

Evolving the story, reviewing the IMTAL Global Conference 2013

Foteini Venieri and Ingo R. Glückler give a European perspective on the Global conference in Washington DC





The IMTAL Global Conference 2013 in Washington DC was Foteini's first and Ingo's second experience of a Global Conference after the European hosted Conference in Belfast in 2007. Therefore, our overall expectations were high and our curiosity triggered! Unfortunately, due to the unforeseen government shutdown (that lasted exactly as many days as we were there) we couldn't visit the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution, where the conference would have been held normally. Luckily, we had the chance to experience some of the outstanding museum theatre performances regularly held at the Smithsonian and other well known museums. Moreover we had the chance to learn lots about the American IMTAL culture and their significant

focus on slavery and racism that is still considered a relevant issue, and gain a valuable experience of the different approaches between Europe, the Americas and a bit of Australia and New Zealand. The Asia Pacific presence at the IMTAL Conference was represented by IMTALers from Australia, who gave a valuable insight on the up-to-date issues and techniques of museum theatre on their continent, notably focusing on Aborigines and the preservation of their culture. An interesting aspect was a successful student museum theatre festival that bridged in a creative way between secondary education and museums. Nigeria and Taiwan gave a really international perspective

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to the conference, unveiling the many different forms and narratives that museum theatre can adopt in different settings and contexts. For instance, colorful puppet shows in museums are very popular in Taiwan and are deeply rooted in the country's history. Austria's and Greece's representation as well as issues concerning the IMTAL Europe by Lara Muth, opened up different points of view and marked the European contribution to the conference, which was very appreciated by the primarily American delegates.

In brief, some issues where there were obviously different were, for example, the employment status of many American IMTALers who are usually working on a regular basis, as full time employees in respective museum departments, rather than as freelancers which is more common for European IMTALers. This status also offers them the possibility to work with generous funding and allows them to hire specialized professionals for each of the



phases that developing a museum theater piece involves: script writers, (stage)directors, technicians, actors, etc.. We also noted that the financial crisis that has caused so much hurt to parts of Europe and consequently the European museum sector lately was not obvious in the US museums sector. Another interesting difference was the purely theatre background of American IMTALers who are mainly actors rather than educators or historians.

Cultural differences were also obvious to us: we had to evaluate each and every presenter in a numerical scale from 1 to 5. Since we never encountered such a strange approach in Europe the issue was raised during a panel concerning the evaluation of museum theatre. In the context of the conference, evaluation was considered a "must" and we were told that presenters also wish to be evaluated. The answer covering the subject and the outcomes of a numerical evaluation was rather vague. A different content on the approach of social issues was also noted, influenced by the history and development of the American nation and the focus on individualism based on Protestant ethics and its spirit of capitalism. Both are significantly define notions such as social rights and freedom, as well as the way they are approached in museum theatre.

To sum up, the IMTAL Global Conference in Washington DC was an enriching experience! We look forward to more international gatherings also in Europe, hopefully accessible to as many IMTAL community members as possible!

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