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ARTICLE

LeAnn Fields and University of Michigan Press

Edited by Gina M. Di Salvo

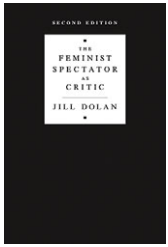
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Editor's Note: In 1987, LeAnn Fields acquired Lynda Hart's *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*. By the time Fields retired in 2024, she had built a list of more than 280 books in the field of theatre and performance studies at the University of Michigan Press. Hart's *Making a Spectacle* is a foundational and still radical book of critical essays on gender, the body, and spectatorship, topics that continue to chart and reverberate among the many intellectual commitments of our field. Like nearly all the books that Fields acquired for University of Michigan Press, *Making a Spectacle* drew from and responded to another interdisciplinary field of study, women's studies, as it simultaneously broke new ground in theatre and performance studies. In this special section, thirteen authors discuss the ways in which Fields encouraged the development of their work and our field. These author accounts are followed by an interview with Fields by Jill Dolan, in which Fields describes how her work as an acquisitions editor began and how it changed, how she navigated the press boards and changes in technology and staffing, and how, from her perspective, our field fosters a unique sense of community. The author accounts and interview offer an invaluable collection of personal histories that trace the development of our field over the past four decades to our vibrant present.

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Jill Dolan

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The Feminist Spectator as Critic, 1991; 2nd edition, 2012.
Presence and Desire: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, Performance, 1993.
Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater, 2005.
A Menopausal Gentleman: The Solo Performances of Peggy Shaw, edited by Jill Dolan, 2011.
Memories of the Revolution: The First Ten Years of the WOW Café Theater, coedited with Holly Hughes and Carmelita Tropicana, 2015.
Wendy Wasserstein, 2017.

LeAnn Fields asked to republish *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* shortly after its original 1988 publication by University Microfilms International (UMI) Research Press. The book was my dissertation. Brooks McNamara, my professor at New York University's then relatively new Performance Studies Department, connected me with Oscar Brockett, the then–theatre editor at UMI, who published the book just after I defended. (Brooks, always generous, wasn't even on my committee.) By the next year, UMI Press had stopped publishing, and LeAnn adopted *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* at the University of Michigan Press.

I can't overemphasize how little I knew about academia or academic publishing at that time. As an M.A. student, I'd planned to be a writer and editor. In fact, when I finished my M.A., I had a tentative job offer from Theatre Communications Group (TCG) and what became *American Theatre* magazine. But one of my NYU mentors, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, persuaded me to stay for the Ph.D., for which I wrote *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*.

At the time, NYU offered no courses in feminist or women's or gender or queer performance. I took a class in nascent feminist film theory from E. Ann Kaplan and one in reception theory from Janet Staiger. But none of the Performance Studies faculty worked in the field or could advise my project. For instance, Michael Kirby, the famed structuralist critic, historian, and director, with whom I'd worked closely as managing editor on *The Drama Review*, flatly turned me down, since he disagreed with my commitment to criticism as standpoint. Peggy Phelan, who was newly hired into the department, finally and kindly agreed to advise the project, even though we'd never worked together before.

I wanted the book to create a conversation about what it meant (and what it felt like) to be a feminist at the theatre. My metaphor of "stealing the seat" from the presumptively white heterosexual male spectator was practical and embodied, theoretical and methodological. I wanted to note the difference it made to be a feminist watching (and creating) theatre. I wanted to describe how such reception might be accomplished and contemplate what it might mean.

In the late 1980s, little ground in theatre studies was prepared for the ideas *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* meant to share. Sue-Ellen Case would publish *Feminism and Theatre* at Methuen in 1988; our books came out more or less concurrently. Michigan published *The Feminist Spectator* in paperback at a price that allowed it to be assigned in courses. In fact, LeAnn's commitment to publishing paperbacks for course adoption invigorated (and established) our field.

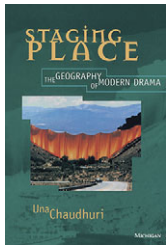
Imagine my surprise and pleasure when it turned out that plenty of colleagues and students and spectators wanted to engage with theatre in ways that belied the so-called objectivity of conventional performance reception theory and criticism. But I had little idea that a feminist critical community was forming until the books LeAnn published at Michigan provided the cartography. We could now find one another at conferences and through our articles and books, and our feisty field was born.

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Una Chaudhuri

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Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama, 1995.
Land/Scape/Theater, coedited with Elinor Fuchs, 2002.
Animal Acts: Performing Species Today, coedited with Holly Hughes, 2014.

I am grateful and honored to count myself among LeAnn Fields's legions of authors, editors, admirers, and friends. Her contributions to the thriving of our field would be hard to overestimate. It was my good fortune to get to know LeAnn and to begin working with her at a fairly early stage in my career, and the support and guidance that I received from her—from the moment I submitted the manuscript of *Staging Place* to Michigan—was among the most valuable experiences of my professional life. LeAnn had a gift that I later came to understand as *true* collegiality: it is that combination of generous affirmation and rigorous, clear-eyed, assessment that you get from people who are deeply committed both to your own professional success as well as to the flourishing of your field of study. LeAnn cared in equal measure about theatre and performance studies as a discipline and about her authors as individuals. She inspired her authors to meet her high standards of excellence while somehow keeping the arduous publication process energizing and enjoyable.

My admiration for LeAnn—and my indebtedness to her great good sense—grew considerably when I began my series coeditorship, with Robert Vorlicky, of the Critical Performances series. Originally conceived by our dear friend Lynda Hart and housed at another press, the series was left without an editor at Lynda's untimely death. I had already published a volume in the series, and was invested in what was, at the time, a fairly new book concept: a collection of scripts by contemporary performance artists accompanied by critical analyses by theatre scholars. The concept was intended to help dislodge the tiresome theory–practice binary that often roils our institutions—our schools and departments—in destructive, regressive ways.

