

*Call for papers*

**TROUPES, COLLECTIFS, COMPAGNIES  
ENJEUX SOCIO-ESTHETIQUES DES MODES D'ORGANISATION ET DE  
CREATION DANS LE SPECTACLE VIVANT**

**TROUPES, COLLECTIVES, COMPANIES  
THE SOCIO-AESTHETIC ISSUES OF THE MODES OF ORGANIZATION AND  
CREATION IN THE PERFORMING ARTS  
(theater, dance, circus, street theater, performance)**

**International conference**

**Université Lumière-Lyon 2 ; Université Stendhal-Grenoble 3**  
Lyon and Valence (France), April 1-2-3, 2015

Organized by Bérénice Hamidi-Kim (Université Lyon 2)  
and Séverine Ruset (Université de Grenoble)

**Introduction**

This conference<sup>1</sup> project was born out of three observations: the first one arose from research, and the other two stemmed from the state of the art. The first observation is the topicality, or even the urgency, of the issue of the forms taken by the organization of artistic work within performing arts companies in France today, in a context where it is clear to all professional actors in the sector that the existing mode of operation is currently in a state of unprecedented weakness. Indeed, the already long-standing ideological (post-1968) crisis of the “public theater’s”<sup>2</sup> foundations, and particularly that of the connection between aesthetic requirements and the democratization of audiences, is now coupled with a crisis in the institutional framework resulting both from the economic crisis and the entrepreneurial transformations of the republican State. Appeals to rework the performing arts economic structure are multiplying and the current dominant models, be they the methods of financing or those of operating organizations in the performing arts, are increasingly called into question. By extending Pierre-Michel Menger’s observation about intermittence<sup>3</sup> to companies, the conference will explore the ambivalent nature of the performing arts world, which can be equally analyzed as a counter-model or as the cutting edge of capitalist labor organization. The reconfigurations of creative work that certain companies have undertaken can thus sometimes proceed from concerns to optimize their productivity in the highly competitive and flexible labor and product market, which is governed by the rules of the current capitalist “per team and per project”<sup>4</sup> organization, but can also avail

---

<sup>1</sup> This event will close the 2013-2015 research program “*‘Nouvelles’ organisations du travail en compagnie: quelles possibilités pour le spectacle vivant?*” carried out by Séverine Ruset (University Stendhal-Grenoble 3) and Bérénice Hamidi-Kim (University Louis Lumière-Lyon 2), and financed by the Rhone-Alpes region under the Arc 5.

<sup>2</sup> See Bérénice Hamidi-Kim, *Les Cités du théâtre politique en France depuis 1989*, preface by Luc Boltanski, Montpellier, Entretiens, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre-Michel Menger, *Portrait de l'artiste en travailleur. Métamorphoses du capitalisme*, La République des idées, Seuil, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *Le Nouvel Esprit du capitalisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1999.

themselves of an artistic or political ideal of cooperation specific to artistic work which is considered the archetype of the emancipated and emancipating free labor that Marx advocated.

The second observation is that of a lack of synthesis which would go beyond national frameworks and build a trans-historical analysis of organization models. The performing arts companies have so far mostly been the subject of dispersed case studies. “*Territoires et ressources des compagnies de spectacle vivant*”, the socio-economic investigation conducted by Philippe Henry and Daniel Urrutiaguer<sup>5</sup> enabled to develop a typology of the performing arts companies’ modes of production and organization in France today. This contemporary state of affairs remains to be put into perspective in a comparative approach, both historically and geographically. This will involve addressing even the terminology: the choice of different words used to refer to organizations in charge of the production of performances but particularly the variety of actual contents that each of these words encompass. “Troupes” and “companies” are the longest-lasting designations. “Collective” is specific to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, contrary to “confraternity” which has disappeared, while “guild” and “society” have a hybrid temporal status as they essentially refer to entities which no longer exist (despite a few survivors such as the actors’ society that is the *Comédie-Française*), but are also used differently now (the North American actors’ guilds). The history of these organizations must be written and their specificities must be connected to the differences in societies, in labor organizations, in the professional statuses of artists, and in the ways in which culture is perceived. Then, what do the powerful associations of Dionysian technicians of the Hellenistic times which gathered stage actors with various talents under the aegis of Dionysus and of their wealthy benefactors to distribute employment opportunities in festivals, which they occasionally organized as well, have in common with the medieval Basoche: the professional community of justice clerks from the *Parlement de Paris* which used theater rhetoric and acting in a purely heteronomous way to conduct court proceedings at a time when there were neither theater texts nor locales<sup>6</sup>? And in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, what did the ensembles of public-servant artists in the repertory theaters of Eastern Europe, which were subjected to high government subsidizing and control until the fall of the Berlin wall, have in common with the independent troupes with limited resources which flourished in Portugal immediately after the Revolution of the Carnations as a counterpoint to the official theater? Comparing such radically different artistic organizations by promoting their specific cultural, social, and political environments, will enable us to step back from the reference systems which are familiar to us and map out various models in order to enrich our reflection on contemporary companies.

