World Society Onstage: The Globalization of Theatre for Young Audiences in the United States and the Netherlands

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I. Introduction

*The complete human truth is global, and the theatre is the place in which the jigsaw can be pieced together. — Peter Brook*

Globalization has many faces. Like a multi-headed hydra, it has economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions. Like the Greek monster, too, every time our analysis manages to sever one of the heads, more intricate entities spring up, entangling us in the complexity of its very often contradictory phenomena. This image of globalization as a monster might be quite appropriate at times. However, when we engage with the head that deals with culture (the arts in particular), we begin to understand how globalization also refers to a “much wider and deeper human rendezvous.”

One of the basic aspects of human interactions is the exchange of ideas, cultural practices, and values, which is carried out through communicative processes. Sociologist Malcolm Waters suggests that, in our current world, “material exchanges localize, political exchanges internationalize and symbolic exchanges globalize.” Let me give an example of how the cultural/symbolic sphere seems to march a step ahead of the material and political fields in terms of its global presence. In the fall of 2006, the Children’s Theatre Company of Minneapolis (CTC) invited Ish, “Amsterdam’s hottest young troupe,” to present their work at its theatre. Ish’s show offered young American audiences an eclectic collage of beatboxing, roller-skating, break and tap
dancing, Asian martial arts, and acrobatics, glued together with an overarching urban hip-hop aesthetic. The paradox here is that it was a Dutch company that was presenting a historically American performance tradition (hip-hop) to an American audience, and not the other way around. Similarly telling is the fact that other cultural forms (i.e., martial arts) had been added in the adaptation process, turning hip-hop into “something else.”

The example becomes relevant for this study in several ways. Firstly, it highlights how theatre, “the place in which the jigsaw can be pieced together,” can be exploited as a rich source of information to understand changes in our world. It stresses the interconnectedness of cultures, the mobility of artists, and the rapidity of the exchange of ideas so characteristic of the current global zeitgeist. Secondly, it sets the geographical locations of this study, the United States and the Netherlands, where my study abroad programs took place. Thirdly, it reveals the field of human endeavor through which globalization will be looked at: theatre for young audiences.

Because many heads can live at once on the same tentacle of the hydra, we need a comparative approach to highlight the similarities and differences between countries. This strategy optimally produces evidence to support the hypothesis I developed during my research, namely, that theatre plays a central role in the creation of a global consciousness, marked by the realization that we are living in the world as one place, that we are part of a “world society.” Ulrich Beck defines this concept as a society “that is not territorially fixed, not integrated, not exclusive...it means social proximity in spite of geographical distance.”

I will argue that theatre has become one of the fora in which world society is being experienced, socially perceived, and practiced. This is leading to the creation of a distinct world culture characterized not by hermetism nor by homogeneity, but by its hybridity. In order to pursue this idea I begin, in Section II, with a brief explanation of how theatre and power have been intertwined throughout the centuries and how that configuration is changing with the advent of globalization. Societies rest on a catalogue of values. Here I seek to show how theatre plays a crucial role in defining and presenting those values. In this section I also define key terms for this study and outline the limitations that constrain my research and analysis. In Sections III and IV, I present my findings in the U.S. and the Netherlands, respectively. My purpose is to provide evidence structured along four main axes: (1) the recent
developments in theatre for young audiences in those geographical areas of study, (2) the role of theatre for young audiences in education, (3) the involvement of national governments and the private sector in funding these artistic ventures, and (4) interculturalist approaches that reveal the creation of a formally and conceptually hybrid culture. To better illustrate this latter point, I will identify and analyze one specific play/performance in each country that engages with one of the narratives of globalization (i.e., immigration, intercultural communication in multicultural societies). Section V, subdivided into “convergences” and “divergences,” presents a comparative analysis of the U.S. and the Netherlands. This section will be the springboard for a larger discussion in Section VI on the creation of a global culture and a world society consciousness. This section will also allow me to weave in some of the overarching concepts of the study abroad program. The conclusion, in Section VII, moves into personal territory in order to show how this yearlong experience has enhanced my understanding of globalization and changed some of my views.

