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World Theatre

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World Theatre

Abstract

When approaching the topic of world theatre, it is necessary to first dispel some popular myths about theatre forms that are outside the traditional Western theatre aesthetic or canon. For the purposes of this chapter, selected examples of world theatre, including theatre of the Western world, are explored. However, there is a focus on the historical trajectory of traditional performance forms of non-Western countries. With the exception of efforts to preserve these traditional forms, it is important to note that “world” theatre is not code for static performance that resists evolution. Nor is world theatre “primitive” or simple. In this postmodern globalized age, performance that is “authentic” to its origins or home culture is less common than hybridized forms. Performance and theatre forms around the world continue to evolve to remain relevant. With the prevalence of intercultural exchange, theatre practitioners must approach their craft with cultural sensitivity and integrity, honoring difference and creating dialogue rather than falling into the traps of easy appropriation and exploitation. Armed with knowledge, the theatre and its audiences are only inspired to understand the human experience, wherever that experience may unfold on our planet.

Disciplines

Communication | Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures | Theatre and Performance Studies

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10 World Theatre

Michelle Hayford

When approaching the topic of world theatre, it is necessary to first dispel some popular myths about theatre forms that are outside the traditional Western theatre aesthetic or canon. For the purposes of this chapter, selected examples of world theatre, including theatre of the Western world, are explored. However, there is a focus on the historical trajectory of traditional performance forms of non-Western countries. With the exception of efforts to *preserve* these traditional forms, it is important to note that “world” theatre is not code for static performance that resists evolution. Nor is world theatre “primitive” or simple. In this postmodern globalized age, performance that is “authentic” to its origins or home culture is less common than hybridized forms. Performance and theatre forms around the world continue to evolve to remain relevant. With the prevalence of intercultural exchange, theatre practitioners must approach their craft with cultural sensitivity and integrity, honoring difference and creating dialogue rather than falling into the traps of easy appropriation and exploitation. Armed with knowledge, the theatre and its audiences are only inspired to understand the human experience, wherever that experience may unfold on our planet.

India

Vedic Chanting

For thousands of years, Indian spiritual practices have utilized drama and performance as vehicles for making spirit manifest and expressing devotion—the Indian philosophy of *maya-lila* embraces the inherently

playful and creative force of the universe. Chanting of the Hindu Vedas, or sacred hymn books, is an embodied practice of spiritual devotion that is learned only in an intimate master/apprentice relationship and entails intense physical training and exercise as well as mastery of the Vedic chants. It is thought to be the oldest surviving oral tradition, dating back to the Iron Age. By way of oral transmission and physical exercises that include the master's placing of his hands on the apprentice's head to move the head to the rhythm of the chanting, the apprentice learns the exact nuance and intonation of each syllable, thereby preserving the world's most stable oral transmission through generations.

The Mahabharata and Ramayana

The *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are the two ancient Indian epic poems that are often dramatized in traditional Indian theatre. The *Mahabharata* is more than two hundred thousand verse lines long, about eight times the length of Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad* combined. It is traditionally thought that Vyasa authored the *Mahabharata*, but some believe that many scholars penned the epic. The oldest sections of the text are dated to 400 BCE. The epic includes the Hindu scripture of the *Bhagavad Gita*, philosophical tales, stories of gods and royalty, and Indian mythology. The *Ramayana*, authored by Valmiki, is told in twenty-four thousand verses and is dated between 200 BCE and 200 CE. It is concerned with morals, dharma (Indian philosophy of "natural law"), and relationships, as told through avatar characters, or earthly incarnations of deities, namely Rama.

Sanskrit Drama

Through the oral transmission of Vedic chants and the performance of the Indian epics, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, India can claim to have had the most highly developed theatre from 1000 BCE through the second century CE. Sanskrit drama of this time period was performed in accordance with the rules of theatre and performance systemized by Bharata Muni, an Indian sage, in the *Natyasastra* treatise (written between 200 BCE and 200 CE). Performances of Sanskrit drama were performed by male and female actors who specialized in particular characters. *The Little Clay Cart* by Bhasa (second or third century CE) and *Shakuntala* by Kalidasa (late fourth or early fifth century CE) are examples of Sanskrit drama, which ceased to be produced in the thirteenth

century as other performance forms came into prominence. Traditional Indian theatre forms share a common aesthetic of codified movement and dance, voluptuous costumes, colorful and dramatic makeup, and spare stages that focus attention on the bodies of the actors.

Kutiyattam is an Indian performance style that is a regional derivation of Sanskrit drama developed in Kerala in the tenth century under the patronage of King Kulasekhara Varman. It differed from Sanskrit drama in that it utilized local language and deviated from strict performance rules of the *Natyasastra*. *Kutiyattam* was understood as a visual sacrifice to the deities of the temples in which it was once exclusively performed. Men and women continue to train in *kutiyattam*, with women exclusively playing the female roles.

Kathakali performance of Kerala is closely related to *kutiyattam* and dramatizes devotion to the Hindu god Vishnu. Traditionally, *kathakali* dancers are all male and perform the physically demanding, martial arts-inspired choreography after many years of rigorous training that includes strenuous exercises for strength and flexibility and body massage. Specific characters are immediately recognizable to the audience because of the consistent makeup and costume codes for each role. In



A *kathakali* performance in Fort Cochin, Kerala, India. Photo by Steve Curati.

1975, Tripunithura Kathakali Kendram, an all-female *kathakali* performance troupe, debuted in Kerala and still trains women in this traditionally male theatre form.

The *Natyasastra*

Bharata's *Natyasastra* is a comprehensive treatise on Indian drama, dance, and music, considered the fifth Veda available to all Indian castes. The *Natyasastra* specifies technical, psychological, and physical requirements for producing theatre, including the architecture of performance spaces and the actor's state of mind, as well as gesture and costume. It defines *rasas* and *bhavas* and the relation between the two in a complex and comprehensive system of specific hand gestures, body movements, costumes, and makeup for every distinct type of character. *Bhavas* are states of being embodied by the actor, and *rasas* are the states of consciousness that are "tasted" by the audience. In order for the *bhavas* to be successfully performed and the *rasas* adequately "tasted," actors undergo extensive physical training that enables them to hold specific dance postures and *mudras* (Indian hand and finger positions) in performance that the audience then interprets. For example, if the drama calls on the audience to "taste" the *rasa* of *sringara* (to feel amorous), then the performers must accomplish the *bhava* of *rati* (love) through the embodiment of specific gesture, facial expression, *mudra*, and pose. Bharata believed the theatre should educate and entertain.

Traditional Indian Theatre Makeup and Costumes

Various Indian performance traditions use ornate makeup and costumes to differentiate among common characters played on stage. For example, in *kathakali*, there are seven archetypal characters denoted by the color painted on the face and the appropriate corresponding costume. The "green" archetype is codified for divine characters and requires the actors to paint their faces green and don a white skirt with orange and black stripes. In this way, the audience familiar with *kathakali* conventions is able to determine who

the character is as soon as the actor steps onstage, increasing their enjoyment of the performance.



Kathakali performer Kalamandalam Gopi meticulously applies his makeup. Photo by Navaneeth.