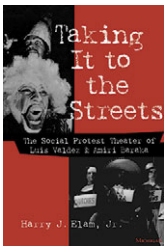
LeAnn embraced the concept with enthusiasm and creativity, leading to one of my most satisfying professional collaborations (in which LeAnn was as active as myself and Bob). My own volumes in that series are among my proudest achievements, each having given me the gift of working with a towering presence in our field: first Rachel Rosenthal and then (as coeditor) Holly Hughes. LeAnn was a guest of honor at the event that Holly hosted in her department to celebrate *Animal Acts: Performing Species Today*. The joyful gathering of artists and scholars on that occasion, as on so many others, was a testament to the vibrancy of our field, which LeAnn has done more to nurture than anyone else.

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Harry J. Elam Jr.

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Taking It to the Streets: The Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka, 1997.
The Past as Present in the Drama of August Wilson, 2004.
Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture, coedited with Kennell Jackson, 2005.

I first met LeAnn Fields at an Association of Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) conference back in 1990. I had an appointment with her to discuss my first book project, then entitled, "The Ritual of Social Protest Theater." Untenured and extremely nervous, I approached the University of Michigan Press's booth. There she was: LeAnn Fields, deeply engaged in conversation with another young scholar. As I awaited my turn, I surveyed the displayed jacket covers of books by scholars I deeply admired. Already feeling overwhelmed, uncertain, and unworthy, I sat down with LeAnn in a quiet back corner of the booth. Kind and patient, LeAnn set me at ease. She listened carefully, as she had the exceptional ability to be in the moment, to tune out the other voices around her, and to focus for that time only on you. What equally stood out to me in that initial conversation was how well LeAnn truly knew the field of theatre and performance. Notably, LeAnn did not simply stand around the Michigan book booth at conferences. Rather, she attended sessions and met with established scholars, who were perhaps already part of the University of Michigan stable, to hear what new scholarship they found innovative and exciting and to make note of what panels she should particularly attend.

LeAnn recognized what a significant role book publishing and editors played in shaping our academic discipline, and she approached this responsibility with care, commitment, strategy, and vision. Because of LeAnn, in no small part, the University of Michigan Press became one of the most important presses (if not *the* most important) in theatre and performance studies. The works the press and LeAnn chose to publish helped to define the field and propel it forward.

In that first meeting with LeAnn, I came to understand that somehow, through her channels, she had heard of my project and was intrigued. Always direct and honest, she invited me to send my proposal, and the press would review it, but there was no guaranty of publication—nor even of sending it out to readers. Nonetheless I was thrilled.

Committed to equity and access, determined to open the field to more works by scholars of color, LeAnn came to believe in and to champion my project and its potential significance in our field. My book manuscript offers a comparative analysis

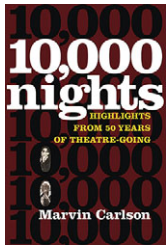
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of Black and Chicano theatre in the 1960s. Conventionally, critical studies of ethnic theatre and performance were siloed—criticism solely on Black theatre or on Latino theatre but not comparative approaches. LeAnn appreciated that my manuscript attempted something different and sent it to two anonymous readers. While the first report came back extremely positive, the second reader questioned my exploration of Luis Valdez and Chicano theatre. Given her prescience, resolve, and ambitions—not for herself, but for the Michigan Press and our field—LeAnn still did not give up on the project. Rather, she encouraged me to solicit feedback from Chicano studies scholars. Jorge Huerta and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano were incredibly gracious with their time and expertise, and I incorporated their suggestions into my final revision. Subsequently, LeAnn sent the book out to a third reader, and the response was quite strong, so she resolved to publish the book. She also insisted we change its name to something much more vivid and exciting: *Taking It to the Streets: The Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka*. I am pleased that the book is still in print, and LeAnn has become a colleague and friend. I so enjoyed meeting with her yearly at theatre and performance studies conferences and reviewing the landscape of the discipline with her. I am extremely grateful to LeAnn for the part she has played in my career and in the scholarly journey of other theatre and performance scholars, including some of my graduate students.

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Marvin Carlson

CUNY Graduate Center, New York, NY, USA



The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine, 2001.
Speaking in Tongues: Languages at Play in the Theatre, 2006.
Shattering Hamlet's Mirror: Theatre and Reality, 2016.
10,000 Nights: Highlights from 50 Years of Theatre-Going, 2017.

When I began my career, the academic study of theatre was largely devoted to archival theatre history, perhaps best represented by the dominant and often reissued text of Oscar Brockett. During the 1980s the rise of semiotics offered a different orientation, and theory, generally speaking, begin to challenge history as an academic approach. I spent much of this decade at Indiana University, which Thomas Sebeok made the American center of semiotic studies, and my interests turned in that direction. Like many theatre semioticians, however, I gradually became dissatisfied with the traditional semiotic exclusive interest on the material

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onstage, and found that the emerging field of reception studies, seeing the audience as a cocreator of the theatrical experience, seemed to offer a more holistic view of this phenomenon.

The result of these concerns led to my first significant study of reception, *The Haunted Stage*, considering how the memory of the audience contributed to shaping their theatrical experience. My previous presses had supported me as a semiotician and historian, but for this new book I hoped to find a press more open to new ways of looking at the total operation of theatre. Several colleagues in the Association for Theatre in Higher Education and the International Federation for Theatre Research, where I presented some preliminary studies for the book, suggested the University of Michigan Press, where LeAnn Fields was gaining a reputation for encouraging groundbreaking new work in theatre studies.

I already had a modest acquaintance with LeAnn, as an external reader, but it was not until *The Haunted Stage* that I got to know her as a truly dedicated, encouraging, and indeed inspirational colleague. My experience with her on *The Haunted Stage*, which appeared in 2001, made me a largely "Michigan" author from then on, with *Speaking in Tongues* in 2006, *Shattering Hamlet's Mirror* in 2016, and *10,000 Nights* in 2017.

