

Turin Colloquium – Chairman's Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to welcome IATC members and our very welcome guests to this colloquium, which represents the first part of the work of the International Association of Theatre Critics in its twenty-second biennial Congress. Tomorrow, in the second part, we shall be addressing the business of the Association and planning our activities for the next two years, which I can already see are going to be very busy and very exciting.

Our colloquium this year is a short one, and does not extend to the usual several days of debate and discussion. This is because we are working in the context of the Europe Theatre Prize, who have generously accepted to host us as part of their event. What we offer you this morning is a short series of contributions on a topic which may seem of limited importance to those outside our small world of criticism, but in fact concerns the whole fabric of contemporary culture. You are going to hear four speakers, from different parts of the world and different aspects of the critical spectrum. Their job is to provoke and stimulate you, to produce matter for the discussions which will follow. These discussions will be led by officers of the IATC, again from varied geographical and critical backgrounds, who will finally bring back to the whole meeting an account of what has developed from your contributions. At the end of the meeting, you will receive copies (in English) of the four papers, which we propose to publish later in more permanent form along with the discussion summaries.

Although our time is short, we shall be here for several more days to witness and report on the proceedings of the Europe Theatre Prize, and it is my confident expectation that the discussions started here today will continue in less formal surroundings right up until the time comes for us to depart.

And I hope it will not stop there: many of you are responsible for journals or columns in which our ideas can be spread to audiences around the world, both specialized and more general. I hope very much that you will find rich material in this morning's discussions and in what follows, and that you will be able to take to your readership (or to your viewers, or to those who seek you out on the internet)

some notion of what IATC is doing to foster – and preserve – the art of criticism, which is the high responsibility placed upon us by our statutes.

Our theme is ‘*The End of Criticism?*’. It is important to notice the question mark. I have to confess that we are not here to bury criticism but to praise it. Yes, our first speaker, Nikolai Pesochinski, has been set the task of persuading us that criticism is no longer necessary. But in the great critical tradition of giving ourselves the right of reply without often granting it to others, we have assembled no fewer than three critics to refute him. Maria Helena Serodio will be telling us of the importance of that writing about theatre which appears in the specialized, academic journals – of which she edits an outstanding example. Ian Shuttleworth will be defending the work of the newspaper critic, and suggesting that more goes into the swiftly produced overnight review than we have any reasonable right to expect. While Porter Anderson will be opening a window into the future, looking at the role of criticism in the new media to which younger generations are increasingly turning. I do not propose to hi-jack any of our speakers’ views, but will instead hand you over to them, ‘without further ado’ – a quaint phrase beloved of English chairmen. The ‘ado’ which follows will not, I can assure you, be *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Ian Herbert

Nikolai Pesochinsky, Russia

The End of Criticism ?

I would like to start with discussion of several critical reviews of the same production. My first questions are obvious: Why do several critics see on the same stage at the same moment DIFFERENT productions? Why do we read the action in this or that way ? What we see, and what we miss ? How do we judge? Is it about being right or wrong ? Does it matter ?

Here are several opinions about just one aspect of one production, -- about the very special movement design in *Death and the Ploughman* at New York based SITI Company, directed by Ann Bogart. It's one aspect but an important one, for it creates the essence of the visual form of the production based on Medieval philosophic dialogue.

(1) In the play's thirty-four panels, there are, according to Bogart, a total of 3,468 different movements—including elaborate choreography, simple hand gestures, and everything in between. The actors executed these movements with astonishing timing and precision. They did not need to be in each other's field of vision to know the exact moment each one ought to complete the current movement or begin the next. This togetherness was emphasized when, toward the end of the production, Bogart inserted a scene in which the actors swiftly repeated many of the movements they had previously made, all the while counting aloud. ([Mark Seamon](#)).

(2) Bogart sticks the actors on what looks like a kind of volleyball court in front of a faux-medieval backdrop. ([Chris Jones](#))

(3) As in most SITI productions, director Ann Bogart complements the language with an arcane choreography of gesture. Though lovely, the swoops and darts don't illuminate or even really punctuate the endless talk. The actors seem to enjoy the complex blocking, but it rarely encourages them to deviate from smugness (Death) or sorrow (Ploughman). ([Alexis Soloski](#))

So Mark Seamon, Chris Jones and Alexis Soloski perceive purely physical movement score and they don't find any dramatic meaning in it.

But others see something else.

(4) Bogart and her trio of actors confound proper narrative with a halting physical aesthetic that throws elbows and angular gymnastics around the stage. As the Ploughman, Will Bond careens about the tight stage-box, clenched fists and face, spitting and flailing like a desperate, washed-up fighter. ([Leah B. Green](#))

Leah Green perceives the movement score as the reflection of “psychological” score. This idea is supported by Jill Stevenson:

(5) While the Ploughman (played with great physical and emotional skill by Will Bond) moves forcefully around the stage, with powerful erratic gestures, Death (played by Stephen Webber) is cool and dismissive. (Jill Stevenson)

Stephanie Bunbury has even stronger point about the dramatic meaning of the movement:

(6) The choreography becomes another layer of argument, a physical echo of this debate that is both ritualised and driven by passion. (Stephanie Bunbury)

But other colleagues read this theatre text in the opposite way.

(7) Most of the time, it is impossible to see what the abstract movements - some of them recognisable from Suzuki workshops - have to do with the text. These abstractions are unsuccessfully integrated with literal human gesture. Each movement is arrested, discretely separate from the next, which gives a strangled and conflicted feel to the stage dynamic but, for all its sharpness, the choreography seems curiously blurred. Aside from the comic sequences, it is like watching a slow, gestural equivalent of Tourette's syndrome. (Alison Croggon)

Matthew Murray came to the conclusion about the negative effect of the choreography for understanding the verbal action:

(8) Bogart exquisitely filled every second of the production with movement or sound but has been less careful in filling those seconds appropriately. Whether executing sweeping arm gestures, twists of the torso, fast-paced cat-and-mouse games, or other near-choreographic movement of less scintillating varieties, the actors barely rein in their bodily manipulations long enough to convince you to listen to their words. (Matthew Murray)

Did this movement produce any emotional impression with or without its connection to the verbal text ?

Again we have opposite readings.

Yes, said Matthew Richter

(9) What makes *Death and the Ploughman* so intriguing, and so watchable, is that you'll rarely see this style of performance (a weird mix of Suzuki movement training, vaudevillian showmanship, modern dance, and presentational pedagogy) executed so flawlessly. The performers are simply razor-sharp, the choreography clean and fluid, the geometric lighting and minimalist scenic designs are perfectly in sync, and the often difficult text is both translated and delivered in a way that both reminds us that it's 600 years old and that it's personal, topical, and always relevant. There is a crispness to the whole aesthetic at work here, a sharpness, a shine, that demonstrates the lifetimes worth of work, of training, of technique that the ensemble has devoted to the project. (Matthew Richter)

Les Gutman agrees:

(10) Production has all of the hallmarks of SIT's work -- finely disciplined acting, highly stylized images and movement and a procession of powerful effects. (Les Gutman)

Bud Bred Fetzer argues:

(11) Movement is not natural, but you couldn't exactly call it dance---though it's certainly choreographed to the nth degree. There are a few moments of physical spectacle that I much appreciated, but most of it is expressive in an unspecific, not-very-expressive sort of way. What it largely serves to do---along with the background music, which ranges from a mosquito-like buzzing to snippets of Nino Rota and movie soundtracks---is to squelch any sense of immediacy or spontaneity from the performance. (Bret Fetzer)

Charles Isherwood is also finally skeptical:

(12) The confined playing space and the repetitive movement schemes echo the hermetic qualities of the text. (Charles Isherwood)

And – after all – our colleagues reach totally different basic conclusions about the dramatic effect that they experienced.