Another *kathakali* performer waits to enter the stage. Photo by Steve Cox.

Ramlila, Parsi, "Bollywood," and Beyond

Ramlila has been performed in India from at least 400 CE into the present, drawing millions of pilgrims to participate in the commemorative drama as spiritual pilgrimage. Pilgrim/performer participants reenact the events of the Hindu Lord Rama's life over at least a three-day period, sometimes in performances that continue for more than a month. The collective performance pilgrimage culminates in the festival of Dussehra, where good is celebrated as having conquered evil. All performers in *Ramlila* are male, and many roles passed down through generations in the same family. The performers are amateurs but full of devotion as they act out Lord Rama's life through tableaux and the procession of pilgrims from one sacred site to another.

Parsi theatre became popular in India in the 1870s as India's first modern theatre form by incorporating Urdu-language dramas and poetry into melodramatic performances with ornate set designs. Parsi theatre appealed to South Asian and English audiences and included female actors in troupes that toured India into the 1920s. With the advent of the film industry, Parsi theatre's popularity waned.

Previously called Hindi cinema, "Bollywood" is now one of the largest film industries in the world. The name *Bollywood* is a combination of *Bombay* (now Mumbai) and *Hollywood*; however, it should not be understood as merely a Hollywood wannabe industry. A highly lucrative



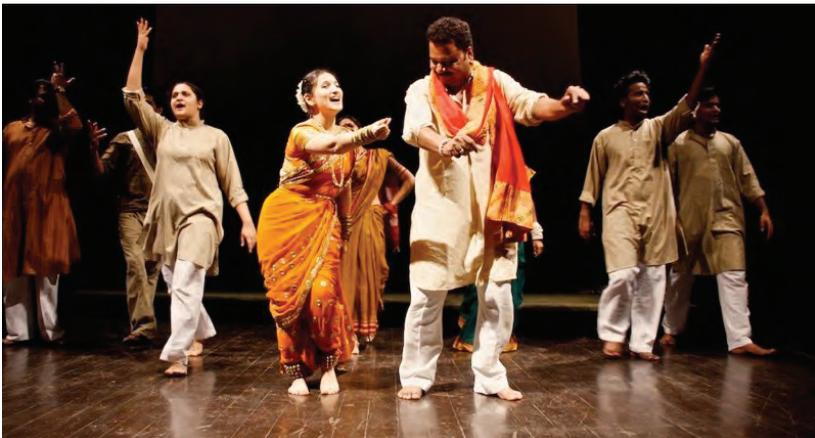
On the last day of Ramlila, these giant effigies of the demon king Ravana and his brother and son will be set on fire. Performed in New Delhi, India, 2012. Photo by Megan Knight.

film industry, Bollywood exports Indian culture globally and meets the demands of Indian audiences who evaluate Bollywood actors by praising a successful actor as *paisa vasool*—translated literally as “worth the money” spent on the movie admission. Bollywood draws on many traditional Indian performance forms for inspiration, largely aiming to appeal to a broad-base family audience with melodramatic musical films that feature dance, music, and often romance. Bollywood actors have attained international celebrity, and the conventions continue to evolve with the pressure to assimilate Hollywood film practices. The highest-grossing Bollywood film to date (at more than \$60 million worldwide and \$6.5 million in North America) is *3 Idiots*, a comedy about three engineering students released in 2009 by Vinod Chopra Productions.

In 1944, a very popular film actor, Prithviraj Kapoor (1901–1972), founded the touring company Prithvi Theatres, which popularized a more restrained and “realistic” acting style and toured until 1960. Subsequently, Prithvi Theatre was founded in Kapoor’s honor in Mumbai and continues to be a popular theatre, with staged performances daily. The 2012 season included a Hindi play titled *S*x, M*rality, and Cens*rship*,



Bollywood actress Hrishita Bhat rehearses with other dancers on the set of *Kisna* in Bombay, 2004. © Arko Datta/Reuters/Corbis.



The 2012 production of *S*, M*rality, and Cens*rship* by Sunil Shanbag, a Hindi play about theatrical censorship in the 1970s. Photo by Kartikeyan Shiva.

by the Mumbai-based Arpana theatre company, that is a reflection on the controversy stirred by the 1970s theatre production *Sakharam Binder*, by the Indian playwright Vijay Tendulkar (1928–2008). Originally performed in 1972, then banned in 1974 because of its explosive handling of the oppression of women in postcolonial India, *Sakharam Binder* is still

performed today, and Tendulkar's socially conscious plays continue to inspire contemporary Indian theatre productions and adaptations.

Yours Truly Theatre, based in Bangalore, India, is a theatre company founded in 2003. With a dedication to the efficacy of applied theatre, it brings interactive theatre, including "complete the story" and "theatre sports," to nontraditional venues and non-actors through the dedication of more than a hundred company members. They offer workshops for children, adults, and nonprofit agencies that serve underprivileged communities. In 2011, they presented a devised musical play titled *Bhagwaan Dhoondo (In Search of God)*, that featured a "complete the story" ending determined by the audience and improvised by the actors.

Today, India's theatre landscape is one of preservation and evolution of classical forms, as well as innovation in response to global media's dissemination of popular "Bollywood" performance and aesthetics.

Japan

Kagura

Japanese who engage in Shinto worship participate in a ritual performance art as part of devotional practice to welcome and honor gods, nature, and ancestors in villages all over Japan. Known as *kagura*, it has been in practice since the eighth century, takes many forms, and has become a traditional source of Japanese collective culture, regardless of the diversity of faith. It consists of ritual music and dance practices that have their own creation story, as follows: The sun goddess Amaterasu was angry with her brother and hid in a cave. When she went into the cave, she took all the light with her. To lure her out of the cave, Uzume, the goddess of music and dance, performed a dance in which she exposed her genitals and stomped loudly. Uzume's titillating dance made the other gods laugh raucously, until Amaterasu's curiosity at the proceedings made her exit the cave. This dance, the original *kagura*, is therefore responsible for bringing light back to the universe.

Kagura is performed as an expression of Shinto devotion and recognition of the *kami*, or spiritual essence of all things, as well as a funeral rite to appease ancestors. *Mi-kagura* is the winter festival ritual *kagura* performance. In *mi-kagura*, performers wear masks to portray demons and spirits and remain unmasked to comically portray human characters.



A *kagura* at a sacred shrine. Photo by Giya (Velvia)/Flickr.com.

Kagura consists of slow, circular, and elegant choreography that emphasizes the four directions and uses handheld fans and bells.

Noh

When Japan's Prince Shotoku (573–621) converted to Buddhism, he opened Japan to influence from Korea, China, and India. The continental influence was embraced in part by the introduction of Chinese performance forms. Eventually, a popular performance style called *sarugaku* was developed, a bombastic medium of acrobatics, pantomime, and magic that was adapted by Buddhists in the twelfth century to demonstrate the Buddha's teachings.

