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Introduction: Theatrical Trade Routes

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The notion of theatre as trade is a familiar one to theatre historians. Since the early modern period theatre has been carried out as a form of commercial enterprise (Henke and Nicholson, 2008). Although the operation of European theatre was until the middle of the nineteenth century strictly regulated in most countries, the operators of theatres regarded their activity as trade rather than art (although claims to the latter could often be employed to good strategic purpose). From the mid-nineteenth century on, however, the theatrical trade expands exponentially throughout Europe and the USA, and in the wake of colonial empires into most other parts of the then known world. As the colonies expanded, and the settler populations grew, so too did the demand for theatrical entertainment of many kinds. In Spanish America the trade begins earlier, as settler populations were well established by the end of the eighteenth century. Whatever the temporal coordinates, the trade was itself very much a two-way traffic, as ships bearing theatrical troupes from London, Paris, Lisbon or Madrid, often returned carrying animals and native peoples contracted to appear in a variety of entertainment and pseudoscientific formats.

Bringing together the two concepts 'trade' and 'routes' carries an interesting tautological resonance because the term 'trade' has its etymological roots in the Middle Low German word *trade* meaning a track or a passage. The word entered the English

language probably in the fourteenth century via Hanseatic ‘traders’ where, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it denoted a nautical term for the ‘course or track’ of a ship. It is not until the sixteenth century that the contemporary understanding of trade as a profession or commerce with its concomitant verb form became established. ‘To trade’ meant therefore almost invariably to move from one place to another along established, and sometimes lesser known, ‘trades’, to enable commerce to take place. Following this historical etymology ‘theatrical trade routes’ emerge roughly congruent to the semantic shift of the word ‘trade’ as it comes to designate a livelihood or form commerce rather than the spatial trajectory along which it is conducted.

Although the itinerant, trading theatre seems to emerge in the sixteenth century in Europe it remained by and large restricted to that continent. The purpose of this volume is to map (even quite literally), characterize and theorize this theatrical traffic beyond the confines of the Europe as it grew in intensity and density after the middle of the nineteenth century and quite literally ‘globalized’. Although the bulk of the traffic was commercial in orientation, parallel to it emerged another concept of theatre that we more closely associate with modernism or even the avant-garde. Amongst colonists and local elites small groups of theatre artists sprang up and a public sphere formed dedicated to creating a new form of theatre, whether spoken, sung or danced, that was carried by artistic and ideological imperatives usually focused on questions of national identity. The papers collected here deal with a diversity of such performance genres ranging from single actor tours through to full-scale operatic productions, from dance troupes to wartime entertainers who moved between continents.

The processes outlined here are complex, intertwined and resist easy categorization, especially in terms of theatrical periodization. While recognizing there are many alternatives, in the following articles recommend one possible beginning, a starting point from which to view the following developments. Many global historians regard the period between 1850 and 1914 as a first phase or age of globalization in as much as it evinces many parallels with current uses of the term.¹ The combination of technological advancements such as the invention of the telegraph, the introduction of steamships and the growing networks of colonial trading posts and administrative centres all combined to create the prerequisites for globalization in almost the present sense. This feeling of being interconnected with the globe and its peoples was forcefully and also somewhat wistfully expressed by John Maynard Keynes in his famous account of the Treaty of Versailles, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, published in 1919, where he describes the situation on the eve of the First World War:

The inhabitant of London could order by telephone, sipping his morning tea in bed, the various products of the whole earth, in such quantity as he might see fit, and reasonably expect their early delivery upon his doorstep; he could at the same moment and by the same means adventure his wealth in the natural resources and new enterprises of any quarter of the world, and share, without exertion or even trouble, in their prospective fruits and advantages; (...) The projects and politics of militarism and imperialism, of racial and cultural rivalries, of monopolies, restrictions, and exclusion, which were to play the serpent to this paradise, were little more than the amusements of his daily newspaper, and appeared to exercise

almost no influence at all on the ordinary course of social and economic life, the internationalization of which was nearly complete in practice (Keynes, 1919, p. 9).

While the privileged London ‘inhabitant’ bears close resemblance to the author himself, the situation he describes is more general. The nearly complete ‘internationalization’, which Keynes observes from economic and social perspectives (he notes for instance that goods and foodstuffs were never so cheap as in the period preceding World War I), also had an impact on theatre, as it too began to internationalize or ‘globalize’ on an unprecedented scale. By the mid-1920s there were 2,499 permanent theatres in Europe alone. In the period post-dating 1890 over 1,500 theatres were built, most of them before 1914 (Hoffmann, 1966, p. 9). This pattern was repeated throughout many of the former and existing colonial empires, particularly in South-East Asia and Latin America. In addition to the construction of permanent theatre spaces, the same period sees a massive expansion of theatrical touring, which began to be organized on an industrial scale and brought European theatre to all those parts of the globe that could be reached by steamship or rail.

