

# What Happened to Theatre Studies?

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this article, the recent development of theatre studies is outlined in order to suggest a way forward under the heading of “theatre studies 3.0.” A double thesis is defended. Firstly, it is argued that the development of theatre studies is marked by a simultaneous tendency towards pragmatization, theorization, and expansion. Secondly, it is shown that these three strands of development may be seen as reactions to a more fundamental threefold change of the social semantics: a decline of the tradition of edification, an insistence of convergence of the theoretically and the practically oriented programmes of education, and finally a loss of self-evident borders for disciplines. Having suggested what happened to theatre studies and why it happened, the article suggests that we follow a path called “theatre studies 3.0.” based on “an asymmetrical double strategy”.

## **KEYWORDS**

Theatre studies, pragmatization, theorization, expansion

## What Happened to Theatre Studies?

More than ever, we live in a time of change that calls for constant rethinking. It feels as if we have all realized, with seventeenth century John Locke, that our life is basically due to our own labour and now we have gone berserk in changing everything. Nobody can probably escape the great whirlpool of change set in motion by modernity, but self-reflection and some reconsideration of the rationales behind our ways of doing what we do may at least help us influence the direction of the development.

Before I throw myself into an attempt to disentangle some of the interesting developments of theatre studies, I will introduce three initial remarks of caution. Firstly, my contribution will be marked by more than 15 years of participation in university politics and I shall try to make use of the general perspective on the humanities you gain from having served as the head of very multidisciplinary departments and later as a vice-dean for education. Secondly, I should caution that my re-description is solely related to theatre studies understood as a discipline within the range of humanistic subjects as they unfold *within the university*. Finally, I realize that I have chosen a title that may seem to hold a somewhat *apocalyptic* undertone as it seems to imply that we are dealing with a deceased object. To avoid misunderstandings, I should probably underline that, on behalf of theatre studies, I am actually an optimist. As far as I can see, theatre studies (in the plural) are very much alive and thriving, perhaps even more so now than when it was conceived as part of the historicist enterprise in the nineteenth century. However, many developments in our general conception of the world have influenced theatre studies, not the least since the nineteen-eighties, and I believe that the vividness of the discipline has to do with (at least in part) the lines of development which I shall outline in a minute. Thus, by my choice of title I mean to suggest that the development of theatre studies should not only be seen as the effect of immanent enterprises of scholars. It should also be understood, and perhaps more so, as *a set of reactions* to developments that transcend the subject. Even if the

patient didn't die, but proved to be adaptable to new circumstances, something *did* happen to theatre studies, and this something may be foregrounded if we apply the broader perspective on the development that I mentioned earlier.

Now, if I take an interest in the destiny of theatre studies, it is basically in order to point out a possible direction for future studies, a direction which I suggest calling "theatre studies 3.0". Hence, my approach will be structured according to two hypotheses of a historical nature and an attempt to suggest a way forward. Hypothesis number one is about the traits of the development. Using a strategy of reduction which is, admittedly, much too crude to represent everything that has happened, I shall suggest that theatre studies after the nineteen-eighties may basically be characterized as a development based on three major strands of change which have implications for humanistic studies in general: *pragmatization, theorization and, expansion*.

My second hypothesis is that these three strands of change may be seen as reactions to yet another tripartite cluster of cultural developments: 1) the decline of the tradition of edification (if you will allow me a translation of the German notion of "Bildung" with an architectonic metaphor instead of the usual concept "education"), 2) a tendency to insist on a convergence between theory and practice to replace the Post-romantic division of labour between scientific and artistic study programmes, and 3) a general loss of the possibility to produce distinct and self-evident borderlines for academic subjects.

Having worked through an attempt to make these two hypotheses plausible by trying to answer the questions "what happened?" and "why did it happen?", I will conclude with a suggestion as to how we may proceed as theatre scholars, i.e. by offering an answer to the question "what may be done?"

