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Country Report

Performative Arts & Pedagogy – A German Perspective

Ulrike Hentschel, Ole Hruschka, Friedhelm Roth-Lange & Florian Vaßen

This report resulted from a number of meetings in the context of *The Performative Arts and Pedagogy Project – Towards the Development of an International Glossary* (for further details click [here](#)). Representatives from five different countries (Austria, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Switzerland) have contributed to the project, engaging in an interdisciplinary and intercultural exchange that aims at an increased awareness of (culture-)specific concepts and associated terminologies that are applied in Performative Arts and Pedagogy contexts.

1 Theatre and Pedagogy – Theatre Pedagogy

Theatre pedagogy involves professional theatre educators putting on theatre with non-professional actors, conveying to them the art of theatre both in terms of production and reception, initiating learning processes and thus enabling the development of aesthetic, social and individual skills, which include the ability to reflect on theatre education from different theoretical perspectives. This understanding of the concept is to be situated within the context of the “aesthetic turn” of the 1990s, which followed on from the dominant role that in the preceding period had been afforded to personality development, collective learning processes and the passing on of political awareness. Functional applications are not to be excluded here, such as sociocultural application, theatre for personal development processes, social interventions and foreign and second language acquisition, although the difference between the art of theatre as an aesthetic realm and theatre methods as a tool used within social, mental or learning processes should still always be kept in mind. The term “applied theatre” also makes sense within this context, whereby application is understood in terms of usefulness.

Theatre educational work usually takes place within projects for which the results are supposed to be presented, that is, in the form of a performance in

front of selected members of the public or before a larger, largely unknown audience.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, theatre pedagogy has enjoyed a considerable upswing as a professional field in Germany, with new academic courses of study in theatre pedagogy at Bachelor and Master level having also been created accordingly.

The following conclusion can be drawn from this: there is no *one* theatre pedagogy. As in other application-based disciplines, different practices, fields of work and theoretical approaches exist alongside one another within theatre pedagogy. These are dependent on the respective historical and cultural development and differ according to their underlying tenets as far as subject, the art of theatre, pedagogy and learning processes are concerned. Over and above that, all approaches are shaped by fundamental ideas about the relationship between pedagogy and theatre. Before this backdrop, theatre pedagogy can be described as a discursive field determined by shifting academic and artistic activities.

2 Traditions and Historical Development

Although the concept has been around for a considerable time now, theatre pedagogy in the sense we understand it today first emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, evidently within the context of the politicisation of the student protest movement of the era. It is no coincidence that – following the *Wandervogel* movement and avant-garde theatre approaches at the start of the 20th century – progressive education, Bertolt Brecht's attempts with the "learning play" (*Lehrstück*) and Jacob Levy Moreno's "Theatre of Spontaneity" (*Stegreiftheater*) all developed around the same time in the 1920s and 1930s; an initial indication of how art and pedagogy would converge became visible here, just as it did in the Bauhaus movement or in the work of Orff or Hindemith, among others. National Socialism destroyed these innovative approaches or integrated several trends from progressive education and so-called non-professional theatre in conspicuously superficial fashion, including that of theatre pedagogy. The period of restoration in post-war West Germany did not reconnect with the ideas of the Weimar Republic, but rather continued the practices of the National Socialist era, although these had allegedly been stripped of ideology. It was only when theatre became politicised from the 1960s onwards and intervened in the most diverse areas of society – such as in children's theatre à la *Grips*, the *Lehrlingstheater*, critical attempts at popular theatre, Boal's forum theatre and practical attempts with Brecht's conception of the *Lehrstück* – and when pedagogy started grasping itself less as focused on instruction and adjustment and more on the emancipation of children and young people that new productive connections between theatre and pedagogy developed into theatre pedagogy.

