DH in Theatre History,and the Challenges of '(Trans-) Cultural Interoperability'
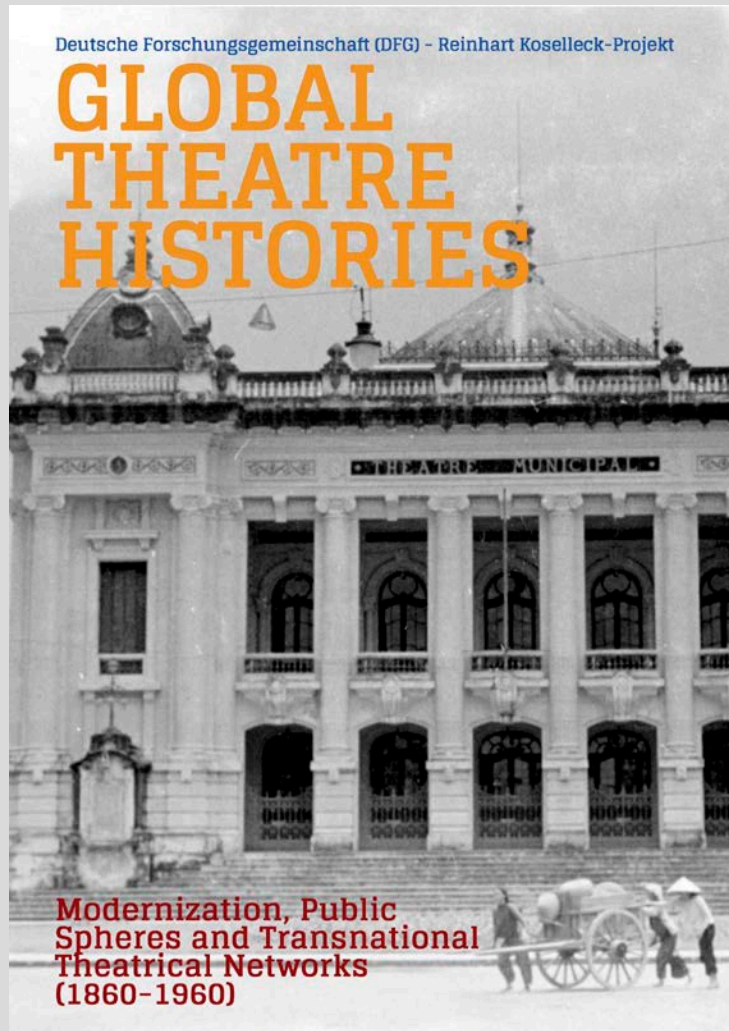

Nic Leonhardt

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EPAD, Amsterdam, 9 November, 2017

Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) – Reinhart Koselleck-Projekt

GLOBAL THEATRE HISTORIES

THEATRE MUNICIPAL

Modernization, Public Spheres and Transnational Theatrical Networks (1860–1960)

Research Project
Global Theatre Histories
(2010-2016)
- LMU Munich
-   financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG)
-   - meanwhile turned into a **Center for Global Theatre Histories** as of fall 2016

www.gth.theaterwissenschaft.uni-muenchen.de/index.html

"The idea of 'global theatre histories' revolves around a central assumption or hypothesis: that during the second half of the nineteenth century a seismic shift took place in the way nations and cultures began to deal with one another and that this shift is reflected in the way theatre was organized, disseminated and how it functioned as a cultural force."

GTH booklet, p. 6

LMU
LUDWIG-
MAXIMILIANS-
UNIVERSITÄT
MÜNCHEN

DEVELOPING
THEATRE

Global Theatre History

erc

Pillars of the GTH Centre
(since fall 2016)

o *Research (individual & colllaborative)*

o *Seminars, Lectures, Workshops*

o ***Theatrescapes* Tool (DH sproject)**

o **MOOC**

o GTH online Journal

o The 'Transnational Theatre History' series (Palgrave Macmillan)

o Academy for DH in Theatre Research

www.gth.theaterwissenschaft.uni-muenchen.de

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Theatrescapes Research Tool

Research Database
(UNDER CONSTRUCTION)

Theatres
DATABASE, MAPS, STATISTICS

Theatrical venues and their development in time and space are one of the main research interests of the project. In this section of the database the individual history of theatre buildings as well as their role as a global phenomenon can be explored

— Open —

Persons
DATABASE, NETWORKS, STATISTICS

The importance of actors, impresarios and managers to theatre as a cultural phenomenon is self evident. To capture the traces that theatre professionals have left in history and to visualize them as networks is the focus of this part of the tool.

