

The Article, the Debate, the Book

Les Essif

While I've never had the opportunity to become personally acquainted with John Gronbeck-Tedesco, I know I speak for a mass of scholars, teachers, and practitioners whose lives he has touched and whose condition he has improved. So I'd like to recount my experience of the publication of an article in *JDTC*, an essay that forged the cornerstone of my first book (*Empty Figure on an Empty Stage*) and an experience that really bolstered my confidence and helped launch and orient my scholarly career.

My connection with John and the journal began when, as a graduate student, I attended a talk he presented on the topic of publishing in the field. His remarks really stuck with me, especially those emphasizing the need to seriously consider unconventional, alternative topics and approaches to theatre research and to inform close textual analysis with a variety of critical and creative writings. Subsequently, in the late 1980s, I spent much of my dissertation-writing time and the first year of my postdoctoral work in France. In 1992, as a freshly minted assistant professor looking to place a major article using an unorthodox approach to Beckett's empty theatrical space (in accordance with John's encouragement to be original), I was not as familiar with American theatre-drama-performance scholarship—including professional journals—as I would've liked to be. It took me some time to identify the most suitable (top) journals for my article. After receiving cursory and unhelpful rejection letters from two of these, I only slightly revised the essay and sent it to *JDTC*. In short, this submission experience was successful, not only because the essay was accepted but also for the feedback and encouragement I received. I had the feeling that, true to the journal's editorial statement, the *JDTC* editors and readers were *genuinely* more open to less mainstream ideas, arguments, and critical approaches.

As proof of the controversial nature of my article, following its appearance several fellow scholars around the U.S. sent me emails taking a stand more or less for or against the critical approach I had elaborated. Several other colleagues approached me at professional conferences to discuss the issue. One in particular made a special effort in this regard and followed up our conference discussion and email exchange by publishing an essay in *JDTC* which respectfully, overtly, and methodically challenged the utility of my critical approach. I knew the objections raised were representative of a larger body of scholars, so the timely appearance of

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this clearly articulated counterargument allowed me to address the objections and sharpen some of the arguments in my book, which I was preparing for publication with Indiana University Press. Though at first I was a bit nervous about this pressure to defend my writing, in the end it provided a vital intellectual debate that helped me get a better grip on my research topic, my writing, and the politics of the profession. The publication of my *JDTC* article and the publication of the challenge to it were equally consequential for the quality of my first book.

In addition to all the excellent scholarship and reviews I've read in the journal over the years, because of this happy and engaging *rite de passage*, *JDTC* (largely personified in the name of Gronbeck-Tedesco) has always been special to me and my career.