REVISED & ENLARGED EDITION

CRITICAL THEORY AND PERFORMANCE

Edited by
JANELLE G. REINELT
& JOSEPH R. ROACH

Critical Theory and Performance

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The University of Michigan Press
Ann Arbor

Published in the United States of America by
The University of Michigan Press
Manufactured in the United States of America
♾ Printed on acid-free paper
2010 2009 2008 2007 4 3 2 1

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Critical theory and performance / edited by Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach. — Rev. and enl. ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN-13: 978-0-472-09886-6 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0-472-09886-1 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN-13: 978-0-472-06886-9 (pbk. : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0-472-06886-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Theater—Philosophy. I. Reinelt, Janelle G. II. Roach, Joseph R.

PN2039.C75 2006
792.01—dc22 2006050195

Acknowledgments
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"What Is to Be Remembered?: Tourism to Ghana's Slave Dungeons," by Sandra L. Richards, *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 4 (2005): 617–37. Reprinted by permission of The Johns Hopkins University Press. © The Johns Hopkins University Press.
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In Memory of
Dwight and Bert

Preface to the Second Edition

In the first edition of *Critical Theory and Performance,* having pondered competing strategies for organizing the material into categories, we wrote, "There is no doubt that a different taxonomy would have produced a different book, but the present plan seeks to provide a preliminary map to the field as it looks to us today." Nearly fifteen years ago, the field changed, in part because it has consolidated some of the methodologies and critical practices that were the focus of the first edition. Relying again on "the field as it looks to us today," we have reworked the sections into which the volume is divided, once again noting continuity and change. We are as convinced as ever of the provisionality of these categories.

We begin with a section titled "Performance Analysis," an umbrella term affording discussion of how actual performances are approached. The sections "Semiotics" and "Phenomenology" address two major theoretical understandings of how performances make meanings, affect audiences, and create innovation. Cultural Studies, which once seemed like a discrete category of emerging interdisciplinary work and therefore was a section in the first edition, has developed until it broadly characterizes a familial affiliation across fields. We have created new sections for "Postcolonial Studies," "Critical Race Theory," and "Performance Studies," where some material from the previous edition appears alongside new essays. The section "Feminism(s)" in the first edition has become "Gender and Sexualities," and we have added a section "Mediatized Cultures," as the burgeoning influence of technological innovation has made serious theorizing of the virtual and the global a necessary part of what we do.

During the past decade, performance studies has emerged in relation to theater studies in such a way that new generations of Ph.D. students engage with scholarship that touches on the many points of mutual interest between these different but fruitfully interdependent terrains. Performance studies now maintains a focus group within the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, is everywhere integrated into programs sponsored by the American Society for Theatre Research, and has its own international organization and journal. Theater studies, meantime, continues to develop, as can be seen from picking up any one of the field's key journals, from *Theatre Journal* to *Theatre Research* or *Theatre Survey. The Drama Review* (*TDR*) continues to emphasize performance studies, but not to the exclusion of scholarship that would be at home in any of the other journals, just as *Theatre Journal* publishes many "crossover" essays. The same authors can be found in *Theatre Journal, Modern Drama,* or *Performance Research International.* In academic departments, colleagues who were trained in one or the other tradition teach side by side and frequently collaborate. Indeed, today more of their students than ever are cross-training in theater and performance studies.

If there was a "theory explosion" at the time we were assembling the

first edition of this book, there are now those who think the "age of theory" is over. We do not. Theory has changed and transformed our field by enlarging the very conceptions of performance, returning performance history and criticism to philosophy, and overhauling the traditional delineations between texts and performances, as we described in the first edition. These changes have had long-term consequences for how we think and write and perform. In addition, much of the theory of the past decade has been absorbed into scholarship in such a way that it is taken for granted—not as visible, perhaps, in its conceptual vocabulary and syntax as when we were first learning about these theories and what they could do, in the context of performances, to bring new ideas forward. Theory has provided fresh starting points each time someone begins a research project or rethinks familiar terrain. There is no going back, and we have no doubt that a decade from now, the scholarly and artistic situation will be somewhat different again, while having consolidated many of the theoretical insights of this generation's work.

