Maria Shevtsova

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF THEATRE PRACTICES

The time has come when the term ‘sociology’ is no longer automatically met in the presence of academics working in Theatre and/or Performance Studies with an ironic smile ­– a polite manifestation of dismissal, among others that, over the years have been less courteous. In the later decades of the twentieth century, the mere breath of the word invariably elicited the response that sociology was fundamentally about facts, graphs, and, worse still, statistics, and was thus alien to the creativity, artistic motivations, genres, forms, styles and processes of rehearsal and construction integral to the making of theatre. Sociology, then, was pictured in a comical reduction of its intellectual range to confirm the theatre’s unique identity.

It was presumed, furthermore, that theatre centered on its own affairs, cocooned in its isolation. When its accent was not on text and dramaturgy but on *performance*, that is, on the *doing,* here and now, of both imagined and concrete actions in a dialogical relationship with spectators (*spectacles* or *spettacoli* are the appropriate terms whose exact equivalent is inexistent in English) – when *performance* happened, theatre asserted its character of practice, which its practitioners took to be its specifying feature. Researchers, whether in tacit or overt accord with this totally accurate premise, thought more about what might be called the internal dynamics of productions, devised pieces, mime, dance, media interactive art, fantasy interjections and anything else that could be located as ‘performance’ than about the social impetus and impulses involved in them. By the same token, little attention was paid to the question of how theatre/performance was uniquely itself, so to speak, while it also fully contributed to the societal dynamics within which it was practised and, which, in some way or other, refracted those dynamics, placing theatre/performance practice in the context of time-space and place.

Indeed, researchers of the late twentieth century usually did not recognize the principle of the ‘social’ at all, unless they were theatre historians, who were a notable exception to the general rule. Simple factors like budgets and box-office receipts, on which the very existence not only of established theatres but also bourgeoning experimental companies or individuals relied, were cast as financial, infrastructural concerns that, yes, affected the survival of practitioners, but were on the outskirts of theatre practice as such. In other words, what I have called the principle of the ‘social’ was decentered or just simply extraneous – a matter for fund-raisers, administrators, ideologues and even politicians, when political interests like cultural policies and electorate audiences were at stake. It was not, however, for theatre artists devoted to their creative processes, skills and art or craft, or for researchers concentrated on theatre scholarship, which they similarly considered to be removed from mundane preoccupations.

Yet, decentering of this kind has lead to myopia, like not noticing, for example, that Grotowski’s ‘poor theatre’ was not solely tied up with aesthetic choice, and so with the anti-aesthetics of bare space, few props and sobre dress. Nor were the anti-aesthetics – the ‘poor’ semioses– cultivated by the Theatre of Thirteen Rows founded with Ludwig Flaszen in Opole in 1957 exclusively to do with a quest for a more genuine, ‘pure’ type of theatre, unshackled from convention. They were, as well, a socio-political protest against ‘official ‘ culture. ‘Poor theatre’, for all its explorative powers, which Grotowski developed in the 1950s and subsequently, was, in addition, closely bound up with a lack of material resources, money included.

Artistic inspiration and the creative possibilities within actual, quite restricted socioeconomic circumstances went hand in glove; and these circumstances initiated to some degree what was to become a definitive working process and also, let us not forget, a potent brand name. Flaszen was to refer, sometimes quite maliciously, to the mystique of ‘poor theatre’ perpetuated by Grotowski disciples who were unaware of its beginnings in very real poverty (Flaszen 2010; 92-3). And, let it be added, that there were those who probably did not wish to know, for fear of downgrading the exalted status which ‘poor theatre’ had acquired.

Here, in this small example, can be found the usefulness of perception that is open to, if not rooted in, sociological thinking for a clearer, more sharply contoured understanding of theatre/performance practices. Given the established habits of compartmentalized perception, where entities have their separate niches, it is not in the least surprising that sociology could have been viewed as an unwelcome intruder on theatre/performance in its distinction from other fields of activity or fields of ‘positions’ and ‘forces’, in Pierre Bourdieu’s words (1993: 30). The idea that sociology is something ‘other’, something *extrinsic* rather than *intrinsic* to theatre/performance, is, where such a notion survives in the present, generally implicit, an assimilated rather than a consciously propagated one. Which does not prevent this idea from harbouring an anachronistic kind of protectionism regarding theatre/performance.