(13) The Greeks and Romans believed that the gods Sleep and Death were brothers. A recent matinee performance of the SITl Company's *Death and the Ploughman* suggested a near relation. Every moment that the character of Death smirked and stamped onstage, more and more audience members slipped into peaceful slumber. A hot theater and elderly spectators contributed to the torpor, but for an audience faced with remaining awake throughout the intermissionless 90-minute performance, sleep seemed indeed, as Ovid had it, "mildest of the gods, balm of the soul." (Alexis Soloski)

(14) The extremely physical nature of SITl Company's work with Bogart, founded in Viewpoint training and the Suzuki method, offers a fantastic dramatic entry-point into this piece and changes the dialogue into a powerful performance. (Jill Stevenson)

(15) But the visual allure Ms. Bogart and her collaborators supply cannot entirely surmount the text's intractable nature. And the staging has its own monotonous qualities. Even when they are exchanging contemptuous curses, the adversaries do not expressly interact, so the argument is never allowed to accrue much dramatic intensity. (Charles Isherwood)

(16) The company works seamlessly with each other, with sound designer Darron West's pulsing, visceral score, and James Schuette's monochromatic design scheme. This collaborative virtuosity is the golden ticket that keeps SITl vibrant, managing relevance even with the most dated scripts. (Leah B. Green)

(17) The emphasis on style over substance becomes repetitive, and the mind starts to wander. Here we have a true language play that needs to be nurtured, not obscured. (Les Gutman)

(18) SITl Company's world premiere production of *Death and the Ploughman* embodied all the enthusiasm of a medieval mystery play. By "enthusiasm," I am referring to the word's etymological meaning: "possession by a god." (Mark Seamon)

(19) This leaves us somewhat cold, and Bogart provides little ancillary heat; the production registers primarily as an intellectual exercise rather than a dramatic one. Perhaps Bogart was too busy staging the forest to see that the trees within were bare? (Matthew Murray)

(20) The narrative is a bit cold. Anne Bogart's stylizations, regrettably, exacerbate this coldness. Despite the skill and commitment that went into this production, it was lifeless. (Bret Fetzer)

(21) For most of this show, accompanied by an intense and oblique soundscape from Darron L. West, you wonder what Bogart is trying to say. Is Death the Christian Right? Halliburton? Fiscal inequality? Or just a man with a tough job? (Chris Jones)

So we see full range of possible emotional response to the show: from "possession by a god" to creating peaceful slumber in audience, from "powerful", "fantastic dramatic" and "vibrant" to "cold". And it's after all – the contradictory descriptions of the style and of this theatre form.

(Interesting what would theatre researcher understand about this Ann Bogart's show in 10 years from these reviews ??)

It seems obvious that our colleagues don't agree with each other in basic aspects when they just REPRESENT theatre form: about dramatic pattern of the action; about emotional score; about the way of philosophic and aesthetic impact on the audience through theatrical devices. The primary problem of analysis of this show seems to be still confusing: it's the methodological question of relation (or juxtaposition) of the movement score to other aspects of action. So we can't consider the issue of the integral structure of the dramatic event produced with all range of devices.

OF COURSE, any art criticism as well as perception of any piece of art starts in quite personal sensual way. Then we have different social and philosophic beliefs, different experience of theatergoers, and different personal values. And we go to theatre in different mood and we may appreciate today a thing that we could have missed the day before yesterday. Liberal society and postmodernist mentality and contemporary communication theories created the firm basis for every critic's human right to be totally relative, "partial", non-integral, and free to express just a "personal" opinion.

From the period of theatre Symbolism, and very much in the avant-garde of the first decades of the 20th century, then in surrealist art, and finally in postmodernist culture, it was obvious that each spectator gets the unique and personal impression being provoked with the devices of certain artefact. No general message, no "whole" impression. Each person in the audience combines the elements of perception in the personal set. Then what is the purpose of our writing at all? If all our assumptions are relative and individual why should the reader believe us at all? The reader inevitably will get another set of impressions when attends the same show.

Are we able to prove our vision and to motivate our conclusion ? Is there any difference between professional theatre criticism and just expressing any opinion by any educated person that has access to regional press or to the Internet ? All it starts with our involvement, presence, or indifference with the inner life of the performance. First of all we consider it "vibrant" or "cold", live or dead. We perceive it in personal way, with our human feelings, But then we start to explain the artistic forces that create our perception. And here the professional work starts!

In no way I argue with pluralism of critic's opinions. My question is more dramatic. What are we able to represent -- the performance, or just one personal impression of it? Don't we often involve so much of our interpretation that the action itself is misrepresented. Otherwise do we really always see the structural units that were certainly put or certainly played around in order that we perceive them? Did we catch main points of this theatre construction, or just we saw things that we have chosen to watch (even when this choice was subconscious)?

Object is one thing, and its interpretation is another thing, and estimation is still another thing (here are three different steps of critic's work). We may have different interpretations and estimations of the object, but if we fail to catch the object - it's a big problem.

Our object is theatre text, theatre action, theatre form.

As every text and every form it is not totally shapeless and invisible.

These Bogart's movements, in principle, - either they express the character, or they are abstract. Or it's a parallel, counterpoint text (reflecting the same theme)? Or movement alienate the personal level of the story and put the narration in cosmos ? Or movement creates the parallel story (the second plot): about the inevitability of misunderstanding of the human souls as planets. Or we see the variant of Rudolph Steiner's Eurythmics? Or merely some sexy decoration of a moralistic verbiage.

But not everything at the same time.

either - or.

Either abstract, or psychological,

either personal, or impersonal,

either illustrative at some points, or nonfigurative,

either it is emotional, or intentionally dispassionate;

either movement patterns of 3 persons are connected with each other -- or they are isolated from each other.

It's a matter of the form that we actually see on stage.

If we SEE it, then we would be able to interpret it and connect with other ideas.

But 10 persons see 10 different forms, or imply different forms.

That's where the End of Criticism is near.

I believe that the ability of deep and precise reading of theatrical text -- this is probably the basic level of our professional job, and it differs our work from the enjoyment of the usual spectator who just have some subconscious feeling about what's happening on stage.

Isn't reading of theatrical poetics, or of theatrical form -- our basic skill? And this theatre poetics, or form is not a shadow, not a dream, to certain extent it is a product, though a very delicious handmade product. And we can say how it works, it's all expressed in devices of theatre action. It's about the structure, the composition and the style of theatre action. These parameters seem to be quite open for description that can be motivated and explained.

But can we say that we have any methodology of performance analysis ??

In reality of our profession very often one review is only a part of a sufficient representation of the show. But we can not expect, that theatergoer will read 5 contradictive reviews, compare it, remember the usual values that are important for Alexis Solosky, and other critics, compare the article of Charles Isherwood with his previous writings, and then decide what perception should work for this theatergoer.

Does the spectator really need "relativistic" set of critics' free impressions? Does it help more than just a press release with basic information about the artistic principles and the creative goals of the team and of the director ? How often do we go in methodology of production more than it is represented in the press release, do we go in the details of analysis, doesn't it happen sometimes that we just add our estimation to description of some basic features of the play and of the presentation?

Our aim is creation of the public opinion around the certain artefacts and around the artistic ideas. We represent theatre event, in order to discover some spiritual and aesthetic pleasure for the spectators, to explain subtle artistic ideas, to emphasize successful theatre innovations, to argue with banality and loose taste. And finally all the community of theater critics, in some integral way, in long time perspective has this influence on theater ideas of the time, we promote what the majority of us likes, we create VIP theatre persons, and we destroy poor candidates, whom we disliked. We do it because spectators community keeps in memory the "professional judgment", and the festivals rely on the public debate of the shows, as well as career of theatre people is or is not supported with critics response. Our message is finally influential to developments in the artistic taste of the public in certain period. So finally when all comes together theatre criticism becomes quite a strong force inside total theatre mentality and in theatre process of the time. Here is the great responsibility that our professional activity finally has. That is why our common general weakness really matters. And this is a part of another big question: whether we really create some public opinion, whether we make it more sophisticated than it was before our involvement? Or we just express the public opinion of the average educated group of theatre audience ?

We announce our attitude to the show that is always based on our system of values. We do it in a way as if we all have similar system of values that is generally recognized by critics, by theatre directors and by our readers. It's just implied. But our values are so different!

