

Dear Colleagues,

you are kindly invited to contribute your paper to the international conference entitled

Intercriticism

Organized by the Maribor Theatre Festival and Association of Theatre Critics and Researchers of Slovenia (*Društvo gledaliških kritikov in teatrologov Slovenije*, the National Section of AICT/IATC).

Our goal is to explore the issue of theatre and performing arts criticism and to invite you to discuss the notion of *inter-criticism*.

To provide a starting point for the discussion, and a very illustrative one for our purpose – i.e. the analysis of the position of contemporary theatre and performing arts critics – we invite you to think about Hitchcock's film *Rear Window* (1954). In this film, a photographer who is forced to stay in his apartment after an accident while away his time sitting by the window and watching “theatre shows” that take place in the backyard and in the neighboring apartments. He is a privileged spectator, having not only a good view of various shows, but also time, space, the financial means, and even a nurse. He maintains his position in the darkened room until the protagonist of the main show – a murderous neighbor – discovers that he is being watched, knocks on the photographer's door and throws him through the window. The photographer is suddenly propelled from the safe position of a voyeur having a perfect view of the performance into the picture, the performance itself.

The movie implies a change in the viewing position, when one loses the overview of the developments and a view becomes the situation itself. This raises a series of questions as to what happens to the analysis, description, evaluation, social and worker's position of the observer and his/her relation to the observed object when there is no clear and guiding boundary between the performance and the observer's position. It is the kind of turn that occurred in contemporary performing practices - a critic no longer observes a show from a privileged, distant position because the combination of circumstances has thrown him into the picture itself.

First. Viewed from the perspective of criticism, this has to do with the aesthetic changes in the format of stage performances. The arrangement of a potential view is invariably inscribed in the format through participatory modules.

However, in many cases, the spectators no longer form a homogenous group, because the arrangement enables a multitude of singular views of the observed, and consequently a multitude of various critical positions. In contemporary performing practices (hybrid, participatory, post-dramatic etc.), we can probably no longer speak about one single kind of criticism, but about various methods of critical writing using specific methodologies, approaches and styles, all of which can be incorporated within a single critical work.

- What are the morphologies of critical writing in these circumstances?
- Does theatre criticism adequately adapt to the changes in the production of contemporary performing arts and in what way? What forms do these adjustments take in various cultural contexts?
- How should a critic approach his work given that practically all segments of the social spectacle, including arts, are capitalized in the process and transformed into the production of surplus value?

Second. The media reduce arts, science, culture, society and even politics to spectacle and entertainment. Since in this spectacle we are the observed beings thrown into the show itself, and since critics, as part of the modern media machinery for the production of fiction and spectacle repeatedly re-establish positions that can secure for them a good overview of the situation, in writing criticism and forming critical views they probably invent specific strategies. theatre or performing art critics have found themselves in a situation in which “theatre criticism” or “theatre journalism” pertains to almost all segments of social life covered by the print or broadcasting media. They are thrown into a media picture where practically all segments of social life are treated as if they were more or less explicit genres of “theatre criticism.”

- How does performing arts criticism establish itself in this situation?
- What is the critic's place and how does he/she ensure his/her critical position?

Third. The position of contemporary criticism is also related to the redistribution and reorganization of the critic's method of work. The largely privileged distance that critics enjoyed in the past has been eliminated in the contemporary context of cultural production. Criticism (or theory) writing is more or less only one of the many roles a critic plays in addition to his work within the field of theatre production and performing arts. A description of critic's roles and responsibilities may reveal that a “free-lance” theatre critic is also a member of various panels and boards, a dramaturge, a producer, a university teacher and a consultant in various artistic projects, that he/she selects performances for a festival or (co)creates festival programs, moderates various round-table discussions, edits various periodicals and other publications,

occasionally even performs and so on. Even in the context of the “labor market” the critic's position is by no means one of the privileged distance, but part of the picture itself.

- What implications does this have for critical writing and how does a critic create a distance within the context of his/her work, if at all?
- What is his/her ethical position within this context? What implications does it have for the “conflict of interests”?
- How does the productivity of a critic's work manifest itself in the society of today? How could the meaning of criticism writing be redefined?

We used the metaphor of Hitchcock's film to derive three examples of critic's embeddedness in the picture/performance itself. We are fully aware that critics were never fully excluded from the picture/performance, as this would have been impossible, but we do think that certain aesthetic, cultural, productional, social and political circumstances have radically changed over the last decade. The critics of today are much more firmly entrenched in a certain liminal area, an interspace within the context of relationships mentioned above, where they establish their position as a delicate presence. We propose the term *inter-criticism*, or *inter-critique*, to denote this presence. We invite you to polemicize, expound on this subject, further develop the thesis or write about a related subject of your choice.

The conference will take place in Maribor, Slovenia, October 20 – 24, 2010, in Anton Trstenjak Hall, Slomškov trg 15. It will include six formal sessions on 21 and 22 October. Each speaker will have twenty minutes to present his/her contribution.

Your abstracts (up to 250 words) should be sent by 15 June 2010 to primoz.jesenko@guest.arnes.si

We look forward to seeing you in Maribor and hope that your writing of a contribution will be an enjoyable task.

Organizing and Program Board

Primož Jesenko, chair of the conference

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