

stature, even if diminished, from the days of Mei. Of particular interest is the chapter on *Qi* or 'Presence' in the actor. Here is an observer's account of all the principles and elements that come into action to sustain the presence of the Chinese actor which can be universally applied.

Riley's accounts constantly juxtapose earlier western interpretations of Chinese performance from Eurocentric standpoints, redressing these with her 'insider's' account of a Chinese sensibility in operation. This book opens a new door, and is a thorough investigation which explores a culture's theatre in its socio-political context which necessarily feeds its living functions. It is accessible to both the generalist and, with its detailed notations of movements, to the student of theatre.

VAYU NAIDU

John Deeney, ed.

Writing Live: an Investigation of the Relationship Between Writing and Live Art

London: New Playwrights Trust, 1998. £10.

ISBN 0-953-34910-1.

Conceived in 1994 to investigate the relationship between playwriting and live art, *Writing Live* is a report on a project set up by the New Playwrights Trust. As John Deeney says in his introduction, the book seeks to inform practitioners and theorists about 'how and why the marriages between writing and live art have occurred, and how some of those marriages are lived'.

In Part One, Ben Payne looks at definitions of new writing and its uneasy relationship with live art since 1956. He examines the role of the writer, shows how battles over the canon of contemporary dramatists 'are as much political as aesthetic', and gives a neat account of the various strategies adopted by performers such as Tim Etchells, Rose English, Claire Dowie, Nigel Charnock, Deborah Levy, and Lloyd Newson. With conventional notions of playwriting in flux, can a devised piece by one performance group be put on by another company? Of particular interest is the institutional context – the role of the ICA, Shinkansen, and Arts Catalyst – and the question of how to fund work which doesn't fit neatly into the categories of theatre, music, dance, mime installation, or sculpture. When money is short, problems of definition become more acute.

Payne finishes not with a manifesto, but by asking how theatre can 'speak the language of our own times'. In Part Two, Ruth Ben-Tovim offers three case studies which critically examine the role, status, and practice of the writer and written text in the field of live art: Moti Roti's *Maa*, *The Counting of Years*, and Gary Carter's *Muster*. In each case, she underlines the importance of venue and audience, and shows how practical collabo-

ration questioned accepted definitions of writer, director, and performer. Clearly written, attractively produced, and provocative, this is essential documentation for anyone interested in forms of theatre which travel beyond known landmarks. Both students and practitioners will be grateful for this map – unfinished, sketchy, but full of possibilities – of a territory which needs further exploration.

ALEKS SIERZ

Alisa Solomon

Re-Dressing the Canon

London; New York: Routledge, 1997. £12.99.

ISBN 0-415-15721-8.

This is a lively, accessible, and thought-provoking volume in which Solomon investigates representations of gender through canonical plays and performances. Using the *Thesmophoriazusae* as her way in, she traces the mimetic activity of theatre linked to performing femininity. Like many other feminist theatre scholars in the USA such as Diamond, Case, and Reinelt, Solomon is keen (in our post-Butler age), to put issues of performance and performativity back into theatre, where many more of us agree they belong. She states her intention to take up Jill Dolan's challenge: 'How can the liveness of theatre performance reveal performativity?', and uses recent feminist theatre theory as her platform.

One might not always agree with some of the author's revisions and challenges (I thought we had actually got a long way beyond 'role model feminism', rather than Solomon's claim to a new departure), but her ideas and criticisms are likely to encourage and to fuel further debate and thinking in the field. What is especially refreshing about her approach is that she has a practical theatre background to bring to her commentaries, and in the second section of the book, where she treats three productions – Mabou Mines' *Lear*, Charles Ludlam's performance as Hedda Gabler, and the Bloodlips and Split Britches collaboration on *Belle Reprieve* – the *Lear* commentary is particularly insightful, since Solomon herself served as dramaturg to the production. (I thought that a video package to accompany these production commentaries would have been very useful for class-based teaching – a point Routledge might like to consider.)

The first section revisits plays by Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Brecht, and a mid-volume chapter on Yiddish theatre is proposed as a means to queer the canonical questioning. I wasn't entirely convinced by this as a strategy, but did enjoy the linking of Sarah Bernhardt with Rachel Rosenthal as a 'post-modern Bernhardt'. The volume is a welcome addition to the field of feminist theatre studies. It also deserves to find a 'fissure' in the

canonically grey areas of the drama syllabus, while the epilogue, 'Notes on Butch', may entice many of us to sign up for Diane Torr's 'Drag King for a Day' workshop.

