

TEEN

THEATRE EUROPEAN ENGAGEMENT NETWORK



A COOPERATION PROJECT
Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union



A COOPERATION
ADVENTURE OF 2 YEARS

TOOLBOX
AND METHODS

TEEN AMBASSADORS
AND THE GOLDEN
RECOMMENDATIONS

THE FUTURE PERSPECTIVE

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A cooperation project co-funded by Creative Europe

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Project partners website:

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Edition: Mantua, 2018





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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is intended to act as a point of inspiration to all people working with teenagers, and particularly to those working in the field of theatre. However, it is not only made for theatre professionals, producers, and curators but is also for teachers who want tools to engage in conversations about theatre with their students.

T.E.E.N. stands for the Theatre European Engagement Network, a European cooperation project focused on developing teenage theatre audiences. It involves the following three theatre festivals produced for younger generations, as well as a research institute:

- *SEGNI New Generations Festival (Segni d'infanzia, Mantua, Italy);*
- *Aprilfestival (Teatercentrum, Copenhagen, Denmark);*
- *Showbox (Norsk Scenekunstbruk, Oslo, Norway);*
- *Researcher, Rui Pina Coelho (University of Lisbon, Portugal).*

Consisting of five parts, the booklet is about the T.E.E.N. project's process and outcomes:

PART 1

provides a description of the T.E.E.N. project. It explains why the project came about, as well as its aims, and the process that it followed. Right from the beginning, the three project partners in Italy, Norway, and Denmark each found their own way of working with teenagers that best suited their local structures and how their three respective festivals were framed. As such, Part 1 explains these three different approaches and presents the role of the research institute in Portugal.

PART 2

describes the performances that have formed a part of the project. All of the performances that have been shared during our visits to each other's festivals are listed.

PART 3

introduces each of the teenage ambassadors who have been visiting the festivals, sharing performances, conducting discussions on theatre, and attending workshops. It details their perspectives on what has been gained from this experience.

PART 4

provides various outlooks on engaging teenagers in theatre. Exploring the use of theatre criticism as a tool of engagement, Rui Pina Coelho (Portugal) presents an essay entitled '*A Critic Is Never Wrong*'. From a producer's point of view, Kjell Moberg (Norway) explores '*The Political Aspects of Critical Thinking*'. This section concludes with a summarising '*Reflection on Becoming a Teen Audience*', written by Naja Birke (Denmark) from a tutor's point of view.

PART 5

presents golden recommendations for working with teenagers and theatre, thereby offering various inspirational tools and methods.

Finally, the *Afterword*, written by the Project Leader Cristina Cazzola, summarises some key aspects of the project and looks towards the future.



PART 1 THE T.E.E.N. PROJECT

1.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

T.E.E.N. is a pilot project that aims to explore, establish, and apply best practice audience development strategies in order to engage European teenagers in theatre. This involves a comprehensive research process that maps and translates successful practices in various local contexts into a methodology that may be applied across Europe. It is intended that this project will mark the beginning of a permanent European network structure that provides step by step support for local organisations to engage the younger generations in theatre.

The T.E.E.N. project partnership was founded by festival managers working in the Theatre for Young Audiences sector. What began with a cursory exchange of experiences around audience development, particularly those approaches used to target teenagers, developed into more in-depth conversations about the similarities and differences in the way we each worked. The most significant outcome of these shared reflections was the acknowledgement that, on the one hand, the sector produces a lot of work for children aged from eighteen months to nine years and is largely successful at attracting large audiences. However, on the other hand, the industry frequently fails to retain these audiences in the later years, between the ages of ten to nineteen (*N.B. for the sake of simplicity, we have defined this age demographic as “teenagers” or just simply “teens”*). With our shared awareness about this problem, the

partners felt the need to consider why this occurs and to work together on a common strategy to resolve this problem. We passionately believe that working with teenagers is crucial to ensure the survival and the development of contemporary European identity and culture in the future.

Some of the reasons why it is difficult to engage teenagers in theatre-going include:

- teenagers tend to be a ‘non-audience’ for the cultural offer in general;
- as a lot of programming has not been directed towards teenagers specifically, an appropriate creative offering for them doesn’t exist;
- as such, it is difficult to reach and attract them with the current creative offering;
- a specific engagement approach to attract teenagers has not yet been fully explored and developed by the sector;
- often it is teenagers’ schools or parents who choose what they will go to see, meaning teenagers are not able to exercise their own choice; marketing and communication about performances is not targeted to suit teenagers’ habits (e.g. how they surf the internet or use social media);
- for those without a close friend, family member, or teacher who is directly engaged in the cultural landscape (such as a parent who regularly attends the theatre), it may be difficult for teenagers to understand the positive and emotionally-engaging experience of theatre.



In response to these points, the project partners decided to develop a new young audience development strategy that built on positive experiences and practices at local and national levels. These practices were further explored, compared, developed, and translated into a comprehensive methodology, that may now be applied to the whole sector at European level, across all European countries.

OBJECTIVES:

T.E.E.N. aims at identifying the most suitable kinds of theatre performances, as well as the most effective engagement techniques, for the teenage age group. To this end, it employs several tools that draw upon theatre criticism and a shared process of direct observation. It brings together festival directors, artists, and young audience members in order to improve the creative offering for teenagers and help creative teams to keep in tune with young audiences. The project is entirely founded upon the idea that it is only through engaging in the perspectives of young people, and listening to their needs and voices, that it is possible to develop meaningful engagement of teenage audiences - an audience which is interested, determined, confident, and able to convey diverse opinions.

THE PROCESS:

Each country recruited a collective of teenagers called a TAG (Teen Action Group). Supported by local tutors, they went to the theatre together and then discussed, wrote about, and processed the experience in different ways. The TAG teams experimented with several critical approaches to form their personal opinions, learning different ways to express and share these. Every participant kept a critical journal of the cultural events they attended in Pepys' Diary (you can read more about Pepys and his Diary in *Part 5 – Toolbox and Methods*).

From each TAG team, three teen ambassadors were selected to visit partner festivals overseas with their tutor, and to meet with their foreign peers. After returning to their countries, they shared their adventures with their local TAG team and acted as hosts to their foreign counterparts when they reciprocated the visit.

Each partner had their own approach of working with the local TAG teams according to each of the three different local structures and cultural contexts. In the following section you can read about the activities and outcomes achieved by each of the partners in working with their TAG teams and teen ambassadors.

1.2 THE ITALIAN APPROACH

After the second meeting of the T.E.E.N. project in December 2016 (held at the festival *Showbox* in Oslo), a call for participation was published on *Segni d'infanzia's* website and Facebook page. *Segni d'infanzia* also presented the project to all middle and high schools in Mantua and the wider province, as well as schools from further away that had been engaged with *SEGNI New Generations Festival*. Furthermore, the call was presented to library reading groups often frequented by teenagers, as well as to social and youth centres. Those teenagers interested in participating were asked to send two reviews of shows or cultural events that they had recently attended, as well as a self-evaluation of their English competency level.

All of the teenagers selected for the Mantuan TAG were contacted and invited to see their first show together in order to get to know each other. A calendar of activities for the TAG was drawn up and included the performances that would be seen together, as well as the monthly meetings that were used to discuss cultural events, performance visions, and to prepare for the international visits with the foreign partners.

The calendar of performances was developed more or less on a monthly basis and involved all theatrical events presented not only in Mantua, but also in nearby cities. Owing to the fact that there were no performances programmed especially for young audiences in Mantua, the calendar was made up of theatrical events targeted towards adults.

Since there was no project budget for tickets, *Segni d'infanzia* engaged local theatres in the project to negotiate very accessible ticket prices. As such, members of the TAG had free or strongly

reduced tickets at three of the city's theatres upon presentation of their 'T.E.E.N. Card', if they went alone and not together as the TAG team. They were also able to invite their friends to join them and 'have a ride' on the discounted ticket 'merry-go-round'.

These partnerships with the local theatres also provided an opportunity for our TAG team members to share a space with the artists before or after the show in order to discuss and share their opinions, questions, and observations.

Sometimes, when this meeting was done straight after the performance in the presence of all the audience members who attended, the teenagers felt listened, important and so self-confident. This was evident because some of their questions and comments were very sharp and attuned to the themes in the production. As a consequence, this self-confidence feeling transferred to other TAG members, who may normally have been quite shy, and encourage them to ask questions too.

PART 1 THE T.E.E.N. PROJECT

Another indirect output observed by the partner theatres was that, thanks to the presence of the TAG team and their questions, audience members who may not have been confident in understanding theatrical codes and devices had an opportunity to live the experience in a new way and learn more about them. Therefore, we discovered that, when there is a space where it's possible to share questions and points of view, both teenagers and other audience members unfamiliar with theatre may learn that being a spectator can be an engaging and fulfilling experience.

TAG meetings were an opportunity to give voice to the teenagers and to support them to discover and learn new ways of expressing their feelings and thoughts in regard to the Performing Arts field.

During the meetings, it was also necessary to select the teen ambassadors who would be visiting the overseas festivals. The TAG team members decided unanimously that this selection should be done through a secret and democratic election. Moreover, it was decided that the Mantuan TAG would send different teen ambassadors

to each overseas festival in order to allow the greatest number of teenagers to experience an international festival and have the opportunity of cultural exchange with peers from different countries.

This set-up allowed for, and indeed made necessary, the exchange of lived experience between different peers. The adult tutor and project manager were also able to observe those topics considered by the teen ambassadors to be most crucial, in order to pass these on to the other teenagers in the TAG.

As *Segni d'infanzia* was the Leading Partner of the T.E.E.N. project, in addition to coordinating the activities of the Italian TAG, it was also in charge of several other activities such as project management and monitoring, media relations, and partnership development with local stakeholders (this partnership development focused on involving curators and artists in the engagement of the teenagers). Furthermore, as part of the association's organisation of the *SEGNI New Generations Festival*, it also played a role in developing activities that focused on enhancing the professional skills of the local partners.

1.3 THE NORWEGIAN APPROACH

As *Norsk Scenekunstbruk* was already engaged in non-formal cooperation with both *Segni d'infanzia* (Italy) and *Teatercentrum* (Denmark) prior to this process, the T.E.E.N. project was as an opportunity to strengthen and formalise the cooperation with its existing partners. *Norsk Scenekunstbruk* had a special interest in researching international perspectives on teenage engagement in theatre through the T.E.E.N. project because it had already established a project called 'Young Voices' back in 2012.

'Young Voices' aims to foster critical thinking about the arts, encouraging young people to reflect deeper on their arts experiences. *The Cultural Rucksack* (a national programme for arts and culture in schools) was published in 2001 to motivate Norwegian schools to embed the arts into students' daily school lives. This means that every Norwegian student aged six to nineteen will have an art experience three to six times every school year. The 'Young Voices' project utilised these experiences, encouraging young people to act as critics, writing reviews about the performances they saw in their schools. The web platform for the 'Young Voices' project was also launched in 2012 and now includes hundreds of written reviews and interviews that have been contributed by teenagers from all over Norway. Some schools even incorporated the project into their teaching plans and, in the county of Østfold, publishing a critique of a recent arts experience formed a part of students' final exams.

Since *Norsk Scenekunstbruk* already had a large group of teenagers involved in the 'Young Voices' project, it was decided that these existing groups would be used as their TAG teams. Since the start of the project, TAGs have been working not only in Oslo, but also in the cities of Asker, Fredrikstad, Hvaler, and Kristiansand. The work with the TAG groups has taken place throughout the whole year but was of course intensified during the time of the local festival, *Showbox*.