When we perceive a production and when we explain our attitude to it, in fact we also announce our values, our criteria we do it in some latent way! When one critic said that performance “embodied all the enthusiasm of a medieval mystery play” or that “there is a crispness to the whole aesthetic at work here, a sharpness, a shine”, and another critic was sure that “the argument is never allowed to accrue much dramatic intensity” or that “the emphasis on style over substance becomes repetitive, and the mind starts to wander” these conflicting conclusions are based on different backgrounds of each critic's ideology, and we may only imply what the ideology is. Very often it's important to understand not just conclusions of the author of the article, but the reasons, the starting points, the criteria for judgment. We have to discuss our methodological differences. And by the way IATC is the best place for it.

The systematic understanding of the art makes critic equal in methodology to the experienced director, whose work is analysed. Doesn't it happen often that we judge theatre methods, and some of them are very specific, just knowing some general principles from the news conference, or from interview, or from the internet. Can we really make judgment and make advise to theatre creators other than just immediate impressions from the audience member. Can we keep the professional level in discussion of director's, actor's methodology ? Are we methodologically equipped to be in dialogue with theatre creators? Can we make the dialogue of equal professional partners. Or it will still be like a talk of a journalist with a newsmaker?

Contemporary theatre life as well as the festival life brings lots of uncommon theatre languages for our observing and review. Sometimes the philosophy and techniques of that innovative theatre in completely fresh for us, once we saw that for the first time – Tadashi Suzuki, Christian Lupa, Luc Percival, Andrei Zholdak... How do we judge the artistic system that we never met before ? Probably in the same way that it was created. That is to search the roots not in the nearest past, not in our own

experience, but in the general possibilities of the theatre form as it is. And in mentality, that could have been expressed so originally. I believe that the champion level of theatre criticism is to be able to describe the theatre form that seems to be completely new, never seen, and to place it in the framework of culture, to explain the communication peculiarities of it, and mention its indirect predecessors in culture that we don't see around.

Many critics have some secret basement where we keep not merely our knowledge of the recent theatre models, but of the whole range of possible theatre forms through its history. Then we really discover personalities of Ann Bogart, of Christian Lupa, of Luc Percival, of Andrey Zholdak and of other instigators of theatre arguments, then we understand their motives through the whole plurality of theatre models and theatre languages, because Medieval Mystery, as well as Commedia dell'arte, and the Romanticist theatre and many other methods of the Western and Oriental theater often are influential for the contemporary productions, and this is not necessarily the recognizable influence, but sometimes just the type of mentality that was occasionally revived in a new theatrical form. Of course we may do it all without using theoretic terms. Our professional preparations stay behind the curtain. But even short conclusions, even just feeling of it being strangely attractive, or being just fake pretending -- these assessments need a thorough methodological study made in secret from our readers.

To write the short review of the yesterdays show, from the professional point of view, means to write another page of the history of contemporary theatre, to put a single thing in the complex context that is hidden from usual spectators.

There are aspects of theatre criticism may not be easily accused of being just phantoms of occasional personal impression, like nature of certain theatre method; the basic principles of the composition and of the style of production; systematic devices that are used by the director; specific features of the acting techniques... Many our colleagues, in several countries when they write about the yesterday's opening night, they consider basic theatre aesthetics parameters, they do it with same immersion as if they study a far dated historic event. They are "historiographers" of today.

Maybe we are really approaching “the end of conventional theatre criticism”. We move on the way to study theatre, and do it every night, not in a library with the old manuscripts, but in the hot contemporary audience hall, on the newest art events that have no reputation yet.

And we call it Theatre Criticism, very proudly !

Maria Helena Serôdio

The Cook the Thief his Wife and her Lover

Or:

The Performance the Critic the Academic Journal and the Newspaper

Turin, 9 March 2006, 10h40

I apologise for beginning my paper with this insidious paraphrase, redistributing the journalistic framework according to a most revolting sexist prejudice: a male dominance for newspapers, a female preference regarding the academic journal.

But this is also part of the critical know-how we all share whenever we want to write about a performance, though here it is expressed in brief: description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. And I figured out that Peter Greenaway's movie (or rather, his title) could be a good help in understanding the role of the two entities that meet across the forestage, as well as the liaison it can be fostered between them and between each of them and the publishing milieu.

But before going any further in this comparison, and as I am supposed to plead for the need of an academic journal, I would like to use another template from the British culture to measure the good and bad sides of its role regarding theatre criticism. Therefore, following the ‘scientific and scrupulous’ analysis and evaluation set down by Robinson Crusoe (as the ‘State of his Affairs’ setting the Good against the Evil), I would advance 6 topics:

1. Taking for granted that a journal is more often than not a quarterly or a trimestrial publication (which is our case), the review of the performance comes too late, usually after the end of its run. That means that the impact it has on its readers is deferred, does not encourage them to see the performance; the furthest it can go is to create a sort of frustration in those that realise they have missed something important. In this case, therefore, the critic is writing for posterity. But the critic is possibly giving a more fair account of the performance: s/he saw it more than once, read the newspaper reviews, wants to have a last word, is aware of the responsibility of offering a useful document to theatre historians;
2. The critic in this kind of publication can also afford more space to write about the performance, and that is a good thing. However, the bad side of it is that most journals are not careful with graphic quality or with photographs: they either dispense with them altogether, or use few and bad ones (happily, but not by chance, this latter is not our case);
3. The fact that most journals have limits and may offer different sections means that performance analysis and/or theatre reviews have to be restricted to a certain amount of pages, and that means that only a few performances are chosen to be written about. Although this is an acceptable condition, it means that a certain criterion will preside over the choices: only important or good performances are reviewed. Therefore academic journals may tend towards a list of 'nominations' of performances, more than the clash between the bad and the good. One of the possible ways to avoid this homogeneity is to have critics (of different ages, formations and preferences) writing about performances of their own choice;
4. An academic journal has some difficulty in reaching a wide spectrum of readers: it is more expensive (than a newspaper), bookshops are not very keen on keeping them too long: they generally send them back to the publishers after two or three months in the store. The good thing is that they are more visible and accessible in public libraries than are newspapers in general;
5. Raising funds for such an editorial project is not easy, not stable and too demanding for all those who venture to be responsible for keeping it afloat. We have to look for different strategies, but unfortunately, the field of possibilities is not vast or varied.
6. The fact that some of these academic journals are written in a language that is not dominant in the world (though spoken by many millions, as is the case with Portuguese) can be a considerable obstacle to becoming more widely known for both the journal and the theatre it analyses or researches. It gains, however, a

certain 'domestic' quality, which is not bad, and I hope to have the support of Jane Austen in this argument! But the reference to language reminds me of two comments about Portuguese authors (which it must be said were made before the awarding of the Nobel Prize for literature to José Saramago in 1998). Indeed a distinguished Portuguese philosopher – Eduardo Lourenço – regretted that our writers were 'prisoners of a language doomed to silence'¹, or, in novelist Miguel Torga's words, doomed to write 'in a language that the devil still uses to speak to his grand-mother'².

Turning now to a case study regarding our journal in the Portuguese context, I would say that if we were to map the field of theatre criticism in Portugal, the result would not be very encouraging for some of the reasons we do indeed, quite unfortunately, share with so many other countries.

On the one side, to an ever-increasing degree, the 'real news' takes place before the event, therefore more attention and column inches go to news articles about a forthcoming premiere, to social events (perhaps a top model in the cast or a young actor coming from a TV series or soap opera...), or to an interview with a director. In short, this is what can be seen as activity to promote the show, while the critical discourse which comes after the opening night, steeped in expertise and based on value judgements, occupies a diminishing role and is very often delayed, thus proving that overnight reviewing is definitely an extinct species in Portuguese journalism. I have a suspicion, however, that theatre practitioners may have mixed feelings about this ordeal, for it can be better to go unnoticed than to be considered an artistic failure, or to have some of their principles put in jeopardy.

At the moment only three Portuguese newspapers of wide circulation (a fortnightly, a weekly and a daily) have a permanent critic. Journalists on their staff help maintain information on theatre in general, and several newspapers use young freelancers who, nevertheless, do not seem to be truly respected, given the delay and the haphazard way in which they publish their works. So the idea of a steady critical opinion on theatre or the aura of a theatre critic like Bernard Dort, some decades ago, or Michael Billington today, for instance, are among us a haunting - and wishful - image, but in fact a reality of a foregone past.