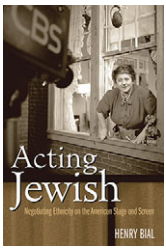
Each of these books owes a great deal to LeAnn, but *10,000 Nights* literally would not exist without her encouragement and support. Some years ago, at one of what had become our annual shared coffees at the ATHE and ASTR conferences, LeAnn asked me if I had considered writing an autobiography. I told her I never had, my life being a rather normal academic one of research and teaching. She suggested, however, that as an inveterate theatregoer I had a particularly rich exposure to the modern theatre, and with my interest in audiences and reception I could apply that interest to my experiences.

10,000 Nights was the result. The book is a close study of my personal experience attending a single significant production each year from 1960 to 2010, offering a lifetime perspective of late twentieth-century theatregoing, a sort of Samuel Pepys for our times. The year the book appeared, a special session at the ASTR conference was devoted to a panel discussion of it by leading scholars in the field, and LeAnn added to the festivities by providing small candies bearing the title *10,000 Nights* to the many attendees. One of those candies remains among my most treasured professional souvenirs.

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Henry Bial

Department of Theatre and Dance, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, USA



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Acting Jewish: Negotiating Ethnicity on the American Stage and Screen, 2005.
Theater Historiography: Critical Interventions, coedited with Scott Magelssen, 2010.
Playing God: The Bible on the Broadway Stage, 2015.

When I began work on *Acting Jewish* in the late 1990s, most of the burgeoning scholarship on popular culture focused on questions of *access*: the underrepresentation of women, people of color, and other marginalized groups was commonly, and correctly, attributed to their underrepresentation in positions of power within the entertainment industry. By contrast, Jewish writers, directors, producers, and performers seemed to be overrepresented on Broadway and in Hollywood, whereas explicitly Jewish characters and stories were considered outliers, given little critical or scholarly notice. Even less attention was paid to *implicitly* Jewish entertainment, from plays like *Death of a Salesman* to pop culture sensations like *Seinfeld.* As I wrote at the time, "Jews are not marginal in either theater or the academy, yet Jewish performance criticism is at home in neither theater nor Jewish studies."

The missing ingredient, I felt, in the "representations of" studies then proliferating was the desire and ability of audiences to read and interpret "difference" in ways that affirmed their identities. Michigan had published Jill Dolan's *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1991), Marvin Carlson's *The Haunted Stage* (2001), Stacy Wolf's *A Problem Like Maria* (2002), and other studies that had emphasized the critical agency of spectators, and so it seemed like a natural home for my project. Bob Vorlicky, who had served on my dissertation committee, graciously agreed to introduce this nervous assistant professor to LeAnn Fields at an ATHE conference. I don't remember exactly what I stammered out at that first meeting, but after about ninety seconds she smiled and said, "I've got a few minutes right now. Why don't we go sit down somewhere quiet and you can relax and tell me about your project?" As I talked her through my more-than-a-dissertation-less-than-a-book, she offered encouragement and positive feedback, and after about twenty minutes declared, "This sounds great. I don't need to see a proposal. Send me your manuscript when you get home." Thus began a long and fruitful period of collaboration, one that would eventually include the volume *Theater Historiography* (coedited with Scott Magelssen) and my second monograph, *Playing God.*

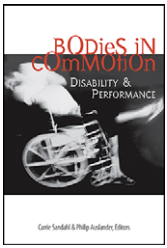
For *Acting Jewish*, LeAnn secured two thorough, detailed reader's reports, which provided me with a clear road map toward revision. She also offered her own insights, encouraging me to lean into the multiple media (theatre, film, and television) aspect of the project, and challenging me to ensure that female artists such as Gertrude Berg, Barbra Streisand, and Wendy Wasserstein were adequately represented among my case studies. Most important, she helped me understand how to shape and sustain a book-length argument, with each chapter building on the previous one, a characteristic I have come to appreciate in other Michigan titles.

In retrospect, I am especially proud of the way that *Acting Jewish* helped demonstrate the applicability of performance studies theory and methods to the consideration of Broadway theatre and other mainstream entertainments. The gradual shift in our field from "theatre *versus* performance studies" to "theatre *and* performance studies" owes a great deal to LeAnn's willingness to embrace new ways of thinking, and I feel fortunate to have played a part.

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Carrie Sandahl
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Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance, coedited with Philip Auslander, 2005.

Authored by Philip Auslander

LeAnn's contribution to the development of disability performance studies cannot be overstated—but it has certainly been understated. Case in point: here's the original draft of the acknowledgments for *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance* (2005), which my coeditor, Philip Auslander, and I initially submitted:

> Phil and I would like to thank University of Michigan Press's editor LeAnn Fields for coming up with the idea for this book and ushering it to fruition. LeAnn approached me with the idea for *Bodies in Commotion* at the Association of Theatre in Higher Education's annual conference in Chicago nearly seven years ago. At the time, only a few theatre and performance scholars had ventured into disability studies, and I was feeling rather isolated in my home disciplines. LeAnn was an early champion of disability studies in the humanities, publishing path-breaking books in the field, and foresaw that it was only a matter of time before disability studies would make an impact on theatre and performance studies. She was right. I will be forever grateful to LeAnn for her prescience, for her support of my scholarship, and for the opportunity to build a community of disability performance scholars as we built this collection. Our first meeting over coffee will always be memorable not only because of LeAnn's faith in my abilities to spearhead this project, but because we both had our purses stolen as we left the hotel restaurant. I think we were both so enthusiastic about our plans that we were oblivious to our surroundings!

During revision, LeAnn asked us to cut this paragraph to less than half its original length. In characteristic humility, she proposed edits that removed any mention that the anthology had been her idea and downplayed her pivotal role in shaping the field and jump-starting my career. At the time, I was too junior to push back. Even after twenty years, that edit has never sat right with me. I'm grateful for the chance now to acknowledge LeAnn's foundational role in building disability performance studies into the thriving subfield it is today.