As part of the TAG process, Anette Therese Pettersen, a Norwegian tutor, also facilitated workshops in schools across the country that explored how to foster critical thinking and how to critique the arts. Pettersen's workshops, which have been developed in collaboration with music critics Ida Habbestad and Hild Borchgrevink, have usually been held at schools. Conducting the workshops with pre-existing classes of school students meant that not only did the teenagers already know each other but there was also already trust within the group. Although all of the workshops focused on introducing the concept of criticism (a link to the corresponding PowerPoint can be found in *Part 5.3* of this report), the content of the sessions varied according to the age of the TAGs and on what performance they had seen in the past and/or would be seeing with their schools in the future. Usually the workshop begins with a task called 'Five Words', where the TAGs listen to music (specifically folk music, which they have often not listened to before) and are asked to write down five words. There are no

rules as to what sort of words they write down - the point of the exercise is to see what sort of associations, thoughts, and opinions occur to them during the three to four minutes of listening. Each TAG member's paper is collected anonymously (i.e. without their names), these are shared, and then there is a discussion about what sorts of words have appeared. The workshop then continues with other exercises where the TAGs see videos from different performances and write down descriptions and their opinions on what they see. "What actually happened? What did you think about what you saw and heard? What thoughts or memories occurred during or after watching it?" The TAGs often have some experience within dance, music, and/or theatre, and we also discuss how our competence and preferences affect and form our meetings with art. After discussing these ideas around art, and by looking at examples of criticism (including texts written by other teenagers), we discuss what criticism does as well as different approaches and formats of reviewing and criticism that can be used. To do this, the TAGs work in groups, discussing examples of art. Towards the end they either write a short review of a single scene from a performance (shown as film clip) or they complete

a collective piece of criticism. When possible, the workshop also includes research into a performance that the TAGs will be seeing in the near future.

The aim of these workshops is to provide the TAGs with tools for describing and discussing art. By conducting this in a group setting, different opinions and views on the art can be thoroughly discussed - demonstrating the value of having multiple opinions and thoughts without concluding with any 'definitive' or 'correct' view. The Norwegian teen ambassadors all have experience in writing about theatre and dance, and their critiques were used during the TAG workshops as examples of what criticism can be, who can write it, and where to publish. One example is Rauand Ismail's criticism of the opera performance '*Simon*' - a performance that was targeted towards teenagers. In the text, Ismail writes about being a part of the performance's intended target group, of watching a performance comprised solely of teenagers, about his own prejudices, and of how these were confronted while watching, and then writing about, the performance. (Read the review here: <https://www.minervanett.no/ensomheten-utfordres-operaen-simon/>).



1.4 THE DANISH APPROACH

The *Aprilfestival* in Denmark is a touring festival that changes municipality every year. *Teatercentrum* works in collaboration with the chosen municipality to bring theatre performances to young audiences living locally. Throughout the week of the festival, theatre is performed in schools, kindergartens, nurseries, cultural centres, libraries, local theatres, and even venues like old factory buildings. Many people in the municipality get involved as collaborators in the festival - from the people working in the local theatre to schoolteachers, caretakers, municipal road and park agencies, and even the mayor.

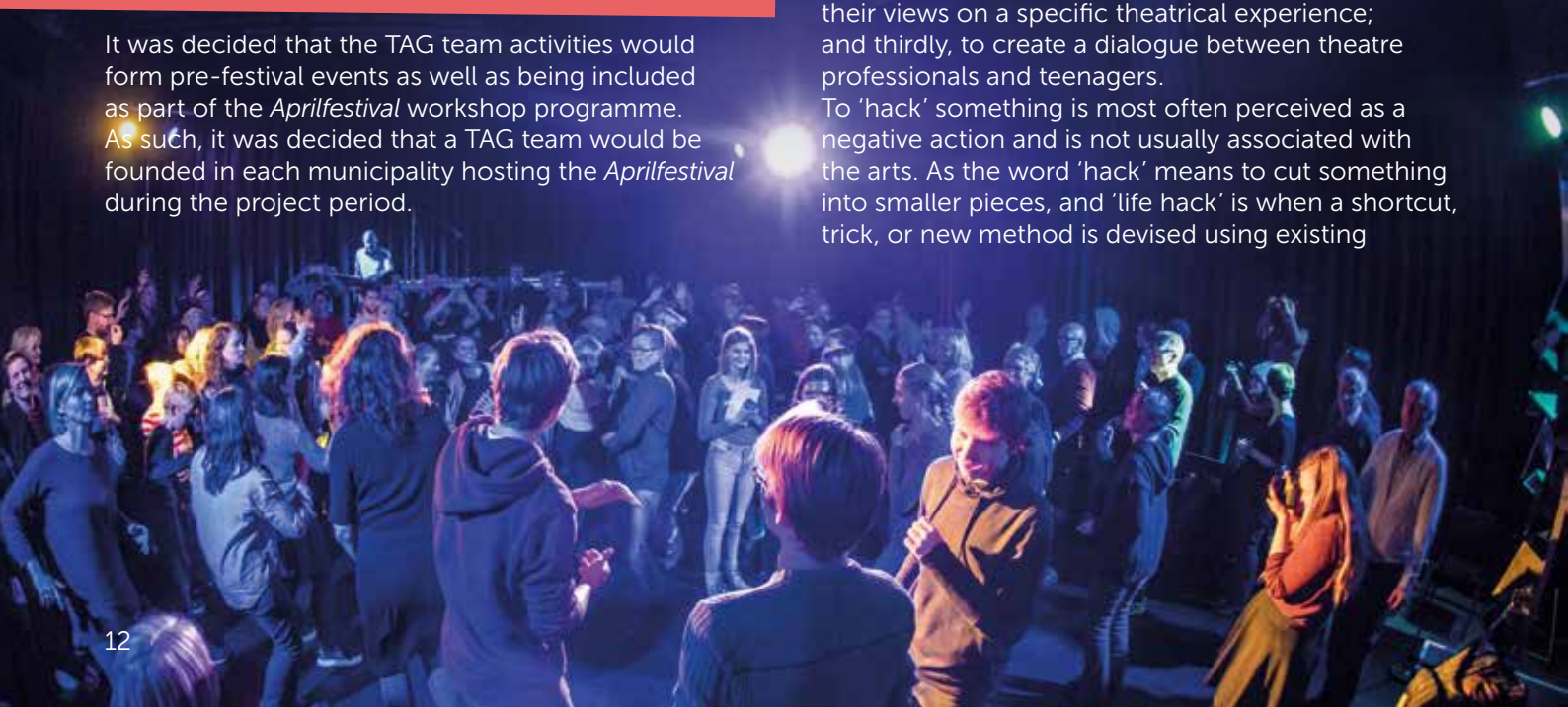
It was decided that the TAG team activities would form pre-festival events as well as being included as part of the *Aprilfestival* workshop programme. As such, it was decided that a TAG team would be founded in each municipality hosting the *Aprilfestival* during the project period.

Introducing a New Method of Engagement – ‘Hacking the Theatre’

Exploring new methods of teenage engagement in theatre took place during a series of workshops both in the run up to, and during, two manifestations of *Aprilfestival* – firstly the *Aprilfestival* in the municipality of Sønderborg in 2017, and also the *Aprilfestival* hosted a year later in Syddjurs.

The idea of ‘Hacking the Theatre’ came about in response to several aims: firstly, to create workshops that focus on engaging teenagers in theatrical experiences; secondly, to use theatre criticism as a tool to create new methods for teenagers to express their views on a specific theatrical experience; and thirdly, to create a dialogue between theatre professionals and teenagers.

To ‘hack’ something is most often perceived as a negative action and is not usually associated with the arts. As the word ‘hack’ means to cut something into smaller pieces, and ‘life hack’ is when a shortcut, trick, or new method is devised using existing



materials to make an action easier, more productive, and more efficient, there are parallels with theatre criticism. When a piece of art is analysed, the critic reduces it down to all its constituent parts, looks at all the different pieces, and then presents them together as a subjective interpretation. In other words, a 'hack' involves taking out different pieces and doing something with them in order to offer new value. 'Hack the Theatre' began as a working title for our series of workshops. These explored and tested tools of talking about theatre, reflecting on the expectation and experience, and learning about how to express those reflections both through written and non-written forms of communication (see *Part 5 – Toolbox and Methods* to learn more about these tools). In this context, to 'Hack the Theatre' is to cut out or isolate a specific piece / element of the performance that stood out to you – for example, something you thought was fantastic, good, special, weird, or annoying – and to comment on it by using words, video, podcasts, drawing, body language, and so on in order to reshape and remodel it into different media formats. More details in Part 5.4
N.B. Videos and hacks can be found on the T.E.E.N. website (www.teentheatreetwork.eu).

1.5 THE ROLE OF PORTUGAL

As T.E.E.N. is a research project that investigates how teenagers use critical thinking to engage with theatre performances, an important part of the project has been to stay connected to professionals in the field of theatre criticism. As the premise of the T.E.E.N. project is that critical thinking, specifically theatre criticism, can be used

as a method of engaging teenagers, the knowledge and perspectives of a critic have been essential in gathering the ideas and tools of teenage engagement to be used on a European scale. Furthermore, sharing a common language with the field of theatre criticism will help us to make a solid base for a strong European network and to develop productive collaborations with many new partners in the future.

Taking on these responsibilities has been Rui Pina Coelho, a researcher from the *University of Lisbon*; the Chief Editor of the *Performing Arts and Theatre Studies Journal*, *Sinais de Cena*; and member of the *International Association of Theatre Critics*. Included in his role has been framing the project through research questions on theatre criticism and coordinating Pepys' Diary – an activity completed by everybody involved in the project, from the teenagers to the tutors, curators, and festival directors (N.B. *More about the research questions and Pepys' Diary can be found in Part 5 – Toolbox and Methods*). In addition, Rui Pina Coelho has offered a refreshing perspective in his essay, *'A Critic is Never Wrong'* that can be found in *Part 4* of this booklet.

These activities brought scholarly writing and research methodologies into the discussion with curators and producers from cultural institutions. This academic experience on theatre criticism is founded upon the researcher's experience of Theatre for Young Audiences in Portugal, whilst practical experiences comes from his role as a theatre critic at a European level.

PART 2 "THE SHARED VISIONS"

During the project the TAG teams in Denmark, Italy, and Norway kept busy engaging in the different activities listed in Part 1 of this booklet. However, teen ambassadors also came together with the project partners, tutors, and sometimes the local TAG team for the shared performances during the *Aprilfestival* (Denmark), *SEGNI New Generations Festival* (Italy), and *Showbox* (Norway). These productions have been selected by the TAG team tutors based on criteria of thematic choice, diversity, and availability and are referred in the text as "shared visions".

Each shared vision was analysed, discussed, and commented upon by the teen ambassadors. In some cases, the teenagers also had the chance to talk with the artist and producers after the show. These activities demanded that a common language be established and allowed the teenagers to engage in even more theatre criticism whether it be through writing reviews or initiating conversations.

The teen ambassadors were encouraged to share their experiences with teenagers from other counties through both virtual and face-to-face dialogue. This led to the adoption of the Instagram hashtag #t.e.e.n.eu through which the teen ambassadors and other TAG team members were able to update each other and share information on performances and other cultural events that might have captured their interest.

In the following you will find a list of the shared visions during *SEGNI New Generations Festival* (*Segni d'infanzia*, Mantua, Italy), *Aprilfestival* (*Teatercentrum*, Copenhagen, Denmark), and *Showbox* (*Norsk Scenekunstbruk*, Oslo, Norway) from 2016 to 2018.

N.B. To read the TAG team and TEEN-ambassador reviews please visit the T.E.E.N. project website: www.teentheatreetwork.eu

SEGNI NEW GENERATIONS FESTIVAL 2016

These performances were shared during the T.E.E.N. kick-off meeting that just involved the curators, in order to define common principles with which choosing and starting a comparison on shows to be selected as shared visions.

Effets Flours – Cie Lilou – All Audiences

An inebriating dance of flowers gives colour to the Sordello square during the weekend of the festival with a spectacular and interactive show that reawakens all the senses.

Petit Cirque – Laurent Bigot – 11/18 Years

A musical cabaret inspired by the miniature Circus by Calder to astonish and enchant the public like a work of art does.

La grenouille au fonds du puits croit que le ciel est rond – Vélo Théâtre – 6/13 Years

A house is a shelter and the first play space for a child. Two butlers guide us into the world of Monsieur Brin d’Avoine for a trip into memories.