This onward-looking attitude is all the more anomalous because theatre/performance today consists of multiplying practices that an ever-expanding arch of denominators attempts to grasp and secure. Among them are ‘art’, ‘entertainment’, ‘event’ ‘performance art’ and ‘performativity’, with numerous less imposing identifying terms marked into the picture, many with uncertainty as to where or how they are to be placed. The proliferation of practices brings down the borders of what is – or was – ‘intrinsic’ to theatre/performance and thus more or less fixed in perception. In doing so, it questions the validity of any notion determining where the limits might lie of what is – or was – believed to be ‘extrinsic’, elsewhere and thus beyond view.

Rimini Protocoll’s work in and out of Germany is a case in point, almost made to measure for my discussion. Take the company’s city series, which includes *100 Berlin* (2008) and *100 London* (2012), and which raise the question of where performance ends and sociology begins in their, nevertheless, theatre-intended, stage-designated productions. Rimini Protocoll’s idea of sociology is, moreover, one that *welcomes* rather than dismisses statistics, since the ethnic composition, gender, age and profession of each city’s inhabitants are projected on a pie chart on a screen, accompanied by a voice-off telling audiences the percentages of each category. Or else the facts and figures are given as sheets of computer-projected information.

Meanwhile, the sociological and so, also, demographical categories of ethnicity, and so on, are illustrated by the groupings of the ordinary people off the streets who have volunteered their services as non-actors for the show. They form living parts of the pie, clustering together on the stage to shape and reshape the pie and/ or any other diagram offered for contemplation according to the statistics read out. Perhaps, in fact, Rimini Protocoll has invented a new genre, the genre of sociological theatre?

The idea is worth entertaining, since this performance company is quite confident in its re-assessment of how the theatre can be in the present time, when it does not follow the conventions of professional actor-centered, groomed and polished work. Furthermore, Rimini Protocoll re-evaluates the status of ordinary, everyday people who have no pretensions to visible status by assigning the role of ‘actors’ to them. That is to say that, by becoming ‘actors’ in the theatrical sense of the word (they ‘act’ by doing something in the full view of others, who are spectators), they become agents of action – ‘actors’ – ­in a social sense (they assume responsibility for themselves by embodying as well as providing information about themselves). In doing its socially oriented production-events – this hyphenated term best covers the company’s very particular way of doing things ­– Rimini Protocoll makes it quite clear that its intentions include the goal of democratizing theatre. This not only entails having theatre accessible, by its interest, to everybody, but having it open to be makeable by everybody: theatre is not exclusive to the professionals of the field, but is inclusive of the creativity in all human beings.

Contemplate, now, Rimini Protocoll’s *Remote New York* (2015), which the company calls a ‘pedestrian-based live art experience’, but which can also be described, with less brio and more prosaically, as a ‘walking tour for people wearing headphones’ (*New York Times*, 12 March 2015). Such a tour, which goes from Brooklyn to Greenwich Village, is a variation on the headphone ‘discovery’ walks of town, country and, on occasion, major highways, organized for the past fifteen years in Britain, and it demonstrates the fluidity of conceptions of performance at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Selected, directed walks like these are meant to ask, as well, what constitutes theatre when the ‘old’ theatre of sitting in front of a proscenium arch theatre is replaced by a participant mode of enactment.

Rimini Protocoll’s interest in urbanscapes intersects the perspectives of urban architects keen on rendering cities ‘performative’. Architects of this kind activate cities in order, on the one hand, to raise city-population awareness of surrounding spaces and, on the other, to regenerate cities by recovering and reconstructing spaces that are decrepit, or dying, or lost. The two goals are, of course, interrelated, although the question arises of who, exactly, benefits from revitalized urban spaces? Are they real-estate moguls, the homeless, or whoever lies between these social extremes? And this very question questions the *modus vivendi* of the ‘performative’: What, exactly, is the ‘performative’ and how, exactly, does it shed light on (or redefine? or rejuvenate?) theatre practice? It is evident that conterminous questions like these of a sociological nature raise their head the moment Rimini Protocoll intervenes in the urbanscape, wherever it may be (it does not have to be New York), as do the sociological inferences that can be drawn from the questions posed.