A form called *noh* emerged under Kan'ami (1333–1384), a *sarugaku* performer, and his son Zeami (1363–1444), who developed the refined court-patronized art form with accompanying treatises. Patronized by the shogun, Zeami and *noh* were elevated to a high status equivalent to the aristocracy who frequented the performances. In fact, in an effort to maintain *noh*'s elite status, commoners were forbidden to learn *noh* dance and music until the end of the Edo period, at the end of the nineteenth century. *Noh* demonstrates the concept of *yugen*, or quiet



A *noh* performance in 2004. © Toshiyuki Aizawa/Reuters/Corbis.

elegance, and was strongly influenced by Japan's embrace of restrained Buddhist philosophy. While never enjoying mass popularity, it remains Japan's oldest theatre form and has survived with most traditional elements intact, including the exclusion of female performers.

The *noh* conventions call for a main actor (*shite*), supporting actors (*waki*), a chorus (*jiutai*), musicians (*hayashi*), and the five *noh* plots, interspersed with short comic performances (*kyogen*): the "god" play, the "warrior" play, the "woman" play, the "present-day" play (often about an insane woman), and the "demon" play. *Noh* main actors use masks for some characters, taking time to stare at the mask and embody the emotion of the mask before donning it. Demon characters are often portrayed with a full-face mask, intensifying the performance. Even if taking place indoors, a traditional *noh* theatre recreates the outdoor *noh* pavilion with painted pine tree background and roof and an elevated stage to allow space for empty drums underneath the actors to amplify their stomps. Because there is no set to speak of, the costumes and masks are ornate and attention stays with the main actor as the storyteller.

Bunraku

Bunraku, Japan's puppet theatre, emerged during the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867), but there is evidence that puppet theatre existed before

that period. All puppets are operated by at least three puppeteers: one operates the feet and legs (*ashizukai*), another operates the left hand (*hidarizukai* or *sashizukai*), and the main puppeteer (*omozukai*) manipulates the right hand and head. The puppets are built with movable eyes and mouths and jointed fingers, and some are designed to transform into demons. The puppeteers are dressed in black and, according to troupe conventions, may even cover their heads in a black hood. The *tayu* is responsible for chanting the text from a lectern, including creating different voices, pitches, and facial expressions for all characters. Next to the *tayu*, the musician plays the *shamisen*, a Japanese banjolike instrument. *Bunraku* puppeteers must first learn manipulation of the feet and legs, then the left hand, and finally the right hand and head. This process can take thirty years to master. *Bunraku* puppets are usually three to four feet in height, with human and yak hair and ornate costumes. Double-suicide love stories are common in *bunraku*, many of which were penned by “Japan’s Shakespeare,” Chikamatsu Monzaemon. Traditional *bunraku* is carried on today by two male-dominated institutions in Japan, employing the rare woman as a builder rather than a performer.



Bunraku performance in Kyoto, Japan, 2002. Photo by Susan Hunt.

Kabuki

In the late 18th century, *bunraku* began to decline in popularity as *Kabuki* ascended. *Kabuki* continues to be the most popular of Japan's traditional theatre forms. Having overcome its associations with prostitution and crime due to its humble origination, *Kabuki* now enjoys international exposure as a highly esteemed art. Izumo no Okuni, a female shrine dancer known for performing domestic stories full of sexual innuendo, is credited with inventing *Kabuki* performance and popularizing the all-female *Kabuki* performance troupes in 1603. These early troupes also participated in prostitution, and an urban underground culture grew up around *Kabuki* theatres. The upper class shogunate in power did not approve of the hedonistic *Kabuki* culture and the practice of prostitution by *Kabuki* actresses. Therefore, *Kabuki* performed by women was banned in 1629. However, the handsome young boys who were then cast in female parts subsequently also encouraged prostitution. Taking another tack, in 1652 the shogunate then allowed only adult men who shaved their forelocks (this was thought to make them less attractive and therefore less likely to engage in prostitution) to perform *Kabuki*. This is largely still the convention today, with popular male *Kabuki* actors known for their female



Japanese *Kabuki* actor Nakamura Tokizo performs in Tokyo, 2004. © Yuriko Nakao/Reuters/Corbis.

roles (*onnagata*) appearing in film and television in female roles. Some notable Kabuki conventions include codified makeup, *mie* (discussed shortly), and the stage “tricks” that allow for quick reveals. *Hikinuki* is often used, in which a stagehand dressed in black (traditionally thought of as invisible) comes onstage to pull a string that reveals a radically different costume layer underneath to effect a character transformation for the actor. Revolving stages, lifts, and cables allowing for “flying” characters are also popular Kabuki stage tricks.

Similar to Indian *kathakali* makeup, Kabuki makeup or *kesho* is elaborately painted on actors’ faces according to the codified character colors: purple for nobility, green for the supernatural, and so on. Kabuki actors often strike dramatic poses and hold them to heighten emotional affect, a practice known as *mie*. In combination with *mie*, the mask-like Kabuki makeup translates into memorable and striking performances.

Western Influence

Called “new school” as opposed to “old school” Kabuki, *shimpa* theatre introduced Western-style drama and conventions to Japan in the 1880s, including the occasional use of female performers. This was followed by *shingeki* or “New Theatre,” which performed Western drama with the conventions of realism. During this time Jiyu Gekijo, or Free Theatre, would retrain professional theatre artists to perform in the Stanislavsky “method” so popular in Western actor training.

After World War II, *noh* was recognized as a national treasure and the National Noh Theatre opened in Tokyo in 1983. The Bunraku Association was formed in 1963 to preserve the art form, and the National Bunraku Theatre opened in Osaka in 1984. Kabuki also has been deemed worthy of preservation with the opening of the Japanese National Theatre in 1966.

The 1960s were a time of global civil unrest, and Japan was no exception. The Shogekijo (small theatre) movement that sprung up in unconventional venues at that time was in reaction to the strict formalism of traditional Japanese arts. One of these companies, Jokyo Gekijo (Situation Theatre), founded in 1963 by Kara Juro (b. 1940), was also called Red Tent Theatre in homage to the red tent they often set up on vacant parcels for performances. Jokyo Gekijo continued to create works until 1988 and now operates under a different name, Gekidan Kara Gumi (Shogekijo). *Butoh*, an avant-garde dance form and theatre of protest,

also developed in the turbulent 1960s and is known for the white body paint donned by the performers as well as slow and hypnotic movement. Sankai Juku is a *butoh* performance troupe founded in 1975 that continues to perform internationally.

Many significant Japanese artists were affiliated with Shogekijo, Suzuki Tadashi (b. 1939) among them. Suzuki created an actor training method that utilizes strenuous lower-body physical exercises inspired by martial arts, Kabuki and *noh*, called the Suzuki Method. This method of actor training is taught in acting programs all over the world. In 1976, Suzuki founded the Suzuki Company of Toga (a remote mountain village in Japan), which continues to host regular performance seasons and workshops throughout the year.

Chelfitsch

Baby-talk for "selfish," *Chelfitsch* is an innovative Tokyo-based theatre company under the direction of Toshiki Okado (b. 1973). Okado founded *Chelfitsch* in 1997 and the company has found an appreciative audience for its striking choreography, exploration of daily life, and use of everyday language. Okado writes and directs post-modern plays that do not privilege text but treat the words actors deliver equal to the attention given to gesture, movement, lighting, and set design. With *Five Days in March* (2004), Okado deals with his feelings about the Iraq War within the context of his daily life, using the stage to reframe the everyday with characteristically dynamic choreography.



