



Children and adults as today's conscious audiences!

by Lucie Morin

Review of: Manon Pasquier: *Spectateurs d'aujourd'hui. Étude exploratoire sur les publics du spectacle vivant pour le jeune public, Nantes et Reims, 2013.* Available free of charge on the pages of the participating festivals: www.nova-villa.com and www.petitsetgrands.net.

The publication “*Spectateurs d'aujourd'hui*” (2013) examines the whole family as an audience group in theatre for children and young people. This study thereby places the child spectator (“*Enfant-spectateur*”) at the centre of its socio-cultural environment and throws a light on how theatre for children and young people can make theatre accessible as a cultural event for audiences comprising members of different generations.

Since theatre for children and young people scarcely plays a role in international debates on the cultural practice of children, theatre-workers in France commissioned the culture mediator Manon Pasquier to do a study of her own. She examined audiences and their cultural practices at three French festivals (“*Petits et Grands*” in Nantes, “*Méli'Môme*” in Reims and “*Festi'Mômes*” in the country area of Questembert), in three parts using differing methods. This study opens up approaches to future research in an exemplary and inspiring way.

The first part “*Young people visiting the theatre*”, is based on a questionnaire whose answers reveal certain tendencies, e.g. of the role played by mothers as decision-makers and companions in the theatre visit. Asking questions about motivation, selection criteria and information channels brings up concrete ideas on mediation. In the second part entitled “*The effect of theatre for children and young people on child spectators*”, the author comes up against the difficulty of evaluating the recall of young spectators. Nonetheless she succeeds in portraying the midterm effects of

spectator practices like, for example, the possible influence on orientations in school. In her interviews with young people the observations formulated by Sylvie Octobre (the sociologist and consultant in the study) are made tangible. She describes the active re-introduction of the category of taste (French: "le goût" which has undertones of pleasure and desire) in contemporary theatre for children and young people and in its mediation.

Spectator's feelings and their capacity to make judgements are promoted by regular theatre visits and a mediation which has nothing to do with learning aims.

The third part entitled "Visiting the show as a family" describes the way the family experiences the theatre, and outlines this in mini-portraits. The decisive role of mothers as mediators for the whole family is explored more deeply in interviews. Fortunately the feedback shows how access to theatre can be created – also after becoming parents – along with the will to give young children as many cultural opportunities as possible. The assessment of many parents that "theatre for children and young people is not just for the children but also for me", tells us a lot about adults' enthusiasm for the "théâtre jeune public".

As an inspiration for further research on current audience practices the study offers relevant concrete tips for heads of festivals and theatres beyond the borders of France. It documents how the cultural aims of the theatre for children and young people and its mediation can be fulfilled. This is a "must-read" especially – but not solely – for culture mediators.

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