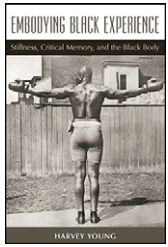
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Our intention with this anthology was to chart an agenda for the subfield by organizing it into five parts representing major areas of inquiry: defining disability and Deaf theatre; disability aesthetics and reception; speaking back to the medical model; performing disability in daily life; and reading disability in dramatic literature. In the past twenty years, significant conversations have developed beyond these areas to include inter-impairment collaboration, ethics of collaboration, access as aesthetic, repurposing disability history, communicating disability phenomenology, and issues related to casting, training, and presenting. Experimental praxis in the field has revealed disability not as a problem to be solved, but as a source of generative potential.

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Harvey Young

College of Fine Arts, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA



Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body, 2010.

More than a decade before the publication of *Embodying Black Experience*, I won the Theory & Criticism Focus Group annual graduate essay award from the Association for Theatre in Higher Education. The award, which included credit with the University of Michigan Press, allowed me to purchase books by scholars including Andrew Sofer and Una Chaudhuri. It also enabled an introduction to LeAnn Fields.

I fondly remember that first conversation with her. She congratulated me and said, "We now have a connection." She asked about my dissertation research (which was very much in its infancy). She expressed interest. LeAnn stayed in touch over the years, as I researched, drafted, wrote a dissertation, and began steps toward revision. By the time I was ready to seek a publishing contract, I couldn't imagine another publisher for the book.

In the late 1990s and the early 2000s, I wasn't as ready—as some scholars and critics—to imagine the opening decades of the new millennium as being free from the prejudice and racial violence that defined the previous century. I had seen and experienced too many things.

Although President Barack Obama had just been inaugurated when I was making final edits on *Embodying Black Experience*, I could not proclaim that Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream had been fulfilled (as some journalists had done). The memory of

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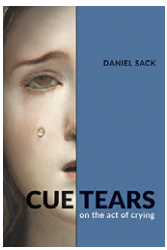
James Byrd Jr., who was dragged to death in Texas in 1998, lingered—and still lingers—in my mind.

This was before #BLM, Black Lives Matter. I wanted to write about why experiences of race, racism, and racial violence persist across centuries into our present. I wanted to account for strategies of resistance and resilience. Fifteen years after the publication of *Embodying Black Experience*, I remain grateful to have had the opportunity to think through ideas that remain relevant today.

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Daniel Sack

Department of English, University of Massachusetts–Amherst, Amherst, MA, USA



After Live: Possibility, Potentiality, and the Future of Performance, 2015.
Cue Tears: On the Act of Crying, 2024.

The year after Michigan published my first book, *After Live*, LeAnn and I met up for our annual chat at ASTR. The conversation turned to next projects, and I shared two rough ideas: the first a rather conventional extension of my first book, the second a stranger, and yet much more familiar, endeavor. I related how my father had been a biochemist who studied human tears, how in my childhood he'd collected my tears for his research. I'd begun taking acting classes at the same moment, trying to cry on cue, and a complexity involving lachrymose expression had knotted itself in me. LeAnn's response was certain: this was the book to write. A few days later, a package arrived with a copy of a recent issue of *The Threepenny Review* featuring a roundtable on tears. Inside, too, a note of encouragement. This was the first of many offerings that LeAnn shared concerning the "tears project"—anecdotes about her mother's Baby Tears plant (*Soleirolia soleirolii*) or historical oddities passed on from other scholars (thanks, Marvin Carlson)—buoys to keep me afloat through a difficult voyage.

We'd not discussed whether Michigan would be the right home for the book, but I wanted to try to work with LeAnn again. And so, in early 2022, five years after our first conversation, I sent in a proposal. LeAnn's incomparable sense of the field located a pair of exceptional readers whose reports articulated my project far more eloquently than I could manage at a time when I was too close for any perspective. I'd been unusually anxious about sharing what was a departure in many ways. The writing traversed fields where I was a stranger, harking back to the science I had studiously avoided in secondary school. Each essay in the book moved differently, some mimicking conventional criticism, others taking peculiar forms, touching more

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personal matter. The process had been an unusually private one, too, exacerbated by the pandemic and the birth of my first child. I'd only publicly shared one essay, and none of the work had been published. Looking back, LeAnn's sustained support allowed me to try ways of writing I would not have ventured otherwise.

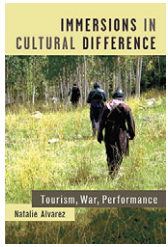
It helped to have an expert editorial eye on the proceedings. She'd pinpoint small shifts that realigned whole continents of a text—as when the removal of the opening paragraph brought the book to life. Wanting the volume to feel approachable, we opted for a smaller, handheld format, and with LeAnn's blessing, I cut two essays, streamlining the text to a slim 150 pages. When I struggled over the design for a cover, she sent a dossier of iconic cover designs drawn from literary fiction, parsed according to their compositions.

When we first discussed a contract, LeAnn had revealed that she planned to retire in the coming years, and she stepped down from her position the week that I returned the final proofs. *Cue Tears* was one of her last projects as an editor. LeAnn had a sense of occasion, suggesting we distribute specially branded packets of tissues at the book launch at ASTR. The birth of my second child prevented my attendance at that conference, but any launch would have felt hollowed without the person who most helped to issue it into the world. *Cue Tears*, indeed: our greatest editor has left the field; may she enjoy the greener pastures of a well-earned retirement!

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Natalie Álvarez

School of Performance, Toronto Metropolitan University, Toronto, Canada



Immersions in Cultural Difference: Tourism, War, Performance, 2018.

It was 2009 at the American Society of Theatre Research gathering in Puerto Rico and I had just presented one of the central case studies of *Immersions in Cultural Difference* in a plenary session. I was new to ASTR, only recently on the tenure track, one of a handful of Canadians in attendance, and it was my first plenary paper at the conference. It was also the first time I had been in a conference situation where attendees stood up to ask questions (assertive!) and were not afraid to be brutally direct (while standing!) if they sensed a critical weakness in your argument. This was both exhilarating and terrifying. I remember waiting for the hotel elevator and ruminating on this experience when I looked to my right and noticed LeAnn Fields standing next to me.