Kanikuly – Le Bateau de Papier – 8/18 Years

When you are waiting for your holidays, your imagination turns the office into a passenger car and the floor into a beach, but the boss still remains the boss...

SENI NEW GENERATIONS FESTIVAL 2017

Piccoli eroi – Teatro del Piccione – 11+

Seven spectators are seated at a table onstage to discover the adventures of Tom Thumb through the poetry of Wisława Szymborska as a metaphor of growth.

Operastracci – Teatro Koreja – 9+

The most famous lyrical arias accompany and narrate the recurring meetings of two children as they grow up through their different phases of life, relying on the

expression of sentiment through music and dance.

Ma biche et mon lapin – Collective Aie Aie Aie – 9+

A comic show with theatre objects about relationships between adults.

WAX – TJP – 2+

A studio in which the artist creates his characters using wax. Wax is a material always changing, slipping, resisting. It is an interplay of form and content which makes for a light-hearted reflection on free will.

Moi et Rien – Teatro Gioco Vita – 2/5 Years

Shadows and actors onstage tell the story of a friendship between a girl, Lilà, and her imaginary friend, Nothing, a strange creature who teaches an important lesson. Based on *Moi et Rien* by Kitty.

Escargot – Teatro del Piccione – 2/5 Years

A snail, moving slowly, begins a hypnotic dance. Abandoning his shell at the centre of the stage, on the rhythm of the seasons he moves without haste and with surprising wonder, leaving the trails of his dance behind.





SEgni NEW GENERATIONS FESTIVAL 2018

Caino e Abele – Compagnia Rodisio – 8+

A story implanted in everybody's imagination, an ancient tale reinterpreted through the language of breakdance and images drawn by both primitive and street art, which establish immediate communication with the new generations.

Berberio – Zonzo Compagnie – 6+

Opera becomes accessible and fun for all, turning into a kaleidoscope of shapes and colours. A wonderful mix of music, voice, objects, images, and text.

Garage – Cirka Teater

Garage is based on this very theme: two workers, armed with a hammer and a soldering iron, give life to a machine that moves, breathes, and even plays music.

D'orfeo – Teatro all'improvviso – 6+

Orpheus is an ancient fable set to music by Monteverdi and made accessible to a young audience. A moving, dreamlike show with videos and live musicians.

Terrarium – Fondazione Teatro Ragazzi e Giovani onlus – 6/12 Years

At a time when a return to the land is sought, three brothers try to create a vegetable garden, but have to fight against dragonflies, beetles, spiders, and other bugs that decide to make a home there.

C'est Parti Mon Kiki – Traffix Music – 6/10 Years

A dialogue between musical instruments and sounds from toys and everyday objects, leading the audience into a child's den and awakening imagination.

SHOWBOX 2016

The Virus – Jo Strømgren Kompani – 16+

Physical theatre/dance.

Soft Eyes – Artilleriet – 14+

Theatre.

Oldschool – Absence crew – 14+

Dance.

Mørkemedig – Katma – 6+

Visual theatre.

SHOWBOX 2017

The Basement – De Dansers – 14+

They're living on the wrong side of the road, in the gutter of the world. It is dark there, you keep the door locked. You have to be tough, very tough. Disciplined and unafraid to show your teeth. If you let everybody come near you, you'll be trampled, hurt. Dance theatre.

Goodbye Kitty – Rebekka/Huy – 14+

Theatre performance, concert, and party at the same time! Children and adolescents have talked about who they want to be and who they want to become, about role models and Hello Kitty, about pink and blue, about what's normal and abnormal. This has become the performance, Goodbye Kitty. Goodbye Kitty! Hello Kitty! Good. Theatre.

Sticks, Stones and broken bones – Bunk Puppets – 6+

Do you think shadow theatre sounds old-fashioned? Well, this will make you wish that all theatre was shadow theatre hereafter. Rippled, magical, and





incredibly funny. In English, but very visual, with little to no dialogue. Puppets and Shadow Puppets.

Game over – Rebel Angels – 14+

«Rebel Angels, Game over» is an interactive performance of Lost & Found Productions where the audience is invited into a simulator. We simulate reality to be able to fuck with it without people getting fucked. All must be allowed if we are to figure out what's not going to be. We are sick, tired. This is a rebellion against shit. Game over. We'll start again. Performance.

APRILFESTIVAL – TEATER FOR STORE OG SMÅ 2017

Romeo and Juliet – Teatret MISH MASH – 12+

MishMash has, in its storytelling style, created a unique interpretation of William Shakespeare's classic, 'Romeo & Juliet'.

Min Odysseé – Asterions Hus – 12+

An Odyssey. Through Europe. The performance is based on the experiences from a pan-European theatre project that involved artists and performers from several European countries. 'My Odyssey' is Tilde Knudsen's personal testimony from this trip. It is a tale about the European motion. Tilde's story and Homer's story are woven together in a magic pattern.

Senses of Cities – Hvid støj sceneproduktion – 3+

A sensuous artistic theatre experience containing a sensational sculpture placed in the city's landscape, which holds an interactive installation of the senses and the stage for a theatrical performance for the entire family. Is fantasy the sixth sense? And can you taste a sound and swallow it?

Soldaten – Teater Fair play – 14+

For more than 14 years Denmark has been a nation participating in war – apparently with massive support from the population. Several young men and women seek the personal challenge in the military to experience the world and "make a difference". Do they know what they are doing? And what are they coming home with?

The three monks – China National Theatre for Children – 4+

Adapted from an ancient Chinese legend, this beautiful, wordless production integrates traditional Chinese opera, martial arts and classic elements of Chinese culture in an exploration of philosophy of unity, cooperation, and the harmony between man and nature.

Bounce! – Compagnie ArCosm (France) – 7+

Bounce! happily discusses failure, a universal experience, an unexpected start for a new way of living, the beginning of an adventure, gushing, and questioning how to bounce! The quartet move in space, musicians tune, dancers heat up. Gestures are febrile, uncertain... What if nothing happens the way we expected? But we have to

try, alone or with others. Pushing, yelling, climbing, playing, dancing, whispering, singing ... try any way and go further.

Ressacs – Compagnie Gare Centrale (Belgium) – 14+

Ressacs is a poetic review of the crisis that losing a house, possessions, and identity can be. A lost couple alone at sea is tossed around in despair. The show is a humorous depiction of our tendency to live the "right" kind of life.

APRILFESTIVAL – TEATER FOR STORE OG SMÅ 2018

No fun ction all language – The Chaeli Campaign – 14+

Physical performance with disabled actors from South Africa.

DIVA – Sofie Krogs Teater – 10+

In the depths of a dark and quirky cabaret, the lives of a beautiful diva, her lovesick butler, a mischievous lab assistant, and a beyond-mad scientist are about to collide. Audience members are lured into the mystery within the cabaret walls as each character endures an ill-fated night that may well be their last.

Empty Steps – Teater Glimt – 10+

Empty Steps shows the passing of one day for a brother and sister living on the street. Choreographer and director Camila Sarrazin uses dance, physical skills, humour, and drama, to make the audience feel and reflect on how reality is for millions of children around the world.

AlgoRitmo – Boing theatreproduction – 6+

An algorithm is a mathematical recipe to solve a particular type of problem. Contact with thousands of algorithms every day is part of the digital reality in the life of modern people, as they perform a lot of tasks and solve problems for us without us needing to think about it. AlgoRitmo is a music dramatic and comic solo performance with award-winning and acclaimed multi-artist Thomas Sandberg.

Ashes – Plexus Polaire (French / Norwegian) – 14+

Ashes is an emotional thriller straddling fiction and reality, equally remarkable and disturbing. Based on the book by Gaute Heivoll, the production tells the true story of a Norwegian arsonist. When Heivoll compares this event to his own life, ambiguous and subtle parallels emerge. Puppet theatre.



PART 3 THE AMBASSADORS

The TAGs were created following the different approaches outlined in part 1 of the booklet and these groups of teenagers were involved in the project's activities. From each national TAG team three ambassadors were chosen to travel to each of the festivals in order to share performances and workshops with each other, enter meaningful discussions about theatre, and have intercultural social exchanges with each other, the local TAG team, and the project partners.

During the T.E.E.N. project the ambassadors visited and met each other at:

- *Aprilfestival (Teatercentrum, Copenhagen, Denmark);*
 - *SEGNI New Generations Festival (Segni d'infanzia, Mantua, Italy);*
 - *Showbox (Norsk Scenekunstbruk, Oslo, Norway).*
- As result of dissemination actions, the ambassadors were invited to:
- *ASSITEJ's Artistic Gathering 2018 (China National Theatre for Children, Beijing, China).*

In each of these meet-ups the teen ambassadors hosted a public discussion to present their point of view on a topic related to theatre and arts, in a set-up referred to as the 'Kitchen Table' format. In addition to the youngsters' inputs, adults and experts were sometimes invited to the table to contribute a comment or question. In *Part 5* of this booklet (*Toolbox and Methods*), you can read the 'Kitchen Table Manifesto' created by the ambassadors, and you can also find the 'Golden Recommendations' that they drew up.

Here we have included short CVs from each of the teen ambassadors involved in the project that not only introduce who they are, but also describes some of their theatrical experiences. Following this are some reflections from the ambassadors' perspective on what they feel they gained by participating in the T.E.E.N. project.



ANDREA CRUSCO



CITY/COUNTRY: Mantua, Italy

HIGH SCHOOL: ITIS "Istituto Isabella D'Este"

WHO ARE YOU? I'm a walker, explorer, nature lover, and pizza addict.

DESCRIBE THE FIRST THEATRE PERFORMANCE YOU SAW

When I was a child, my mother took me and my sister to see a series of classical stories told through puppetry. The first one I remember is *'The Odyssey'*. The play began with normal-sized puppets in their 'little theatre box' before real actors came out from the frame. Little by little the entire stage became bigger and the set grew around them. In the end, at the conclusion of the play, all the actors came onstage for a final song.

DESCRIBE THE BEST THEATRICAL SCENE/ PERFORMANCE YOU HAVE EVER SEEN

'Io e Niente' (*'Me and Nothing'*) is a children's play that talks about the difficult relationship between a young girl and her busy father who works as gardener for the king. He is always tired from his job and he can't find time for her. So, she invents an imaginary friend named 'Nothing' to spend her free time with. In the play, the set is constantly changing: at the beginning there are real actors on the main stage, then they turned into puppets in a little toy kitchen, then they become shadows or light or glass figures projected on the walls or on big screens. These dynamic changes of perspective are followed by lights and colours that make your eyes move in every direction. By doing so, the audience travels across different perceptual planes accompanied by psychedelic music.

FEDERICO BOTTAZZI



CITY/COUNTRY: Mantua, Italy

HIGH SCHOOL: Liceo Scientifico "Alessandro Manzoni"

WHO ARE YOU? A boy who likes Netflix and TV series and, most importantly, Nutella. I heard about the project one year ago, when it started, and I liked it from the beginning.

DESCRIBE THE FIRST THEATRE PERFORMANCE YOU SAW

When I saw my first play I was thirteen. 'Nerd' was about a man who bought his first computer and had to make it work. I really liked it because, at one point, the actor called me up on the stage and made me do a video chat, which was really funny because he kept making jokes.

DESCRIBE THE BEST THEATRICAL SCENE/ PERFORMANCE YOU HAVE EVER SEEN

During the project I saw *'Mi sa che fuori è primavera'*. The play was about the kidnapping of two children by their own father. The story told in the play had happened in 2011. The mother of the children was abandoned by her husband and the police. The actress who played her was incredibly capable of representing the pain of a mother who couldn't see her children anymore.

LEDA BONZANINI



CITY/COUNTRY: Cremona, Italy

HIGH SCHOOL: Liceo linguistico statale "M. Gioia"

WHO ARE YOU? I'm Leda, I'm sixteen years old. I love music, playing the clarinet, theatre, and learning new things. I really like talking with other people, especially to share my ideas with them.

