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Fictions of Order: Social Representations in the European Theatre from the Napoleonic Wars to the Russian Revolution

The theoretical problem of referentiality (and self-referentiality) has been approached by different disciplines over the last few decades. In literary studies, however, the dichotomy "text vs. context" is addressed in a way that does not seem satisfactory. Within the Marxian paradigm, on the one hand, discourses are mere derivatives of the social basis. Postmodernist criticism, on the other hand, in its radical relativism, reversed this scheme to proclaim that (social) reality was virtual, i.e. generated by discourses and representations. In the vein of studies in post-Marxian social history, my project will focus on competing and conflicting narratives for representing society and the agency behind them. My approach is informed by the sociology of interaction and namely by the revision of Pierre Bourdieu's critical theory in the works of French pragmatic sociologists (such as Luc Boltanski). This sociology provides a language of analytical description suitable for exploring links between the social categories used by individuals and the language of self-description diffused in the society by the dominating social groups. In other words, my project will study the complex relationships between subjectivity and what Bourdieu calls "symbolic violence" in the domain of drama and performance.

I will provide a comparative analysis of dramatic production in France and in Russia, occasionally broadening the comparative perspective to include German-speaking and English-speaking countries. My corpus will include works from the classical canon, as well as lesser-known literary texts, and a variety of non-fictional sources (from both the public and private domains). I will consider them in order to overcome the binary opposition "text-context", but not to abolish the dialectical tension produced by this couple, which seems productive.

I will study, for instance, symbolic economies of the "emplois" in drama and theatre and their interactions with other discourses about society. My special focus will be on the reception of dramatic works by the readership and theatre audiences. I will therefore pay close attention to the public polemics and individual identity conflicts generated by the representations of social hierarchies.

Recommended Reading

Evstratov, Alexei. "Drama Translation in Eighteenth-Century Russia: Masters and Servants on the Court Stage in the 1760s." In *The Art of Accommodation: Literary Translation in Russia*, edited by Leon Burnett and Emily Lygo, 31-54. Oxford, etc.: Peter Lang, 2013.

-. "La réception du théâtre de Regnard à la cour de Catherine II." In *Jean-François Regnard (1655-1709)*, edited by Charles Mazouer and Dominique Quérou, 303-326. Paris: Armand Colin, 2012.

-. "Ad Urbanitatem informare: la langue et l'éducation dans les comédies de Catherine II (exemple de *O temps!*)."
Histoire. Épistémologie. Langage 32, 1 (2010): 13-29.

Watching the Human Comedy: Theatrical Experience and Social Knowledge

Two very general questions frame my research:

* How does what one today would call "entertainment" inform individuals' knowledge of the social world and their place in it?

* In this respect what are those specific features of performances whereby members of the audience share the same geographic space (e.g. movie theater, stadium) and can see and interact with each other?

To put it more synthetically - what happens when an individual encounters a fictional representation of social reality as part of an audience, and how is it important for the individual's aesthetic experience and everyday life?

My investigation into the cultural history of theatergoing will draw on theatrical life in France from the emergence, in the 1750s, of a new dramatic theory, which redrew the boundaries between public theater and the domestic sphere, to the Third Republic (1870) when the liberalization of theaters transformed the way authorities and subjects interacted in the playhouse and beyond. This year my focus is on the "long" eighteenth century and, more specifically, on the French Revolution, situated in the middle of the period under study.

Why Theater?

Starting with Aristotle, a theater audience was supposed to represent the entire polity - that is to say, members of society involved in public life. An investigation into how this notion changed over time provides insight into more general social change.

Before the emergence of cinema and mass sporting spectacles, theater was the master medium shaping and disseminating social and political representations.

Until a certain moment in the history of theatrical institutions there was a tension between the now obvious reason for the gathering - to attend a performance - and other things taking place in the playhouse (including the social display of status, business transactions, flirting). Theater thus provides a valuable site for understanding how art acquired autonomous value and became a commodity.

Why the Eighteenth Century?

In many ways eighteenth-century notions of drama and performance inform how we commonly think about social representations, subjective perception and the collective response to spectacles as well as the distinction between private and public spheres.

It was during this period that institutionalized theatrical performances rapidly gained new audiences both geographically (from big urban centers to national and international peripheries) and socially (from urban elites to a broader range of audiences). This had a strong impact on certain technologies of performance, from theater architecture to acting and stage effects.

Why France?

Eighteenth-century France was the paragon of a "cultural empire"; its domestic policies and international status were in many ways grounded in the prestige of francophone cultural production.

While the French Revolution changed the political regime and reconfigured social groups and institutions, theater has enabled me to observe continuity in the models of subjective perception and political domination, which need to be explored and interpreted.

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOW LIBRARY

Evstratov, Alexei G. (S.n.,2022)

Désordres + Ceux qui vont bien

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1879908581>

Unrueh

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1879908581>

Evstratov, Alexei G. (2016)

Russian prince vs. "German swine" : public slap in the face, émigrés, and local elites in St. Petersburg at the time of the French revolution

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=878186530>

Evstratov, Alexei G. (2016)

Dramatic conflicts and social performance at the Russian court in the 1760s : a sociocultural perspective on marital infidelity

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=87818578X>

Evstratov, Alexei G. (Oxford,2016)

Les spectacles francophones à la cour de Russie (1743-1796) : l'invention d'une société

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=863530389>

Oxford University studies in the enlightenment ; 2016,07

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=863530389>

Evstratov, Alexei G. (DeKalb,2016)

The Europeanized elite in Russia, 1762-1825 : public role and subjective self

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=859424227>