However, we have to look at this scenery affecting theatre criticism as a sign of the times and not derived from reticence, let alone the maliciousness of editorial boards in newspapers or TV news.

¹ Eduardo Lourenço, *Nós e a Europa, ou as duas razões*. Lisboa: IN-CM, 1994 (4^a ed. augmentée).p. 139.

² Cit. por Eduardo Lourenço, *ibid*.

Moreover, it is not only the media in general that are facing cutthroat competition and have to fight back the lack of general interest in theatre; it is also the theatre itself that is undergoing a systemic change.

First there is the simple mushrooming of theatre projects, aesthetic lines, and kinds of live performance work, which encourages the relativity of any critical judgements, at the same time as demanding varying expertise, a huge amount of time and a disposition to cover all the events as fieldwork. Anyway, this reality also corresponds to an expansion of the term theatre by artists and theorists alike, all through the 20th century, from modernists up to anthropologists (such as Turner or Schechner) or philosophers like Michel Foucault (*theatrum philosophicum*), Jean-François Lyotard (the philosophical and political stage), or Jean Baudrillard (the stage of the body), just to name some of them. And to that explosion of possibilities we should necessarily add the fact that our modes of perception have changed a lot due to new scientific advances as well as technological innovations that have entered our daily life.

Secondly, much of theatre life nowadays is of a short-term and ephemeral nature and much of the attention it attracts is related to minor trials and tribulations experienced during rehearsals, or to tit-bits about ephemeral matters involved in getting the show off the ground.

Moreover, due to the limited attention of big business to theatre (they will instead sponsor the renovation of monuments or grand rock concerts), most of our theatre activity depends on State subsidies, that are allotted by a jury of specialists (combined with a representative of the Arts Institute or regional committees of the State Secretary of Culture). As for commercial theatre, it is still fighting for a place within the range of successful ventures: we may, however, note that two main recipes have been tried these past 4 or 5 years with a good response from audiences: either the cast has actors who are engaged in TV soap operas (mainly adolescents) or the performance is an adaptation of a traditional musical or film (*My Fair Lady*, *Lisbon Song*, *Amália...*).

All these traits tend to assign to theatre a kind of schizophrenic existence, balancing between a practice that is evaluated and judged by specialists and supported by public funding, but that has a diminished visibility if ... the actors or artists committed to the production are not known for reasons other than straight theatre. The companies exist, operate on a regular basis (having to produce three performances a year, at least), but may pass unnoticed by the general public.

So what we can discern on this map is a proliferation of theatre groups (sometimes not more than one person and occasional other contributions to certain productions) and clusters of interpreting communities around some of these groups.

It is then no wonder that the need to analyse – and discuss - theatre activity is pushing people to a clear-cut binary solution: either working furiously at home alone constructing an online diary and journal (the blogosphere) and belonging to a small chat group (which gives their authors a considerable self-esteem in the sense that they feel incredibly free to write extensively and about everything), or to venture into the mission of founding a journal with whatever funding they can raise. In both cases it is obvious that there will be no payment for those who write theatre criticism: it becomes mainly a cultural mission, a hobby, sometimes a solipsistic occupation.

I am not so much worried about the lack of mechanisms to confer credibility (let alone authority) to these online commentators. Rather, this seems to me a clear demonstration that theatre, to be discussed, needs a “private” club, talking only to the converted. Newspaper readers, TV viewers and even theatre audiences in general are not given a share in the debate, unless a director or actor is clever enough to pursue a marketing strategy of launching political challenges or scandalous declarations to gain some visibility (we, in Portugal, can boast of these two kinds of experts: thank God, in one case, thank the devil, in the other!).

What is definitely lost is the practice (though not the idea or the wish) of ‘(...) a theatre that once was the very body of thinking, the actual experience of Citizenship – of History and Politics. (...) The collective meditation on the City ‘³

As for specialised journals: they are a major consequence of the present characteristics of the theatre realm that I mapped above. And two serious needs blend themselves together: we have to exercise a kind of approach that demands a considerable range of expertise (so we have to be open to an endless theoretical *aggiornamento*) and, at the same time, we have to benefit from a steady academic job (or a research grant) to indulge in this venture. But one commandment seems to me a categorical imperative: those who collaborate with this kind of publishing should have a foot in theatre criticism and not arrive only from the literary or the comparative studies departments.

³ Jorge Silva Melo, *Prometeu agrilhoado/ libertado* (1997)

The recent appearance (in 2004) of a theatre journal in Portugal – *Sinais de cena (Theatre Signs)* - of which I am proud to have here two other members of the editorial board: Paulo Eduardo Carvalho and Sebastiana Fadda - stemmed out of this complicated situation of theatre criticism in Portugal.

I can add that three other journals were operating at that moment – *Adágio*, *Artistas Unidos/United Artists*, and *Cadernos/ Exercise Books of Almada* – but all of them were published by theatre companies, thus assigning to them the role of displaying their own concerns, by linking interviews or articles to their repertoire or recent performances. And their frequency was not all that regular, I must add.

This new journal - *Sinais de cena (Theatre Signs)* – to appear twice a year (in June and December) was launched by the Portuguese Association of Theatre Critics, but indeed it owes its existence to the joint efforts of this Association and the Centre for Theatre Research of the University of Lisbon.

The ultimate key to this convenient combined action is the fact that these two entities share most of their active members. And this again shows a coincidence – attributable to the past 10 or 15 years – of theatre criticism being performed by scholars who are (or were for a time) committed to criticism too. Most of them do share a University degree and a reasonable experience of theatre reviewing.

Recently Professor W.B. Worthen was in Lisbon for a conference and witnessed the work which is being done at the Centre for Theatre Research; among other projects, the implementation of a very detailed (“technologically intelligent” I could claim) database for the theatre in Portugal. He mentioned the fact that we were rather lucky to have begun the project when it was already easier to design such a device. He himself had gone through a very laborious effort when computers were huge monsters and the cards to fill were not practical at all. And much of the work done in that framework was suddenly dismissed as old fashioned and useless. So, in a way, latecomers can have some advantages.

Another good thing about the institutional framework in which the journal exists is that it was possible to assemble old and new generations of theatre critics (in the context of the Critics’ Association), as well as theatre historians and experts, professors and students (some reconverted from literature and humanities), researchers and theatre practitioners attending our graduate course on Theatre Studies.

And again here we were lucky to have joined Theatre Studies after the 1980s when performance analysis of current productions came to improve the field, which until that time was so much (almost exclusively) dependent

on historical documents and positivist historiography, as Erika Fisher-Lichte observed in *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1997, p. 338 ff.)

We know that the ephemeral quality of theatre leaves us only with left-overs (photographs, costumes, videotapes, etc.) so that, when researching theatre that is past, what we indeed examine are documents and not proper theatre. But it is urgently important not to discriminate between the historical and the analytical field of research, rather to approach the immense reality of theatre with the possibility of diverse approaches, in order to allow for more questions to be asked.

That is one of the reasons why we keep in each issue 10 different sections appealing to different realities, using various tools of research and proposing different heuristic possibilities: Editorial, a Random archive (historical research on practitioners, venues, companies, publications, etc.), Performance analyses (of current productions), Theatre book reviews, Applied essays, News from abroad, Internet Sites, Portfolio (with numerous photographs of a company, an artist, a photographer, etc.), a long interview with a theatre practitioner, and a File on a specific theme.

Once a year this File addresses a certain interesting theme (once it was set design, another time performativities); the other issue (in June) publishes the essays read by the members of the jury of our Association that awards the annual Theatre Prize, and the three Special Mentions (established by our bylaws), in a public ceremony generally held in March.

Unfortunately, although theatre practitioners are happy to receive these awards and are present at the ceremony with fellow artists, friends, relatives and members of their audiences, these gatherings do not attract great interest from the media. But, then...

So what? If the media are recurrently issuing forth so many disgusting news items about terrorist attacks, imperialist wars declared and pursued by unproven reasons, political corruption, child and domestic abuse.... we have to conclude that the wise aphorism, 'no news is good news' is also true as far as theatre criticism is concerned. And that can be a solace in our strenuous activity.