DESCRIBE THE FIRST THEATRE PERFORMANCE YOU SAW

It was a children's play about nature and how it changes during fall. I was very little, so I don't remember everything, but I remember there were musicians playing classical pieces and we were sitting on the floor.

DESCRIBE THE BEST THEATRICAL SCENE/ PERFORMANCE YOU HAVE EVER SEEN

One of the plays I've enjoyed the most is '*Sogno di una notte di mezza estate*' ('*A Midsummer Night's Dream*') by William Shakespeare. The director was able to bring out the play's comedy, making the audience laugh and enjoy the performance. The plot was very clear, and the scenography was simple but wonderful. The actors were really good, and they managed to create a magical and fairylike atmosphere, as demanded by the plot.

LORENZO TORTELLA



CITY/COUNTRY: Mantua, Italy

HIGH SCHOOL: ITIS "E. Fermi"

WHO ARE YOU? A human, a son, a student, a musician. In this order up until now.

DESCRIBE THE FIRST THEATRE PERFORMANCE YOU SAW

I don't remember the very first performance but one of the first was watching my brother and his band (they're called *Miatralvia*, check them out) playing instruments made of rubbish in a theatre. I don't know if this would be considered a theatre performance, but it was definitely a powerful performance put on in a theatre. I still remember it from my childhood because I would have liked to have been on the stage with them. I felt that they were having fun and so did we, the audience.

DESCRIBE THE BEST THEATRICAL SCENE/ PERFORMANCE YOU HAVE EVER SEEN

The performance that engaged me the most was probably '*Io e Niente*'. It is 'just' a fairy tale, but I felt there was sincerity in the way they told the story. Most of all, I liked the unpredictable ways they used lights and shadows. Also, the soundtrack was in perfect harmony with the mood created by everything else. The only thing that this show lacked was a little bit of transgression such a social critique, or the revelation of irony about our lifestyles, but, as it was a show for kids, I suppose it was normal that it was meant to create a different mood.

MARTINA TONDO



CITY/COUNTRY: Mantua, Italy

HIGH SCHOOL: Liceo Linguistico "Virgilio"

WHO ARE YOU? I'm an eighteen-year-old girl who is interested in a lot of things. What I like is talking and meeting with new people, in lots of different contexts: going to concerts, going to the theatre, and going to art exhibitions. All these cultural events not only help you to meet new friends but also help you to know yourself better.

DESCRIBE THE FIRST THEATRE PERFORMANCE YOU SAW

The first performance I saw was a puppet show with the famous Italian puppet 'Arlecchino', but I was about four years old, so I don't remember too much.

DESCRIBE THE BEST THEATRICAL SCENE/ PERFORMANCE YOU HAVE EVER SEEN

Earlier this year I watched a musical performance by *France Théâtre*. This year, they focused on a single theme – the condition of migrants in Calais' Jungle camp as they are trying to reach England. There were five characters – four were migrants and the other one was a woman who was a member of a humanitarian group. Her name was 'France', and this was by no means a random choice. During the production, each of the migrants told their stories to France about how they arrived there. The performance was able to compare the situation faced by the migrants to the conditions of the French people during revolution – as both groups were wanting to do something to change a bad situation.

NICHOLAS GUANDANINI



CITY/COUNTRY: Mantua, Italy

HIGH SCHOOL: Itis "E. Fermi"

WHO ARE YOU? I'm a student with a passion for music and theatre. I also play bass.

DESCRIBE THE FIRST THEATRE PERFORMANCE YOU SAW

The first theatre performance I saw was during elementary school. I liked it because of its story and the mood that the performance communicated to me.

DESCRIBE THE BEST THEATRICAL SCENE/ PERFORMANCE YOU HAVE EVER SEEN

The best performance that I have ever seen was in Denmark at the *Aprilfestival*. It was a performance called 'Bounce'. I liked it because the dynamics between the actors was just right.

NORA JUNGEILGES HEYERDAHL



CITY/COUNTRY: Oslo, Norway

HIGH SCHOOL: Oslo Cathedral School

WHO ARE YOU? I am eighteen years old, and in my spare time I volunteer for the Green Party in my city. My family used to bring me to the theatre as a child, and I still go whenever I can.

DESCRIBE THE FIRST THEATRE PERFORMANCE YOU SAW

I do not know for certain which performance was the first one I saw but I believe it was a puppet theatre in a big tent called *'Karius og Baktus'*. The message of the play was to brush your teeth though I remember that I was terribly afraid of the toothbrush in the play!

DESCRIBE THE BEST THEATRICAL SCENE/ PERFORMANCE YOU HAVE EVER SEEN

The best performance I ever saw was a play called *'Nyanser av Gris'* because it spoke to me and my current life in a brilliant way. It also made me rethink my political opinions on an issue that I have spent a lot of time thinking about lately. Whilst the play was being performed, I honestly forgot that I was not a part of the action of the play because, just like the actors, we were seated in a classroom like students. I also liked that the actors were my own age.

RAUAND ISMAIL



CITY/COUNTRY: Oslo, Norway

HIGH SCHOOL: Foss videregående skole

WHO ARE YOU? I am an eighteen-year-old boy and work as a freelance art critic. I recently finished my high school education and will start my Philosophy degree at the University of Oslo this fall. I have been involved with the T.E.E.N. project since 2017.

DESCRIBE THE FIRST THEATRE PERFORMANCE YOU SAW

The first theatre performance I remember seeing was August Strindberg's *'A Dream Play'* at the *Norwegian National Theatre* in 2008. I vaguely remember the character of Agnes meeting other characters who were representing different issues surrounding humanity, such as poverty, for example.

DESCRIBE THE BEST THEATRICAL SCENE/ PERFORMANCE YOU HAVE EVER SEEN

The best performance I have seen recently was Sarah Kane's *'Cleansed'* at the *Norwegian National Theatre*. The play is set in an institution that tortures its participants and makes them act as the institution's leader wants. The minimalist imagery and contemporary approach to Kane's play struck me as one of the most important interpretations of *'Cleansed'* in my lifetime.

HANNE HAUG JOHNE



CITY/COUNTRY: Oslo, Norway

HIGH SCHOOL: Recently graduated from *Oslo Katedralskole*

WHO ARE YOU? I have grown up in Oslo. My parents brought me to performances and exhibitions from a young age which fuelled my interests in art, literature, and culture. In recent years, I have written theatre criticism and curated an art exhibition.

DESCRIBE THE FIRST THEATRE PERFORMANCE YOU SAW

The first performance I can properly remember was 'Peter Pan' in which the actors were flying around above the set, throwing glitter at the audience.

DESCRIBE THE BEST THEATRICAL SCENE/ PERFORMANCE YOU HAVE EVER SEEN

The best performance I have seen recently is 'Engler i Amerika, Part 1' at *Nasjonalteateret* in Oslo. The play is set in the US in the 1980s and is about how the gay community there reacts and deals with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The performance managed to be humorous, serious, and tragic at the same time - which made it very interesting and fun to watch.

PHILIPPE MANANE



CITY/COUNTRY: Sønderborg, Denmark

HIGH SCHOOL: *Sønderborg Statsskole*

WHO ARE YOU? I'm a boy that likes theatre and to be drawn into a universe where everything is possible. I have performed onstage myself many times before and enjoy it very much.

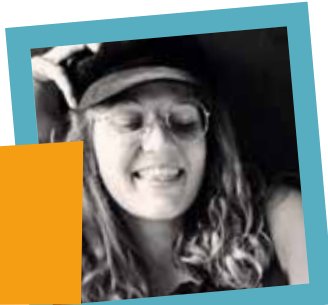
DESCRIBE THE FIRST THEATRE PERFORMANCE YOU SAW

The first play I saw was called 'Gummi Tarzan' and was about a boy that no one liked. Suddenly he got strong and he started to get popular.

DESCRIBE THE BEST THEATRICAL SCENE/ PERFORMANCE YOU HAVE EVER SEEN

The best scene I've ever seen would be from a show called 'Klokkeren fra notre Dame'. A lot of the story took place in a cathedral. The visuals were amazing. All the walls consisted of huge displays that changed throughout the whole play.

MAJA LENE BIRKMAND



CITY/COUNTRY: Rønne, Denmark

HIGH SCHOOL: Rønne Gymnasium

WHO ARE YOU? I am an eighteen-year-old girl, who likes theatre and performance, and I am a human being.

DESCRIBE THE FIRST THEATRE PERFORMANCE YOU SAW

I was with my grandmother in the Royal Theatre and I saw a ballet called 'Nøddeknekkeren' ('The Nutcracker'). I am sure it was great, but I was five and I didn't understand anything at all.

DESCRIBE THE BEST THEATRICAL SCENE/ PERFORMANCE YOU HAVE EVER SEEN

When I was fourteen, I saw 'Les Misérables' in London. It was on a big stage and it was fantastically magical.

SIGBRIT ELI NØRGAARD GYLDENKÆRNE



CITY/COUNTRY: Rønne, Denmark

HIGH SCHOOL: Rønne Gymnasium

WHO ARE YOU? I am a nineteen-year-old girl who lives in Denmark. I like to watch theatre.

DESCRIBE THE FIRST THEATRE PERFORMANCE YOU SAW

My first performance was when I was five or six years old. I saw a well-known television performer perform a children's show with a teddy. His name is Sigurd and the show was called 'Sigurds bjørnetime'.

DESCRIBE THE BEST THEATRICAL SCENE/ PERFORMANCE YOU HAVE EVER SEEN

I am not sure which was my absolute favourite performance but one of the best performances I have seen was 'Hjerterum' by Syddjurs Egnsteater. The play was split into three stories and throughout the whole show the actors and actresses were amazing.

3.2 THE AMBASSADORS' PERSPECTIVES

We asked the teen ambassadors to reflect on what they have learned from being a part of the T.E.E.N. project and this is what they said:

If someone asked me what I learned from the project I would say, of course, that I learned that the world of the theatre is not only vast but also gripping. Many ideas have been invested into every piece of onstage action. Days and days of actors and actresses rehearsing together have been necessary to reach the highest level of performance. I learned how to describe my feelings and emotions and how to appreciate other points of view, even if they are different from mine. However, the most important thing that I learned is that I should always be a critic, think with my own mind, and follow my dreams without being scared of what other people may think. The T.E.E.N. project was a fantastic experience! I'm glad to have had the chance to take part in this amazing adventure!

MARTINA BOSI

I learned a lot from this project which makes it very difficult to summarise everything in a few short lines. Not only did I acquire knowledge about theatre, but I also developed new soft skills. I learned to express my own ideas without being ashamed or afraid of what others may say, to have new creative ideas, to speak in public, and I also improved my English. During the Aprilfestival in Denmark and the Showbox Festival in Norway, I had the possibility to learn even more. I could compare my ideas with the ones of people who had grown up in different cultural contexts, and to discuss this with them. However, what was really important for me during these amazing experiences was that I didn't feel that I was 'only' Italian anymore. I felt I was part of something bigger and stronger, something that allowed me to widen my horizons and to make new fantastic friendships with people I would have never met without this project, who come from different places: I felt European. This helped me to find my way and to grow.

LEDA BONZANINI



I learned how to reflect upon the availability of theatre for children and young people in my own country compared to other places and I got better at expressing why I think performances are good or bad. In addition to making new friends and contacts, we've also had the opportunity to discuss our thoughts on being a young audience with curators and programmers (through the 'Kitchen Table' discussions).