3 Theatre Pedagogy as Aesthetic Education

The renewed discussion of the aesthetic in the arts and social sciences in the 1980s and 1990s – taking the much-propagated “actuality of the aesthetic” in the wake of post-modernist philosophy as its starting point – also led to this topos taking on a prominent role in education studies and other subjects concerned with communicating art. Before this backdrop, the aesthetic education approach brought about a shift in perspective or emphasis within theatre pedagogy to be explained in summary in the following:

- The theatre pedagogical approach to aesthetic education focuses on the specific contribution made by the art of the theatre to educating non-professional actors. Theatre pedagogy is thus conceived of by taking its own subject, that is theatre, as its starting point. In this context, aesthetic education is understood as referring to the process of the individual engaging with themselves and their contexts within the medium of the art of theatre. At the same time, this allows the materiality unique to theatre to come into focus, which had previously been neglected in the predominantly didactics-centred discussions surrounding aesthetic education.
- The perspective thus shifts in relation to theatre pedagogical approaches that are more skills-oriented or relate to socialisation theory: instead of formulating desirable educational goals for subjects or particular target groups in advance, it is assumed that specific educational opportunities are inherent to the very process of theatrical creation.
- The experience of difference is regarded as a decisive characteristic of aesthetic education.

This experience of difference can appear at various different levels of theatre production: between the actor and the character, between onstage communication and communication between actors and audience, between “having a body” and “being a body”, between sense and sensuality. The pre-requisite here, however, is that the theatre reality is understood as an independent reality located within a particular frame rather than being in ontological contrast to reality as a sort of “quasi”-reality. In this sense, theatre acting is always connected with the creation and acceptance of different realities. It is only when an independent theatrical reality is created by the performance that the “between” can be experienced, an experience of difference, which can be regarded as a key pre-requisite of aesthetic education.

4 Fields of Work

4.1 Theatre Pedagogy at City and State Theatres and in the Independent Scene

Programmes offering practical theatre work for children, adolescents, senior citizens or generation-spanning groups have not just become a fixture at city theatres, but also within the so-called independent scene. Diversifying the sort of programmes on offer for adolescents in particular is seen as an important task, so that not just university-track high school students, but also young people from immigrant backgrounds, refugees and those with disabilities can equally get involved. These acting clubs offer creative spaces for the actors to develop their own productions, which can incorporate their experiences, interests and points of view in the rehearsal process under professional guidance.

4.2 Theatre Pedagogy at Schools

In more and more German states, theatre/drama is being introduced as a third aesthetic subject alongside music and art. In the meantime, most federal states have implemented the 2006 recommendation of the *Kultusministerkonferenz* (Conference of State Cultural Ministers) to also offer a university-track examination (*Abitur*) in this subject. In Hamburg, an education plan has been passed that makes drama a regular subject from primary school to secondary school. Theatre also continues to exist at school in the traditional form of free working groups or an (ungraded) optional subject, but is increasingly entering normal curricula and school structures as a full subject of its own, with the accompanying grading and examination.

In other subjects too, the repertoire of theatre educational methods has grown in importance enormously, which is based on physical and role play approaches, forms of cooperative teaching and learning and targeted use of creative techniques and means of presentation. The corresponding forms of performative instruction are not just used in politics, history or foreign language classes, but also offer an ideal training ground for didactically innovative forms of science teaching. In an immigration society, inter- and trans-cultural drama and theatre pedagogy are being taken into increasing consideration, not least in how multilingualism can be dealt with productively.

The ultimate starting point and goal of theatre pedagogical work in the subject of drama/theatre is the art of the theatre. This is its unique characteristic and distinguishes it from all other fields in which theatre pedagogical methods are employed in ancillary function as a means of social learning. In the various preambles, curricula and handouts developed since the end of the 1990s, there is widespread consensus that the core content of the subject consists of the “trying out theatrical possibilities in practice and reflecting on their effects.”¹

The most important goals and pre-requisites of the subject – which distinguish it from all other school subjects – include the fact that adolescents can incorporate

¹Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg, Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung (ed.): Bildungsplan Gymnasium Sekundarstufe I: Theater, Hamburg 2011, p. 11.

their entire life reality into a theatre or acting process. Working with the staging procedures of theatre and other media is not aimed at merely reproducing everyday experiences and media stereotypes, but also at transcending and transforming them in artistic fashion.