In spite of all these facts I have mentioned on our Crusoe's second list, this is what we feel that has to be done to provide a fitting approach to theatre at this stage. But it is perhaps acted out as a "willing suspension of disbelief", as Samuel Taylor Coleridge would say: for it is, indeed, an act of faith, of sheer voluntarism. In the back of our

minds, we assume it is, to a certain degree, a mission, as if digging out a kind of utopia. A similar feeling presides over the idea of multiplicity which is a governing principle of the journal.

If I may, I would like to claim the use of that powerful metaphor of the rhizome that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari use in their *Mille plateaux (A Thousand Plateaus)* (Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1980) as an approach to our main goal: a decentred intellectual scenario, working across a diversity of topics or plateaus. And I quote:

‘Un plateau est toujours au milieu, ni début ni fin. Un rhizome est fait de plateaux’ (p. 32). Or: ‘Un rhizome ne commence et n’aboutit pas, il est toujours au milieu, entre les choses, inter-être, *intermezzo*’ (p. 36).

It is this condition of rhizomatic method that we seek when approaching theatre.

Therefore, the title of this paper - I have just read - sticks to linearity for the listing of entities and preposterous liaisons implicit in the sequence:

The Cook the Thief his Wife and her Lover

IATC XXII Congress, Turin 2006

Uniformed Members of the Public

Ian Shuttleworth

Theatre reviewer, *Financial Times*; editor, *Theatre Record*

In this paper, I want to assume what is often portrayed as the traditional posture of the critic: that is, I want to face both ways at once. I think I’m justified in this. As we see time and time again from opinion polls and market research, answers can vary widely depending on how the question is phrased. On the matter of whether critics are necessary, I have no hesitation at all in taking my place here amongst the defenders of the practice. However, if we consider not the immediate question, but rather the overarching topic of this colloquium, “The End of Criticism? [question mark]”, I find myself much less optimistic. I fear it is quite possible that criticism – particularly in my own field, that of journalistic criticism – may not survive to the end of the lifetimes of some of us here. I hope you will forgive me, then, if some of my remarks take on an edge of plaintive self-interest. Furthermore, my

observations concentrate almost exclusively on journalistic reviewing in the UK. I know that my own country has gone further than some others down the worrying path I'm about to speak of, but as Maria Helena Serôdio has already indicated, the cultural developments in question already affect all of us to some extent.

Put bluntly, the situation is as follows: the end of criticism – in the sense of its goal or purpose – is, in the view of editors of newspapers and magazines, their owners and advertisers, to make their publication look as if it cares about culture. Live art reviews (apart from those of pop and rock music) and those of visual and plastic arts, architecture and design, are in publishing terms “loss leaders” for mainstream titles. Our output allows the powers-that-be on our journals to maintain an *image* of being engaged with the full spectrum of life: material and mental, social and spiritual. However, from the editorial point of view, the extent of actual coverage is a matter of finding a happy medium: too little and the tokenism I'm talking about would be transparent, too much would take up space that could more profitably be put to other use. As soon as the cost/benefit equation alters, then, in the words of Liz Imbrie, the photo-journalist in Philip Barry's *The Philadelphia Story*, “Belts will be worn tighter this winter.” If they are still worn at all.

Increasingly, too, the culture of celebrity, and of “rolling news”, means that critical coverage of a work will take second place to news or “showbiz” coverage of its opening night – not the work, but the event, as Maria Helena Serôdio has already suggested. Sometimes it even means that reviewers themselves are hired principally for being a name that appeals to readers rather than due to any particular engagement they might have with the subject in question. As Maria Helena also says, this isn't a result of editorial malice, but sometimes it does amount to culpable negligence.

To give an example of the first of these situations: in September 2004, the National Theatre in London presented *Stuff Happens*, David Hare's play about the political background to the war in Iraq. The *Guardian* newspaper sent to the first preview performance a large group of media commentators, Conservative and Labour politicians, a military officer and a former U.N. weapons inspector, to offer their own perspectives on the play. These were printed fully a week before the press showing when that paper's theatre reviewer Michael Billington was permitted to see the play. During that week, the paper's approach became a minor news story in itself, and the editorship commissioned Michael to

write an article defending what they had done. Thus, probably the UK's most respected theatre critic was put in the awkward and frankly absurd position of having to justify a policy whereby his own views had been marginalised, his own position trivialised – and remember, all this before he had even had a chance to form those views of his own. It was as if a defence of the traditional Christmas dinner had been commissioned from a turkey.

However, at least Michael normally enjoys an editorship which is committed to a respectable degree of engagement with cultural matters. Elsewhere, the picture is gloomier. One of the UK's major current affairs magazines in 2004 appointed as its theatre critic a former Secretary of State for Defence who had until then shown no discernible public interest in the art. Another magazine engaged an old university friend of the editor, a journalist-provocateur who had shown similarly little interest but had confided to his friend that he needed the work. And these are among the country's more "thoughtful" publications. The UK's biggest-selling middle-market newspaper now employs as its main theatre critic a man who also writes its semi-humorous, barbed parliamentary sketches; the result is reviews that advance the political agenda and social prejudices of that newspaper's chosen editorial line, with only notional attention being paid to the artistic or theatrical-cultural side of things. This man is also, to the best of my knowledge, the most highly paid theatre reviewer in UK print journalism.

So, if editors and to an extent even readers seem to regard critics as a cosmetic accessory rather than a necessity, how can I stand up here and claim that we remain truly necessary?

To an extent, this pessimistic vista speaks *for* me. What I have just portrayed is a culture which, in trivialising arts criticism, has trivialised and impoverished itself. The most succinct description I have encountered of the function of criticism is "to explain culture to itself". This is true whether the forum of criticism is the media or the academy: our respective modes of discourse may differ with our primary audiences, but the fundamental activity and the three-way relationships between subject matter, criticism and audience are the same. Of course we can't provide comprehensive explanations; no critic, whether academic or journalistic, should pretend to do so – plainly, our opinions and perspectives are each our own. But we can *inform* culture about itself.

Similarly, though, it must be understood that by “culture” I am not just referring to any conception of legitimate or “high culture”: for instance, I am proud to have contributed a chapter a couple of years ago to a scholarly critical volume about the TV series *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. We here today all know that culture is a broad, almost all-encompassing concept. What we need to do, then, is to be seen to be embracing such latitude in our practices.

Last week, a production opened on the London fringe of Arthur Miller’s double-bill *Two-Way Mirror*. It would have been entirely undistinguished in the critical landscape – certainly eclipsed by a Royal Shakespeare Company revival of Miller’s *The Crucible* and the Robert Altman-directed UK première of his *Resurrection Blues*, both of which opened in the same week. But one factor made this smallest show the one that the popular media paid most attention to: its lead female actor is one of the foremost current examples of British celebrity culture, a young woman who is famous solely for being well-known: who has become a pin-up image, a face about town and a fixture on various television programmes simply because she is a pin-up image, a face about town etc. Our approach as critics in such a situation must be neither to disdain her for supposedly having ideas above her cultural station nor treat her as a kind of theatrical exotica, a visitor from a parallel cultural dimension.

But part of the problem here is that those who set the context in which journalistic critics operate – the editors and owners of our papers, the mass broadcast media and so on – tend to be caught within this polarised notion of culture. Even on what we might term the quality newspapers and magazines, there is something of an assumption (though it may be unconscious) that popular culture is, perhaps not wholly distinct from “high culture”, but nevertheless a more fitting or at least more profitable field of coverage. What we as reviewers have to do is implicitly rebut that in all our writings: to forge a three-way connection between the immediate subject work, the broader social and historical contexts in which it is located, and our various audiences.

And this is something which in many cases we must do covertly, or at least on our own initiative. One of the most pervasive misconceptions among theatre practitioners is that we reviewers owe a duty to theatre to be “supportive” or “constructive”, or some other term which in practice means only voicing criticisms that those practitioners are prepared to listen to. There is a feeling that strong criticism is somehow a betrayal of our comrades – of, as Nikolai Pesochinsky has just put it, our “equal

professional partners". And this feeling is nonsense. I despair, frankly, of practitioners ever understanding the simple fact that *we are not active in the same area as them*. They are active in theatre; we are active in journalism. Theatre may be – almost without exception, it is – a fierce passion for us, but it isn't where we work. We may be theatrical types and/or critics by vocation, but by profession we are journalists. There, you see, I get so fired up by this delusion that I've just denied it four times in a row.

