



# THEATRE AND TECHNOLOGY

**14th CONGRESS OF THE SOCIETY FOR THEATRE STUDIES**  
**Düsseldorf, 8th to 11th of November 2018**

at Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, Institute for Media and Cultural Studies  
Organisers: Maren Butte, Kathrin Dreckmann, in cooperation with Tanzhaus NRW, NRW Forum,  
Forum Freies Theater (FFT), Theatermuseum Düsseldorf.

Theatre and Technology – the 14th Congress of the Society for Theatre Studies wants to re-examine the theatre, its history, theory and aesthetics with regard to its technological condition. Keynotes and lectures on eight subject areas will be accompanied by discussions, workshops and performative formats as well as student projects.

The history, theory and aesthetics of the theatre are deeply interwoven with the question of technology and with developments in (media) technology, yet this connection appears as an uncertainty relation: The technical conditionality of the theatre frequently takes a back seat to questions of artistic organisation, implementation of ideas and aesthetics. This creates a hierarchy of practical and artistic knowledge which can also manifest itself in institutional divisions. This congress dedicates itself to the relationship between theatre and technology – the impact and continuity of techniques, practices and objects – with regard to the technological condition. Analogous to the painter-paintbrush concept, it must be asked what technology is doing with the theatre and vice versa. How do the concepts of theatre, knowledge and subjectivity change with this perspective? How do the descriptions of the respective “Theatralitätsgefüge” [theatrical framework] (Münz 1998, 89) change if we do not take empirical technology histories of separation and otherness as a basis but rather observe them in their entanglement and situational conditionality?

According to the historical meaning of the word, the ancient *techné* encompasses processes of creation, artistry and skilfulness as well as the ability and the knowledge to use raw materials and forces for production (Agamben 1994, 103f; Aristoteles 2009, VI, 5; Nancy 1998, 17; Platon 2004, 175). How does the theatre relate to *techné*, *praxis* and *poiesis* – its creative, artistic and technical dimensions? In the extensive processes of mechanisation and industrialisation since the 19th century as well as the later cybernetisation and computerisation since the middle of the 20th century, a “*technologische Bedingung*” [technological condition] (Hörl 2011a) has emerged which determines the social, political, epistemic, economic and aesthetic domains. Where does the theatre find itself in this age of digitalization and information and service societies, deemed a technological era?

For the first time, the congress will take place at the Institute for Media and Cultural Studies at Heinrich-Heine University in Düsseldorf. It will grapple with questions in media studies as well as with the metaphor of a technical unconscious – orientated towards Walter Benjamin’s concept of the “*Optical Unconscious*” (Benjamin 1974, 371) – to contemplate that which is specific to theatre with regard to technology and media: What is the relationship between craftsmanship, technical and “*mimetic*” practices (Aristoteles 1994, Benjamin 2002, 123 and 1974, 373), the objects of the theatre, processes involving training, designing, planning, acting, improvising, composing, coordinating, recording, note-taking, documenting as well as dramaturgical and scenographic processes to their corresponding (media) technological environments of their time? How do artists incorporate technical innovations, and to what extent do these affect practices in other areas? How can theatre be conceived in light of its dissolution of

boundaries with the philosophy of technology as well as in the areas of technology, engineering and natural sciences? Which historical periods of change result in this new perspectivation of the theatre? What are the respective (techno-)economic (Hörl 2011b, 47; Stengers 2015) and political conditions of a production?

### **Philosophical perspectives on technology in the theatre**

Since antiquity, the contemplation of technology in Western discourse has always provoked new positioning of the human in its reference to the environment and to other beings. Johann Gottfried Herder called the human – in contrast to other animals – a “*Mängelwesen*” [deficient being] (Herder 1993, 24), which uses “*Vernunft*” [reason] (*ibid.*) to compensate for that which it lacks. Sigmund Freud speaks of the human being as a “*Prothesengott*” [prosthetic God] (Freud 1974, 222). Helmuth Plessner formulates thusly: “*der Mensch ist von Natur aus künstlich*” [the human being is artificial by nature] (Plessner 1975, 309 / 316). Humanity’s “*nature*” enables it to create both culture and technology, hence technical gesture and the thinking in material symbols and abstractions (Leroi-Gourhan 1964).

