

Sixty Years of Theatre Studies

A Personal and Professional Odyssey

Marvin Carlson

While an undergraduate in the mid-1950s at the University of Kansas, I had already decided that my future lay in the theatre. I had taken every drama course offered by the program, been extremely active in the university theatre, and written my MA thesis on the plays of Ibsen, then and still one of my favorite authors. The leading PhD programs in the Midwest at that time were at the University of Iowa and Northwestern, both with faculty whose work I knew and admired, but I was determined to move closer to New York City. In that area Yale had the strongest reputation for theatre studies, largely due to the preeminent position in the field then held by Alois Nagler, but Yale had no theatre program, Nagler being a professor of English. I did not really want to continue in English and looked for major schools in the Northeast with independent theatre programs. In 1959 there were still fairly few. Among the Ivy League schools only Cornell, in a number of ways more like a large midwestern university than an Ivy League one, had such a program, founded less than two decades earlier.

In fact, the official title of the Cornell department was Speech and Drama, which was the most common title for university departments teaching theatre across the United States in the mid-20th century. Although in a few cases theatre programs in the United States grew up within literature departments, as they often did in Europe, in the United States, their origin, as at Cornell, was usually in programs of public speaking.¹ Cornell had a Department of Elocution

1. Shannon Jackson's *Professing Performance* (2004), as its title suggests, is largely devoted to the impact of performance-oriented theory upon the academy, and is particularly useful in that subject. It devotes very little analysis, however, to the field of theatre studies before the late 20th century, which is represented almost entirely by a chapter about George Pierce Baker at Harvard. The reader who relies upon this highly selective summary of early theatre studies in the United States should be aware of its limitations. Baker, important as he was for American playwrights, was not a significant force in the development of academic theatre in the United States, nor was Harvard, which never in fact created a program of theatre studies. Jackson rightly points out the rival genealogies of performance studies at Northwestern and NYU, but does not explain that this Midwest-Northeast rivalry largely defined theatre studies from the beginning, affecting every part of the profession from curriculum to professional organization. I hope my article, though brief, will provide some clarification of this genealogy of the profession as a whole, which is largely missing in Jackson's Harvard-oriented analysis.

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and Oratory as early as 1898, which became a Department of Public Speech in 1914 and in 1942 a Department of Speech and Drama, which it was when I arrived. According to the university catalogue the program was devoted to “oral communication as a humane study, exploring the limitations and potentialities of speech, particularly in public address and in the drama” (Cornell University 1959:81). The faculty of eleven had six in speech and five in theatre, and offered just over 40 courses, approximately evenly divided. There were only four upper-level academic courses in theatre, one each on theatre history, American drama, history of theory, and modern theory. The influence of the American educational theorist John Dewey (1859–1952) and his emphasis on applied knowledge was strongly felt,² especially in the large state universities, and like these, Cornell required a balance of practical and academic work for its theatre PhDs and also an equally strong background in speech and theatre. Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* was considered as foundational to our study as his *Poetics*, and the speeches of Cicero, Lincoln, and Churchill were then as closely studied as the plays of Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Ibsen.

This structure was, as I have said, characteristic of the field at mid-century. Academically, theatre study still remained in United States universities much under the wing of speech and rhetoric just as a generation before speech had been under the wing of English. The development of academic professional organizations in the US marked the changing field. In 1911 a group of professors of English formed the National Council of Teachers of English as an independent academic field.³ Only three years later, in 1914, teachers of public speaking within that organization proposed creating a new professional organization of their own. The proposal was very controversial, with 57 members voting for the new organization and 56 against it, establishing the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking (NAATPS). It launched *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* in 1915. In 1923 the association was reorganized as the National Association of Teachers of Speech.⁴

In 1936 the American Educational Theatre Association was formed. Despite its title, it did not develop like the NAATPS, inside the university, but began in the professional theatre as an outreach to theatre educators. In fact, university scholars then and later remained a minority of its members, which included theatre professionals, people from community theatre, military theatre, and children’s theatre. The organization created its own academic journal, *The Educational Theatre Journal*, the first in theatre studies, in 1945. Before that date, and for some time after, however, the journal with the highest reputation for theatre scholars was the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*.