And this is the context in which we must do what we are required to do: required by our job on the one hand and our passion on the other, requirements which may often be in conflict with each other. We have to square that circle between intellectual analysis and reportage. We have not to write just for posterity, but to make it clear that *art is news* – not because it has a particular name, face or other brand attached to it, but on its own terms; that it is an integral and a vital part of how we live and understand ourselves both individually and as a society.

And we have to do this in a way that enlists the complicity of our readers and also our editors: we have to seduce them into accepting this as a given, and to disguise the possibility that we may in fact be challenging their preconceptions about art. If we can get them to accept, at least while they're reading us, that art is an essential element rather than a marginal luxury, then there's a chance that they might consider it on other occasions as well.

I want to make it plain that I'm not suggesting that this is an impossible demand to meet; on the contrary, it must not only be achievable – we must make it *routine*. This is the media landscape through which we must walk, giving what directions and guidance we can, informing culture about itself. We can't be all things to all people, of course: what we can do is engage on a broad *enough* front. A few years ago I heard a brilliant if awkwardly phrased insight from a student: art, he said, (and thus our criticism) is not about reaching the right sort of people; it's about reaching the wrong sort, and *turning them into* the right sort.

I think perhaps the greatest vitality in journalistic criticism is demonstrated in overnight reviewing. To be sure, the demand to write several hundred words of fully formed opinion on a play, perhaps within an hour of the final curtain, can be an invitation to disaster. But it is also the most direct manifestation of art as news: a report of an event barely ended, a piece of writing which blends factual

record with comment and a dose of rapid-response analysis. It may not be possible for us to make significant preparation for this in terms of background reading or other mental refreshment: our response is fundamentally an immediate one. (Though, once again, let me make it clear that when I speak of “immediacy” here I mean immediacy only in time: any experience other than the direct, physical sharing of a performance in time and space is of course a mediated experience.)

Even when not compelled by deadlines, I personally tend to write my reviews up “on the night”, because I adhere to this view of the vitality of overnight reviewing. This may be partly because such an approach chimes with both my facility for memory and my inherent laziness! My justification comes from my early study of Law, before I even imagined becoming an arts critic. In the early days of the police force, officers had no greater powers of arrest or detention than any other citizen; it was simply that they were professionally engaged to exercise those common powers. This status was memorably summed up by one nineteenth-century judge when he described a policeman, in this respect, as merely “a uniformed member of the public”.

I try to approach most of my reviewing as, so to speak, a uniformed member of the theatre-going public. Granted, my view is now backed by twenty-odd years of experience, having seen several thousand productions and written over a million words about them. But my inherent stature is no greater than that of any other spectator. (I’m speaking figuratively, of course; anyone who’s ever found themselves seated behind me at the theatre will know that, in at least one sense, my stature is much, *much* greater!) In other words, I think that the very plurality and provisionality that so worry Nikolai are in fact strengths. It’s ridiculous for us to pretend to offer the last word on a production; what we can do, by recognising our place in a continuing broad debate, is to help that debate to move on to the *next* word, and the next, and so on: precisely the rhizomatic state of affairs which Maria Helena has identified, rather than the “private club” she also mentioned.

It’s the same as regards what I said a couple of minutes ago about theatre practitioners’ discomfort with what we sometimes say: there’s no point in only listening to people whose views you already know you can accept. Cybernetics, the scientific study of communication, defines “information” as the amount of unpredictability in a message. If you just soak it up, if it doesn’t make you stop and think, then there’s no real information there. And so with criticism: we can’t just

pronounce judgements, we have to argue them. As the archetypal essay question in British school examinations puts it, “Give reasons for your answer.” (As far as space permits, of course!) And these reasons must be both readily comprehensible by our readership and yet unpredictable, informative, to them. Every time we write, we have to earn and re-earn the privilege of being listened to. Freedom of expression, as Nikolai has noted, is a right, but being *listened* to... that’s a privilege.

This leads me to another aspect of the role of the journalistic critic, and one which I hope doesn’t pre-empt what Porter Anderson is about to say. It seems to me incontestable that we must embrace the possibilities of new media for opening up discourse. Already the “blogosphere”, the vast nebula of online diaries, journals and commentaries – usually self-published, usually interactive – has become for millions their primary or most trusted channel of social/political/cultural information and discourse. And as I say, this openness and democratisation must surely be regarded as a good thing.

However, what are largely missing from the blogosphere at this point in its evolution are mechanisms of authority. As I’m sure we’ve all experienced when trying to Google for information on a particular subject, it can be quite bewildering figuring out which sources are worth following up. Sturgeon’s Law was inadvertently formulated by science fiction author Theodore Sturgeon; when an interviewer protested that 90% of science fiction was crap, Sturgeon replied, “But 90% of *everything* is crap.” (The director Lindsay Anderson, on being told of Sturgeon’s Law, remarked grouchy, “It’s got worse since then, hasn’t it?”)

This is what relates to my point about the status of reviewers: authority – by which I mean credibility, trustworthiness, that whole nexus of critical status indicators by which a reader evaluates a writer – does not inhere, it is earned and conferred. And new-media modes of criticism simply have not been in existence long enough to evolve structures of conferment of authority. It’s not simply a matter of numbers of hits to a web site, any more than a newspaper’s authority is a function of its circulation figures; nor can we use as reliable indices the volume or intensity of interactive feedback, the number of links published elsewhere to a given site, or (Lord help us) Google ratings. Reputation, reputation, reputation: it’s as intangible in this area as in any other. But we haven’t yet evolved the right kind of “reputation radar” to navigate reliably through the blogosphere. We will do, I’m pretty

certain. But we haven't yet. And, *pace* Maria Helena, this is a problem: not for us in particular as writers, but for all of us as readers.

Which means that for the time being, the combination of relative immediacy and conferred authority in cultural debate continues to find its best example in journalistic criticism. Such work may enrich the experience of consumption, on the page or on the stage; but we have to recognise that only a small percentage of our readers will ever have the chance to experience any given play. The principal function of journalistic reviewing is not to act as an adjunct to the experience of reading or seeing a particular play: it reports on the event, and informs the broader discourse of which the work and its reception form component parts.

A final personal point: a year or so ago, I inadvertently generated a storm in the teacup of British theatre journalism. I remarked in a column in the magazine I now edit, *Theatre Record*, that a number of critics are of a certain age and that this contributed to a problem. To my astonishment, this got reported in various news and gossip pages; and it was reported as if I'd been making an embittered call for older critics to retire and make way for, for instance, me.

I said nothing of the sort, of course: what I was pointing out was that, as long as the resources given to journalistic criticism continue to diminish, then the longer the existing generations and tiers of critics remain in place, the fewer opportunities there will be for coming generations to enter the field. In that respect, perhaps the new-media sector had better find its mechanisms of conferring authority pretty quickly, otherwise there may soon be no avenues or structures outside the academy for young critics to learn their craft and take their place in the mainstream of the cultural conversation. In short, editors are not investing in the long-term welfare of the medium as a whole. In twenty or thirty years they may find themselves without the critics they need. And what's horrifying is that they may not even notice, or care. As against that, what I found grimly amusing about this whole artificial dispute was that, once again, coverage was given to a trivial, sensationalised aspect rather than the central matter: just as, in a number of papers, you'll find pictures of celebrities at an opening-night performance but no review of the play itself.

These are all highly provisional observations. I'm aware that in many respects I'm indulging in the well-known phenomenon of harking back to a mythical Golden Age one or two generations ago, in

this case an age when column space, budget and respect were all allegedly so much greater. Yet today, even though we often find ourselves competing for attention with the most vapid ephemera, we are also engaged in a much more dynamic exchange of views and ideas. We no longer pretend to pronounce and judge: we argue, advocate and advise. And we listen when others do likewise. We help explain culture to itself, not as part of a debate within a citadel, but within the totality of the ongoing national and global conversation.

