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Sound Studies: Voice and Aurality in the Theatre

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REVIEW ESSAY

Sound Studies: Theories of the Material Voice

Patrick Finelli

DRAMATIC THEORIES OF VOICE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. By Andrew Kimbrough. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2010; pp. 332.

THE SARAH SIDDONS AUDIO FILES: ROMANTICISM AND THE LOST VOICE. By Judith Pascoe. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011; pp. 176.

SAY IT: THE PERFORMATIVE VOICE IN THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF SAMUEL BECKETT. By Sarah West. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010; pp. 278.

The aural aspect of performance has emerged as a unique topic for theatre research at a time of technological advancement, providing a distinctive entry point for historical analysis while raising important theoretical questions about recording, reproduction, the interplay of live and recorded sound onstage, and the act of listening itself. The three books reviewed here offer insights into some of the issues defining this emerging field, even as they propose new resources and new directions for conducting further research.

Until relatively recently, “sound studies” as a research focus has been a minor grace note in the composition of theatre studies.¹ Robert Hamilton Ball might be said to have

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¹See, for example, Johanna Frank, “Resonating Bodies and the Poetics of Aurality; Or, Gertrude Stein’s Theatre” (*Modern Drama* 51, no. 4 [2008]: 501–27), which explores the relationship between producers and receptors of sound in theatrical space; and Anke Birkenmaier, “From Surrealism to Popular Art: Paul Deharme’s Radio Theory” (*Modernism/modernity* 16, no. 2 [2009]: 357–74), which examines the quasi-telepathic communication achieved in radiophonic art. Sound specialists regularly publish articles on devices and techniques in the professional journal *Theatre Design and Technology* and other technical publications. Ross Brown’s *Sound: A Reader in Theatre Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) is the first in a series

sounded the bellwether when he wrote an article titled “The Shakespeare Film as Record: Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree” sixty years ago.² In it, Ball acknowledges the difficulty of reconstructing what historical audiences saw and heard. In his pre-Internet era, historians combed libraries and archives for prompt books, drawings, photographs, musical scores, light plots, reviews, criticism, and letters, but there was not much available beyond blocking schematics that indicated movement, facial expressions, gestures, or—rarely—reflections on the actual sound of an actor’s voice. According to Ball, “[w]e know very little about what Garrick’s *Lear*, Kean’s *Othello* or Booth’s *Hamlet* were really like. The more closely we approach our own time, of course, the more we have to go on” (227). Looking to motion pictures for answers, a modern historian like Ball acknowledged the value of such technology, as remarkable then in the decades before streaming video and YouTube as it is now.

Despite the promising efforts of Ball and others who added film records to the theatrical archive, scholars have lacked a critical framework sufficient to elevate sound as a discipline in theatre scholarship to the level at which it could make a contribution to the field. This is not to say that scholars have not recognized the importance of sound to the history of the art form; although theatre is a place for seeing, it is also a place for listening. And how an audience attends to the *mise en scène* depends upon factors like sound reproduction, reinforcement, acoustics, dramaturgy, and production processes and effects. Thus at a time when theatre production is being transformed by rapid advances in sound technology, we should not be surprised to find those advances resonating in theatre scholarship, especially given theoretical developments in sound, voice, and meaning over the past half century. As the books under review here attest, the time is now right for revisiting theatre history and reevaluating performance theory and criticism from the perspective of aurality, in order to address the traditional dimensions of voice and other agents involved in sound transmission and reception. The three books in this review do just that, intersecting at key points, while framing sound studies in remarkably different ways.

Andrew Kimbrough’s *Dramatic Theories of Voice in the Twentieth Century* is an exceptional book, presenting philosophical and scientific theories of voice in an approach that is both accessible to young scholars and useful to those already familiar with its source texts. Kimbrough combines excerpts and analyses of those source texts in a single comprehensive treatment of the voice that reveals critical insights into the topic, making it much more than a survey. Hoping to “distill and articulate the theories of voice generated in twentieth-century philosophic and scientific discourses as well as dramatic theory and theatre practice” (2), Kimbrough provides a series of concise essays expounding on core ideas across disciplines.

His organizational strategy is to pair chapters covering the theories of influential philosophers or linguists, with companion chapters that contextualize those theories in relation to theatre practice. After an overview of the evolution of vocal anatomy titled “Vocal Origins,” each of the three theory chapters is followed immediately by another relating those theories to the work of theatre artists. Thus “The Voice in Phenomenology and Existential-

that, according to reviewer Adrian Curtin, promises to “gather together both key historical texts and contemporary ways of thinking about the material crafts and practices of theatre,” thus bridging the mooted theorist/practitioner divide” (reviewed in *Theatre Journal* 62, no. 4 [2010]: 706–7).