Rimini Protocoll provides the spaces for a something ‘inter’ that can be devised for theatre/performance. In this company’s case, the ‘inter’ of performance-non-actor-but-social-actor, which overlaps with sociology and the politics of democrac, holds sway. But the academy, too, taken as a composite institution, whether surveyed on national territory or along the vistas of the networked, globalized and globalizing world, has developed its particular version of the ‘inter’ – the ‘interdisciplinary’ – and so much so, in fact, that ‘interdisciplinarity’ is the order of the day, The trend seems to be particularly strong in British universities, and to query it, let alone to refute it, is to be open to the charges of ‘conservatism’, ‘traditionalism’, ‘backwardness’, and the rest. So invasive is the call to be interdisciplinary that it looks more like a matter of command and coercion than an invitation to the free embrace of interdisciplinary delights.

Theatre and Performance Studies have been far from immune to these extremely noticeable pressures in Britain today, and they have been exerted across all fields of study, including mathematics, the intellectual discipline seemingly least likely to step out of its specialist domain. Of course, interdisciplinary work has to do with opening minds, broadening horizons and expanding knowledge. At the same time, it appears, at least in Britain, to have as much to do with such institutional imperatives as cutting university costs; it could even be said that the financial drive is operative in a more persistent and accelerated fashion than the intellectual one, which interdisciplinary ventures are assumed to promote.

One example of financial consideration may here suffice, that of collecting much larger numbers of students in one centralized ‘interdisciplinary’ course rather than squandering labour on so-called duplicated courses across smaller classes in different disciplines. After all, interdisciplinary courses pool teachers, who will give one or two classes in their specialism within, say, Theatre Studies, Sociology, Philosophy or Visual Arts, to a given interdisciplinary course over the ten weeks of a trimester, thereby freeing them to teach additional classes in their ‘home’ discipline during the same ten-week period. In the meantime, new students to fill the new slots opened up by a teacher’s having more available time will have been recruited by the drive for expansion. Currently, expansion is designed not only to cover university costs and prevent failure (‘failing ‘institutions, like ‘failing’ departments in them, are closed), but also to make profits and ensure sustainability in the increasingly aggressive competition between universities. Never has the competition for students been so strong in Britain as now, 2015.

There is no need to be cynical as regards realities; these realities are bad enough without the debilitating effects of cynicism. Even so, much can be said against this type of piecemeal interdisciplinarity where a bit of this and a bit of that from disparate areas are more or less set side by side, and sometimes juxtaposed against each other, mostly so as to look at topics A, B, and C from different disciplinary angles. These angles may well encourage a plurality of views, adding layers to A, B, and C, or breaking them up in kaleidoscopic fashion to render them more complex than at first meets the eye. This smorgasbord of sightlines may certainly be instructive to varying degrees of success. Meanwhile, the alternative approaches presented by teachers X, Y and Z are not only disconnected from each other, but there is no continuity of thesis, thought and argument in respect of object A or question C. In short, there is little or no capacity available for depth and for something resembling the synthesis and the integrated approach of the holistic cast of mind that should, desirably, be driving interdisciplinary work.

In the end, the methodology of the interdisciplinarity fervently promoted as innovative for our times is, in actual fact, a re-run, albeit with adjustments to contemporary idioms, of the interdisciplinarity born of the 1960s and the 1970s. Within that past frame, *Hedda Gabler*, for instance, was analyzed from a Theatre Studies viewpoint (structuralist semiotics for the 1970s), then from Feminist Studies, then from Psychoanalysis, then from another subjec – today it would be the Cognitive Sciences and Neuroscience – and so on. The components might change, but the methodology is still one of compartmentalization or, in the words of a popular protest song sung by Pete Seeger in 1963, it is the methodology of ‘little boxes, little boxes’, even if they are not ostensibly ‘all the same’ (their fate in Seeger’s song).

Value is always to be had from another content, even, allow me the joke, when it comes from Pandora’s box. However, where is the ‘inter’ of the enterprise? Where are simultaneously flowing interchange and exchange, the dialogical to and fro amid diversity, the texture of threads weaving in and out of debate, and the dialectical urge for engagement and interconnection? Where are these processes, since all of them precipitate formulation, transform concepts, highlight neglected or even unnoticed aspects of areas, or whole areas, and advance thought?