The third observation, which is at the heart of the conference project, is that of a lack in existing research of an approach which would articulate studies on organization forms with those on scenic forms. The conference project is precisely meant for that purpose: to analyze the plurality and complexity of interactions between socio-economic (organization, production and distribution methods) and aesthetic (creation processes and creative works) issues within teams which are set up around the mission to produce works in the performing arts. To what extent do the arrangement of production factors and the resulting working conditions and rhythms influence works and their presentation to the audience? Can organizational differences partly be explained by the technical or material differences which distinguish the various scenic arts (theater, circus, puppets, or street theater)? What effects do certain performance styles –

---

5 Daniel Urrutiaguer and Philippe Henry, « Territoires et ressources des compagnies en France », report for the DEPS of the Ministry for Culture, July 2011.

6 See Marie Bouhaik-Gironès, *Les Clerks de la Basoche et le théâtre comique (Paris, 1420-1550)*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2007.

interartistic and intermedial forms, or certain styles of creation processes – collective improvisation – have on the organization of artistic work? And conversely, how does the organization of the performance arts market influence these artistic choices? Therefore, this decidedly interdisciplinary conference ultimately aims at initiating a socio-aesthetic approach to labor organization in the performing arts and will cross methodological approaches and theoretical reflections of drama studies, sociology, economy, and history.

### **Axis “Contemporary organizational trends”**

The conference, which will include moments of discussion with artists, is intended to help develop possible answers to four types of question which are at the heart of the performing arts companies’ current concerns: the companies’ internal power relations (particularly the issue of the position of artistic director/stage manager, or choreographer), external power relations (between companies and selectors – subsidizers and programmers), the temporality of artistic work, the perenniality of bonds between individuals who participate in projects, and the financial balance of the structures which manage them.

A first sub-axis will focus both on the various possible internal operating systems for organizations responsible for the creation of performances, now named companies, but also on the relations that they maintain with one another (forms of mutualization, of federation), as well as on the conditions of their relations with their economic environment. The purpose will be to examine the development of production and distribution ways which adapt to the logics of an ever more speculative market, or, on the contrary, attempt to escape it while not necessarily compromising but even striving to improve the economic viability of these organizations. From this viewpoint and from those of internal and external power relations, comparisons will also have to be made between other models and today’s majority model of the micro-company that is centralized around an artistic director, oftentimes a stage director, who, according to his needs, summons up temporary teams of different sizes, but often small ones, for each project. Furthermore, the case of collectives will invite us to ask what distribution of tasks and what coordination mechanisms are likely to increase the democratization of the work tool, but also stabilize “chains of cooperation”<sup>7</sup>, and intensify the collaborative logics for the benefit of long-term artistic research. Both at the intra-company and inter-companies levels, the alternative – but also all the modes of hybridization – between capitalist and labor-emancipating organization, particularly between competition and cooperation, will have to be understood. This will then lead us to examine the different forms of “cooperation”<sup>8</sup> initiated by a market which equally favors solidarity, or at least give-and-take, and competitive logics. Within the framework of a market economy being administered in the way of the economy which tends to characterize the French performing arts (actually not without diverse forms of intertwining between market and public redistribution logics), this ambivalence is emphasized by the fact that companies, which aim at being subsidized by the government for the most part, are not the sole masters of their destinies.

