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Thomas Eder – *Innovation or Path Dependence?*
James Rowson

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Greetings to the Reader

In this issue of our journal, we place the main emphasis on the sociology of theatre, which focuses on the social functioning of theatre, providing insights through studies, case studies and an interview into the role of theatre forms and their organisational frameworks in transmitting values.

One of the research groups with a strong interest in this issue, STEP (Project on European Theatre Systems), was founded in 2005 with the participation of researchers from seven European cities, explicitly representing smaller countries: Aarhus (Denmark), Bern (Switzerland), Debrecen (Hungary), Dublin (Ireland), Groningen (Netherlands), Ljubljana (Slovenia) and Tartu (Estonia). The composition of the group facilitated the use of a comparative methodological approach, assuming that different theatre systems may convey different values, which the research seeks to make visible. A highlight of STEP's events showcasing experiments in exploring cultural similarities and differences was the international symposium on the sociology of theatre organised on 29 April 2023 in the framework of the 10th Theatre Olympics at the National Theatre. In our journal, we publish the papers of some of the speakers and other experts of this academic conference with the undisguised aim to stimulate sociological research of theatre in Hungary.

Christopher Balme, Thomas Eder and James Rowson's study, *Theatre after the Covid Outbreak – Artistic Innovation or Road Addiction?* takes a mixed-methods approach to present the results of the research data and discourse analysis of the material collected in the UK, Germany, Switzerland and Austria. The authors sought to answer the question as to whether the exogenous shock of the Covid pandemic led theatres to innovate. They argue that the preliminary results point to transformations that affect both the technological and institutional dimensions of theatre, particularly in the areas of digital infrastructure and *know-how*.

Hedi-Liis Toome's paper, *How political values influence theatre*, discusses the results of an empirical study which examined the functioning of the institution—its production, distribution and reception spaces and their interrelationships—in Tartu, Estonia. The research was based on the methodology and comparative aspects developed by STEP. According to the author, although theatre systems always stem from cultural roots and the structure of a theatre system has

a direct impact on how theatre works, the theatre experiences of audiences in the countries studied tend to be similar rather than different, despite the fact that their theatre systems differ.

Antine Zijlstra and Berber Aardema's case study, titled *Social and community value creation in small Dutch villages through the example of the Frisian-language performance of Anne Frank's Diary*, explores how the members of Frisian and Dutch audiences in the villages of Toppenhuizen and Twellingea value amateur theatre events in Frisian and how they contribute to community life. The play was staged in late April and early May 2022. Friesland is one of twelve provinces in the Netherlands and Frisian is an official minority language, used mainly orally and in family circles, but is also present in rural social life and in the regional media, although the education system offers few opportunities to learn it.

Natália Gleason-Nagy's case study *Connectivity is calling us in* explores the socially distributed and embodied cognition through the audience relations of theatre inspired by the Woolly Mammoth Theatre in Washington, D.C. In her article, the author aims to inspire the proven and experimental tools of audience experience and community events through an international case study. The paper offers our readers an insight into the work of the Connectivity Department in the hope of providing new perspectives on the role and possibilities of cultural management in the pursuit of public benefit, which also provides the audience with opportunities for more active community inclusion.

Among those working in the field of theatre studies, *Quirijn Lennert van den Hoogen*, a researcher at the University of Groningen, has been instrumental in developing a theoretical conceptual framework that has helped to define how to investigate theatre far more sociologically. **Szofia Tölli's** interview with Van den Hoogen, titled *Cabaret and Beyond*, offers insights into aspects of Dutch art politics and sociology of art, as well as the experience gained from the STEP City project and the interviewee's individual research into the sociology of theatre.

Enikő Sepsi, in her study *The Weilian Concept of Attention and János Pilinszky's "autobiographies,"* analyses the aspects of the daily practice of attention and of the creative imagination that recognise necessary events, relations and, in general, necessity in the Weilian sense ("*nécessité*")—and that thereby create reality—on the basis of Simone Weil's fragmentary oeuvre, the reconstruction attempt published in 2021, and the volume collected under the title *János Pilinszky's Önéletrajzaim* (My Autobiographies). The study demonstrates that, in addition to the Weilian concept of attention, Pilinszky was familiar with

the Weilian connections between “necessity” (“*nécessité*”), misfortune (“*malheur*”) and love, as evidenced by the markings on his copy of *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes* in the legacy, and that these connections are also to be found in the draft volume *Önéletrajzaim*.

Zsolt Antal
Editor-in-Chief

Christopher Balme –
Thomas Eder – James Rowson

Theatre after Covid

Innovation or Path Dependence?

Abstract

Drawing on a mixed methods approach, this paper will present findings from survey data and discourse analysis of materials gathered in the UK, Germany, Switzerland and Austria. It asks the question whether the exogenous shock brought about by the Covid pandemic has prompted theatres to innovate. Starting from the theory of path dependence which suggests that institutional change is extremely difficult, the paper will argue that preliminary findings do indeed point to transformations that affect both technological and institutional dimensions of theatre, particularly in the field of digital infrastructure and knowhow. The differences vary, however, considerably across the countries and theatre systems surveyed which provide a point of departure for a discussion on systemic differences. The surveys also provide some surprising results concerning work satisfaction and income as support programmes ensured that theatre workers could survive and in fact reduced pressure to produce and perform on schedules that were often deemed unsustainable.

Keywords: Covid-19, path dependence, performing arts institutions, digitalization

Introduction

In early March 2020 the most severe crisis to affect the performing arts since the Second World War took hold. By the middle of March the world was in the grip of unprecedented lockdowns to prevent the spread of the Corona virus Sars-Cov-2 and its associated illness Covid-19. Most theatres and indeed cultural venues of any kind were closed throughout 2020 and were subjected to intermittent closure and restrictions well into autumn 2021. How can we as theatre scholars approach this once-in-a-century event? Crises of this magnitude could be expected to cause both institutional and aesthetic transformations on a significant scale. In the depths of lockdown this seemed to be true as theatre artists, administrators and scholars embarked on a process of introspection regarding the future of their medium.

To address these questions the authors present results from a research project that has been conducted in the UK at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in collaboration with researchers based at LMU Munich. The project investigated, among other questions, whether the pandemic produced artistic and institutional innovation on a scale that was to be expected. And secondly, did the effects of the pandemic play out differently in the heterogeneous institutional frameworks of German-speaking and UK theatre? The former with its high level of public funding, the latter with a theatre system that is much more 'sensitive' to market forces?

In the first section of the paper we will briefly discuss the two terms: artistic innovation and path dependence which define the two ends of a continuum along which organisations and even the institution of theatre can be positioned. These are sociological questions that can be best addressed and answered with sociological methods. In this case a mixed methods approach involving discourse analysis and survey data was employed. A comparison of German-speaking countries and the UK is productive because both regions have highly developed cultural infrastructures which are based, arguably, on heterogeneous institutional logics and legitimacy myths. Over a two-year period we observed how the institutional infrastructure and logics reacted to and recovered from (or not) the pandemic which led to eighteen months of closure of performing arts venues.

Path dependence and innovation

Organisations defend at all costs hard-won and outworn myths, which leads to what sociologists and institutional economists define as path dependence, the tendency for organisations and institutions to resist change. Path dependence research usually tries to identify what events in the past lead to current practices. Following historical sociologist James Mahoney, path dependence is defined as “contingent events set into motion institutional patterns (...) that have deterministic properties” (Mahoney 2000, 507). These lead in turn to so-called “self-reinforcing sequences” that serve to strengthen the contingent path. This dynamic suggests that whatever the institutional future may hold, and whatever the intensity of the utopian impulses set free by the pandemic, path dependence will almost certainly work to ensure that as little radical change as possible will come about.

Despite path dependence-induced inertia, it should, nevertheless be possible to detect shifts in the institutional frameworks using a mixed methods approach. One of the defining myths of the subsidized theatre sector is that of artistic innovation. Only through state subsidies is it possible to ensure artistic freedom which is usually defined as freedom from market forces.¹ In this myth art and the market are positioned as antitheses, best known in German through the concept of the *Kulturindustrie*. By the 1990s, however, in its anglicized version of the Cultural Industries, the antithetical relationship had been flexibilized so that the two terms no longer defined a conflictual relationship in a situation of radically reduced public funding.

‘Artistic innovation’ is a relatively recent addition to our discursive vocabulary. While art, at least since modernism, but even before it, has been explicitly tied to the so-called ‘innovation imperative’ encapsulated in exhortations such as Ezra Pound’s ‘Make It New!’ or Robert Hughes’ television series on the rise of modern art, *The Shock of the New* (BBC, 1980), the term innovation has, until recently been linked to technology and business. *The Oxford Handbook of Innovation*, first published in 2005, does not contain any entries on art or culture. Recent contributions on ‘artistic innovation’, most of which postdate 2000 bear traces of innovation’s technological and economic legacy (see Eder and Rowson 2023). In a world in which the term ‘cultural industry’ is no longer a contradiction

¹ Since direct censorship is less of a problem in liberal democracies, artistic freedom is defined differently in illiberal regimes.

in terms but a positive category of economic growth, it is little wonder that artistic innovation has also entered the vocabulary of funding organisations and project managers.

Researching theatre during and after Covid

The outbreak of the pandemic resulted in a proliferation of research from universities, the industry itself and thinktanks. The research was conducted almost in realtime and explored different facets of the pandemic's impact on the field of arts and culture in general. The first responses came in the form of scenarios produced by consultancies and thinktanks. These started to appear very quickly, within months of the first lockdowns. A Munich-based consultancy, Actori, which specializes in culture and sports, published in May and October 2020 estimates of the economic impact of lockdowns for Germany on the performing arts.² The focus was on theatres and opera houses, orchestras, festivals and museums. Some of the assumptions were already outdated by the time the reports were published. The report concludes with a summary of chances and challenges for cultural institutions and their—in most cases—public sponsors (state or municipal authorities). The former are seen in the area of digital outputs and the possibilities of acquiring new audiences. The challenges reside not just in a better calculation of financial knock-on effects but also in the demand for 'future strategies'. These are formulated explicitly in terms of 'scenarios' in order to better calculate the artistic, social and monetary effects of the Corona crisis. The Actori scenarios constitute just one example of consultancy-based research, others are discussed in Balme (2021).

The largest project in the UK, indeed perhaps worldwide, is the AHRC funded *The Pandemic and Beyond* project which by its own account brings together 70+ teams of researchers across the UK who are exploring the wide-ranging impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and looking for solutions.³ Individual scholars have also attempted to reflect on the impact on the pandemic on theatre and the performing arts. In *Toward a Future Theatre: Conversations During a Pandemic*, Caridad Svich argues that the events of the global pandemic have triggered

2 See https://www.actori.de/fileadmin/PDF_PPT_DOC_XLS/Corona_Studie_-_actori.pdf and the October update: https://www.actori.de/fileadmin/PDF_PPT_DOC_XLS/201001_Corona_Studie_Update.pdf (last visited: September 6, 2023).

3 See <https://pandemicandbeyond.exeter.ac.uk> (last visited: September 19, 2023).

a 'huge, evolutionary pivot' that 'recalibrated' the field of theatre and live performance (Svich 2021, 4). Recent English-language publications, such as Barbara Fuchs's *Theater of Lockdown: Digital and Distanced Performance in a Time of Pandemic* (2021) and *Performance in a Pandemic* (2022) edited by Laura Bissell and Lucy Weir have primarily focused on the short-term transition to online streaming and digital performance that occurred during the initial stages of Covid-19 restrictions around the world, including the emergence of nascent virtual communities within the theatre sector.

The project, on which the current article is based, is unique because it is designed as a comparative study of the performing arts in the UK and German-speaking countries with an institutional focus. It is a collaboration between a team based at the Royal School of Speech and Drama, University of London, and the ongoing research group at LMU Munich (Krisengefüge der Künste, FOR 2734).⁴ The in-depth involvement with the situation in the UK will provide crucial data for a wider, European perspective. Both projects investigate the impact of the Corona crisis around four major research questions with an institutional focus: social justice, especially precarity and working conditions; governance; aesthetics, especially digital innovation; internationalization. These terms guided the construction of a quantitative survey.

Methodology

The project was conceived as a panel study, which typically traces responses over time. The same respondents were surveyed once in 2022 and once in 2023. To record developments in relation to pre-pandemic times, in the 2022 survey, respondents additionally reported their memories of 2019, while the 2023 survey additionally queried their expectations for the future. This establishes a longitudinal perspective over the entire pandemic period as well as opening up prospects for what is to come. The same survey, with a few local adaptations, was conducted in German-speaking countries and the UK.

The content orientation of this quantitative approach builds on a qualitative media analysis that documents how the public media discusses pandemic risks and opportunities for the performing arts and thus indicates where the biggest potentials for institutional transformation lay. The qualitative document analysis

⁴ See <https://www.krisengefuege.theaterwissenschaft.uni-muenchen.de/english-information/index.html>.

based on a data base of currently 865 documents collected since the outbreak of the pandemic by the German research group. It is presented in detail in Eder and Rowson (2023). Social justice, international collaborations, digitalization and participatory governance proved to be the most common issues that emerged from this analysis. The subsequent analysis of the quantitative panel study refers to these four overarching themes. Instead of presenting media expectations, it, however, measured concrete experiences of artists and art organisations.

The German-speaking (DACH) sample includes 117 respondents who took part in both the 2022 and 2023 surveys. As they are exactly the same respondents in both years, the data have high internal consistency as well as a strong explanatory value. The field investigated is the performing arts in the German-speaking countries. As a representative sample of such a diverse population is impracticable, it uses a probabilistic one. The questionnaire was distributed via the newsletters of national performing arts advocacy organisations, representing both, independent as well as permanent stages in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The sample consists of 77 individual artists and cultural professionals. In addition, 40 executive representatives of performing arts organisations responded. The individual artists and the organisation executives each answered different questionnaires. 32% of the total sample live and work in Austria, 21% in Switzerland and 55% in Germany. The UK survey was similarly completed by a total of 89 respondents in both 2022 and 2023. Again, the respondents were the same in both years, 63 were individuals working in the performing arts field and 26 were representatives of performing arts organisations.

Social justice

The above-mentioned media analysis revealed threats to livelihood, deterioration of the social situation as well as loss of income as the main perceived risks for performing arts practitioners and organisations in the wake of Covid-19. This is not surprising given the mostly (self-)exploitative, low-paid, poorly secured and uncertain working conditions prevailing in both independent and permanent theatres long before the pandemic.

Had this threat, however, materialized in a significant measure, it would certainly have had a strong impact on job satisfaction for all those involved. Yet, a majority of respondents in all three DACH countries proved to be more satisfied with their work. Of the Austrian and German artists and cultural workers, just over

50% each stated that they are more satisfied in 2022 compared to 2019. In Switzerland, the figure is as high as 73%. Likewise, a majority of 74% of the entire sample expect no reason for their job satisfaction to worsen, not even after the end of the pandemic air programs. It appears as if the intense pressure of production, which led to the unsustainable working conditions in the field has found relief in new ways of working under pandemic conditions. The less intense regime of performance pressure, fewer premieres, fewer spectators and thus less stress, while at the same time being able to experiment with new ways of working and sustaining a living based on state aid programs, prompted such a development. Nevertheless, the operating conditions to realize productions during the pandemic were different from country to country. Especially in Austria (78%) Switzerland (80%), a large proportion of artists and culture professionals report that the crisis significantly reduced working hours. In Germany a smaller number (70%) reported the same, reflecting that a generously financed Covid-related rescue program *Neustart Kultur* provided better job opportunities than the aid programs in the other two countries. Nevertheless, in all three countries, the majority of respondents did find work during the pandemic, which indicates that the feared loss of livelihood did not occur on a large scale. Neither does a majority of the artists and cultural workers surveyed expect their existence to be threatened in the near future. In Austria 67%, in Switzerland 72% and in Germany 51% of respondents report that they are not in serious danger of experiencing anything of the sort.

