

**ABSTRACT/ Paper Extra congress Seoul**  
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Theatre is permanently changing; so does the world

Going to the theatre 1806, 1906 and 2006 is not the same. Going to the theatre 1506, certainly not. Going to the theatre today in Stockholm, Sweden - where I come from - or Seoul, Korea or Johannesburg South Africa is not the same. Going to the theatre for the first time in your life being a child, quiet different.

Trivial to point out, but necessary. Theatre always changed and still does, living close to the political or religious changes and conventions, quickly reflecting the interests of kings, courts or nations as well as wide audiences. The drama playwrights often formed an avantgarde, pushing forward in public burning questions on freedom, democracy, individual rights the meaning of our lives from Molière to Ibsen to Sarah Kane. The art form, the performing arts, embrace and have in a historical perspective always embraced a multidisciplinary tradition, a glimmering and fascinating toy box of music and pictures, opera and drama, dance and acrobats, shadowtheatre and projections and puppets. What we call cross-over theatre today, could also be seen as a basic characteristic of theatre since, at least, the ancient greeks.

Sad to say, in this pattern of a caleidoskopian artform, the least moving actor to be seen is, very often, the critic. When Isadora Duncan turned the concept of dance up side down and changed the attitude toward an exposed human body, the critics were suspicious. The audience came immediately to watch the sensation, the critics only gradually turned interested. The ambition of being critical, reflecting, sceptical could also can show to be a trap, where the critic is unable to see important new steps in the art form.

Change is not a moral quality, it is a fact

Theatre is an instantly quick artform, not only close to profound intellectual thinking but also to fashion, trends, the most superficial aspects as star cult, gossip, extravagance. Every new aspect of theatre, every change is not in itself good, beautiful, important, high quality. The audience might be thrilled by the sensation of having a famous star actor live in front of you, the critic is supposed to look a bit further. Is this artistically high quality? It is an impossible position to a critic to be for or against modernism as well as romanticism, psychological realism or post-modernism, new-circus or site specific happenings. The critic as an individual might prefer Strindberg to Ibsen, but he or she can not be against one of them or promoting the other.

The critic, with all capacity, knowledge, sensibility he or she can mobilise is there to describe, discuss and evaluate. The critic should, at least try to, follow the balance between tradition and renewal. The research being made on theatricality and the boundaries of theatre is also reflecting the climate within the university and scholar's world, where disciplines are crossing each other and ethnology, sociology and statistics is melting into the studies of the performing arts.

Media and the acceleration of change

Since the middle of the 19th century the printed press in the western world has looked similar to the tabloid or broad sheet newspapers we still see daily. Proportions has changed, but looking to theatre criticism the similarities between today and hundred years ago are

strucking. Very often rather short and journalistic texts, covering every public event locally or nationally. The international outlook is often impressive. The steam engine meant a lot to tour theatre companies as well as make journalists move to watch the world.

The fast speed change of the medias in the late 20th century took everyone by surprise, even the media managers, owners, technicians and, not the least, the journalists. As little as we knew around the 1990-ies about what the media situation would be in fifteen years, as little do we know now when we try to figure out what would happen with the web-site editions of daily papers, the new tv-stations of the daily paper, nowadays becoming one of the different editions of a media factory. The former national broadcasting system of radio and television, public service, is more and more questioned, and a spread of individual blogs are popping up.

To "cover" all public theatrical events is simply not possible. Cultural life is richer, more spread, more varied, more split into many more genres than it used to be for centuries. Music, cinema, television are all over all the time, theatre and performing art today is a thin slice of a big loaf and medias are, and has to be, selective. The general tempi in the medias is presto; printed medias compete with broadcasted and text are shorter, more personal, less judging more guiding.

#### Towards a new criticism

When we recently in the Swedish Association of critics were planning a seminar we wanted to give it the title - towards a new criticism. But when we overlooked the situation we realised that we still see and count the critics in the traditional medias and often are unaware of a parallell world of free papers, independent magazines, websites and blogs, commercial radio channels as well as criticism in weekly papers and other publications. A new criticism is already here, and it is normally performed by young critics. Most of the young theatre critics are women, normally they have long and qualified studies behind them in literature, theatre, art and journalism.

Looked upon this way you can see a flat structure of non prestige writers reaching wide audiences of readers. Prestige is still (for how long?) kept within the printed daily papers, even if the most prestigious names among the critics have difficulties to keep up with the new realities of theatre and new aspects of theatricality. Theatre criticism, as other forms of criticism, always were a part of media and a genre of journalism. It still is. But both medias and the performing arts have changed quicker than the theatre critics; this is our problem.