When we envisioned the first edition of this book, jotting ideas on a bar napkin in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1988, there was no comparable resource easily available for course use. Creating a second edition, we are aware of other volumes that now provide their own perspectives on the relationship between theory and performance. We hope it will be useful to compare and contrast not only the changes we chronicle, but also the various competing ways of organizing materials in order to construct an intellectual history of the field. For the most part, this book is limited to North American scholars; other regions and nations apprehend the architecture of the field rather differently. The international conversations about these topics have provided both of us with professional stimulation and satisfaction during recent years, and have influenced the character of our own thinking.

—J. G. R. and J. R. R.

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Introduction to the First Edition

To take up a book on critical theory and performance is immediately to encounter the topography of *post*. There are postmodernism, poststructuralism, post-Marxism, postfeminism, postcolonialism—all designating a departure from something prior. Of course, the use of the prefix *post* is incrementally problematic: in the case of *postmodernism* and *poststructuralism* it indicates that there once was a monolith called "modernism" or "structuralism" that is now definitively defunct; in the case of *post-Marxism* and *postfeminism* it marks as "over" certain political theories that are in fact changing but vitally alive. As for *postcolonial*, any informed observer would be justified in wondering what possible accuracy it might have in this presently quite colonial world.

By way of introduction to critical theory and performance, *postmodernism* offers a good starting point. The term reappears frequently in the essays that follow, but it has no chapter of its own. Perhaps this is so because postmodernism represents neither a category nor a method but, rather, as Jean-François Lyotard has observed, a "condition." The condition it represents reflects the collapse of categories themselves, an implosion that has been attributed to the media-saturated powers of capitalistic production and consumption. Postmodernity has been described as a culture of "hyperrepresentation" in which objects lose their authenticity and become indefinitely reproducible and representable as commodities. "Eclecticism," Lyotard writes, "is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and 'retro' clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games."[1] Even nature, which it was once art's theoretical purpose to imitate, becomes a fabrication, a representation of itself, as in the television commercial that shows various species of marine animals joyously applauding petrochemical conglomerates for rescuing the environment from toxic spills. Postmodernism embraces simulations; it distrusts claims to authenticity, originality, or coherence. Postmodernism appropriates the popular debris of retrospective styles; it vacates modernist belief in progress and the perpetual avant-garde. Postmodernism inspires pluralism; it deflates master narratives and totalizing theories.

As editors of this volume, we acknowledge the impact of postmodernism—and of the pluralistic eclecticism it inspires—on critical theories of performance as well as on performances themselves. Performance research and practice both have found in postmodernity a positive stimulus to creative work, an opening out and up of imaginative possibility whereby the emotive and cognitive, the popular and the esoteric, the local and the global can come into play. In his study of the development of performance art, for instance, historian of the American avant-garde Henry M. Sayre substitutes the category-resistant term *undecidability* for pluralism

in order better "to describe the condition of contingency, multiplicity, and polyvocality which dominates the postmodern scene."[2] In one of the most quoted essays of the last decade, anthropologist Clifford Geertz welcomes the emergent "genre blurring" among collapsing disciplinary categories, and he places performance, which he terms symbolic action, at the head of an agenda for the "refiguration of social thought."[3]

The exhilaration produced by the blurring of genres cannot be denied, but it makes our necessary task of developing a taxonomy, of organizing the contents of this book and introducing them, a kind of performance in its own right, one that certainly encourages us to leave room for improvisation, but also one that compels us to make choices. We take note here of the ongoing critique of postmodernism by such theorists as Jürgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson, and Christopher Norris, one of the burdens of which is the slackness of its politics amid its play of shimmering surfaces.[4] In face of the postmodern multiplicity of performance research, we accept responsibility for the politics of the categories we have constructed.

These politics intensify most sharply, predictably enough, as we approach the most contested boundaries. Feminism, for example, became a plural section in our first discussions, but equal representation of its divergent positions exceeds not only our grasp but also our reach. We also chose not to develop separate categories on the basis of racial, ethnic, or national differences, though, of course, work pertaining to ethnicity appears throughout the collection. Similarly, we chose not to make a category out of theories of gay male and lesbian performances, though several essays pertain to these topics, including one on the politics and representation of AIDS. We do not intend to efface important differences, but neither do we wish to create taxonomic ghettoes to contain them. We did not include a section on the pure aesthetics of performance, transcending the realm of ideology, because we could not imagine one.