For the independent performing arts, Eder (2023) found that in all three countries the already very low average income of independent performing arts professionals declined significantly between 2019 and 2020. In the German example an individual net income of €17,284 euros was determined for a sample of 138 respondents in 2019. In 2020, the same sample had an average of 4,367 € less than in the previous year, which was certainly a direct consequence of the pandemic and a threat to their existence given the small annual amount they had before. Recently the German Federal Association of Independent Performing Arts indicates an individual net income of 20,739 euros for 2021 in a sample of over 516 independent performing arts professionals in Germany (Tobsch et al. 2023). Although the samples of the two studies are not the same, the results show that the immediate threat of pandemic-related income loss was politically coped with and, after the initial uncertainty, the aid and funding programs have even led to a temporary improvement of income for many. Nevertheless, it is unlikely, that this development will continue after the end of *Neustart Kultur*.

Overall, the pandemic made visible, where and how working conditions were unsustainable and it prompted positive change through new and additional funding within the entire performing arts field. The problem of precarious social conditions had been recognized and addressed politically before the pandemic, while at the same time 'good work' and social protection became increasingly important in the discourse on work of the future in both academia and politics. Taken together, this gives rise to optimism that policy makers, funders, venues and artists alike have learned lessons from the pandemic that will help transcend old path dependencies and lead to a better future.

In the UK, as in the DACH countries, we asked survey respondents whether they were happier in their careers at the time of our surveys than before the pandemic. At the time of our first survey in early 2022, 46% of participants agreed with this statement. It is significant to observe that these figures are noticeably lower than the DACH country responses analysed above. This is potentially explained by the fact that the results of the UK survey underscored that freelancers in the theatre industry were working longer hours than their peers and for less pay. For example, 38% of freelance respondents answered that they worked over 50 hours or more a week compared to 27% overall, and compared to just 13% in Germany. Perhaps even more tellingly, while 25% of the survey's overall respondents reported being paid more since the pandemic, only 14% of freelancers had experienced this. These results present an apparent connection between the pandemic and the increasing financial instability and precarity faced by theatre freelancers compared to salaried staff.

Notably, however, when asked the same question in our second survey in May 2023, this had changed to 69% of respondents who were now happier in their careers than before the pandemic. These divergences in responses over the 16 months between our first and second survey suggest an important shift not only in job satisfaction, but also reinforce the notion that the profound uncertainty and industry crisis created by the pandemic presented a crucial moment that amplified pre-existing precarity, vulnerability, and unsafe working conditions in the UK theatre sector.⁵ This data from our two surveys, suggests the immediate impact of Covid-19 restrictions on the performing arts that

5 For example, Roberta Comunian and Lauren England underscore the 'impact—or rather exposure—that Covid-19 has given to the vulnerability of the creative and cultural industries and their workers' in the UK (Comunian and England 2020, 112).

were only fully lifted in early 2022, created an urgent moment of reflection for independent arts workers where they re-considered their career goals and the deep-rooted insecure working conditions in the industry. This was apparent at the time of our first survey conducted at the same time when despite the lifting of the most strict social distancing measures, theatres were still grappling with the exacting economic impact caused by a combination of cancelled performances due to outbreaks of Covid among their casts and staff, as well as low audience confidence after the winter wave of cases caused by the Omicron variant. This moment of interruption and reflection within the industry on entrenched unethical working practices and conditions does not appear to have been sustained or developed in the medium term. Instead, the UK theatre industry has experienced a more widespread reset in working practices and expectations for improved working conditions.

Alarmingly, workers in the UK have also reported a dramatic rise in job insecurity compared to their peers in the DACH countries. In our 2023 survey, 44% of individual respondents felt that their professional existence was currently under threat, while only a comparative 20% replied that it was not. The reasons given for this anxiety were complex, but many respondents articulated the ongoing pressure of the 'cost of living crisis' in the UK as a key facet of their unease. Inflation and soaring energy bills have hit all areas of theatre, creating further financial instability after the challenges of Covid.

Digitalization

When it comes to the future of work, digitalization is a key focus. Analysis of media documents revealed a strong focus on the development of a new, digital aesthetics, but also on the possibility of better digitally-driven organisation and working practices. Since we explored digital aesthetics in other publications (Eder and Rowson 2023), this paper focuses on organisational change. The data reveals that the vast majority of theatre and performing arts organisations surveyed in the DACH countries have recognized and reacted to the need for digitalization during Covid-19. They show a high demand for suitable, technical staff; however, the often newly created positions were difficult to fill. Eighteen of the forty organisations had technical vacancies in 2022 for which they could not find staff, and in 2023 the number increased to twenty-five. Since demand could not be covered by new hires, it was met through inhouse staff training.

Seventeen of the organisations already in 2022 offered technical training for their staff, and also this number increased to twenty in 2023. Interestingly, digital art offerings developed exactly the opposite way. Significantly fewer performing arts organisations presented digital productions in 2023 (56%), compared to 2022 (90%).

While on the one hand it becomes apparent that experimenting with digital technology during Covid-19 required serious organisational adjustments, on the other hand it is not entirely certain that the resources and efforts invested will prove justified in the future. A majority of the individual respondents and organisation representatives expect an increase in digital ways of working when it comes to organisation and communication within management, production and administrative processes, however only 31% of the organisations and only 13% of the individual art workers expect to produce digital performances in the future.

As pandemic restrictions in the UK were imposed in March 2020, the industry rapidly responded by relocating theatrical programming online and engaging audiences through new forms of digital entertainment. This included digital and hybrid content specifically created to be viewed online, as well as broadcast performances of previously recorded productions streamed by theatres such as the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. This is backed up by the data from the UK strand of the surveys, which underscores that arts organisations had been quick to employ the latest digital applications and technical devices for their work as social distancing measures were enforced.

As in the DACH countries, British theatres have grappled with the difficulties of filling these technical positions needed for the successful production of digital work. In 2022, 46% of organisations surveyed had vacancies for creative digital technicians, increasing rapidly to 76% in 2023. Unsurprisingly, this meant that theatres were now focusing their resources on training existing staff in technology-related skills, with the number jumping from 46% in 2022 to 71% in 2023. This reinforces wider data and scholarship that suggests backstage and technical staff has disproportionately left the theatre industry in the wake of the pandemic (Chatzichristodoulou et al. 2022, 3). These workers moved into film and television production, leaving a critical skills shortage of sound, lighting, and creative digital technicians in the UK.

Despite the creative response to the pandemic that saw a flourishing of new multidisciplinary performance modes, the survey also reveals reluctance among many theatre-makers and venues in the UK to maintain or develop these digital

ways of working. Between early 2022 and mid 2023, there was a clear decrease in both organisations and individuals using digital technology in their practice. This hesitancy to commit to producing further virtual performance models can be partly explained by the difficulties faced in monetising digital content, especially for small-scale companies and organisations. This was exacerbated in the early stages of the pandemic when many high profile cultural institutions provided audiences with access to free digital content (see Aebischer and Nicholas 2020, 29–30). Moreover, as Roberta Comunian and Lauren England argue, while organisations have provided training for in-house staff, the freelance artists they employ are 'likely to have to pay for this up-skilling and take time off work for training without further forms of support' (Comunian and England 2020, 121). While our results reflect that the economic challenges of producing hybrid work has resulted in a decrease of new digital productions in 2023, it is also clear that not only did the pandemic generate wider opportunities for practitioners to experiment with intermedial digital projects, but also contributed to the development of new forms and the re-evaluating of wider creative practice and aesthetics. This liminal work, employing innovative use of disparate digital platforms and interaction demonstrates that the pandemic similarly offered a period of artistic innovation, as organisations aimed to re-think their working practices and forge new artistic dialogues and collaborations. In doing so, these innovative new ways of working recalibrated how theatre organisations interacted with audiences on both a national and international level, as well as how they operated on both a structural and economic model.

International collaboration

In February 2020, borders around the world began to shut down and international touring ground to a halt. The dissolution of longstanding networks, the cancelling of international projects, premieres and co-productions, contact restrictions, border closures, the risk of contagion in public transport, all these were described as risks for the international networking of performing arts in the media analysis presented above. Some predicted nationalization tendencies, or as Monika Gintersdorfer from the performance collective Gintersdorfer/Klaßen put it in the newspaper *Rheinische Post*: "We should continue to think internationally, so that Corona doesn't lead to everyone going into isolation and only revolving around their own narrow interests" (Krings, 2020).

It is certainly true that international collaboration plays an important role in the performing arts. Though, whether it has suffered due to Covid-19 remains unclear. The 2022 survey revealed the level of internationalization of the forty organisations surveyed in the DACH countries and it confirms that for only ten do not address an international audience and for eight companies international travel is not part of their routine. Moreover, many respondents who work in the German-speaking theatre do not have German, Austrian or Swiss citizenship. Consequently, the performing arts seem to be consistently committed to the task of international cooperation and understanding, as well as to serving an often-international urban cast and audience. The vast majority of organisations claim that their international work has not decreased as a result of the pandemic (AT 83%, CH 78%, D64%). Digital forms of work have been tried and tested, and an increasingly confident use of online meetings, digital events and art opportunities has not only maintained existing international connections, but also created new communication networks, meeting opportunities and collaborations. Overall, the data shows that independent organisations are more interested in expanding their international activities in the future and that many individuals also expect an increase in their international engagement.

In the UK, participants stated that they saw their practice as part of an interconnected international theatre ecology. While the numbers were slightly lower than the result of the German-language survey, 69% of UK organisations stated that international projects and productions were included in their programming. Similarly, 68% stated that their work addresses international audiences and that they had staff working on international projects.

In our 2022 survey, the short-term impact of the pandemic on international work in the UK was apparent and 50% of organisations reported that they were less involved in international activities than before the pandemic. This demonstrates that the initial slump in international work in the first phase of the pandemic continued well into 2022. Significantly, however, 53% of organisations who responded to our second survey in 2023 stated that they were now more involved in international work than they had been a year ago, with a substantive 65% looking to expand international cooperation in the future. This data shows a significant return to a more international outlook amongst theatre organisations in the UK as the sector continues its recovery. As in the DACH countries, this can be explained not simply by a return to pre-pandemic working practice, but rather through the use of digital platforms to

create generative communication networks at an international level with far greater prevalence than before.

Yet, there are also new barriers to sustainable global working practices and international mobility placed on UK theatre workers and institutions in the wake of the UK's official exit from the European Union at the end of 2020. *The Stage* described the combined challenges of both Brexit and the pandemic as a 'double whammy effect' for internationalism that will have a 'particular impact on young and emerging talent who are less likely to be able to afford, or be approved for, work permits' (Snow 2021). While the long-term impact of Brexit is yet to emerge, it has had continuing repercussions on British theatre's recovery from the pandemic and fresh attempts to forge new international collaborations on the European continent.

International performing arts networks developed well before the pandemic were not threaten in the same way. International work is based on strong partnerships, and contacts have been maintained and expanded during the epidemic thanks to digital media. As with the other themes, internationalization is a societal development far beyond the arts. The fact that the fears of national isolation and the collapse of international co-production networks did not materialize during the crisis has strengthened the field as an international one and it leads us to expect that international understanding will here continue to be promoted in the future.

Participatory governance

As the pandemic affected the entire field regardless of the differences between independent and permanent stages, the following section questions if and how the field has pulled together to meet the challenges. Applying DiMaggio and Powell's conception of "institutional definition", an organisational field strengthens its institutional definition when the level of interaction between organisations increases, clearly defined inter-organisational governance structures and coalition patterns emerge, when the information load that organisational in a field have to deal with increases, and when a mutual awareness of being involved in a common enterprise, among participants in a number of organisations develops (DiMaggio & Powell 1983, 148).

In 2022, 76% of individual respondents in the DACH countries noted an increasing need for communication, networking and exchange with colleagues,

in 2023 this figure decreased but it was still 59%. For organisations, it was 85% in 2022 and still 82% in 2023. This clearly reflects the fact that the immediate shock of the pandemic brought a lot of additional communication effort, even if this slowly leveled off over time. Furthermore, in 2022, 52% of individual respondents reported working towards common policy goals with others; by 2023, the figure had risen to 57%. For organisations, it was 75% in both years. In the comparison of theatre types, the numbers are slightly higher for the independent, compared to the permanent stages. This suggests that the focus is not only on communication and exchange, but that artists and culture workers as well as organisations recognize that they are engaged in a common political enterprise. 69% of the independent and 74% of permanent organisations surveyed report having had equal or less contact with other organisations in the field before the pandemic, indicating a clear transformation towards more institutional definition. As for the future, 55% of the individual actors and 78% of the organisations expect to become more involved in alliances with others. Moreover, 55% of the independent respondents reported regular collaboration with the permanent theatres and 71% of respondents from permanent stages report that they regularly collaborate with individuals or organisations of the independent stage. Thus, institutional consolidation is taking place in the theatre subsystems and across the board.

Despite these institutionalization processes, the willingness of governments to include artists, cultural practitioners and performing arts organisations in collective decision-making processes does not seem to be improving. In 2022, 66% of the total sample do not see policy makers giving them the opportunity to provide feedback on policy decisions that ultimately affect them. However, the picture improves as the pandemic progresses. In 2023, only 53% still feel the same way. Overall, respondents in Switzerland see more opportunities for dialogue and feedback than respondents in the other two countries. This indicates that individuals and organisations have directly felt a slight increase in political efficacy. In 2022, only one third of the permanent theatres surveyed stated that they do not believe that their associations are able to assert their positions in politics and 15% of the independent organisations stated the same. However, this also changed dramatically during the pandemic. In 2023, 62% of the independent organisations have found that their concerns are heard, and not a single one disagrees. Among permanent theatres, a few remain dissatisfied, but here too the majority notices that the associations have been effective in

steering them through the pandemic and it had a positive effect, as 60% of all organisations believe that through advocacy they will be able to solve the problems in the field in the future.

Mark Banks and Justin O'Connor observe that in the UK, despite the arts and cultural sector issuing a series of urgent warnings as the pandemic swept across Europe, the impact of the Covid crisis was met with 'indifference and silence' from the British Government (Banks and O'Connor 2021, 7). This initial failure of both institutions and the UK Government to recognise the precarity of the creative and cultural industries, especially in the initial phases of the pandemic during the initial national lockdown in the spring and summer of 2020, intensified the belief that the value and identity of the theatre sector had been eroded throughout the pandemic.

Echoing the results of the DACH country respondents, the UK survey indicates an increasing desire among theatre workers for wider and more meaningful collaboration, as well as communication and exchange. 84% of individuals in 2022 saw an increasing need for communication, networking and exchange with colleagues, rising to 87% in 2023. There is also a significantly higher level of desire for creative networking and engagement amongst recent graduates with 100% reporting a need for more communication and networking with peers, highlighting the importance of a reciprocal working relationship and more defined career paths within the sector for early career employees. Amongst organisations, this was even higher, with 93% in 2022 and 82% in 2023. This suggests that there has been an increasing institutional awareness of the potential of increasing artistic exchange and collaboration precipitated by the pandemic, as new and diverse ways of peer-to-peer collaboration and support are experimented with.

As noted above, the surveys also aimed to shed new light on how theatre organisations and individuals have collectively aimed to work towards common policy goals in the wake of the pandemic. Again, the result of the UK survey had strong parallels to the responses given by the German-language respondents. In 2022, 63% of individual respondents reported working towards common policy goals with others, rising to 75% in 2023. With representatives of organisations, this was slightly higher, with 83% reporting that they similarly did both years. This move towards a common political goal for theatre in the live arts is further reinforced by the fact that 66% of organisations and 54% of individuals surveyed articulated that they aimed to become more involved in alliances

with others in the field beyond 2023. These results demonstrate that theatre workers and organisations in the UK are re-thinking their collective strategies on an institutional level, as well as formulating new reciprocal ways of working between theatres and their freelance employees.