— Open —

Theatre and Globalization
DATABASE, MAPS

Results of the theatre collecting assignment, conducted during the 2015 MOOC 'Theatre and Globalization'.

About
ABOUT THE PROJECT, LEGAL NOTICE

General introdurction on the project's goals, legal notices, contact details as well as other miscellaneous information.

- http://theatrescapes.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/

- sister project to GTH

- since 2014

- Financed by LMU excellent Start–Up Grant

Theatrescapes Tool: Aims

Localizing and profiling

- ◆ **purpose-built theatres**
- ◆ **theatrical venues** hosting international troupes)

Tracking and Revealing

- ◆ theatrical trade routes
- ◆ routes & networks of performers/ agents/ impresarios

Developing and making accessible

- ◇ a relational database on the basis of geo- und chronoreferencing

Performing Arts Research in a Digital Age:
productive whirl & constructive connectedness of
centrifugal ➔ ⬅ centripetal forces

Centrifugal: strong orientation towards new media and the digital by theatre practitioners and theatre scholarship

Centripetal: recalling and reconsidering of (disciplinary) conventions, media, and cultural specificity, methodology

"the ability of computer systems or software to exchange and make use of information."

(*Oxford Dictionary online*)

Interoperability: challenges

1) (Don't) Mind the Gap: databases seek homogeneous data

2) „This is not a Theatre/ an Event/ a Contributor"

3) Digital tools allow for collaborative work and therefore for considering multiple perspectives. – Do they?

## Interoperability
Challenge: (Don't) Mind the Gap
Databases / frameworks for digital collections seek homogeneous data

o Availability and validity of & accessibility to resources
o Classification (requires a theoretical (and historical) frame of reference)
o Comparative analysis requires equal set of data in order not to cause interpretative asymmetries
o Global level entails incompleteness and homogenization where local specificities are requested
o Curation

Interoperability

Challenge: „This is not a Theatre/ Event/ Contributor"

o Members of a given culture, disciplinary, educational background look at things from a certain perspective

o values, conventions, cultural practices, concepts, rules, systematisation

o Agenda of a research perspective or a (digital) collection
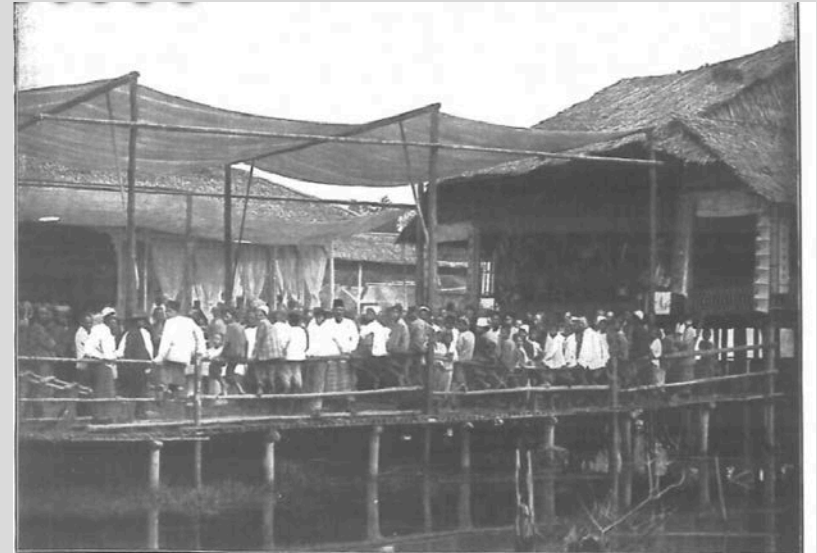
A CHINESE THEATRE AT SINGAPORE.

