

FROM THE EDITORS

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RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGY FOR A TURBULENT DECADE: APPROACHING THE LEGACY OF SIXTIES THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

For theatre historians, teaching the gradual emergence of the political aesthetics that shaped the performances and theatres of the 1960s can be a particularly daunting task, but it is also a task whose importance to our work as scholars and teachers is fundamental because the political aesthetics that took seed in the sixties continue to shape our critical practices at the beginning of the twenty-first century. When we teach the sixties, we are in effect teaching the impact of that period on the discourses and institutions of theatre scholarship. So, at one level, a consideration of the theatre of the sixties almost inevitably entangles us in difficult (but valuable) self-reflexive practices. These moments of scholarly self-reflection in relation to our not-so-distant past need to be encouraged. Above all, they need to be made the product of conscious and deliberate aim; otherwise, we risk committing the same errors that were warned against four decades ago. Such self-reflexivity can, potentially, teach scholars and students about the sociohistorical underpinnings of pedagogy, historical periodization, canon formation, and the multiple technical necessities of the theatre form.

That said, the process upon which such moments of self-reflection depend is by no means easy to define or implement. The cultural politics of the sixties

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belong to a historical terrain whose one abiding characteristic would seem to be that it is contested, volatile, and fractious. In short, there is no one-to-one correlation of the theatre practices of the sixties to their—or our—historical context because neither the theatre nor the historical context of theatrical practice of that era can be discussed under the auspices of a unified conceptual or practical rubric. Simply put, theatre of the sixties is diverse, plural, and contradictory. So, too, are the sociopolitical contexts in which that theatre erupted and in which we study it today.

Many theatre historians have legitimately called attention to a loss of this sense of plurality when, at the expense of mainstream and popular theatres, scholarship focuses too narrowly on the experimental theatrical practices of the 1960s, a focus that we admittedly perpetuate in this special issue of *Theatre Survey*. But even within that narrow focus, we not only have to write about theatres (plural) of the sixties, but also need to commit ourselves vigilantly to diversifying our familiarity with the rich cultural variety of theatres that defined the performative practices of the period. While obviously linked to the calls for genuine cultural diversity that resonated through the political milieu of the 1960s, the call here to diversify the cultural scope of our understanding of sixties theatre is intended to enable us to trace the possibilities of confronting our assumptions about what the sixties were, what they meant, and what they mean today. As the articles in this collection demonstrate, the sixties can assume a variety of forms in such confrontations. They can appear as a *chronological marker* (the sixties as a historical period), as a *political aesthetic* (the sixties as an identifiable model of artistic expression), and as a *critical practice* (the sixties as a theoretical discourse of critical inquiry). In any combination of these forms, a confrontation with the culturally diverse theatres of the sixties can demystify the sanctified images of the turbulent past—images kept sacred, incidentally, by both progressive and conservative critics. It can promote insight into the most enduring elements in the legacy of the period and keep scholars and critics from overlooking the contradictions involved in studying and teaching cultural radicalism.

These three concerns have shaped the selection of essays included in this issue of *Theatre Survey*. We have sought essays that challenge our understandings of the sixties as a discrete historical period, that retrieve critical methods through an examination of the period's theatrical and performative gestures, or that critically draw attention to the questions of institutionalization that were so often asked during the sixties and that still demand answers—however situational they might be—four decades later.

Pushing beyond a Eurocentric or Anglo-American image of the sixties, as well as beyond a strict interpretation of the sixties as a period, Jean Graham-Jones's article explores an issue that will be receiving increasing attention from scholars in the near future: the impact on local, progressive communities of the texts (plays, journals, manifestos, etc.), intellectuals, and critical methods that

The Legacy of Sixties Theatre and Performance

traveled freely across regional, national, and hemispheric boundaries during the sixties. Utilizing the critical concept of “transculturation,” Graham-Jones describes how radical theatre in Argentina, especially Buenos Aires, made use of the dramatic, theatrical, and performative experiments of other regions and nations, especially those of the United States. The need to act locally but think globally is cast in provocative form in this essay. How one “acts” locally depends, as Graham-Jones demonstrates, on an always shifting dynamic of political transformation, on the global aspirations of artists, and on the theatres in which such acting occurs. In the sixties and early seventies, this dynamic was particularly volatile in Argentina. The stunning sequence of political events that characterized the Argentinean sixties not only affected which texts, which methods, and even which intellectuals were integrated into that country’s progressive theatrical culture, but those events ultimately enabled the progressive theatre community to survive the vertiginous, brutalizing political shifts of the seventies. In other words, experience with transculturation as an international process enabled artists and audiences to resolve a crippling, local division within an intranational context, namely, the division between *vanguardia* and *realismo* that had divided the Argentinean theatre community for years. Examining how transculturation occurred between these two polemical positions in the late sixties, Graham-Jones tells a previously untold story of how the efforts of theatre workers and audiences to participate in the global theatrical revolution taught it crucial lessons about how to come together as a local community and withstand political and cultural oppression.