A second sub-axis will be devoted to studying the various ways in which one can position oneself in relation to government, both local and central. In France, the term “tutelages”, which is recurring in the companies’ rhetoric despite no legal existence, reveals how subsidizing is experienced in the sector of artistic production under tutelage. As far as the French context is

---

7 Howard S. Becker, *Les Mondes de l'art*, Paris, Flammarion, 1988.

8 Boltanski and Chiapello, *op. cit.*

concerned, particular attention will be paid both to the way artists advocate/internalize the values of the “public service” in the performing arts, and to attempts to distance themselves from these values, and/or from the institutions which embody them. This ambivalence was illustrated by Stanislas Nordey, when he explained in 2011 that he “[thought], with a few colleagues, about other forms of organization inspired by experiments such as Ariane Mnouchkine’s at the *Théâtre du Soleil* or of Peter Brook’s at the *Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord*, who protected themselves from the institution while promoting the values of the “public theater”<sup>9</sup>. The system of subsidy which erects stage directors to hegemonic positions is also recurrently called into question. Therefore, proposals that study the requests defended by performers’ or authors’ collectives will be most welcome. It will be important to open the field for investigation to companies which develop private forms of funding, and look at other types of performing arts markets. Whereas in France, beginning with the creation of the national centers for dramatic arts after the Second World War and then of the ministry of cultural affairs in 1959, the public/private borderland and the defense of a “public service” art have been fundamental elements to understanding the performing arts, these notions make no sense in other countries. In the United Kingdom for instance, the “liberal’ model of support to the arts<sup>10</sup>” which prevailed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, favored the emergence of an extremely heterogeneous theater landscape. In the absence of a strong institutional framework, organizers in the performing arts have developed vastly diverse forms and missions founded on complex production systems in which private funding plays a crucial role. The challenge of international comparisons will be twofold: on the one hand, grasping the organizational differences which might help companies now they are increasingly encouraged to develop resources that are independent from public power, and on the other hand, promoting apprehension of the transnational phenomena which they have to master in order to make their way through a globalized environment.

### Axis “Historical models”

In this second axis, we suggest addressing the interaction between ways of organization and creation from a historical viewpoint, paying particular attention to power relations and to the production methods and rhythms they rest upon.

A first sub-axis will favor analyzing how singular organizations devoted to the creation of performances are shaped by the context in which they take form. This sub-axis will thus shed light on the different ways of dealing with exogenous constraints, be they political, economic, social, or cultural, and with the existence – or absence – of an established professional field in the performing arts, to grasp how they provide information on the conditions for existence of “creative work”<sup>11</sup>. The first notarized contracts of actors’ associations in France, as early as 1486<sup>12</sup> as shown by recent research, seem to have helped along an egalitarian internal operating system. Likewise, even though the contract of Padoue in February 1545 that was considered as the birth act of the *commedia dell’arte* formalized the submission of associates to a troupe leader, the latter essentially played the part of arbiter in France and in Italy throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century and his existence did not prevent status equality among actors – one could even say that it was a

---

9 Stanislas Nordey, « Les théâtres ne doivent pas être des charges notariales », *Le Monde*, 01/21/2011.

10 Robert Lacombe, *Le Spectacle vivant en Europe. Modèles d’organisation et politiques de soutien*, Paris, La Documentation française, 2004.