It is not my intention to offer you a ‘history’ of interdisciplinarity, interesting though the subject may be. Yet my remarks are necessary in order to indicate how the principle of the ‘social’ referred to earlier is imbricated, right there, unavoidably, one might say, in the very terms guiding this conference, their key term being ‘theatrology’. ‘Theatrology’, by the way, is not an English word, but the study of theatre (‘-ology’) implied by it is at the heart of this conference; and if there were no academic sector (devoted to an intellectual discipline) to study it, we would not be here, ‘thinking the theatre’. We might never have existed, or we might have been sacked, by now, as proponents of a ‘failing’ discipline because it had not generated enough capital. It is plain that, even without lost employment, increasing stress on profitability will eventually have consequences for the very content, form, and methods of study, not to mention, crucially, their quality, defining our collective body of knowledge and thus, too, our ‘-ology. So my observations are very much to the point.

Nor, within the area of the interdisciplinary, will I chart the emergence and spread of ‘interdisciplinary performance’, as it came to be known some ten years ago in Britain, following such internationally disseminated synonyms, or near-synonyms, as ‘inter-art’, inter-media’, ‘multi-media’, ‘mixed media’ or ‘hybrid’ performance. The notion of the ‘hybrid’ has circulated for decades, having grown out of, and become applicable to, Robert Wilson’s astonishing subversion, from the earliest 1960s, of fixed artistic categories. The merger of categories and so the dissolution of boundaries between them, which is typical of Wilson’s work, provided significant challenges. Thus, what was possibly an installation was also a sculpture, was also a painting, was also performance art, was also dance, was also opera; and his destabilization of forms, together with their reinvention in new co-ordinations, continue to inspire artists of different kinds to this day. This area of ‘performance’ warrants its history too, but my rapid observations serve the purpose of embedding the ‘sociology of theatre practices’ which is integral to my argument and which now comes briefly into focus.

The sociological dimension of my discourse has been present all along, sometimes rather unobtrusively, since it was necessary to establish the frames of reference first. Sociology is the study of societies in their many varieties and varying dynamics, and several questions press forward: What, other than history, could be more multi-layered, more complex, more fraught with difficulties, contradictions and problems than societies – their structures, systems, institutions, peoples and the lives of people going about their business in finite time, space and place?

Is sociology an interdisciplinary study by virtue of what it studies, that is, societal phenomena? How can such phenomena, which incorporate theatre practice, be understood, explained and appraised without at least some recourse to the tenets of history, economics, politics, anthropology and more, depending on what, exactly, is the subject of study? Since theatre is made within a discernable conglomerate of people known as ‘society’ by practitioners who exercise their agency – they are *doers* of meaningful actions in society and are thus social agents – the issue is not whether the theatre is social, but *how* to use methodologies that identify this social without losing sight of, or diminishing, the creative-artistic energy embodied in the theatre.

The aim is to have these methodologies operate synergistically in the holistic fashion referred to above, and this is what the sociology of theatre and performance aspires to. Yet the aim cannot be achieved unless it is understood, at the outset, that a holistic rather than ‘little box’ approach necessarily entails an interdisciplinary methodology on two counts: the object of study of sociology is society, and what constitutes society is multi-sided, multi-layered and rooted in, and open to, multiple different factors and forces at play simultaneously; theatre (the second ‘count ‘ at issue), in whichever way it is defined it (and however ‘performance’ is defined) is affected by the same multi-sided and multi-layered factors and events that are coterminous with it. Grotowski’s ‘poor’ theatre served as an example earlier of how multiple factors other than aesthetics (social, economic, and political, each to be grasped in the ‘language’ of sociology, economics, and political science) were at play in Grotowski’s supremely artistic endeavour.

Another example, this time of Ariane Mnouchkine’s *Macbeth*, which she staged in 2014, is also useful. It is important to notice that Mnouchkine directs and her actors perform in the Théâtre du Soleil’s customary *théâtralité* – a heightened, exaggerated, physically pronounced and fully exteriorized mode of performance, which is the antithesis of inwardly gestated psychological realism, as Mnouchkine intended it to be. Her position on *théâtralité* was not solely nurtured by her artistic aversion to life-like theatre. It was, as well, motivated by her desire to build a large ensemble company that was capable of devising its own scripts and its own ways of playing; and this passion was fed and helped by political and economic support in the 1980s in the shape of France’s Ministry of Culture. *Macbeth* is still the fruit of the accumulated confidence, in cultural and social terms, which allowed Mnouchkine to construct a faithful audience along with her large company, which sustained her artistic aims in the longer term. Her theatre practice did not happen by itself, in a vacuum. Nor did it survive simply because it was ‘great’ art.