Finally, the data from the first UK survey suggests clear frustration over the paucity of information provided by regional and national governments in the aftermath of the pandemic. 74% of respondents did not feel well informed by their regional government in how it intends to shape cultural and theatre policy. Similarly, 60% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they felt well informed of cultural policy by national government, while only 27% agreed or strongly agreed. Once again reflecting similar results from the DACH countries, 82% of total respondents reported that they did not believe policymakers allowed them to provide feedback on policy decisions that ultimately affect them in 2022, with this number staying the same in 2023. The survey further revealed wider anxieties in the British theatre industry in its ability to advocate for better working conditions and funding or to communicate effectively with political decision-makers. For example, in 2022, 50% of all participants stated that they did not feel able to specifically participate in political decision-making processes in the field of the performing arts. This had only dropped to 44% in 2023.

The pandemic prompted a crucial opportunity for individuals and organisations to formulate strategies to improve industry conditions and re-consider ethnic, gender, and class-based inequities in the industry. Furthermore, our data suggests greater engagement from advocacy groups during the ongoing pandemic. However, unlike in the DACH countries, there remains a strong scepticism amongst the respondents about these groups' abilities to represent their interests and effectuate positive institutional or political change. Although it is clear that the pandemic created a significant moment where the industry re-considered its collective influence on policy and political decision making, the current Conservative Government's damaging response to pandemic's impact on the culture sector, as well as a decade of austerity that has seen deep funding cuts to the arts, has made many in the industry uncertain of their ability to effectuate change.

Conclusion

Institutional theory suggests that exogenous shocks exacerbate and accelerate pre-existing structural problems. An analysis of structural crises as a complex of interrelated elements may indeed provide a perspective on the 'historical future' (Koselleck 1988, 127). According to the predicative logic of path dependency, the various theatrical "systems" should have re-started without any profound changes. Even in the area of technological innovation, where the greatest innovations were to be expected, there has been a noticeable return to pre-pandemic practices as theatres have wound down their digital offerings. This applies, however, only to the specific area of performances. The path towards the digital organisation of work, however, was already in full swing before the outbreak of Covid-19, and reinforced by it. Now that theatres have regained the possibilities of the analogue, it is only partially being revoked.

The domain of social justice, which involved here mainly working conditions and precarity, revealed a workforce even before the pandemic that was existing on incomes near or even below the poverty line. Two surprising outcomes were that respondents reported an improvement of work satisfaction during the pandemic which is directly related to a decrease in pressure to produce and perform, suggesting that the pre-pandemic norm had established a situation of overwork and overproduction. The expected drop in income did eventuate in 2020 but had already recovered by 2021 thanks to the various aid programmes rolled out by most governments. These lead in fact to a temporary increase in income in the independent scene compared to pre-pandemic levels measured around mid-2023.

The sphere of international contacts, on which the independent companies are particularly reliant, revealed a pre-pandemic field that was already highly connected. Although these contacts were curtailed during the height of the lockdowns, the data shows a significant return to a more international outlook amongst theatre organisations in the UK and DACH countries as the sector continues its recovery. This can be explained not simply by a return to pre-pandemic working practice, but rather through the use of digital platforms to create generative communication networks with their organisations and artists at an international level with far greater prevalence than before. The UK groups, however, face the added complication of travel restrictions caused by Brexit.

Like social justice, international networking and digitalisation, participatory governance did not emerge during the Corona pandemic. Associations existed before, as did political dialogue. But with Corona, many individuals and organisations working in the field realised what influence they had, why they were needed, and that they worked best when their activities were connected back to the field. Thus, the pandemic has improved the democratisation and empowerment of the performing arts, and increased their political effectiveness. It is to be expected that the newly formed political working relationships and the success in maintaining the field in an exceptional situation that threatened its existence will strengthen participatory governance and will continue to play a strong role in the future.

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Hedi-Liis Toome

How political values influence the functioning of theatre?

The example of Tartu in Estonia in a comparative European perspective¹

Abstract

The paper introduces the results of an empirical research studying the functioning of theatre (the production, distribution and reception domain and their relationships) in the city of Tartu. All public theatrical events during one year were counted and categorized into types and genres. In addition, quantitative and qualitative audience and reception research was carried out. The methodology was developed by an international research group STEP (Project on European Theatre Systems) and comparative aspects of the study are also presented. Even though theatre systems have cultural roots and clearly are the outcomes of particular cultural, political and social history, it is also the priorities in theatre politics and the structure of the theatre system that have a direct influence on the functioning of theatre.

Keywords: functioning of theatre, reception research, audience research, values, empirical study

¹ This paper is a short overview of my PhD (Toome 2015). My aim to attend the conference was not to published, but to introduce the results of my PhD research that in full capacity have only been published in the thesis (different parts of the results have been published in articles that the PhD contains of).

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Introduction

Theatre—be it the theatre venue or institution, theatre as a cultural phenomenon or theatre as a particular act of communication between the stage and the spectators—does not exist in a vacuum, but is a part of society, reflecting its past and its present, sometimes maybe even its future. Especially in a neoliberal market society where theatre as an art form cannot survive without state support, the impact of theatre on the society is often under observation. This is not so much the case in Estonia. Questions like “what is the social role of theatre?” or “what are the aims of theatre from the perspective of theatre makers themselves, from the perspective of policy makers and from the perspective of theatre spectators or even from the perspective of people who never attend theatre at all?” are rarely asked by policy makers or even theatre makers themselves. However, these kinds of questions should be asked by theatre researchers.

Estonian Ministry of Culture executes a bottom-up policy when it comes to performing arts institutions. Although theatres do not have any prescriptions what they should do, the subsidy system and legislation affect the functioning of theatres all over Estonia. This paper provides a unique and empirically based analytic overview of a theatre system of a city of Tartu in a comparative perspective.

The data presented in this paper is based on study of analyzing the functioning of theatre in the cities of smaller European countries that are not the capital cities, but regionally important cultural hubs of the country, in addition being all university cities: Groningen (The Netherlands), Debrecen (Hungary), Maribor (Slovenia), Aarhus (Denmark), Tyneside (United Kingdom).² The research presented in the article is conducted by an international research group STEP (The Project on European Theatre Systems) that consists of sociologically minded theatre scholars from smaller European countries.

Using empirical data as much as possible to support the argumentation of the research was important already in the first publication of STEP (Van Maanen et al. 2009) in which the economic and political effects on the theatre system both on

² Tyneside area is an exception—UK is undeniably not a small European country, but as the project was supported by the Arts Council England, this enabled to include this particular area of UK comparable to other STEP cities to the research.

the global and the local levels, as well as case studies of realisation of values on the local level were discussed (Van den Hoogen and Wilders 2009, 528).

This paper focuses foremost on the functioning of theatre in the city of Tartu, but also analysis the comparative aspects where necessary. The following questions—1) what influences the production, distribution and reception domain and their mutual relationships in the theatre system of Tartu 2) what kind of differences and similarities are there in the production, distribution and consumption of theatre in the STEP cities and what are the influential reasons 3) what kind of differences or similarities are there in experiencing different types of theatre in the STEP cities—will be under scope in this paper.

Theoretical background

The paper follows Hans van Maanen's definition of theatre system. According to the Dutch theatre researcher the theatre system is considered to consist of the production domain (the producing organisations and productions they offer to the audiences), the distribution domain (the amount of different types and genres of performances available for the audiences), the reception domain (the number of visits gained by different types and genres as well as the experiences the types and genres are able to elicit in the spectators) and context and of the relationships between these domains (see *Figure 1*). Even though the figure seems linear, the domains affect each other mutually as is pointed out by the arrows that show the relationships between different domains. There are three levels (individual, institutional and societal) at which these domains could be studied (Van Maanen 2009, 11–12). The domains of operations that should be analyzed on these levels are organisational structures, processes and outcomes (Van Maanen 1999, 722–726; Van Maanen 2009, 11).

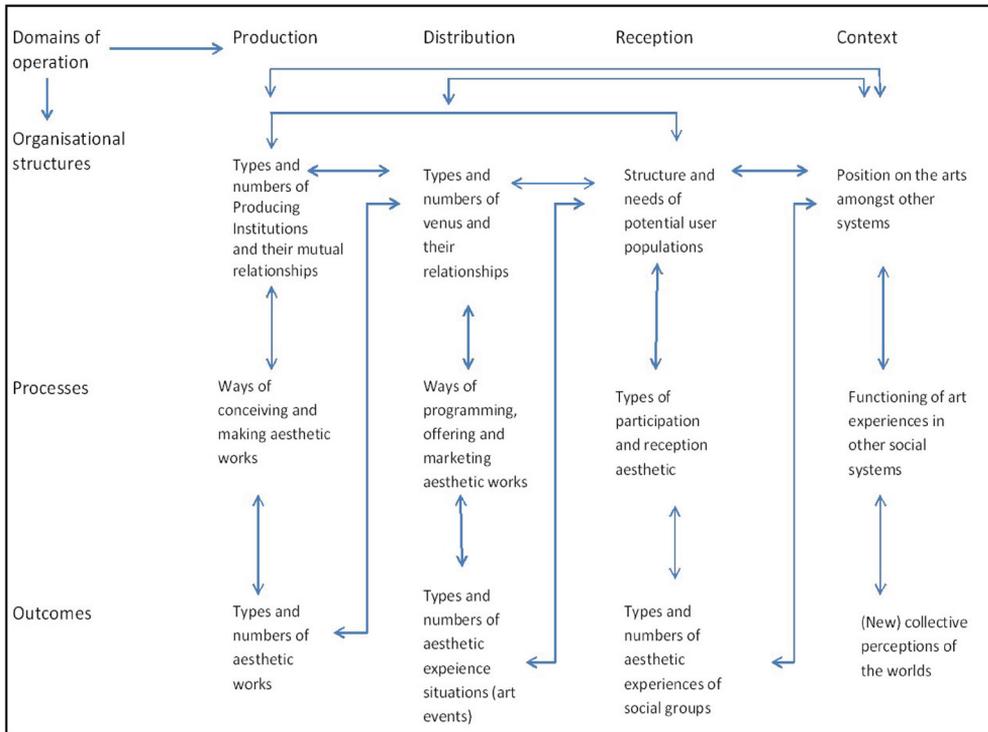


Figure 1. Fields and relationships to be studied, concerning the functioning of an art world on the societal level (Van Maanen 2009, 12)

From the point of view of the STEP research group, functioning refers to the “values and functions that can be related to aesthetic experience, in this case, the experience of performing arts” (Van den Hoogen 2009, 266). Hans van Maanen proposes distinguishing between values and functions of art: “It seems to be more useful, however, to separate the production of aesthetic values from the intrinsic and extrinsic functions to be fulfilled through the realization of these values by users” (Van Maanen 2009, 9). This means that the arts can have values that bring fourth functions that are intrinsic, i.e. specific to the arts, or extrinsic, i.e. those that can be also achieved through other types of experiences than arts (like sports etc.) (Van den Hoogen 2010, 41).

Reception research in the context of the functioning of theatre is much influenced by the concept of the Theatrical Event (Bennett 1997; Martin and Sauter

1995; Sauter 2000; Sauter 2008; Cremona et al. 2004) that means that the specific encounter between the stage and the audiences is seen in a wider context that influences the reception act. This implies that the focus is not on the reception process—studying only identification or being interested in the aspects that determine the overall satisfaction with the performance—but the enquiry is about whether the different values are realized by the spectators and whether theatre has or should have any impact in society by producing and distributing different values that are realized by different audience members. Therefore, it is necessary to include the spectators in the research in order to understand how theatre is experienced and what aspects are valued most by the spectators and whether and how these experiences can be related to or seen as outcomes of the production and distribution domain.

Methodology

The methodology used in this research has been worked out with a joint effort of the members of the international working group STEP. However, the challenge lay in comparing the systems to one another based on empirical evidence (Hoogen and Wilders 2009, 537; Edelman et al. 2015, 224).

Therefore, a comparative methodology was needed for a more advanced study of the functioning of theatre. Four types of data were gathered between years 2010–2014:

- 1) short descriptions of a city, with an emphasis on its cultural and theatrical infrastructure (Van Maanen et al. 2015a);³
- 2) data about the theatre supply in the city (Toome and Saro 2015);
- 3) quantitative data that include both audience and reception research (Van Maanen et al. 2015b; Wilders et al. 2015; Edelman and Šorli 2015; Toome 2015);
- 4) qualitative data that include reception research (Wilders et al. 2015).

It was not possible to carry out the three-step research in all these cities (see *Table 1*).

³ There is a description of the city available for all the cities and therefore it is left out of the table.

City	Data about theatrical events	Quantitative audience and reception research	Qualitative reception research
Aarhus (Denmark)	X	–	–
Tartu (Estonia)	X	X	X
Groningen (The Netherlands)	X	X	X
Maribor (Slovenia)	X	–	–
Debrecen (Hungary)	X	X	–
Tyneside (UK)	–	X	X

Table 1. The data gathered from the STEP cities between 2010–2014

The data about the supply makes it possible to describe the production and distribution domain of the theatre system, the data about audiences and their experiences allows analyzing the reception domain. The description of the city forms a context for the analysis and facilitates the understanding of the cultural life of the city. In general, the different levels of data collection can be related and depend on one another. Knowing the supply of theatre in a city makes it possible to choose representative productions suitable for audience and reception research; the qualitative data collected alongside the quantitative data helps to carry out a more in-depth analysis of the experiences of the audience members. The description of the city gave a necessary understanding of the cultural infrastructure that formed a base for the analysis of the supply.

The data about the public theatrical events was collected and categorized as follows: 1) name of the production; 2) the number of performances of the production, 3) the number of theatre-visits it attracted during the period under research; 4) the type of production and, if necessary, also the 5) genre of the production. The following seven main types of theatre were used in categorizing the productions and performances shown in the cities: 1) Spoken Theatre; 2) Musical Theatre; 3) Dance; 4) *Kleinkunst*; 5) Puppet and Object Theatre; 6) *Cirque Nouveau* and Show; and 7) Physical Theatre. Three of these types—Musical Theatre, Dance and *Kleinkunst*—are also divided into genres (Toome and Saro 2015, 261).

Quantitative audience and reception research were conducted in the cities of Debrecen, Groningen, Tartu and Tyneside (see *Table 2*). In all the cities the aim was to choose a variety of performances that could be considered a representative sample of the supply available to the spectators during a season, also trying to consider the different companies or venues present in the city (for the short overview of the venues and/or companies see Wilders et al. 2015, 309–310).

Performances of Spoken Theatre, Dance Theatre, Musical Theatre and *Kleinkunst* were included in the sample. An exception is performances of *Kleinkunst* in Tartu due to the lack of this type of theatre during the period of research.

	Debrecen	Groningen	Tartu	Tyneside
Research period	2012	2010–2011	2012	2014
Productions in the sample	8	52	13	24
Performances in the sample	23	52	23	105
Respondents of the quantitative survey	1139	2773	1401	1808

Table 2. Research period, number of productions and performances and number of respondents included in the quantitative audience and reception research

The quantitative audience research was conducted mostly through electronic means. In general, the spectators answered an electronic questionnaire which they got through e-mail in a few days after the performance. The e-mail addresses were collected before the performance or during an intermission; in Tyneside also audience lists were used to distribute the questionnaire. In Tartu, a small number of print questionnaires with stamped envelopes were also distributed to the people who did not have e-mail accounts but were willing to participate in the survey.

The questionnaire distributed to the spectators mostly through e-mail, consisted of five types of questions: 1) the overall evaluation of the performance, the venue and the evening in general and the reasons for coming to the theatre; 2) the frequency of theatre attendance as well as attending different types and genres of theatre (both professional and amateur) during last twelve months; 3) the expectations for the evening, if and from where the spectator had gained

information before coming to the theatre and if and from where the spectator got information after seeing the performance; 4) the questions about the experience of the theatre; 5) questions concerning the socio-demographic data (Toome 2013, 66).

In this paper only the questions concerning the overall evaluation of the experience of the theatre are discussed. Other parts of the collected data have been used by other STEP members (for example Van Maanen et al. 2015b; Šorli and Toome 2019) or will be used in the future for individual and joint scholarly papers.

