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TDR, THE DRAMA REVIEW: A SCRIPT FOR THE “GESTATION” OF PERFORMANCE STUDIES

TDR, The Drama Review, is the first and most important Performance Studies journal. It has existed for more than half a decade, it testifies to the birth of this field of research and its following main developments. By going through the history of the journal, this short overview shows how TDR is engaged in a genuine mutual osmosis between what appears on its pages and what is happening in the world of performance practice, studies, and research.

Performance Studies is an area of research that has expanded so much that I cannot (and in fact I would not even) exercise a form of control over it. There are departments, or, anyway, courses in Performance Studies everywhere, and everyone is free to write what feels more right and to draw his or her own line within this field of research. I have my own tool through which I choose and I spread my Performance Studies and that tool is *TDR*, the major Performance Studies journal. Reading *TDR* means to be continually updated on further developments that occur within this discipline. By reading the various issues of *TDR*, from the beginning to the present day, it is possible to reconstruct the story of what happened inside the PS²⁷.

During a conversation in Canterbury, while working on *Imagining O*, his last performance created during his visiting professorship at the University of Kent, Richard Schechner used these words to explain me the way *TDR* has always been the review that offers up evidence of the state of the art in the field of Performance Studies, at least in the NYU tradition²⁸. In fact you might almost

²⁷ Interview with Richard Schechner, Canterbury, UK, July 2011.

²⁸ R. Schechner, *Performance Studies. An Introduction*, second edition, New York, Routledge, 2006, p.5.

Here Schechner explains that the discipline of Performance Studies has developed in many different ways in many different departments, but he also mentions “two main brands”, New York University’s and Northwestern University’s.

NYU’s performance studies is rooted in theatre, the social sciences, feminist and queer studies, postcolonial studies, poststructuralism, and experimental performance. NU’s is rooted in oral interpretation, communications, speech-act theory, and ethnography. But over the time, these two approaches have moved toward each other sharing a common commitment to an expanded vision of “performance” and “performativity”.

speak of a relationship of genuine mutual osmosis between what appears in the issues of *TDR* and what is happening in the world of studies of, research into and theories of performance. The two spheres appear to influence each other, as specified again by Schechner in a special issue of *TDR*, which came out on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of the review and which is dedicated to the history of the journal.

The positions taken—explicitly in editorials and implicitly in the selection of materials and special issues—reflect the worldview, or at least the discipline view, of the editor. [...] I believe *TDR* has affected scholarship, performance theory, and—especially during my first editorial term from 1962 to 1969—what actually went on in the worlds of performance. Later, and especially since 1985/86 when I became editor for the second time, *TDR* influenced the development of performance studies as an academic discipline.²⁹

And in fact by reading the issues of *TDR*, and through them the history of the journal itself, you can find within them the visible traces of how the first department of Performance Studies came to be founded at New York University³⁰.

TDR, The Drama Review, is today considered to be the quintessential journal of Performance Studies in the industry, or at least one of the undisputed "leading academic journals" in this field. Indeed, the name itself reveals how, originally, when it was founded in 1955 as *Carleton Drama Review* by Robert W. Corrigan, the review was not concerned with performance in the strict sense of the word. Rather it was initially conceived as a place for some lecture series to be published, and afterwards, by the joint action of the then founding editor Corrigan and his advisory editor, Eric Bentley, it was transformed, in all respects, into a proper scholarly journal. The name of the journal was changed for the first time in 1957, when Corrigan, moving to Tulane University, decided to bring it with him from Minnesota to New Orleans, renaming it *Tulane Drama Review*. But the real turning point in terms of growth and influence came when Richard Schechner in 1962 was appointed director of *TDR*. Under his leadership, *TDR*

²⁹ Richard Schechner, *TDR and Me*, in *TDR: The Drama Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (T 189), Spring 2006, p. 9.

³⁰ As summarized below, regarding the publishing history of *TDR* resulting from the research I carried out at Princeton University Library, in particular from consulting the *Series 1: TDR, 1962-2001, box 1-91*, of the *Richard Schechner Papers and The Drama Review Collection*, in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections of the library, as well as from careful reading of specific issues of *TDR* dedicated to the story of the journal: *TDR: The Drama Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (T 189), Spring 2006.

started to become a showcase for non-traditional playwrights and for experimental ideas, and, in particular, it began to widen its lens to focus on a variety of other types of performance, without limiting its scope of investigation only to dramaturgy. The editorial choices made by Schechner led the journal to deal extensively with forms of political and experimental theatre, with happenings and no longer exclusively with Western theatre, as well as to make the important shift to reach out towards the social sciences and critical theory; this led, in about a decade, to the much clearer metamorphosis into Performance Studies.

Looking back, I wanted the improbable if not the impossible: a theatre journal that was about more than theatre; an “engaged” theatre (something I learned from my reading of Sartre and Camus); a connection to the emerging youth revolution in the U.S., which was tied to the movement against the Vietnam War; an equally strong participation in the black Freedom Movement. (I was active in both these movements.) But could all this happen inside theatre? Obviously, given the pallid commercial theatre of Broadway, the nascent regional theatre movement, and the entrenched conservatism of the academic theatre, what eventuated for *TDR* was a program that exploded the boundaries of theatre—that went beyond the theatre. I had some Artaud in my blood, along with a big dose of Brecht.