An odd feature of American theatre studies is that for most of its history this academic field has been represented by two rival professional organizations, each with its own scholarly journal, annual convention, and parallel structure. Two decades after the American Educational Theatre Association (AETA) was formed, in November of 1956, a small group of English professors in Ivy League universities, inspired by a gathering in London in 1955 of European theatre scholars that resulted in the creation of the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR), founded the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR). From the beginning ASTR had close organizational and personal ties to its European counterpart (Marshall 1981). Over the years, AETA and ASTR sometimes worked closely together, sometimes operated almost as rivals, and on occasion considered merging, but their separation continues (even though, as I explain later, AETA has reorganized under a different name, ATHE), each with its loyal followers, although many scholars in the field are members of both.

2. Most notably in his 1938 book, *Experience and Education*, John Dewey argued for the superiority of active learning, in which students were physically involved, over passive learning, in which they were provided with information. In theatre education, disciples of Dewey insisted that all theatre students should be actively involved in performance, even if they planned careers devoted to archival research.

3. See “About Us” at <https://ncte.org/about/>.

4. See “A Brief History of NCA” at <https://www.natcom.org/about-nca/what-nca/nca-history/brief-history-nca>.

Why two professional organizations? The origins of course lie in the origins of the field itself, which has always been somewhat divided between institutions in the northeastern United States and those in the Midwest (this appeared again in more recent times in the rival origins and development of performance studies). In the midwestern universities, theatre grew out of communications programs, with continuing strong ties to rhetoric and public speaking. In the East, and especially the Ivy League schools, the study of theatre grew up within, and in some cases never departed from, English departments. Cornell was unique in the Ivy League not only in actually having an independent theatre department like a midwestern university, but also like the Midwest, in developing it from public speaking. In other respects, Cornell also followed the Midwest, not the Ivy League. It combined academics and practice, while other Ivy League schools followed the European pattern of leaving the practical side of theatre to separate conservatories or to student clubs. The two professional organizations were similarly distinct: the more pragmatic and practical AETA included such areas as community, military, and children's theatre; while ASTR restricted its concerns to traditional academic ones, almost exclusively to theatre history. Perhaps most fundamentally, at least during the first two decades of ASTR, the two organizations followed quite different models. AETA, dedicated to a diverse public, followed the now familiar structure of most academic societies in America, open to anyone wishing to join. ASTR was more like a European professional gentleman's club, consciously exclusive and limited, accepting new members only if sponsored by an established member. The sponsorship requirement ended during the more egalitarian 1970s, but ASTR remained a much smaller and more focused organization than AETA, or its successor organization Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE). Often, I heard ASTR's members refer to themselves as the "serious" scholars in the profession. These different orientations were also reflected in the national conventions and in the professional journals of the two organizations, ASTR launching *Theatre Survey* in 1970 while ATHE published the *Educational Theatre Journal* (ETJ), renamed *Theatre Journal* in 1979.

When I arrived at Cornell in 1959, I was unaware of ASTR, founded only three years before, but strongly aware of AETA, with which Cornell had a close association from the beginning. Indeed, my thesis advisor, Darkes Albright, was one of the first national presidents of that organization. Within a few years, however, I became aware of ASTR and attracted by its focus on theatre history. Sponsored by Richard Moody, a Cornell graduate who was among the founders of ASTR, I joined and from then onward remained, like many colleagues, a member of both professional organizations.

The focus of ASTR on theatre history was hardly surprising, since that was the aspect of theatre studies that almost exclusively concerned academic theatre students of that era. My first book, *The Theatre of the French Revolution* (1966), was such a project, and my research during the 1960s and 1970s—during the time I was a member of the Cornell faculty—was entirely historical. Although I was involved, as was typical of the theatre faculty of a large university, in both academic and production work, my teaching reflected my research concerns. The program had no courses in dramatic literature, which was taught in the English and foreign language departments, and I did not teach the one course in theatre theory, which was a survey of writings on that subject from Aristotle to Shaw, made up entirely of readings from the only sources then available, a collection of fragments of rather uneven quality, *European Theories of the Drama* ([1918] 1947), assembled by Barrett H. Clark, a prolific author and editor of theatre materials in the early years of the century. In 1967 the Cornell English and Theatre Arts (so renamed in this year) departments made a joint appointment of Bert O. States, the first serious theatre theorist I encountered, who began building a student interest in this hitherto largely neglected aspect of the discipline.