THE NORWEGIAN AMBASSADORS

We are two girls from Denmark and we joined the T.E.E.N. project in March 2017. To be honest, when we joined the project and left for the Aprilfestival in Sønderborg in 2017, we had no idea what we had agreed to. We did not know who we would meet or what we were supposed to do. We just knew that we would be going to watch theatre - and we hadn't seen much theatre before joining this project. It has now been a year and a half and what have we learned? It struck us how little emphasis is placed on theatre for young people. Even though people really want to hear about this project (everywhere we went people have been ecstatic at the opportunity of getting feedback from us), we feel that there is not very much theatre in the world that speaks to our age group. In the T.E.E.N. project many of the ambassadors are between fifteen and nineteen years old and it is seldom that we find a performance that hits this target group spot on. Many theatre producers think that they have found exactly the right ingredients to encourage more young people go to the theatre - but they do not get it right. We need to guide them, so they know which ways to develop. In spite of this, we have been able to learn that theatre can be interpreted in many very different ways - it is a completely individual experience. We have learned what language can bring to a performance and what happens when you don't understand the language. In the T.E.E.N. project, we met young people from three different countries and together we found a definition of what good theatre consists of. One of the things that we have been especially happy about in the T.E.E.N. project has been all the people we have been so fortunate to meet. It is the people we will miss the most.

MAJA LENE BIRKMAND AND SIGBRIT GYLDENKÆRNE



PART 4 OUTLOOK

A CRITIC

IS NEVER WRONG

– Essay by Rui Pina Coelho, Portugal

I found myself involved in the T.E.E.N. project as a theatre critic and, for me, the most crucial aspect of this project has been how criticism is used as a tool to activate dialogue between teenagers and theatre professionals, rather than just developing the teenagers' skills as young critics for the sake of it.

1. WHAT IS CRITICISM

GOOD FOR?

A critic is never wrong! A critic is never wrong for the same reason that he is never right either. That is not the 'game'. It is not, I think, a question of whether to find the correct way to read a performance. A

critic is never right or wrong. The task of criticism is neither validation nor refutation of an artistic object. The only thing a critic can do is react as honestly as possible, and in the most transparent way possible, to the performance in which he participates. And with that, what the critic does is expand the zone of impact of a performance, prolonging its life and bringing it to the city, inscribing it in the public sphere. Thus, theatre criticism, when it serves something, serves to provoke the memory and to start a discussion. Though it may seem simple, this is one of the most difficult and important tasks of a critic's work. What is disturbing, however, is that the activity of criticism is still - although very close to extinction - one of the last strongholds where interference in the public sphere is possible. The role of critics should aim to unite the individual and the audience to the public sphere and the collective, as Terry Eagleton (2005) understands. This problem is not just confined to criticism. It is, in fact, a problem faced by most Western societies dominated by a capitalist logic, submerged in consumerism and publicity, indifferent to the arts, and with a lack of debate in the public sphere. But criticism still has a chance to interfere in the city - it is part of its function and its vocation. Criticism, when it serves anything, serves as an effective weapon against contemporary acedia. Saving criticism can, perhaps, save us all.

2. THE EXERCISE OF A PROFOUND SUBJECTIVITY

Honesty and transparency are accompanied by subjectivity. The exercise of criticism, I believe, can only be done with the awareness that it is the expression of a subjectivity. There is no objective data on how one understands a performance. Nor is there necessarily any objectivity in the way a critic gives account to his reception of a performance. The critic's relationship with a performance is unique, private, idiosyncratic. Of course, we have identities shaped, in part, by the cultural context in which we are inserted. And of course, we all share a large number of features with those around us. But, ultimately, there are aspects to the identity of a critic (as there are of any individual) that are not shareable with anyone else. They are directly affected by their readings, their ideological matrix, their age, their provenance, their state of mind - a hypothetically infinite set of variables. In my view, it is impossible to find a review that provides a last word on the subject. Criticism must be closer to dialogue than to authority; must be closer to experience than to reading; must be closer to democracy than to absolutism; must be closer to subjectivity than

to objectivity; must be closer to passion than to impartiality; must be closer to error than to lesson; must be closer to poetry than to science.

3. CRITICISM AND CULTURAL JOURNALISM

I believe that criticism has nothing to do with journalism. I believe that performing arts criticism has nothing to do with cultural journalism. And I also believe that nothing has accelerated the disappearance of criticism more than the growing confusion between the former and the latter. In the limited space devoted to the performing arts in most media publications, cultural journalism has been gaining ground in criticism and, perhaps unintentionally, throwing it off the pages of newspapers (and magazines and so on). The problem is not cultural journalism itself - which has a major role in spreading and promoting the arts. Nor am I referring to the dingy, boorish distinction between a so-called journalistic critique and a so-called academic critique - this distinction is more than outdated. The problem lies in the fact that cultural and critical journalism play different roles.

Both important and central but, ultimately, different. It is easy to imagine an editor who, after devoting two whole pages to a performance on the day of its premiere, complete with text exploring the main themes, lavish quotations from the director or actors, and stunning production photographs, would dispense of yet more text – a review of the same performance – given the scarce space for the arts in a newspaper. It is easy to excuse this editor – but it is also urgent to remember that this is a wrong decision. Cultural and critical journalism play different roles. Both are important and central but they are, ultimately, different.

4. THE PARTICIPATION OF THE CRITIC

In the section above, I wrote – not by mistake – “to the performance in which he [the critic] participates” and not “to the performance he watches.” In fact, long gone are the times when a spectator / critic was under the dominance of the semantics imposed by an all-powerful director. This was the reality of theatre and criticism for much of the twentieth century and it is this difficult (if not impossible) relationship that imbues many of the contemporary misunderstandings between critics and creators. What you see onstage is not always what is there.

Sometimes it is not possible and sometimes it is not wanted. There is a certain criticism that is associated with the alleged crisis of the *mise-en-scène*. To a large extent, this crisis results in the inefficiency of a performance analysis model based exclusively on the instruments of semiotics. Roughly, it was accepted that the performance could be “read”; that everything that appeared on stage would have a reading; that all signs would correspond to a signifier and a meaning; that these signs were arranged by the performance’s author (the director); that the spectator / critic would be able to decode what was presented to him; that of course, there would be something to be decoded; and that the decoded meaning would be able to be shared by a particular cultural community. The relation that would be established with the spectator was, necessarily, a hierarchical relation.

However, the spectator has long since been ‘emancipated’ from this dictatorship. They were emancipated from the moment in which they began to distrust the reciprocity between meaning and signifier and from the moment in which new performances demanded a new set of instruments of analysis. Thus, terms such as energetic theatre (Lyotard), performative theatre (Féral), post-dramatic theatre (Lehmann) or rhapsodic theatre (Sarrazac) account for a new paradigm of representation. This emerged from the 1970s, where they emphasised more evanescent qualities such as presence, energy, and the very relationship with the audience,

thereby exploring aspects that can hardly be semiotisable, that is, translated into signs.

Thus, rather than watching a performance passively, critics and spectators participate in the very creation of the performance; more than watching a performance, critics and spectators 'experience' the performance. In this way, the emphasis of his critique or analysis is, of course, on the expression of his uniqueness or subjectivity.

5. PITY THE POOR

THEATRE CRITIC

Of course, the more subjective the critic is, the more exposed he becomes to misunderstandings. These misconceptions have resulted in many colourful arguments. The ironic verve of the Irish playwright Brendan Behan is amusing: "Critics are like eunuchs in a harem: they know how it's done, they've seen it done every day, but they're unable to do it themselves." Or Théophile Gautier: "The critic who never produced anything is a coward; it is like an abbot who makes the court of the wife of a layman: he cannot do the same, nor can he be beaten with him." Or the playwright - and critic - George Bernard Shaw: "A drama critic is a man who leaves no turn unstoned." The Elizabethan Thomas Dekker provocatively stated

in *News from Hell* (1608): "Beware of critics: they are like fish, they bite everything, especially books." Irving Wardle, a noted writer and critic of British theatre, asserts that they are often seen as a sort of separate race, such as numismatists, taxonomists, or executioners (Wardle 1992: vii). For Christopher Hampton, "Asking a playwright what he thinks about the critics is like asking a lamp-post what he thinks about dogs." This brief collection denotes some of the mistrust and discomfort with which theatre criticism was first entangled. Indeed, even today, in the present discourse, it is not difficult to find the same mistrust. Critics are often regarded as mere parasites of the art of others and are often accused of showing presumptions of intellectual superiority. However, if the dialogue between criticism's established conventions and the present is often difficult and full of misunderstanding, it is also certain that many of the memorable moments in the history of the theatre have largely been achieved thanks to an attentive criticism that goes against established opinions. In addition to this synchronic importance, theatre criticism has been of undeniable importance in the preservation of memory. It has an additional historical responsibility as a privileged instrument used to study the history of the theatre and to reconstitute theatrical experiences. "What they say about my plays does not matter, my plays will outlast the critics; but what they say about my performances matters a lot, because what they write is all that posterity will have on the subject", wrote Bertolt Brecht.

6. ON THE HISTORY OF CRITICISM

Of complex etymological root, the word 'critical' derives from the Greek *krinein*, that means to "break" and, simultaneously, to put in crisis, and also *kritos*, that implies a judgment. It is the latter meaning that has prevailed - that of the issuance of a judicious judgment on a work of art. However, as we know it today, it is closely linked to the emergence of the written press in the eighteenth century and to the consequent journalistic coverage of theatrical activity. In the newspapers, theatre criticism summarised the plots of the performances, with a sprinkling of everything from rumours to behind-the-

scenes gossip. Theatre criticism, by this time, was extremely subordinate to the observance of rules and canons. The work of the critic amounted to that of a vigilant police officer in any non-observance of the laws of dramatic art. Added to this was the increasing commercialisation of art and the exponential rise in importance of the commercial status of artistic objects. With the public and the market entering the equation, the critic gained an added importance as mediator and artistic consultant to the emerging consumers.

With the advent of the star rating system and its mastery over all aspects of theatrical activity, criticism took on the role of comparing performances and interpretations, quickly realising that the classics should not be preserved as immutable standards of quality and aesthetic value but as dynamic and open starting points

for reinterpretation. In this vein, it is the casting decisions that often change the performance in the most noticeable way. The critic William Hazlitt said enthusiastically in *'On Actors and Acting'* (1817): "Actors are the 'brief and abstract chronicles of our time'; the burlesque representatives of human nature. They are the only honest hypocrites. Your life is a voluntary dream, a studied madness. Their ambition is to be outside themselves. Today kings, tomorrow beggars, are nothing but when they are themselves" (*apud* Ward 1945: 101, t.m.). And Hazlitt, defending the singularity of his comments, said: "My opinions have sometimes been classified as singular: but they are only sincere. I say what I think; and I think what I feel" (*apud* McDonald 2007: 66). The paradigm shift from "Does this obey the rules?" to "What do I feel?" paved the way for some eccentricity and subjectivity in the exercise of criticism, leading theatrical professionals to develop a (sometimes well-founded) dislike of criticism.

The journey of theatrical criticism in the twentieth century follows the experimentation of different instruments for the analysis of the performances. During this period, theatre criticism gained various functions and modulations. Since it is understood to act as a watchman of good taste (read this as 'of the dominant taste'), as an accomplice of creation, as a part of the dramaturgic work, as a translator of the new, or as a counsellor to the purchase of the ticket, theatre criticism has experimented with such instruments as

formalism, structuralism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, phenomenology, and deconstruction among others, thereby navigating between aesthetics, philosophy, history, literature, and journalism.

7. THE PRECARIOUSNESS OF CRITICISM AND NEW MEDIA

The current situation that theatre criticism finds itself in is precarious insofar as it depends, traditionally, on a *medium* that is also suffering. The general press is facing increasing difficulties and restructurings in search of identity in a world increasingly dominated by new media formats. However, despite the historic reputation of theatre criticism and the increasing influence of public opinion (especially with the advent of the blogosphere) it is important to maintain the role of a professional, experienced, and skilled critic. Having sufficiently recognised competency and authority can lead to the important discovery of neglected works or proposals that would otherwise remain unknown. It is true that the press and specialist journals also play an extremely important role in that they enable a longer, more demanding dialogue with readers. However, by specialising in this way they lose breadth of scope, which makes it difficult for theatre criticism to inscribe a performance in the public consciousness.