Question 1 asked to evaluate the performance, venue and evening in general on a six-point scale from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree. Question 2 presented a list of statements, question 12 a list of keywords/characteristics to be also rated on the same six-point scale. The list of statements is mostly based on the TEAM model by Hans van Maanen (Van Maanen et al. 2013, 85) so the sentences could be divided between five dimensions: theatrical (concerning the forms and ways of acting), thematic (concerning the themes and characters), immersive (concerning the captivity of the performance), communicative (concerning the communication between stage and spectators) and contextual (concerning the relevance).⁴ The keywords can be divided into six clusters: forms and skills, emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, complexity, entertainment, relevance. The first cluster, Forms and Skills, refers to values such as the experience of beauty, newly experienced images and the level of skillfulness the performers display. The clusters Emotional and Cognitive Engagement have their roots in the emotional and cognitive dimensions of the theatrical experience discerned by Eversmann (2004). The fourth cluster, Complexity, is related to the distinction between comfortable and challenging experiences (Van Maanen 2009, 191–194). Being entertained is often seen as characteristic of more comfortable experiences and therefore used as a separate category. Finally, the experienced Relevance of the performance refers to its relevance for the real life of spectators, either on a personal or on a societal level.

⁴ Differently from the original model, an immersive dimension was used instead of the narrative dimension because the statements refer to the ways the story captivates the spectators and is able to immerse them in the world created on stage.

Results and discussion

In this part of the paper the results of the empirical research will be discussed following the research questions raised at the beginning of the paper. First of all, the relationship between the production, distribution and reception in Tartu will be discussed because it enables to understand the functioning of a theatre system of Tartu.

The analysis of the supply shows a mutual relationship between the number of performances available and the number of visits they collect—it is possible to show more performances of a production if there are enough audiences who are interested in it. Thus, *the number of audiences available for (a certain type of) theatre and the habits of audiences of visiting the theatre, including a certain type of the theatre are important factors in the functioning of the theatre system.* The availability of audiences for a certain type of theatre is a question of cultural policy as well as arts marketing and theatre education. Spoken Theatre is culturally and historically the type most familiar to the audiences and most of the performances shown in Estonian theatres are Spoken Theatre performances, making it the most accessible type for regular and potential audiences. Also, the education system favors Spoken Theatre—the two acting schools in Estonia are focused on teaching Spoken Theatre actors, and to a lesser degree also dancers and opera singer; also, it is mainly Spoken Theatre that is included in the school curriculums.

The preferences of Estonian audiences as well as the existing theatre system are the outcomes of their *cultural and historical background.* Estonian literary culture is rather young compared to most Western cultures, having started flourishing in the second half of the 19th century. Until this time, the literary languages had been German and Russian. The cultural identity of Estonian was, and still is, very much based on the Estonian language. So, the preservation of the language that is spoken only by a million people is an important aim of Estonian culture. Even the Constitution of Estonia states that the state “shall guarantee the preservation of the Estonian nation, language and culture through the ages” (see “Eesti kultuurpoliitika põhialused aastani 2020”). In the Soviet times, especially in the 1970s and 80s that was a time of heavy Russification, Spoken Theatre allowed a way to present Estonian language in theatres. Also, Estonian dramaturgy was, and still is, very much valued by theatres as well by the Ministry of Culture also today: therefore 39% of the texts of the premieres

of Spoken Theatre productions in 2010 were written in Estonian; supporting the staging of Estonian drama is one aim of the state (Kultuur 2030).

Even if there are audiences available for different types of theatre, *the lack of suitable venues* can also be an obstacle. For example, Dance Theatre might need a certain number of square meters or a special dance floor to be able to show the performances. Also, Puppet and Object Theatre might need certain conditions to perform. There is only one suitable venue for Puppet and Object Theatre in Tartu, but for financial reasons the venue has made a contract with the biggest theatre in the city to present mainly their performances. The venue of small private theatre Tartu New Theatre offers basically the only affordable venue for Contemporary Dance groups, the black box of biggest theatre in the city being too expensive for the small private dance theatres and big considering the number of available audiences for this type of theatre in Tartu.

Another influential factor is *the cultural policy in programming that values certain types of theatre or certain productions more than others*. Because of that certain highly valued works are kept in repertoire even in the case of mediocre audience interest. In Tartu, this is visible in terms of Opera. Opera in the repertoire is only shown in Tallinn and Tartu. The aim of the music department of the Vanemuine theatre, the biggest theatre in the city, the only three type staging theatre in Estonia, is maintaining and developing the Opera genre, but the emphasis of the department is also on the Musical, targeted at general audiences as well as children, to guarantee a sufficient number of audiences for Musical Theatre and through this the income to be able to maintain Opera in Tartu. The Opera in general is not a very effective genre economically, which is the reason why the state subsidy for both the National Opera and the Vanemuine is larger compared to that allotted to other theatres. Supporting Opera in the Southern part of the country is a decision of cultural policy.

The case of the music department of the Vanemuine also clearly illustrates that *the cost of productions and performances* influences the availability of certain genres and *forces companies to attract more audiences*. Producing Opera, Musical and Classical Ballet is expensive and in order to maintain all these genres, attracting large audience numbers with Musicals is a possible way to earn a box office income that the Opera is not able to do as the number of possible audiences is smaller.

Finally, *the availability of educational input for different types and genres of theatre* directly influences the availability of different types and genres. In Estonia, it is possible to study acting for Spoken Theatre (there are two schools that

both teach acting based on Stanislavsky), directing in Spoken Theatre (some of the graduates have also directed Musical Theatre productions), dramaturgy, set design, Ballet and Contemporary Dance and Opera singing. In addition, light design, visual technology, and theatre theory can be studied. Until the end of the 1980s, the majority of the actors and directors all came from the same acting school. Even now, where there are two acting schools, the teachers of the more recent one is graduates of the older school, carrying on the same ideas. Some of the practical areas of theatre are not taught in Estonia at all—Puppet Theatre actors are either Spoken Theatre actors originally or have studied themselves abroad. New Circus or Urban Dance is usually taught at hobby schools, there is no school for *Kleinkunst* as there is in the Netherlands. Cultural management is taught in Estonia only since 2002. Of course, in a small country like Estonia, it is not useful to teach Puppet and Object Theatre actors or Opera directors, because the demand is minimal for these type of artist in the theatre field.

When comparing the functioning of theatre in STEP cities, specifically Tartu to Aarhus, Debrecen, Groningen and Maribor, the analysis of the production (number of productions), distribution (number of performances) and reception (number of visits) of theatre points at some similarities, but also differences. First, Tartu and Maribor, the two smallest cities among those studied, have the highest number of theatre visits (1.5 visits) per inhabitant. At the same time, the variety of theatre types available for the audiences when considering the number of productions is the narrowest in these two cities. This means that inhabitants of Tartu and Maribor have fewer possibilities of choosing between different types of theatre.

	Aarhus			Debrecen			Groningen			Maribor			Tartu		
	Prod	Per	Vis	Prod	Per	Vis	Prod	Per	Vis	Prod	Per	Vis	Prod	Per	Vis
Spoken Theatre	30%	54%	41%	44%	36%	42%	43%	48%	28%	45%	42%	30%	71%	72%	59%
Musical Theatre	10%	13%	38%	9%	16%	24%	14%	18%	31%	13%	8%	24%	13%	19%	31%
Dance Theatre	15%	7%	3%	27%	11%	11%	12%	9%	11%	9%	6%	17%	11%	8%	7%
Kleinkunst	14%	4%	12%	7%	3%	6%	24%	17%	21%	–	–	–	–	–	–
Puppet and Object Theatre	10%	12%	2%	12%	30%	16%	2%	1%	2%	30%	43%	27%	4%	1%	2%
Other	21%	10%	4%	1%	4%	1%	5%	6%	8%	3%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 3. The percentages of productions (Prod), performances (Per) and visits (Vis) per genre (Toome and Saro 2015, 279)

Tartu stands out by having the highest percentage of Spoken Theatre productions, while Maribor has many Puppet and Object Theatre productions and Groningen has the highest percentage of *Kleinkunst* productions in the supply. While the division of productions by type makes it possible to understand the variety of theatre offered to potential spectators, the division of performances gives a better understanding of the level of availability of the types as well as a more clear-cut picture of what the audiences actually visit. Although there is quite a rich variety of different productions in Groningen and Aarhus compared to other cities, in the distribution domain Spoken Theatre either dominates the supply or shares its leading position with Puppet and Object Theatre as is the case in Maribor) and in Debrecen. There are not so many performances of Puppet and Object Theatre in the supply of other cities. In Groningen, 17% of the performances are *Kleinkunst* which is four times more than in other cities. This means that even in cities with a high variety of different types of theatre available for the audiences, Spoken Theatre still is the most easily accessible type of theatre. Secondly, in terms of percentages in all the cities the percentage of Musical Theatre is a little bit, but not significantly higher as regards performances than is the case with the productions (exception is Maribor where it is the opposite): Musical Theatre productions make up 9–14% of the supply and constitute 8– 19% of the performances. The situation is opposite for Dance Theatre, where productions form 9–27% of the whole supply, but the performances only 6–11% (the highest being there percentage for Debrecen).

This suggests that a theatre or a company is able to give more performances with Musical Theatre productions than with Dance Theatre productions.

Thirdly, in all cities, except for Groningen, Spoken Theatre collects the most visits. This can be explained by the fact that Spoken Theatre is probably the most cognitively accessible type of theatre and it is also the most familiar theatre type for different kinds of audiences. However, in Groningen and Aarhus the number of visits to Musical Theatre is almost equal to the visits to Spoken Theatre, in Maribor the Spoken Theatre visits are quite comparable to the visits to Puppet and Object Theatre.

The differences and similarities of the supply can be explained by four aspects:

- (1) the influence of cultural traditions;
- (2) the structure of the theatre system;
- (3) the policy aspects of the theatre system;
- (4) the economic factor of theatre production (Toome and Saro 2015, 275).

Denmark and the Netherlands have been in a different social-political situation during the second half of the 20th century compared to Estonia, Slovenia and Hungary that either belonged to the Soviet Union or were in its sphere of influence. The political and social changes in the West at the end of the 1960s influenced the relationship between theatre and cultural politics in the 1970s that led to an increased acknowledging and supporting of smaller and new agents in the theatre field by the states (Van Maanen et al. 2015a, 247). On the other side of the iron curtain, theatre was seen more as a means of state propaganda and departures from the mainstream were less supported or more denied (depending on the political conditions in the countries). Lelkes (2009), Saro (2009) and Sušec Michieli (2009) have also pointed out that even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the existing theatre systems were largely maintained in Estonia, Slovenia and Hungary. Next, the structure of the theatre system, as well as the theatre policy, has a direct effect on the theatre supply. The presence of a company in a city, the availability of venues for certain types and genres and educational aspects are often a result of cultural history, but at the same time they are also constantly being re-negotiated. The subsidy system, the cultural programming, the use of venues, the educational priorities—all these features have to be taken into consideration as potential factors determining the functioning of a theatre system. In addition, the economic aspects have to be considered. The costs of some types or genres force theatres to attract wider audiences and might therefore influence the artistic decisions of the theatre in general. Finally, the size of the country also plays a role. In small countries like Slovenia and Estonia, number of potential audiences who would be interested in different type of productions is limited and therefore some types or genres can be quite marginal and attract spectators only in the capital city. Genres like Opera or Contemporary Dance in particular might require that the audience have certain competences to be able to follow them and derive pleasure from them. In addition, the size of the country also affects the possibilities of available training required for certain occupations, which can affect the availability of certain genres in its turn.

From the perspective of functioning it is relevant to know whether different types of theatre create different values for the audiences; if yes, where the biggest differences lie and if these differences can be explained by how the production and distribution domains function. In general, all types of theatre in the cities of Tartu, Groningen, Tyneside score high in the theatrical dimension, which means that spectators are especially content with the quality of the performing, but

also with the forms of the performance (set design, costumes etc.) and value it if the performance is well directed (*Table 4*). However, this is not the case in Debrecen, where the highest scores in the theatrical dimension are only given to the Musical Theatre. In case of *Kleinkunst* and Dance, it is the immersive dimension that is valued the highest, which means that the spectators feel they have been drawn into the world of the performance, and the play has made them use their imagination.

In general, Dance scores the highest averages in all the dimensions everywhere except Groningen where *Kleinkunst* is rated the highest. The other exception is Debrecen, where *Kleinkunst* has the highest averages for the thematic dimension instead of Dance. Musical Theatre is rated lowest in all the dimensions in Debrecen and Tartu; in Groningen and Tyneside the results are more varied. In all the cities, the lowest scores are given to the communicative dimension meaning that the spectators do not feel that the performers expect something from the audiences or that they had established a direct connection with the performers on the stage. However, these results are not in accordance with the qualitative research that tends to show that people are more content with the performance if they feel a personal connection either to the themes or the characters (compare with the example of *Kleinkunst* in Groningen). This is also seen in the quite high averages for the immersive and the thematic dimensions which make it possible to assume that spectators are captivated by the performance and like the themes of the performance, while finding the behaviour of the characters interesting as well. However, the contradiction between the low scores on the communicative dimension and the higher scores for the thematic and immersive dimensions can also result from the infelicitous phrasing of the sentences in the questionnaire: "Experiencing something very directly, almost physically" can be understood as the performance evoking physical reactions (trembling, crying etc.) that can be the result of so powerful experiences that may occur only a few times during a lifetime.

When considering which dimensions are the most important ones in terms of the overall evaluation of the performance, the immersive and the theatrical dimensions are the most essential for Spoken, Dance and Musical Theatre audiences. This also confirms the importance given to a captivating world created on stage that is brought to the audiences by competent performers when rating a performance.

	Groningen				Debrecen				Tartu				Tyneside			
	D	S	M	K	D	S	M	K	D	S	M	K	D	S	M	K
Theatrical	4,79	4,72	4,86	5,03	5,37	4,75	4,94	5,03	5,21	4,88	4,80	–	5,95	5,44	5,58	5,42
Thematic	4,28	4,47	4,53	4,81	4,74	4,74	4,30	4,83	4,70	4,56	4,38	–	5,51	5,0	5,0	5,01
Immersive	4,34	4,18	4,14	4,51	5,45	4,67	4,47	5,09	4,86	4,52	4,35	–	5,50	5,09	5,09	4,72
Communicative	3,37	3,53	3,53	3,80	4,58	4,06	3,61	4,54	4,06	3,79	3,43	–	4,70	4,20	4,42	4,52
Contextual	4,24	4,43	4,1	4,47	5,3	4,81	4,34	4,87	5,06	4,67	4,41	–	5,68	5,22	5,15	5,12

Table 4. The averages of different dimensions by types and cities (Wilders et al. 2015, 336–337). D – Dance Theatre, S – Spoken Theatre, M – Musical Theatre, K – *Kleinkunst*.

Dance Theatre is considered the most skillful, beautiful to look at, full of new images, impressive, inspiring, exciting and least superficial. Together with Spoken Theatre these two types can be considered the most complex ones based on the higher scores for such keywords as complicated, demanding for you personally and lower scores for easy to follow in comparison with Musical Theatre and *Kleinkunst*. Spoken Theatre is also considered the least relaxing and less amusing than other types of theatre. This means that Dance and Spoken Theatre offer the best possibilities for emotional and cognitive engagement and are considered more complex and are experienced as the least entertaining. Musical Theatre and *Kleinkunst* are experienced less complex and more entertaining, scoring higher on keywords such as relaxing, good fun, funny and having lower scores for complicated and demanding for you personally. Musical Theatre is also found to be the most conventional type of theatre except in Tyneside where this position is taken up by *Kleinkunst* that is also considered as the most entertaining and least complex. This means that Musical Theatre and *Kleinkunst* are in general considered to be easier types of theatre compared to the two other types. In general, all four types of theatre are considered to be more relevant on the social than on the personal level. *Kleinkunst* and Spoken Theatre are experienced as the most socially relevant, and *Kleinkunst* the most personally relevant type of theatre.