It is characteristic of the Chinese drama that it may require days and even weeks for its proper development. It is not wonderful, therefore, that the spectators in the primitive theatre, of which a representation is here given, should have found time to divert their attention from the performance on the stage, and to resign themselves, as they evidently have done, to the requirements of the artist whose camera has depicted them for the benefit of our readers. The Chinese play is not easily comprehended by the European, who has, moreover, to accept the conventional stage treatment which endows the principal actors with masks of the most extraordinary description, and which thus makes the play of feature quite superfluous. The Chinese form a large element in the population of Singapore, and the theatre is one of their favourite recreations.

Interoperability

Challenge: **Digital tools allow for collaborative work and therefore considering multiple perspectives. – Do they?**
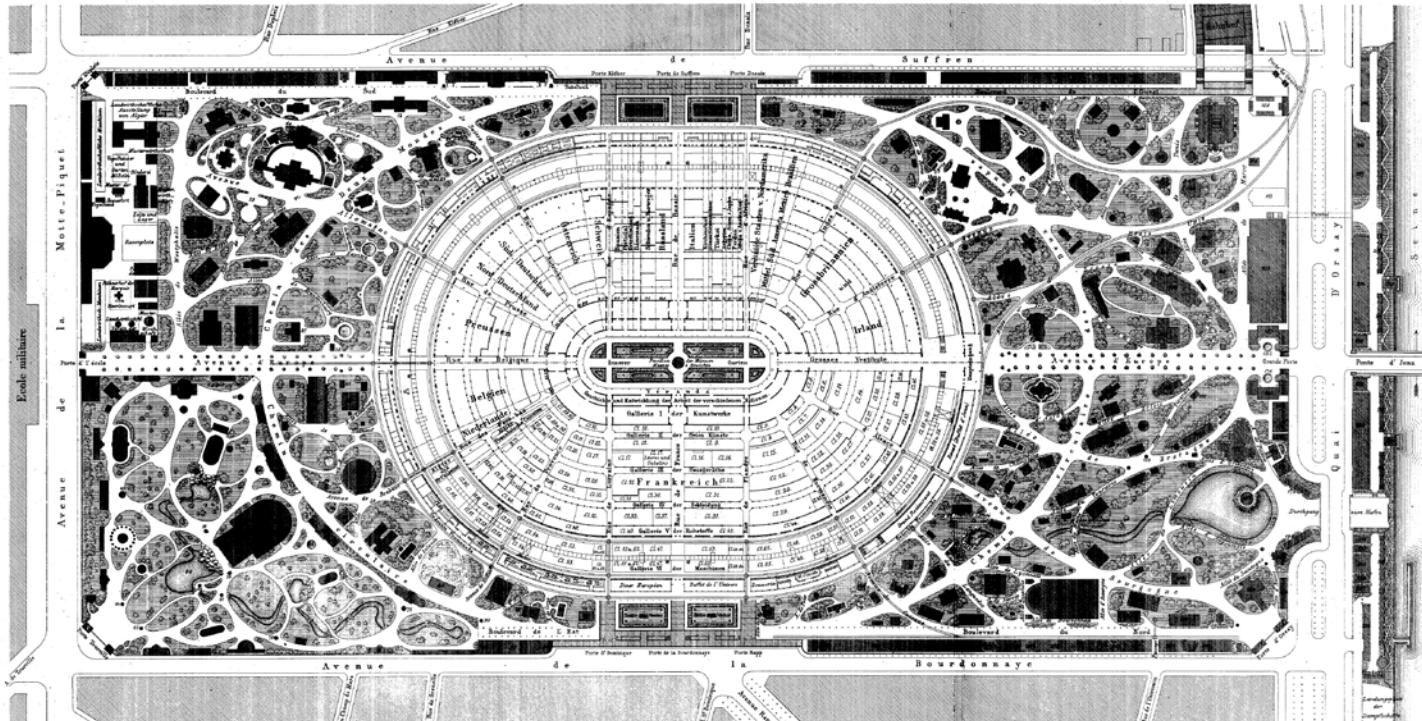
o   availability and accessibility on an institutional level: who holds, who (allegedly) owns material?

o   Politics: staff; financial resources; existence of archives

o   agency

o   Mentality: willingness ./. 'digital prejudice'