Martin Heidegger specifically picks up this discourse in 1953 and describes *techné* in respect to Aristoteles not “*als Mittel zum Zwecke*” [as a means to an end] or as a “*Tun des Menschen*” [act of mankind] which pursues its goal in the “*manufacturing, usage of things, devices and machines*” (Heidegger 2000, 6). Much more, he introduces the concept of framework, which avoids the binary distinction between nature and technology, and/or world and technology and understands the human being as a part of a structure. Simultaneously, as a result of and in contrast to Heidegger’s polysemic concept of framework, Gilbert Simondon, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Jean-Luc Nancy, Erich Hörl and others feature positions which point towards a shift from technology as a “*Utensil*” [utensil] to technology as an “*Ensemble*” [ensemble] (Simondon 1958/2012, 14, 12). This understanding of technology puts the focus on the various human and non-human “*Akteure*” [actors] (Latour 2007b) of a situation, on materialities, objects, cultural technologies and institutions. In this transition from technology to a technology as a duplication, proliferation, dispersion and disintegration of purposes (comp. Hörl 2011b, 45), the teleological rationale pattern is broken open.

This shift challenges the human being as *homo faber*, tool carrier and sovereign artistic subject or genius, as well as the accompanying technophile or technophobe narratives. Particularly, however, the pluralisation of purposes circumvents the idea of a “*rift*” (present since the Romantic period) between art and technology, aesthetic and technical art, *poiesis* and *praxis*, poetry and craft (Nancy 1998, 16, 18). Against

this backdrop of continuity of technical achievements, the forms of the theatre should be looked at as technological ensembles: Performances, stagings in political, social, (non-)artistic contexts, pop concerts and sporting events, cinema, film, video, installations, audio walks, demonstrations and everyday rituals. To interpret theatre as technology means to interweave the manner of production, performance and experience itself and thus to combine praxis, poiesis and methexis. Staging and performance are not to be described here as technically instrumental, meaning in a causal relationship or cybernetic control, as demonstrated for example by the intentionality of "Industrie- und Technikkapitalismus" [industry and technology capitalism] (Hörl 2011b, 47). Much more, the phenomena materialise as "Unbestimmtheits-spielräume" [spaces of indeterminacy] (Simondon 2012, 12), into which moments of disassociation and intensification can be embedded.

Thus a revision of the relationship between theatre and technology brings up specific questions about the ways of creating, the (artistic) producing as well as the relationship between nature and culture; especially, however, questions of the state and position of the subject. Furthermore in this perspectivation, questions as to the theory of body, sex and gender, and/or cyborg theories (Balsamo 1996; Braidotti 2015; Haraway 1985; Hayles 1999; Puar 2011) can also be newly outlined, and Western conceptions of technology and their colonial interrelations critically interrogated. In order to reflect on the theatre with respect to its technological condition, contributions to the following sections may be submitted:

### **1. Theatre and technique/technology with respect to its technological condition**

What does it mean to analyse the theory, history and aesthetics of the theatre from a perspective focusing on its technologies/techniques? What if they are not considered here to be controllable instruments but rather a technological ensemble of many (non-) human actors? Which approaches in theatre studies, which methods, which theoretical models does this require, and which shifts of relations and narratives result?

### **2. Techniques of the body**

Are drama, dance and song physical techniques (Mauss 1989) and, if so, at what moment and to what extent? Which cultural and disciplinary technologies (Foucault 1993) of the theatre, which training, conceptual methods and objects does the respective "form" of speaking, acting, portraying, dancing, singing, writing, reading and conveying create? How does the technological and discursive a priori of the act help to determine its respective updating, materialisation and perception? What does it mean to contemplate performative and social constructions of bodies, identities

and subjects in repeating acts (Butler 1990), including their technological mediation and environment?

### **3. Spatial technologies / Processes of positioning**

How are theatrical spatial processes to be understood with respect to their technological condition? What relationship do subjects, environments and forms have to each other? This section allows for research of historical and current perspectives on concrete spatial figurations in relation to their environments, their cultural, political and social contexts: scenographic and machine effects, modular and prefabricated elements as well as cybernetic, post-dramatic, intermedia and interactive settings. How do those visual cultures of the audience and the techniques of the observers (Crary 1996) change? What other senses and perceptions are organised and in which way? What relationships exist between the respective techniques, perspectives, deployments and apparatuses?