²Robert Hamilton Ball, “The Shakespeare Film as Record: Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (1952): 227–36.

ism" (Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre) is followed by "The Voice in Theatres of Presence" (Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook, and Richard Schechner); "Synchronic and Diachronic Voices" (Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Victor Turner, and John Searle) is paired with "The Literarized Voice of the Modern Stage" (Bertolt Brecht, Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, and Peter Handke); and, after an interlude titled "Walter Benjamin's Technological Voice," Kimbrough addresses "The Poststructural Voice" (Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jean Baudrillard), which is succeeded by "The Voice of the Postmodern Stage" (Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, Karen Finley, Laurie Anderson, and the Wooster Group). Each of the seven chapters is neatly summarized in a coherent conclusion.

Pairing a mode of inquiry (for example, phenomenology) with a performance style (for example, Artaud), Kimbrough intends to show not correlation or influence, but contiguity between theoretical and artistic responses to social and intellectual forces. Following Tobin Nellhaus, he adopts a "critical realist" position, arguing that changing material forces within the broader culture shape both cultural theories of voice and vocal performance practices in twentieth-century theatre. For Kimbrough, the human voice is one of the materials through which cultural change is registered.

Kimbrough's introduction not only defines the critical terms used in his study (*phoneme*, *vox*, *lingua*, and *logos*), but also lays out his argument under three headings: "Mediation, Language and Thought," "Theatre History and Mediation," and "The Voice, Mediation and the Twentieth Century." Kimbrough thus starts with the observation that the voice has been mediated throughout history, beginning with the theories of Plato and Aristotle. As he points out, both philosophers anchor a logocentric tradition of defining writing against speech that, having indelibly shaped philosophy and linguistics, is now, according to Kimbrough, being refuted by neuroscience and postmodern theatre practice. Aiming to demonstrate this thesis, he turns, in the rest of the book, to consider schools of thought in philosophy and human science that establish how we hear and how concepts are mediated. He notes that technologies of recording (beginning with the introduction of handwriting) have altered our concepts of knowledge and truth. As we move from spoken to written to print and electronic mediation, the complexity multiplies.³ Even as philosophy took a "linguistic turn" in the twentieth century, Marshall McLuhan and the Toronto School of Communication (among others) were calling its assumptions into question. Kimbrough places a strong emphasis on McLuhan's work, noting that the rise of electronic forms created new "cognitive conditions" within which thinkers and performers began to conceive of the voice—and use it—in novel ways. Kimbrough suggests that recent research in cognitive science, including its application to theatre studies, derives from these new conditions.

Theatre scholars will be familiar with many of the cultural theorists that Kimbrough draws from in philosophy and critical theory. Less familiar, however, are the scientific theories he introduces, such as the paleo-anthropological view that voice and language evolved

³ After receiving my review copies of these three books in bound versions, I proceeded to download an electronic version of Kimbrough's *Dramatic Theories of Voice* to my iPad and read West's *Say It* as an e-book on the university library website. Pascoe's book on Sarah Siddons was available only in printed form. Aside from the physical differences—turning the pages of a book and writing notes in the margin or scrolling on a tablet and highlighting words and passages with the touch of a finger—technology and the medium may have played a role in shaping my thoughts and opinions.

for “materialist” purposes, to communicate and engage with the world. With them, Kimbrough gives us a glimpse into an advanced course in anthropology. Of course, practitioner/theorists like Schechner and Eugenio Barba have written on anthropological aspects of theatre, but, by discussing topics like bipedalism in *Australopithecus afarensis* or tool use in *Homo habilis*, Kimbrough goes further, showing that adaptations for vocalized speech evolved concurrently with a change in hominid lifestyle. He reminds us that spoken languages depend on audible sounds emanating from the supralaryngeal vocal tract that are understood because neurological platforms in the brain permit meanings to be encoded and decoded. What appeals to me in this section is the way that he skillfully describes the neurological and cultural changes at important stages of evolution, while reinforcing contemporary theories of embodiment. Even as he elucidates the idea that ontogeny (the development of a living member) recapitulates phylogeny (evolutionary history), Kimbrough illuminates foundational concepts in performance theory. While reading his sections on fossil evidence, the externalization of memory 40,000 years ago, and performance practices in oral cultures, for example, I was prompted to think of the work of Joseph Roach, Diana Taylor, and others who distinguish between written archives and performance repertoires in order to propose performance as an alternative record of cultural history.⁴ While I find their work persuasive, I am made to wonder if the archives, documents, and texts that yield one kind of phylogenetic record of human performance also interact with what is learned in the acting studio, voice workshop, rehearsal rooms, and the theatre to affect the ontogenic development of individual performers. The living tradition of performance embodies the cultural history and theory of performance, broadly understood.

This is just one of several insights that the generative pairings in Kimbrough’s book provoked for me. The limitations of space prohibit a full account of those pairings, but worth noting is the way they build upon one another toward a cumulative effect, allowing Kimbrough to return to the argument laid out in the book’s introduction. For example, the book’s second pairing on phenomenology is linked to its third pairing on poststructuralism through a mutual interest in the soundedness of voice. Although these schools of thought differ considerably, voice is central to both, with phenomenology emphasizing it as “a site of revealing” (Heidegger, qtd. on p. 91) or as an embodied site of meaning (Merleau-Ponty, qtd. on p. 94), while poststructuralism rejects the voice and the entire context of enunciation in its insistence that meaning is solely a function of linguistic structures. Because those structures are often imagined to link semantic content to visual image, Kimbrough critiques the visualist bias that continues to haunt twentieth-century philosophy. Revisiting the theories of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in light of McLuhan’s insights, then, would return us to foundational concepts that promise to serve as twin piers for constructing critical research projects in sound studies in the future.

