



Francophone Youth Theatre presents

On April 23rd, 2017 at 2 pm

During the Festival

Round Table Event

How theatre can be an asset in the
teaching/learning of a foreign language in
American schools?

With

John Ireland, Associate Professor
Director of Undergraduate Studies for French, *University of Illinois at
Chicago*

Philippe Ravanans, Professor
Chairman of the Business and Entrepreneurship Department at *Columbia
College in Chicago*

Park Krausen, Former Artistic Director-*Théâtre du Rêve in
Atlanta/Producer/Actress*,

Moderation: Sylvie Goutas, Lecturer
Department of Romance Languages & Literatures, *University of Chicago*

Sylvie: Bonjour, hello everybody, my name is Sylvie Goutas and I will be moderating this talk, which focuses on the contribution of theatre to French as foreign language pedagogy for the American school system. First thank you to the organizers Karine Deren and Linda Mesnel, Renée-Claude Thériault and Sylvette Nicolini, also I would like to thank teacher participants, so John Ireland and all the college and high-school students that took part in the preparation of many scenes performed yesterday and the ones that will be performed today as well.

All the participants (directors, teachers and guest speakers) have been transformed by their theatrical activities but at the core of any experience involving theater there is something deeply human which changes us, which educates us, I think.

The importance of theatre in Anglo-Saxon education is rather a key to success and I think the reason why we all teaching theatre in America.

Before introducing you to our speakers I would like to say how reading their biographies impacted me on a specific moment I had when I lived in Paris and I was student at a school of drama, l'école Florent. I remember I was attending for a quarter painting class in a neighborhood of Paris (cultural center) and someone told me "oh I can introduce you to someone that could interest you as a student, and she introduced me to Paul Bouquet. I think Michel found through the theatre a way to express that, to express his frustration, to save people through acting, directing and teaching theatre right now. I was impressed and after that, each time I was talking to somebody who was attending the National Conservatory of Dramatic classes I was asking him if the instructor was Michel Bouquet and what was the class about. The answers were the same each time, "the things we learn in this class has nothing to do with becoming famous or entering in the Comédie Française but we are attending classes of humanism". And I found humanism in the biographies of our speakers of today. Please pay attention to the diversity of all the places they got to work and live and all the people the got to meet.

Biography of Park Krausen

Park grew up in Milwaukee, in Chicago and in Hartford Connecticut. She has lived in Chicago, Montreal, NYC and LA and currently lives in Atlanta. She was educated at Brillant Mont International School, Emory University and then at the National Conservatory of

Dramatic Arts in Paris, France. Park has lived in Switzerland, France and Quebec, worked in those three countries as an actor and as an assistant director and producer as well as in Poland, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. For 10 years, Park Krausen served as Producing Artistic Director of Theatre du Reve (theater of the dream) - the only professional francophone theater company in the US. She focused on international dialogues through theater and produced over 10 major productions.

As an actor, she has performed all over the US and the world specializing in Shakespeare, Beckett and Chekov and focuses as a producer on developing new work. Acting credits are from the following theaters - Lincoln Center Living Room Series, Hartford Stage, The Alliance Theater, Georgia Shakespeare, North Carolina Shakespeare, Actors Express, About Face, Chicago Dramatists among others.

She speaks fluent English and French, conversational German with Spanish, Italian, Welsh and Japanese familiarity.

Biography of Philippe Ravanas

A native of France, Professor Ravanas is an Arts Management expert with two decades of experience in building bridges between cultural industries and academia in Europe, North America, China and Russia.

He is a Full, Tenured Professor and Chairman Emeritus of the Business & Entrepreneurship Department of the College. During 6 years, he successfully led the largest cultural management education center in the world, with 1000 students, 150 faculty members and 120 different subjects taught.

He is a Visiting Professor of the University of Montreal (Canada) and the Central Academy of Drama of Beijing (China). He is also a Research Fellow at the Beijing International Studies University.

He teaches graduate classes such as Arts Marketing Box Office & Revenue management, Sponsorship and Cultural Policy.

He is the co-author of the books *Marketing Culture & the Arts* and of *Marketing Planning for the Arts*. He is the Associate Editor of the *International Journal of Arts Management* and a contributor to the *Journal of Cultural Economics*.

He previously served as Corporate Communications VP at Disneyland Paris. He participated in its launch and developed pan-European marketing strategies with its sponsors, including Coca-Cola, Mc Donald's, Mattel and Nestlé. He contributed to the redefinition of its pricing strategy and served as its official spokesperson, reporting directly to the CEO and successfully turning around adverse press opinion. He then joined Christie's Auction House in London and New York, where he took charge of its worldwide client relationship management strategies, processes & database.

John Ireland

John Ireland is Associate Professor and Head of the Department of French and Francophone Studies at UIC.