As was shown above, the aspects of immersion (the ways spectators are captivated by the story and feel drawn to the performance) and theatrical dimension are the most influential when evaluating the performance as a whole. Also, impressive is one of the most significant keywords in defining the overall evaluation given to a performance. However, qualitative research shows that impressive is interpreted rather differently by the spectators of Musical and

Spoken Theatre. For Musical Theatre audiences, impressive is connected more to the skills of the performer, the vocal crafts, the articulation; the ability to act and sing credibly is pointed out as a skill not all opera singers share.

Spoken Theatre audiences are impressed if the performance has made them think about the themes presented on stage and they have been able to relate this to their own personal experience. In addition, they also admire the acting skills, especially if the role is an obvious challenge for the actor (such as playing children's roles) or a perfect fit (good casting for the role). The most influential keywords determining the overall evaluation of the performances are skillful and impressive.

First of all, it has to be pointed out that the focus was on the comparability between cities, which is why types like Puppet and Object Theatre, Cirque Nouveau etc. that were available in some cities and not available in the others, were deliberately left out of the research. This means that it is not possible to say on the basis of this research whether theatre systems that have more alternative types of theatre in the supply, are also able to deliver different kinds of experiences. Nevertheless, the research does point out some variation in the data that can be interpreted as a result of the differences between the systems. For example, even though Musical Theatre is generally experienced as more entertaining than Spoken and Dance Theatre, in Tartu and Debrecen, where there are fewer Musicals in the supply, Musical Theatre is experienced as less relaxing and more complex. In Tyneside and Tartu where the Dance Theatre sample consists of Classical Ballet, the type is more admired for the skills involved in it, while in Groningen with more Contemporary Dance in the supply, it is admired for being more engaging, more surprising, less recognizable and more complicated. Whether conceptualization of the theatre is based on cultural conventions or emerges as more universal is one of the most relevant questions in the light of the results presented in this chapter. It can be seen that in all the four cities, theatre is most valued for its external quality (the performing, the set design, the way performance is directed). Secondly, being immersed in the world of the performance is as relevant for the audiences as is being impressed by the skillfulness and by the themes and characters presented.

	Groningen				Debrecen				Tartu				Tyneside			
	D	S	M	K	D	S	M	K	D	S	M	K	D	S	M	K
Skillful	5,07	4,81	4,75	4,83	5,62	4,89	4,98	5,37	4,97	4,3	4,44	–	5,79	5,05	5,16	4,85
Beautiful to look at	5,04	4,51	4,94	4,93	5,06	4,14	4,36	3,25	5,32	3,87	4,6	–	5,6	3,58	4,7	3,97
Full of new images	4,40	3,69	3,34	3,69	4,56	4,18	3,71	2,93	4	3,42	3,33	–	5,18	3,43	3,56	3,53
Impressive	4,51	4,09	4,01	3,86	5,06	4,24	4,22	4,68	4,78	4,22	4,15	–	5,74	4,86	5,18	5,44
Exciting	3,43	3,13	2,91	3,23	4,37	4,31	3,78	4,34	3,85	3,23	3,25	–	5,53	4,22	5,14	5,14
Comforting	2,43	2,52	2,66	2,42	3,12	3,05	2,76	2,75	4,17	2,49	2,41	–	3,28	2,83	3,91	4,47
Satisfyingly complete	–	–	–	–	5,06	4,19	4,11	4,81	4,35	4,25	4,23	–	5,11	4,3	4,94	5,41
Painfully surprising	2,6	2,99	2,17	2,84	2,19	3,24	2,75	1,43	2	3,39	2,31	–	2,81	3,14	1,99	1,97
Inspiring	4,39	4,1	3,86	3,99	4,88	4,23	3,81	3,26	4,27	3,7	3,4	–	5,32	4,24	4,25	4,26
Recognizable	2,84	3,28	4,2	4,23	4,75	4,44	4,59	4,16	2,92	3,15	3,73	–	4,7	4,23	5,32	4,97
Confrontational	2,96	3,53	2,41	3,07	3,06	4,47	3,64	4,68	–	–	–	–	3,3	3,08	1,81	1,51
Challenging	–	–	–	–	3,06	3,16	2,38	1,68	3,43	3,39	2,99	–	4,09	3,76	2,09	2,53
Conventional	2,13	2,29	2,71	2,19	2,81	2,48	3,17	2,65	3,12	2,58	3,26	–	1,86	2,5	2,7	3,54
Superficial	1,91	2,1	2,59	2,14	1,44	2,03	2,21	1,68	1,97	2,11	2,3	–	1,52	1,85	2,2	1,61
Boring	1,89	1,95	1,63	1,54	1,25	1,81	1,85	1,22	1,56	1,92	1,88	–	1,15	1,44	1,3	1,23
Complicated	3,43	2,96	1,7	1,84	2,37	3,09	2,24	1,47	32,5	2,98	2,45	–	2,49	2,5	1,3	1,26
Easy to follow	3,55	4,1	5,08	5,06	4,93	4,24	4,56	5,34	3,71	4,06	4,23	–	4,95	4,76	5,55	5,68
Demanding for you personally	2,75	2,75	1,71	1,89	2	2,86	2,25	1,66	2,05	2,21	1,91	–	2,7	2,79	1,52	1,53
Relaxing	4,08	3,87	4,9	4,8	4,13	3,35	3,86	4,47	4,17	3,37	3,79	–	3,76	3,05	3,89	4,94
Amusing / good fun	3,51	4,05	4,64	5	5,56	4,47	4,57	5,85	3,75	3,62	3,65	–	4,85	4,2	5,5	5,83
Funny	3,19	3,95	4,38	5	4,63	3,47	2,57	5,53	2,54	3,46	3,12	–	4,05	4,38	4,56	5,66
Relevant for you personally	3,19	3,23	2,66	3,57	4,06	3,79	3,01	4,31	3,12	3,09	2,58	–	3,67	3,5	3,96	4,88
Socially relevant	3,1	4,04	3,04	3,91	4	4,46	3,51	4,93	3,28	4,25	3,44	–	4,39	4,5	3,82	4,56

Table 5. The averages of keywords by types of theatre and cities (Wilders et al. 2015, 340–342). D – Dance Theatre, S – Spoken Theatre, M – Musical Theatre, K – Kleinkunst.

Conclusion

Despite the availability of different types and genres of theatre in different cities Spoken Theatre is the most accessible type of theatre in all the cities in Northern, Western, Eastern and Central parts of Europe as the largest numbers of performances offered to audiences is Spoken Theatre. It is also the most visited type of theatre everywhere; however, it shares the position with either Musical Theatre or Puppet and Object Theatre. The almost equal number of visits to Musical Theatre in Northern and Western cities is a result of a theatre system that consist of much more commercial theatre than Estonian theatre.

Even though theatre systems have cultural roots and clearly are the outcomes of particular cultural, political and social history, it is also the priorities in current theatre politics and the structure of the theatre system in general that have a direct influence on the functioning of theatre. The emphasis that in Western cultural politics has been put on supporting more alternative theatre types is visible in the variety of theatre that is on offer in Aarhus and Groningen. At the same time the system has created a basis for a lively commercial theatre scene that more often produces entertaining genres (like Musicals) in big venues for large numbers of audiences. So, the subsidizing or non-subsidizing (who is subsidized and who is totally dependent on their own box-office income) of certain types or genres determines the functioning of theatre. In Estonia, commercial theatre is almost non-existent and therefore almost all professional theatre is subsidized. This means that even the more entertaining genres like Musicals are produced by subsidized theatres. In the context of Tartu, this can be seen in a positive light for the income from Musicals enables the Vanemuine to stage Opera and Classical Ballet in South Estonia, while these genres would never collect so many visitors as to cover their productions costs by themselves.

What it is maybe more striking, though, is that the ways in which people consume and experience theatre in these countries have more similarities than differences despite the fact that the theatre systems are rather different. Spoken and Dance Theatre are experienced as more serious types of theatre, Musical Theatre and Kleinkunst as more entertaining and relaxing. In general, spectators everywhere value what they see on the stages very highly. The quality of acting, set design, costumes, the good work of the director or choreographer are rated high for all the types of theatre. The ability to immerse spectators into the world

of the performance as well as the satisfaction with the quality of acting, directing and forms of the performance in general are the most influential aspects when evaluating the performance as a whole.

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Antine Zijlstra –
Berber Aardema

Perspectives on the social and communal values

of the Frisian spoken performance
The Diary of Anne Frank, a first impression

Abstract

Using the example of the Fordivedaesje amateur theatre association's performance entitled *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the essay explores the topic of how Frisian-language amateur theatre events performed in small villages contribute to the creation of social and community value for Frisian and Dutch audience members. The research is based on 17 short and 5 in-depth interviews, which the authors conducted with audience members, 13 Frisian and 4 Dutch attendants, and 2 Frisian and 3 Dutch visitors. The results show that participating in this amateur theatrical event strengthens the relationship between the members of the Frisian and Dutch communities, increases their members' involvement in the production process, contributes to the creation of a collective experience, and strengthen the vitality of the villages, but at the same time it raises demographic questions, and other aspects related to the use of a minority language.

Keywords: amateur theatre events, Frisian (minority) language, villages, social and communal values, Frisian and Dutch audience members

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Introduction

How do Frisian and Dutch audience members value Frisian spoken amateur theatre events in village communities and in what way does it contribute to communal living? Using the amateur theatre production *The Diary of Anne Frank* of the amateur theatre association 'Fordivedaesje' as an example, light is shed on the social and communal values a village performance generates for its audience members. The performance was staged in late April and early May 2022 in community centre Harspit in Toppenhuzen and Twellingea, twin villages of about 1600 inhabitants, near one of Frisian cities Sneek, or Snits in Frisian, in the north of the Netherlands.¹ Frisia is one of twelve provinces of the Netherlands and has its own language: (West) Frisian, that has been acknowledged as an autochthonous and official minority language. In 2018, 61% of the population of Fryslân considered Frisian their first language. However, Frisian is mainly used informally and orally, especially within families, social and public life in the countryside and regional media, since minority language learning is scarcely offered by the educational system. (Riemersma 2023). Research into the general language proficiency of inhabitants of the province Fryslân supports this observation. It shows that 92% can understand Frisian (fair to good), 64,1% can speak it (fair to good), and 52,4% can read the minority language (good to very good). Yet, only 15,9% claims to be able to write it (good or very good) (Provincie Fryslân 2019).

Importance of Frisian spoken amateur theatre for the minority culture and research context

Because of its oral nature and connectedness to local communities Frisian spoken amateur theatre fulfils an important function for the Frisian language and culture. It has his roots in the 330 villages in the province Fryslân, far more than any other Dutch province and dates back to 1860 (Oldenhof 2006). This longstanding amateur theatre tradition has been passed on, mainly informally, through generations. In 2015, 194 active amateur theatre associations and

¹ For more information in Dutch and to a lesser extent Frisian on the website of the villages: <https://www.topentwelonline.nl/onze-dorpen/top-en-twel-in-t-kort> (last visited: October 27, 2023).

34 open air theatre groups were counted, spread over the province. Some of these groups create performances yearly, others more occasionally. Also, their artistic ambitions vary: amateur theatre groups that perform 'for and with the village' seem to focus on their social function for the community, whereas more ambitious amateur theatre groups often employ a professional director and/or technical staff to achieve higher quality performances (Zijlstra et al. 2016). Often, the latter groups broaden their audience reach, also because their way of working is more expensive and ticket sales are an important income source for most amateur theatre groups (Zijlstra et al. 2023).

The Diary of Anne Frank, the performance chosen as a case study for this article, has been studied as part of the larger research project *Re-voicing Cultural Landscapes* (JPICH Horizon 2020) that aims to better understand the interplay between majority and minority perspectives on marginalised intangible cultural heritage, like the Frisian spoken theatre tradition. One of the questions the project addresses is how different groups of participants value minority cultural events in Cornwall (UK), Livonia (LV, EE) and Frisia (NL).²

This short article focuses on the perspectives of self-acclaimed Frisian and Dutch audience members on social and communal values of participating in the theatrical event at hand.

Theoretical background and research design

Studying performances within a minority cultural context demands a broader perspective that includes the social and cultural context of the performance. Therefore, the notion 'theatrical event' has been chosen as a key concept. Within theatre studies it is broadly defined: a theatrical event takes place during a specific time, a specific location and under specific circumstances, bringing together participants, both theatre makers and audiences (Sauter 2000). By that, it offers the opportunity to study performances from its roots in human presence and interaction, both during the performance and the social and communal context surrounding it. Thereby, it enables the study of performances as part of a set of social and cultural conventions and circumstances that determine the specific characteristics of the performance, the cultural practice it is part of, and the way it is embedded in the social and collective lives of participants (Knowles

2 See <https://www.heritageresearch-hub.eu/project/re-voicing-cultural-landscapes>.

2004). Frisian spoken amateur theatre productions offer their communities the opportunity to experience performances collectively and meet at a local venue or location, which enables social interaction about their theatrical experiences and connect experiences and insights to their personal and communal lives. As such, they offer the circumstances to socialise and exchange personal viewpoints and discuss world views, which might lead to social values like social bonding with familiar audience members or creating new relations with unfamiliar others, usually called 'bridging' (Putnam 2000; Van Maanen 2009). By doing so, theatrical events support building and strengthening relationships within a community that surpass the event itself and might contribute to the vitality of that community, and cumulative to a (minority) cultural tradition (Brown 2006; Zijlstra 2020; Zijlstra et al. 2023).

Alan Brown (2006) developed a general framework that show the way cultural events create value for individuals and communities, which functions as a basic scheme for understanding different types of values and the relationships between them (*Figure 1*), which he specifies into five dimensions (*Figure 2*). For this article especially 'human interaction', also called social values, and communal meaning, or communal values, are important. At the interpersonal level, the benefits related to social interaction that Brown describes are grouped involving more satisfying relationships, family cohesion and teamwork skills (Brown 2006). For the aim of this article the analysis of the social values *The Diary of Anne Frank* generates focuses on creating relationships and the perceived effects it has, either through bonding or bridging as described above (see Putnam 2000). The value dimension 'meaning for the community' consists of a cluster of collective benefits, which take place during and around the art experience. This dimension includes strengthening or sustaining cultural heritage, political dialogue, creating shared memories and common meaning, the transmission of values and ideals, social context and a sense of belonging (Brown 2006).

Especially the way participating in *The Diary of Anne Frank* contributes to communal values and the minority culture is of interest for this short article. Consequently, creating memories and meaning is interpreted as creating collective memories and meaning, thereby clarifying the difference with similar interactive social values that can be connected to the theatrical event itself.