Each of the eight sections below begins with an introduction to the major critical theories pertinent to what we inclusively call performance. Each introduction also includes the identification of seminal texts and key terminology, and each is followed by several essays that demonstrate how the critical theory is used by practitioners in the field. Each of the essays collected here, however, might have found an appropriate place in more than one of our sections. There is no doubt that a different taxonomy would have produced a different book, but the present plan seeks to provide a preliminary map to the field as it looks to us today. Three categories—Marxism, feminism(s), and, arguably, cultural studies—derive from an explicitly doctrinal yet interdisciplinary position or set of positions. Others—semiotics, psychoanalysis, and history—organize themselves around their respective disciplinary practices and methodologies. Still others—deconstruction, hermeneutics, and phenomenology—represent philosophically based strategies of reading and interpretation. This is not to say that the discipline of history is without a doctrinal aspect or that Marxism lacks a philosophical basis; on the contrary, it is to recognize that categories overlap in complex networks of influence and affiliation.

We have sought to recognize such affiliations—and at the same time to open up a space for taxonomic improvisation—in three ways. First, we have sometimes included essays with a methodological base in one field within categories organized around another. The essays by Kate Davy (in "Feminism[s]") and David Román (in "After Marx"), for example, share the topic of gender critique in performances by gay male artists. While Ellen Donkin's theater historical essay joins the section on feminism(s), Marvin Carlson's consideration of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of dialogic play resides in "Theater History and Historiography"—and so forth. Second, we have provided what we hope is a rigorous system of cross-referencing in which the keywords are appropriately glossed and indexed. Third, we have invited two of our contributors, Herbert Blau and Sue-Ellen Case, to conclude the volume by writing summary essays under the rubric of "Critical Convergences," momentary sites where ideas come together but do not come to rest.

Much of the turbulence generated by performance and performance scholarship, which has proved productive and frustrating by turns, stems from the divisions created by the diverse institutional sites of research in the field. These include departments of theater, performance studies, communication, literature, media studies, and anthropology—and their respective professional associations. The dialectics that they produce include theory versus practice, history versus theory, dramatic text versus stage performance, performance (as a high culture form like most performance art) versus theater (as a popular form like circus), and theater (as a high culture form like the production of classic plays) versus performance (as popular culture, including rituals and social dramas). Some of these divisions, such as the almost completely separate institutional development of both dance research and musicology, may explain omissions from this book, which we hope future scholars will address.[5]

While it clearly emphasizes the extraliterary, the collection contains a number of essays concerned with traditional dramatic texts. The range and diversity of performance genres do, however, enter the collection in juxtaposition to and in potentially subversive dialogue with canonical and other texts: a Hmong shaman, a *King Lear* in the mode of Indian kathakali, stand-up comics, a circus sharpshooting act, jazz, and performance art—all exert pressure on the dominant status of the text as the privileged object of critical theory and on the exclusivity of high culture forms as its central domain. Yet, while this collection goes beyond the canon, it also remains canonical since part of the appeal of the new theory is its ability to enhance and revitalize traditional texts. Theory has also, we believe, inspired new ways of creating texts and performance events, or, at least, created a new climate for their inception, and some of the essays discuss this work. Indeed, we see an inherently political character to the performance analysis that has emerged from critical theory; it revises, challenges, rewrites, interrogates, and sometimes condemns received meanings.

We have collected these essays, however, with a sense that they belong to a particular tradition. Theory, as a discursive literature devoted to

fundamental principles, has had a longer history in the academic study of theater than in almost any other discipline in the humanities. Venerable anthologies such as Barrett Clark's collection of dramatic theory and criticism introduced generations of theater students to Plato and Lodovico Castelvetro, August Schlegel, and Emile Zola—broad reflections on general theories of art and literature—at a time when English departments emphasized New Criticism, the close reading of particular literary masterpieces.[6] Many theater departments require a course in theory, separate from dramatic literature and theatrical history. In theater and drama studies, the search for general structural principles across a variety of historical periods and genres has produced some significant theoretical statements.[7] Moreover, theatrical performance has assembled an impressive array of theoretical writings concerning stage practices, including, for example, Richard Wagner and Adolph Appia on the social and aesthetic role of the total work of art, Vsevolod Meyerhold and Bertolt Brecht on the political implications of that role, and (prophetically) Antonin Artaud on its disintegration into fragments of autonomous gesture and obsolete languages in a culture with "no more masterpieces."[8] Many of the theatrical practitioner/theorists, such as Constantin Stanislavski in acting and Robert Edmond Jones in stage design, have exerted a continuing day-to-day influence on the curriculum and pedagogical approaches of theater programs.[9]

Our collection does not prove that there is nothing new under the sun. There has been a theory explosion, and it has had important consequences for both theater studies and other humanities as well. First, it has enlarged the conception of performance in ways not envisioned in the traditional study of drama and therefore reduced some of the separation of specialties between theater history, theory/criticism, and theater practice, a trend strongly reflected by the movement between categories in this collection.