## WHAT HAPPENED?

Let's begin with the strand of *pragmatization*. Ever since the nineteen-seventies, subjects included under the heading "the humanities" have been under pressure to prove their utility. In the eighties, the leftist call for relevance was replaced by a right wing call for relevant qualifications and competencies for the labour market. Today, the latter agenda seems to have almost entirely won the day – especially if we are speaking of study programmes.<sup>1</sup> Since the advent of the Bologna declaration in 1999, we have begun to think of study programmes in terms of the competencies to be obtained by students rather than the substance of the subject at hand. In Denmark, this development was reinforced by the launch of the so-called "Qualifications framework" some ten years later.

The Bologna convention was probably needed as a means of rendering study

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<sup>1</sup> For a particularly precise exposé of the so-called "transnational development" in pedagogical thinking, see Kristensen et al. 2017. For a critical account of how this agenda has changed the university in general and the British University in particular, see Collini 2018.

programmes throughout Europe compatible by measuring programmes not only by a common ECTS-standard, but also by the competences achieved via the courses rather than the specific substances. Nevertheless, the change of outlook from substance to ends represents no less than a revolution which may not have been fully recognized. Thinking education in terms of qualifications and competencies forces you to consider study programmes in terms of the jobs for which graduates must qualify, and in the age of the massification of higher education, this also means thinking study programmes in terms of a much broader labour market than the subjects were invented to serve.

In Denmark, this form of pragmatization has recently led to a major cut back of the humanities (around 30 %) based on poor unemployment rates for the newly educated candidates. Much can be said about this cap on intake, but here, I only mention it as an illustration of the fact that the pragmatization is for real and that all humanistic study programmes more than ever must engage with practice in order to provide students with a broad packet of qualifications. In passing, I would like to add that the same tendency towards direct utility applies for the area of research, but I will have to leave it at that.

For theatre studies, undertaking the task of becoming more useful in a hurry seems to have proven somewhat easier than it has been for many other subjects. As is the case for scholars of the other aesthetic disciplines (and in particular musicology) the scholars of theatre seem to have found it less challenging to bring theory and practice together. In some countries, the division of labour established by the Romanticist Historicism between theatre studies as a scientific enterprise and as a preparation for becoming an artist was never put in place institutionally, cf. the Anglo-American college tradition in which theoreticians and practitioners are trained side by side. In other countries, like Denmark, in which practitioners are trained in art schools placed under the jurisdiction of the ministry of culture, whereas theoreticians are trained in universities under the jurisdiction of the ministry of research and education, the pragmatic spirit of Lessing seems to have lingered on and made it easier to overcome the transition to a more relevance oriented approach to theatre studies. Anyway, to my mind, the growing interest in *applied theatre* bears witness to the strand of pragmatization, be it in the form of theatre anthropology directed at understanding the secret (or perhaps not so secret) art of the performer or versions of applied theatre directed at the utilisation of theatre for pedagogical purposes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Here, I am, of course, thinking of Eugenio Barba's theatre anthropological project and Peter Brook's reply on the one hand and the use of the tradition of pedagogical drama in the wake of Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton on the other. See Barba 1991, Brook 1995, Heathcote 1979, Bolton 1984. For an account of the division of labour between science and art within the aesthetic disciplines, see Fjord Jensen 1993.

Now for the second strand – *theorization* – which is hard to overlook when considering the humanities in general from the nineteen-eighties and onwards. Throughout the subjects of the humanities an increasing interest in theory is discernible. Since the nineteen-seventies in which Marxist theory governed the language game of the humanities, we have seen many grand theoretical enterprises surface – from the semiotic attempt to nail down “the signness” of signs and the phenomenological endeavour to show how meaning resides in our experiences, over the poststructuralist, deconstructivist, postcolonial, and postfeminist attempts to undermine the straight forwardness of such theories, to the undertaking of cultural studies to create theories of culture which will make it possible to compare cultures.<sup>3</sup> Almost every subject has been influenced by at least some of the branches of this tree of theory. It seems that not even university professors are able to escape the increase in reflexivity that Anthony Giddens finds significant for late modernity, a tendency which has provoked harsh responses from scholars who still believe that the historicist enterprise should still be determining the agenda. Some have even seen fascist tendencies in the theorization of the humanities.<sup>4</sup>