While Jorge Huerta’s article adheres primarily to a notion of the sixties as a chronological marker, the keynotes of his history of Chicano/a theatre are struck when he reminds us that the term “Chicano” is as politically charged today as it was in the sixties, when young radicals purposefully identified themselves not as “Mexican Americans” but as members of a diverse community that crossed various national, political, regional, and aesthetic identities. Huerta shows that when the essential hybridity of the term is highlighted, the way we write the theatrical history of Chicano/a culture is transformed. Two implications of Huerta’s essay are worth considering at length. First, it complicates the revisionary history presented by Yolanda Broyles-González in her recent book on *El Teatro Campesino*. Broyles-González argues that the central place held by Luis Valdez in most scholarship about *El Teatro Campesino* erases its roots in Mexican-American popular culture, threatens the memory of women’s roles in the organization, and validates the “great-genius” model of theatre and dramatic history. Huerta would hardly disagree; however, he demonstrates that a history of the group without Valdez threatens to erase an empowering source of Chicano/a hybridity, namely, its links with the European avant-garde and with communities of Chicano/as who were no less victims of racism, but lived far from the fields in which the first *actos* were performed. Second, the essay tells another story, that of the Chicano/a intellectual who, much like Chicano/a theatre itself, has had to continually “hybridize” in order to respond effectively to the ongoing, always changing structures and consequences of racism. In a

sense, the Chicano/a scholar and teacher cannot be separated from theatre history; as the one changes, so will our understanding of the other.

By far the most consciously self-reflective essay in this collection, Janelle Reinelt's article on the San Francisco Mime Troupe's 1986 production of *Spain/36*, initially appears to be far removed from a discussion of theatre in the sixties. But the distance that her essay maintains from a direct discussion of the Mime Troupe's theatrical practices during that period pivots on the acknowledgment that any discussion of "the legacy of the sixties" must constantly ward off nostalgia. More important to Reinelt than adding to existing studies of the Mime Troupe's early productions (for example, Orenstein's or Mason's) is the description of how scholars and teachers—especially those who played an activist role in the sixties—might construct a dialectical relationship to the past that is both personal and political. The multilayered reflections of her essay suggest how scholars and teachers might critically engage a past that belongs both to individuals and to wider communities. Reinelt appropriates this dialectic from the Mime Troupe's own self-conscious reflection on the terms of its historical legacy in works like *Spain/36*. The implication is that locating where the theatres of the sixties are today may very well illuminate where we as scholars and teachers are in relation to the sixties.

Originally, one of the key objectives in including an essay on Tadeusz Kantor's happenings was to disrupt the strong association in scholarship that happenings have had with New York galleries and, more generally, with Western market economies. The real surprise to emerge from Michal Kobialka's article about the Polish playwright and performer, however, is the legacy from the sixties that it affirms even as it dispels established but problematic images of experimental performance. On the one hand, by situating the work of Kantor within the sociopolitical dynamics of socialist Poland in the 1960s, Kobialka's essay disrupts attempts to categorize happenings as a unified genre and, thus, complicates the aesthetic, historical, and political boundaries that supposedly separate the modern from the postmodern. On the other hand, the critical tools that Kobialka uses to provide us with that nuanced reading of Kantor's happenings imply other kinds of unity. This is evident in the fact that Kantor's work, intentionally poised against the postmodernization of art and politics, is so capably revealed by the critical methods that ushered in the postmodern. Indeed, we are confronted in Kobialka's essay by a body of critical theory drawn from Western intellectual circles (those surrounding, for example, Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze, and Baudrillard) that constitutes one of the sixties' most enduring and important legacies for our work as scholars. The result is an amazingly provocative and even at times problematic tension between an admonishment against a uniform understanding of happenings and a framing of that admonishment within a poststructuralist model that sweeps across cultural boundaries.

These essays sample a vast range of scholarship that historians and theorists have produced concerning the legacies of the 1960s, a range partially

The Legacy of Sixties Theatre and Performance

represented by the issues that surfaced in the American Society for Theatre Research's seminar "Research and Pedagogy for a Turbulent Decade: Self-Reflexive Practice and Radical Performance of the 1960s," which provided the foundation for this special issue of *Theatre Survey*. We want to extend our gratitude not only to the organizers of the ASTR Annual Meeting for 2000 for their support of that seminar, but also to its participants. Finally, we want to thank our contributors for their work in making this special issue a reality.