Theatre Criticism and the New Media:

From Empty Space to Cyberspace

2006 IATC WORLD CONGRESS

PREMIO EUROPA PER IL TEATRO: TORINO

By Porter Anderson

Senior Producer

CNN.com / CNN Pipeline

Atlanta

“Occasionally, on what (the actor) calls a ‘good night,’ he encounters an audience that by chance brings an active interest and life to its watching role – this audience assists. With this assistance, the assistance of eyes and focus and desires and enjoyment and concentration, repetition turns into representation. Then the word representation no longer separates actor and audience, show and public: It envelopes them. What is present for one is present for the other. The audience too has undergone a change. It has come from a life outside the theatre that is essentially repetitive to a special arena in which each moment is lived more clearly and more tensely. The audience assists the actor, and at the same time for the audience itself, assistance comes back from the stage.”

Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, 1968⁴

NOTE: This paper follows a defense of academic criticism by Maria Helena Serodio of the University of Lisbon, and a defense of traditional newspaper/ and journal criticism by the Financial Times’ Ian Shuttleworth.

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⁴ Peter Brook’s *The Empty Space*, first published in 1968, remains one of Western theatre’s most influential meditations on the art and its psychological and emotional proximity to an audience. One of its strengths, in fact, is Brook’s understanding at the time he was writing, that the art would evolve beyond the point at which he referenced it: “As you read this book,” he wrote, “it is already moving out of date. It is for me an exercise, now frozen on the page. But unlike a book, the theatre has one special characteristic: It is always possible to start again.”

ow that we've heard from my wonderful and always articulate friend Maria Helena on behalf of academic criticism – and from Ian, whose expertise handily straddles both newspaper and journal criticism of theatre – I'm afraid you must think of me as the Ghost of Criticism Future.

I'm doing my best to look a bit less frightening than that final specter of Scrooge's long night's journey into the inevitable



Figure 1: John Leech's full-page illustration of the Ghost of Christmas Past for, 'A Christmas Carol,' 1843

standing ovation. But I believe I do come as the bearer of somewhat difficult tidings for both criticism and theatre, itself. And my message may not be all that different from the one delivered by Dickens' mysterious entity in the black cowl. It's just this: Making peace and finding a home amid the new media is an imperative, not an option. Time is running out.

In the 1940s and 1950s, television and even film were still seen as interesting novelties and sidelines to life. The wartime newsreels had given film a head start on pertinence, but TV still was establishing itself as a meaningful source of news. Both media seemed to many people, especially in Europe and North and South America, as no more a danger to legitimate theatre than radio had seemed in its infancy to live music.

Similarly, the advent of the Internet's popular usage in the late 1980s and early 1990s looked even less like a problem for the stage: It seemed to mount no competition to the arts and to have only a passing relevance to the stage, usually limited to the efforts of some ticketing agents to sell theatre seats online. (Nothing wrong with that, more power to them.)

Online video gaming then played through, accompanying the Internet's arrival with all the vulgar charm of a satyr



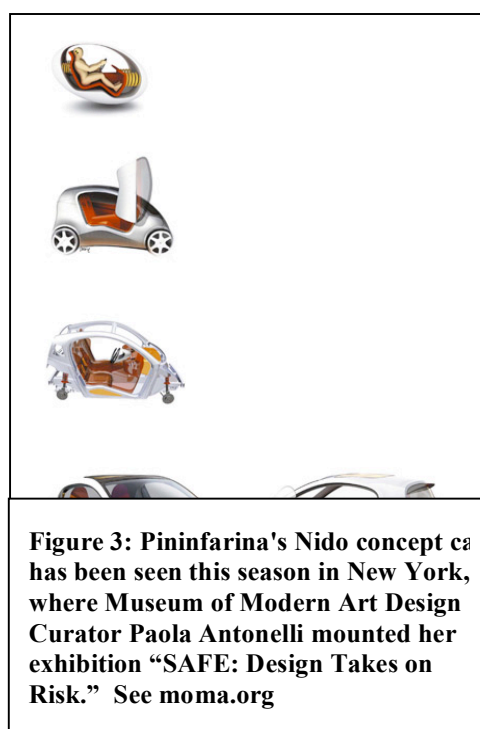
Figure 2: 'Rome: Total War' is one of the most successful of the Creative Assembly gaming software maker's series of graphically opulent, historically accurate strategy video games. See totalwar.com/community/rome.htm

play tacked onto a very long trilogy. We shrugged as the gaming consoles rolled by with their loud, nightmare images and weapon-wielding figures, surely just so much adolescent violence-fantasy, right? These gamers, we thought, were the angry young men we'd never want in a theatre anyway.

Well, the reckoning shows now that we probably should have thought harder, and earlier, about our venerable and vulnerable art of theatre.

Those video games? The average age of the joy-sticky masses is 37 – not the screaming 16-year-old we'd all like to think is driving that “little” industry ... now worth \$7.4 billion US dollars annually, or 6.2 billion euros. And can the women still save theatre from such mindless pursuits of males? Maybe not: The Entertainment Software Association tells us that 43-percent of gamers are girls.⁵

And the Internet? It is the wireless world of our age, the rising environment of our communications, our education, our cultural context. They will look back at your neighbors who keep resisting getting



broadband as we look back today at people who feared the Model T Ford and scoffed at Pininfarina. When the young people of your country are restless and discussing what they might do for a diversion, do they talk about seeing a play, a classical concert, a dance company? Or do they consider a movie, a video game arcade, a dance club and surfing the Net?

We all know how ubiquitous TV and film are. And the addition of the Internet's viral global penetration – not to mention that of satellite radio systems that have generated a field of more than 4,000 Internet radio stations, alone⁶ –

⁵ <http://www.recordonline.com/archive/2006/02/06/news-kwgirlgamers-02-06.html> These figures on video gaming come from a February 6, 2006, report in the Times Herald-Record's online edition, the RecordOnline.com.

⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/18/business/18music.html> The New York Times on February 18, 2006, reports that Sirius satellite radio has 3.3 million subscribers, while XM Radio, the key player in the industry, has

means a world more deeply than ever wrapped, and maybe shrouded, in a new atmospheric layer of entertainment.

And so here we are. People of theatre. People of discernment, analysis, criticism. What's missing?

When we sit down to watch some of the thoughtfully produced productions we see here in Torino?

What do we not see?

The art of theatre, like so many of its sister arts – symphonic, chamber and choral music, classical and modern dance, the visual, written and spoken arts – remains, for the most part, stuck in its “box.” Those four walls, that stage, our beloved proscenium, the seats and the lobby ... the physical gathering to watch together a performance of a text. We here today know how powerful an experience this can be, how important a thing it is. And so it is also up to us here today, to start moving that experience toward the new media – before theatre as we know it is left hopelessly and utterly behind.

That is what's missing: That link with the world outside our playhouses.

Our art is out of touch.

As the electronic mass-media of radio, film, television, the Internet, its games and the burgeoning network of satellite services grow, the traditional live-performance/live-experience arts are being outstripped at a new rate. How many body blows can theatre take before it's finally down for the count? If radio was one, film was two and TV was three ... the Internet can get us all the way to ten.

The problem is not necessarily that audiences are too small. At least not always, not in all places, not for all arts. Here in Europe, you do better than we do in the States. Your model of state-subsidized theatre has never succeeded in America. And our U.S. theatre workers, for the most part, have never

6 million. So costly are the build-outs of radio stations for listeners of these satellite radio systems that Sirius reports spending \$113 for each new subscriber it signs up, down this year from \$124 in 2004.

learned to make their art survive as a market commodity, which of course is the true currency of Yankee approval.

Nevertheless, the real problem is that global presence becomes increasingly important to the survival of any art when your people can participate in the diversions of a planetary network any time they like.

And if theatre is to communicate itself to the audiences of satellite radio and television and Internet gaming communities and those busy, busy bloggers, it may fall to us – its critics, who have always been its advocates – to help get it “out there” onto the “ether” of the new media.

At CNN.com in Atlanta, our basic news Web site has more than 27 million readers on a slow day. Any major news of note – bad mudslides in the Philippines, a disastrous earthquake in the Kashmiri region, Palestinian election results – can swell that number to 50 million readers in a single day. Those readers are all over the world, not just in the United States.