“The Poststructural Voice” is a pivotal chapter, because it is where Kimbrough identifies inadequacies in visualist philosophies to prepare the ground for these new theories of voice. Refuting the ideas of de Saussure, Derrida, and Lyotard that perpetuate this visualist bias, Kimbrough writes, for example, that “[i]n Derrida’s theory of voice, our voices do not reveal truth but give sound to the linguistic structures that create the impression of truth” (218). As he points out, even Artaud’s theatre of intense, primal sounds is impossible for Der-

⁴ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

rida, because it cannot escape signification and representation. Kimbrough asserts that any theory based in Saussurean linguistics cannot hold up against empirical evidence produced by neuroscience, claiming that “[w]hat we now know about our cognitive abilities refutes the Saussurean view that words generate meaning. Language began as action, in descriptions of actions. Meaning lay in the human being’s ability to do something with language, not in the ability of language to name things or express ideas. We hear and intuit meaning in the sound of the voice” (230). Kimbrough observes that poststructuralism comes at the end of the visualist endeavor, since it is “based in an arch-visualist ontology” (ibid.). He concludes by calling for such theoretical strategies to be modified in light of both contemporary modes of aurality and changes in communication technology and media that have altered the way knowledge is shared. He also proposes revising critical approaches to the postmodern stage, which shares some of the theoretical foundations of poststructuralism.

This leads him to the companion chapter, “The Voice of the Postmodern Stage,” where Kimbrough’s aim is to articulate vocal practice in postmodern theatre in relation to poststructuralist theory. What he finds is a variety of strategies that contradict as often as they illustrate the poststructuralist theories discussed in the previous chapter. For example, Kimbrough regards “[t]he Wooster Group as a postmodern theatre company whose productions aim to expose what Lyotard intimates are normative and institutional structures in the Western theatrical canon and traditional stage practice” (256), and that Foreman’s theatre “reflects the poststructural view that the voice cannot communicate prelinguistic meanings or reveal truth and being” (248). Finley, on the other hand, “does not readily corroborate poststructural views of voice and language” (250), because her performances do not deny the communicative nature of her voice and language, while Wilson approaches the voice as did Artaud, with his creation of “aural soundscapes within which nonlinguistic meaning may arise, where words are used merely for their sound and music value” (261). Kimbrough thus demonstrates the inadequacy of poststructuralist theory to explain many uses of voice in the contemporary theatre, and calls for new analytical approaches and revisions to current theoretical frameworks used to understand the voice in performance. As noted, he places his greatest hope in the cognitive sciences, which propose new ways of understanding the primal or prelinguistic voice. As he asserts, “neurological and linguistic studies . . . clarify that much of our linguistic comprehension takes place on an embodied level” (64).

Dramatic Theories of Voice in the Twentieth Century will be a useful resource for theatre scholars and eminently suitable for assignments in graduate and undergraduate courses in performance theory. Students of voice especially will benefit from reading Kimbrough’s “Vocal Origins,” about human evolution and the development of vocal anatomy and vocalization.

Sarah West’s *Say It: The Performative Voice in the Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett* begins with a narrower focus—on the concept of the performative speech act taken from language philosophy and literary analysis—but, in its examination of the work of Samuel Beckett, reveals how productive such an approach can be. For her, the performative speech act in Beckett’s plays is “not only language looking for a way into sound, but also a force which is responsible for creating and sustaining drama in the plays” (12). With Beckett as her focus, West examines his prewar fiction, the influence of James Joyce, and the development of his own artistic voice, before expanding her scope to examine his BBC radio plays

and stage productions. The plays she selects reveal Beckett's use of embodied voices and acousmatic sounds (that is, from a source you cannot see) in various media, thematically linking *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), *Embers* (1959), and *Eh Joe* (1967), in which the main character deals with his own memories in the form of a voice from the past. She also considers plays in which the physical body disappears and voice becomes the dramatic entity: *Cascando* (1963), *Not I* (1972), and *Ghost Trio* (1976). Beckett wrote for the voice, claiming that he never wrote a word without saying it out loud first (21) and working out vocal patterns, rhythm, and tempo in meticulous detail, attaching great weight to the way his plays sounded: "My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible," he said, "and I accept the responsibility for nothing else" (qtd. on p. 18).

West's fine-grained analysis makes *Say It* a valuable dramaturgical resource, and the book includes a useful chronology of Beckett's works, which allows her to adumbrate the development of his ideas by showing how certain images take shape in his novels and stories before appearing in his dramatic works.⁵ An example is "the vast cretinous mouth, red, blubber and slobbering, in solitary confinement" that appears in *The Unnamable*, twenty years before commanding the stage in *Not I* (22).⁶ West further points out that Voice's monologue in the radio play *Cascando* is much like the one in *The Unnamable*, and that both *Waiting for Godot* and *Krapp's Last Tape* were based on earlier, incomplete prose texts.

Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Not I* offer obvious entry points for critical analyses in sound studies, since a tape recorder plays back a voice in the former and a disembodied mouth speaks the words in the latter. Perhaps this is why the two plays are subjects of study in both Kimbrough's and West's books, which vary greatly in their interpretations to provide key points of comparison. Kimbrough's view of *Krapp's Last Tape* is filtered through the theoretical screen of structural linguistics and existentialism, emphasizing the play's structure and agency, where

voice deliberately disrupts communicative intent and introduces into [Beckett's] work an investigation into the assumed efficacious utility of the voice providing agency and effecting a meaningful, informational circuit of communication. . . . [Krapp's] commitment to the tape recorder suggests an investment in the process of recording similar to an investment in a speech act—there exists on Krapp's part his desire to create or refashion a state of being. . . . The juxtaposition of Krapp and his recorded self reflects the tension noted in linguistics and semiotics between linguistic synchrony and diachronic autonomy. (190–92)

Here, Kimbrough acknowledges that the structural dimensions of language determine the way Krapp thinks and expresses himself, yet also asserts that language is subject to change through his creative and autonomous agency.

West takes a dramaturgical approach, pointing out that *Krapp's Last Tape* is Beckett's first play to use recorded sound; never before had a character been able to visually manipulate his memories onstage by means of a machine. She notes that he had written the radio play *All That Fall* a few years earlier and "conceived it as a series of noises" (44). It started as "the wheezy ruined old voice with some characteristic accent" (46). The tapes were sent from London to the Paris BBC studio, where Beckett sat listening to a voice articulating his own thoughts from the past. This was the first time he had seen a tape recorder being

⁵There is at least one typo in West's book: the year 1988 is given, instead of the correct 1998 for Maurice Harmon's edited collection of letters between Beckett and Alan Schneider.

⁶*The Unnamable* is "[a] novel originally written in French [during] 1949–50 under the title *L'Innommable*" (West, *Say It*, 12).

operated at such close quarters, and he was quick to recognize its dramatic potential for representing different voices of the self, commenting to Alan Schneider that it had “endless possibilities.”⁷ West observes that the voice of Patrick Magee that Beckett heard through the static on BBC radio was in Beckett’s head when he wrote the monologue, influencing the aural aspect of the play he was about to write. “In *Krapp’s Last Tape* sound technology had not only enabled Beckett to disembodied a voice, it also allowed him to break up linear time by transporting Krapp’s voice from an earlier period of his life into the present moment” (70). Thus where Kimbrough reads the play as an illustration of concurrent (if conflicting) developments in linguistics and existentialism, West situates it within the historical moment of Beckett’s encounter with this new technology to emphasize the defamiliarization he experienced in relation to presence and time.

She also addresses recorded sound in relation to the preservation of memory. Audio recordings promise to function as a form of voluntary memory that can be stored and retrieved. Krapp’s tape is a representation of his past that he can access freely through replay, revisiting the experience over and over again, just as we now download songs onto iPods and other digital devices in order to play back later, hoping to relive the performance and its emotional affects. In the case of Krapp, West observes, “[w]hile this mechanisation of the storage and retrieval of memory may lead to a more faithful representation of the past, it does not necessarily follow that the recorded experiences will be any more re-liveable when played back” (60).

When Beckett first sent *Not I* to Schneider, he stated: “The text must go very fast, no pause except for breath.”⁸ He wanted the isolated image of a mouth moving in darkness. Kimbrough puts a theoretical spin on this: “Even though both de Saussure and Husserl recognized that words are relative, even empty entities, unless a community of speakers gives them value, in *Not I*, the sound of speech serves to identify a thinking, communicative human essence, even though the Mouth exists in social isolation” (193). However compelling Kimbrough’s reading is, it cannot be confirmed by the archival record. Schneider also imputed a human essence to the character, asking Beckett if she was in some sort of limbo or death. His answer was that “I no more know where she is or why thus than she does. All I know is in the text. ‘She’ is a purely stage entity, part of a stage image and purveyor of a stage text.”⁹

This points to one of the weaknesses of Kimbrough’s broad theoretical approach. For all the insights it yields, it occasionally falters on an overlooked piece of evidence. Kimbrough states that Billie Whitelaw “created” the part of the Mouth (146), for example, but West cites a letter from director Schneider that establishes that Jessica Tandy was in the first production of the play, part of a double bill with *Krapp’s Last Tape* in New York on 22 November 1972 (ibid.). According to West, Tandy delivered the monologue in just under twenty minutes, with a teleprompter in front of her to help with the lines. Schneider wrote to Beckett, saying that he was trying to get her voice on tape so that Beckett could hear her, “if we can sneak it all past the unions” (294), alluding to other concerns for researchers concerning recording, copyright, and juridical issues. Perhaps that difficulty contributed to a gap in the audio archive that led to Kimbrough’s mistake. In any case, he claims that

⁷ Beckett, quoted in Maurice Harmon, ed., *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 42.