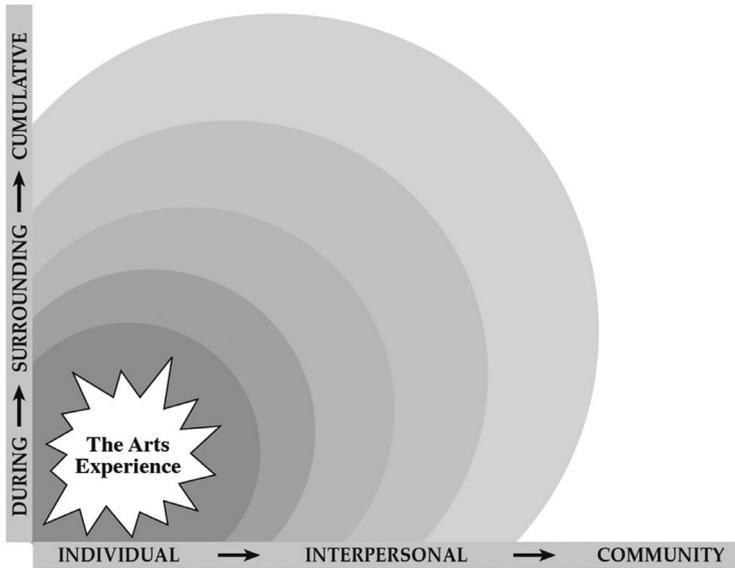


Figure 1. An architecture of value (Brown 2006, 19)

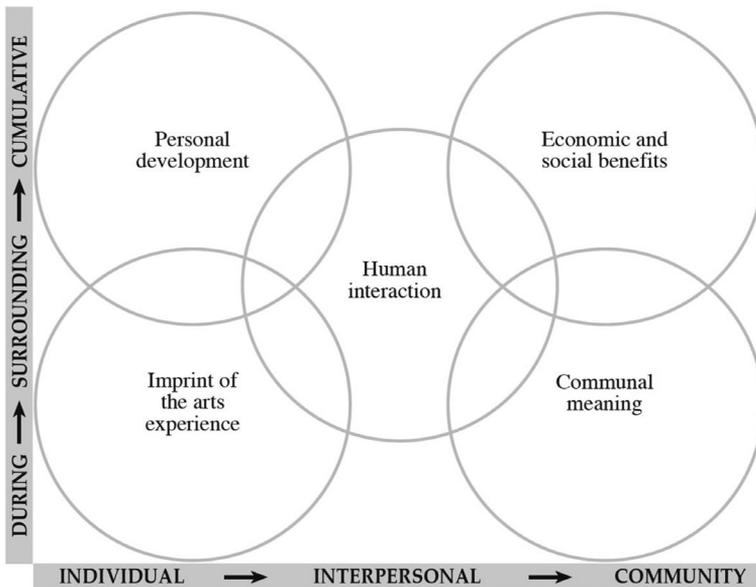


Figure 2. Value dimensions of Brown's architecture of value (Brown 2006, 20)

To better understand the social and communal value of attending *The Diary of Anne Frank* 17 short and 5 in-depth interviews with audience members were organised, respectively 13 Frisian and 4 Dutch attendants and 2 Frisian and 3 Dutch visitors. The short interviews took place immediately after the end of three performances and lasted on average ten to twenty minutes. The in-depth interviews were held at a time and place of the respondent's choosing and lasted on average an hour and a half. Also, respondents were asked to fill in a questionnaire with their basic details and background information on language and identity. Additionally, if relevant, insights gained from in-depth interviews with three board members about the organisational context of the theatrical event will be used and referenced. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed using Atlas.ti.

The case

The performance *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the case this article focusses on, is produced by the amateur theatre group 'Fordivedaesje' that normally focusses on its connection to the local community. However, in the context of the 75th anniversary of Dutch liberation after the second world war, the amateur theatre group chose to up their game and produce a larger production which they planned to premiere in 2020. The board of 'Fordivedaesje' chose *The Diary of Anne Frank* which had been translated to Frisian from its original English adaptation of the Dutch/Jewish book of the same name and hired a professional director and extended the rehearsal time to achieve their goals. Unfortunately, the performance had to be postponed due to Covid19 and was re-produced in 2022 resulting in five performances for audience members from their own and neighbouring villages in the multifunctional community centre. However, the endeavour and (personal) risk that producing this performance took made them decide to make a smaller, more comical production for the next theatre season without professional support.

The amateur theatre association 'Fordivedaesje' was installed in 1977 and has been performing yearly in the local venue, offering a broad range of genres. Also, a larger open-air production was made in 2017.³

³ See <https://fordivedaesjetopentwel.nl> (last visited: October 28, 2023).

Insights: a first impression

Meeting other attendants at an event like *The Diary of Anne Frank* is enjoyable, especially in a larger group and offers the opportunity to talk about it and, in this specific case, also feel proud. Analysis shows that the Frisian language plays an important role in the social interaction on and off stage, in the social context of the performance and therefore, an important mediator for the social and communal values of *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Especially, because the village community is dominantly Frisian speaking and finds it important to stress this to newcomers as can be read on their village website:

“The main language in the villages [Top en Twel] is Frisian. Newcomers are not immediately expected to start speaking Frisian, but they are expected to learn to understand Frisian within a reasonable period of time.”⁴

Even though respondents report to be impressed by the acting and staging of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and have talked about the themes of the performance and their love for (amateur) theatre, when asked about the value of the theatrical event as a Frisian spoken cultural tradition, the use of Frisian as a minority language is the main topic. As such, *The Diary of Anne Frank* creates a space where using the minority language is obvious and, as such, offers the opportunity to perform Frisian identity even though the original book the performance is based on is Dutch and can be seen as part of the Dutch majority culture.⁵ Also, the values of the social interaction between attendants contribute to creating and strengthening personal relationships and bonding within this minority culture context. The use of the Frisian language, as an identity marker, is positively valued by all Frisian and Dutch respondents, and seen as an important ingredient of the amateur theatre tradition in Fri-

4 See <https://www.topentwelonline.nl/onze-dorpen/top-en-twel-in-t-kort> (accessed 29 October 2023). However, the need the village representatives feel to stress these expectations to newcomers that speak other languages implies a certain level of uncertainty about the position of Frisian, as a minority language. This observation is supported by the board members of the theatre group express their concerns about the increased amount of Dutch speaking village inhabitants that moved to Frisia for its rural qualities and are less aware of the minority cultural context they have entered.

5 Most respondents feel the story told is a universal one, that is relevant globally. Some stress that is important to offer Frisian translations of highly esteemed books or plays, either to contribute to the cultural value of the minority language or because it should be available in as many languages as possible.



Image 1. Leading amateur actress as Anne Frank (used for publicity; Photo: Fordivedaesje)⁶

sia. However, as multiple respondents point out that Frisian speakers tend to switch to Dutch when a Dutch speaker joins the conversation of a group, even when this person can understand Frisian. This habit of ‘language breaking’ is a common phenomenon in the Frisian minority language community and is viewed and valued from different perspectives: Some Frisian respondents see it as an endangerment of the Frisian language practice, others view it as a way to include other language speakers since all Frisians are bilingual. A sim-

⁶ More about the director and the cast:

<https://fordivedaesjetopentwel.nl/it-deiboek-fan-anne-frank/regisseur-rense-rotsma>,

<https://fordivedaesjetopentwel.nl/it-deiboek-fan-anne-frank/eftergrun-spilers-toanielstik-deiboek-fan-anne-frank/#page-content> (last visited: October 28, 2023).



Image 2. The set design (Photo: Fordivedaesje)

ilar distinction can be seen in the viewpoints of the Dutch speaking respondents: Some feel it is unnecessary and makes learning to understand or speak Frisian harder, others point out that it makes them feel welcome. The tensions between these positions can be seen as the result of the negotiation process between the minority and majority culture within the context of *The Diary of Anne Frank* (see Zijlstra and Aardema in Hodsdon et al., forthcoming).

When analysing the communal values respondents mention, the focus shifts to the cooperation necessary to produce amateur theatre events and the values derived from the production process. Amateur theatre-making enables interpersonal communication, active participation and social involvement as is emphasised by both the board members as Frisian and Dutch respondents that live in the twin villages. As such, organising and staging this kind of amateur theatre events contributes to community involvement. This collective involvement is highly valued by most of the audience members. They admire the twin villages for being able to achieve a high level of community engagement and are impressed by the quality of the acting and staging of the production this results in. Especially, because it in their experience it is getting harder to find volunteers for these kind of communal activities throughout the cultural and leisure domain.

Also, creating theatrical events like *The Diary of Anne Frank* is seen as part of a village tradition, since it occurs yearly and village inhabitants grow up knowing



Image 3. The theatre space in the multifunctional hall of community centre 'It Harspit'
(Photo: Antine Zijlstra)

about it or participating in it, either as an active participant (for example as an actor or volunteer) or as an audience member. Thereby, it keeps inhabitants enthusiastic and secures engagement of all generations. However, keeping youngsters involved is a point of concern mentioned regularly.

Additionally, theatrical events like *The Diary of Anne Frank* create opportunities for village inhabitants to actively participate in a cultural practice that is part of their 'living space', which is seen as an added value. As such, it contributes to the vitality of a village community (and decreased dependence of the cultural life in the nearby city).

Concluding remarks

Participating in theatrical event *The Diary of Anne Frank*, an example of a Frisian spoken amateur theatre production that has a strong connection with the village community it is produced in and performed for, offers audience members the opportunity to meet as part of a dominantly Frisian community. Thereby, it enables creating and strengthening relationships between all, both Frisian and Dutch, participants, and offers the opportunity to express their Frisian identity or empathise with the minority language and community. On a communal level, it creates opportunities for active involvement in the production process and opportunities to meet as part of a larger community group, which not only contributes to the exchange of personal experiences and viewpoints, but also to a collective experience and, in this case, community pride. Also, its contribution to the vitality of the twin villages is valued positively. The different viewpoints on the use of the Frisian language between the Frisian and Dutch respondents are visible and lead to discussion, but they aren't disrupting the amateur theatre practice as such. Note, however, that because only attendants of *The Diary of Anne Frank* were interviewed, all of them have a positive attitude towards Frisian and Frisian spoken theatre. Additionally, some future challenges have been mentioned, respectively as part of the amateur theatre practice and as part of demographic changes: Keeping young people involved and attract volunteers, and a stronger need to explain the importance of the minority language for village inhabitants to—slowly increasing amount of—Dutch speaking newcomers.

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<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003082538-73>

Natália Gleason-Nagy

Connectivity is calling us

In approaches to socially distributed
and embodied cognition through theatre
inspired by Woolly Mammoth Theatre

Abstract

This article intends to serve as a case study and inspiration in the field of audience engagement and community experience and invites international exchange & discussions on best practices and experimental praxes. It briefly examines the cultural history and context that preceded Connectivity. Then sets out to illustrate with examples how the aim of the Connectivity department is to forge dynamic and multifaceted bilateral relationship between the theatre—Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company specifically—and her community in Washington, D.C. Each play programmed has a constellation of curated experiences designed to engage, explore and educate: from open first reads, to interactive lobby displays, to post show events, the theatre seeks relentlessly how to best facilitate the encounters that strengthen and enrich lives in and with the arts. By bringing the concept of Connectivity to a continental readership, the article invites us to examine the function and potentiality of our institutions in the civic and cultural landscape they serve and thereby extend our notions of cultural leadership by offering a variety of approaches to invite, engage and sustain audience participation beyond spectatorship.

Keywords: audience design, community engagement, point of entry, institutional change, cultural leadership, theatre management

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Theatre is uniquely suited as a laboratory for ever new ways of community building, engagement, and social learning. The present paper is an introduction to innovative audience-relations from Washington, D.C.'s Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. In 2009, a new department was created called Connectivity to vitalize and reimagine audience engagement and community building. Investigating this innovation allows us to reflect on the role theatres occupy in the life of the city and in the life of the people they serve. Sharing best practices internationally—now that the project has been running successfully for over a decade—may offer a new framework for exploring audience relations, community partnerships and opportunities for programming beyond the repertoire. Further study of theatre in cognitive sciences could illuminate and activate uncharted landscapes of socially distributed cognition and learning and is presented below.

As Dr Miranda Anderson points out, the perception of cognition and subjectivity as extended across brain, body, and world, in itself, supports the argument that crossing the disciplinary divisions between the neurobiological and the socio-cultural, between sciences and the humanities, will benefit the understanding of all since all are necessary to encompass the nature of being human (Anderson 2015). Connectivity Director Kristen Jackson defines her mission as the aspiration to be more than a theatre; through these efforts this multifaceted, multidimensional, longitudinal relationship with the people has become the very core of the mission.

These efforts in the macro context of the city also prompt us to consider theatre in the constellation of other institutions playing a part in the eudemonic wellbeing of the citizens that they serve, by promoting autonomy, competence, interest in learning and social engagement. Washington, D.C. is an especially potent landscape to study given its powerful position and the wealth of cultural institutions that are housed in the district—and their connections and united efforts in serving and affecting local as well as visiting populations. These efforts could also be investigated in relation to humanities/higher education collaborations, noting the trend of pointing outwards; and reach beyond the well-established circles of high-art and academia seeking, honoring, and serving the typically or historically unengaged, to work towards collective liberation and a better future for all.

As Sarah Bloomfield, director of the Holocaust Museum in D.C. pointed out, humanities are incredibly important if we want to create an engaged and responsible citizenry (Bloomfeld 2018). Projects "Humanities are for All" (to us Hungarians this sounds like a Kodaly-paraphrase of course) documents efforts across the

United States' humanities' faculties and students who are extending the benefits of the humanities beyond the classroom by engaging diverse communities in their work. Tapping into the tendency to radically include audiences in a deeper and sustained relationship, Woolly seems to be conjuring and manifesting the art management Zeitgeist, which is expanding the very function of theatre.

Connectivity is an innovation which might not seem immediately relevant to our theatre ecology in Hungary for two key reasons:

First is whether the theatre is much more prominent in the cultural and everyday Umwelt of the citizens here than in D.C. Language itself is a clue to that. The Hungarian "közönségszervezés" (audience-organizing) connotes that there is already an audience, and the task is only to lure them towards a specific theatre/performance. Community building/outreach implies that the community needs to be created out of individuals or found in extra theatrical groups and actively ushered into to the given institution.

Second, in western cultures certain institutions often formulate a specific mission, target a well-defined artistic goal, or cater primarily to a specific audience. In London, the Young Vic is dedicated to giving early-career directors opportunities, the Royal Court champions contemporary writing and the Gate Theatre prides itself on international collaborations. In D.C., Theatre J produces and invites performances that have Jewish identity at heart and the Shakespeare Theatre presents a season of the bard mixed with classics. Contrary to that in Budapest, the palette of institutions appears homogenic; what separates them often is a certain type of aesthetic or taste, the institutional identity is hardly driven by a mission statement. The plays in the repertoire are predominantly classics and they typically do not prompt the questions that drive Connectivity.

However, the rapid pace of the digital change, the post-pandemic era, and the forever present quest to win and keep our youngest audiences call on us to familiarize ourselves with international best practices to imagine, adopt and implement ways of communicating and communing with our colleges, patrons and visitors. A rich and robust theatrical ecosystem might avert our attention from areas of potential growth or innovation. Yet cross-cultural analysis provides opportunities to illuminate our systems of operation both for their strengths, uniqueness, dimensions of potential improvement, growth, and even innovation. Re-thinking and reframing the event of going to the theatre also invites scholars to explore what impact and benefit these new ways could mean for individuals and societies alike.

To quote Howard Shalwitz, Founder and First Artistic Director Emeritus, “More than anything the Innovation Lab provided a kind of values exercise, understanding what is meaningful to us about the work that we do. What our hopes and dreams are and how our work is going to affect the world around us. It has made us look more harshly at other aspects of our organization and say where we are not living up to those values.”¹

Innovation usually comes when change makes it inevitable. In 2005, Woolly Mammoth moved into their current purpose-build, award winning space: a 265-seater theatre. Founding Artistic Director Howard Shalwitz and his team decided that the education program that was inspired by the 52nd Street Theatre legacy had to give way to something new. Woolly’s bold risk-taking programming was often at odds with classroom agendas and the new geographical distance made the education system less sustainable (Gamble 2014).

Woolly has for decades been at the forefront of championing contemporary American plays and providing playwrights world-premiers that went on to be widely produced nationally. Yet over time the niche became the norm and new voices bringing new plays found the gates increasingly open, making the time ripe for a shift in vision towards a new goal. This was further enabled by the impending departure of the founding Artistic Director of 36 years. The inevitable shift in leadership allowed for moving his legacy in a new direction and consider what the next chapter should bring for the theatre.

It is also important to note that historically Washington, D.C. is a city where social innovation through music, arts and theatre had strong and vital traditions. An example of the local cultural earth from which Connectivity blossomed is Arena Theatre’s Living Stage.

From its inception in 1966, Living Stage was one of the first community outreach programs by US regional theatres. Living Stage’s commitment to working with the “forgotten,” led them to engage an unprecedented range of community partners. Through the course of their history, they engaged students with disabilities, students in the poorest and most segregated neighborhoods in D.C., inmates at Lorton Penitentiary and D.C. Jail, senior citizens, deaf students at Gallaudet, social workers, teachers, parents, and teen mothers, among others (Crowley 2019).