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It might be a stretch to call it an editorial crush, but I snapped to in her presence and stammered an attempt at a hello. Mentors in my discipline had described LeAnn Fields as the best editor in the business, and the series she led, Theater: Theory/Text/Performance, as the gold standard in our field. LeAnn's unparalleled editorial eye practically guaranteed a quality publication. For those authors who had the honor of being contracted, the editorial experience was described as one of care, attention, and thoughtfulness, producing books of which authors were proud. She asked me about my plans for the project, whether I had a publisher in mind, and encouraged me to consider sending in a proposal.

LeAnn's encouragement in that brief encounter and the unruffled curiosity about my work was validating for me at a particularly vulnerable moment in my career, and it planted the seeds of a long correspondence. *Immersions in Cultural Difference* was the result of more than seven years of field research in Mexico, the United States, Canada, and the UK. At first glance, the book brought incompatible companions of case studies into conversation with one another: my field research took me to military training camps, sites of Indigenous anticolonial activism, and beyond to examine the ways in which immersions were being used as intercultural rehearsal theatres, staging cultural encounters with significant political stakes and ethical implications.

In its early stages of development, I was riddled with worry, not only by the unlikely juxtaposition of case studies and their political stakes, but also by moments of somewhat confessional, first-person writing in which I felt a responsibility to acknowledge the ways in which I was colluding with the very phenomena I was critiquing.

My experience in that time proved the reputational rumors about LeAnn to be true. The calm strength of LeAnn's editorial experience left me feeling like I could be more adventurous, take risks, and bring these unlikely case studies together if the argumentative through line held strong. I was afforded the enjoyment of allowing the book to become what it wanted to be, rather than becoming consumed with how it might be perceived. The book was brought to completion in 2018, and I still have the kind, handwritten note LeAnn left in the advance hardcover copy: "I'm so pleased with how it turned out. I hope you are, too."

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Kareem Khubchandani

Department of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies, Tufts University, Medford, MA, USA



Ishtyle: Accenting Gay Indian Nightlife, 2020.
Queer Nightlife, 2021, coedited with Kemi Adeyemi and Ramón H. Rivera-Servera

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It never ceases to amaze me that I have *two* books—my first monograph, *Ishtyle: Accenting Gay Indian Nightlife*, and the coedited *Queer Nightlife*—published in a series that I admire so dearly: University of Michigan Press's Triangulations: Lesbian/Gay/Queer Theater/Drama/Performance. During graduate school, I read with such eagerness monographs by James Wilson, Ramón Rivera-Servera, Marlon Bailey, Sara Warner, Alicia Arrizon, and Stacy Wolf and marveled at their curation into a single series. To state the obvious: these books beautifully stage why queerness and performance need each other. So much of the queer canon, or what is regularly taught as queer theory, pivots around literary archives and analytics: Sedgwick, Edelman, Love, Cvetkovich, Butler, Ahmed, Halberstam, to name a few. And certainly there are exceptions: Johnson, Muñoz, Cohen, Rubin. Triangulations reorganizes theory and analysis by curating a body of texts that approach the analysis of dissident gender and sexuality squarely through performance. Also, the series includes Fabio Cleto's reader *Camp*. Reading that book certainly made me a little gayer! The field building of Triangulations made space for a more expansive queer performance studies, one that *starts* with performance rather than applies queer (as theorized outside the field) to performance.

In the act of seducing me into the glittery vortex of Triangulations, LeAnn cleverly made clear to me that there was very much a place for dance in the series, not just *Butch Queens Up in Pumps* and *Performing Queer Latinidad*, but also a project she had very recently acquired, Selby Schwartz's brilliant *The Bodies of Others. Ishtyle*, focused on the social dance spaces of queer South Asian migrant men, needed good company with dance texts. LeAnn also understood that my book's transnational approaches to race, diaspora, and colonialism deserved to be in the company of others that shared my analytic scope. She was smart to let me know that in addition to the already published works on Latinidad, Blackness, and *mestizaje*, my book would be in company with forthcoming works such as Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes's *Translocas* and April Sizemore-Barber's *Prismatic Performances.* And certainly, nightlife was well covered in the collection: Detroit's ball culture, Harlem dance halls and house parties, and gay bars in border towns.

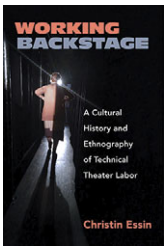
Thinking back to the beginning of *Ishtyle*, I recall a much more anxious me just out of graduate school asking myself, "But what's your *intervention*?" But this is where Triangulations allayed that anxiety. The series had laid a path and created a conversation for me to engage with, without having to argue—or perhaps fight—for the radical newness of my work. This allowed me to lean deeply into the performance material from my fieldwork in Bangalore, Chicago, and other global cities, and speak to more specific patterns, phenomena, and eruptions that I documented. The book touches on vigorous rough dancing, reluctant gogo boys, horny Craigslist personal ads, diva choreographies, and my own drag practice. Honestly, I didn't know I was allowed to write a book *this gay* until I wrote it, and it is LeAnn's prescient vision for queer performance studies that gave me the permission to do so.

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Christin Essin

Department of Theatre and Department of Gender and Sexuality Studies, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, USA



Working Backstage: A Cultural History and Ethnography of Technical Theater Labor, 2021.

Dear Christin,
Hello—I hope all is well with you. After I sent you that last hopeful message, the world turned upside down. . . .

If one must revise a manuscript during a global pandemic, one could not ask for a better editor than LeAnn Fields. When little was certain and universities had shuttered their buildings, she persevered, finagling reports from readers whose professional obligations and priorities had shifted abruptly. From our first conversation at the ATHE conference in 2013, LeAnn was a strong advocate for *Working Backstage.* As well as her pioneering work in theatre and performance studies, she acquired titles for Michigan in labor history, so she forecast the interdisciplinary connections of my research well before I had wrapped my head around them. And she was persistent, reminding me at each subsequent conference to keep writing because she wouldn't be delaying her retirement on my account.