⁸ Ibid., 273.

⁹ Ibid., 283.

Whitelaw's performances in the January 1973 London stage production directed by Anthony Page and in the subsequent film were definitive versions. Whitelaw reduced the running time to fifteen minutes, and noted that she did not search for or try to impart meaning to the words. With Beckett in attendance at rehearsals, her goal was to deliver the words in a way that satisfied him. Beckett said that "[i]t will never be the way I hear it," although, according to West, who agrees with Kimbrough's assessment of Whitelaw's performance, the sound and tempo reflected the vocal pattern that Beckett heard in his head.

By West's reading

[t]he performative voice in *Not I* rages in Mouth's head and vents itself through an orifice. It is a powerful force in the play, one that all but overruns the protagonist. . . . The image of the furied mouth is fascinating to watch, especially in the television version, but it would not be nearly so arresting without the sound of Mouth's voice. The voice is meant to disturb. It is not simply a byproduct of meaning; instead of drawing attention to the meaning of utterance, the stream of words coming from Mouth puts the sound of language under the spotlight. This language is barely recognizable as speech, the sheer speed of delivery blurring the boundaries between words, making it difficult to process. . . . *Not I* is Beckett's tour de force in the dramatic rendering of the performative voice. (151–53)

With a vital combination of text and production analysis, West teases out the play's meaning to support her thesis that, in this and many of Beckett's plays, the voice is not merely a transducer, converting language into sound, but also an authorizing agent, producing and maintaining dramatic action.

Kimbrough, West, and other scholars of twentieth-century theatre can follow Ball's lead in working with audio and video recordings. But, without them, how can theatre historians recreate the sound of an actor's voice? In *The Sarah Siddons Audio Files: Romanticism and the Lost Voice*, Judith Pascoe attempts to do just that in a search for traces of the lost voice of Sarah Siddons, the famous Romantic-era actress whose celebrity was partially based on her ability to evoke intense emotional responses. Siddons's biographers tended toward hyperbole when writing about her magnificent voice, claiming that fans "sobbed, moaned and even howled with emotion" (4). Her repertoire of "thrilling vocalizations" included Belvidera's scream in *Venice Preserved* and Isabella's scream in Southerne's *Isabella; or, The Fatal Marriage* (68). The painter Joseph Severn fainted when he saw Siddons play Queen Katherine in *Henry VIII* and was nearly trampled by the crowd. Pascoe's analysis, based on significant pieces of historical and experiential evidence, brings us very close to approximating what it was like to hear Siddons, while raising important questions about the historicity of listening, comparing the cultural experience of two centuries ago to the present age of advanced audio technology.

Pascoe's book is quite different from the other two, in that she takes a practical rather than theoretical approach, acknowledging that performance resists documentation yet managing to strike a balance between an admitted "antiquarian" tendency to rely upon archival evidence and a desire to utilize "new-school" theoretical frameworks, in order to recover an irretrievable vestige of Romantic-era vocal virtuosity. She draws us into a compelling and superbly documented journey, spurred by her study of Romantic poets. Citing the "cracked soprano" of Shelley's speaking voice, Pascoe tells us that "in their daily lives the Romantics heard poetry more than most of us do, and when they read silently, they heard it more in the ear of the mind, and they heard it differently" (11). She suggests

that her situation as a historian mirrors Wordsworth's narrator in "The Solitary Reaper," since, in the poem, he "was trying to preserve a voice he'd never heard, and he was using a written account to discern how it sounded" (13). Pascoe's objective is to reanimate a voice she has never heard: "If I could figure out how Siddons sounded, I might also understand how people listened in the romantic [*sic*] period and how that style of listening influenced what they heard" (14). Siddons died in 1831, forty-six years before Edison recorded sound on foil-wrapped cylinders; in the decades before audio recordings, her voice was stored in the aural memories of her fans.

Pascoe labels herself a "throwback," one of the "leather-helmet wearing" theatre historians immersed in the details of historical research. She is adamant in claiming that critical theory "has provoked an identity crisis among theatre historians who, in recent years, have invested as much time in pondering how to write theatre history as in actually writing theater history" (30). Her tone is acerbic as she rails against the "brash arrival of critical theory" and the "conflicted musings" of "self-questioning" historians like R. W. Vince, one of the contributors to Thomas Postlewait and Bruce McConachie's edited collection *Interpreting the Theatrical Past*.¹⁰ She appears to identify with the predicament of Robert Sarlós, however, who advocates a mode of theatre reenactment that links him to "fussy empirical fact-gathering from which many of the [other] contributors back away," saying sardonically that "he might as well join a troupe of morris dancers or swap hardtack recipes with Civil War buffs—he is that close to losing credibility with the new historian theorists who, according to Sue-Ellen Case, 'no longer sound the old, wheezing one note of the seamless narrative style'" (31).¹¹ I am not sure whether her scathing critique is meant to acknowledge the value of the archive or to contrast her positivist methodology with current theoretical approaches, but it is clear that she is drawing a line in the sand. Nevertheless, she takes a turn at historiography, media studies, and even critical theory, while making a strong case for the nostalgia of the past, when scholars would spend many hours toiling over manuscripts at the Folger Shakespeare Library or examining the architecture and acoustics at Drury Lane and the Theatre Royal in Bath. She examines books and play scripts that Siddons owned, cites contemporary anecdotal accounts, studies pronouncing dictionaries, handles artifacts, and reads a dusty three-volume set of leather bound notes she calls "the closest thing she has to an MP3" (99). Pascoe reads James Boaden, Siddons's contemporary and biographer, and Naomi Royde-Smith's 1933 *The Private Life of Mrs. Siddons*, acutely aware of the historiographic implications of her work "sifting through the psychological study of a woman who had sifted through the biographies of a man who couldn't get Siddons out of his head" (28).