2010 production of *Who Knows We Are Not Injured Like the Others?* Photo by Kazuyuki Matsumoto.

China

Theatre's Evolution through the Dynasties

Performance has played an important role in Chinese cultural life through the millennia, with each dynasty innovating art forms and privileging some performance over others. It is not until the Shang Dynasty (1767 BCE) that there is archival evidence of various court entertainments, including mime, dance, and music. By the time of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), there is a flourishing of the “hundred plays” entertainments at court, fairs, and marketplaces, which include present-day circus acts like tightrope walking and juggling as well as athletic feats, music, and dance. Chinese emperors established the first institutions to nurture performance art forms, including the Imperial Office of Music created by Han emperors (104 BCE) and a training school created by Emperor Yang-Di during the Sui Dynasty, responsible for hosting a festival that included at least eighteen thousand performers.

Emperor Xuan Zong of the Tang Dynasty (618–907) created the Pear Garden school for entertainers in 714, with a mission to innovate art forms and create a distinctively Chinese theatre. The Pear Garden served more than eleven thousand students who studied music, dance, acrobatics, and dramatic text. During the Song Dynasty (960–1279),



Chinese shadow puppets. Photo by Ernie Reyes.

popular novels were narrated by professional storytellers in teahouses and performed in puppet and shadow-play theatres, the most popular theatre forms of the time.

The Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368) is known for ushering in the golden age of Chinese drama written by intellectuals who were banished by the Mongol court and therefore forced to turn their attention to non-government-related concerns. Happily, for theatre's sake, these intellectuals rediscovered earlier Chinese music-dramas and penned classic works that have stood the test of time.

Chinese literary drama conventions were regional. The “northern” or *zaju* style of Chinese theatre that developed in Beijing during the Yuan Dynasty was a highly prescribed form that was made up of four acts including up to twenty songs all sung by the protagonist, while the other characters merely recited their dialogue. There was an orchestra, plots that privileged good over evil, male and female actors, ornate costumes, and simple stage design. Theatre companies were often named after the lead actress in the troupe. It is estimated that more than seven hundred plays were penned in the Yuan period. Of these, Guan Hanqing (c. 1245–c. 1322), the “father of Chinese drama,” is said to have written sixty-seven plays, eighteen surviving.

The “southern” or *hangzhou* regional theatre style was favored by the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), and therefore this style prospered and eclipsed the *zaju* style in popularity. Conventions of the southern style include individually titled acts that totaled around fifty and singing by any character (not the protagonist alone, as in *zaju*) to a slower tempo with a spare orchestra. The southern style was in practice for some five hundred years in China, eventually giving way to the predominance of Beijing opera.

By 1850, Beijing opera reigned as China's most prevalent theatre form. Emperor Qian Long's eightieth birthday party in 1790 prompted the development of Beijing opera when the celebration brought all the best performers of each region to Beijing. Many of the performers stayed and perfected an art form that blended regional performance conventions and created a codified Chinese theatre that privileged performance elements over text. Beijing opera shifted China's performance focus from literary concerns to the formalizing of dance, song, and acting.

Beijing opera usually consists of several different acts, interspersed with acrobatic performances. Actors do not need to adhere to a specific



A Chinese opera performance at Chang'An Theatre, Beijing, 2009. Photo by Gustavo Thomas.

text while performing a story, and as long as the tale retains its happy ending, unique interpretations of major works are expected. All movement is dance in Beijing opera, as it is in sync with the orchestra and systemized: for example, similar to the Indian *mudra*, there are specific finger patterns to indicate numerous plot developments or emotions (such as sword battle or femininity), and the flick of a sleeve may denote disgust, or surprise when paired with a hand thrown above the head. There are four types of characters: male (*sheng*), female (*dan*), painted face (*jing*), and comic (*chou*). The actors are dressed in rich, colorful costumes and, as with Indian *kathakali* and Japanese Kabuki, distinct makeup. The painted-face characters have codified patterns and designs on the face that amplify the archetypal characteristics of the general, dragon, or hero, to name a few.

When the Chinese Republic of 1912 replaced the former empire, a new age in theatre ushered in the *spoken drama*, to differentiate itself from “sung” traditional performance. Most often these spoken dramas were translations of contemporary popular Western works. The most renowned Chinese playwright of the twentieth century, Cao Yu

(1910–1996), is credited with founding spoken theatre in China with popular works like *Thunderstorm* (1933), which dealt with the controversial topic of incest.

Beijing opera, however, remains the most recognizable Chinese theatre form, having survived mandates to conform to communist doctrine in 1949 and the oppression of the Cultural Revolution after 1966. China's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) limited permissible theatre to eight “model” plays promoting the communist government's agenda. The eight model works favored socialist realism and consisted of two ballets, a symphony, and five “revolutionary operas.” The Cultural Revolution was cruel to theatre practitioners, subjecting actors and directors (as well as intellectuals, doctors, teachers) to violence, imprisonment, and forced “re-education” via hard labor in the countryside. In the post-Cultural Revolution era, Chinese theatre flourished with a restoration of traditional plays and a fusion of traditional and modern forms. New plays were self-aware and presentational, combining spoken drama and traditional Chinese performance aesthetics. However, the mid-1980s witnessed a swinging of the pendulum as these modern plays suffered a backlash and



A performance of *Legend of the Red Lantern* at Chang'An Theatre, Beijing, 2009. It tells the story of communist resistance during the Japanese occupation in World War II. Photo by Gustavo Thomas.

were accused of Western-influenced “spiritual pollution.” Then government opinion swung in the other direction and theatre saw a period of experimentation coinciding with more widespread cultural liberalization. This ended with the crackdown culminating in the Tiananmen Square protest of June 4, 1989. Since this student-led “democracy movement,” the arts continue to be subject to government censorship.

Cross-Dressing in Performance: *Dan*, *Hijra*, Takarazuka

Female performers were banned in Beijing by the Chinese emperor in 1772; therefore *dan* roles were performed by men in Beijing opera. By 1870, women were unofficially acting in *dan* roles, and in 1912 the ban was lifted. The ban resulted in a complex training in feminine performance by male actors, which in itself became an art form. Before the ban on female actors in Beijing, women participated in Chinese theatre and both men and women practiced cross-dressing in performance. In 1923, it became more common for men to portray men, and women to portray women, onstage, a marked departure from traditional Chinese theatre forms.

The *hijra* of India are a community of transgendered women (many have male physiology, but identify as women) lobbying for official recognition as a “third gender” on passport documents. The



A group of Indian *hijra*. Photo by Daniel Lofredo Rota.

hijra have a long history in India; since 400 BCE to 200 CE, they have been an integral component of Indian marriage traditions and male birth ceremonies via their traditional dances and songs thought to bring blessings from the *Buhuchara Mata*, the Indian mother goddess. They are a marginalized community otherwise; many *hijra* beg for alms and engage in prostitution to survive, underscoring the urgency of their current demand for equal rights.