His primary research interests are focused on Jean-Paul Sartre, existentialism and contemporary theater. He is a former President of the North American Sartre Society and is currently Executive Editor for North America of the journal *Sartre Studies International*. He is also a member of France's "Centre National de Recherche Scientifique", attached to the "Equipe Sartre" of the "Institut des Textes et des Manuscrits Modernes" and was part of the team that published the first complete, annotated edition of Sartre's theater in Gallimard's Pléiade collection in 2005. He is a member of the "conseil d'administration" for the "Groupe d'Etudes Sartriennes" in Paris and the "comité de redaction" for the journal *Etudes Sartriennes*. Other Sartre publications include: *Sartre: Un art déloyal. Théâtralité en engagement* (Paris : Jean-Michel Place, 1994) and many articles dealing both with the concept of theatricality in Sartre's work and his many unpublished manuscripts.

He is also active in the « Laboratoire des Arts et des Philosophies de la Scène (LAPS) » at the Université de Paris IV (Sorbonne). He has worked closely with the activist playwright Armand Gatti on a number of projects since his graduate student days and written about and presented many other contemporary French and Francophone playwrights at conferences all over Europe, North America and North Africa. His current research seeks to evaluate how theater takes on aspects of war trauma in ways inaccessible to the novel and film. In 2006 he was made a "Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques" by the French government.

At UIC, he teaches primarily in the area of 20th century French and Francophone literature, theater and film. He is the recipient of a number of teaching awards, most recently UIC's Silver Circle Teaching Award in 2015.

Questions

Sylvie: Could you please describe us the education institutions and universities where you got to work at or still work at?

John: I am working at the UIC, which is of course a state University and we are currently facing an incredible challenge since we are all aware of the Illinois budget situation. Basically the budget situation impacts us in pretty devastating ways. Actually we are running programs on hypothetical budget but despite the circumstances I think we do pretty well. *The Department of French and Francophone Studies* offers a Basic Language program, an Undergraduate program (B.A) and a graduate program (M.A). We did very well to maintain these programs and actually we have two majors very interesting. Our students like very much their french classes and they are very motivated to learn and discover the french culture.

Philippe Ravanas: Columbia College is a very large applied arts school, it has a real theatre, and it has to be essential because Columbia College is a specialized business program who trains managers for the cultural fields in general and my background precisely, is live form arts so I taught in this field extensively at Columbia and also around the world. When it comes to language education, Columbia is far less developed than an institution such as UIC and it does an angle, most of our classes are dedicated to students who seem and who want to have an understanding of foreign language being French-German-Italian in that prospective so they do the focus on the pronunciation-ish way more than on the French literature. That is my academic background.

Sylvie: How do you convince high school students to keep studying French at college?

Philippe: Just offset the layout and to quote few figures I researched for this conversation, surprisingly language education over the past 10 years has not been a priority in the US at the university level. Of course just to mention Chicago, because we have the privilege of the large town and we have many programs but in reality the numbers of student studying a foreign language in the US is very low. 93 % of high schools offer at least one language and the default language is mostly French or Spanish. But you have a drastic reduction at the university level, I think only 7% of American students are taking any foreign language classes and only 1% of these students retains actually some level of proficiency after leaving

school. I just wanted to lay out that and comparatively French is doing pretty well but in an environment that doesn't seem to fit, even in terms, you mention budgetary crisis and it seems that it does overwhelmingly impact language education. And it is also a question of efficiency among the teachers but more mostly at high school level where on average the majority of teachers in high schools are below what is called the military standards.

John: We'll I have a couple of things to say actually. Yes, all the elements in regard, I wanted to go back to the example that you just previously quoted, the double majors. People in a sense effectively choosing maybe another profession maybe not. I read a study where they thought in a sense their best career options lay. And again you know the fact that the Americans go into so much debt due to tuition influences the way they see their own education choices. I think that there are many portions to that. The other thing is I think that some of the aspects of a humanistic/humanities education are not emphasized as they should be. A couple of facts the language association convention which attracts all language graduate students, everybody is sort of the big apple of our meeting, is also attended by representatives of all the major companies in the United States saying "are you sure you want to go into research and teaching because we value the skills you have?" The ability, what you have developed in terms of analytic skills is something absolutely extraordinary and we can teach you the skills related to our particular business but we want people who can produce and analyze text as effectively as you can. Who can see what a text is getting at, what a text is hiding, how its strategy is organized. And those skills, particularly when you add another cultural component, are incredibly valuable. And this is where I'm seeing business programs, they're actually starting to introduce some knowledge of foreign language, of foreign culture because in this globalized economy, these skills are becoming extremely necessary as well. So I think that there are aspects to foreign language that just don't get the emphasis that they really should have, that they're attractive to people in really every profession. I would tell a high school student that they need to do something that they really want to do, because if they don't want to do it, they aren't going to be very fantastic at it, and they're probably not going to be very good at it either. Do what you have a passion for you're not going to starve. It will eventually work out. We heard this from actually Jack McCord from the Alliance Française who came to talk to our students. He said listen: "are going to matriculate with your degree and go straight out into your dream job? No. But keep the faith, keep the faith and eventually, as was my case (because he gave his own example), it will happen. And if you keep that other language or that language interest alive, it will work for you. It will find its way into what you do".