II. Theatre and Globalization

From an historical perspective, the arts in general and theatre in particular have always played an important role in supporting state and/or religious ideology and strengthening national identity. Such has been the case of nationally sponsored institutions (i.e., Comédie Française, Teatro Real, Pear Garden Beijing opera academy), erected as bastions of national identity. These institutions reified onstage the values of their times and were an important part of the ideological apparatuses of nation-states as defined by Althusser. Simultaneously, there have also been countless forms of subversive, anti-establishment theatre. The Commedia dell’Arte companies of the 16th century provide a case in point. These were the first professional theatre troupes in history, motivated by a desire to make money; also for the first time, they allowed women to act. These companies toured around Europe and performed using different languages and dialects simultaneously. They employed masks, improvisation and physical comedy, and criticized social inequalities by mocking those in power.

What we must notice is that both examples of theatre were fundamental in the making of the worldview of societies. American director Anne Bogart states, “As societies develop, it is the artist who articulates the necessary myths that embody our experience of life and pro-
vide parameters for ethics and values.” Theatre for young audiences, more than any other type of theatre, has the power and the obligation to instill ethical values in the citizens of tomorrow. Concurrently, the “morphing” nature of nation-states and their reconfiguration into a new world order change the relationship between artists and patrons as much as the content and form of theatre plays. One of the main lessons learned during my study abroad program was the idea, expressed by Bourdieu, that a work of art cannot be seen “without relating it to anything other than itself.” It must be related to the works constituting the socio-political milieu in which it was created. This study seeks to better understand that relationship and what those new changes imply.

The most relevant of the main concepts used in this study is theatre for young audiences (TYA). By TYA, I refer to “adults performing plays for young persons under eighteen years of age.” Another crucial notion is that of “interculturalism.” Coined in the 1980s by Richard Schechner, interculturalism refers to the fluid borrowing of theatrical traditions, texts, and acting styles from different parts of the world that are incorporated and translated into the aesthetic canons of other theatrical practices. This practice gives birth to hybrid products, such as klezmer flamenco and Japanese salsa.

The first and most important limitation of this study is the imbalance or difference between the companies studied. In the United States, I looked almost exclusively at CTC, which is one big company/institution with large economic resources and the stability of its long history. In the Netherlands, in contrast, I studied several smaller companies, since there is no equivalent institution. The circumstances affecting the creation of artistic work in the two contexts must perforce be different. The second problem was the almost complete lack of literature dealing specifically with the globalization of the arts and theatre. For this reason I had to use broad cultural theory and apply it to the field of theatre. Finally, I struggled with the challenging reality of the language barrier. In the Netherlands, theatre is obviously performed in Dutch, and not speaking the language considerably limited the amount of plays I could understand.

III. World Awakening: TYA in the United States

During my semester in the United States, I researched and studied the work of the Children’s Theatre Company (CTC). Here I found that (1)
Let me begin by tackling the first point. The CTC was founded in 1965, when The Moppet Players moved into the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. The CTC quickly became “North America’s flagship theatre for young people” through its mesmerizing adaptations of classic children’s literature and storybooks. Nowadays, CTC is among the three largest children’s companies in the world, offering theatre to more than 350,000 young people and families yearly. Their mission statement articulates CTC’s desire “to be an international model for excellence in theatre” through its five key program areas: stage productions, new play development, community partnerships, theatre arts training, and an annual regional tour.

CTC’s evolution over the past forty years is representative of the changes in the field of TYA in the U.S. For instance, the first season (1965-66) offered plays such as Sleeping Beauty and the Pied Piper of Hamelin, classical Western texts with a linear development grounded in a world of imagination and very much disconnected from the real world and the historical events of the time. It was only when artistic director Peter Brosius took over in 1997 that CTC started consistently looking outside the realm of children’s literature proper and “discovered the world.” The new century has seen daring productions, such as The Beggars’ Strike (2002), a play that interrogates the realities of international charity, tourism, and the responsibility of the state to protect its citizens in contemporary West Africa; Dragonwings (2001), about a father and a son who dream of flying beyond their lives as Chinese immigrants; and Esperanza Rising (2006), a production about “Two countries—Two cultures—Two languages” bridged by a young Mexican immigrant in the 1930s who finds herself in a migrant labor camp in the U.S.

These new productions represent the values that have come to the forefront over the past decade in the field of TYA, of which I would highlight three. Firstly, there is the realization that “young people
embody complex realities, imagination and possibility, and have the power to know the world and to transform it.” Secondly, there is the understanding that being “part of a larger world, theatre has a responsibility to illuminate connections, build bridges, and celebrate diverse cultures.”

