The Haunted Stage
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Haunted Stage

The Theatre as Memory Machine

Marvin Carlson
To Daniel Mesguich

whose ghost-filled productions have haunted
my memory as they have haunted this book
For theatre is, in whatever revisionist, futurist, or self-dissolving form—or in the most proleptic desire to forget the theatre—a function of remembrance. Where memory is, theatre is.

—Herbert Blau, *The Audience*

Even in death actors’ roles tend to stay with them. They gather in the memory of audiences, like ghosts, as each new interpretation of a role sustains or upsets expectations derived from the previous ones.

—Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead*

What, has this thing appear’d again tonight?

—Shakespeare, *Hamlet*
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The basic concerns and interests that this book addresses were first developed in a series of reports and discussions that took place as a part of the ongoing Working Group in Performance Analysis of the International Federation of Theatre Research, and I am extremely grateful to the continuing members of that group, and especially to Sarah Bryant-Bertail, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Janelle Reinelt, Freddie Rokem, and Eli Rozek, for helping me to clarify my thoughts on this subject. A departed member of this group, Michael Quinn, was especially helpful at an early stage of the work in both conversations and writings. Although I hope that this study will contribute something to an awareness of the provocative relationship between the theatre, haunting, memory, and ghosts, I am certainly not the first to notice this relationship and must express my deepest gratitude for the fascinating and stimulating insights into this subject provided by the two theorists whose thinking has most haunted my own in this research, Herbert Blau and Joseph Roach. The epigraphs drawn from each that open this study suggest how closely some of their concerns resonate with my own.

The reader will quickly discover how important to my study are examples from the living theatre. I must also express my profound gratitude to the many theatre artists in many countries and traditions whose work I have been privileged to see and who have instructed and inspired me in this speculation upon certain aspects of that highly complex and challenging cultural phenomenon, the theatre.