Part of the core business of the intersection of theatre and school includes the reception of performances alongside the pupils' own artistic productions. If theatre is seen as a process of interaction with open results and offers communication of a variety of different meanings, the function of attending a performance cannot, however, be about explaining to the pupils what they have seen. The focus should lie instead on conveying the openness of meaning and contingency of aesthetic productions.

4.3 Theatre in Social Fields

At the start of the 21st century, an EU-wide theatre pedagogy initiative was started by a group of colleagues from Austria: "Theatre Work in Social Fields" is the name of the concept, with a special curriculum available to this end (see Koch, Roth & Vaßen 2004). It combines the many different theatre pedagogical approaches rooted in the social sphere, such as target group theatre, community theatre, theatre for development and the Theatre of the Oppressed. Traditional theatres also increasingly understand themselves as sites of social and artistic learning and experience and develop theatre pedagogical programmes for audiences young and old (such as via youth groups at theatres – headed by theatre teachers). This is not merely a consequence of theatre educational activities or others external to theatre, but rather stems from the fact that the self-conception of theatre has itself become broader: think of performance art, so-called post-dramatic theatre, audience participation and interactive theatre and the mixing of genres: film, image, music, object and material theatre, circus, variety, the incorporation of indigenous forms into popular theatre within artistic theatre, the inclusion of theatre traditions from other countries and cultures, theatre expeditions, theatre as research and as theatre anthropological research and representation, as deconstruction, as a mixture of so-called professionals and so-called amateurs; the format "feature" has been used in documentary drama, narrative theatre is remembered and applied, as is autobiographical theatre, rehearsals are carried out onstage and so on. Theatre now frequently shows its working process and airs its own doubts in public and thus provides a model for methods of generating insights in public – in not dissimilar fashion to pedagogical activity.

5 Structures for Professionalisation

5.1 Theatre Pedagogy Courses of Study

Current situation: Since the end of the 20th century, numerous courses of study in theatre pedagogy at Bachelor and Master level have been created.

The following should be mentioned within the field of non-school educational work: the Bachelor courses in theatre pedagogy at the Hochschule Osnabrück, Campus Lingen (Ems) and 'Theatre in Social Contexts' at the Fachhochschule in Ottersberg, the Master course at the Universität der Künste Berlin. A Master course in "Cultural Communication" is also offered at the Universität Hildesheim, which includes an optional focus on theatre. There are currently three basic courses of study on offer for secondary teacher training (which lead to a Master of Education qualification): since 1999, the performing arts course offered jointly by the HBK Braunschweig, the Leibniz Universität Hannover, the Universität Hildesheim, the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover and the TU Braunschweig and, since 2018, the teacher training course in theatre at the Universität der Künste Berlin and since 2019 a teacher training course at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Rostock. Further education courses in theatre education/drama for teachers wanting to study an additional subject and gain certification are offered at universities in Koblenz-Landau, Bayreuth, Erlangen-Nürnberg and at the University of Education Ludwigsburg; at the University of Hamburg there is a primary school education learning block dedicated to theatre education/drama, and a course component on acting and theatre is offered for all those on teacher training courses. The Bundesverband Theater in Schulen has developed a core curriculum for theatre pedagogy and published an overview of all teacher training courses on its website, which is, however, incomplete.²

In addition, numerous universities of applied sciences offer a theatre education focus within social studies and cultural communication programmes.

Content: All of the Bachelor and Master courses mentioned above share a distinct focus on practice and, on activity- and project-orientation. The courses of study contain modules in the areas of theatre practice (space/scenography, time, voice and language, improvisation, body and movement, music and sound, text and special forms of theatre forms), communication (direction, drama didactics, cultural education, cultural management etc.) and theory (theatre theory and history, the aesthetics of contemporary theatre, dramaturgy, theories of theatre pedagogy) as well as independent artistic and theatre education practice. These are supplemented by internships and visits to theatres and festivals.

