The Theatre of the Real

Mackenzie, Gina Masucci

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“The Theatre of the Real is a groundbreaking book. MacKenzie analyzes playwrights who isolate disparate dimensions of stage action—in Yeats, the dance; with Beckett, the alienated gesture; in Sondheim’s musicals, cacophony—that precipitate the audience’s experience of the Real. She has articulated a powerfully coherent vision of the Theatre of the Real that promises to change how these works in particular and theatre more generally are interpreted and discussed.”

—Donald E. Pease, Avalon Professor in the Humanities, Dartmouth College

“Gina MacKenzie has written a highly original and entirely *timely* book: the application of Lacanian psychoanalysis to cinema, literature, and the fine arts has been current for more than twenty years, but there have been few sustained applications of what is, arguably, the most important school of theory of our time to theatre. *The Theatre of the Real* has the potential not only to enrich but also to fundamentally re-orient the ways in which we read, view, and understand theatre and performance.”

—Eric Savoy, Université de Montréal

*The Theatre of the Real: Yeats, Beckett, and Sondheim* traces the thread of *jouissance* (the simultaneous experience of radical pleasure and pain) through three major theatre figures of the twentieth century. Gina Masucci MacKenzie’s work engages theatrical text and performance in dialogue with the Lacanian Real, so as to re-envision modern theatre as the cultural site where author, actor, and audience come into direct contact with personal and collective traumas. By showing how a transgressively free subject may be formed through theatrical experience, MacKenzie concludes that modern theatre can liberate the individual from the socially constructed self.

*The Theatre of the Real* revises views of modern theatre by demonstrating how it can lead to a collaborative effort required for innovative theatrical work. By foregrounding Yeats’s “dancer” plays, the author shows how these intimate pieces contribute to the historical development of musical as well as modern theatre. Beckett’s universal dramas then pave the way for Sondheim’s postmodern cacophonies of idea and spirit as they introduce comic abjection into modernism’s tragic mode. This exciting work from a new author will leave readers with fresh insight to theatrical performance and its necessity in our lives.

Gina Masucci MacKenzie is assistant professor at the Community College of Philadelphia.