The parallel is valid because of the range of their partners, and because of their groundbreaking, improvisational and participatory methodology. Yet, while Living

¹ For more information about EmcArts Innovation Lab see Gamble 2014.

Stage is centered on creating theatre, Connectivity is centered on community conversation and is curated around the art. The Connectivity event is not performative, as a praxis it is typically extra-theatrical in all its beautiful diverse Methods. It aims to affect discourse, aid learning, and enrich the experience. Connectivity is also a “calling in” effort (vs an outreach program). It stays in the theatre building, it pulls the community in, and the invitation is sustained and radically inclusive. Calling in is also a Woolly terminology used in-house to encourage and support difficult conversations vs calling out. Their culture is clear: it is ok to disagree, it is not ok to disengage.

This open-mindedness is essential when we consider the exempla virtutis tendencies of the enterprise but unlike the Neoclassical artists who are depicted in ancient history as uplifting moral messages for the art-viewing public, Connectivity takes on the mission of setting high moral standards and collective expectations. It is not about artistic representation; it is an ongoing presentation of a shape-shifting platform. The performances remain bold, provocative, and risk-taking—the art is not the tool, but the messenger—Connectivity is there to deliver, deconstruct or elevate the messages for those who are willing to enter. It is not a practice of virtue-signaling, quite the contrary it is about virtue building, strengthening the ability to explore, discover and grow. As their updated mission statement declares:

“Woolly Mammoth produces courageous and invigorating new work to radically redefine theatre as a catalyst for an equitable, creative, and engaged society.”²

In his speech shared as part of the Citizenship and the Arts Talk series at the *National Innovation Summit for Arts & Culture* on October 22, 2013, Howard Shalwitz explains his ever-present desire to fuse the aesthetic with the civic—and looks to accomplish that initially within the plays (Shalwitz 2013). Then in 1990, they thought outside the stage and knocked on all their neighbors’ doors on 14th street in D.C. and asked them how “a bunch of theatre makers might be helpful”. From these conversations grew education programs and community partnerships. These started feeling misaligned after the 2005 move and in the 30st season in 2009, it was decided that they needed something new, so they organized a one-day workshop for affiliated artists, audience members and industry representatives entitled, *Who is in your circle? Theatre, Democracy*

² See <https://humanitiesforall.org/essays/goals-of-the-publicly-engaged-humanities>.

and Engagement. From this workshop, the notion of Connectivity emerged, and it was developed deeper and further through EmcArts's Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts

It is worth noting that in both instances the whole community participated in shaping the plans. Extended minds of the theatre's board, departments, supporters, and guests were thinking together. The innovative potential in both cases was expanded by using a conference room like a rehearsal hall and employing methodology in a devised process. Theatrical thinking and learning inseminated organizational orientation. These sessions—in the naïve, casual, knock-on doors near my stage and the transparent, democratic, thought-leader of an invitation—both point to higher forms of learning also, and contour practices and methods that can serve us well in arts management, internal communication, creative processes, and audience engagement alike. 'Who should be in the room for this?' is a humble powerhouse of a question that has enriched the culture of Woolly in many ways.

According to Howard Shalwitz, the most innovative decision was not to position Connectivity as a subset of marketing but as its own senior level department that is tasked to draw all other departments into a deeper conversation about the work that happens in the theatre. With time, as the process unfolded, the Connectivity Director accumulated the Associate Artistic Director role—blending the civic with the aesthetic making the founders dream come true and affirming connectivity as the essence of the theatre. Let us explore the concepts three main pillars; audience design, point of entry, and total audience experience.

'Audience design' implies that curating who comes to the theatre to see the show is as important as designing the stage or costumes. Who should see this play? Who should be heard in this conversation? Months before opening night the Connectivity Director will reach out to the stakeholders in the community, tell them about the play, and invite them to the theatre. In 2014, a year before *Cherokee* by Pulitzer Prize finalist and interdisciplinary artist Lisa D'Amour opened, Woolly held an in-house workshop (they also organize workshop retreats for intense development of world premieres) and Connectivity organized a 45-minute teaser presentation at 5 pm on their stage (they also have a rehearsal room, and many Connectivity events live in the lobby) where all departmental staff and ticketholders of the day as well invited as audiences could hear a scene by the actors and have an insight into how they prepare and their initial impressions about the world and the characters.

This helped collectively envision what sorts of events and collaborations might be possible as well. There was an embodied memory of seeing the event and this enriched conversations with the artistic team, colleges and ambassadors to see where they see the center of the play and the performance and who do they want to invite to the show. From these conversations, a plan for activities emerges. This is especially helpful in an ensuite system where the theatre will stage 30 consecutive performances. It is a challenge to land a rich understanding and language of the world. These efforts also create time for ideas from the box office staff to the marketing director to surface, discussions to occur and to build momentum early on.

Connectivity always organizes an open first read at the start of the typically four-week rehearsal period. Board members, underwriters and community partners will gather in the rehearsal hall (imagine this as a basement room with a capacity to hold 120 which used to have all glass walls on one side to signify transparency and openness even through its very architecture). Here stakeholders really get a sense for what this play will become on Woolly's stage: hearing the whole play voiced by the cast is typically preceded by introductions from the Artistic Director, Director or Dramaturg and the seeing design presentations from stage and costume designers. It feels bold and vulnerable at the same time, peeking behind the scenes but ahead of the crowds. The excitement is tangible in the room as the production takes its first breath and it is very satisfying to be given all the components in this deconstructed fashion and be able to build your own expectation out of these pieces of information.

In 2014, when *Marie Antoinette* by David Adjmi had its first read, one had a sense for the power of the play that had arrived in D.C. through the voice of the actors seated around the long, white, plastic table; many of them beloved local company members. But there was no foretelling where director Yuri Urnov was about to take production. The gift of Connectivity here again is time: come see a sapling and return a mere month later to witness in its full majestic, theatrical, technicolor bloom.

What Connectivity calls a Point of Entry, is also easier to discover and define in the light of these events and subsequent conversations. Even though all great plays offer multiple opportunities to engage, the goal is to find where the Woolly production's beating heart is, and the most burning topic that is important to the people. The 2011 production of *Oedipus el Rey* by Luis Alfaro served as a pilot project for Connectivity where the embedded conversation it uncovered



Picture 1. Woolly Mammoth, lobby activation (Photo: Kristen Jackson)

was recidivism. The play allowed space for this nationally important debate to be reframed by art. The conversation in *Oedipus el Rey* was centered on self-determination versus destiny, thus the entry point: “Can we break the cycles that drive our fate?”. Connectivity reached out to former inmates from local prisons, scholars of mythology, tattoo historians, and a transitions program at the YWCA. These perspectives were the catalyst for post-show conversations that focused on themes of the military, mental health, suicide, and family relationships, rather than the usual technical and production-focused conversations. The Connectivity prototype of *Oedipus el Rey* generated valuable lessons and reinforced the value of experimentation (Gamble 2014).

Total audience experience is thinking deeply about how people feel from the moment they get their first email, see their first poster, engage in social media, and enjoy the space before the performance as well as post show. The lobby is the centerpiece of this work—it will change with each performance, so the experience is immersive, so the curated journey begins before the lights go down.

In 2017, Woolly presented *Pike St.*, a one-woman show from writer-director Nilaja Sun. One of the characters in the play was a disabled daughter whose



Picture 2. Spit Dat (Photo: Kristen Jackson)

mother tried to keep her safe during New York hurricane. Connectivity chose to curate an exhibition in the lobby by local artists who were differently abled. Audiences could see not only the works but also photographs of the creators. It gave the community agency and access to worlds they might not enter and see. Considering the intersectionality of art and disability, this allows us to reflect on theatre as a space that can fuse civic and cultural function.

Nilaja Sun also held a workshop for Howard University's theatre students (she is an alumna). For those hours, she was both an artist activist and an artist teacher. The lobby was a school where young talent could see their trajectory from classroom to big stage all on their own and engage in embodied learning in the craft of building a one-person show. As "Drama in Education" practitioner-theorist Gavin Bolton asserts, theatre when used as pedagogy often aims for a "a change in 'felt value'...—in respect of me in the objective world." In training you obtain skills and competencies, and in so doing you have affective experiences that alter your perception of yourself in relation to the world. This theory of change is not deferred, no future action is necessary, as the change that happens is immediate, affective, and perceptual (Crowley 2020).

Core program are curated partnerships that share the space and the brand with smaller scale cultural enterprises. Spit Dat is the longest-running open mic in the American nation's capital and now is a resident at Woolly. All their events are free and open to the public. Investing in these relationships is mutually beneficial and lets theatre function as an interdisciplinary, intracultural hub. This type of programming also strengthens the whole city's cultural ecology not only by sharing resources with the most inventive and nimble enterprises but also facilitating new encounters, dialogue and creative cross semination between artists, audiences, ideas, and experiences.

Connectivity also positions the theatre as the house of life-long learning. A constellation of events and a variety of curated experiences cultivates the culture of inclusive pedagogy and invites us to consider theatre's status, role and potential in education. The eclectic mix of opportunities to engage allows for audiences who are given agency as community members, allies, and ambassadors to experience Woolly in unusual ways yet journey towards the same connected conversations and communal experiences around the art. The writing of the present article is also a manifestation of my status as an ambassador. Woolly inspires a group of people to build a network of D.C. area community members with connections to other arts and culture organizations, frontline service nonprofits, academic institutions, and policy think tanks, who care deeply about Woolly and growing our shared community. Ambassadors are asked to give their insights on plays, are given special discount codes to share with their networks, are invited to meet and feed-back potential new hires in management positions, are called upon to volunteer when the theatre needs an extra hand and find their own ways of connecting.

In conclusion, Howard Shalwitz remarked, "The long-term impact of Connectivity has been far greater than I anticipated. In the beginning, it was primarily a strategy for connecting more deeply with our community in order to motivate new groups of people to attend our shows and energize our audience. Over time, we learned that to do this with integrity, we needed to create a more authentic and trusting relationship between the theatre and our community. This meant reaching out more widely, listening to what community members had to say, creating genuine two-way relationships with community groups, and exploring new directions for the work on our stage. Connectivity evolved

from being an add-on activity to being the very heart of Woolly Mammoth's identity."³

The vision encompassed three key components: women, people of color and Connectivity were to become the beating heart and the driving force for Woolly's future. With the appointment of artistic director Maria Gonzales, under the leadership of Kirsten Jackson who now holds a dual role as Connectivity and Associate Artistic Director, the theatre seems to fully embrace, continually forge and live out an institutional identity that is true to the legacy of the institution, as well as the history of the place, where it stands in fierce and soulful conversation with the people of the day.

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³ Howard Shalwitz's personal communication.

Cabaret and Beyond

Discussion about the Dutch theatre scene and cultural policies

An interview with Quirijn Lennert van den Hoogen by Szofia Tölli



Photo: Quirijn Lennert van den Hoogen

There are quite a few differences between academic and cultural approaches in the Netherlands and Hungary. Quirijn Lennert van den Hoogen, assistant professor at Groningen University talks about the specifics of the Dutch system in the context of his research.

In the Netherlands, at Groningen University you are working as an assistant professor in art policy and art sociology. It was not your original field—could you tell more about your academic path?

■ Originally, I trained as a business administration student at the University of Groningen, and halfway through, I also did a program called arts and arts management. I've always stayed in the art world, and I focused my studies and knowledge on public administration in the art world. For over ten years I've worked as a consultant and later as a policy advisor on local and provincial levels in the Netherlands. In the meantime, I had started my PhD on the topic of cultural policy, and performance arts policy on the municipal level in the Netherlands. My question was how Dutch municipalities evaluate such policies and how those evaluations can be improved. I started teaching courses on arts policy and art sociology at the university during the final stages of my PhD studies and have been teaching for over 15 years now.

Art sociology has many aspects. What is your focus?

■ I started to deepen my knowledge in the field of sociology during my PhD. That was the first time when I started reading Bourdieu and some of the criticisms of Bourdieu. From critical art sociology, my research shifted to the role of the government, particularly local governments in the cultural sector, having done a lot of research on value changes in cultural policies in the Netherlands. Lately, I'm also looking at the role of arts and culture in peripheral regions or peripheral locations. It includes everything that happens in the countryside. That research hasn't taken off empirically, you need a lot of money to get someone who then has a lot of time. In my opinion one has the most chance to do empirical research during a PhD, after that it becomes quite difficult because it is very time-consuming.

Throughout your career Groningen University remained your intellectual base. Could you tell us some specifics about the Dutch university system?

■ In contrast to how it works in Hungary, in the Netherlands there is a particular rule: the right to tutor a PhD student is only reserved for associate professors, and full professors. I'm an assistant professor, which means that I don't have that right. You always have a team of supervisors, usually at least three people. The reason behind it is to avoid any chance of fraud. It could be easy to do because tutoring mainly involves one-on-one consulting sessions. Unfortunately, there was a mishandled case, so the procedure became safer and more bureaucratic. We always complain about our bureaucracy, because it is ever expanding here and that is also true for the cultural sector which makes it more difficult to devote enough time to art exclusively.

Do you think that bureaucracy affects the artistic field and the expression of freedom negatively?

■ Yes, but I think we are ahead in the development. The Western system in general and the Netherlands have done this very well, I need to say, to provide some sort of security to art organisations for them to be free content-wise. What works very well is the system of independent art institutions. In the Netherlands, almost all of them are independent foundations with their board of trustees, with their own managing director and artistic director. This double role in the management of institutions is very normal in my country.

What about the local level?

■ The system is mirrored on the local level. Every municipality organises independent advisory boards when they are allocating their subsidies. Not following the board's advice is political suicide in the Netherlands. If the advisory board gives the green light to a project, you need to subsidize it.

We also have precedents for saying no, but it only happened twice in the history of Dutch cultural policies. It comes with a cost because the cultural sector in the Netherlands tends to be very autonomous and does not need to connect to societal issues. It simply represents what the artists want to do, and the board needs to hope that they choose relevant topics. The projects sometimes have

a very limited audience appeal. Subsidized Dutch spoken theatre is seldom played for sold-out houses. It simply does not happen, because there is not enough demand for this type of theatre, however in number there are many companies. The more experimental parts of the system are particularly overproducing while playing for only twenty people.

How can these companies get support for their art if their projects are often-times reaching out to a limited number of people?

■ Well, if that is the audience you can get for this type of performance, then you've done well. My perspective is always that you take the performance with the artistic company's profile as the starting point and then try to select a better or larger audience rather than trying to adapt the performance to attract a larger audience. I've done a big research project on the National Council for Culture, which is the advisor to the Dutch Government. I have talked to the theatre committee about the judging of applications. We have six national theatre companies; they all tour the country. I was told that nowadays the artistic director's and lead artists' name on the application is a must. Apart from that companies need to name the marketing director and the educational director as well. The reason behind it is that the advisors know these professionals and they want to ensure that not only the artistic, but every aspect of the company's work will uphold a standard.

The theatre committee usually doesn't turn down applications, because there are not many alternative possibilities amongst the bigger companies. If they say no to an application, a spot in the system is not filled. However, if an application does not meet a standard, companies have to do certain things to get support.

The theatre committee keeps its eyes on the companies. Does your role and research at the Council for Culture mean that a sociological approach is implemented in financing the art field?

■ To answer that we need to define the sociological approach. If one says that the sociological approach to theatre means that theatre makers account for their position in society and think of the relation of their work to the rest of society and to their audiences: the answer is yes. If one defines the sociological

approach by a certain sociological perspective such as critical theory or system theory, then the answer is no.