The notion of practice invoked here and referred to in the title of this text emphasizes both the ‘doing’, that is, the making and performing of theatre, and the idea that purposeful doing in societies such as making theatre is a social practice. When theatre is viewed as a social practice, its construction collectively by actors, directors, designers, musicians and many more collaborators in concert is properly acknowledged: it is ‘social’ in the sense that it is not a purely individual action, let alone purely an action of genius that is accountable only to itself and is unaccountable to any social influence or impact.

It is ‘social’, too, in that it directly communicates sense and meaning to different groups of spectators in different ways, thereby triggering processes of interconnection, as well as of conscious and unconscious interaction between these spectators, the performers who are playing, and their performance. Elsewhere I have detailed more points that help to explain why theatre is a social practice, all concepts that can be harnessed to deal methodologically with this practice (Shevtsova 2013: 297-303).

Three main principles among a good number of them indispensible to the methodology of the sociology of the theatre and performance may here serve as points of reference. They are ‘context’ ‘cultural specificity’ and ‘social group’.

Context and the processes of contextualization are essential for several reasons. First, they situate chosen works in concrete time-space and place. Situation allows – second point – precise identification of the particularities of those works, also in respect of their differences and similarities with other theatre works. Such links or disassociations can be traced within narrowly defined time-spaces, as well as across quite wider gaps separating them. They can also provide considerable insight into the shifts and changes of theatre and why they have occurred. Identification and apperception of this kind necessarily entail interdisciplinary research.

The third reason, then, interdisciplinary research – not in boxes, note again, but in crisscross interaction – provides scale, depth and resonance, and highlights this or that aspect of a cultural, religious or economic order, or whatever other order proves, during research, to bring out the importance of the works, or people, or conditions, or forces in play that are being examined.

The fourth is the dissolution of the notion of ‘background’ as ‘backdrop’, and the emergence of a fluid, dialectical relation between work and context. Contextualization throws into relief (*mise en relief*) divers factors, and facilitates a researcher’s understanding of the interconnections between the immediate, central focus of the research – its subject – and what is known merely as ‘background’ in old-fashioned non-dialectical approaches. In the latter approach, background, once ascertained, is kept *in* the background as a kind of backdrop, like an old-fashioned painted backdrop of the theatre.

Backdrops, as a design method, have been superseded since the beginning of the twentieth century. Meyerhold was in the lead, deploying designs that were no longer simply pictorial or illustrative, but were actually used and manipulated by actors, making them integral to acting. Think of Lyuybov Popova’s construction for Meyerhold’s production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold* in 1922, which, besides being artistically revolutionary, was redolent with the political, social and cultural expectations and aspirations of the 1917 revolutionary period. It is this type of integration of contextual material *in* the subject, and not left parallel to the subject as ‘background’, that is required for clarity of understanding. Fifth, contextualization guides and helps to answer the question Why? This is probably the single most important question of the sociology of theatre practices.

A sketch of how contextualization might operate concretely can be drawn from the example of *Lady Macbeth*, adapted from Shakespeare and directed by Han Tae-Sook in 1999. The production was part and parcel of a major social turning point in Korea, when the country, after the financial crisis of 1997 – so serious that it was monitored by the IMF – was exposed more than ever before to the market forces of globalization; and this increased exposure virtually forced the government to abolish its ban on Japanese electronic games, animations and similarly so-called popular-culture goods. The Japanese electronic invasion on the hearts and minds of the young was suspect because of Japan’s colonization of Korea (1910-1945) and such atrocities as enforced sex work by Korean women during World War II.

Until as recently as 2014, Korea was still seeking an apology from Japan for these war crimes. Opened-up trade relations with Japan softened attitudes, including towards Japanese-imported theatre, Shakespeare also being an item of this importation. Koreans, in any case, had adapted Shakespeare, as already acculturated by the Japanese, in the late 1930s. Korean translations began to appear in the 1980s. However, the scars of Japanese occupation had remained, to be exacerbated not only politically, but also in socio-psychological and moral terms by the Korean War, on the one hand, and the division of the country into North and South Korea, on the other. The protracted impact of Korea’s division into two warring parts on people’s perceptions and behaviours continues, often present in subterranean ways in new plays and productions.

A veritable stage renaissance of Shakespeare in the 1990s came out of this entangled context, here outlined from longer as well as shorter views. All Korean social classes and strata find it exceedingly difficult to bear. Shakespeare, in the 1990s, was seen as dealing with issues that had contemporary resonance rather than promoted the ‘givens’ of the ruling foreign elites; or, for that matter, that pampered the tastes of the national moneyed elites.