[...] My first editorship of *TDR* work was partly formed by my education at Cornell, Johns Hopkins, Iowa, and Tulane. Not finding what I was looking for in orthodox theatre or lit-crit texts, I turned to Sigmund Freud and to Herbert Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* (1955), Erving Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), and R.D. Laing’s *The Divided Self* (1960). I began to read deeply in social anthropology and ethnography. In 1966, I was simultaneously introduced to structuralism and poststructuralism [...] to [...] Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan, among others. [...] It took a while for me to warm to Derrida et al., but I was instantly drawn to Claude Levi-Strauss’s ideas. The link between the social sciences and what I would soon dub “performance theory” was made. I wanted *TDR* to become more concerned with theory. But I was just as influenced by what was happening all around me.³¹

In 1967, following a series of frustrations accrued in respect of Tulane University, Schechner decided to join a group of other theatre professors in the

³¹ Richard Schechner, *TDR and Me*, in *TDR: The Drama Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (T 189), Spring 2006, pp. 7-8.

same department and resign; but this happened also because, in the meantime, he had received a job offer from the School of the Arts at NYU, which was founded and directed in 1965 by Bob Corrigan, Schechner's friend, former mentor and thesis supervisor, and also the first author of *TDR*³². When moving to New York University Schechner took *TDR* with him, changing the name from *Tulane Drama Review* into *The Drama Review*. During the years in New York the journal took on a more evident political commitment; yet only two years later, in 1969, Schechner preferred to leave the editorial guidance of *TDR* to devote all of his time, apart from teaching, to his work as theatre director of the Performance Group.

Throughout this time, I continued to teach at NYU—not only because I love teaching but also because NYU was/is my bread-and-butter. However, I discovered that I could not give myself fully to *TDR* and to The Performance Group at the same time. I chose TPG over *TDR*.³³

The editorial direction of *TDR* passed to Michael Kirby in 1971, and it remained in his hands for the next 17 years, until 1986, when Schechner returned firmly to the helm, a position that he still holds today. At that point, the emergence of Performance Studies had already taken place and *TDR* officially became *The Performance Studies Journal*, resting its magnifying glass more and more not only on theatrical phenomena (even if avant-garde forms) but on the much broader "spectrum of the performative phenomena".

I, *TDR*, and performance studies have been accused of being "antitheatrical." It's not true. What is true is that I have argued vehemently for the restructuring of theatre departments, the expansion from theatre into the broader field of performance studies, and for the serious study of as many of the world's theatre and performance practices as possible. But at the same time, I know that the "aesthetic genres" of theatre, music, and dance are part of the larger world of performance. Within my own department at NYU, I work as hard as I can to maintain some distinction between performance studies and theatre studies.

³² Richard Schechner, *What is Performance Studies Anyway?*, in Peggy Phelan, Jill Lane (edited by) *The Ends of Performance*, New York University Press, 1998, pag. 357-358. [In 1965 Robert W. Corrigan founded the New York University School of the Arts. Corrigan had been at Tulane University, where he was my dissertation advisor/mentor. He was also the founding editor of the Carleton Drama Review, later the Tulane Drama Review, presently the Drama Review (*TDR*), which I edited from 1962 to 1969 and again since 1986] [...] [In 1967 Corrigan invited me to head the Drama Department in the NYU School of the Arts. I came with *TDR*, but declined the headache of administration, suggesting instead Monroe Lippman, who had resigned as chair at Tulane].

³³ *ibid*, p. 10.

And most of the courses I teach are theatre courses. In terms of performance theory, as far back as Goffman (1959) and Turner (1974), and on to Jon McKenzie (2001), Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait (2003), and Diana Taylor (2003), among others, all use theatre, theatricality, and drama as their core model. On a much more personal level, how can I be “antitheatrical” when I have spent most of my life working in the theatre? [...]

Before I was a scholar, I was a theatre director. Before I wrote theory, I wrote plays. [...] This personal history impacts *TDR* because I work hard to make the journal about “performance” without forgetting the theatre. This reflects the contradiction that my most intense artistic work takes place onstage, while my most probing theoretical thinking includes theatre but also goes beyond it.³⁴

Mantichora, the journal for which this brief overview of the history of *TDR* has been conceived, has shown, since its first issue, a specific attention towards the field of Performance Studies. Each story is a story in itself, of course, but I think it is interesting to look at the way the first and still most important Performance Studies journal was created and then developed, sometimes following sometimes anticipating, yet always testifying the changes within this discipline. In the most recent years, the Italian academic context has been manifesting a clear interest in Performance Studies and, although a specific Performance Studies department does not (at least yet) exist, a lot of research, including mine, has moved towards that field of interest and investigation. As Marco De Marinis had pointed out in an article recently appeared on *TDR*, there are many points of contact between a certain tradition of Italian theatre studies (which he calls *New Italian Theatrology*) and the work done by American Performance Studies³⁵. Being aware that these points of contact can be translated into an open and fruitful dialogue, we wish that *Mantichora* will keep following, anticipating, and testifying the next coming developments within this adventure. Good luck!

³⁴ *ivi*, pag. 11-12.

³⁵ Marco De Marinis, *New Theatrology and Performance Studies. Starting Points Towards a Dialogue*, translated by Marie Pecorari, in *TDR* (T212), Vol. 55, No 4, Winter 2011.