ELAINE ASTON

Oliver Double

Stand-Up! On Being a Comedian

London: Methuen, 1997. Pbk., £9.99.
ISBN 0-413-70320-7.

Groucho Marx, asked to explain the difference between the sense of humour of a normal person and a comedian, replied: 'A normal person will laugh at a man dressed as a little old lady careering down a hill smashing into a brick wall. For a comedian to laugh it must be a *real* old lady.' Judging Oliver Double's book with this particular 'Marxist' slant – 'Are we offered the truth behind the image as seen through the unique perspective of the comedian?' – the answer has to be a qualified 'Yes'.

As a stand-up himself, Double paints a vivid picture of the day-to-night world of comedians. In a relaxed, conversational style he describes the post-gig blues or highs, the appalling venues, the rubbish television at three in the morning, the strange elation when it's another comic who dies the death instead of you, and, most interestingly, the need for 'faith' in the interdependent relationships of material/self/audience.

Defining stand-up as a 'single performer in front of an audience', Double somewhat limits himself. He mainly excludes double acts, but includes comedians who worked with stooges such as Sandy Powell and Jimmy James (though sadly not Hylda Baker and 'Cynthia'). The biographies of the major names in stand-up are very good, especially when Double offers his own insights into why these people became comedians in the first place. He also presents a short history of music hall, variety, working men's clubs, and alternative comedy – 'altcom', as he calls it. However, his analysis of comic theory is far too brief – he is especially unfair on Bergson and lacks depth on Freud. That said, *Stand-Up!* is a perfect book for the budding comedian – or indeed anyone interested in the somewhat dysfunctional mind and world of the comedian.

STEVE NALLON

Geddy Aniksdal, Maggie Gale, Julia Varley, eds.
The Open Page 3: Theatre, Women, Politics
Denmark: Odin Teatrets Forlag, 1997. £5.00.
ISBN 87-87292-03-3.

The Open Page is an annual collaborative project between various women involved in the international network of the Magdalena Project (Wales).

Published through Denmark's Odin Teatret, *The Open Page* takes a different theme each year (Issue 1 was concerned with *Myth*, Issue 2 with *Lives*), and hosts contributions from women who work in many different kinds of theatres in a wide range of cultural contexts. This third issue – *Theatre, Women, Politics* – gathers articles which 'give an image of the very different way in which politics affect women's work in theatre', and includes articles as varied as Roberta Gandolfi's academic piece on 'Edy Craig and the Suffrage Theatre' to more personal articles such as Lieve Delanoy's 'Returning to Andahuaylas' and Sally Rodwell's 'A Week in Wellington'.

Indeed, it is not only the range of cultural backgrounds but also the range of approaches to 'writing out' experiences which make this publication so interesting – it is refreshing to read of women's theatre work without the often debilitating harness of theoretical rhetoric. Thus Malika Boussouf, in 'Woman, Theatre, Politics, in Algeria', has no need to expound theory: the concrete nature of her own experiences speaks far more than theory ever could. Similarly, the direct nature of the polemics in Pol Pelletier's 'From Politics to Spirituality' and Rachel Rosenthal's 'Earth First' needs no political/theoretical frameworking.

The editors have obviously attempted to keep a sense of the tone of each piece in its original language and sometimes this makes for difficult but ultimately rewarding reading. All in all, this publication is to be recommended to anyone interested in international theatre and performance as well as to those with a more specific interest in women, gender, and theatre.

CELIA WADE

Helga Noice and Tony Noice

The Nature of Expertise in Professional Acting: a Cognitive View

New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997.
ISBN 0-8058-2170-8.

This volume contains, in adapted form, research published in a number of psychological journals through the 1990s. Although presented primarily for the psychologist reader, the material is also of interest to performance researchers. The Noices' interest in the skills that characterize the 'expertise' of the professional actor derives from well-established psychological studies of differences between experts and novices in other domains, particularly in areas of problem-solving and representation.

The three main strands of their research to date, as documented in the volume, have focused on: 'elaboration' – a comparative investigation of the textual elaborations generated by 'expert' actors and 'novices' during the process of