For my students, and the profession, however, theory remained a rather exotic side interest, rather like non-Western theatre. Traditional Western theatre history was still the focus of the field, especially after 1968 when Oscar Brockett's *History of the Theatre* first appeared. From the outset it established a clear lead over competing volumes, and, appearing in new editions every few years, it remained for decades the one essential book for advanced theatre students. Reading

Brockett became the standard first step in preparing for oral PhD exams, and indeed a knowledge of Brockett alongside a handful of canonical plays was often all that was needed to excel in such examinations.

The turbulence of the 1960s was strongly felt at Cornell, a center of the anti-Vietnam War movement—and from 1969, when armed Black students occupied the Student Union building, of the rising Black power movement as well. Although the upheavals of the '60s greatly affected the theatre world in general, their effect was only gradually felt in the organization and focus of the academic profession. The various structural changes in the professional organizations reflected the period's increasing interest in populist reforms. At almost the same time in the early 1970s when ASTR gave up its requirement that new members had to be nominated by existing members, AETA clarified its diverse constituency by renaming itself the American Theatre Association (ATA), uniting under that title six largely independent organizations: the Children's Theatre Association (CTA), University and College Theatre Association (UCTA), American Community Theatre Association (ACTA), Secondary School Theatre Association (SSTA), National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST), and University Resident Theatre Association (URTA). It also stressed its broad mandate by dropping the term "educational" and becoming simply the American Theatre Association.

My own teaching and research, and that of the profession as a whole, showed little change during the 1960s and 1970s, but major shifts were developing that would profoundly alter the field during the following decades. One was the growing interest in feminist studies, spurred by books like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. Two other new orientations were led by two theatre professors at New York University, Brooks McNamara and Richard Schechner, the former dedicated to popular culture, the latter to the concept of performance. Of these two, popular culture made a more general impact on the profession before the 1980s. In 1974, *TDR*, which moved in 1962 with Richard Schechner from Tulane to NYU, presented a special issue on Popular Entertainments, edited by McNamara, the first such scholarly collection. At that time, *TDR* was the major voice for new ideas in theatre theory and practice. I contributed an essay to McNamara's issue, my first contribution to *TDR*. Although many conservatives in the profession feared that the legitimation of popular entertainment would damage the scholarly standing of the field as a whole, *ETJ* presented a similar special issue the following year, and ASTR devoted its annual conference to the subject, considerably altering theatre studies and opening the way to the even broader idea of performance studies that followed.

In 1979 Oscar Brockett left Indiana University for the University of Texas, and I was invited to replace him. It was a flattering offer and after 20 years at Cornell I felt it was time for a change. I naturally assumed that I would be essentially the resident theatre historian, as Brockett had been, but the Indiana chair, Keith Michael, urged me to begin teaching theory as well, which neither Brockett nor I had done. It was a major but intriguing challenge and I began planning for a regular survey course plus a seminar in theory. I first began looking for a general history of theatre theory similar to what Brockett had provided for the history of production, but was astonished to find that none existed. Again, this indicated the general indifference to theory in the field at that time, since Brockett's history text had at least six or seven quite reputable rivals. I therefore decided to begin writing such a book alongside my developing my knowledge of this field. The result was the publication in 1984 of my *Theories of the Theatre*, which sought to address that lack. How far the field still had to go was suggested by the fact then when I sent the book to Cornell University Press for consideration, one of their reviewers urged that I conclude it around 1950, since it was impossible to tell what was important in more recent theoretical writing. I responded to this criticism that more recent theory was what students wanted and needed to hear about. Fortunately, Cornell accepted my argument, thus allowing me to include the theatre of the absurd, Grotowski, the politically engaged theatre of the 1960s and '70s, the developing Black and feminist theatre theory, Schechner and Turner's anthropological explorations, and the beginnings of semiotic theory.