Interoperability

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Paris International Exhibition, 1867. Building plan. (Anonym. *Allgemeine Bauzeitung*, 1867, plan No. 36)

*in context / in situ**

In context

- uses particular techniques of arrangement and explanation to convey ideas
- objects are set in context by a means of labels, charts, diagrams,
- objects are set in context by means of other objects, often in relation to a classification
- theoretical frame of reference, comparisons,
- strong cognitive control over the objects, asserting the power of classification and arrangement to order large numbers

In situ

- *in situ* approaches to installation enlarge the (ethnographic) object by **expanding its boundaries to include more of what was left behind**, even if only in replica, after the object was excised from its physical, social and cultural settings
- environmental, re-creative displays
- **>> assets: interactive, annotative, semantic plurality, multifocal, hermeneutic, process, not products**

*) B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Univ of California Press 1998

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Theatre & Globalization

❖ First launched in spring 2015
❖ 7000 students from all over the world enrolled
❖ Relaunch in August 2016

MOOC Theatre & Globalization

Focus: Global Hubs and Local Theatres
Hubs and Contact Zones

Assignment: „Localizing Theatres in your hometown"

- Do you have a theatre building in your hometown dating back 50,100 years or even further?
- When was it built?
- How did it look back then?
- How does it look today?
- Is it still in use as a theatre? Or has it become a cinema or something else, perhaps a shopping mall?
- Students were provided with references to newspaper archives and were allowed to use wikipedia or other freely available online resources
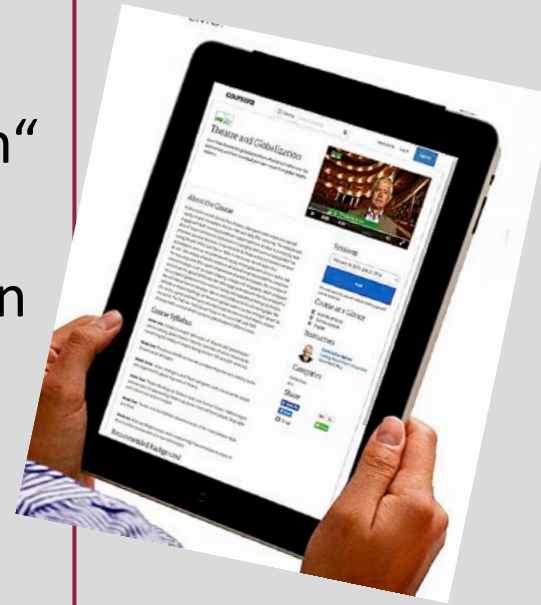
MOOC Theatre & Globalization

>> <u>assignment cont</u>.

Information requested:

When was it built?

When did major changes occur such relocation, fire, etc. who owned or built it?

Did a major star actors or troupes perform there?

You can also go to the place and take a picture of the theater as it looks today

>> students were provided with a mask to enter their data

>> editorial team inserts the data on a digital map

http://www.theatrescapes.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/#home

Thank you for your kind attention!

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Building new communities and/ or strengthening existing ones

o Increasing accessibility of resources and knowledge
o Transparence/"Monitoring": who is doing what? At what points can we joint forces?
o Shifting working mode of scholars and curators: sharing and exchange instead of solipstic mode of work
o Open scholarship in open formats
o Encouraging the community outside academia to contribute
o Kindle interest in scholarly work by making it accessible to non-scholars
o Local and translocal lobby of Theatre Studies: collaboration and exchange
o Alliances!
o representing DH in Theatre Research at DH conferences

DH in Theatre Research: Status Quo

(roughly) **3** (interconnected) **phases** of Digital Humanities (in Theatre Research)

1) Applying digital technology to the <u>recording and archiving</u> of theatrical goods, sources and artifacts: **operational – Digitization**

1) Developing Databases, Collections and Infrastructures for systematizing and displaying digitized material**: quantitative – scientific approach**

2) Connecting and expanding phase 1 & 2; focus on finding ways of mediating DH projects and digital collections: public access, citizen scholarship, annotations, playful interaction, interconnectedness, education, public outreach: **communicative, qualitative – Humanities approach**