The internet, particularly through blogs, also plays a pivotal role in the survival and renewal of theatre criticism. With the advent and democratisation of opinion through the blogosphere, theatre criticism has gained new, more accessible, and more agile support. This allows theatre reviews to have a greater degree of specialisation and also, potentially, to be more directed to certain niches of interest. However, this does run the risk of creating tight circles of hermetic discussions that, in turn, work against the spirit of general public discussion.

I confess that I do not believe that the survival of criticism can only be achieved by migrating its form to digital formats. I do not believe that its survival is only dependent on finding a new medium. It may exist but it must be a criticism that can fulfil its social function.

8. STRESS FREE

Given the current state of affairs, rather than anticipating or decrying the death of critics, it is important that they reinvent their practice, innovate with media and training methods, and deepen its capacity for intervention in the public sphere. Its historical importance in the development of the arts - and the theatre in particular - should not be neglected or ignored but it is important to establish that its true mission is the promotion of synchronous dialogue with the contemporary performing arts.

9. THINKING ABOUT PERFORMANCES FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

All of this may be very well but when we think of performances for young audiences these questions about performing arts criticism can get even further complicated. What is the value of publishing my experience of a performance when it was intended for an age group other than mine? Am I not always deprived of a synchronous experience with the performance? Is the adult critic always standing outside a kind of invisible cord that separates him from the performance? Just as I, a forty-three-year-old Marxist born in Évora (Portugal), cannot pretend to be a twenty-year-old girl or an eighty-year-old man, I cannot pretend to experience the performance as a six-year-old child. And so, we return to the exercise of profound subjectivity. The only thing a critic can do is react as honestly as possible, and in the most transparent way as possible, to the performance in which he participates. The exercise of criticism, I believe, can only be done with an awareness that it is an expression of absolute subjectivity.

Further to this belief that the critic's subjectivity must be expressed, I have found four aspects useful to bear in mind when analysing a performance

for young audiences. The first aspect to consider, it seems to me, is its construction. That is, all the questions related to the quality and originality of the materiality of the performance (i.e. the scenery, props, costumes). The second aspect is everything concerning the narrative construction of the performance (i.e. the exegetical processes, the stylistic choices involved, the rhetoric). A third aspect is the quality of the interpretation or puppet manipulation. And lastly, the dramaturgy of the performance needs to be considered. Dramaturgy, understood here as meaning, relevance, or the way the performance relates and penetrates into life and the world, can dispense with good construction,

a good narrative, and good interpretation / manipulation. Sometimes it is the ineffable things that best account for our experience in life and in the theatre.

Having said that, it is important to remember that a critic is never wrong! A critic is never wrong for the same reason that he is never right either. That is not the 'game'. The only thing a critic can do is react as honestly as possible, in the most transparent way possible, to the performance in which he participates.

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THE POLITICAL ASPECT OF CRITICAL THINKING

– by Kjell Moberg, Norway

When we began the T.E.E.N. project, we did not know what its impact would be until we conducted the research. It has been a journey of searching for, and researching, a methodology that would give our participants, the teenagers, the best tools not only for critical thought but also for verbalising their experiences of the performing arts.

Initially, the T.E.E.N. project focused on the format of criticism. During our festivals in Italy, Denmark, and Norway, the teenagers were led through a series of workshops on how to write and publish critiques / critical reviews about something they had seen or taken part in.

After experimenting with different formats and settings for the exposition of critical thought, we decided to try out the 'Kitchen Table' format during the festival in Mantua, Italy in 2017. Explained simply, this format involves a panel of young people discussing topics of interest to them in the

contemporary performing arts. The audience of adult professionals watching this 'Kitchen Table' were able to ask questions of the panel. The success that was achieved during this direct dialogue in Mantua in 2017 led to a more comprehensive dialogue with an audience of global theatre professionals during the Showbox festival in Oslo later in the year.

It was at this point of the project that the teenagers moved from being mere participants of the T.E.E.N. project to becoming active teen ambassadors. They were representing their own values and ideas that they had developed on the project leading up to this point, as well as the ideas of their local TAG teams. Rather than just writing critiques or making films about their reflections (as they had done before), this was an active format where they were in charge of setting the topics of discussion and leading the debate. As such, I propose that it was at this point that the project developed an entirely new political dimension.

The change in positionality, from someone who produces written thoughts or video materials to be disseminated indirectly, to stating your viewpoint directly to a group of professionals in front of you, is one of real empowerment.

To start on the path of becoming political, one does not need to know everything there is to know about the subject at hand. The first step is to simply

realise that your thoughts and feelings are legitimate. Teenagers are, after all, the experts on what it is like to be a teenager. Undeniably, there are lessons they can teach us about teenage life and these must be understood as politically legitimate viewpoints. The second step is to realise that you have the language and ability to verbalise your experiences, that your subjective reflections are an important means of deepening the debate. Thirdly, it is necessary to understand what power structures are at play and to realise that you have the ability to reflect and

comment on them. Lastly, and most importantly, for your thoughts and visions to have real impact, you need to get yourself into a position where your message is being genuinely listened to.

From where I was standing, I saw a remarkable change in all the teenagers after they participated in the first 'Kitchen Table' debate in Mantua. This experience was only amplified during the session held later at the *Showbox* festival in Oslo. Rather than asking hypotheticals (e.g. What might be relevant?),



the teenagers began asking very concrete questions of importance to their own lives (e.g. What is relevant for me?).

They also started addressing questions about the democratic process like, 'What is a good and valid discussion?' and 'What is important for the panel to consider in the 'Kitchen Table' session?' This I found very interesting - as the teenagers felt more comfortable about what their role in the project entailed, they also started considering how the 'Kitchen Table' sessions could be made into a truly democratic platform.

I believe there were two political aspects that were most relevant in the room at this point – (1) the realisation of power and status and the effect this can have, and (2) the definition of what constitutes quality.

A good example of when this first point arose during the 'Kitchen Table' in Oslo was when one of the teenagers commented, "We are very aware that we are successful white middle class youth, and that a big part of our society is not represented on this panel. However, we have to remember that you are the adults in this room that are in real power to do something about this situation."

When it comes to the second point, the definition of quality, it is of course very complex to delineate any specific 'elements' of quality in objective terms, as

it is an inherently subjective task. Nonetheless, the teenagers still had a lot of advice for the professional theatre makers and programmers about quality (as can be seen in the later section listing the 'Golden Recommendations'). During the 'Kitchen Table' session in Oslo, one of the teenagers remarked, "The point is to understand that [when you see a performance], you do not always have to understand." Interestingly, this statement parallels, in many ways, the Socratic paradox, "The only thing I know is that I know nothing". She went on to say, "The point is to not feel stupid. You should not leave the theatre feeling stupid." This neatly sums up the notion that, whilst it may not be easy to define quality, it is still important to have certain demands for the work.

The development of the teen ambassadors' political approach towards the project was very interesting and, in many ways, their views were in opposition to the current political climate when they stated, for instance, that "we realise that we do not hold the ultimate power to change this but we still want to understand more" and, "there are no easy answers to what quality is".

What I do believe is certain is that many of the teenage participants in the project will be part of forming European cultural politics of the future – after all, you cannot take part in a project that fosters critical thought like this one, without having some new ideas about how things may be made different.





REFLECTIONS ON BECOMING

A TEEN AUDIENCE

– by Naja Birke, Denmark

Teenagers are often overlooked when it comes to theatre programming due to the fact that they seldom choose to go and buy a theatre ticket themselves. Often young audiences, whether children or teenagers, watch theatre performed in their kindergartens and schools. In this context, the production has been chosen for them and so, more often than not, they do not arrive at the performance with any expectations or thoughts about what it is they are going to see.

If their teachers, or other adults, do not engage them in conversation about the performance either, they may not even form a cohesive opinion of what they have seen. In other words, the theatre they are presented with is out of context and this can easily lead to teenage apathy about what it is they see.

With the T.E.E.N. project partners having combined our efforts over the past two years to find new ways of engaging teenagers through means of theatre criticism, a number of things appear to have been important, even essential, in the process of developing an audience identity.

Matthew Reason, Professor of Theatre and Performance in the Faculty of Arts at *York St John University*, authored the *'Talking About Theatre'* booklets (you can find a link to these in *Part 5 – Tools and Methods*) on the premise that talking about theatre prolongs the experience. When you talk about your experience, he argues, the conversation has its own quality and is, in fact, just as important as the original theatre experience itself.

From creating theatre critiques, to discussing shared visions with fellow TAG team members and teen ambassadors across various countries, the teenagers not only got a sense of their own likes and dislikes, but also learned how to express their opinions, and how to remain culturally sensitive regarding their peers from other countries perceiving art and theatre through a different social and cultural lens.

I learned how to describe my feelings and emotions and how to appreciate other points of view although they are different than mine.

Martina Bosi, Italian teen ambassador

As Rui Pina Coelho stresses in his essay *'A Critic is Never Wrong'*, to work with theatre criticism is to start a dialogue. It can never be right or wrong, nor can it ever be the last word. Rather, it is the beginning of a conversation about the performance, about art

in general, and about the cultural and social context through which we have each experienced the art. By understanding that a critic is never wrong, and that theatre criticism is the start of a dialogue, the teenagers had the possibility to share their thoughts freely whilst appreciating, and being able to explore, the diversity of their peers' different opinions. This opportunity for the teenagers to gain a wider perspective on their own likes and dislikes, in the context of other people potentially disagreeing with them, is an important stepping stone to becoming an active audience member.

Moreover, the teenagers were empowered to take charge in these conversations about art and how it is relevant to them. Such discussions are inherently political, as Kjell Moberg proposes in his short article, *'The Political Aspects of Critical Thinking'*. The teenagers were empowered even more when they became aware of their own value as audience members, aware of the significance of expressing their opinions and engaging professionals in their ways of perceiving art, and aware that those professionals were listening and taking them seriously. It is important to note that, when the teenagers developed this position of authority, the professionals were not only inspired to listen more seriously to the teenagers themselves, but also to each other's points of view.

When we started the project, it was considered that teenagers were often overlooked in theatre programming. However, the dialogue achieved through the tools of theatre criticism allowed the teenagers to develop more of an established identity as audience members. Establishing an identity as a young audience member is to find out what you expect of a performance, to allow yourself to feel moved by the experience, and to be able to share that with others. Not only were they able to identify their own artistic preferences but they were also able to express them to their peers, producers, curators, and other theatre professionals.

It was important that the teenagers found their own voices not only for this project, but also as an important life lesson for the future. Having a voice is crucial to being an active part of a society with a rich cultural history, as it allows us to tell the stories of who we are as individuals and as part of a group. If we are people of any age group, nationality, class, gender etc. it is important that we are able to frame our experiences.

So, if using theatre criticism as a tool to start these dialogues is important for young audiences, who will teach them?



How can you enjoy a game of football if you don't understand the rules? We do not expect young people to understand the conventions of mathematics, biology, history, or language without schooling, but for some reason we seem to expect artistic taste to be a matter of individual perception, and therefore, something to be learned instinctively without any schooling. This is particularly impractical when it is considered that art and theatre are part of a complex history that refers not only to other pieces of art, but also socio-political events, cultural references, and other stories.

As such, we need to provide tools for teachers and teenagers to explore art together, teaching our young people about different cultural and historic contexts. This will start them off on their dialogues with each other about how they experience theatre performances and will ultimately, therefore, help on the road towards them becoming an audience.

PART 5

TOOLBOX AND METHODS

In this section, you will find a description of the tools and methods that were found to be useful during the research carried out throughout the T.E.E.N. project.

The tools have all been translated into English and are meant to act as inspirational reference points for you to adapt to your own needs, structures, projects, and desires. One of the most important things we have discovered throughout our experiences of working with teenagers is that *there are no hard and fast rules*, so by all means use the tools and methods we include here, but make sure you adapt them accordingly.

At the end of this section, you will also find 'Golden Recommendations' that emerged from the project, as well as the 'Kitchen Table' manifesto written by the young teen ambassadors.