Thirdly, we see that the idea of theatre as a tool of education becomes crucial. This is the second point I want to explore.

In this respect, CTC offers several education programs. The Theatre Arts Training Program offers the usual courses in acting, dancing, singing, etc. More interesting, however, is the Neighborhood Bridges Program through which the CTC goes into the community. Since 1997, several teams of artists have been imparting weekly two-hour classes for thirty-one weeks to an assigned classroom. Using storytelling and creative drama they help students develop their reading, writing, and public speaking skills while pushing them to think critically about their lives and environment.

All these ambitious objectives require a solid budget, which takes me to my third point of analysis. The program given out to audiences always contains four pages that disclose where the funding for CTC comes from, and reveals the significant disparity between public and private support. The first page is devoted to “corporate, foundation and government partners” who have contributed gifts from $500 to $50,000 and more. American Express, Northwest Airlines, Wells Fargo, and Target are four of the most generous seventy-nine corporate partners mentioned. In terms of foundations, the Bush, Rockefeller, and McKnight Foundations are important donors, among the other forty. Surprisingly, only three governmental partners appear: the Minnesota State Arts Board, the U.S. Department of Education, and the National Endowment for the Arts, all three in the upper two ranks of donations. The next three pages thank approximately six-hundred individuals who have made personal contributions to CTC. Thirty-one advertisements and the logos of the main corporate partners populate the program, which ends with a request for people to consider including CTC in their will.

The strong financial resources of CTC allow the creation of plays with high production values. Many of these performances reveal an interculturalist approach and participate in the creation of a “world society consciousness,” which is the fourth aspect I want to explore. In order to illustrate this concept, I would like to engage in what Clifford Geertz calls a “thick description” of one of the many representative plays performed at CTC. I have chosen Anon(ymus), a blisteringly
contemporary adaptation of Homer’s *Odyssey*, by Naomi Iizuka. In *Anon(ymus)* a multicultural/multicolor cast tells the story of the cunning and wandering Ulysses, embodied here by a teenage refugee boy from a war-torn country in Southeast Asia. The rhythms of a beatboxer mix with the pulsations of taiko, tabla, and gamelan, accompanying Anon on a journey that takes him to the U.S. He is in search of his mother, a modern day Penelope who weaves a shroud in a sweatshop. The mythological creatures that populate Homer’s text become embodied in modern archetypical representations of globalization’s monsters.

These monsters include the impact of conflict in world migration, which underscores how political, social, and economic problems in previously remote parts of the world now affect stable and developed societies. When Anon lands in the U.S. he brings with him nightmares of “bombs, mines like deadly flowers, boys holding M16s.” The problem, as the play stresses, is that these refugees wander around our countries like they were already dead, ignored like invisible ghosts roaming in the emptiness of our de-industrialized urban landscapes. Appropriately, when Mr. Zyclo (a Hannibal Lector-like modern-day Poliphemus) asks Anon his name, he replies, “I am Nobody.” This tragedy of identity (it cannot be called otherwise) is also embodied by the ghost of an undocumented Mexican worker, who died trying to cross the border hidden in a truck. He tries to communicate with Anon (“my name was…Remember Me”) but his story and identity have been erased.

When taught in the classroom through one of CTC’s educational programs, these snapshots of life in America’s multicultural underworld introduce students to “the regional distribution of the human population at local to global scales and its patterns of change [using] the concepts of push and pull factors to explain the general patterns of human movement in the modern era, including international migration and migration within the U.S.”

This *leitmotif* of migration ultimately points to a larger theme explored in *Anon(ymus)*: that of the social and economic inequalities between the global North and the South. The character of Calista, a wealthy daddy’s girl with iPod and digital camera included, falls in love with Anon. When he wants to leave her, she tells him:

> Your ‘real home’ is a dirty little third world shack with no running water. It’s raw sewage in the streets and malaria and cholera and all kinds of
disgusting parasites...I’m just saying how it is. Don’t be mad. Let’s kiss and make up.

Calista’s straightforwardness and frivolity painfully juxtapose the big economic divide between areas of the world. She confronts the audience with those invisible realities. The realities become even more present at the end of the show, when the audience finds in the lobby several display tables with brochures by the Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights (MAHR) about refugees. These brochures ask young audiences to take action and make a difference by highlighting some ways of collaborating with MAHR. In my opinion, these displays offer a compelling way of making theatre an active part of world society and vice-versa. They also strengthen the message of the play, which echoes Seyla Benhabib’s conclusions in *The Rights of Others*, namely, that nowadays we are more interconnected than ever before and that we have a moral responsibility to deal with the problems of others, because ultimately, they are also our problems.