Even if theorization may seem to be the opposite of the aforementioned pragmatization, it may very well prove to be nothing but the other side of the coin. As a matter of fact, I tend to see this second strand of development in the light of the need to create new platforms of legitimization for subjects that have become pragmatized. As long as a subject may be defined by a reference to the subject matter at hand, for instance theatre, and as long as a subject is enclosed in an overall historicist enterprise directed at digging up historical truth and ordering it in epochs, the legitimization of it is more or less a given. In so far as subjects are rather seen as a means to help building a better future, the self-evidence evaporates and a question arises about what a particular subject may bring to the party.

This may explain why so much of the theoretical endeavour has taken the form of attempts to define the particularity of the various subjects. We may exemplify this by turning to theatre studies. The semiotics of theatre (in the image of, say, an early Erika Fischer-Lichte) was basically interested in establishing a theory of the particular set of signs involved in a theatre production. Just as colleagues in Comparative Literature searched for the literarity of Literature, theatre semioti-

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<sup>3</sup> The literature to exemplify this development is abundant. Erika Fischer-Lichte’s development from a semiotician in *Semiotik des Theaters: Das System der teatralischen Zeichen* from 1983 to a phenomenologist in *Ästhetik des Performativen* from 2004 may serve as an illustration of the first phase in this development whereas periodicals such as *Theaterschrift*, started in 1992, and *Performance Research*, started in 1996, may be seen as tokens of the influence of theoretical endeavors often associated with postmodernism.

<sup>4</sup> One way of trying to grip what is at stake in this sometimes rather heated debate is to read Paul de Man’s exposé of the reason for distrusting modern theory in “The Resistance to Theory” in the collection of essays bearing the same name (de Man 1986).

cians were on a hunt for the theatricality of theatre. Likewise, a phenomenology of theatre (in the image of, say, a late Erika Fischer-Lichte) has been interested in digging out the particularities of theatre, but in this theoretical framework they are to be found in the special character of theatre as being performed here and now in the presence of an audience, i.e. the performativity of a performance. Thus, both of these attempts are about defining the specifics of the object for theatre studies and I think they should be seen as ways of legitimizing theatre studies as a particular and, by consequence, a *needed* subject if we want our understanding of the disparate human forms of communication to be complete.

Concluding this section, I will address the third strand of development that I mentioned, i.e. *expansion*. The turn to theory opened a wide range of new possible themes for research and teaching. The advent of poststructuralism, for one, not only accelerated the theoretization of the humanities. Its interest in intricate power structures also called for cunning analyses of the hidden structures of meaning production in a very broad context. Gender and queer studies (along the line of, say, Kristeva and Butler) came in vogue as did discourse analysis (with reference to, among others, Foucault) and postcolonial studies in search for the voice of the other (following perspectives suggested by, for instance, Edward Said, Guyatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha).

I also believe that the growing interest in *historiography* should be seen as part of the turn to theory which also expanded the field. A meta-perspective on history becomes necessary when writing history is no longer seen as an enterprise that can be detached from the perspective of the historian, and when we begin to regard history as a contemporary attempt to make sense of the past from *our* perspective, a double expansion of the field of study is called for. Former interpretations of the historical sources must be treated as sources themselves and not just used as possible interlocutors. Secondly, the historian must take a much broader interest in the contemporary culture and society in order to relate the historical study to the current situation.<sup>5</sup>

For the sake of doing some justice to the forerunners involved in the expansion of the field, it should probably be added that poststructuralism and the new historiography only stimulated the increase of themes which had already taken place in the critical theory of the nineteen-seventies. Cultural Studies (as performed, for instance by the so-called Birmingham School) had already broadened the scope by transgressing the border between fine art and mass culture and by taking the point of departure in an anthropological rather than an aesthetic notion of culture. By doing so, cultural studies brought about a much broader notion of the object based on a widened definition of the text, as it were.

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<sup>5</sup> Scholars must, in other words, begin to take into account the line of thoughts as presented, for instance, in Hayden White's book on metahistory from 1973.