Semiotics represented for me and for the profession a special case, the first manifestation of a shift toward theoretical concerns that would dominate the field going into the future. In 1979, when I moved to Indiana, I was already aware of this new approach through French writings, but English scholarship in the field was just beginning, opened by Keir Elam's flawed but highly influential *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, which appeared in 1980. I had already decided to offer my first theory seminar at Indiana in semiotics when I discovered to my great surprise and good fortune that Indiana was home to one of the world's leading sites for semiotic studies, the Research Center for Language and Semiotics, founded there in 1965 by one of the field's most distinguished scholars, Thomas Sebeok. Sebeok was one of the most brilliant and eclectic scholars I ever encountered, and theatre was among the multitude of human and animal behaviors that fascinated him. I soon joined the large group of his friends and admirers, and thus became involved with semiotic studies just as it was gaining in importance in theatre studies.

During the 1980s much of my work was influenced by semiotics. Some of the most interesting early work in semiotics was done in architectural theory and I was inspired to combine that approach with my historical background for my 1989 book, *Places of Performance*. Sebeok's own journal, *Semiotica*, now joined *Theatre Journal*, *Theatre Survey*, and *TDR* among my favored journals, and I began attending semiotic conferences alongside theatre ones. In 1984 Sebeok urged me to attend my first international conference, which was in fact the first one in the semiotics of performance, devoted primarily to opera and held in the conference center in Royaumont, France. There I met most of the scholars from around the world concerned with applying semiotics to theatre studies, among them three emerging leaders in the field who became close friends and colleagues—Patrice Pavis from France, Freddie Rokem from Israel, and Erika Fischer-Lichte from Germany. During the decade all four of us found our interest in semiotics moving from the analysis of individual performances to concerns of how different semiotic systems interact. This came about partly as a result of the growing internationalization of theatre scholarship and partly in response to the highly publicized and influential intercultural experiments of leading international directors like Peter Brook and Ariane Mnouchkine. Indeed, I presented a paper on the intercultural work of these two directors at the first major European seminar on intercultural theatre, a gathering of 25 international scholars convened by Fischer-Lichte in Bad Homburg, Germany, in 1988 with participants from Europe, North America, Asia, and Africa. Fischer-Lichte's own work increasingly moved in this direction and led to the establishment of the International Research Institute "Interweaving Performance Cultures," at the Freie Universität Berlin in 2008, the most significant center for such research in the new century.

Before leaving Indiana, I must mention that while there, I took advantage of Indiana's noted reputation for language training to undertake my first non-Western language, enrolling in their program in Arabic. The Eurocentric character of traditional theatre studies was beginning to trouble many younger theatre scholars, and Arabic held a particular attraction for me, my first graduate student at Cornell having been an Egyptian scholar, Abdul-Aziz Hammouda, who later became Rector of Cairo University, where I had several times visited him.

A major shift in my professional career occurred in 1986, when I left Indiana to accept a position at the City University of New York (CUNY). Obviously, my new location at the center of the American theatre and with easier access to Europe had an enormous influence upon my life and my career, but looking back now at the closing years of the 1980s, I realize that my own career changes took place against the background of major shifts in the field of theatre studies, which in one way or another affected almost everyone engaged. At one important level these years marked the passing of the generation of scholars who established the field, along with its structures and procedures, and the coming of a new generation with very different ideas of theatre study and of its place in the academy and the world. The most obvious organizational change was the disappearance of ATA, the leading professional theatre organization in America, which dissolved in 1986, cutting loose its constituent elements to function on their own. Details of the dissolution are now buried in the archives and in individual memories, but from an institutional

point of view it is important to remember the generally suppressed fact that the ATA was forced into bankruptcy by fiscal mismanagement. Why this is important is that no officer of that organization was legally allowed to assume an official position in any related subsequent organization. This in turn meant that when an inevitable replacement organization appeared, ATHE, it had to be organized and operated by a new generation, all of the elder leaders of ATA being legally banned from participation.