11 See Pierre-Michel Menger, *Le Travail créateur. S’accomplir dans l’incertain*, Paris, EHESS/Gallimard, 2009.

12 See the work of Marie Bouhaïk-Gironès.

condition to their equality<sup>13</sup>. How can these organizational choices be explained? What do they reveal about national traditions and artistic practices of groups, and how did they influence them? In addition, how did they stand the test of time? Although they sometimes depend on other resolutions than those which govern the current situation of companies, they are no less likely to enrich our understanding of these situations. Now that the decline of permanent troupes in Europe, presented by Dominique Leroy as the revelation of a transition from the “stock system” to the “combination system”<sup>14</sup>, is interpreted by many observers of the contemporary scene as symptomatic of the government’s disinvestment, but also of the disintegration of collective values and of the individualization of work relations, examining for instance how the combination system worked in Ancient Greece festivals could fruitfully renew perspectives by revealing a paradox – are the relations between the Greek theater and community not considered as exemplary? Historical viewpoints will thus enable to underscore convergences, but also porosities, between seemingly antithetical realities. In France, artists’ initiatives from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, for instance, have inspired the development of the public service in the theater. Therefore, private, almost self financed troupes – who lived in extreme financial precariousness in accordance with the tacit rule of “voluntary ascetism”<sup>15</sup> – served as role models. The case of Copeau’s and his Copiaus’ adventure is exemplary in that regard. As well as regarding the mythologizing of these troupes’ organization.

The second sub-axis will then be historiographical; it will be devoted to the golden legends which were built on collective adventures such as that of the Copiaus or the *Illustre théâtre* in France, of Elizabethan troupes in England, of the *Berliner Ensemble*, or on past historical periods – the Greek theater being the classic example built in the western world from the identification between theater and *agora* as the unwavering foundations of a forever civic theater, at the expense of forgetting a few factual details (the reality of the audience’s sociological composition at the time, the mostly private funding of choreges). We will confront these systems of mythological values, address their convergences and differences depending on their countries, and ask questions about their present role. What are their functions of legitimization or concealment and for which social actors (artists, government)? How did they impact the history of organizations in the performing arts and to what extent did they exercise domination on other systems of values and other understandings of what a drama work is? This conference is meant to invite case studies which permit to make the transition from the great tales that surround the illustrious men of the theater to an approach which pays attention to the complexities of History and of organization models in the performing arts in charge of creation. The purpose is evidently not to reach an exhaustive worldwide view from Antiquity to the present, but rather to draw a typology of organization ways, of their economic and political issues, and of the forms of performing arts which they enable/ or which they result from.

**Paper proposals (about 500 words in French or English, including a brief bio-bibliographical note) have to be sent before September 15, 2014, to both following addresses: [berenice.hamidi@univ-lyon2.fr](mailto:berenice.hamidi@univ-lyon2.fr) ; [severine.ruset@u-grenoble3.fr](mailto:severine.ruset@u-grenoble3.fr)**  
**Authors will be notified of the Scientific Committee’s selections early November 2014.**

---

13 See Claude Bourqui, *La Commedia dell’arte*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2011.

14 Dominique Leroy, *Economie des arts du spectacle. Essai sur la relation entre l’économique et l’esthétique*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 1998.

15 See Cyprien Tasset, Thomas Amossé, Mathieu Grégoire with Maëlezig Bigi, Vincent Cardon and Olivier Pilmis, « Libres ou prolétarisés ? Les travailleurs intellectuels précaires en Ile de France », IMM/EHESS, CEE, 2011 report.

## Scientific Committee

Howard Becker sociologist (United States)

Marie Bouhaik-Gironès, CNRS / University Paris 4, history

Leonor Delaunay, Société d'Histoire du Théâtre

Christophe Floderer, deputy director of the Comédie de Valence

Philippe Henry, retired MCF-HDR, University Paris 8, socio-economy of the performing arts

Piotr Olkusz, Lodz University (Poland), drama studies

Martial Poirson, PR, University Paris 8, drama studies

Serge Proust, MCF-HDR, University Saint-Etienne, performing arts sociology

Daniel Urrutiaguer, MCF-HDR, University Paris 3, socio-economy of the performing arts

Karel Vanhaesbrouck, Free University of Brussels, performing arts

Laure de Verdalle, CNRS / University of Versailles-St-Quentin-en-Yvelines, sociology

Jean-Claude Yon, PR, University of Versailles-St-Quentin-en-Yvelines, history



**SOCIÉTÉ D'HISTOIRE  
DU THÉÂTRE**

**Rhône-Alpes** Région

**LA COMÉDIE  
DE VALENCE**  
CENTRE  
DRAMATIQUE  
NATIONAL  
DRÔME-ARDÈCHE

*Projet soutenu par la Région Rhône-Alpes*