While it began in 1914, Japan's Takarazuka Revue certainly appeals to postmodern performance sensibilities of today. Consisting only of young women, the cast of the revue train for many years in their particular parts, and in an inversion of most traditional Japanese theatre forms, young women are trained to portray male characters (*otokoyaku*). The Takarazuka Revue still thrives today with an enormous fan following—young Japanese girls are especially fond of the *otokoyaku* actors. In Takarazuka, we see an example of the traditional Japanese convention of cross-gender acting and audiences that continue to respond positively.



Takarazuka Revue poster on the Kyoto subway. Photo by David Z./Flickr.com.

The National Theater Concert Hall

The National Theater Concert Hall (NTCH) in Taipei City was built in 1987 to host Chinese and international performance and serve as an experimental theatre venue. Recent productions include an adaptation of *Peach Blossom Fan*, by Qing Dynasty playwright Kong Shangren and performed by ½ Q Theatre, a postmodern Chinese theatre company established in 2006 that blends traditional Chinese opera with experimental modern drama. NTCH played host to another contemporary Taiwanese theatre company, Mobius Strip Theatre (founded in 2005), with a recent production of *Spider in Meditation*, a poetic rumination on modern city life. Mobius Strip Theatre is known for their provocative audience engagement and site-specific environmental performance.



Zhongzheng District, Taipei, Taiwan. Photo by Miguel Vicente Martínez Juan.

Censorship in China

Many theatre productions have been censored by the Chinese government. *The Peony Pavilion* is a twenty-hour-long work penned by Tang Xianxu in 1598 that has long been barred from performance because of a plot that government officials have found objectionable: the passionate story of a girl who finds a lover in her dreams.

In 1998, a production of *The Peony Pavilion* was commissioned by New York's Lincoln Center as the centerpiece of its annual festival. The Shanghai Kunju Opera Company, directed by Chen Shi-Zheng, rehearsed in Shanghai until a mere three weeks before their scheduled departure for New York, when the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Culture denied the company permission to perform. Concerned about foreigners' perceptions of China, Ma Bomin, the bureau director, seized the set pieces and costumes, insisting that the show change what she called its "feudal," "ignorant," and "pornographic" elements (including a chamberpot prop and effigy burning). The cast was relocated to a country house outside Shanghai and instructed to rehearse changes; however, the Bureau of Culture was not placated and the performance was ultimately canceled.

A year later, in 1999, Chen Shi-Zheng's *The Peony Pavilion* was remounted at Lincoln Center and performed in its entirety, followed by a successful U.S. tour. In January 2012, the China Arts and Entertainment Group, under the administration of the Ministry of Culture for the People's Republic of China, approved the U.S. premiere of a condensed dance adaptation of *The Peony Pavilion* by the China Jinling Dance Company of Nanjing again at New York's Lincoln Center. The history of *The Peony Pavilion* on the international stage illustrates the still fraught relationship Chinese theatre has with government officials. Chinese theatre artists continuously negotiate the approval and censorship of their craft.



The Peony Pavilion performed at Peking University Hall in Beijing, China, 2006. Photo by sweet_vickey/Flickr.com.

The Middle East

Theatre has been a relevant and vibrant art form in Israel since its independence in 1948. A forum for its citizens to reflect on the difficulties of new statehood and the continuous Arab-Israeli conflict, theatre has been a necessary site of negotiation of Israeli identity. Theatre education programs are popular, and the theatre is a reliable source of critical cultural analysis in Israel. The state of Israel is unique in the Middle East in this way, as theatre is a more contentious undertaking in Islamic Middle Eastern countries. With a few notable exceptions, theatre as understood in a Western conventional framework was not performed in Islamic countries until the nineteenth century. While theatre has not developed as a major art form, certain forms of storytelling, mime, and shadow puppet performances have long been popular.

The Sufi Islamic doctrine that equates humanity to a shadow manipulated by its creator infuses shadow puppetry with a spiritual dimension that can perhaps explain the popularity of the shadow puppet play in Islamic countries. The fact that holes were purposely made in shadow puppets in the late Middle Ages illustrates the major point of tension between the art of theatre and Islamic theology; the holes disrupted the audience's perception of the puppet as a "real" representation and proved the puppets were not alive, and therefore the performance could not be accused of idolatry. Without the holes, the puppets could have been interpreted as creating an image of a person or animal, even unrelated to religion, which to some Islamic theologians violates the prohibition of idolatry. Idolatry is a contentious concept that is rife with subjective interpretation, including what does and does not count as idolatry. Some Islamic theologians interpret idolatry, in part, as giving undue regard toward created forms other than God; theatre, as a created representation, is met with disapproval by those who hold this view.

Theatre may not be a state-sponsored institution in the Islamic Middle East; however, the literature, architecture, and visual arts of the region have inspired many Western play adaptations, notably tales from *The Thousand and One Nights*, which was first translated in 1704 and continues to enchant Western audiences. Of course, the tales from *The Thousand and One Nights* were born out of an ancient Middle Eastern storytelling tradition orally transmitted over many generations, in which storytellers, called *hakawati*, performed various folk tales and mythic

stories sometimes with the accompaniment of a one-string viol. The *sha'ir*, or poet-musician, is another pre-Islamic Middle Eastern storyteller who figured predominantly in nomadic tribal life. *Sha'irs* performed song poems that praised their own tribe, satirized enemies, and channeled supernatural forces. The most acclaimed storytellers attracted *rawis*, “reciters” who memorized the tales and kept their oral transmission alive. Competitions in poetry and musical performances were held regularly among the best pre-Islamic poet-musicians in the Ukaz marketplace in Mecca. After the death of the prophet Muhammad, a new type of storyteller emerged: the *qussas*. The *qussas* told stories from the Qur'an that were often embellished but nonetheless popular.

Iran

After the murder of Imam Hussein in 680, whom the Shi'ite people honor as the martyr grandson to the prophet Muhammad who was denied his right to be caliph, *Ta'ziyeh* is performed annually in Iran (and sometimes in Lebanon and Iraq). *Ta'ziyeh* is a commemorative passion play that dramatizes Hussein's martyrdom in battle at Karbala. It is a mourning ritual for Hussein and a site for keeping cultural memory alive. The performance usually takes place in the round under a large tent and calls on the audience to participate. Actors sing and read their text, horses are used to recreate the battle at Karbala, and self-flagellation is part of the ritual mourning.



Ta'ziyeh, an Iranian religious play about the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. Courtesy of english.tebyan.net.

Turkey

The Turkish sultans who ruled during the time of the Ottoman Empire (1299–1922) sponsored their personal troupes of actors as well as acting companies and were accustomed to lavish pageants at court that included dance, circus acts, and theatre. The Ottoman aristocracy mimicked the court entertainments in more modest open-air performances throughout the empire.

By the sixteenth century, the Turkish shadow puppet play, called *Karagoz* for the main “Black-eye” puppet character, was a highly popular theatre form. The *Karagoz* puppet master needed to be adept at performing many voices, manipulating several puppets, and playing musical accompaniment. Some puppet masters had an assistant and one or two musicians. There were also at least twenty-eight stories to memorize (one performed for each night of Ramadan) that are either historical or indecent and included improvised humorous arguments between the two lead characters, *Karagoz* and *Hacivat*.