Pascoe reprints drawings and sketches that show Siddons in poses, accompanied with shorthand notations indicating the positions of her hands, arms, and body. Of course, the visual evidence lacks any indication of how Siddons sounded while playing these roles. The book jacket displays an altered reproduction of the 1784 painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds *Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse*, from the Huntington Library Art Collections. That iconic portrait is rendered as a mirror image with Siddons, one hand raised as if to speak, facing to her left instead of the right, and wearing earbuds as if listening to her iPod—a

¹⁰Thomas Postlewait and Bruce McConachie, eds., *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989).

¹¹Sue-Ellen Case, "Theory/History/Revolution," in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 427.

visual reminder of how technology has altered our listening habits and affected the way we perceive the human voice. As the image suggests, Pascoe imagines what Siddons would hear if she could listen to her own voice. Would she react as Henry Irving and Ellen Terry did when recorded by Edison, the way most of us do when we say, "Is that my voice?"

Despite her claim to be theory-averse, Pascoe usefully draws on several important theoretical models. For example, she references McLuhan's communication theory to consider the three interrelated dimensions of content, transmitter, and audience, asking whether Siddons's voice as transmitter overwhelmed the content it conveyed. She surmises that Siddons's "voice had the impact of a new media" for her Romantic-era audience, suggesting that listening to it was analogous to "switching from mono to stereo" (53). Pascoe then rotates McLuhan's triangle in order to think about Siddons's voice as a form of content transmitted through changing theatre acoustics, examining the ways in which her voice resonated in late-eighteenth-century theatres, during a period of expansion when Covent Garden and Drury Lane each held over 3,000 spectators.

She also engages Roland Barthes's suggestive essay "The Grain of the Voice" and Julia Kristeva's subtle distinction between *pheno-texts* (expression, communication) and *geno-texts* (pleasure in sounds), which Kimbrough also discusses. As he points out, the voice provides both the material of language and the individual sound of a person, regardless of whether the sound has linguistic (that is, semantic) value: "the voice on stage informationally represents the character and text of the author, but it also presents itself as it exists autonomously as part of the actor and as a medium of his vocal art" (164). He says that audiences familiar with Dustin Hoffman and Meryl Streep recognize their distinctive voices regardless of any accents they assume; they are what Bert States referred to as the "self-expressive actor."¹² For her part, Pascoe contends that there was "something about the 'grain' of Siddons's voice that penetrated her fans' consciousness and made them feel like they were seeing and hearing something totally new, even though they were seeing and hearing plays that had been performed for decades or even centuries, plays they hadn't thought they'd ever want to see again" (46).

Citing Marvin Carlson's contention that "all theatre . . . is as a cultural activity deeply involved with memory haunted by repetition," Pascoe considers ways that it might be possible to hear Siddons speak again through vestigial "ghosts" of performance (32).¹³ She enrolls in a "Voice for Actors" class, hoping to discover what Roach calls "kinesthetic nostalgia"—the belief that "movements and gestures descend like heirlooms through theatrical families" (33). Working alongside student actors, she learns about different breathing exercises, "untrained clavicular breathers," and the "rib reserve" of Edwardian actors, in what she calls a "misguided Stanislavskian attempt to imagine what it was like to be Sarah Siddons" (34). Yet in doing this, she is taking what I would characterize as an ontogenic approach to performance.

Hoping to find evidence that Siddons lives on in a surviving actor's gestures or in a living actor's voice, Pascoe forges on, watching video recordings of actresses playing the same roles that Siddons made famous. She listens to various versions of *Lady Macbeth*,

¹² Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 201.

¹³ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

from Fiona Shaw (CD) and Jane Lapotaire (DVD) to Francesca Annis and Jeannette Nolan (VHS). She views Dame Judi Dench's 1976 performance on YouTube, which was voted the greatest performance by an actress in the history of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Even so, Pascoe admits, with "so many generations removed, it's impossible to trace a direct line of descent" (107). Despite this mocking exercise of pursuing the lost voice in living bodies, Pascoe's ability to make use of critical theory strengthens her analysis, as much as her bias leans toward empirical evidence. Perhaps this balancing act is why I enjoyed her writing immensely.