**IV. My House, The World: TYA in the Netherlands**

During my semester in the Netherlands, I identified four important features of the field that are being affected by the processes of globalization: (1) the growing diversity and expansion of the work, (2) the governmental financial support that companies receive, (3) the partnership with educational institutions; and (4) the multidisciplinary, experimental and intercultural approach.

The first point is partly explained by the fact that TYA in the Netherlands has always occupied an important place in the national arts scene. Dennis Meyer states that, “diversity in form, content, style, scope, and audience have become the main characteristics of Dutch TYA.”24 This can be appreciated in the 2006 report by the Theatre Institute Netherlands, which includes thirty-two very heterogeneous TYA companies. To better understand this diversity it is necessary to briefly look at the history of TYA in the Netherlands.

Manon van de Water makes an explicit link between the birth of contemporary Dutch TYA and the politically turbulent period of the late 1960s and 1970s. Concerned with raising political awareness in youth audiences, many plays dealt with themes “not devoid of risqué, such as sexuality, conflict, love, and power relationships in the direct environment of the child.”25 Guided by the most experimental theatre
techniques, companies included qualities intrinsic to children in their work, which resulted in multi-disciplinary theatrical events including other art forms and a move away from text-driven linear-logic plays. Companies like Stella Den Haag and Huis aan de Amstel are exponents of this stylistic hybridity, which exists to this day.

Contemporary TYA continues to delve into issues of profound socio-political concern. For instance, “world news is increasingly the impulse for international co-productions about the life of children in war zones.” Huis aan de Amstel traveled through the Occupied Palestinian Territories, which resulted in the creation of *The Day my Brother Didn’t Come Home*, a searing play about life under military occupation. Similarly, Het Waterhuis has worked with African theatre makers and created performances about child soldiers in Uganda, AIDS in South Africa, and the journey of two refugees from Guinea. These projects reflect the incredible mobility of Dutch theatre artists, some of whom have working relationships in the U.S. Artistic directors Onny Husink of Speeltheater Holland and Moniel Merkx of Theatre Group Max are regular guest directors with CTC in Minneapolis. More importantly, these ventures show that Dutch theatre is concerned with presenting the problems of world society to Dutch audiences, inviting them to reflect about their positions within that society.

Since 1984, the existence of a national TYA festival highlights its vibrant presence in Dutch society. Held in Utrecht, the Tweetakt festival covers “the entire gamut of arts and disciplines for the young, ranging from interactive multi-media theatre to a ‘Little Biennale’ with visual art for children.”

The growing expansion of TYA companies can be partly explained by the influence of government policy, which is the second point I want to explore. Beginning in 1996, the government project, Culture and School, has placed “looking at the arts” as an intrinsic component of the national curriculum in schools. Part of the national “Cultural Policy,” it seeks to invigorate the artistic scene in the Netherlands. As a result, in 2005 the Dutch government spent EUR 1.732 billion on cultural activities. Of this amount, EUR 303 million were destined for the arts.

A direct consequence of this political development has been that cultural institutions (in this case theatre companies) have established an unprecedented relationship with educators and centers of learning. As Anita Twaalfhoven points out, “subsidized youth theatre in the Netherlands embraces some 30 TYA companies.” The fact that there
are around forty theatre schools for youth in the country also speaks to the robust connection between theatre and education.

In terms of plays presented, it is refreshing to see that the activist edge of the first TYA groups has not been lost. One example is *In de Gluria*, a play performed by Hulde and presented at the Tweetakt Festival.35 This play dealt with communication across difference, the most surprising element being that no words were used in the performance. The action took place inside a large rectangular glass house divided into two halves by a wooden fence and a clothesline. The audience had to sit outside, on either side of the house, thus getting to see only one of the gardens created by the division. The first garden had a clean tiled floor with gorgeous plants and a birdcage. It belonged to a sneezing, “autochtonen” middle-aged lady, an “old Dutch” woman who kept throwing used tissue paper over the fence. On the other hand, the floor of the second garden was made of dirt and contained a little shrine of the Virgin Mary. It belonged to a Polish girl dressed in a colorful skirt who was trying to decipher the instructions, in Dutch, of a vacuum cleaner. This division was also expressed by the music. One speaker played loud klezmer music while the other produced calm piano chords. At times both sounds played simultaneously, producing an annoying cacophony that reflected the confrontation of the characters.