In theatre studies, an obvious example of this expansion of the field is the development of theatre anthropology. In fact, this development comes in two forms each of which results in its own particular form of expansion. In the hands of Barba, theatre anthropology sticks to the theatre in so far as he is first and foremost interested in the art of the professional performer. As the interest is directed at the fundamentals of performing for *all* performers, it demands a transgression of the narrow borders of performing in the *Western* theatre. Thus, Barba expands the interest of theatre studies to world theatre. Schechner also sees the importance of going beyond the Western biases, but, in the spirit of cultural studies and unlike Barba, he also understands theatre anthropology as a way to do theatre studies “after the great divide” between high culture and mass culture, as Andreas Huysen has put it.<sup>6</sup>

Schechner’s position, inspired by cultural studies, has opened a wide range of theatre studies that go beyond theatre. It allows us, so to speak, “to go Goffman”. By that I mean that the theoretical endeavour to find the theatricality of theatre or the performativity of performance can be turned into a lens, a perspective or, if you please, a methodological approach with the help of which we may analyse non-theatrical events like a game of football, a demonstration, work relations, or a trial as if they were performances. A branch of performance studies after Schechner has indeed taken this pathway (for instance by Willmar Sauter in Stockholm).<sup>7</sup>

### WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

Now, if my description of the development of the humanities in general and theatre studies in particular is valid, it begs the question *why* the developments have happened along the line of the three suggested strands. My suggestion is that we see the developments in the light of yet another threefold cluster of cultural developments.

Both the pragmatization and the expansion may be explained, at least in part, as a reaction to the decline of the tradition of edification – or, if you prefer the more ordinary translation, education. As long as we share an undisputed belief in what constitutes “good education” – as long as the idea of a “sensus communis” is still viable, as it were – subjects may indeed be construed with reference to particular substances of knowledge. Today, however, we don’t seem to be able to sustain this idea – not even if we try. Unlike Humboldt who launched the idea of “Bildung” in the beginning of the nineteenth century, we have become multicultural and, by

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<sup>6</sup> In *Between Theatre and Anthropology* from 1985 Schechner basically follows Barba on a visit to world theatre whereas in *Performance Studies* from 2002, he embarks on a trip to the histrionics of extra-theatrical artefacts. The argument of Andreas Huysen may be found in Huysen 1986.

<sup>7</sup> For a theoretical exposé of the broad approach to theatre studies suggested by Sauter, see his book *Eventness* from 2008.

consequence, we have lost track of the Kantian notion of a common taste as a corner stone of our culture. We still experience attempts to revitalize the notion of “Bildung”, but in my experience, such attempts either amount to highlighting particular aspects of a contemporary edification (for instance, when people talk about *digital* edification or *techno*-edification), or they proceed by emptying the notion of all content by determining edification as personal development as such. As far as I can see, both of these versions bear witness to the difficulty of maintaining a binding notion of “Bildung”, the first by adding too specific a content, the second by becoming too general and lacking in substance.

It seems obvious to pin the impossibility of sustaining a classical concept of edification on globalisation. If anything, it teaches us to acknowledge the existence of other cultures based on other paradigms of education. However, a growing national multiculturalism probably also plays a role as a determining factor. Even the nationalism evoked in order to keep multiculturalism at bay bears witness to the fact that within the boundaries of a nation, people from different sub-cultures practice disparate life styles. If this wasn't so, there would hardly be any need to launch loud defences of national identity.

If the pragmatization of university subjects and the expansion of the field of study outlined above may both be seen as a response to the impossibility of legitimizing subjects with a reference to the tradition of edification, it is for the following reasons. As the value of the substance of a subject like, say, theatre studies can no longer be secured by an overall notion of what we need to know – or at least *ought* to know – it seems inevitable to substitute ends for substance. Perhaps this holds true in particular for aesthetic disciplines in so far as they are intimately linked to the production of art. In so far as the arts have played a central role in the conception of what it means to be educated, the theoretical endeavour to understand the arts used to be in a position in which it could “borrow the aura” of its object, so to speak. When the art-world loses its aura, this is no longer the case. If the object of study loses its self-evident value, so much the worse for the theoretical disciplines related to it. Likewise, if there is no longer a “sensus communis” to determine what to study and what not to study, the field is left completely open. Any form of life may be of interest.

