Symposium 'European Performing Arts Dataverse'

9 Nov. 2017 (Amsterdam, Filmtheater De Uitkijk)

The purpose of the symposium was to explore the willingness and potential for more transdisciplinary cooperation among scholars in the fields of music, theatre and cinema history. More specifically the meeting was aimed at those researchers particularly interested in audiences and reception, often working with digital datasets and tools, for instance collecting information on programming, on venues, or on networks of people or companies involved in the circulation of performing arts. As Julia Noordegraaf (University of Amsterdam) pondered in the opening address, wouldn't it make sense to connect and compare the various data projects that have sprung up during the last decades, both across geographical and disciplinary boundaries? Can we join forces both in linking our data and also in combining related research questions and methods? A similar aspiration had led to the formation of the interdisciplinary Flemish scientific research group 'Cultures of Spectacle', initiated by film historians Leen Engelen and Roel Vande Winkel (KU Leuven), co-organizers of the symposium. As Leen Engelen illustrated, a cinema often used to be more than a cinema (for instance also a theatre and music hall), a film actor was regularly also a stage performer, and a movie goer commonly was member of a diversity of audiences besides that of the movie theatre. Kati Röttger added during the discussion that the genuine degree of hybridity of the historical forms of performed spectacles will not become apparent until we transcend discipline-bound definitions. Clara Pafort-Overduin cautioned not to lose sight of the content of what was performed and maintain an interaction between content and context.

In a similar vein, theatre historian Nic Leonhardt (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, München) discussed how we should alternate between the macro and micro levels in our research practice. Moreover, she pointed to the opportunities that digital data and tools offer humanities scholars to use their specific skills and training to critically interrogate their data and the way to classify those data and define ontologies. Film scholar Joseph Garncarz (University of Cologne) emphasized the importance of the specific research questions that sparked off and drove his data projects. His work focuses on the preferences of cinema audiences and more specifically on the relation between the popularity of Hollywood versus domestic film production. He stressed a point that repeatedly recurred throughout the gathering: the concern for the sustainability and curation of both running, finished and future data projects. How can we secure these sources of information for the next generations?

The dual presentation of two music historians that are pioneers in digital humanities approaches, Simon McVeigh (Goldsmiths, University of London) and Rachel Cowgill (University of Huddersfield) demonstrated to theatre and cinema historians they each share many questions and methodological concerns. Another important point the British speakers stressed, was the profoundly transnational character of music culture which is circulated far beyond national boundaries, an observation that also applies to theatre and cinema. The ubiquity of music creates dilemmas of how to define an event where music is performed as a concert. Cowgill mentioned the example of an early nineteenth-century announcement of a 'self-acting grand piano': does this count as a concert? Or the string band ornamenting a skating rink, should that fall within the scope of the database?

In the next contribution, Terezia Porubcanska (University of Antwerp and Masaryk University, Brno) showcased the potential of spatial analysis of urban cinema locations displayed on layered maps indicating social and infrastructural information. Spatial analysis is one of the approaches that shows potential for cross-disciplinary comparisons, as was vividly illustrated by the following speaker, cultural historian Jan Hein Furnée, (Radboud University, Nijmegen). Applying both GIS and network analysis on a wealth of data of nineteenth-century theatre and concert goers (subscribers, members of cultural associations, etcetera) he could demonstrate how quantitative and qualitative methods

can work in tandem, in this case to bring out the subtleties of social hierarchies that are performed through cultural consumption.

Frode Helland (Oslo University) presented the IbsenStage project, an online database containing thousands of stagings of Ibsen plays worldwide, for which the data model of the Australian Ausstage website has been used. IbsenStage allows for a variety of 'distant reading' techniques, raising questions about how the staging of a specific play (such as *A Doll's House*) fluctuated through time and space. An interesting example was a network analysis that showed a genealogy of *A Doll's House* productions in Sweden both for the stage and in radio and TV adaptations, that demonstrated a remarkable continuity throughout most of the twentieth century because each new production of the play contained a performer that was also involved in an older production. In the discussion, the point was raised that it is important for users know exactly what the scope and compilation history of a certain data set is: how is the data collected, what are the hiatuses and biases?

The final paper by Julia Noordegraaf discussed some of the challenges encountered in the statistical analysis of data on the post-war Dutch and Flemish cinema markets. How can we correlate statistics on cinema markets (for instance: a mapping of the size and location of cinemas) to broader contextual data (demographics, political-religious affiliation, degree of urbanity, government policy)?

After tea, the last section of the symposium consisted of a 'Data Blitz': in very brief presentations of 5 minutes each, 8 projects were introduced to the audience to give a rough idea of the types of data projects 'out there', the research questions behind them and a general idea of how the data were organised.

- ONSTAGE & ACT – FRANS BLOM/ROB VAN DER ZALM/HARM NIJBOER (UNIV. OF AMSTERDAM)
- UTRECHT'S COLLEGIUM CONCERT DATA – THOMAS DELPEUT (RADBOUD UNIV.)
- ENTHOUSIASTIC SPECTATORS – JOSEPH GARNCARZ (UNIV. OF COLOGNE)
- CINEMA CONTEXT – THUNNIS VAN OORT (UNIV. OF AMSTERDAM)
- TOWARDS A BELGIAN CINEMA CONTEXT – DANIEL BILTEREYST (GHENT UNIV.)
- EXPERT NETWORKS FOR THEATRE – NIC LEONHARDT (LMU MÜNICH)
- DUTCH OPERA DATABASE – MASCHA VAN NIEUWKERK/RUTGER HELMERS (UNIV. OF AMSTERDAM)
- SOME DATA ABOUT FILM IN OCCUPIED BELGIUM – LEEN ENGELEN & ROEL VANDE WINKEL (UNIV. OF LEUVEN)

The question that initiated the symposium could be answered affirmatively: there clearly is a willingness and potential for more transdisciplinary and international cooperation among scholars that carry out data-driven historical research into performing arts and its consumption. Participants have expressed the intention to apply for collective funding that would enable more extensive collaboration in the form of a research network. So the discussion will be continued next year!

Thunnis van Oort, University of Amsterdam