

LMU

LUDWIG-  
MAXIMILIANS-  
UNIVERSITÄT  
MÜNCHEN

DFG-PROJEKT  
GLOBAL THEATRE HISTORIES



# Report on the Theatrical Trade Routes (1850-1945) Workshop

DFG - Global Theatre Histories  
24-26 March 2011, Munich



## *Introduction*

The purpose of the **Theatrical Trade Routes** (1850-1945) workshop was to map, characterize, and theorize the theatrical traffic as it grew in intensity and density from the middle of the 19th century until roughly the outbreak of the Second World War, in the period of modernity. Although the bulk of the traffic was commercial in orientation, parallel to it emerged another concept of theatre that has been more closely associated with modernism, as well as the avant-garde. Amongst colonists and local elites there emerged small groups of theatre artists and a public sphere that were dedicated to creating new forms of theatrical performances, that were driven by the artistic and ideological imperatives usually of nation-state- and national identity- building.

From the above mentioned categories new methodologies of scholarship and analysis of theatre in the period of modernity were proposed and discussed. The methodological framework of trade and economy proposed by Tracy Davis was one of the key departure points, and was the underlying current for the discussions within the workshop.

The workshop included various internationally renowned scholars and professors speaking on the contested issues of colonialism, nationalism, and the trans-national variants of theatre and performance. Issues based on political culture of a performance emerged as a primary site of enquiry along with the notions of multiple identity formations and negotiations within in a given cultural context.

The workshop was conducted in a private conversational space where intensive and focused discussions took place. The workshop aimed at close interactions between participants, and extensive responses from the house through the format of discussants and commentators: a participant's paper was commented on by a different person and based on those comments the participant and the rest of the house started the discussions.

# Key Concepts and Themes

The following key concepts came up recurrently from different papers and discussions during the workshop:

## **1. What theories can be used to frame transnational theatrical/performance culture?**

## **2. The questions of modernity and modernization.**

How did modernity and modernization operate within different regions, more importantly within areas outside Europe? Prof. Balme proposed that theatre worked as the motor for modernization in the early globalization.

## **3. The relationship between literacy, language and translation.**

How does the reflect on the power and control of a cultural performance? How do we accommodate the issues of translation? How do we approach works and source materials in languages that we do not speak? Inevitably, by choosing to discuss works or source materials in one language we are silencing works that are unrepresented.

## **4. Institutionalized and non-institutionalized theatre**

How did these two institutions differ and interacted with each other? What purposes did they serve in the dissemination of modernity and modernism in theatre? The issues around economic and aesthetic legitimacy in the context of cultural performance (i.e. the debate around amateur theatre, and the professional theatre)



**5. The question of trade** became a site of contestation within the conference. The questions and comments revolved around these elements:

Is theatre as a commodity fundamentally different from other commodities? How is theatre “valued”?/What kind of values did theatre gain and generated, both commercial and cultural?

What can we learn from the theatrical mode-of-production of the time, and its production surplus? How do we analyze the markets of consumption and creation of a consumption pattern through theatre? What are the social capital and symbolic capital of theatre? How does the patronage (both governmental and private) dictates theatre within a given socio-geographical space? How can theories of consumer product studies be borrowed to apply to study of the theatre (as a product which circulates within a vast geographical area)?

#### **6. Theatre and mobility**

How, who and what is moving within vast geographical spaces? What roles do government patronage, political ties, festivals, pseudo-scientific exhibitions play with travelling circuses, theatre, operas and other forms? How do we analyze the inscription of agency in intercultural relations in the transnational/travelling performances? What are the important financial documents that supported these exchanges? What would be the archival method to detect this phenomenon?

#### **7. The idea of a constructed space**

How is the concept of “region” constructed? For example, what does it mean to be ‘East European’ or ‘Californian’? Are these self-evident geographical constants or are they culturally fictive ideas through which certain spaces are constructed and consumed? Often, the idea of theatre and performance arising from that space become synonymous with the region, even if the cultural artifact has a ‘global/transnational’ format.

### 8. The role of the theatre manager/impresario

Who is the impresario? How does the impresario manage vast distances, finances and profit arising from his/her theatrical companies and other forms? What was the relationship of the impresario/manager with the performers? Were they, exploitative or empowering? How did the impresarios manage to utilize the performer or performance? How did he /she make her project commercially, as well as culturally viable? And how far did mobility helped in these traveling performances?

### 9. How did identities emerge within transnational travel?

How were the different identities of the performers constructed within different socio-temporal contexts? In some cases the very mode of mobility and travel itself gave the performer and his/her community a sense of identity and a space for cultural and commercial recognition. Quite interestingly it was asked in the workshop whether identity politics can be exported, or whether identity politics can be fully understood in the past.



### 10. Absences

It was noted that African representation was absent in the workshop.

### 11. Media

How did media shifted the reception of performance and spectatorship? Media made it available for the stars to be brought home (recordings become more available to be taken home to be listened to, and to bring experience of an event at home). What are the structures of feeling, and structure of responses in a given cultural performance? How can these categories be accommodated as a methodology? The element of technology also comes into being at this juncture and devices ranging from Theatrophones to the cinema and radio become very important.



**12. The element of the 'everyday'** was also discussed within the workshop and it was proposed that the 'everyday' can be utilized as a site for global theatre histories. An example of this is how communities recount travels of ancestors through performance and the traveling 'object'. In the case of travelling objects, it is important that the object is followed in how it moves, how it interacts, how it transforms. In this sense, this makes the analysis of travelling objects a fertile subject in the study of mobility.

**13. How important and 'real' is authenticity?**

How are issues of "real" and authenticity raised within the context of Global Theatre Histories?

**14. Race and gender.**

What role does gender and race play in the practice and reception of transnationally touring performances.? How is race and gender 'formed' within a performative repertoire? How do race and gender change within different cultural contexts and how are these represented and constructed?



# Final Part:

## Logistics and Future Plans

In the final session of the workshop, future collaborations through databases, cliometrics, publications and conferences were discussed.

1. Presentation of Mapping of Trade Routes, Cliometrics Data Visualization. The attempt to map out theatres within a global scale was discussed. The example which appeared was a network of theatres within a time and space digital map
2. Gathering of Bibliography and Articles. The question of copyright came up and it was decided that as long as passwords are not given to non-members, there will be no copyright issues that will be violated.
3. Prof. Christopher Balme mentioned the concept of a publication series with Palgrave Macmillan arising from the workshop and the future conferences.

## Suggested topics for the next workshop

1. Soviet /communist network-Cold war (decided as the next conference topic)
2. Public Sphere
3. World Wars (WW1 and WW2) or Any Global Conflict(s)
4. Canonization Process, Legitimization
- 5 Globalization, cosmopolitanism
7. National Theatre Phenomenon