The year 1989 has often been cited by historians of modern American theatre studies as a watershed point in the development of the field. Almost inevitably they take as their central example the ASTR conference in Williamsburg, Virginia, but in fact all three major annual theatre conventions that year made distinct contributions to the change. First came the June conference of IFTR in Stockholm, organized by Willmar Sauter, one of the leaders of a new generation of international theatre scholars and the next president of the organization. Traditionally IFTR conventions were organized, like most academic conferences then and since, into a pattern of keynote speakers and small panels. Sauter instead divided the conference into eight areas, among them theatre history, sociopolitical theatre, and performance theory, in which scholars interested in these areas met for seminar-like discussions similar to the 1988 conference in Bad Homburg. Although this radical restructuring was not repeated, one group, Performance Analysis, of which I was a member, decided to create an ongoing entity within IFTR, meeting during subsequent conventions. Thus was born the first IFTR working group, a structure that became more and more central to the organization. Today there are over 20 working groups in IFTR and these have become essential elements.

In 1989 I gave the state of the profession speech that concluded [ASTR's] turbulent convention. I argued that, given the intellectual revolution during the previous two decades, especially the critiques of assumptions about objectivity and the neutrality of language, historians could no longer assume that a singular traditional methodology was self-evidently superior.

The ASTR Williamsburg conference that year was also considered a critical event among American historians of modern theatre. I have mentioned that despite the tremendous effect of the political upheavals from the mid-1960s onward in many aspects of theatre production and performance, their direct effect on theatre scholarship in the United States was still relatively minor. The theme of the 1989 Williamsburg conference, Theatre and Politics, directly confronted this lack and opened a divide among American theatre scholars that continued through the rest of the century. The choice of Williamsburg, where American and Confederate flags greeted the delegates as they entered the conference hall, encouraged

a new consciousness of racial politics among this still almost totally white organization. Even more visible was a new consciousness of the rising importance of feminist concerns within the profession. Encouraged by a conference call from Gay Cima and the planning committee for papers that would examine power relationships in the theatre and in society, many of the papers, although wide-ranging in period and geography, challenged the racism and patriarchy deeply embedded in most theatre scholarship to date. The critique extended beyond race and gender to question such fundamental ideological concerns as the positivist approach to research or the sociological assumptions of traditional humanism. A confrontation, sometimes personal, between an older generation and its methods and procedures and a younger one with a very different orientation had been brewing both in ASTR and IFTR for some years. Probably the key early document in the struggle was Bruce McConachie's 1985 "Towards a Postpositivist Theatre History,"⁵ which directly challenged traditional theatre research in the person of Oscar Brockett as imposing a narrow

5. First a convention address at ATHE and subsequently published in *Theatre Journal* (1985).

and hegemonic view of theatre upon the profession. This challenge was bitterly resisted by many in the organization, especially the older members, and a struggle between “history” and “theory” troubled the profession for many years.

In 1989 I gave the state of the profession speech that concluded this turbulent convention. I argued that, given the intellectual revolution during the previous two decades, especially the critiques of assumptions about objectivity and the neutrality of language, historians could no longer assume that a singular traditional methodology was self-evidently superior. In a world where many different cultural perspectives were now being represented, there was no common audience with a common agreement on how (or whose) history should be written. The historian at this juncture must begin with theoretical questions, including ethical and political questions, and must ask what is the purpose of my history writing and to what and whom should I be responsible?

This speech, slightly reworked, appeared in the 1991 book *The Performance of Power*, which included a number of the Williamsburg papers and served as a guide to the new directions the profession was going. The book’s editors, Janelle Reinelt and Sue-Ellen Case, were already among the clear leaders of these new directions, Reinelt in theatre as a political operation, Case in feminist theatre studies. Feminist theatre studies was a major development of the late 1980s. A feminist interest in theatre had grown steadily throughout the 1980s emerging into the mainstream in 1988, the year before the Williamsburg conference, with the publication of two foundational books, Jill Dolan’s *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988) and Sue-Ellen Case’s *Feminism and Theatre* (1988). These books insured a central place for feminist studies in the complex new vision of the field.