Second, the "new" theory has returned the humanities to philosophy: performance history and criticism, along with other humanities disciplines such as English, modern languages, and history, have returned to a fundamental examination of the underlying assumptions that govern their own methodology in particular and their understanding of objects of inquiry in general. Both epistemological and metaphysical questions have been reopened, and they have forced a reassessment of all that has "gone without saying" for too long. Some of these fundamental issues have involved the nature of representation and its relationship to a reality it doubles/produces/defies; the exact relationship is precisely the question. The twin problems of agency and subjectivity, what constitutes them and how they work, also return studies of performance to philosophical questions of the nature of the self, to what used to be called "philosophical anthropology." In fact, much of the "new theory" derives from the work of philosophers (or perhaps "post-philosophers"): Jacques Derrida's critique of metaphysics, Paul Ricoeur's phenomenology, J. L. Austin's speech / act theory, and Jean-François Lyotard's conception of the postmodern all constitute traditional philosophical thought or its undoing by philosophers.

Of course, philosophy has always spilled over into other discourses (some think it colonizes all academic disciplines); to this list we can add, among others, Lacan's revision of Freud, Raymond Williams's and Fredric Jameson's revisions of Marx, and Foucault's epistemological critique. Even to begin to make such a list is to realize how intensive and productive the theory explosion has been.

Finally, the new theory has provided a methodology and an impetus to specify the meaning of an old cliché: a text is different on the stage than it is on the page. Theory has done so principally by radically questioning the idea of what a text is. Semiotics, for example, has provided notions of multiple sign systems coinciding in performance. The difference between a playscript and a performance text can be theorized and articulated. The audience can finally be interrogated as to its role in the production of meaning. There are concrete reasons why a show differs from night to night, venue to venue, cast to cast. Perhaps most important, performance can be articulated in terms of politics: representation, ideology, hegemony, resistance.[10] In a way, theory gives theater back again to the body politic.

Ironically, the history of the discipline of theater studies is one of fighting for autonomy from English and speech departments, insisting on a kind of separation from other areas of study. It was necessary, politically necessary, to claim this distinctiveness, even at the expense of becoming somewhat insular and hermetic—a result that unfortunately became true of many departments of theater. Now, however, it is even more necessary to recognize and insist on the interdependency of a related series of disciplines and also on the role of performance in the production of culture in its widest sense.

—J. G. R. and J. R. R.

NOTES

1. Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?" in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 76.

2. Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), xiii.

3. Clifford Geertz, "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought" in *The American Scholar* 49 (1980), reprinted in *Critical Theory since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), 514–23.

4. Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Incomplete Project," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991); Christopher Norris, *What's Wrong with Postmodernism: Critical Theory and the Ends of Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). See also Jonathan Arac, ed., *Postmodernism and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

5. For the stimulating dialogue between dance scholarship, theater history, and performance theory, see Susan Leigh Foster, *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in*

Contemporary American Dance (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and Philip Auslander and Marcia B. Siegel, "Two (Re)Views of Susan Leigh Foster's *Reading Dancing*," *TDR: A Journal of Performance Studies* 32, no. 4 (1988): 7–31.

6. Barrett H. Clark, *European Theories of the Drama* (1918; rev. ed., New York: Crown, 1965); and Bernard F. Dukore, *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974).

7. See, for example: Bernard Beckerman, *Dynamics of Drama: Theory and Method of Analysis* (1970; reprint, New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1979); Michael Goldman, *The Actor's Freedom: Toward a Theory of Drama* (New York: Viking Press, 1975); Manfred Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, trans. John Halliday (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

8. Key modernist texts are anthologized in Eric Bentley, ed., *The Theory of the Modern Stage: An Introduction to Modern Theatre and Drama* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968); and E. T. Kirby, ed., *Total Theatre* (New York: Dutton, 1969).