It is clear from the title that investigation of this phenomenon is primarily, at least initially, spatial in orientation. The focus on ‘routes’ directs our attention to connections between nodal points. We can probably safely assume that these nodal points emanated from metropolitan centres, especially those that functioned as imperial capital cities. We know from research into shipping routes, submarine telegraph trajectories, and later telephone lines, that very specific lines of communication were established and maintained primarily to service either the lines themselves or colonial towns and cities. One working hypothesis is that the theatrical trade made use of these existing routes and provided a kind of cultural superstructure to enhance living conditions in what were often entirely commercial, administrative and military centres. But it is equally important to track less obvious trajectories and routes, which probably established themselves between colonial centres, and not just between the metropolitan centre and the periphery. Preliminary research suggests that by the early twentieth century colonial centres became themselves nodal points connecting centres within a region (Frost, 2004) and some regions had trading networks that predated colonial times (Cohen, 2006).

Commodification of theatre

In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations.²

With great prescience the authors of the above quoted Communist Manifesto observed an emerging inter-dependence of nations and multi-directional intercourse built around satisfying wants that transcended material commodities. This mid-nineteenth century globalization included also ‘intellectual creations’ leading ultimately, they supposed, to the emergence of a ‘world literature’. Although Marx and Engels probably did not have theatre in mind their prediction proved accurate. Touring troupes carried theatre in its many genres to new markets and created a demand for a product that had often never been seen before in this form, although in many places other forms such as shadow plays,

Chinese opera and temple dances were of course very familiar. While touring European and American troupes did not introduce theatre per se, they did offer a new and apparently highly attractive variation of the medium. Its stories, its illusionistic scenery and special combination of spoken word, music and dance all combined to provide a new technology to accompany the telegraph, the rail and the steamship, and in fact was dependent on the latter.

Building on Tracy E. Davis's work (2000) that investigates the application of industrialisation and the dynamics of capitalist production to the theatre in nineteenth century Britain, we can ask how the new markets provided by the colonies throughout the world were harnessed by theatrical troupes and enterprises. Whether we follow the orthodox Marxist-Leninist interpretation of imperialism as a necessity for the investment of surplus capital, or more recent research which tends to focus on questions of self-regulating 'networks' and 'webs' (Potter, 2007), in the English-speaking world at least there seems little doubt that the commercial theatre model of the late nineteenth century saw in the colonies new markets and potential for profit maximisation.

If we are to understand the nature and extent of theatre on a global scale as it was produced and consumed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we have to accept that it was almost indistinguishable from other forms of economic activity designed to produce, transport and sell products on a consumer market. Following the research paradigm of consumption studies, we could define this approach by understanding consumption to be 'a cultural organization of economic transactions, legal relations, social institutions, and ideological apparatuses that continually redrew the boundaries between social classes, between public and private life, between high art and low, and between men and women.' What Bermingham and Brewer (1995, p. 15) posit for the period 1600-1800 in Great Britain pertains even more so to the period of high empire 1860-1939 and the 'first age of globalization' (Ibid.). This period saw a huge outflow of theatrical productions from metropolitan centres that brought the full gamut of performance genres from vaudeville acts to high opera to numerous towns and cities around the globe. In this economy of desire and gratification theatre was predicated on mobility and transience for its economic survival, and promised palpable connection with the metropolitan centres and ways of life. Theatre was thus a part of circulating consumer products, which need to be considered within a research paradigm that balances economic with ideological and aesthetic imperatives.