When the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, it took a favorable stance toward the arts. The republic began subsidizing theatre companies, a drama school, and an opera house and allowed Muslim women to work in the theatre.

Egypt

In 1910, Jurj Abyad, a Christian from Syria who had studied theatre in Paris, began an Arabic language theatre troupe in Egypt that performed European and Arabic works. Naguib al-Rihani (1892–1949) was an Egyptian actor known as the “Charlie Chaplain of the East” and thought of as the father of Egyptian comedy. He is known for his “Kesh Kesh Beik” character, whose antics revealed social class issues. Egyptian dramatist Salah Abd al-Sabur (1931–1981) was inspired by T. S. Eliot to write free verse drama and modernize Arabic poetry. His *The Tragedy of Al-Hallaj* (1965) won the State Incentive Award for Theater in 1966.

Contemporary Middle Eastern Theatre—Highlights

Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia does not allow men and women to be in the same theatre, and women are not allowed to act. Therefore, men play all roles, donning masks and wigs to play women. Children are allowed to perform with male adult actors.



2012 Tehrik-e-Niswan's production of *We are the Dispossessed*. Moving between past and present, this multimedia production shows how war affects women through violence, loss, rape, and displacement. Courtesy of the Hawler International Theater Festival.

Pakistan. In Pakistan, the Tehrik-e-Niswan (Women's Movement) theatre and performance troupe have been advocating for women's rights since they formed in 1979. Through their plays and dance performances, the women actors continue to communicate their feminist message.

Syria. Saadallah Wannous (1941–1997) was a Syrian playwright whose politically infused productions sometimes met with government censorship and often included an Arab *hakawati* storyteller character. He believed his work was not totally suppressed in Syria so that he could be an example to Western critics of Arab freedom of speech; he stated in an interview, "My very existence is propaganda." He wanted theatre to serve as a forum for Arab peoples to consider political failures and imagine Arab unity.

Israel. Since 1980, the Acco Festival for Alternative Israeli Theatre has occurred annually in Acco to showcase the best of submitted new works. Often, the theatre performances are political in nature, taking on current cultural debates and crises. The festival has also grown to demonstrate coexistence among Arabs and Israelis, with Arab theatre work featured in the festival. The festival takes place over four to five days with street theatre, workshops, and international theatre troupe performances in addition to the presentation of original works selected in competition.

Lebanon. There is a resurgence of interest in the Middle Eastern *hakawati* storytelling tradition as evidenced by the annual storytelling festival held in Beirut since 2000 by the Mannot Theatre, showcasing regional Arabic tales. Ahmad Yousuf, of the United Arab Emirates, is a *hakawati* storyteller who keeps the tradition alive when he rehearses adaptations of classics with a troupe of twenty actors at the Sharjah National Theatre.

Iraq. In 2003, al-Najeen (the Survivors), a theatre ensemble in occupied Iraq, produced *They Passed by Here*, a play that struggled with the concept of freedom, in the al-Rachid National Theatre ruins that had been recently bombed and looted during the war. The stage remained amid the rubble, but there was no electricity, and the actors often spoke their lines over each other and in constant motion as they explored the tensions of occupation. The actors said about the play, “We have to create [hope] ourselves.”

Kuwait. Kuwaiti theatre director Sulayman Al-Bassam (b. 1972) founded Sulayman Al-Bassam Theatre (SABAB) Kuwait in 2002. Al-Bassam has an international reputation for his adaptation of classic works, including *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy*. The D-CAF Downtown Contemporary Arts Festival was held for the first time in Cairo, Egypt, in 2012 and featured SABAB’s timely work *The Speaker’s Progress* by Sulayman Al-Bassam, set in an unspecified Arab country suffering postrevolution stagnation.

West Africa—Highlights

The first *griot*, a West African storyteller and living archive, was Balla Fasseké, personal griot to Sundiata Keita, the founder of the Mali Empire in the thirteenth century. Griots accompanied kings and were transferred as “presents” from one king to his successor. Many villages in northern Africa still have their own griots—the “praise-singers,” the keepers of local history, current events, genealogy, and mythic tales. The griot also performs songs passed down through the oral tradition with musical accompaniment, such as the *kora* or *komsa*. There are also women in this tradition, called *griottes*.

The Yoruba people of West Africa have a rich history of ritual performance to practice divination and to mark the installation of a new chief, births, and deaths. Yoruba ritual performance is marked by the



A *griot* sings at an engagement party in Mali, 2006. Photo by Emilia Tjernström.



The role of the *griot* was used for the play *Fly*, produced at Ford's Theatre, Washington, D.C., 2012. It depicts the experiences of the Tuskegee Airmen, African American officers and pilots during World War II. The cast included the "Tap Griot," a dancing storyteller who expresses the inner emotional world that the soldiers cannot show. Featuring Omar Edwards (directed by Ricardo Khan). Photo by Scott Suchman.

improvisational nature of the performance events and the agency of the participants in their ritual journey. Ritual performance in Yoruba may take the form of parades or processions and involve masks, costumes, dance, and music. Since 1370, the Osun Oshogbo Festival has taken place at the same sacred groves in Oshogbo, Nigeria. Upon settling there and preparing the ground for planting, the people felled a tree, and it landed in the Osun River. The settlers then heard the river lament her destruction, and the people began singing to the river to placate the goddess who resides there. The Osun grove draws tourists from all over the world to witness the two-week ritual proceedings to honor the river goddess Osun and the founding of the Oshogbo kingdom.

Sierra Leone. The Temne Rabai initiation ritual in Sierra Leone does not have a known origination date but is a practice passed down from the ancestors that prescribes a formal set of ritual performances and ceremony to circumcise young boys and metaphorically crown the “little kings” into manhood. The ritual is a community celebration of sexuality and includes the “abduction” of the young boys by their guardians to a clearing where rebirth practices, such as shaving of the head, are undertaken before the boys are circumcised.

The Mende people of Sierra Leone have a story performance tradition called *domei*, which draws on a regular stock of archetypal characters, such as the Defiant Maid and the Stubborn Farmer, in order to engage in critical debate through an improvisational storytelling form. The *Kaso* (spider-trickster) and *Musa Wo* (trickster-hero) fall in the *njepe wovei* narrative category, which utilizes music and a basic plot of transgression followed by punishment. *Kaso* is the most performed character in the Mende story performance tradition.

Nigeria. Wole Soyinka (b. 1934) is a Nigerian playwright who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, the first African to receive that honor. He was a dramaturg at London’s Royal Court Theatre in 1958–1959. In 1967 he called for a cease-fire during Nigeria’s civil war and was then imprisoned in solitary confinement for twenty-two months. His plays are influenced by Western drama but retain his Yoruba cultural heritage with African music, dance, and mythology.