Sylvie: And I think that as instructors and teachers it is very important for us to inform our students because I think at the institutions where we worked at always advertise maybe the globalization importance of being global citizen. I think that if students knew at the end of high school or at the very beginning when they are freshman, that you know "Yes a language is a tool and if it is not a tool it is a way to be higher in the end".

Park: To speak to that because I'm not in higher education and I don't have to defend those kinds of programs. As an artist I do work with students in higher education. But this notion that you (to John) were speaking to, about exercising a different muscle. If you think about all of the different muscles, there's a muscle of science, there's a muscle of theatre, there's a muscle and language, foreign language and the ability to access all of these different muscles and to have the facility in your body, mind, fingertips, heart, and tongue gives you access and a creative approach to whatever job and whatever field you may end up employed in in the future. To pretend that there isn't a dialogue, or this isn't this notion of amassing a chest of tools to serve you in whatever field you end up in seems silly to me.

Having access to something in its original language also gives you another point of entry for whatever tier you want to jump in. Or being respected by the rest of the world who tends to have a stronger, okay I'm speaking specifically to France just as like it prepares you to do, it prepares you in how to be a critical thinker I think in a different way. To have access to a cultural knowledge and landscape that I don't think looking at civics or arts or literature is not necessarily encouraged in America. So how do we respect it when you enter the workplace? If you are dealing with, I'm thinking because we're so in French mode right now, but specifically people from France if you have had that as part of your own formation, there's a dialogue you can have and respect that exists between colleagues that ...

Philippe: And I saw that extensively when I worked for Disneyland in Paris where there is this assumption from the American executive that everybody speaks English, first it is not true and when it is true it doesn't play to their advantage because people who only speak English and it was the case in a number of figures of American executive at Disney of Paris, most of them were incompetent at it and I had terrible difficulty to understand the context in which I was working, because they made the assumption that nothing was different. But again that is not a certain advantage for a person who only speaks English.

Sylvie: *What about theatre? What about the impact of theatre in the learning of a foreign language?*

Park: I think that the question is: "how do you really learn a language except through dialogue? How do you make it your own except through dialogue? And what is theatre based on?" Theatre is traditionally dialogue and monologue. But to me what is exciting in truly appropriating language, getting inside of a language, getting inside of even syntax, you could read French poetry or novels out loud for days, or newspaper, but you're not speaking the

spoken word. So, when you are given a text, French or otherwise, you get inside of it and you start to break it down and think about it as “okay I’m a human being, so is this character that I am going to embody or read, and what do these characters want? What desires? How do they feel? How are they emotionally connected to what they’re saying?” And I think that we don’t really learn a language until we have to use it because we need to input/get what we want. And if you look at modern theatre, at Stanislavskis technique, you break it down. What are your objectives, meaning what do you want? What are the tactics you use to get it? You check and see does it work? Does it not work? Okay so it’s not working, so what am I going to do to get what I want? And that’s really how we function as human beings, so in using theatre in a foreign language classroom we start to connect to our own humanity, the way that other people think/speak, by putting yourselves in their shoes and using your tongue in a different muscular way and their syntax and their brain space. And I think that it almost seems like its inexplicable at this point, because of what I do, I’m preaching to the choir. I majored in French and theatre in college and I thought “when am I ever going to use these two things together at all?” and my parents said “Oh good, you’re going into diplomacy”. I spent some time in Michigan and realized I preferred acting on stage instead of in real life. But there’s all of these things can come together. And to me it seems like a no brainer as to why you would use theatre.

Sylvie: Could you elaborate maybe a little, I was impressed by the fact you worked on Stanislavskis work because for any French speaker, theater is already so challenging yet at the end it totally makes sense but how can English speakers can deal with his work?

Park: I also translated Novarina into English, so I have a relationship with it. But then again, so Novarina invented his own language. He’s using the French language as a jumping off point. I don’t know if any of you are familiar with his work but some might consider him an absurdist. Some might consider him a surrealist of sorts. And the idea of just combining words. Words and the syntax in his own language. So, then to me, again, you’re appropriating the world without reading Novarina and getting into that moment, that space. I really don’t know how else to speak to it other than you, I think it’s about connecting breath to body to sound, which is what a language does.