9. For a comprehensive survey of theatrical theory, which charts the boundaries of the subject, see Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984).

10. For a collection of essays that acknowledge the political articulations of performance, see Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle Reinelt, eds., *The Performance of Power: Theatrical Discourse and Politics* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991).

Performance Analysis

> It seemed to me (around 1954) that a science of signs might stimulate social criticism, and that Sartre, Brecht, and Saussure could concur in this project.
>
> —Roland Barthes

> It is impossible . . . to decompose a perception, to make it into a collection of sensations, because in it the whole is prior to the parts.
>
> —Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Perhaps what we do most in theater and performance studies is analyze performances. Large portions of our classroom hours are devoted to discussing texts and performances, and the relationships between them; or between historical performances, and their conditions of production and reception. Underlying many of our debates about the difference between live and mediated experiences of performance is some idea about what constitutes performance and also about what constitutes the experience of attending a, or to, performance. Outside the United States, particularly in Europe, curricula in theater and performance studies almost always include classes in performance analysis. From Sweden to Germany, concentrated attention is paid to the pedagogy of performance analysis. Although this prescription is sometimes not the case in the United States, most North American curricula include introductory level courses in which students are expected to attend and write about performances. We foreground performance analysis in this volume as a preeminent activity of the field, embracing the need to examine tools and processes whereby such analyses are conducted.

Semiotics and phenomenology, long in conversation with each other, have emerged over the last decade as major methodologies of performance analysis. Deconstruction, on the other hand, has become more important for its wide-ranging philosophical contributions than for its earlier analytic deconstructive procedures. We have organized this section using semiotics and phenomenology as key performance tools; other sections of the book, in particular "After Marx," "Psychoanalysis," and "Gender and Sexualities," will be seen to be the home of current reflections on Derrida and deconstruction.

Perhaps the most prolific theorist of performance analysis, French scholar Patrice Pavis, is exemplary of the development of this practice. His books and articles have proposed methods for analyzing all elements of performance, including the mise-en-scène, the actor, auditory, visual, and spatial aspects of performance, and spectators' experiences. He was an early proponent of semiotics and a maker of systems and charts, but he also has always recognized their limitations. Pavis acknowledges the need to keep transcending rational and cognitive methods in order to find adequate modes of analysis for the affective and embodied aspects of analysis and spectatorship. In his recently translated *Analyzing Performance,* he develops a narrative in which the 1980s saw a reaction against the segmentation and overly organized categories of semiotics in favor of a "global" reaffirmation of materiality and libidinal investments. Urging the development of a systematic synthetic process for maintaining the cognitive emphasis on meaning in tandem with the embodied experiences of energy and flow, Pavis summarizes the current challenge of performance analysis: "The description of a performance always negotiates the space between a totalizing demand for synthesis and an empirical individualization, between order and chaos, between abstraction and materiality."[1] Before exploring what such a negotiation entails, however, it is necessary to revisit the terrain of theatrical semiotics and phenomenology in order to grasp the specifics of their approaches.

Semiotics developed out of linguistics. Early theoreticians of the sign such as Ferdinand Saussure and Charles Peirce saw that the structure of language was useful for understanding the structure of any sign system. Languages make meanings only differentially; that is, within a given language, words only derive meaning by reference to other words. The particular language system makes meanings possible through rules, conventions, distinctions. Since not only language but also human behaviors and customs are signs that operate within the organizing patterns of social systems, Saussure called for a "science of semiology."[2] Claude Lévi-Strauss, doing structuralist anthropology, recognized the affinity between cultural and linguistic analysis and explicitly linked his work to semiology.

Signs, following Saussure, are divided into signifiers and signifieds. The signifier is the sound, or mark, that stands in for the signified, which is the concept, or meaning. Together they point to the referent, which is the actuality referenced. The letters *p e a c h* form a word signifying the concept "peach" and may be used to point to a particular round, yellow piece of fruit. Each of these connections is, however, arbitrary. That is, a different group of markings might just as well serve as signifier for the signified peach. Meanings are therefore conventional. Furthermore, signifiers establish their meaning by reference to what they are not: *peach* is understood as not *apple* or *perch.* Thus, meaning is the functional result of the difference between signs, and always might be otherwise. If meaning is always only present in difference, the stability of any particular sign system overturns. A specific signifier means not only in relation to one other signifier that it is not, but to a whole tissue of signifiers, potentially end-