Different incidents showed the distrust and even fear of the other that both women felt. However, when the older lady’s bird escapes and is rescued by the Polish girl, an important first step toward understanding takes place. When it starts raining, both women collaborate and help each other take down the clothes hanging on the line.

Although the action was very simple, the themes dealt with in *In de Gluria* are important. Director Frank Wijnstra said that the play wanted to tackle the question:

how do you interact with people when you don’t speak their language? It’s happening in the schools, when a new Moroccan kid comes to class not speaking a lot of Dutch…. We want to show that you don’t need language to communicate and that most misunderstandings between people of different cultures are caused by previous assumptions and stereotypes.36

In terms of the aesthetic approach, the example of Ish that I mentioned in the introduction offers fruitful material for analysis. Despite
its spectacular and fluid hybridity of styles, Ish’s performance raises
an important issue usually associated with interculturalist practice in
the theatre. Patrice Pavis warns that the superficial borrowings of some
art forms “degenerate into an exchange of cultural stereotypes, for
metatheatrical amusement.”37 The jumbling together of kung fu with
break dancing, for instance, did lead to a reduction of both traditions
to flashy entertainment. More importantly, the adaptation process of
all these forms led to an unfortunate disembedding of hip-hop culture
from its historical and social context, one defined by social struggle
against racial and economic oppression. None of this was seen in the
performance by Ish, but before condemning them for this omission
we must look at the larger picture. The surprising contradiction is
that, outside the realm of performance, Ish is perhaps one of the most
socially active companies in the Netherlands.

Wanting to reach youth of all social, economic, and racial back-
grounds, company founder, Marco Gellis, decided to create the Ish
Institute, where participants are trained in all the different disciplines
used by Ish.38 In the belief that theatre can be a powerful tool for
change, Ish has organized exchanges with youth from the Netherlands
and Senegal, Morocco, and Ethiopia. A visit to India with youngsters
from Utrecht has been scheduled as well.39 Such exchanges “create an
opportunity to discuss differences in the way of thinking and the way
of life between two cultures which may open the way for [the partici-
pants] to come to new initiatives.”40 Simultaneously, the Ish Institute
provides a forum in which multicultural tensions in the Netherlands
can be talked about and changed through the creative work of youth
from all backgrounds.

V. Analysis

A. Convergences

TYA in the United States and the Netherlands presents major simi-
larities on three fronts: (1) the topics dealt with in the plays, (2) the
educational component of their activities, and (3) the set of values dis-
seminated. Theatre companies in both countries are fearlessly engag-
ing with some of the most relevant, socially sensitive, and urgent issues
affecting our world. They do so with a desire to raise awareness among
youngsters and sometimes with a clear activist agenda. An anthology
of plays performed by CTC, Huis aan de Amstel, and Het Waterhuis,
for instance, could be a perfect reading companion to the syllabus of our Globalization and Inequality class while at Maastricht, since the plays focus on most of the topics studied, including international migration, conflict, colonialism, diseases of poverty, and environmental sustainability. Both countries are doing artistic work of generally high quality. Companies in both countries do not treat the child as a passive, naïve entity who must be protected and secluded in a disconnected world of fairy tales and rosy fantasy. Plays like Anon(ymous) or The Day my Brother Didn’t Come Home, while often using the narrative structure of children’s tales, confront young audiences with stories of children around the world who have to overcome real dangers, such as war, slavery in a sweatshop, or child soldiering. These dangers are more monstrous than any of the witches, wizards, or wolves that populate the fictional universes of the Grimm brothers or schmaltzy Disney. Many TYA artists in these countries daringly use contemporary dilemmas as a source of dramatic material in order to show young audiences the realities of the phenomenon that John Tomlinson appropriately calls “complex connectivity.” More saliently, I believe that this choice of material creates a social proximity between children in the audiences and the fictional embodiments of children in other parts of the world. This proximity allows events and contexts in geographically distant parts of the world to enter the consciousness of the child at a local level. In fact, social proximity has to be understood “in terms of a transformation of practice and experience which is felt actually within localities.” Theatre becomes an efficient vehicle to achieve that goal.