It must also be said that the T.E.E.N. project research remains an ongoing occupation. To find newly updated and implemented tools / methods please visit the project website: www.teentheatreetwork.eu

5.1 PEPYS' DIARY AND THREE QUESTIONS ON THEATRE CRITICISM

– Portugal

We asked everyone involved in the project to create a diary in which they could not only reflect on the performances they had seen, but also on the wider world and how the performances they had seen might impact the public sphere. The goal was to intertwine ideas about life, theatre, writing, and public debate in order for the participants to understand that performances actually inhabit a public space and that there is no way to escape the spectator's subjectivity. From 1660 until 1669, Samuel Pepys, an administrator of the English navy and a Member of Parliament, maintained a private diary. This is considered to be one of the most illuminating primary sources for the history of his time, in which the author mixed personal reflections with acute observations. Through his diary, we can learn about the Great Plague of London, the Second Dutch War, and the Great Fire of London – and we also have a glimpse of the theatre from his time. Through his colourful descriptions of venues, people, politics, and performances we can revive the atmosphere and fanfare of Restoration Theatre. In effect, Pepys's diary is considered to be one of the early examples of theatre criticism. You can read a short extract of it here:

PEPYS' DIARY

Samuel Pepys

Monday, 29 September 1662
(Michaelmas Day)

This day my oaths for drinking of wine and going to plays are out, and so I do resolve to take a liberty today, and then to fall to them again. Up and by coach to White Hall, in my way taking up Mr. Moore, and walked with him, talking a good while about business, in St. James's Park, and there left him, and to Mr. Coventry's, and so with him and Sir W. Pen up to the Duke, where the King came also and staid till the Duke was ready. It being Collarday, we had no time to talk with him about any business. They went out together. So we parted, and in the park Mr. Cooke by appointment met me, to whom I did give my thoughts concerning Tom's match and their journey tomorrow, and did carry him by water to Tom's, and there taking up my wife, maid, dog, and him, did carry them home, where my wife is much pleased with my house, and so am I fully. I sent for some dinner and there dined, Mrs. Margaret Pen being by, to whom I had spoke to go along with us to a play this afternoon, and then to the King's Theatre, where we saw "Midsummer's Night's Dream," which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid ridiculous play that

ever I saw in my life. I saw, I confess, some good dancing and some handsome women, which was all my pleasure.

Thence set my wife down at Madam Turner's, and so by coach home, and having delivered Pegg Pen to her father safe, went home, where I find Mr. Deane, of Woolwich, hath sent me the modell he had promised me; but it so far exceeds my expectations, that I am sorry almost he should make such a present to no greater a person; but I am exceeding glad of it, and shall study to do him a courtesy for it.

So to my office and wrote a letter to Tom's mistress's mother to send by Cooke tomorrow. Then came Mr. Moore thinking to have looked over the business of my Brampton papers against the Court, but my mind was so full of other matters (as it is my nature when I have been a good while from a business, that I have almost forgot it, I am loth to come to it again) that I could not set upon it, and so he and I past the evening away in discourse, and to my lodgings and to bed.

The following is a template used to emulate Pepys' diary during the T.E.E.N. project completed by a teenager participant:

THE PEPPY'S DIARY EXPERIENCE

PROJECT TEEN RESEARCH TOOL #1

To be sent to teentheatreproject@gmail.com

Your Name, City, Country, Date.

Martina Bosi, Mantua, Italy, 26-01-18

[Title of performance, author of text (if applicable), main responsible/s for the performance, Company/Structure, Venue, date of attendance.]

Rzeczy/Cose, by Daria Deflorian and Antonio Tagliarini, produced by Tagliarini/Deflorian, at Teatro Magro Home, 25-01-18

Diary Entry (Around 100 words):

Today I have seen the performance Rzeczy/Cose at the teatro Magro. I was very excited to go to the theatre because I hadn't been there for a long time. I wanted to feel emotions, to be kidnapped by the show. When I entered the theatre, there were no chairs and people

could walk around and watch the screenplay. Then the actors took some chairs and we sat on them. The start was strange and for this reason it increased my curiosity. There were lots of boxes full of stuff. Was it only stuff or could it be considered more important, a part of our life? This was the point of the entire performance. We should have given a sense to every little action.

Before going to the theatre I had been to the church. The priest said that our life is a sort of a bad picture and behind this bad picture there is another one which makes satisfied, proud and cheerful. After having seen this performance, I can say that I don't think our life is horrible. We only must transform it into a treasure, we must change our point of view. Janina Turek found the way to spread her life appreciating tiny things. As the actors told us, she wrote how many times she had called someone, how many times she had said "hello", what she had eaten... So, she gave a sense to her routine. I totally admire her method. It's more than a normal diary, it's the key to find useless things useful.

THREE QUESTIONS ON CRITICISM

In addition to the Pepys' Diary task, everyone involved in the project was asked to answer three questions about theatre criticism. This was used as a starting point to reflect on what theatre criticism is, who uses it, and how they go about it.

1. WHAT IS THEATRE CRITICISM?
2. WHO NEEDS THEATRE CRITICISM?
3. WHAT IS THEATRE CRITICISM GOOD FOR?

Templates of the two tools are available on the website: teentheaternetwork.eu at the section "Tools and Research".

RUI PINA COELHO

The critic and researcher of the project



5.2. QUESTIONS, AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT, AND SELF-PORTRAITS

– Italy

Two needs were identified as fundamental: increasing the knowledge about audience development's processes and about the target of the project. The analysis prompted a dialogue with *Fitzcarraldo* (the foundation leader of the European project co-financed by the EC which identifies the best knowledge and the best actions to increase the audience engagement in cultural initiatives: *ADESTE*) and *Codici* (the association promotes research and social transformation and which led a national research on the identity of teenagers) which led to organising two workshops, one to develop expertise and a second one to train crucial skills for the development of the process.

Post-Show Questions

The project is based on the opportunity to evaluate practices already tested at a national level and to share those at a European level.

A group of questions known were used, experimented and then shared. These questions were developed by the *Stratagemmi Association* (based in Milan and specialised in theatrical criticism) and the *Codici* to interview teenagers after they had watched a show.

In the T.E.E.N. project, they were used by the Italian TAG team to help them to express their feelings and opinions having journeyed to the Italian festival *Santarcangelo dei Teatri* in 2017, where they had met another group of teenage theatre-goers.

This tool was useful to understand their experience of the trip, the programme that had been devised for them, and their relationship with the other group of teenagers.

Post-Show Questions

- What will you not forget about each of the shows you've seen?
- Which aspect of each of the shows did you find most interesting?
- What do you think of the variety of shows presented by the artistic director?
- What was the most exciting thing about the trip?

Questions on Becoming an Audience

- What does it mean for you to be spectators?
- When you were at the theatre did you have the same outlook as in everyday life?
- Do you act differently as a spectator at the theatre than you would as a spectator at a concert or exhibition?
- Do you prefer productions that involve you in the action as a participant or do you prefer to keep a distance between yourself and what you see?
- What was your first memory of being a spectator (not just in a theatrical context)?

Audience Development

This tool was developed by the *Fitzcarraldo Foundation* and was presented during the training workshop for professionals at the T.E.E.N. project kick-off meeting in 2016.

To find the power point presentation and get more information go to www.teentheatreetwork.eu at the section "Tools and Research".

Self-Portrait

This tool was developed by the *Codici Association* and presented during the training workshop for professionals at the T.E.E.N. project kick-off meeting in 2016.

To find the power point presentation and get more information go to www.teentheatreetwork.eu at the section "Tools and Research".

5.3. WRITING CRITIQUES**– Norway**

This PowerPoint presentation is an introduction to theatre criticism. It was developed by Anette Therese Pettersen, together with Hild Borchgrevink and Ida Habbestad, as a tool for teaching youths how to describe and discuss performing arts – and how to write a review.

To find the power point presentation and get more information go to www.teentheatreetwork.eu at the section "Tools and Research".





5.4. HACK THE THEATRE

– Denmark

This PowerPoint presentation was developed by Naja Birke, a T.E.E.N. tutor from Teatercentrum in Denmark, to explain the idea behind the 'Hack the Theatre' concept.

To find the power point presentation and get more information go to www.teentheatreetwork.eu at the section "Tools and Research".

'Hack the Theatre' Workshops

It is important to stress that the 'Hack the Theatre' workshops were adapted as necessary according the context of the participants and their environment, as well as the resources that were available to use in the municipality.

Sometimes the municipality had a local theatre with professional educators or actors / directors who would engage in the process or we would involve a social media expert or a critic etc. The different

groups of teenagers were also of different ages and some individuals had dyslexia, so each group required adaptations in different ways.

Each of the workshops had different themes such as reviewing, using social media, working on creative processes, recreating ideas in another media format, and so on. Nonetheless, every workshop with a class or a TAG team began by watching a performance together.

Having encouraged the teenagers to rethink how they commented on a performance, groups then explored how they could form and express their opinions on what they thought of the performance. From this starting point of having explored the performance through the workshop theme and activities, the teenagers then produced a 'hack'.

The process of hacking a theatre performance was intended to allow and inspire the teenagers to express themselves and comment on their experience in ways other than writing a review. For example, they might make a video that presents an idea about how the audience are let in and out, or they may offer suggestions about the production of supplementary learning materials. In one workshop, after watching the 'DIVA' performance by *Sofie Krog Teater*, some teenagers reshaped the performance by coming up with multiple new endings, whilst other groups focused on constructing background

stories for some of the characters in the play. The teenagers were keenly inventing new ideas that had been sparked from the play. In another session, one group decided to reshape a scene that they felt had used too much pathos, saying that it felt silly in an otherwise very solemn play. They offered recommendations to the director to adapt it to maintain the serious tone. Another group simply commented on the nature of the touring venue, pointing out that the seats were uncomfortable, which they felt detracted from the experience of an otherwise excellent performance.

It was important to the team that these comments should be sent or presented directly to the professionals involved in producing the performance rather than being disseminated (like reviews are) to other potential audience members. As such, the hacks produced at the 'Hack the Theatre' workshops were shared with the theatre companies who had produced the original performance. By doing so, we aimed to create a dialogue between theatre professionals and their young audiences. This gave the young audiences an opportunity to engage in conversations with theatre professionals at *Aprilfestival* through which they were able to feedback their comments directly. This also gave them a huge sense of achievement and responsibility, believing that they, as young audiences, could contribute something valuable to the debate with professionals.



A Hack by Syddjurs CultureCrew

Based on the performance '*Den halve papdreng*' ('*The Half Cardboard Boy*') produced by *André Andersen SOLO*.

What do we think of the play?

We thought the play was generally good. The way the actor did things was really good, because he managed to make it interesting even though it was on a serious theme. Before we went in we thought the play would be boring but when we saw it we found out that it was very good and interesting. The way the actor told it made it interesting.

What would we change?

We think the seats should have been different because many of the seats were not really nice to sit in. We think they should be more comfortable. We think it is important to be able to sit well to make the most of the play. See the picture below.

The hack from Syddjurs CultureCrew is very interesting because it relates to the practices of how we produce theatrical experiences for young people in Denmark. Since a lot of the theatre performances are toured, and therefore do not take place in an actual theatre but in classrooms and school gyms, the seats are very often old classroom chairs, tables, or even just a space on the floor.

Furthermore, it raises the question of how to encourage teenagers to become active theatre-goers who choose to go out and see a performance when they are used to theatre being brought to them in schools. How do we encourage young people to find their way to theatre buildings and to select from the possibilities available to them?

Another lesson learned from the 'Hack the Theatre' workshops is that young audiences are schooled from an early age on how to write a review in a very structured way. It can be very difficult for them to rethink how they comment upon a performance because they become uncertain of what is expected of them. In this sense, the workshops were an opportunity for the students to be open to new possibilities, not always following the rules set by the schools, and using their imagination and creativity in new ways. The potential of the workshops to help young people rethink what they had learned from school was only realised at the end of the workshop series in the 2018 *Aprilfestival*.