Sylvie: I am sure you faced the same kind of difficulty when you ask your students to study classical texts, I was impressed by the way they were saying: "I work on Racine and Corneille only", and I was impressed by the way students would say this in French.

John: And it’s true. It’s so useful for language instruction too because the most difficult faculty I think, and I’m not a specialist...But the most difficult faculty for most students is that they don’t understand the phrase, they’re just sort of speaking back to you. And the last

thing to come is sort of speaking fluency. It's hard. I've learned from my own experience too that if you go to France and you spend a whole day speaking French and by the evening you're exhausted. Your mouth is just exhausted, they're completely different muscles, you know. *C'est dur de parler francais. C'est tres fatiquant aussi.* And I remember that my French would just collapse in the evening. And also when speaking in a foreign language and you struggle, you speed up. You just skip over it. And in working with theatre it makes people slow down. It can't do that. You have to get into the rhythms and the sounds. And alexandrin has been wonderful. Talk about a hard school, and a great school for learning how French, in particular French rhythms are. It feels like you're inside trying to *respire*. I mean it's so good for the students pronunciation, so good.

Sylvie: I think it is interesting if you had worked on the new research project based language learning which has been developed in high-school and it started happening in higher education I think theatre activities are very interesting.

Park: Can I jump back to Novarina though. There's something, you just said that that reminded me of Novarina. So when we're working on theatre too there's something about getting up off your seat. Having to speak out. So – holds his text like this so you have to pick your head out of the book. So when you have to invite an audience into a conversation, or your scene partner. There's confidence, there's communication. There's a physical engagement. Just to go back to you and your comment about confidence and the notion of wearing these masks and when you're doing theatre and a foreign language there's two masks the character and the language that creates that has the potential to free you.

John: And I just want to add that the story I tell my people is that I don't believe in the supernatural, and I love my contradictions. I don't believe in the supernatural, but theatre is great magic. And I had that experience after this semester and especially in 20th century theatre. I opened up a couple of science practical sessions where you could take a section and just work on it. Two girls decided they wanted to take a small section from the first part of *En attendant Godot* and they decided that this discussion that they might leave each other. That maybe they would be better off, but they can't leave each other. So they made some paper loops and fashioned them into this kind of chain of paper to each other's feet and then it was all about waiting and feeling time. So they pulled out a cell phone and put it on metronome function to make time mortal. And I thought, it's so simple, it's brilliant, it never crossed my mind. And then they took possession of this and they went away for an hour or something and they came back and they started, and they didn't memorize text. But with the metronome they got elements of rhythm and movement and then they put the language in. And even though they didn't know the words of the text and even though it wasn't great theatre, it was real theatre. Suddenly they started to create something on stage. And I think it was interesting because the other students in the class, they got silent. Complete

absorption and it was like they were seeing these two girls in a completely different light. And it was wonderful. I just stepped back and said “yes”.

Sylvie: I think it was interesting to try to give them many tools to use the language. I was wondering if you think that student who take foreign language literature should have qualities or practices before learning a language?

Park: Oh in general. Practices, yeah I mean you have so many different traditions and styles and basic formations. Like in France for example we can speak to that with the national conservatory of dramatic arts, there are schools that are designed to feed performances for the court to which sometimes plebs were invited. Or in England where we're looking at the traditions here, it was supported by the patron saints and the royalty and some of that never fully went away as the royalty lost power. So there's a different structure to the importance and the traditions of theatre in certain countries. And then, in Turkey where you also have the artist's center, you have the director who has his perfect world which dictates everything. And each artist has a sense of who they are physically. Whose their voice is. You know it's so different than in America. So it's such a large question, I don't even know how to answer it. But yes, top down and bottom up. And in Haiti where there's a need to just get people into the streets, and after the last two major hurricanes and whatever else may have been ...

John: You have to think of the context. You have all these different situation and the one I kind of think about is Algeria. Algeria is fascinating case because I mean what we think of theatre wasn't part of their tradition and it sort of came in as a colonial cultural practice in the 20's. But when the FLN began its sort of insurrection and movement, it suddenly realized that theatre could be mobilized effectively for propaganda reasons. And because they were largely about socialism they looked to a kind of European model, so Mayakovski, etc. And that kind of model made after le theatre national algérien had a revolution. So in 1962 the tech theatre came through, I think is 63 or 64, but it started to encounter all of these problems because that tradition didn't exist. They were going to rural areas where they had no kind of facility. But they did have a different kind of story telling tradition like the market day, the Mehta, the story teller just used props and sort of naturally, the Aristotelian model met the other model and changed. And it's sort of really interesting to follow certain people whose practice changed and evolved so much as the kind of going evolved in different areas of Algeria and trying to engage with different languages, different practices, within this country and this culture were in reality decimated by colonialism. So he's trying to take stock of himself.

Sylvie: Thank you, we have to stop now, we would really need more time!

Thank you all.