Siddons lived in an era just before mechanical and technological inventions made voice recording possible, yet her audience sat in their seats holding her voice and the poetic words she spoke in their heads and perhaps, *pace* Artaud, the very viscera of their bodies. Neuroscience can try to explain the cognitive processes, but how do we reconstruct what it was like for the listener to sit in a theatre and experience a performance in a culture or historical period far removed from our own? As Pascoe points out, audiences during the Romantic era were acutely sensitive to the voice. Although sound historians and media theorists can help in developing frameworks for interpreting the way a voice sounded in the past, Pascoe recognizes the differences in the way we perceive the voice in an age when everything is recorded. Do we listen less carefully? When a voice falls behind the veil of memory, how do we experience its loss? Pascoe identifies the cultural divide produced by history as a major obstacle:

Even if I could be whisked back to 1809 and take a seat in the Covent Garden theatre, even if George Joseph Bell was jabbing me with his elbow or Joseph Severn was hyperventilating by my side, I would not be an equal sharer in the pleasures of Siddons's performances because I would not, like Severn and Bell—like almost anyone who went to the theatre in the romantic [*sic*] period—have a vast dramatic repertoire filed away in my brain, with subfiling for variant performances of particular roles. I would sit like a listening-impaired lump, clutching a sad little clothespin bag of Shakespeare quotations, while Siddons made the rest of the audience resonate like harp strings. (103)

The three books in this review help to delineate emerging boundaries in a field that currently lacks clear definition, where the category of "sound" has only recently expanded to include historic sound (and its reconstruction), and the phenomenological essence of an actor's voice. Slowly, theories of voice are being developed for theatre research. Michael Cordner, for example, has focused on the vocal qualities of various Shakespearean actors,¹⁴ and Peter Holland examines Garrick's vocal style, addressing the historiographic problem of accounting for the significance of voice.¹⁵ The study of Garrick's voice is intriguing, because we have many eyewitness accounts, such as Lichtenberg's famous description of Garrick's performance as Hamlet when, upon meeting the Ghost, his hat falls off and his hair (a trick wig) stands on end: "At last he speaks, not at the beginning, but at the end of a breath with a trembling voice."¹⁶ There are also secondary sources like the *Rules for Actors*, attributed to Restoration actor Thomas Betterton though dated much later. Nigel

¹⁴Michael Cordner, "Are We Being Theatrical Yet?: Actors, Editors, and the Possibilities of Dialogue," in *A Companion to Shakespeare in Performance*, ed. Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 399–414.

¹⁵Peter Holland, "Hearing the Dead: The Sound of David Garrick," in *Players, Playwrights, Playhouses: Investigating Performance, 1660–1800*, ed. Michael Cordner and Peter Holland (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 248–70 (reviewed in *Theatre Journal* 64, no. 2 [2012]: 309–10).

¹⁶Quoted in A. M. Nagler, *A Source Book in Theatrical History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), 368.

Cliff's book *The Shakespeare Riots* refers to Edwin Forrest's "refined elocution, and his strong, melodious voice" in his American performances that Drury Lane critics characterized as "replete with a rough music befitting one who in his youth has dwelt, a free barbarian, among the mountains."¹⁷ Other related topics might range from oratorical style (for example, Burbage's protean acting versus Alleyn's bombastic rhetoric) to comparing the vocal techniques of Sarah Bernhardt to Eleanora Duse. The availability of historic recordings on YouTube (for example, Henry Irving, Ellen Terry, and Bernhardt) is problematic, since the voices were recorded in a studio and not at a live performance onstage, yet technology since Edison affords the opportunity for further analysis of theatrical voices.

Kimbrough, West, and Pascoe—each in different ways—push the boundaries of this emerging field. Kimbrough, by summarizing the writings of important twentieth-century theorists and situating them within the context of a study of voice, invites us to make fresh discoveries by understanding them in relation to this new—and in some cases unexpected—topic. He prods further discoveries in his chapter pairings, which propose connections between these theorists and performances on the stage. While Kimbrough's book casts a broad net over the sea of contemporary critical theory, West takes a more focused approach to the topic of voice, concentrating her attention on the theory of performative speech acts in Beckett's plays. Nonetheless, her book also opens up new ways of theorizing voice in the theatre, augmenting a literary approach with productive attention to the ways that meanings are enacted by the material qualities of the vocal apparatus and the existential status of the human body that speaks. Likewise, Pascoe generates big ideas from her limited focus, considering Siddons's voice within the context of her cultural-historical moment. Mining the archive for textual and visual descriptions of Siddons's performances, she does not reconstruct them (recognizing the futility of that goal) so much as historicize the listening habits of Siddons's audience by acknowledging the cultural assumptions that differentiate their world from ours.