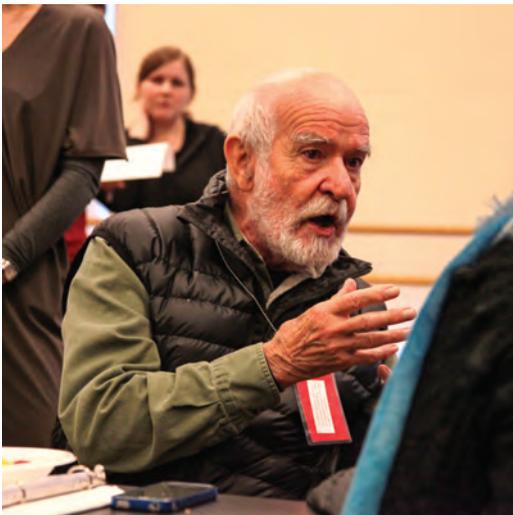
Ghana. In the 1920s, a popular form of traveling theatre emerged in Ghana; it was created by Bob Johnson and was known as the *concert party*. While popular, these performances did not fall under the traditional African performance forms, nor were they given the status of

dramatic literature. The concert party depended on quality musicians to provide musical accompaniment for the cabaret-style performances, which included dance and minstrelsy in a style inspired by popular minstrelsy and film in the United States, as well as African American spirituals, Latin American music, Ghanaian flag dancing (*asafo*), and “highlife” (West African jazz and guitar) music. The heyday of the concert party in the 1950s and 1960s is considered a golden age for Ghanaian theatre. In 2006, Ghana’s first minister of chieftaincy affairs and culture, S. K. Boafo, announced his intention to revive the concert party theatre.

Efua Sutherland (1924–1996) founded Ghana Drama Studio in Accra in 1957 and was instrumental in establishing modern Ghanaian theatre as a director, playwright, and patron. She advocated for the study of African theatre at universities, and her own plays interwove traditional African performance with references to Western classics.

South Africa

Athol Fugard (b. 1932) is a South African playwright whose early plays revealed the pain of institutionalized apartheid. His “*Master Harold*” . . . and the Boys, an autobiographical play, is about Harold, a white boy, who chooses to assert his dominance and reinforce systemic racism by sabotaging his friendship with “the Boys,” Sam and Willie, black men employed by his parents. The Fugard Theatre, named in his honor,



Athol Fugard directing his play *Blood Knot* for the Signature Theatre in New York City, 2011. Photo © Erik Carter.

opened in 2010 in District 6, Cape Town, South Africa. District 6 is the former site of apartheid's cruel deeds—once a black neighborhood that was savagely demolished with its inhabitants forcibly relocated. In its debut season, the Fugard produced *The Train Driver*, a work that Fugard claims is his most important play. *The Train Driver* is a meditation on the harsh realities of social, economic, and racial dynamics, inspired by a newspaper article about a South African black mother who walked from the squatter camp where she was living to commit suicide with her three children in her arms, on the train tracks. Fugard's work is an example of a South African theatre tradition that bears witness to real stories of struggle for social equity.

Latin America

The performativity of Latin American cultural practices dates back to Mesoamerican Mexica, Aztec, Maya, and Incan civilizations that practiced diverse performances such as the rituals that marked Aztec human sacrifice to the gods, Incan festival parades with the divine deceased, and the Mayan *Rabinal Achi*. Many of these performances, as early as 3000 BCE, seek to commune with an afterlife or to understand human life and death as a continuum rather than in opposition. With the colonization of the New World (sixteenth to nineteenth centuries), indigenous performance practices took on greater significance as the primary means by which the colonized could retain their traditional culture and resist the violence of stolen heritage. Performance was more difficult to censor, did not require literacy, and was a site of rich embodied practice of community that persisted in the face of the conqueror's mandates to assimilate European culture and religion.

Ancestor Worship in Performance: *Rabinal Achi*, Day of the Dead, and *Egungun*

In *Rabinal Achi*, a Mayan performance that originated in the fifteenth century, masked actors represent the dead, performing communion with ancestors and allowing the audience to make contact with the deceased. The play puts the character of Cawek on trial for betraying the inhabitants of Rabinal. Spanish conquerors



Dancers of the *Rabinal Achi*. Photo by Rosemary Burnett.

were threatened by the play's interrogation of the dynamics between rulers and their subjects and tried to censor the performance, especially Cawek's "decapitation." In 2005, the dance drama from *Rabinal Achi* was named one of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

Present-day Mexico continues to undertake ritual performance to honor ancestors with the **Day of the Dead** festival celebrations, a legacy of an Aztec festival to honor the goddess of the afterlife. Day of the Dead festivities may include the creation of altars, wearing a costume to imitate the deceased, cooking the favorite foods of the dead as an offering, and other ways to publicly perform the connection to ancestors. Latin American performance that honors the dead continues to be an important aspect of cultural heritage.

Since the fourteenth century, the African Yoruba people annually participate in *egungun*, a ritual performance involving dance, masquerade, drumming, and improvisation that honors the ancestors and encourages the living to meet high ethical standards. The robed *egungun* performers become possessed with the spirits of ancestors and, in doing so, spiritually cleanse the community. *Egungun*



Egunguns waiting to begin, Cové, Benin, 2009. Photo by Dietmar Temps.

that honors one's blood relatives is named *Baba* (Father) and *Iya* (Mother), while the rest of *egungun* performances honor Yoruban ancestry, traditions, and heritage more generally.

Mexico

Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz (1648–1695) was born in Mexico as the illegitimate daughter of a Spanish captain and a Criollo woman and registered as a “daughter of the church,” since her parents were not married. From these humble beginnings, she overcame the obstacles to receiving an education and was a celebrated and self-taught intellectual. She became a nun in order to continue her studies and intellectual life, including writing fifty-two dramatic works and teaching drama to young women. She is most famous for her poetry and her courageous treatises on the rights of women to an education. However, her significant work as a dramatist is often overlooked. She contributed to various genres of Mexican drama—the *falda y empeño* (petticoat and perseverance, plus the love and mythology subgenre), the *auto* (sacramental, hagiographic and biblical), and *loas* and *villancicos* dramas.

Mexico experienced a revival in folk performance during the 1920s as well as the rise of experimental theatre, as demonstrated by the short-lived

but influential Teatro de Ulises, established in 1928 as an experimental theatre that performed works by international playwrights. Rodolfo Usigli (1905–1979) was a Mexican playwright and director called “the playwright of the Mexican revolution.” His play *El Gesticulador* (*The Impostor*, 1938) was popular with the public but met with criticism by the Mexican government when it was finally staged in 1947. The first play that dared to script contemporary Mexican politics and the “death” of the Mexican Revolution, it was ultimately censored by the government when several performances at Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City were canceled. Usigli was an advocate for women’s rights and mentored men and women in Mexican theatre who continued his legacy of using the theatre to tell the truth.

From the midtwentieth century, the National Autonomous University of Mexico has fostered the development of Mexican avant-garde theatre and nurtured Mexico’s experimental dramatists. From 1956 to 1963, the Poesia en Voz Alta (Poetry Out Loud) festival, hosted at the university, accomplished the aim of encouraging Mexican dramatists to step away from Spanish romanticism and canonical works and instead experiment with staging, realism, and colloquial language. The influence of the Poetry Out Loud festivals reverberated into the theatre of the 1970s.

Mexican theatre of the 1980s reflected the political and economic turmoil of that time with plays that relied on realism and the use of personal narrative, called the New Mexican Dramaturgy. By the 1990s, economic depression and lack of government financial support resulted in the fragmenting of the theatre into individual companies with no unified Mexican theatre movement or style. An exception was the 1990s movement in Mexican theatre called *theatre of the body*, which called for the body to be used as theatrical fodder. A group of women directors founded La Rendija (The Slit), and took on the theatre of the body, with avant-garde theatre pieces that foreground corporeality and make use of alternative performance spaces. Still an active theatre company today, La Rendija hosts an annual festival to encourage the development of new works.

The first Festival of Mexico City occurred in 1984 and continues to be organized annually to showcase art forms of all kinds, including theatre. The festival events transpire over two and a half weeks and feature Mexican and international performers. Mexico has many diverse festival offerings such as the International Festival of Street Theatre, which has taken place every year in October in Zacatecas since 2002.

Jesusa Rodriguez (b. 1955) is a Mexican performance artist, playwright, and activist who has been instrumental in shaping and contributing to postmodern Mexican performance. Her wife Liliana Felipe (b. 1954) is an Argentine composer and actress who fled Argentina before the Dirty War, which claimed her sister and brother-in-law as “disappeareds.” They are the founders of the political cabaret theatre El Habito (now called El Vicio) in Mexico City, which serves as a space of civil cultural resistance. Rodriguez’s performances often called on the audience to participate in sounding off about the politics of the day. Home to the performance arts of the cabaret space, including avant-garde gender transgressive drag acts that celebrate non-normative sexuality, El Vicio has been an important home for many contemporary Mexican performance artists. Rodriguez and Felipe operated El Habito and Teatro de la Capilla, another alternative performance space, until 2005. However, El Vicio still thrives as a cabaret performance space. Typical of much of Rodriguez’s explicitly political work, *New War New War* is a *carpa* (Mexican vaudeville) performance that addresses the foreign policy effects of the post-9/11 era and explores the role of humor in dealing with tragedy. Rodriguez insists on the “. . . necessity to protest and resist through pleasure.”

Argentina

Argentina experienced a “glorious decade” of theatre (1904–1914) that produced *genero chico* and naturalist plays. *Genero chico* plays are generally one-act satirical comedies with dance that stage the realistic lives of local people. In the 1920s and 1930s the *grotesco criollo* play became popular in Argentina, influenced by the Italian grotesque playwrights, such as Luigi Pirandello. The *grotesco criollo* plays staged the horrible truths of impoverished and oppressed immigrant communities, grotesquing the immigration policies of the day.

From 1950 to 1956, the most compelling productions in the Argentine theatre were produced in independent theatres opened as a reaction to the commercial and politically controlled popular theatres. The theatre happening in the independent venues at this time introduced plays that were unafraid of social commentary during great political unrest. While the independent theatres did not survive long, they managed to plant the seeds of a new realism aesthetic that continued to take shape in the Argentine theatre of the 1960s. The 1960s saw the infusion of the avant-garde movement into the theatre landscape, which continued to

affect Argentine realism on the stage. The Argentine plays of this decade centered on disaffected antihero protagonists unable to overcome life's difficulties. The Centro Experimental Audiovisual Instituto Torcuato di Tella in Buenos Aires opened in 1958 with the strident mission to avoid realism altogether in favor of new performance modes that would reinvent the theatre, until the government closed the theatre in 1971. By the end of the 1970s, many theatre practitioners were forced or compelled to leave the country; such was the political climate that stifled freedom of artistic expression. During the Dirty War (1976–1983), some theatres were closed and the Picadero theatre was burned down, while writers were kidnapped, tortured and murdered.

In 1981, the Teatro Abierto was established and managed to produce works that were critical of state terrorism by way of disguised critique that audiences easily deciphered as resistance to the regime. But with the new democracy in 1986, the theatre ceased to exist, its function no longer necessary. By the end of the 1980s, Argentine theatre had dealt with the terrorism of the Dirty War so extensively that the focus of the theatre shifted to lighter fare, as artists and audiences alike did not want to suffer the reliving of recently passed atrocities. It turned to issues of social concern and identity, including grappling with feminism, sexuality, gender, and “machismo.”

One of the most accomplished avant-garde dramatists and writers of Latin America to work at the Instituto di Tella was Griselda Gambaro (b. 1928), Argentina's most acclaimed playwright. She courageously penned plays that dealt with the horrors of the political turmoil that eventually culminated in the Dirty War (1976–1983). Her works focus on political crisis (e.g., *The Walls*, 1963) and the “disappeared” (e.g., *Information for Foreigners*, 1973)—Argentines whose bodies were never recovered after the violence of kidnappings and murder perpetrated during political upheaval. She situates her work squarely in the uniquely Argentine *grotesco* genre and uses parody, black comedy, collage, and encoded language (to avoid censorship) to explore the violence, complicity, and what she calls the “schizophrenic” nature of her home country. Gambaro continues to write novels, essays, short stories, and plays, with her *Teatro 7* (seventh collection of plays) published in 2005.

Brazil

Julia Lopes de Almeida (1862–1934) was a Brazilian writer and playwright whose best-known dramatic work was *A Herança* (The Heritage), a psy-

chological romance. This work was performed in 1908 at the Teatro de Exposição Nacional. Notable as one of Brazil's first women to be socially accepted as a writer, she also used her position to advocate for greater equality for women and abolition. It is thought that her husband was elected to the Brazilian Academy of Letters as a stand-in for his wife, given the gender constraints of the time.

São Paulo Teatro de Arena, or Arena Theatre, was established in 1953 and closed in 1972. It succeeded in creating a national theatre that adapted classics to speak to Brazilian life, such as Augusto Boal's 1956 adaptation of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, and then became a platform for new work by Brazilian playwrights.

Grupo Macunaima, a São Paulo theatre company founded in 1978 by Antunes Filho, still operates as it always has: staging authentically Brazilian performance, whether through adaptation of classics (1992's *Macbeth* adaptation, *Throne of Blood*) or the work of Brazil's native playwrights (1993's *Path of Salvation* by Jorge Andrade). Leading Brazilian theatre through the transition out of the "reign of terror" dictatorship and into democracy, Grupo Macunaima called on a collective Brazilian identity and dramatized Brazil's mythology as well as its reality.

Conclusion

An active traditional Japanese *bunraku* performance company operates in Missouri with the slogan "Traditional Japanese Puppetry in America." Rohina Malik, an American Muslim playwright who resides in Chicago, wrote *Unveiled*, a play about Muslim women reflecting on their identities post-9/11, and it is currently enjoying international production. She was recently commissioned by the Goodman Theatre to write *The Mecca Tales*, which explores the diverse motivations for five Muslim women to embark on pilgrimages to Mecca. In each case, intercultural exchange that interrogates traditional performance conventions is being performed in the heartland of the United States. As Micaela Di Leonardo argues, the "exotic" has come home and culture is "a foreign microbe run wild." The theatre and its audiences are increasingly the benefactors of the connectedness forged through our hybridized culture staged in performance venues around the globe. In a postmodern age, "world" theatre is difficult to pin down—preserving traditional forms becomes elusive when *we* are the world.