Educational activities linked to TYA also delve into the creation of a world consciousness. These ventures abound in the two countries and are often guided by cosmopolitan values. In the Netherlands, the reform of the national Cultural Policy has pushed many TYA companies without a venue to use the schools as a primary site for performance. Like CTC, the Dutch Het Lab trains youth and offers a space for artistic experimentation. Very often the educational component transcends the mere transmission of strictly theatrical skills and seeks to educate youth holistically. For example, the Ish Institute features courses in nutrition and public speaking. Similarly, CTC conceives each of its productions as an original vehicle to support the efforts of teachers in the classroom. Most plays presented at CTC come with a Study Guide that teachers can request for free. This guide shows which Minnesota Academic Standards the play addresses. For instance, the guide to The Lost Children of Sudan focuses on the topic of Government and Citizen-
ship by having students “describe how governments interact in world affairs [and] explain reasons for conflict among nation states.” On the Dutch side, the international projects that Ish is leading also contribute to create social (and geographical) proximity among world youth, in this case by bringing theatre to youth in less developed countries.

The conjunction of the topics explored and the educational efforts of TYA artists in both countries lead to the creation of similar sets of values. Plays in both countries offer a message of tolerance, compassion, and cosmopolitanism in which children are put at the center of a complex and fast-changing world. TYA becomes the actualization of what anthropologist Victor Turner calls *communitas*, “a direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities [which] is the foundation of community cohesiveness.” TYA becomes the intersection of social impulses where “world society” is presented, experienced, interrogated, and discussed. It offers the audience the tools to engage with world society and effect change.

B. Divergences

“Dutch theatre makers regard working in the technically well-equipped American youth theatres as a challenge, and the subject matter of Dutch youth theatre is likewise a challenge for Americans,” states Twaalfhoven. This observation reveals some of the differences between the two countries, particularly in the realm of funding. Other differences explored in this section deal with the scope of multiculturalism in productions and the mobility of artists.

CTC has an institutional character and relies mainly on private funding. As a result, it has a budget substantially larger than any of the Dutch companies I studied. CTC also has a permanent venue fully equipped with the most advanced technology at the Minneapolis Institute of Art. These conditions, and the large number of designers, stage managers, and others who collaborate, allow CTC’s productions to meet the highest standards of quality, which does not always happen on the other side of the Atlantic. There the economic circumstances are radically different. The dependency on government subsidies leads to touring and school performance obligations. This means that, “TYA companies seldom get the chance to make ‘large theatre’ performances that exceed the usual three to five actors per show.”

Another difference has to do with the scope of multiculturalism in productions. As Twaalfhoven points out, in large Dutch cities, “more
than half of the young people are of foreign origin, but unlike in the auditoriums this wasn’t always reflected onstage.” In the work of CTC this has not been the case since many productions (i.e., Sophocles’s _Antigone_ with an all African-American cast, and _Anon(ymous)_ ) find their artistic strength in the diversity of their actors. The radically different approaches to multiculturalism on both sides of the Atlantic might explain this phenomenon. Fortunately, over the past years, “the theatrical achievements of other cultures [in the Netherlands have] won their place, and crossovers are now increasingly seen in the theatre between the many different cultures that the country is home to.” Such is the example of groups like Dox, Made in da Shade, Ish, and Dans-theater Aya.

The final crucial difference that I want to address refers to the degree of mobility of TYA artists. In this, the Dutch have a clear advantage over their American counterparts, because all Dutch TYA companies tour. CTC tours some of its shows regionally, but in a very limited way. More crucially, Dutch artists frequently travel internationally to work with other companies or present their own work. CTC’s institutional character, on the other hand, dictates the limited mobility of artists, but it partially tries to solve this by inviting international companies to perform in its theatre.

**VI. Towards a Global Culture**

The evidence presented in the two preceding sections allows me now to contribute to one of the most recurrent debates on globalization: that of the creation of a global culture. Because this is a persistent quandary repeatedly raised during my study abroad programs, I have chosen it to put my findings in the field of TYA in global perspective.

One of the major charges against globalization is that it threatens cultural diversity through the imposition of a homogeneous culture based on certain Western values, such as “consumerist universalism.” This idea of cultural synchronization (popularly known as McDonaldization), however, represents only one of three paradigms about global culture.