### **4. (Re)Production techniques**

This section dedicates itself to artistic practices, procedures and strategies for the creation of performances: for instance the planning, coordination, improvising, transmission, sharing, marking and rehearsing in relation to their respective media-technological environments. When and for which purpose do artists incorporate technological innovations and possibilities (film, video, digital formats)? When is there a conscious distancing for the benefit of a "media-pure" presence of the acting body? What relationships exist between ritual, the live event and "technological reproducibility" (Benjamin 1974) and methods of re-enactment, re-performing and reconstruction of performances? The question of (re)production also makes it possible to ask about the respective economic conditions of the process of creation.

### **5. Dramaturgy and/as technology**

The question of technology also changes the view on language, drama and dramaturgical practices. This section therefore dedicates itself to questions and forms of drama and of dramaturgy in the context of their respective media-technological environment. How have forms of drama changed in relation to its environments? Also questions of speaking, reading and writing techniques as well as of the relationship of literal and transferred meaning can be discussed with regard to a technological condition of language and transformations of drama.

## **6. Decolonising technology**

A revision of the theatre and of the Western definition of technology requires a criticism of eurocentric and colonial dimensions of technology. Has there existed since the modern age a continuity in theatre with colonial hierarchies of technical rationalism created through technology? Are these hierarchisations and narratives of progress expanding in the theatre or is the theatre able to thwart them? Which forms of the theatre, what rituals and magic techniques (cf. Stengers 2015) and which approaches in theatre studies can help to decolonise the thinking and technology (as an instrument of disciplination, suppression and destruction) (Mignolo 2000, Mbembe 2003, Garuba 2015)?

## **7. Theatre of (technical) objects**

This section aims to investigate the material culture of the theatre and its transformations: the technical objects, their uses, stages of development, their functions, their relation to other technical objects, their agency and their otherness and similarity with human ensembles with respect to Actor-Network Theory (Latour 2007b). What part of a production do the floodlights, pulleys and gears play in relation to actors, machinists, operators? How can one determine those micro-meetings or the intra-active "entanglement" (Barad 2007) of different materialities?

## **8. Pop techniques and technologies**

Pop practices and their dissolutions of boundaries of daily (media) life and art take a special position in regard to the question of the manners of creation with respect to their technological conditionality, because they circumvent the boundaries of high and low art as well as between art and craftsmanship (for instance in the design). Their often audiovisual figurations accentuate the technical, mechanical, digitised and reproductive procedures (sampling, quotation, assembly, mixing, etc.) and create new connections in their playful references between subjects, techniques/technologies and environments. How does pop materialise in and/or as theatre and non-theatre?

Keynote speakers and experts from the fields of science as well as art are planned for this event. In addition to the classical form of the keynote and panel with three individual lectures of 20 minutes each, the congress would also like to encourage other forms of contribution: Proposals are therefore welcome for lecture performances and/or joint presentations of 60 minutes in length, held by up to six persons, with discussion to follow. In addition to individual lectures, suggestions may also include complete panels with three corresponding lectures; in this case the organisers would reserve the right to complement or reassemble the panels with respect to the incoming suggestions.

In particular, work groups are invited to apply with a thematic panel.

The organisers will make an effort to raise funds in order to allow consultants and speakers whose lecture or presentation proposals have been accepted to take part in the congress free of charge, provided that they have no other possibility to obtain funding elsewhere. Please inform us at the time of entry submission whether this applies to you.

Other elementary components of the congress includes joint visits to theatrical performances in local theatres as well as the presentation of student projects on the topic, which arose in the preliminary planning of the congress at the Institute for Media and Cultural Studies.

There will be also a junior research group participating in the congress which will present their results in their own panel. A separate announcement by the Gesellschaft für Theaterwissenschaft can be found on the website.

To make hotel reservations, please visit the congress website at [www.theater-wissenschaft.de/kongresse](http://www.theater-wissenschaft.de/kongresse) – a list of hotels will be posted by no later than May 1st, 2018.

Further information at: [www.theaterundtechnik.de](http://www.theaterundtechnik.de)

Please note that you must be member of the Gesellschaft für Theaterwissenschaft to participate (<http://www.theater-wissenschaft.de/mitgliedschaft/mitglied-werden/>).

**Please submit your abstract for a paper (max. 1500 characters) or panel (max. 3000) and a short cv until April 30th 2018 via:  
[info@theaterundtechnik.de](mailto:info@theaterundtechnik.de)**

**If you would like to take part in the congress, please register on our homepage any time after June 01, 2018.**

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