Such a shift in perspective was propitious for women playwrights and directors. They were a small but feisty social group, defined and definable as a cohesive rather than random group by the women’s education, professional standing and social commitment. They can be grouped, as well, due to their shared sympathies regarding Korea’s future and the role of women in it. In addition, they shared views concerning the future of Korean theatre, its prospects as a site of freedom, courage and innovation in a legitimated patriarchal theatre structure that was virtually an exact microcosm of the ambient patriarchal social structure. Han Tae Sook cut out various male parts from Shakespeare for her *Lady Macbeth*, reshaping it from a female point of view on power *usurped* – a theme of great consequence to a country whose power had been illegitimately taken more than once by colonization.

 Most important of all, however, was her concentration on Lady Macbeth’s internalized emotions of guilt, shame, frustration, resentment and sense of loss – in short, on the Korean notion of *Han*, which is the collective internalization and memory of these emotions, secreted during colonial domination, military dictatorship (1960s to 1980s), and a nation divided. The specificity of *Han* to Korean culture – and here is the ‘cultural specificity’ earmarked earlier ­­– in its primary importance for the production cannot be underestimated. When specificity is justly acknowledged, the contextual explanations stemming from it and the production’s formal-compositional features illuminate each other, accounting, to a certain degree, for the aesthetic choices made, while giving them their full value as aesthetic principles of the work.

 A predominant aesthetic feature of *Lady Macbeth* is its trance-like quality, and more specifically, its recall of the shamanic ritual of *Gut* (Shim 2009: 70). Trance in the production certainly plays on shamanic sounds and movements in the framework of which Lady Macbeth seeks to heal herself of the shame and guilt that she has brought on herself and others, especially Macbeth. She becomes, in the course of her expiation, a shaman who, in Korean ritual (as, for that matter, in Siberian ritual) is capable of healing collective malaise – the *Han* recognized within Korean society.

The production’s voluntary ownership of *Han* is similar to that of the foremost Korean director Oh Tae-Seok, who is also a playwright of renown. Oh Tae-Seok, when discussing his production of *The Tempest* in 2011, said that all his work is an apology to the younger generations of Koreans for having failed them (8 August, 2011 in my public conversation with him at the Korean Cultural Centre, London). Many actors of his company, Mokhwa Repertory, are very young. Master Oh, now 75, asserted that his shame, together with the shame of his entire generation, was their inability to exorcise pain and reunite Korea. His endeavour to ‘modernize tradition’, as he puts it, by which he appropriates shamanism, among other bases of Korean traditional culture for his Shakespeare productions, is his way of drawing the consciousness of the young to their cultural heritage and of making its beauty their pride. Shakespeare, if a vehicle for this journey, also helps them to deal with modern Korean society. In his interpretation, Shakespeare’s preoccupation with the conundrums of what it is to be social is exactly why his plays can be staged today.

Countless instances of cultural specificity in its knotted ties with scoio-cultural, economic and political contexts and theatre practices, which is integral to these contexts, come to mind. Not last among them is a scene from Yukio Ninagawa’s *Hamlet*, whose eighth staging he mounted in early 2015. The scene concerns the play within the play known as the *The* *Mousetrap*, which Ninagawa’s actors performed in the style of Kabuki. Kabuki throws into relief the modern stylization for which his productions are celebrated. Simultaneously, his signature stylization leverages the cross-cultural dialogue for which his productions are known.

Yet Ninagawa’s bow to Japanese cultural tradition can be taken in *Hamlet*, as elsewhere in his *oeuvr*e, to be a subtle protest against the worldly ambitions so typical of the economically networked world to which Asia, like Europe, is subordinated. The thread of sociological thought, together with the defense of cultural tradition embedded in it, is right there in Ninagawa’s stage poetry. Comprehensive research on Ninagawa’s position regarding the defense of traditional Japanese theatre within the contemporary Japanese theatre field may well show that he is not alone to take this very position; that, indeed, a social group exists which holds a similar position and which, in a similar way, suggests that the globalizing world may be disempowering societies rather than empowering them, as the reigning ideology asserts. From a methodological point of view, consideration of a demarcated field of theatre allows research to centre on these and numerous other questions, all of which shed light on the importance of the theatre and why thinking about it matters beyond academic inquiry (Shevtsova 2009: 21-109).

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