Although *The Performance of Power* grew most directly from the Williamsburg conference, it began by stressing the importance of various recent conferences in the rapid changes occurring in the profession. Indeed, some of the essays included came from the 1989 conference of the recently formed ATHE in New York, which both Case and Reinelt attended. Both also participated in what was widely seen as a central event of the conference, a two-session panel entitled “History/Theory: The New Convergence.” The panel included a number of the leading emerging voices in the field—in addition to Case and Reinelt were Rosemarie Bank, Elin Diamond, Timothy Murray, Thomas Postlewait, Joseph Roach, and me. The panelists, although their approaches varied considerably, agreed upon a growing convergence of the sort I outlined here and in my Williamsburg paper. But there was growing resistance to all this new “theory” from more traditional members of the profession. The struggle between these two positions in fact troubled the profession for most of the rest of the century. Sharp divisions appeared at the next ATHE conference, in San Diego in 1990, over the relation of theatre studies to such matters as race, gender, and class. The confrontational tone was set when Sue-Ellen Case prominently walked out of Jonathan Miller’s opening keynote address when he dismissed feminist readings of *The Taming of the Shrew* as simply boring. In addition to the flashpoints of race and gender, there was an ongoing tension between proponents of more traditional, largely archival-based research and more abstract, European-oriented work that often utilized a more specialized critical vocabulary that American traditional scholars found offensive in itself. I still recall convention speeches in the 1990s being interrupted with shouts of “No more jargon.” Traditionalists were particularly disturbed when during the 1980s the editorship of *TJ* was given to the radicals, especially Sue-Ellen Case, who ended her editorship with a special issue entitled “Theatre and Hegemony” (1989)—flaunting the theoretical term that many traditionalists found particularly offensive and representative of the new jargon. So disturbed were some that ATHE actually created a new journal in 1991, *Theatre Topics*, which was privately justified as a journal that would avoid the linguistic and theoretical excesses of those now controlling *TJ*, but which more publicly justified itself in gentler terms as a journal that would be accessible to both scholars and practitioners.

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The complexity of the situation was increased by the growing importance, during these same years, of performance theory, especially as championed by Richard Schechner at New York University. As early as 1966 Schechner had been calling for his own desired convergence of theatre studies and the social sciences (Schechner 1966), and although his journal, *TDR*, was widely read in the 1970s and 1980s for new trends in theory and production, his championship of what he called performance studies did not have as great an effect on the field of theatre studies during the 1980s as did other fresh approaches. This changed during the 1990s, however. A major symbolic indication of the shift occurred in 1992, when the program organizers for the annual convention of ATHE invited Schechner to give the keynote address in Atlanta. Most of those attending, if they knew Schechner's work at all, knew him as a reputable scholar but somewhat on the fringes of the discipline, with interests in Asian ritual theatre, environmental theatre, quasi-theatrical forms like street theatre, sports, the performance of everyday life, and politics, as well as avantgarde artists like Jerzy Grotowski. Some also knew him as the creator of *Dionysus in 69* by The Performance Group, whose use of nudity caused considerable comment even in the indulgent '60s. Few expected Schechner to explode a rhetorical bomb by arguing that the theatre represented by his audience, devoted to the traditional staging of Eurocentric drama, was headed for virtual extinction, "the string-quartet of the 21st century," a beloved but distinctly minor element in the much larger field of performance studies (Schechner 1992).

Like Sue-Ellen Case, Schechner was well aware of the power of outrage to stimulate discussion, and during the 1990s performance studies joined the other areas of contestation that were causing deep divisions within the hitherto generally unified world of theatre studies, especially in the United States. For a decade or so after Schechner's challenge, many felt that scholars in the future had to choose between theatre studies and performance studies, but gradually, as with the earlier history/theory divide, convergence triumphed over antagonism and today programs of Theatre and Performance Studies (TPS) are a significant part of today's academic landscape.

Although I heard Schechner's notorious Atlanta speech, I did not share the shock and dismay of many of my colleagues. Nothing he said was at odds with his clearly expressed opinions of the preceding decade, and my only surprise was that those who invited Schechner to speak were apparently unaware of either his opinions or his style. In the wake of the widespread controversy in the profession generated in part by Schechner's challenge, Talia Rodgers at Routledge asked me if I would write an introduction to performance, building in part upon my work in *Theories of the Theatre*. Although the primary aim of my 1996 *Performance: A Critical Introduction* was not at all some sort of reconciliation of performance studies and theatre studies, it did attempt, by considering performance as an event-based social activity, to show how it both paralleled and complimented the new attention within theatre to such matters as identity formation, cultural placement, and postmodern indeterminacy.