And they now are being offered a new service they can use to watch news on the Internet as it happens, often without the interruption of any correspondent or news reader -- always without commercials – and from anywhere in the world we have a camera. It's called CNN Pipeline⁷. Like an oil pipeline. The technology we've developed for this took 15 months and 300 people to put together. It offers up to four simultaneous live streams of news as it happens -- raw feeds from anywhere in the world. Recently, we carried an EU briefing in Brussels, Question Time with Tony Blair in the House of

Commons, a session in the trial of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad and updates from the Olympics here in Torino, simultaneously as they



Figure 4: CNN Pipeline uses a live-video-streaming technology on the Internet to transmit high-quality imagery in 16x9 aspect ratio format. See cnn.com/pipeline

happened, commercial-free on CNN Pipeline.

We think – and I must emphasize that this is in the exploratory stage right now – we think that we can create a similar “portal” on the Internet for arts events. There is a lot of work to be done before we’re there. This could be a year or longer in the making. But we now have the capacity to stream a performance at the National in London, for example, live to a worldwide audience of subscribers who might never get to London and never be able to sit down in that “box” called the Olivier on the South Bank of the Thames – on the Internet. As it happens. In real time. Eventually, we like to think, we could be bringing everything from theatre, music and dance performances to art-gallery walk-throughs, poetry and prose readings to a global audience, once rights negotiations and production logistics are worked out.

As I say, it’s a big undertaking.

But a taped production of a stage event – maybe on TV -- never carries the immediacy that a live performance does. And we do now have the capacity to transmit high-definition, 16x9 images of the arts and performance – thanks to the Internet – to a potential audience of the size enjoyed routinely by film, television and radio.

So now, then – now – think about it. What is the role of the critic in all this?

If you agree that at some point, and maybe not all that long from now, traditional theatre is going to need to “live” in that “layer of atmospheric entertainment” that wraps our world, then surely, it’s the critics of our art who must prepare the stage to come. Surely, we are the ones who must be out there waiting, ready with context, history, dramaturgical insight, institutional knowledge and sheer love of the art, to welcome it as it evolves outside that “box” in which we’ve always known it.

Already, there rages a major battle in cyberspace between the legitimate mainstream media and the “rogue” media. The renegades are the self-appointed “news” sites that have no journalistic checks

and balances on what they report, no traditions of restraint and responsibility, and no dearth of online readers eager to consume and espouse their rumors as fact. There is a serious divide widening as bloggers, chat-room mavens and mass-email operations vie for newspaper's readers and television's an audience that once knew clearly how trustworthy each bit of information it found would be in a major daily newspaper or on a key television network's newscast. Whether you held a state-published journal in your hand or an independent newspaper, you knew what you had. You knew how to read it. Today's audience on the Internet may not know. And may not realize or care how important it is to know.

What does that mean if theatre moves into cyber-performance? It means that we, as both the critics and the advocates of the arts we cover – from academia and from journalistic newsrooms as well as online outlets – we must all find the energy to be sure the battle is joined. I can tell you a couple of things about the power of the Internet, since it's my current base of operations.

- An online review of a new music CD can change that CD's rank on the sales-registers of major Internet music-sales outlets – Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, Indigo, and so on – within minutes.
- Some of the biggest fights over tickets for popular concerts these days aren't being played out at box offices or even on ticket-order phone lines. Those sell-outs are happening on the Internet.

- And when Sotheby's was preparing to auction some 70 highly significant photographs deaccessioned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the way it drew its bidders to the auction in New York on Valentine's Night last month, was on the Internet – Sotheby's posted each photo in an online catalog, e-mailed its regular bidders about the upcoming auction ... and Sotheby's sold a 1904 Edward Steichen photo for \$2.9 million US



Figure 5: Edward Steichen's 'The Pond – Moonlight' of 1904 became the richest sale for a photo at Sotheby's in New York on 14 February 2006. See sothebys.com

dollars, 2.4 million euros. The highest price in history for a photo.

What are our answers, then, to Nicolai's demand that we justify theatre criticism in this world of iPods and Pay-Per-View and the runaway series of video games titled "Grand Theft Auto?" (God help us.)

How could we ever have asked Dorothy Parker⁸ or Pauline Kael⁹ to compete with Lara Croft?¹⁰ As Ken Tucker reminds us in Salon Magazine, Kael – under fire from listeners to her early film reviews on KPFA Radio in Berkeley, California – said during a broadcast, "My dear anonymous letter writers, if you think it so easy to be a critic, so difficult to be a poet or a painter, may I suggest you try both? You may discover why there are so few critics, and so many poets."

So let's first be good to ourselves, and patient. This is no easy dilemma we face.

⁸ http://www.smallandelegant-hotels.com/nyc/Algonquin_Round_Table.htm Dorothy Parker was one of the famous critics who, from 1919 to 1929, met regularly for highly publicized discussion and debate at the Algonquin Hotel near Times Square, forming what was called in its heyday the Algonquin Round Table.

⁹ <http://www.salon.com/bc/1999/02/09bc.html> Pauline Kael was from 1967 to 1991 the film critic for the New Yorker. She once wrote, "

¹⁰ <http://www.tombraider.com/> Lara Croft is the digital action-figure heroine of Eidos' series of video games that include the new "Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend" to be released in April.

What's waiting for us out there are fan 'zines, those nattering blogs, bottomless chat rooms. By nature, these frequently are operated and patronized by folks who dislike such establishment figures as mainstream critics. Many have no expertise in the field at all and may be adamantly proud of the fact. They may have little regard and even disdain for our hard-won credentials and glistening curricula vitae.

But that may be just the point.

- I believe that in the future, it's the theatre critics who must lead both theatre artists and their audiences to find each other on the Internet.
- I believe that we must each encourage in our own cities, communities and countries our theatre's Internet Web sites and – as soon as technology and economics make it feasible – actual presentation online of live, staged performance.
- And I believe that we must be prepared to open our work and our process and our hearts to these online amateurs through what Internet aficionados hail as “interactivity.” We need to hold online forums in which readers challenge our critiques, question-and-answer sessions in which students and theatre subscribers can test our dramaturgy, and even real-time lectures in which we assist, as Peter Brook taught us, our theatres and their artists in providing historical, political and aesthetic context for upcoming productions and particularly for new texts and experimental approaches.

Our Georges Banu, in 1990, arranged for me to see Brook's fourth working of *The Tempest* at the Bouffes du Nord in Paris. I've never forgotten its upheaval of tradition and transportation of that great text to another idiom of production, as Brook read his genius into the script we thought we'd all known so well – until then.



Figure 6: Peter Brook's and Micheline Rozan's Bouffes du Nord 'empty space' in Paris. See bouffesdunord.com

What may be the last chance for theatre to position itself among the new media -- and to re-enter the cultural consciousness of wider society -- is a hyper-jump from the most contained to the most liberated performance space. To paraphrase Peter Brook, this could mean going from a Dying Theatre to the most Immediate Theatre imaginable in which a 300-seat house becomes a 3-million seat arena, your local audience becomes a global conclave and your work at last becomes that "oasis" Brook wrote about, in the lives of people we'll never even meet.

The people of my country could be seeing the theatre of your country. And boy, would we be the better for it.

"In the immediate event, there is an unmistakable result," wrote Brook. "This is how I understand a necessary theatre; one in which there is only a practical difference between actor and audience, not a fundamental one."

The practical technology, suddenly, is here.

- How big do we now dare make our Empty Space?
- Can we groom a young cyber-critic – maybe someone here now in this room -- to embrace a planetary audience?
- Can we find the generosity to allow that teeming audience out there to interact with us, as "Netizens" – Net citizens -- will surely demand to do?
- Can we give up our brick-and-mortar constructs and step out onto a stage of such breadth that we can't even see the left wing from the right?

The artist, Brook tells us, "challenges the audience truly when he is the spike in the side of an audience that is determined to challenge itself. He celebrates with an audience most truly when he is the mouthpiece of an audience that has a ground of joy."

I propose that we get onto the information highway like the troubadours we once were, go find those audience members -- and play our art in their towns, on

their computer screens, in the great as-yet untapped empty space of their global imagination.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH