

IATC Symposium June 2009

'Forced to tour - or *tour de force*?'

A meeting organised by the Holland Festival, the International Association of Theatre Critics / *Association Internationale des Critiques de théâtre* (IATC / AICT) and its Dutch branch *de Kring voor Nederlandse Theatercritici* (KNT).

Date: 17 – 21 June 2009

Location: Amsterdam

'*A society transformed – transformations in theatre*'

Society has changed much over these last decades, and especially so in large cities. Political, economic and social turbulence have engendered large-scale migration flows that in their turn have created a social landscape that is becoming more and more varied. Countless urban societies have changed from monocultural to multicultural communities as a result of these migration flows.

The effects of this have been felt in all levels of society, as much for immigrants as for the original population. Differences in standards and values, work ethics, political preferences and spending habits as well as attitudes to culture lead not only to confrontations with the new arrivals but also to confrontations with our own established social patterns.

An example of this can be seen in the last decades in Asia, where Western patterns of consumption have been copied and adopted because of a greater local appreciation of Western consumer goods than for their own products, whilst a re-evaluation of the supposed Asian attitude of tolerance and patience in regard to materials and consumption has been simultaneously growing in the West. Another example can be seen in the appreciation by West European festivals of theatre productions from the former Eastern Bloc countries because of their political commitment, whilst the newest works and discoveries of young theatre directors in these countries are not as a whole concerned with such theatrical forms.

These transformations in society and confrontations with other cultures have led to new forms of presentation and representation for the theatre, with new themes and subject matter and other forms of theatre. Performer and spectator are both involved in this, as of course is the theatre critic. The critic has to relate in one way or another to this transformed theatrical practice: such total cultural diversification is an invitation to the critic to embark on a journey in many different ways.

The first of these is *literal*: because of globalisation and thanks to new technical possibilities, an internationally-oriented target group has now come into existence that finds it necessary to be kept informed of developments in theatre on an international level. A corollary of this is that there is a steadily increasing amount of theatrical activity taking place outside the framework of normal theatre spaces everywhere.

The second of these is *metaphorical*: the varied cultural origins of theatre directors and their new theatrical forms force the critic to tread new mental paths and to remain open to the unknown, aided in this by his imagination.

The Symposium

Our intention during this symposium is to provide a forum for discussion of the following questions, both in the abstract and in relation to particular national, regional or urban situations.

Travel in the literal sense of the word:

- Should the critic travel or remain where he is? How does the critic justify his choice?
- Does this mean that we can talk of international theatrical criticism, of critics that travel to large-scale or unusual productions outside their country's borders, who follow developments, visit festivals and later report on and discuss the above in their particular media?
- Is this a desire for travel on a truly worldwide scale or is it limited to the critic's own (usually European) area of interest?
- With the current development of high-circulation free newspapers, news programs specialising in local news and personal websites and weblogs, will the critic's work become steadily more provincial and localised?
- How does international theatre criticism relate to the various bodies of national criticism? How does national theatre criticism relate to local or regional criticism? Does provincialism occur in such circumstances? Are the critic's possibilities for reflection limited in such cases? Or do the new media offer a possibility of an escape from provincialism?

Travel in a metaphorical sense:

- Is cultural diversity seen as a problem or as a challenge? What consequences have the different forms of migration had on the theatrical world?
- How do audience members react to such diversity? How can we deal with the acknowledged lack of integration among both theatre professionals and their audience groups in many countries, and with the segregated continued existence of various forms of theatre for various audiences?
- How does a critic, a spectator *par excellence*, relate to these developments?
- What problems confront a theatre critic who must analyse, interpret and judge unfamiliar forms of theatrical expression? What are the issues for a critic who must convey his impressions of a theatrical production by people of a different cultural background to his own reading public? What roles do new and digital media play in the dissemination of and the attention paid to the critical reflection upon theatrical performances that come from another culture?

Organising Bodies

International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC) (www.aict-iatc.org)

The IATC draws together more than two thousand theatre critics from some seventy countries, based on some fifty national sections. Founded in Paris in 1956, the IATC is a non-profit, non-governmental organization, benefiting under the B statute of UNESCO. The purpose of the IATC is to bring together theatre critics in order to promote international cooperation. Its principal aims are to foster theatre criticism as a discipline and to contribute to the development of its methodological bases; to protect the ethical and professional interests of theatre critics and to promote the common rights of all its members; and to contribute to reciprocal awareness and understanding between cultures by encouraging international meetings and exchanges in the field of theatre in general. The IATC holds a world congress every two years, seminars for young critics twice a year, as well as symposiums, and contributes to juries. English and French are the association's two official languages, and its place of incorporation is Paris.

De Kring voor Nederlandse Theatercritici (KNT)

is the professional organisation for theatre critics in the Netherlands. The *Kring* is the Dutch branch of the *Association Internationale des Critiques de Théâtre* / International Association of Theatre Critics (AICT/IATC).

The Netherlands branch has fifty-seven professional theatre critics as members as of 18 May 2008. Membership of the KNT is limited to those who regularly write about theatre for one of the media: these are the daily newspapers, the various weekly and monthly magazines, radio, television and Internet. Membership of the Guild is awarded by professional employment and after acceptance by the executive committee of the KNT. At this moment almost all professional Dutch theatre critics are currently members of the organisation.

Executive Committee 2008:

Hein Janssen, chairman (*Volkskrant*)

Maja Landeweer (*Algemeen Dagblad /Haagsche Courant*)

Lucia van Heteren (*Theatermaker and Theater Topic*)

Wijbrand Schaap (*Geassocieerde Persdiensten*)

Ingrid van Frankenhuyzen (*NRC Handelsblad*)

Holland Festival

The Holland Festival has provided a choice selection of artistic projects from throughout the world since its foundation in 1947. It presents theatre, music, dance, opera, film and the visual arts, both Western and non-Western, all of which share one overriding characteristic: high artistic quality on an international level.

Forty productions on average are presented per festival, with a total of approximately ninety-five performances and concerts. A supplementary programme of lectures, debates and educational gatherings is also organised in conjunction with the Festival's performance schedule. Audience attendance at Festival events averages 80%. The Holland Festival is the Netherlands' largest international performing arts festival.

General management:

Pierre Audi (artistic director)

Johan Dorrestein (administrative director)

Annemieke Keurentjes (programming theatre, dance, Mindfuel, Context)

Lieven Bertels (programming music and music theatre)

Programme dates

Symposium: 17-21 June 2009.

Young Critics seminar: 15-21 June.

The last official activities will take place on the evening of Saturday 20 June.

Young Critics Seminar

The IATC has been organising seminars for new critics under the age of 35 since 1974. The Young Critics Seminar in Amsterdam will be organised in collaboration with *Theater Instituut Nederland* and the *Domein van de theaterkritiek*. Fifteen young critics, ten from outside the Netherlands and five Dutch, will discuss performances that they have seen under the aegis of the Symposium with several senior critics. They will also take part in supplementary activities, meeting dramaturgs, directors and actors from the performances they have attended.

The Young Critics Seminar will begin two days before the Symposium itself; their discussions will take place in the Theater Instituut Nederland.

A suggestion for a theme as an extension of the theme of the Symposium itself: *'Elements of belonging — elements of belonging in a theatrical context*. Where do you belong? Where do you feel 'in' or 'out' of context? Literally? Metaphorically? In what sense does a critic have to take note of the specific context in which a production is presented? Is it possible for a critic not to be interested in the context of producing? How much research needs to be done, if any? Does the critic function as a bridge for bringing cultures closer together?

Further details of the seminar will be available in due course from the IATC Director of Seminars, Paulo Eduardo Carvalho.

Call for Papers
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The title and an abstract (up to 500 words) of your proposed paper should arrive at the Holland Festival by 15 January 2009. Notification of acceptance will be sent by 1 February 2009. The complete text of your paper (3500 words maximum) should be sent by 15 April 2009, so that it can be translated into the official languages of the Symposium (English and French). Participants will be expected to speak briefly about their paper, **not** to read it out in its entirety. Full papers will be made available in advance on the IATC website.

As in the case of previous symposia, the papers will be published in English and French by the organisation at a later date.

The Holland Festival will fund the cost of accommodation, theatre tickets and other activities, including lunches and a festive dinner on the final evening, as well as transportation to and from point of arrival (airport or train station) to hotels.