

Dear Jaleen,

I am delighted to learn that you have completed your work .... Its perspective is revealing of the silences that remain in art criticism and of the taboos and misunderstandings that still prevail.

In addition to my general interest in your topic regarding the range of "what is art?", I was particularly fascinated as I read it to note the resemblances between what you were saying about art traditions, standards, practices and critical discourse and my own current research along similar lines on theatre. The large, publicly funded theatres of the country are announcing their 2006-7 programs right now. These are heavily weighted in favour of the eurocentric canon of well-made plays created almost exclusively by men. Their audiences will be largely made up of upper middle-class, well educated people. Experimental theatre is relegated to the margins, except in certain selected areas, while a range of performance and paratheatrical activities, almost all popular culture and shows that would be the equivalent of illustrations, are excluded as not really being theatre. Right now audiences are led to believe that the only kind of popular theatre and performance that's interesting is in the flood of stand-up comics one finds everywhere.

This question about "what is theatre?" has been around for a long time and has served to exclude women, non-white ethnic groups and non-members of the bourgeoisie through distorted representations of them, all forms of their cultural expression and their ceremonies, and watertight boundaries between what is theatre, what is art, what is dance, what is music -- and what is not (usually viewed with scorn and little knowledge). Thus, when it comes to theatre, burlesque, vaudeville, radio & TV drama, cinema, performance art, shows for alternative audiences including children, festivals that take place outside official theatre spaces, etc. are all considered uninteresting by the experts. As a result, there are gaps and distortions in our collective memory about these theatrical forms -- students and scholars can continue to ignore and scorn them because of the image already constructed of them in official discourse. As you say about the art world, most research continues to be done on what is generally classified as fine or high art.

I am quite convinced that your topic is very important, if ever we wish to move beyond the privileged and narrow view of excellence in artistic & cultural creation that says, without admitting it, that only those who are of the right class and with the right education can create art....

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