Challenges: Theatre courses aim at professionalization and put a special emphasis on the skills needed within a given field of work. However, they also develop the students' ability to think conceptually and to carry out critical analysis, to tap into new fields of practice and thus make an active contribution to the development of the subject. Training people to take on a self-reflexive stance of this kind forms the basis for a critique both of a narrow understanding of education and certain exaggerated expectations of the effects of theatre education work, as well as of the ways in which theatre education work can potentially be monopolised in the context of cultural education.

²See <https://bvts.org/2/fachentwicklung/studieng%C3%BCnge.html>.

5.2 Further Education and Training

A variety of different opportunities for further education and training for theatre educators exist in Germany. Alongside qualifications offered at theatre education centres and other further education and training organisations, the Bundesverband Theaterpädagogik (BuT), founded in 1990, does not just provide its own set of courses to this end, but also developed an Theatre Education Framework in 1994 compiling the essentials for the career perspectives of theatre educators, including the following fields : theatres, theatre and music schools, higher education institutions and universities, organisations dedicated to theatre and the expressive and performing arts, schools, kindergartens, social work, the medical field, sport, economy, theatre education centres. A theatre educator should possess the following skills: expressive skills, decision-making and responsibility, balancing skills (in the sense of being able to maintain an equilibrium between emotional, expressive and cognitive dimensions), constructive abilities, ethical, communicative and aesthetic skills. In 1999, the Bundesverband Theaterpädagogik started a qualification campaign, which set out the basic guidelines for the training of theatre educators. According to these guidelines, theatre educators are supposed to receive basic training totalling around 600 hours of instruction, while the advanced training involves an additional 1100 hours of instruction. Such training programmes take place at institutions (private companies, charitable organisations) which have received a training license from the Bundesverband Theaterpädagogik. A license is granted on the condition that the relevant institution has enough qualified staff to offer a permanent training programme, usually running for one to two years. To ensure the development of sufficient artistic, pedagogical, reflexive and organisational skills, completing the course requires carrying out an individual theatre education project, while the final examination is co-assessed by a specialist selected by the Bundesverband. Those completing the course receive a certificate with the title 'Theatre Educator' accredited by BuT.

6 Developments – Perspectives

Since the end of the 20th century at the latest, theatre has developed a variety of techniques and expressive forms that can be summarised under headings such as performance-oriented or post-dramatic theatre, discourse theatre, conceptual theatre, theatre of expertise and complicity, theatre of ethnological research, theatrical interventions, participatory theatre in the sense of a “relational aesthetic” (Bourriaud 2007) or others. These current developments in theatre have also blurred the boundaries between high culture and popular culture, between the institution of theatre, the so-called “independent scene” and theatre educational productions.

Breaking with the exclusivity of what theatre offers and removing barriers for audiences that possess little cultural education or show little interest in bourgeois culture is hardly straightforward and requires time. The most prominent current

example of this is the *Bürgerbühne* (Citizens' Stage) in Dresden where around 400 people of different ages regularly perform, alongside professional actors. This citizens' theatre has consolidated its place in Dresden in the meantime and has already served as a model for several public theatres in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Contemporary expressive forms as demonstrated in the formats of biographical, documentary and site-specific theatre, narrative theatre, theatre installations and theatre put on by different groups of experts, accommodate the performative abilities of non-professional actors. Non-professional actors act in theatre productions by independent groups with increasing frequency, which are then performed at state and city theatres. Performances by theatre youth clubs are included in the main programme and can frequently no longer be distinguished from the rest of the repertoire in terms of the professionalism of the means employed. On the other hand, professional theatre with children and adolescents (e.g. *Before your very eyes* by God Squad, or *That night follows day* by Forced Entertainment) and by and with actors with physical and mental disabilities (Theater Hora) have also shaken up traditional views of what constitutes professional actor training.

Within this complex melange, the focus for theatre educators is, from an economic perspective, on defining fields of work within a competitive employment market. At the same time, the question arises as to whether these diverse performative formats should indeed be categorised according to different social fields or whether they just refer to different acting and theatre configurations which are not mutually exclusive but rather supplement and boost each other.

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