Working Backstage benefited significantly from LeAnn's support and my determination to craft scholarship that would live up to the Michigan imprint. As a graduate student at the University of Texas, I had witnessed not only how Jill Dolan elevated small, local performances that I had attended in East Austin into profound critical commentary for *Utopia in Performance* (2005), but also how Stacy Wolf had personalized large-scale Broadway musicals through queer analysis in *A Problem Like Maria* (2002). These publications and many others with the Michigan imprint taught me to delve deep into that which held my fascination, even if overlooked or deemed insignificant by others. So I tried to approach the work activities and experiences of unionized backstage laborers with the type of curiosity, respect, and sincerity I saw modeled by the authors I admired. With LeAnn's encouragement and advice to imagine my reader as my "smart Aunt Sally" (Did she know that my mother's name is Sally or that my great aunt Rene wrote poetry?), I embraced my perspective as a former theatre technician and endeavored to write in an accessible language. I was determined that my subjects would recognize themselves in my descriptions of their work, and that many smart Sallys would understand my motivation to document their stories. I was pleased that *Working Backstage* won awards, of course, but positively elated when I heard that Local One members had shared snippets of my

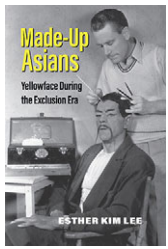
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writing with each other during their preshow checkouts. I have LeAnn to thank for these honors.

• • •

Esther Kim Lee

Department of Theater Studies, Duke University, Durham, NC, USA



Made-Up Asians: Yellowface during the Exclusion Era, 2022.

When I began working on *Made-Up Asians: Yellowface during the Exclusion Era*, I knew I wanted to write a book grounded in theatre history. As I mentioned during the 2022 "State of the Field" panel at the ASTR conference, "theatre history" has too often been synonymous with positivist, Eurocentric narratives—laden with names and dates, yet disconnected from pressing cultural and political concerns. The central question that guided my project was, *Can theatre history be made new again?*

It was with this question in mind that I contacted LeAnn Fields in the summer of 2020. I wanted to work with an editor who understood both the disciplinary terrain and the kind of intervention I hoped to make. I also hoped to collaborate with her before her well-earned retirement. My goal was to produce a book firmly rooted in archival research, but one that also proposed a new historiography of US theatre—one that challenged the very narratives and frameworks that shaped the archives I was investigating.

This was my first sustained archival project, and it required me to grapple with the limitations and assumptions embedded in the sources themselves. The US theatre history I encountered in graduate school was largely Eurocentric and East Coast–focused, often inattentive to its own blind spots. In writing *Made-Up Asians*, I aimed to be both critical and constructive—to trace the history of yellowface as a theatrical practice while remaining attentive to both past contexts and present implications. I was committed to telling this story as a theatre history, with attention to actors, playwrights, costume and makeup, and audience reception.

Working with LeAnn made all the difference. I never had to justify the value of theatre history to her, nor explain the importance of engaging archives through the lens of performance. Her expectations were high, and the editorial process was rigorous. The book underwent two full rounds of peer review and countless revisions. The final version bears little resemblance to the first draft I sent her. But through this process, LeAnn made me a better theatre historian. I am deeply grateful—and truly honored—to have worked with her.

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Throughout the entire process, LeAnn's editorial insight pushed me to sharpen my analysis and, as one peer reviewer put it, to be conceptually ambitious. She encouraged me to lean into the archival tensions and ultimately trusted me to transform a set of research findings into a cohesive narrative—one that I hope will resonate with scholars beyond my own field. Completing this book project with LeAnn felt like a full-circle moment: a culmination shaped by her generosity, precision, and unwavering commitment to authors.

• • •

Interview with LeAnn Fields

Jill Dolan

LeAnn Fields served as the theatre and performance studies editor at the University of Michigan Press for more than thirty-five years. She has been instrumental to the genesis of scholarship in our field through her unique talents as a visionary editor and as a person with a deep interest in the people and ideas that comprise our work.

In feminist and queer theatre and performance studies, for example, LeAnn published groundbreaking work that helped make our scholarship visible and helped scholars find one another at a time when networks depended on physical publications and conferences, rather than the Internet or virtual meetings.

LeAnn took a personal stake in our field's flourishing. In the late 1990s, for example, she invited me and David Román to inaugurate Triangulations, a series in LGBTQ theatre and performance studies that Ramón Rivera-Servera and Sara Warner now coedit. She was also willing to publish collections of scripts and ephemera that might otherwise be lost to history. These included *A Menopausal Gentleman* (2011), the collected performance pieces of lesbian icon Peggy Shaw, and *Memories of the Revolution: The First Ten Years of the WOW Café Theatre* (2015), coedited by Café originals Holly Hughes and Carmelita Tropicana, among many other such collections across the theatre and performance series Michigan publishes.

LeAnn's editorial advocacy for this repertoire of subcultural, queer, and feminist performances, presented in offbeat formats that required new designs and unusual styles, took courage and insight. Because of her stalwart vision, our field boasts a rich archive and future for feminist, LGBTQ scholarship, as well as for work in race and class, theatre history and criticism, and international studies.

LeAnn's influence was profound for so many scholars and practitioners in theatre and performance studies. In 2024, she retired from the Press, which offered an opportunity to look back at her decades of editorial work and at the changing fortunes of our field. Our Zoom conversation took place on 5 May 2025.

Jill Dolan: The theatre and performance series at Michigan was the first to really highlight the "new waves" in the field, starting in the late eighties: feminism; queer theatre; performance art; theory; and later, dance. All in a field that had been almost

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entirely theatre historical. Where did your interest in the field in general and in this more expansive definition of what it might mean begin?

LeAnn Fields: I'm not sure how far back you want to go here, but there was a production of *Bye Bye Birdie* in high school that first amazed me. As an undergrad, I caught as many local theatre productions as my budget would allow. Then after college, on my first trip to New York, I saw *The Fantasticks* and *Fiddler on the Roof* (with Bette Midler in the role of Tzeitel) and felt similarly awestruck. Two years later, terrific shows by It's All Right to Be Woman Theatre raised my feminist consciousness.