Another rather paradoxical distinguishing feature of late modernity may be part of the explanation for the combination of pragmatization and theorization of the humanities which I have talked about as two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, we tend to determine value in terms of immediate utility, but on the other hand, we demand scientific proof of the validity of any action taken. In other words, we seem to call for a simultaneity of action and reflection which is rather hard to come by. This may be exemplified by evoking the political system. Politicians are measured by their ability to take immediate action, but hanged out



to dry if later investigations happen to show that the action was unwarranted. In our context, the double pressure for an orientation towards action and reflection, practice and theory, seems to show itself in the form of a complementary demand for more theory in the study programmes directed at educating future theatre artists and the already exposed demand for practice in the programmes directed at educating theatre theoreticians.

Art school programmes have also become “bolognanised”, so to speak, and the result of the entire Bologna process seems to be that the aforementioned division of labour between education of artistic practitioners and scientific theoreticians introduced by Romanticism has come under serious pressure. Today, theatre school programmes and university programmes of theatre studies are forced to look much more alike than before Bologna. The two types of study programmes are forced into a manoeuvre of convergence, not only in so far as they are now both measured in ECTS points, but more so because the simultaneous demands for more theory for the practitioners and more practice for the theoreticians seem to force everybody into the same middle ground.

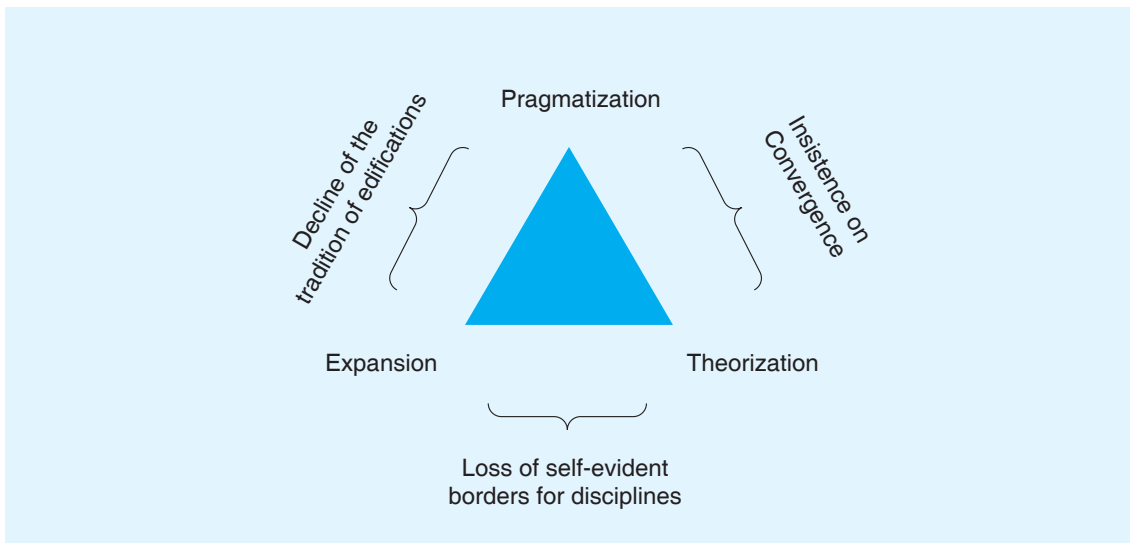
It is tempting to interpret this situation as part of a de-differentiation of the distinction between art and science, but I tend to see this as a misnomer. Training for the theatre still pertains to theatre art while theatre studies relates to the criteria of pertinence for science and even if new forms of the relationship between theory and practice have to be coined on both sides, we are still dealing with two different forms of relationships. In theatre schools, theory is still (and as far as I am concerned, still should be) used as a means for deepening the understanding of the practice already in place by providing knowledge-based teaching. As opposed to this form of the combination between practice and theory, the combination involved in theatre studies for theoreticians seems to be following a sort of complementary reasoning. Whereas the pragmatization is pursued in order to fulfil the new demands for utility oriented teaching and research, the simultaneous increase of theorization may be seen as a way to maintain the specificity as a theoretical university study. In fact, this is the rationale behind my suggestion that the pragmatization *as well as* the theorization be seen as two different reactions to the pressure of convergence directed at art schools and the aesthetic disciplines.