An alternative to the McDonaldization thesis is that of cultural differentialism. Samuel Huntington best defends this notion through his concept of “clash of civilizations,” which presents “civilizational spheres as tectonic plates at whose fault lines conflict, no longer subsumed under ideology, is increasingly likely.” Huntington’s undoubt-
edly important contribution has been to present culture as a significant factor in international relations. Unfortunately, his analysis foments a new politics of containment based on the distrust generated by insurmountable cultural differences, a circumstance that the third paradigm dismisses.

Whereas Huntington understands cultures as hermetic spheres, the cultural hybridization thesis, the third paradigm, perceives culture as a locus of ongoing mixing and syncretism of symbols, values, and cultural practices. This is exactly what is happening in the field of TYA, where refugee stories meet Homer and kung fu greets break dancing. The concept of intercultural performance closely resembles the definition of hybridization given by Rowe and Schelling as “the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices.” This creates the aesthetic basis of theatre groups like Ish and of some productions at CTC. More interestingly, the “mixing” steps out of the fictional realm and takes place in reality. Ish, for instance, has been called a “United Nations on wheels,” due to the diverse national and ethnic origins of its components.

The problem with the “global mélange” or hybridity thesis is that it might obscure “the asymmetry and unevenness in the process and the elements of mixing.” Some of the most outspoken critics of interculturalist performance see interculturalism as “an ethnocentric strategy of Western culture to conquer alien symbolic goods by submitting them to a dominant codification.” This might result in a dislocation of performing traditions from their cultural milieu, which leads to the loss of original meaning as the cultural practice is placed in quotation marks. However, this view is somewhat reductionist. More often than not, the performance traditions incorporated into a larger piece (I am thinking now about the work of Ish) give birth to a hybrid product created at the intersection of two cultures and two theatrical forms, which becomes infused with a new meaning in the act of mixing.

An important caveat is that all three paradigms described above are taking place simultaneously in different contexts, in different minds, and to different extents. The value of the last one, however, is that it presents hybridization as “an antidote to the cultural differentialism of racial and nationalist doctrines because it takes as its point of departure precisely those experiences that have been banished, marginalized, tabooed in cultural differentialism.” Hybridization, despite its limitations, offers a compelling and broad basis for the creation of a world society. Theatre, in turn, offers the physical and fictional place
where world society becomes actualized. Theatre is capable of this more than any other art form because its defining principle is that of the immediacy and live nature of performance. A dialogue between performer and audience creates, for the span of the performance, a real mental and physical landscape where time and space, life experience, and culture are collapsed and articulated together as they are experienced simultaneously by everyone in attendance. This truly “human rendezvous” we call theatre has the power and duty to present and also to create the society in which we live.

As discussed in the second section, theatre has historically played a powerful role in pushing people to perform, as Benedict Anderson would put it, the necessary “acts of imagination” to form their consciousness about the society they lived in. That function is even more relevant today, but nation-states perform less of a role in defining those values. Therefore, I find that the archetype of the itinerant and mor-dant Commedia dell’Arte actor becomes useful in explaining profound trends in the contemporary globalized theatre scene. The mobility of artists in the Netherlands and the sponsorship of the private sector in the U.S. mean that the values put forth in performance are being defined more polyphonically than ever before. Artists have a much greater say in defining those values. It is gratifying to see that in the field of TYA these values seek to excite in young audiences the “empathy” that philosopher Peter Singer deems crucial to deal with the dangers of globalization. Singer’s proposal “to make ‘one world’ a moral standard” has found receptive ears in TYA artists. This can clearly be seen as the motivation behind the choice of dramatic material in both Dutch and U.S. TYA and in initiatives like CTC’s partnership with Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights.

TYA in both countries is educating children to become responsible citizens who are aware of the world they live in and its problems, and regard children from other countries as fellow citizens. Furthermore, TYA in the Netherlands and the U.S. represents a “horizon within which capital, culture and politics merrily come together to roam beyond the regulatory power of the nation state.” This is Beck’s definition of world society and it provides TYA artists with a useful model for which to strive.
VII. Conclusion

The idea that theatre plays a central role in the creation of a global consciousness was the motivation behind this project. My study of TYA in the Netherlands and the United States has shown that this occurs to a large extent and that a global culture characterized by its hybridity and syncretism is becoming predominant. This yearlong experience, however, has been more than just an academic endeavor. It has taught me a lot about the world we live in but it has also given me important insights that will be useful in my career as a theatre artist.