So I responded with enthusiasm when then–Press director Colin Day asked me to develop a list in theatre and performance, although I had no formal training aside from the drama courses I had taken as an English major. Today, most acquisitions editors have advanced degrees, but at the time I entered scholarly publishing, that was not the case. A liberal arts degree, maybe helped by a wide-ranging curiosity, was sufficient. This work has been my graduate school, and I've learned a lot along the way.

At that time, in 1988, the Michigan list in theatre and performance consisted of two anthologies of Aristophanes in translation (one included three plays, one included four)—that was the extent of it. The Theater: Theory/Text/Performance series was launched then with Michigan faculty member Enoch Brater at the helm.

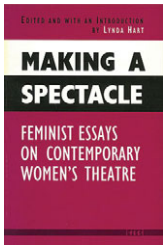
I had been acquiring manuscripts in literary criticism and also had responsibility for one of the earliest interdisciplinary feminist studies series (fought for, and won, in the 1970s by women faculty at Michigan, I must add) so I was aware of the emerging new scholarship in these fields.[1]

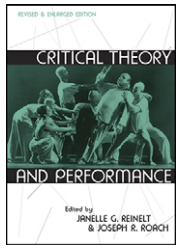
The first two theatre conferences I attended were the International Women Playwrights conference in Buffalo, and the New Languages for the Stage conference in Lawrence, Kansas, both in fall 1988. At these conferences, it was clear that the field was in the midst of a sea change. The forces that had sparked a revolution in literary scholarship—critical theory, the new emphases on race, gender, sexuality—were beginning to challenge the status quo in theatre studies. You remember what heady times those were! These forces were starting to affect theatre studies as well. It was exciting to witness new voices coming forth to be heard.

Editors are always looking for books that fill a gap in the literature, and during that period, I learned of two such volumes that were in their early stages. The timing could not have been better for *Making a Spectacle*, a collection of essays in feminist theatre criticism edited by the late Lynda Hart, and *Critical Theory and Performance*, edited by Janelle Reinelt and Joe Roach.[2] Those collections had me imagining various possibilities for developing the list in theatre and performance, both as an intellectual project and as a publishing opportunity. The essays in those books covered a wide range of subjects and critical approaches, and brought me into contact with leading thinkers in the field.

Presses don't always encourage collections of essays (and editorial policy towards them can change from time to time) but they can be immensely useful, as these indeed proved to be. We were also signing theatre monographs, of course, but these collections in particular suggested that there were subjects worth pursuing beyond the boundaries of traditional theatre scholarship.

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JD: So much of our work in the field is based on relationships. I know that my relationship with you helped suggest and foster some of my own work. How did you form and maintain so many of these relationships? Was Lynda Hart one of the first feminist theatre scholars you met?

LF: Well, another benefit of taking on those essay collections was that they instantly expanded my network. As I recall, there were nineteen contributors to *Making a Spectacle*, and twenty-eight to *Critical Theory and Performance.* Many of these authors later published their own books with Michigan, served as manuscript readers, and even became series editors.

At conferences, I tried to spend as much time as possible at sessions to hear papers and to learn what people were working on. Series editors gave me invaluable advice on emerging trends and promising projects, and they reviewed proposals and reader reports, and again and again provided the intellectual fire power that fueled our publishing program.

Those series editors include you, David Román, Ramón Rivera-Servera, and Sara Warner [Triangulations series]; Enoch Brater, who founded not only Theater: Theory/Text/Performance but also the Michigan Modern Dramatists series; David Krasner, Rebecca Schneider, and Harvey Young [Theater: Theory/Text/Performance]; and Bob Vorlicky and Una Chaudhuri [Critical Performances]; and Clare Croft [Studies in Dance: Theories and Practices].

JD: I have to say that we all noticed the continual presence of Michigan Press at ATHE and ASTR and other meetings. Your presence meant we could build relationships with you. And, LeAnn, the fact that you went to hear people's papers meant you saw us answering questions and thinking through our arguments. You heard the debates. We all knew that you were invested in our work and our careers. That was really important.

LF: I was never very good at retail, so I appreciated the years when the Press could afford to send a second person to sell books at conferences while I went to panels and met with people. Through these encounters I came to realize that yours is an uncommon community within academe—in fact I can't think of another discipline where the word "community" fits quite as well. One proof of this is that you buy and read each other's books, a phenomenon that for the Press meant modest but steady, respectable sales that ensured the viability of the list, even through changes in management and editorial vision.

I don't know of another discipline of any size where the level of collegiality is this high. Is there something about the collective character of the people who choose this

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field? I've watched so many of you serve on committees, take your turn at leadership, deeply invest in the success of junior colleagues, provide service as manuscript readers, journal editors, and more. Not to sound too schmaltzy here, but among you I saw a rare level of commitment and deep empathy and that, I suspect, comes with the territory of theatre and performance.

I first met Lynda Hart at the Modern Language Association meetings in 1986 when she stopped by the exhibit booth and we got to talking. I remarked that it was amazing to see so many edited volumes in women's studies that were breaking new ground, but where was the one for theatre studies? Well, as a matter of fact, she said, she was considering putting together the collection that would become *Making a Spectacle*. Lynda Hart and Enoch Brater were the people who set the wheels in motion for the hundreds of theatre and performance titles that followed.

I would see Lynda every year at MLA, where she would often stop by the exhibit booth and insist (in her honeyed Tennessee accent) that I meet with various of her colleagues and friends from Tulane, Xavier, NYU, and Penn. Lynda was one to bring people together, and knowing her further broadened my network.

JD: Books are the "stuff" by which academics are hired, tenured, and promoted. How did you negotiate the more transactional aspects of your work as an editor? What explanations for the importance of critical work in theatre and performance studies were most persuasive to the Press in the 1980s? When did you know that you'd secured receptive ears and commitments for the discipline?

LF: Press employees are university staff, not faculty, and no project can go forward without the approval of the faculty editorial board. When I first started as an editor, I would sometimes face resistance from the board (forty years ago, it consisted of eight men and one woman—all white). They would sometimes grill me on projects in feminist studies, particularly if both reader reports recommending publication were from women. A board member would say, "Hmm, I'm not sure about this. Why don't you ask so-and-so on our faculty what *he* thinks of this manuscript?" And then they would table a decision until I could solicit the requested third report, creating a delay that an author up for tenure or promotion could not always accommodate.

I was determined to find ways of approaching the board that would inspire confidence in me, in the projects and in the review process, but it took a while. Finding the right, most rigorous readers has always been essential, but as you know, the review process can bring surprises. In a couple of memorable cases, I inadvertently stepped on an academic landmine in choosing readers, and received reports caustic enough to take the paint off a car.

You'll remember an early project in the Triangulations series, where we received a vehemently negative report, and where you as series editor saved the day by preparing a letter offering an interpretation of the divergent reader reports, situating the importance of the project to the field, and making the case that controversy isn't necessarily a reason not to publish—in fact, the opposite is often true.

Another false step I made a few years later drew a reviewer's wrath over a project in performance studies, something I did not see coming. In the end I was able to persuade the board to accept the manuscript, but it taught me to be particularly strategic where there were interdisciplinary aspects to a manuscript in performance studies.

The fortunes of a press are intimately tied to the fortunes of the university where they're located, obviously, as well as to the fields they choose. It's a diverse board now

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and you don't have to explain things in as much detail, because they get it. The board now includes subject specialists to complement all of the areas in which the Press publishes, but until the last decade of my work in theatre and performance, there was no one on the board from the field—so I had a lot of explaining to do.

JD: Publishing has changed so much since the theatre series began in the late eighties. I think, of course, of technology and how we even compose, submit, and edit manuscripts. I think of AI, and how that must have an impact on publishing. I think of fears of plagiarism and how so much published work now requires retroactive "fact" checks (or "author" checks). How do you characterize these changes and how did you track them as your career progressed?

LF: Publishing technology has certainly changed, and continues to change. When I joined the Press, manuscripts were still being typeset on Linotype machines! I watched as each innovation in typesetting or manufacturing came on board, bringing efficiencies that helped presses stay afloat financially in spite of rising costs and shrinking revenue.

As technology has become more refined, many aspects of manuscript production have been automated. Other processes have changed as well, with more and more of the publishing services that presses once provided moving upstream. For example, authors are now effectively their own compositors, their own proofreaders (and at some presses, copy-editors), and often their own marketers. Software now exists that can replace nearly every prepress function, from grammar checking to index creation. And with AI-based software, it's possible even to replace the author, by creating the manuscript itself.

The arrival of e-books dramatically altered reading practices, as well as the business of publishing. It was exciting to see how, in performance-based disciplines, the technology allowed readers to make the text "come alive" by clicking on embedded links connected to performance videos. During the time I was acquiring in disability studies, technology was introduced to evaluate text and artwork in a manuscript, to ensure their accessibility to all readers. Charles Watkinson, the current Press director, led the effort to make all of Michigan Publishing (the Press's umbrella group) titles fully accessible, which included adding textual descriptions of visual material to serve readers with print disabilities.

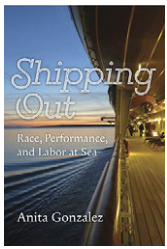
Another major change has been the push towards open access publishing across the disciplines, and here, too, Charles, along with the University of Michigan Library, has been at the forefront. The OA model brought with it significant changes in the ways individual titles are funded, and in some cases the responsibility for funding is yet another function that has moved upstream, from the press to the author, their home institution, or outside funding source.

JD: You also started a series at Michigan about class. How did that influence your theatre and performance work and vice versa?

LF: In the subjects in which I acquired I would see many manuscripts dealing with aspects of race, gender, and sexuality, but often the dimension of class was missing or buried within the analysis. I had hoped that starting the Class : Culture series and declaring the Press's interest in books treating issues of class would attract an array of manuscripts, as the Triangulations series had done. While we were only partially successful in that effort, I continued to find myself drawn to projects where questions of class play a significant role.

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As I think back, there are many examples within the theatre and performance list; for instance, Anita Gonzalez's new book, *Shipping Out: Race, Performance and Labor at Sea*, or on the backlist, Christian DuComb's *Haunted City: Three Centuries of Racial Impersonation in Philadelphia* (recently in the news for being one of the books ordered to be removed from the US Naval Academy library).





JD: What did you tell your successor about the theatre and performance list at the Press? What do you hope its future will be?

LF: Well, it was hard to leave work that I loved and relationships that have meant so much for so many years. You hear stories about authors left in the lurch when their editor leaves, and I was concerned about my authors and the manuscripts that were still in the pipeline. I had worked with Sara Cohen, the new editor for the series, for five years and was delighted when she expressed interest in taking over my lists. We attended the same editorial meetings, and I came to realize that although she is younger and more energetic, we shared similar perspectives and standards, for example, being author-centered in our approach and welcoming innovative projects.

During the transition, we talked about the major graduate programs, key academic conferences, the various book prizes. I tried to trace the genealogy of the field of performance studies, explain how theatre history has been changing, how it was that dance studies became a hot area, et cetera. And, of course, I talked about the remarkable people in this field and predicted that they would become some of her favorite authors. Sara has already put her stamp on the publishing program, moving it in promising new directions. It's a new era, and she was the perfect person to whom to pass the baton.

Notes

[1] Fields recalled that the first women's studies series in the country were published by Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan. LGBTQ publishing she said, by contrast, started on the coasts.

[2] *Critical Theory and Performance*, like my own first book, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, came to LeAnn at Michigan via Research Press, a division of University Microfilms International, a press that produced monographs mostly for libraries. When they stopped publishing, Fields acquired my book and the contract for Reinelt and Roach's book.

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