Closely related to or indeed indivisible from the capitalist model are the interrelated notions of commodification and commodity chains. If we understand the latter as Hopkins and Wallerstein suggest, as 'a network of labor and production processes whose end result is a finished commodity', then through the study of such networks, as they also suggest, 'one can monitor the constant development and transformation of the world-economy's production system' (Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1994, p. 17). Although theatre and performance are far from their minds, we can still observe the same dynamics at work. A 'commodification paradigm' (Balme, 2005) can be applied to theatre history as a form of micro-analysis whereby persons, plays and productions can be followed as they move through time and space creating new forms of consumption. Commodification is thus not just a profit maximisation process, which turns a putative 'critical spectator' into a consumer, but is closely linked to ideological imperatives and discourses that inform it

and that it in turn forms. It can be investigated from diachronic, ideological and aesthetic perspectives. As Shannon Steen argues in her contribution, theatrical commodity chains did not just stretch from colonial centre to colonized periphery but were in fact multi-sited and structured around the movement of peoples in diasporic networks. They are always interconnected with other commodities. In the case of Chinese Opera for example which extended throughout South East Asia and around the Pacific Rim (Lei, 2006), the theatrical trade routes were set up to help Chinese migrants survive culturally and socially and were built on the interaction between three commodities: tea, opium, and gold.

There are good conceptual reasons for regarding theatre in terms of consumption and commodification. It's much vaunted ephemerality and seductive power place it much closer to consumables such as tea and opium than to more durable commodities like gold. To trade in the theatre, especially in distant markets far from the point of metropolitan origin, required considerable investment in knowledge, nerves and sheer entrepreneurial *chutzpa*. The important point is, however, that the theatrical trade was not independent or in some way transcendent of the material economy but inextricably implicated in it.

Circulation and mobility

As Ulf Hannerz notes in *Transnational Connections*: 'People, meanings, and meaningful forms which travel fit badly with what have been conventional units of social and cultural thought' (Hannerz, 1996, p. 20). This has no doubt to do with the fact that the 'container' of the nation-state, as Ulrich Beck (2006) has argued, still continues to dominate research paradigms in the humanities and social sciences. Recent interest in questions of circulation and mobility are to be understood as an attempt to overcome these old patterns and restrictions. Stephen Greenblatt's manifesto on cultural mobility (Greenblatt, 2010) is a clear signal to engage in research into how the movement of ideas, peoples and institutions have influenced history. Greenblatt's call is to revise the still virulent legacy of nation-state-based cultural history by recognizing mobility and cultural exchange as the norm and not the derivative form: 'The problem is that the established analytical tools have taken for granted the stability of cultures, or at least have assumed that in their original or natural state, before they are disrupted or contaminated, cultures are properly rooted in the rich soil of blood and land and that they are virtually motionless.' (Ibid. p. 3)

It takes therefore little effort to recognise the importance of circulation and the ability; the question is rather how we can design research questions that go beyond just tracing movement (although this must also be done) and perhaps see circulation as a cultural form or structure *sui generis*. In an influential article Lee and Li Puma have made such a suggestion: 'circulation is a cultural process with its own forms of abstraction, evaluation, and constraint, which are created by the interactions between specific types of circulating forms and the interpretive communities built around them. It is in these structured circulations that we identify cultures of circulation' (Lee and LiPuma, 2002, p. 192). They argue that it is necessary to overcome an established dichotomy that sees performativity as the mode in which meaning is created 'whereas circulation and exchange have been seen as processes that *transmit* meanings, rather than as constitutive acts in themselves'

(Ibid.). By linking performativity with circulation it might be possible to arrive at a more legible and productive *cultural* account of economic, and we should add, theatrical processes.

If we interconnect theatrical performance (a quintessential cultural act) with trade (traditionally the prototypical form of economic exchange) we can re-examine the activities of touring troupes, itinerant performers, brokers and managers in the light of current forms of globalization as well as in the context of the historical period of early globalization. In the framework of theatrical trade routes, it is useful to see the circulation of theatre and performance not just as a relationship between two nodal points – points of origin and arrival – but also as a phenomenon *sui generis*. The circulating performance is no doubt subject to different codes and modes of reception than the one located within an established cultural matrix. Recent conflicts over the ‘resettlement’ of Roma have highlighted once again how deeply unsettling cultural practices of mobility and nomadism remain. The provocation and attraction of the ‘travelling circus’, once proverbial, is now receding from our cultural memory, but in the period we are looking at, such practices were still highly controversial. As we will be looking at many different cultural and regional contexts, it is rewarding to examine how notions of mobility, which encompass movement from and to inhabited cultural spaces, impacted.