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By no means unrelated to my new interests in performance but really much more directly developed from my earlier interest in semiotics was a growing attention to reception, which during the 1980s was gaining increasing attention among European semioticians. The early semiotic model, concerned primarily with how signs were created, was now widely seen as incomplete without a consideration of how they were interpreted. The last three essays in my 1990 collection *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life* were all analyses of theatre audience reception. As one of the founding members of the continuing Performance Analysis working

group of IFTR I found our annual meetings an excellent opportunity to further explore how audiences process theatre. Several members of this group—Erika Fischer-Lichte, Janelle Reinelt, Freddie Rokem,

Eli Rozek, and Michael Quinn—made important contributions to reception analysis during the 1990s, but my own focus was on how the memory of previous theatre experiences affected new ones, a process to which I gave the name “ghosting.” My thoughts on this grew into one of my most popular books, *The Haunted Stage* (2001).

Among the less publicized but highly justified critiques Schechner leveled against traditional theatre studies was that it had from the beginning been profoundly Eurocentric. My concern about this continued to increase over the years, especially with my study of Arabic and the rich traditions of Egyptian drama I learned about from Abdul Hammouda—a tradition not only unknown to most theatre scholars but denied by many. Brockett specifically claimed in his canonical *History of the Theatre* that theatre could not develop in the Arab world due to Islam’s opposition to representation. Opposing this widely held error became an important project for me. In 1999, some Egyptian students and I organized the first scholarly conference in the US on the modern Egyptian theatre, featuring a number of Egyptian playwrights and critics, headed by Lenin El-Ramly and Alfred Farag, the two leading contemporary Egyptian dramatists.

These concerns took on new urgency after 9/11, which called attention to how unfamiliar the traditions and culture of the Arab/Islamic world were to Westerners in general. In 2003 I attended the first international conference on Arabic theatre, organized by Meike Kolk at the University of Ghent in the Netherlands. A follow-up conference was held two years later in Morocco, organized by Khalid Amine. At a concluding roundtable, Hazem Azmy of Egypt proposed the organization of an ongoing international organization devoted to the study of Arabic theatre, and while the group felt this was premature, Azmy, Kolk, Amine, and I decided to develop instead a real Arabic presence within IFTR. Our efforts resulted in an invitation from IFTR to the distinguished Egyptian critic Nehad Selaiha to deliver the keynote address at the 2006 conference in Helsinki. Hers was the first ever IFTR lecture by a scholar from the Arab world. At the same conference Kolk and I organized the first ever panel on Arabic theatre. The panel attracted an overflow crowd and led to a new working group in Arabic theatre. The Arabic working group has since been an important part of IFTR, producing a number of collections, translations, individual published essays, and in 2004, founding the journal *Arab Stages*.

Not surprisingly, a significant part of my research and travel in recent years has involved researching, writing, and editing works related to the theatre of the Arab-Islamic world from the 13th century to the present, from Morocco to Iran. A 2014 invitation from the Shanghai Theatre Academy to establish an institute for the study of Western theatre, along with my ongoing work in Arab theatre, encouraged me to begin studying and writing on the challenges and strategies of a global theatre, a concern attracting increasing attention among theatre scholars.

Finally, as I passed my 60th, 70th, and 80th birthdays, the attention to memory and memorization that inspired *The Haunted Stage* in 2001 naturally increased and became more personal. One result was the writing of my memories of six decades of theatre going, *10,000 Nights* (2017), which ended with 2010 but to which I have since added another decade, extending the chronicle up to the Covid shutdown. That addendum appeared the spring of 2024, which along with this present essay, provides an admittedly idiosyncratic, but I hope informative look back at a lifetime of theatregoing and professional participation. As a historian, I can think of few periods where the theatre has offered so varied and exciting a range of experiences as it has in my lifetime. I hope these necessarily fragmentary tellings suggest something of that trajectory.

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