachers. Reading them from cover to cover (and, in my case, back to back) is like being taken by the hand and led on a carefully constructed journey that progressively builds (and builds upon) ideas and concepts, performance lineages, reflexive experience, and the application of critical thinking that displays its workings. With their accompanying websites (that include discussion points and links to relevant—for the most part, open access—video materials), each book could easily form the basis of either a taught course or a single session or thematic topic within one.

The strength of these books lies in meticulous organisation and, while the series preface outlines a common template for each volume, the authors interpret this model flexibly. This ensures that their arguments are well-girded without becoming either too formulaic or else reading like extended literature reviews. In addition to helpful introductions, each comprises three sections. Section One is “a historical overview of interconnected theoretical models.” Bennett focuses hers on “classical sound,” considering the use of sonic imagination to understand how sound created meaning and experience in an ancient Greek and early modern English theatrical context (in particular, at the theatre at Epidaurus and Shakespeare's Globe).

Solga's approach to Section One, on the other hand, here prioritises the exposition of theoretical and methodological “lenses” over their application. While she starts with an Aristotelian framing—by establishing catharsis as an inherently spatial practice—her emphasis is on contemporary thinking in theatre and performance, which she categorizes in three ways: 1) the material production of social space, conjoining urban theory and performance studies; 2) the production of meaning via generic spatial conventions in theatre-making and of theatres; and 3) the production of “heterotopic” spaces in and through theatre practices that link histories, site, and social relations. Although Solga's survey is even-handed, her overarching approach to the book's topic aligns most closely with that of Henri Lefebvre. She describes this in the first section as “not simply the space in which human social interaction *takes place*; rather, social space is the entirety of human perception, activity, imagination, and social organization, produced in relation to economic, political, historical, and ideological formations” (32; original emphasis).

Solga's framing of theatrical space as socially produced overlaps significantly with Bennett's starting point—that is, Mark Grimshaw's definition of sound which stresses the interaction of material auditory stimuli, memory, environment, and personal experience.

In other words, both space and sound are located and created through and in the individual who is perceiving them. Both space and sound are shaped by legacies and current machinations of power relations. And, as Solga and Bennett both emphasize, regardless of which one you concentrate on, sound and space co-produce each other, cognitively and metaphorically. Perhaps this explains the importance accorded in each of their books to the “audio walk” (in Solga's framing) or “headphone theatre” (in Bennett's). The first of Solga's three examples in Section Two—which, according to the series template, is to comprise extended case studies of twentieth and twenty-first century performances—is Platform's 2007 “operatic audio walk in three acts,” *And While London Burns*. Telling the story of her own experience of this performance-for-one designed to reveal how the city of London has been structured by global capitalism, Solga explicitly deploys a combination of critical approaches outlined in the first section of the book; these include the cultural materialism of human geography, a phenomenological approach to performance analysis, and the proxemics systems of modern theatrical realism.

Bennett's second section is concerned with “avant-garde sound,” in which she analyzes performances by the Italian Futurists, Jean Cocteau, John Cage, and Samuel Beckett through their own theorisations as well as those of Roland Barthes and Pierre Schaeffer. She then devotes the third and final section of *Sound* to “sonic practices enabled by the late twentieth-century development of new mobile technologies” (97). The series preface tells us that this is the section that is to look ahead to important new developments. Bennett uses this frame to consider “experiential sound,” noting that this the first substantive section of her book in which women make an appearance as both thinkers and makers. Her case study examples include sound walks by Janet Cardiff (whose work is also discussed by Solga in *Space*); Andrea Hornick's revisionist museum audio guides (2017); Shannon Yee's *Reassembled Slightly Askeew* (2015), which recreated her experience of medical trauma; and Rimini Protokoll's *Situation Rooms* (2013), a multi-player environment in which participants enact sonic scripts based on oral histories related to the international arms trade. Bennett uses Luce Irigaray's theories of ethical listening to position these performances as embodied, deterritorialized experiences that, in the words of Siddall and Waterman, make “negotiations of (material and discursive) subjectivity audible” (112).

By way of contrast, Solga uses the third section of her book more speculatively, to begin to ask what it might mean to decolonize Anglo-European stages. This reminds white settler-colonial readers, in particular, that decolonization is first and foremost a spatial practice. “The theft of land,” she writes, “has gone hand-in-hand with the theft of the means of representation” and those “of individual subject-formation” (p. 140–41). Once again connecting sound and space, her key theoretical framing comes from Stó:lō musicologist, Dylan Robinson. Robinson describes a predominant form of settler listening as one that is “hungry,” emerging from a “state of consumption and extraction” of food, land and culture (146). Solga ends with a reading of *Kinnalik: These Sharp Tools* (2017), made and performed by Inuk artist Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory and white settler Canadian theatre artist Evalyn Parry. Here she models an attempt to “listen beyond hunger.” Like every example of performance analysis in *Space*—and in common with those by Bennett in *Sound*—this is writing that is thoughtful, perceptive, and illuminating.

It is, of course, possible to criticize any publication. I would have liked, for instance, to read a similar attempt by Bennett to address the many missing voices and perspectives to which she

draws attention in the brief “Coda” to *Sound*. Even given the dearth of published materials on non-Western sound in theatre and performance studies and cognate disciplinary pathways, as well as the situated strategy of authorship practised by both herself and Solga, it should have been possible to decentre whiteness to a greater extent. In both books, it also would have been useful to offer firmer framings and definitions of words like theatre and theatrical, especially when not all of the practices discussed would be readily recognised as either by many readers. Related, I was not always convinced by Solga’s characterizations of performance studies as discipline and methodological frame, although this never undermined the analysis itself or insights offered.

To read *Space* and *Sound* while sheltering in place and with no access to the types of performance experiences at their heart (with the significant exception, of course, of audio walks) was both provocative and challenging. Solga’s description of attending Shakespeare’s Globe in London underlined just what I had taken for granted and was missing terribly—that is, “the unmistakable physical proximity—the shared, embodied investment in the performance—of one another” (52). Later, she refers to Una Chaudhuri’s concept of “geopathic dramaturgy” through which modern realistic theatre can be understood as “a disease of place and space” whereby the concept of “home” is staged as a collision of the incompatible desires for a stable identity and deterritorialized self. That thinking about performance and its theorization is able to resonate so powerfully—especially in a historical moment in which theatre cultures, ecologies, and assumptions of its constituent elements (such as shared presence and perspective) are shaken—demonstrates why this new series is so valuable.

Contributor

ROBERTA MOCK is Professor of Performance Studies and Director of the Doctoral College at the University of Plymouth (UK). Her most recent book, co-edited with Mary Paterson, is *Josua Sofaer: Performance I Objects I Participation* (Intellect, 2020). She is the Chair of the Theatre and Performance Research Association (TaPRA).

ALVAREZ, NATALIE, CLAUDETTE LAUZON, and KEREN ZAIONTZ, EDS.

*Sustainable Tools for Precarious Times: Performance
Actions in the Americas.*

Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave, 2019, 343 pp.

KATHERINE ZIEN
McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

“Sustainable tools and time-sensitive tactics that defy the habitual *and* enact more democratic futures are needed to aid communities caught in the throes of political violence, manufactured