Brokers and performers

The somewhat abstract concepts adumbrated above are ultimately profitless without examining the human ingenuity required to execute these processes. While there has been some work done tracking prominent performers and troupes such as Fanny Elssler, Sarah Bernhardt, Adelaide Ristori or the Meininger, a largely neglected area of activity pertains to the managers and impresarios who organized, marketed and executed the theatrical trade. Although most tended to focus on one country or even city such as the Shubert Bros in New York, J.C. Williamson in Australia, or I. W. Schlesinger in South Africa, their activities were inevitably transnational as they ceaselessly traversed the oceans between metropolitan centre and colonial periphery recruiting performers and productions. Their activities have been largely ignored by theatre historians because their talents were more focused on making money than art.³ Yet without them, the theatre trade would have remained largely the domain of individual performers and enterprising local promoters. It would certainly never have attained the scale it did, complete with all the trappings and tactics of monopoly capitalism. To call Williamson, the Shuberts or Schlesinger ‘managers’ or impresarios is to understate the scale of their operations, which became almost complete monopolies, owning and leasing all vertical levels of theatrical distribution from production to ownership of buildings. While all three had a firm national base from which they conducted their transnational operations, Maurice E. Bandmann, who is studied by Christopher Balme in this special issue, constitutes a new type of ‘global’ theatre entrepreneur. Bandmann, born in New York in 1872 as the son of German-Jewish Shakespearian actor, Daniel Bandmann, grew up in England and Germany, but built a theatrical empire between 1900 and 1922 from a headquarters based in Calcutta. Bandmann traded in theatre along a route that stretched from Gibraltar to Yokohama. Although his product was drawn chiefly from London and his

audiences were in the first instance Europeans, his enterprise depended economically on attracting audiences from multiple cultural backgrounds. Bandmann and his ilk can thus be regarded as cultural brokers in that they guaranteed for the first time an almost unbroken supply of theatre as opposed to the prevailing model of intermittent visits from itinerant performers.

Although we tend not to think of mobility in connection with institutions – in fact the latter would appear to be semantically antithetical to the former –, an important but largely under-researched corollary of the theatre trade is the relocation of theatre as an institution. Whether in the form of academies, state-supported theatres or educational initiatives, we need to ask if there were direct or indirect connections between the movement of performances and performers during the high imperial/capitalist phase and the later post-independence initiatives to institutionalise this form of entertainment. The construction of buildings alone did not guarantee institutionalization as some of the examples in this volume illustrate. If the buildings survived at all, then mostly as cinemas. Only recently have local authorities and patrons begun to reinvest in the legacy of turn of the century theatre construction. It is especially necessary to trace as precisely as possible the paths of informational exchange, the migration of ‘experts’, the circulation of ideas, traditions, and aesthetic norms that gradually led to the implementation of globally comparable institutions.

Spheres, Routes and Contact Zones

Mobility, circulation and theatrical trading routes demand hubs where theatrical commodities are exchanged. If we assume that theatrical trade routes are connected by nodal points emanating from the metropolitan centres, then cities, theatrical venues and urban institutions can be considered hubs or contact zones for cultural entanglements where cultural goods and ideas are traded. Contact zones refer ‘to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today’ (Pratt, 1991). Seen from a global historical perspective, the term contact zone can help us to pinpoint real and virtual social spaces where different objects, goods, people, desires, conventions, meet and clash, where various social classes and patrons from different regions come together, and where conventional boundaries (economic, cultural, social) might be crossed. Contact zones and hubs were places where tradition and modernization as well as different regimes (scopic, economic, social, aesthetic) converged. The papers collected here address contact zones of various kinds such as theatres in colonial cities and European centres, world fairs (gathering international artists and creating exotic imaginaries), hotels and ships (temporarily bringing together diplomats, artists, and theatrical managers), department stores (creating visual spectacles and offering worldwide goods).

The articles collected here address some of these complex and for the most part under-researched questions. The editors hope that these contributions will give rise to more research on these issues, which continue to impinge on the present.

Endnotes

- ¹ From an economic perspective, see for example Mishkin (2006, pp. 2-3): 'The current Age of Globalization is the second great wave of globalization of international trade and capital flows. The first occurred from 1870 to 1914, when international trade grew at 4% annually, rising from 10% of global output (measured as *gross domestic product* or GDP) in 1870 to over 20% in 1914, while international flows of capital grew annually at 4.8% and increased from 7% of GDP in 1870 to close to 20% in 1914. ... This first wave of globalization was accompanied by unprecedented prosperity. Economic growth was high: from 1870 to 1914, world GDP per person grew at an annual rate of 1.3%, while from 1820 to 1870 it grew at the much smaller rate of 0.53%.'
- ² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei [Manifesto of the Communist Party]*. February 1848.
- ³ A notable exception is Marlis Schweitzer (2012 and 2015) who has examined the mobility and activities of the impresario Charles Frohmann.

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