Concluding this section, a few words about my claim that a growing loss of self-evident borders of disciplines also plays a part as a backdrop for the development of theatre studies. Perhaps it is already obvious why this piece fits my puzzle. The push to define subjects in terms of ends rather than substance makes all subjects much more malleable. Unlike substances, ends may be changed by way of simple decision. Add to this the demise of the tradition of edification, which allotted specific spaces for the various disciplines of study, and consider, further-

more, the current call for interdisciplinarity as a prominent way to tackle the so-called grand challenges – a call which forces scholars to transgress their comfort zone and look at their subjects from new perspectives. For better or worse, all of this pushes the borderlines of subjects and makes the definition of them much less self-evident.

If I tend to see both the theorization and the expansion of theatre studies as two forms of reaction to this drift towards unclear definitions of subjects, it is because they seem to represent, respectively, a defensive and an offensive response. Thus, the attempt to spot the particularities of theatre and performance may be seen as a defence put up in order to maintain the borderlines for theatre studies whereas the enormous expansion of the area of potential objects fuelled by the interest in new forms of theory may be seen as an offensive strategy suited to embrace the new possibilities.

For the sake of clarity, it may be worthwhile to summarize the two times three developments and the relationship between them of which I have spoken so far in a simple illustration.



**Figure 1.** The two times three cultural developments.

### WHAT MAY BE DONE?

I speculate about the reasons behind the development of theatre studies in order to substantiate my claim that, at least in part, it hinges on overall changes in the social semantics of late modernity. We may like or dislike the changes, but they determine the conditions of action nevertheless. In my view, there is no turning back. In the search for answers to the question of how we should proceed as theatre scholars, we will probably be most successful if we accept that. Following this line of thought, we are, perhaps, searching for a version of theatre studies

that may be called theatre studies 3.0. based on *an asymmetrical double strategy*. At least, that's one way of phrasing *my* view and, in the final section, I shall try to explain what I mean by taking my point of departure in classical theatre studies (or, if you will, theatre studies 1.0.).

Using the strategy of extreme reduction once more, theatre studies 1.0. may be described as a closed circuit between the theatre as a specific branch of the arts and theatre studies as a particular branch of science. Before the expansion of the field took place, theatre studies aimed first and foremost at understanding theatre. Of course, theatre was also studied in terms of its place and significance in an overall history. For the sake of schematics, this interest may be seen as a secondary, but less important circuit. If you will accept this brutal interpretation as a "baseline", the expansion of the field of study may be seen as a form of theatre studies that reverses the priorities, so to speak. Let's call it theatre studies 2.0. Here, the study of non-theatrical events takes precedence over the study of theatrical events and, by consequence, a distance is produced between theatre studies and its former prime object that makes it harder to maintain the initial circuit.

As I have tried to outline above, this development has been driven, to a large extent, by external forces, not the least the demand for practical relevance for other sectors of society. I have also implied, however, that the new possibilities have actively been embraced by theoreticians like Schechner who have seen the potential in widening the scope and perhaps I have let myself be carried away by the radicalism appearing in some of his writing. More than an adequate description, my image of theatre studies 2.0. may, in fact, be more like a caricature of a tendency – an image of a temptation, or the delineation of a risk. Perhaps, in reality, theatre studies never really lost track of its original object. This may very well be the case, but so much the better. If I have overstated the expansion of theatre studies, you will probably already feel at home in the description of theatre studies 3.0. to which I shall finally turn.