Firstly, to put it in the language of the January seminar, I have learned much about the interplay between “agency” and “structure.” An institutional setting, such as CTC, provides invaluable structural support to artistic ventures but it can limit the mobility of artists. On the other hand, the example of daring entrepreneurs such as Marco Gellis, founder of Ish, suggests that a resourceful imagination and tenacity can exert incredible power. For me, it seems that an artist has to strike a balance between both goals to guarantee the success of his or her projects.

Secondly, I have learned a substantial amount about the intricacies of funding. Now I feel much more receptive to the idea of private sponsorship as long as it does not compromise artistic freedom. It seems that a combination of both public and private capital leads to more stable companies who can realize productions of higher quality; at least that is the case with CTC and Ish (who was sponsored by Red Bull, MTV, United Airlines, and the Municipality of Amsterdam in their tour of the U.S.). Similarly, I started perceiving capitalism not solely as homogenizing but also as a diversifying force, in the sense that the theatrical enterprises heavily funded by corporations studied here still had the ability to become subversive cultural crossroads where diversity could thrive.

Thirdly, I have become much more aware of the importance of TYA in contemporary society. When I was designing my project proposal a year ago I did not suspect that I would find such exciting work being done for young audiences. The educational component of TYA was a very pleasant surprise and reminded me that one of theatre’s *raisons d’être* is to guide society and prepare it to deal with the challenges it faces. I am also more aware of the urgent need for a solid and perceptive corpus of literature dealing with the phenomenon of globalization and the arts, which, as of now, is missing from the shelves of university
libraries and online stores. This literature should deal with the artistic, aesthetic, social, and human aspects that come together in any work of art.

In terms of the human aspect of theatre, Rustom Bharucha reminds us that, “theatre needs to be in ceaseless contact with the realities of the world and the inner necessities of our lives. If theatre changes the world, nothing could be better, but [more important is the] change of our own lives through theatre.” The globalization of theatre is a human undertaking, affecting the lives of individuals. Children in Europe, the United States, and the countries where exchange programs like the one organized by Ish take place are given a window into world society and are empowered to enact change. This is the human face of globalization, a revolutionary phenomenon in and of itself.

Notes
4. I had the chance to attend a performance of Ish on August 31, 2006, at Children’s Theatre Company.
5. In fact, I am pursuing this study in order to match my personal passion for theatre with an intellectual and academic interest in understanding the world and the processes that shape it, in the hope of obtaining a better understanding of how “theatre” and “world” interact with each other.
12. Another circumstance that can be considered, if not a limitation, at least a determining factor is the fact that both countries of study fall in what we call the global North, which results in a series of social and economic similarities. For instance, both countries are democratic, multicultural societies; both are recipients of immigration and have high living standards. The practices analyzed here might be radically different in countries with a dissimilar socioeconomic and cultural background.

14. Van Tassel.
15. Children’s Theatre Company.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
19. The program used was the one given out in November 2007 during the performances of Antigone directed by Greg Banks.
20. Private individual donors are classified in nine categories: from “Stars” like California Senator Dianne Feinstein (donations of $15,000 and above) to the more modest “Advocates” (contributions up to $499).
21. Directed by Peter C. Brosius; stage managed by Jenny R. Friend; scenic design by Kate Edmunds; costume design by Christal Weatherly; lighting design by Geoff Korf. Performed in the newly inaugurated Cargill Stage, 4-30 April 2006.
22. Direct quotations from the play are based on the notes I took during the performance.
26. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
31. Ibid., p. 218.
33. Ibid.
34. Twaalfhoven, p. 214


39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.


42. Ibid., p. 9.

43. Twaalfhoven, p. 214.


45. Lost Children of Sudan.


47. Twaalfhoven, p. 214.

48. This facility was recently expanded with the opening of the Cargill Stage, a smaller black-box venue for more experimental work, in the Fall of 2005.


50. Ibid., p. 217.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., p. 214.

53. The advantage of the Netherlands in this respect is due to the country’s small size, dense population, and large public transport network, features lacking in the broad expanses of the American Midwest.


55. Pieterse, p. 43.


57. Children’s Theatre Company.

58. Pieterse, p. 53.

59. Pavis, p. 4.


63. Pieterse, p. 52.


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