Building on this, we need research into the relationship and intersection between the roles of 'theatre audience member' and 'student'. This was clear from many discussions during the project - from the hacks produced in Syddjurs about the conventions of touring theatre in Denmark, to the Italian TAG

team's recommendation not to bring teenagers to the theatre with their schools, and to the discussion about Norway's *'Cultural Rucksack'* that provides theatre for all school children nationally. Examining how the two roles influence and impact on one another needs to be a priority in looking at what happens if and when teenagers are able to co-curate performance programming in schools, at festivals, and in local theatres and cultural institutions.

To find online the guide entitled *'Talking about Theatre'* and get more information go to the website <http://www.talekunst.dk/en/home/>. This material has been developed by Matthew Reason, Professor of Theatre and Performance in the Faculty of Arts at *York St John University*, and helps to initiate conversations about theatre from six different points of view. It is available in both Danish and English.

Furthermore, this next link contains questions about young people's habits and engagement as theatre-goers, as well as expectation and experience cards that can be printed, ready to use. The Danish version of the cards was developed by *Teatercentrum, Dansehallerne (The Dancehalls), LMS (Live Music in Schools)*, and teachers from the municipalities of Haderslev and Kalundborg. The English translation of the questions and cards was completed by *Teatercentrum* in the course of the T.E.E.N. project. *More information on the website teentheatrenetwork.eu at the section "Tools and Research"*.



5.5 THE 'KITCHEN TABLE' MANIFESTO

The 'Kitchen Table' manifesto was written up by the teen ambassadors as a handbook for facilitators who want to host a 'Kitchen Table' discussion. Whilst the content of the discussion is, of course, flexible, the format should remain consistent. *For more information on how to prepare a kitchen table discussion go to www.teen theatrenetwork.eu*

Rules

1. The moderator should be a teenager.
2. Adult speaker should be timed and will be given a maximum of three minutes to speak. A speaker can continue for longer than three minutes if this is agreed unanimously by the teenagers.
3. There has to be food at the kitchen table.
4. The room must be set out to resemble a kitchen table (or maybe like a picnic, for example) with the spectators around the setting.
5. The teenagers act as the grown-ups and the adults in the audience act as the kids. In other words: the teenagers are the experts, the adults in the audience the students.
6. Whilst it is important that the audience gets involved, the discussion is focused on the opinions of the teenagers, so adults should keep quiet and raise their hand if they want to talk.
7. Opinions should be supported by experiences or examples.



5.6 GOLDEN RECOMMENDATIONS

As part of the T.E.E.N. project, we wanted to bring teenagers to the theatre and 'infect' them with the theatre virus. We challenged ourselves to summarise our experiences into ten 'Golden Rules' that described how teenagers engage with theatre. However, after visiting each of the different festivals, sharing lots of different theatrical visions, and testing different tools and methods of theatre criticism, we found that there was no definitive recipe for working with young people in theatre, and that it all depends on the context of your project, the individuals involved, and your point of view. There can be no rules when it comes to engaging teenagers in theatre, only recommendations. Therefore, we adapted our intended 'Golden Rules' into 'Golden Recommendations'.

In trying to engage teenagers in theatre, we think that it is important to create plans that suit your agenda, to think of the space you want to share with the young audience, and then to ask yourself the right questions. To help you ask those questions, you will find our 'Golden Recommendations' on the next page – from the point of view of a critic, a curator, the T.E.E.N. tutors, and the teenagers themselves. The recommendations reflect the dialogue in the project and the different agendas that are in play when working with teenagers and theatre.



Golden Recommendations – from the Critic’s Point of View

- 1.** Never forget who you are. Don’t mask your identity.
- 2.** Never pretend to believe in things you don’t believe.
- 3.** Always try to be honest with your feelings and perceptions.
- 4.** To criticise is not to judge – it is to begin a dialogue.
- 5.** Be transparent.
- 6.** A performance is not the end of a sentence – it is the beginning of a poem.
- 7.** Your job is not to help improve a performance. Your job is to be there and participate.
- 8.** Never forget that art is part of the world. It has a history, a purpose, and a future.
- 9.** Performing arts criticism is a medium through which we can reinvent the public sphere.
- 10.** A critic is never wrong because criticism is not about being right or wrong. It is about being present.

Golden Recommendations – from the Curator’s and Tutor’s Point of View

- 1.** There is not a definitive recipe for engaging teenagers in theatre.
- 2.** Be brave and dare to let go of your own ideas and agendas.
- 3.** Being present in the moment - engage properly with teenagers and they will respond by engaging with you.
- 4.** Networking - it is important for teenagers to meet peers with mutual interests.
- 5.** Community - create spaces for discussion and disagreement.
- 6.** Knowledge - provide an understanding of the cultural context of theatre and relevant cultural frameworks.
- 7.** Theatre Criticism and reflection - utilise innovate tools and methods of theatre criticism that give teenagers an opportunity to express themselves in ways other than they do at school.
- 8.** Quality - Keep in mind that what adults may perceive as quality might differ from what teenagers perceive.
- 9.** Empowerment - let the young people take control, allow yourself to stand back, and just give them support and guidance when it’s required.
- 10.** Last but not least: Never underestimate your audience.

Golden Recommendations – from the Teenagers’ Point of View

- 1.** Don't bring teenagers to the theatre in school groups.
- 2.** Ensure there is time for the teenagers to meet with the artists or the performers from the production.
- 3.** Programme performances which talk about, or relate to, contemporary issues, even if they are classics.
- 4.** Create a trailer of the performances and work towards making them go viral.
- 5.** Communicate with teenage audiences through Instagram and design one poster for each show you programme.
- 6.** Choose cool titles for your performances or your theatrical programme.
- 7.** Create critical focus groups for teenagers to be involved in choosing shows.
- 8.** Discount theatre tickets for groups of teenagers (e.g. provide a discount if you bring a certain number of friends with you).
- 9.** Don't specify that your theatrical programme is for teenagers, otherwise try to find a hip title / tagline (e.g. "Plays Forbidden to the Over 25s").
- 10.** Make it clear that theatre is composed of several types of art together (drama, music, cinema, art, paintings, visual, etc.).

AFTERWORD

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE – CREATING A TEEN NETWORK ACROSS EUROPE

by **Cristina Cazzola (Italy)**

Since 2016, the T.E.E.N. (Theatre European Engagement Network) project has investigated new audience engagement strategies tailored towards teenagers and has focused on enhancing their experience as active spectators by developing an innovative approach of theatre criticism. The project started by focusing on the expression of the teenagers' individual experiences, however, we ended up devising the 'Kitchen Table' format. This entails a group debate where the focus is on the teenagers' ability to listen to each other's points of view. The 'Kitchen Table' allowed for the possibility of discussing themes around individual performances and wider programming processes and was powerful not only for the teenagers but also for the festival curators and cultural professionals.

Indeed, this format of debate helped us to uncover various barriers to the engagement of teenagers in theatre and allowed us to move the project discussion and research onto the characteristics of proposed show programming as well as the frameworks that could

usefully be put in place to engage teenagers. In this manner, the 'Kitchen Table' format enabled much wider frames of analysis for the debate such that it included discussion over all production processes related in *any* way to the means in which young audiences engage in theatre. In this way, the engagement activities that we had trialled developed into a proper methodology that stimulated young people's critical thinking and awareness – a means of educating them to be engaged in active citizenship.

Above all, we understood that the challenge was not to simply increase the number of teenagers in the audience but, more significantly, to increase the number of those who would repeatedly return to watch performances. The task was to instil in those teenagers who were brought to watch theatre, the same enthusiasm that motivates those who make theatre.

However, the teenagers pointed out that, when theatre is presented in a school environment, the didactic function of the art form is often prioritised over any emotional, empathic experience and that this can have a detrimental impact on teenagers' attitudes and engagement in theatre. With the focus of programming decisions being didacticism, young people learn to view theatre as a mandatory and academic activity, rather than a fun or engaging pursuit. The 'Kitchen Table' format worked so effectively precisely because it was not like any activities that the teenagers engaged in at school and was not led by a teacher figure.

As a result of this research, we understand the need to engage in further work that explores how teachers

and the school system are involved in the creation and selection of theatrical experiences. Forms of expression and reflection like writing, reviewing, debating, and the 'Kitchen Table' format itself would appear suitable to form a central function in this pursuit. These extracurricular activities allow teenagers to process any negative experiences in the theatre by giving them the opportunity to engage with each other's opinions and to express what annoyed or bored them in the performance.

Evident throughout the diverse activities in this project, particularly in the Danish workshops, was that the students' critiques could be used to achieve a new aim, influencing the subsequent stages of the project. In this sense, responsibility is the new keyword, alongside the protagonism championed by many audience engagement projects.

I also understand the term 'responsibility' as Rui Pina Coelho uses it in his analysis (see outlook 4.1), where it is applied to the process of critique itself. In this context, cultural professionals and teenagers are invited to be responsible for the outcome of their work (see the 'Golden Recommendations'). In particular, teenagers are encouraged to take part in creative processes with the due care, reading their own critiques and taking responsibility for expressing their opinions in front of the actors and production team members. This form of feedback is quite the opposite of what tends to happen on social networks, where critiques and comments

are being thrown out whilst being masked behind a protective virtual wall.

The introduction of the Kitchen table format has shifted attention from engagement to the reflection on group's opinion within an actual and lively citizenship workshop.

On completion of the project, we realised that every method, recommendation, and tool involved in the T.E.E.N. project was focused on preventing the 'boomerang effect'. This is when a teenager watches a single unsatisfying performance which colours their experience and perception of the theatrical artform as a whole. If this can happen even in those productions that have been selected with the utmost care and attention, it stands to reason it is an even more widespread phenomenon when productions are brought in without great consideration of the teenagers' needs. As such, it





is crucial to develop proper engagement strategies in order to overcome this threat.

One of the most productive outcomes of this project was how it empowered cultural curators, by taking on what had been learned, to better programme theatrical events and activities dedicated to teenagers. In order to disseminate this learning further, we are also now able to train, and advocate for, colleagues around Europe to develop their visions and methodologies of teenage audience development in suitable ways. The most crucial aspect to be taken onboard by cultural professionals is that of genuine dialogue and listening, conducted in a manner that recognises that teenagers are not a homogenous group but a collective of individuals with individual tastes, interests, and opinions.

In order to continue extending our thinking beyond this current project, the question we should now be asking is: Is it possible for European theatre festivals targeting teenagers to be programmed and produced by a pool of curators, that includes teenagers themselves? In order to examine this question, a new project, 'Teen Ambassadors across Europe' will be launched to build upon the achievements of the T.E.E.N. project. It will explore the challenges of building a co-curatorial relationship between professional curators, producers, and teen ambassadors, thereby establishing further new long-term strategies for audience development. The new methodology is expected to influence wider European cultural programming, making theatre more

accessible to different audiences of different cultures, including young people who are socially disadvantaged. Working together in partnership on this new project will be the same partners from the T.E.E.N. project (*Segni d'infanzia*, *Norsk Scenekunstbruk*, and *Teatercentrum*) as well as three new organisations (*Caixaescena*, *Cultuurcentrum Hasselt*, and *Dialogue Community Performance*).

It is important to begin the new cooperation process straight after the conclusion of the T.E.E.N. project in order to harness the power of the established TAGs in Denmark, Italy, and Norway. The teen ambassadors in these groups are willing, engaged, and motivated to share their enthusiasm for theatre with their peers. The methodology developed during the T.E.E.N. project (such as TAGs and the 'Kitchen Table' format) will be used as the basis for the new co-curatorial approach. These established tools will continue to be used by the existing partners, will be put into action by the new partners for the first time, and will also be used at festivals in other countries that have expressed an interest in understanding the co-curatorial approach and better engaging teenage audiences.

We are confident that by completing this 'Teen Ambassadors across Europe' project, the sector's call for research into a concrete methodology that may be used to better engage teenage audiences will be answered by a scalable, sustainable, and inclusive approach to teenage audience development in Europe.

AND THE ADVENTURE GOES ON WITH...

TEEN AMBASSADORS ACROSS EUROPE





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