In theatre studies 3.0., the widening of the scope of study towards non-theatrical events is indeed seen as a great potential and even a necessity in a society which is becoming more and more aesthetized. The various branches of aesthetic studies in general and theatre studies in particular do not only have great possibilities to contribute to the understanding of the tendency of art to spread into society at large. They may very well have a duty to do so, but for that we need a definition.

Aesthetization is often given a negative tenor as, for instance, by Jean Baudrillard. In his perspective, aesthetization is basically equal to deception. To my mind, this is a bit over the top. Actually, we haven't reached the third order of the simulacrum in which mediatized reality has taken precedence over reality itself.

Luckily, we still frown when somebody starts talking about “alternative facts”. Yet, there is some truth in Baudrillard’s account. We do, indeed, experience staged reality all over the place and the growth of mediatized communication does increase the feeling of being part of a somewhat fictitious world. If we stick to *these* elements of the account, we may regard aesthetization as a descriptive category used for pointing out yet another overall tendency in late modernity, i.e. the increase in the use of fiction and quasi-fictitious communication, which ought to be studied. Furthermore, the growth of fictitiousness only seems to be one of two dimensions of aesthetization. For one, Gernot Böhme has suggested that it also involves the increased awareness of the importance of atmospheres. In his view, the omnipresence of ambience makes it necessary to conceive an ecological aesthetics that transgresses the boundaries of art in order to allow for studies of atmospheres wherever they appear.<sup>8</sup>

If the aesthetic disciplines in general have an obligation to study these two dimensions of aesthetization, theatre studies seem to be in possession of a particularly powerful toolbox which may prove helpful in undertaking the extensive task. Perhaps, as a means of explanation, I will draw a distinction, which is much disputed, in a particular way. I have, of course, the distinction between theatricality and performativity in mind and, taking my lead from my former juxtaposition of the early and late Fischer-Lichte, I would like to use the notion of theatricality as a reference to the *signs* involved in the staging of a production and the concept of performativity as a reference to the actual concreteness of the production. It is probably obvious that the benefit in drawing the distinction like this in this context is that it mirrors the two dimensions of aesthetization. As a matter of fact, this link between the challenge and the toolbox is one of the reasons for my optimism on behalf of theatre studies.

However, priorities must be set straight. I have introduced theatre studies 2.0. as a temptation because we may very well get lost in the pursuit of the traits of aesthetization. If, as theatre scholars, we may be in a particularly good position to produce important insights about the omnipresent staging activities and atmospheres in everyday life, it is precisely because we are grounded in studies of the theatre. What we need, it seems to me, are not *general* skills, but rather *transferable* skills. Thus, while oscillating between the two circuits, we must nurture the bonds between theatre studies and the theatre and reverse the reversal of the priorities in theatre studies 2.0. We must, in other words, acknowledge the need for an asymmetrical double strategy focussing on the study of theatre while,

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<sup>8</sup> A poignant account of his understanding of aesthetization is given by Jean Baudrillard in his book from 1981 *Simulacres et simulations*. The rather different account given by Gernot Böhme may be found in his collection of essays from 1995 called *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*.

at the same time, allowing us to broaden the scope of study beyond the limits of theatre.

Just one final remark regarding the relationship between the scientific research produced by theatre scholars involved in theatre studies 3.0. and the art-based research initiated by the theatre schools. Following the ideal of convergence, many attempts have been made to bridge the gap. I have already called for some caution in this matter by mentioning that we are, in fact, dealing with different criteria of pertinence. In the system of science, “the correctibility” of hypotheses is paramount (to use the definition suggested by Niklas Luhmann) whereas art schools use originality as the main criteria. Because of this crucial difference, it is my experience that we all do better jobs if we uphold some kind of division of labour. Of course, cooperation is very welcome, and perhaps the notion of “practice based research” is the most suitable category to use for collaborative projects. It should be added, however, that in so far as the collaborators still have to work according to different criteria, the best collaboration will be created if we think of them in terms of what Luhmann has called “structural coupling”, i.e. a form of togetherness in which each part takes different interests in the collective project.

I hope that my attempt to nail the developments of theatre studies may at least have contributed to set the rethinking in motion.

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