Indeed, Pascoe's insistence upon the cultural and historical specificity of listening habits and West's interest in the phenomenological situatedness of the act of enunciation both suggest that one direction for future scholarship is to pursue the distinction between broad transhistorical (or, in my terms, phylogenic) categories, such as sound and voice and specific instances of both. Such a distinction should be observed within the theatre, as well as outside of it. After all, sound is handled quite differently in the realist theatre and in avant-garde performance. Realism may use deictic signifiers denoting the existence of something through inference, such as a knock on a door or the ringing of a bell. Stanislavsky used ambient sound, such as chirping crickets, to create a sense of place and mood, and even made a sound recording to solve a dramatic problem caused by the departure of a consultant for *The Power of Darkness* (1902). Before she left, Stanislavsky made a phonograph record of her voice.¹⁸ Sound is used both diegetically and expressionistically in Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* (1920), where the faint, steady sound of the islanders' tom-tom drum evokes Brutus Jones's heartbeat, and in *The Hairy Ape* (1922), where a dissonant cacophony of stokehole noise, metallic sounds of furnace doors, the teeth-gritting grind of steel, the crunching of coal, and the syncopated beat of the engines ambiguously

¹⁷Nigel Cliff, *The Shakespeare Riots: Revenge, Drama, and Death in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Random House, 2007), 90.

¹⁸The introduction to my technical handbook *Sound for the Stage* (Royston, UK: Entertainment Technology Press, 2002) reviews the use of sound by Saxe-Meiningen, Stanislavsky, and O'Neill (15). Stanislavsky's *My Life in Art*, trans. J. J. Robbins (Boston: Little, Brown, 1924) describes the making of a phonograph record for *The Power of Darkness* in 1902.

symbolizes class oppression and masculine strength, “making the air hum with the quiver of liberated energy.”¹⁹ In a memorandum sent by O’Neill to the Theatre Guild in 1929, shortly before his play *Dynamo* went into rehearsal, the playwright comments on the importance of sound to his play:

I cannot stress too emphatically the importance of starting early in rehearsals to get these [sound] effects exactly right . . . these are not incidental noises but significant dramatic overtones that are an integral part of [the play]. . . . If they are dismissed until the last dress rehearsals (the usual procedure in my experience), then the result must inevitably be an old melodrama thunderstorm, and a generator sounding obviously like a vacuum cleaner; not only will the true values of these effects be lost but they will make the play look foolish. I may seem to be a bug on the subject of sound in the theatre—but I have a reason. . . . I always wrote primarily by ear for the ear. . . . The point here is that I have always used sound in plays as a structural part of them.²⁰

Thus another direction for the new sound studies to pursue would be to revisit canonical works and playwrights to reassess the important, but overlooked role that sound has played in the history of theatre.

Sound has gained more attention in studies of avant-garde theatre, given its historical preoccupation with technology, and recent implementation of motion-sensor triggers and Cirque du Soleil soundscapes. Contemporary British theatre companies like Filter Theatre and Frantic Assembly devise pieces that involve the juxtaposition of video with live actors, sound scores, and sound effects controlled “a vista” and “per audire” by the composer on his MacBook, performing as a character at the mixing console as actors create sound images on microphones in full view of the audience.²¹ Such avant-garde uses of sound can challenge the ontological assumptions underlying the notion of character, or even the idea of the actor in performance. Expanding West’s idea of vocal agency, sound in the experimental theatre is performative, creating and sustaining the dramatic action.

The voice is a primary element of theatrical performance, even when it is silent, as in the art of pantomime. Yet of the elements of theatrical performance, it is the most ephemeral and intangible of all. Although traces of the actor’s voice have been recorded in written accounts of admiring fans and biographers and in media like phonography and film, the essence of the voice has tended to elude the grasp of scholarly analysis until now. Historically, theatre scholarship has referred to the speaking actor, the literary voice of the playwright, the metaphorical voice of the age, or an unseen psychological voice—all of which have provided useful, if limited, insights into the subject. The informed and sharply focused modes of inquiry introduced by the authors considered here, however, promise to illuminate our understanding of the voice and inspire further research on topics like linguistic and paralinguistic voice/body expression, deictic sound effects in staging, premodern theatre acoustics, and filmed plays. With these theoretical modes of inquiry, future scholars will be able to hear anew the voices that speak from historical materials, such as written reflections and early sound and film recordings, considering the archive from new critical

¹⁹ Eugene O’Neill, “The Hairy Ape,” in *Complete Plays*, vol. 2 (New York: Library of America, 1988), 135.

²⁰ Quoted in Lee Simonson, *The Stage Is Set* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1963), 117–18.

²¹ At a recent residency at the University of South Florida, guest artists from Filter Theatre departed for England after the first weekend, so we had to train a student to “perform” the audio during the production. Early in the process, sound engineer Christopher Branch introduced the actors to microphone techniques and Foley effects used in cinema, which prompted one student actor to make a connection to Artaud, reflecting that “sound often became an extension of our bodies, frequently converging and transforming to overwhelm the mind, to crystallize as a new concrete conception of the abstract.”

perspectives. These books center on voice, but their implications extend into the complex field of sound studies more generally, helping to define what constitutes historical and theoretical research in aurality for theatre performance. At the junction of rapidly accelerating technology and advanced critical theory, scholars are going back to the archives and out into the field equipped with neuroscience, Merleau-Ponty, and an iPad.