Most of the members of the Council or the committee know arts management and the basics of arts sociology. Everyone who works in this field in the Netherlands has read Bourdieu. They all know distinction theory: that means that if politicians suggest doing better marketing to sell more tickets, then they can explain how it works for the field. The managers understand that at the end of the day, it is not simply an issue of trying to attract a larger audience. The real issue would be to get people more interested in their work and raise more cultural capital. The key to that is to understand that it is not possible without the proper education. It is not just an issue of putting up more flyers and creating more social media content and then everyone will buy a ticket.

How would you describe the Dutch cultural scene?

■ I think a concept that is well understood nowadays in the Netherlands is cultural democracy. A well-observed idea is that culture and arts are not only for the elite. A lot of institutions are thinking about ways of listening to the people who live around them and addressing what these people have in terms of cultural needs. But that is immensely harder for them because the Netherlands has a strict division between producers of theatre and musical theatre and the houses where they play. Both parties have their management, they are separate organisations. The venues select the program from the producers: they know their local audience way better than the producers do, and sometimes there is also a place for experiments. Several theatres think their role is that they present everything that the big companies do.

In smaller cities, the program is more selective, because usually in smaller cities the ticket sales need to earn back the cost of the program. The municipality may pay for the building, but not for the program itself. In larger cities, the municipalities usually also pay for the program, so you can get a loss on the program economically.

Is it common in the Netherlands to have fully for-profit companies?

■ Yes, there are some for-profit companies mostly specializing in musicals and cabaret. Dutch theatre is famous for its unique Cabaret, which is not the same

as the German term for Cabaret. However, the German term *Kleinkunst* can be linked to this form. These are usually one-man or one-woman shows, mostly like in stand-up, but it also includes singing. The best way to describe it: it is a full musical support, usually with live musicians on stage, and a full staging. It is usually a two-hour show or even longer, and it is fully commercial, although many successful performers of cabaret have started out in publicly funded small theatre venues or performing at festivals that are publicly funded. Dutch Cabaret is very critical politically, and it is also elitist: it's not entertainment. The genre of musical is considered entertainment. On the other hand, Dutch musical producers want space to experiment and to come up with critical musicals.

For how long can the audience see these productions?

■ A tour of a Cabaret may last up to two years, while a tour for a spoken theatre production is usually three months. Maybe if it is successful, they retake the production next year, but it is simply developed for a shorter runtime using the distribution network of the theatres that are funded by municipalities.

These productions tour around the country. However, this system is now under discussion because of the ecological crisis: they have huge emissions because of transport.

Do you think that a green law would solve the problem?

■ The question is whether there will be a green law for culture or whether the green laws for transport will force the cultural sector to change. I think the latter. Well, the political parties that have won the national election in November are not that bothered with the environment at all. But at some point, they will have to implement some changes, and everything is linked to emission in some way.

How is your current research linked to the theatres? Was there a case when a theatre directly used the research studies and its achievements to change their politics?

■ Well, my research is not that much on the institutions themselves, it is on policies. The last big project on policy advice and the value changes in cultural policies was used by the Council for Culture. It showed that indeed this

advisory body acts as a mitigating force between what politicians want and the cultural sector. I have shown through quantitative means, that the values that the Council for Culture use to assess policy plans are quite constant while political values are all over the place. But that doesn't say anything about what is in the applications of the theatre companies, it is not a part of my research. Over time, the companies start writing different sorts of applications. A lot of development in the sector has been on management and marketing, on inclusiveness of company's operations, and now on social responsibility. Even experimental theatre companies now have paid staff to do their marketing, which is an interesting development of the field.

Has marketing become an essential tool even for the small companies and troops?

■ Well, it is now considered normal, however in the 1990s it wasn't so. The question always is whether that is because of what the government wants or is the government following what happens in these companies? I think the latter. Have those changes in the sector occurred because of the pressure from society? In the Netherlands, it is very normal to discuss the legitimacy of the cultural policy. In the UK, France or Italy that's not an issue. In the Netherlands it is constantly under discussion whether it's legitimate.

Do you see a fundamental difference between Eastern and Western European cultural policies? How is the Dutch system wired?

■ I would argue that the Dutch cultural policy nowadays is very much linked to Scandinavia, if we look at the basic value on which the cultural policies are founded in the Netherlands. That's based on the notion of the right to access to culture in general and of one's own culture. That is cultural democracy. However, the Netherlands, before the Second World War came from another tradition, that came from the UK. Here the idea is that arts and culture are so important because they are an expression of personal values and beliefs that the government should not interfere with them. They are an inherently private matter. That makes for a far more limited public budget. It makes sense in the UK because it is a much bigger country, there is a much larger audience, groups can have longer tours, and there is a culture of private donations to the arts.

However, the Netherlands until the Second World War, was structured socially by the denomination. Everything in society was organised through the Protestant pillar, the Catholic pillar, the Socialist pillar, and the General pillar. The remains of this can be seen in the school systems: we have a lot of ecclesiastical educational institutions. Only the social elites transcended these pillars and met each other in cultural institutions. They were the ones to support the arts. This means there is a tendency in Dutch public administration to always choose for bottom-up solutions and leave matters to civil society. After the Second World War, we shifted to a far more active role of the government. On the one hand, people are very much in favor of freedom of education: school boards run their school programs, and the government cannot tell a school what to teach. But in the end, people are unsatisfied that some schools are doing very well and others are not. Everyone has the right to a good education, but not everyone lives near a good school. This is where tension starts occurring because that's a consequence of when you leave it up to society. But politically, that's no longer accepted. Everyone has the same right to the same chances. You need to organise it for everyone at the same level. Our system is really good in general, yet there are differences in what you have access to. The culture policy has the same problem. We expect people to organise it for themselves and then if they do it differently and people get different chances, we get mad. We are at a very difficult point in time, because the internet is everywhere. Everyone is supposed to have access to everything but in reality, that is simply not the case.

How much did the STEP City project help to understand different European cultural systems? What were the benefits of the joint research?

■ Well, I think the major benefit of selecting this set of countries—the Netherlands, Hungary, the UK, Estonia, Ireland, Denmark, Slovenia—is that they are small. This way the system can be described as a whole, and one can make sensible comparisons. We worked with small countries coming from very different cultural regions in Europe and also with very different types of infrastructure and organisational setups. And this was the first international group I've been in where the Netherlands is the biggest country. The main difficulty was that there were certain cultural differences. We wanted to achieve a sort of categorization of the types of theatre that are around. It failed, because to some types of productions or groups there is no international comparison. That was interesting

to be able to find those differences. Even if we could not compare them, we could say a lot about how they are organised, and how does it impact audience. I wasn't part of the research on the audience, but I think it was very worthwhile—Attila Szabó has had an essential part in that project.

With the researchers of STEP we developed a sort of theoretical conceptual frame of how to investigate theatre far more sociologically. People from the field of theatre studies came together to develop a sociological perspective on theatre studies.

How can it move forward?

■ Well, there are several options, but we have the problem of getting them funded. We, the researchers mostly started as a group of PhD students who all had their funding done. We were all busy doing our project and realized, we could find the connections between those projects and help each other. We didn't have to work on applications to get support. That's our big problem now because we don't have funded researchers in the sense of PhD researchers. The beauty of PhD research is that this is the only time in an academic career that you have proper time to do empirical work.

I must say, as the STEP group, we have stayed on the periphery of theatre research internationally, while the efforts and results are being praised for being original. With the partners in the project, we have known each other for a long time, and we like the kind of methodologies we use. But to get it on the road towards a full comparative project as we started, which we managed to do... I don't see that happening soon. I think that's the problem.

What are your preferred topics in research and what are your future plans?

■ The research on peripheral culture is definitely one of my favorite topics, but the problem with that project is that it doesn't prioritize theatre. The goal is to compare how cultural agents in peripheral locations operate compared to those in more central, which is the dominant trope we found when researching these theatre systems, that in every country there is a tension within the system. But when you start from the periphery, there is no argument to start with theatre. You start with the art that is made in the periphery and that can be theatre. Well, not a love baby, I would say, but I think we cannot avoid talking about

sustainability. My big goal for the coming years is to research how cultural policy can contribute to mitigating or averting the ecological crisis, or how it should do that. I think that anyone not asking this question is simply missing the elephant in the room.

What kind of art do you usually come across during the peripheral work?

■ It mostly includes stage events, but not necessarily spoken theatre. The project I'm collaborating with now is also consciously hiring visual artists. And it's a lot of music because you start engaging with people, most people are musically active. One can be surprised at the number of people that draw or paint... I am also working on an introductory textbook on art sociology with my colleagues, we sent the manuscript to Routledge this summer, and we're awaiting publication.

Enikő Sepsi

The Weilian Concept of Attention and the “Autobiographies” of János Pilinszky

Abstract

In this study, I will analyse the aspects of the everyday practice of attention and of the creative imagination that recognise necessary events, relations and, in general, necessity in the Weilian sense (“*nécessité*”)—and that thereby create reality—on the basis of Simone Weil’s fragmentary oeuvre, the reconstruction attempt published in 2021, and the volume collected under the title János Pilinszky’s *Önéletrajzaim* (My Autobiographies). The prose texts are characterised by the absence of temporal and psychological relations, the image of a speaker as “decreated” (cf. *décréation*), multiplied in the characters. The study demonstrates that, in addition to the Weilian concept of attention, he was familiar with the Weilian connections between “necessity” (“*nécessité*”), misfortune (“*malheur*”) and love, as evidenced by the markings on his copy of *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes* in the legacy, and that these connections are also to be found in the draft volume *Önéletrajzaim*. (For the analysis I used the version edited and published by József Bende in 2021.) Nevertheless, it may be concluded that János Pilinszky was not aware of or did not consider important the social aspects of the Weilian concept of attention, or the utopian social vision based on it, since I have not found any reference to them in his oeuvre.

Keywords: Simone Weil, attention, necessity, *nécessité*, misfortune, *malheur*, love, János Pilinszky, absence of temporal and psychological relations, decreeted speaker

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Introduction

Numerous excellent studies have been written on the philological connections between the two oeuvres, such as those by József Bende, Laura Turai and, most recently, Gábor Szmeskó (Szmeskó 2021). My approach will not be primarily philological, but I will try to identify a line of thought from Weil's fragments that an intuitive reader like János Pilinszky might have suspected even if we cannot currently find all the relevant books in his legacy (but based on the references made in his works, he most likely read them, for example *L'Enracinement*). The legacy does, however, include the 1951 edition of *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes* (Pre-Christian Intuitions), published by La Colombe (Éditions du Vieux-Colombier), which is considered to be a fundamental work by Weil on our subject. It contains two pages marked with two writing instruments and two dog-eared pages, which I will highlight in the analysis. The translation of some parts of the *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes*, quoted in my study, and *L'Enracinement* (The Need for Roots) were published in the volume *Ami személyes, és ami szent* (What is personal, and what is sacred, Weil 1983) in 1983, so it can be assumed that János Pilinszky knew the original French texts or parts of them, since he also appears in the volume as a translator (albeit for other texts). The title of *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes* was given by the editors (Father Perrin of the Dominican Order and Gustave Thibon). The first edition of this book was published in 1951, and that of *L'Enracinement* in 1949.¹ It is also important to know that Weil's oeuvre is fragmentary, mostly posthumous, and that certain themes recur repeatedly. We shall also see that Pilinszky's reception of Weil does not cover the whole of her oeuvre.

Attention and necessity

"Toute la force de l'esprit, c'est l'attention" (Weil 1988, 391)—all the power of the mind is attention, said the young Simone Weil.² In her later works, this attention, this creative attention becomes an earthly image of one of the attributes of God:

"Intellectual attention, because of this power, becomes an image of the Wisdom of God. God creates through the act of thinking. Though we do not

¹ Benjamin Braude (Boston) questions precisely the uncensorship of editing in several of his works.

² Cf. Joël Janiaud, *L'attention et l'action* (Paris, PUF/Philosophies, 2002).

create or produce anything by means of intellectual attention, in a certain sense we induce reality within our own sphere of influence." ("Simone Weil a szükségyszerűségről", Gutbrod and Sepsi 2011, 18.)

The creation of reality arises from the recognition of necessity, of the relations that constitute necessity, through maintaining attention and its daily practice (ibid., 20). In the reciprocal movement of the love relationship between the Creator and the created world, made possible by Christ as a bridge (*metaxu*), the "de-created" ("*décréé*") self, which offers its autonomy on the model of Christ's mediation, is no longer an obstacle.³

The second person of the Holy Trinity in the chapter on the 'Descente de Dieu' ('Descent of God'), in Simone Weil's *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes*, is associated with necessity, which she sees as both the director and the Spirit of the World.

"But just as the order of the world in God is a divine Person, which we may call the ordering Word or the Soul of the World, so in us is *necessity a relation, that is, thinking in action*. »Demonstrations—says Spinoza—are the eyes of the mind« [Spinoza, V. 23.]. *We do not have the power to change the sum of the squares of the sides of a right triangle, but we do not even have a sum if the mind does not work and does not understand the proof. In the realm of integers, one can stand forever beside one and never become two unless the mind performs the operation of addition. Only the attentive intelligence can make the connections, and as soon as the attention wanes, the connections break down.*" ("Simone Weil a szükségyszerűségről", *op. cit.*, 17; my emphasis.)

God, who descends into the world with his love (Christ), inscribes his attributes, numbers, physical laws into physical reality, which the attention without an object, central to Simone Weil's thought, learns to decipher in the daily practice of the decreated self. These coded attributes become signs only for total attention.

³ For more on this topic, see Sepsi 2007.

Intuitions pré-chrétiennes (János Pilinszky's copy)

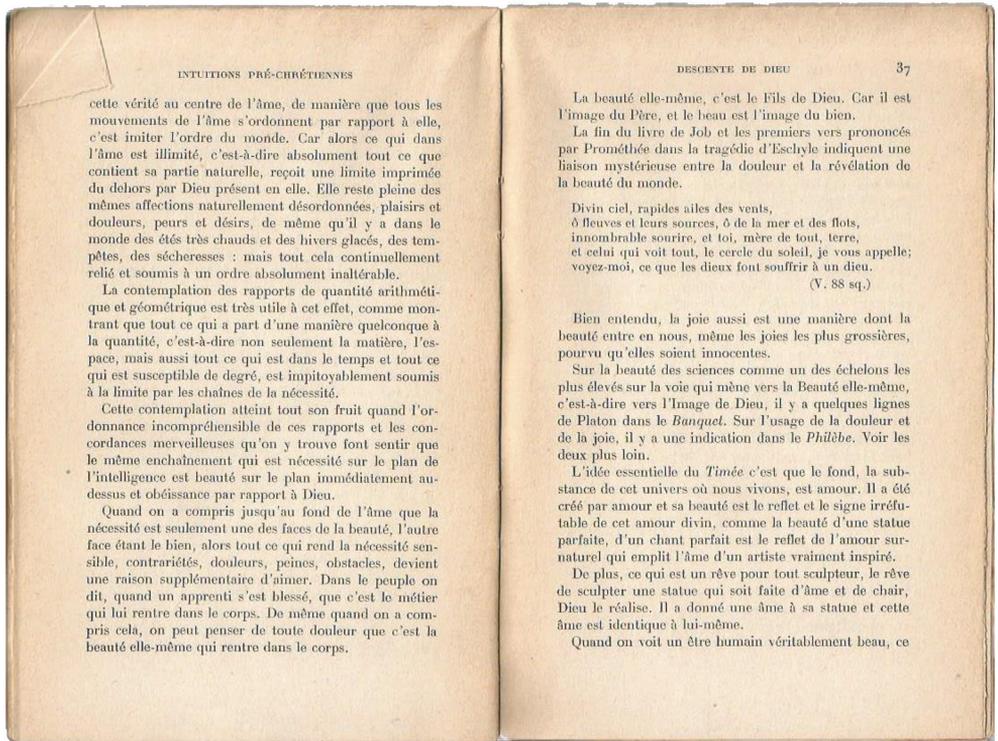
For the artist, necessity can be grasped in the absence of a final goal to be experienced in the universe. In art, the dominance of necessity is matched by the resistance of matter and the arbitrariness of rules.⁴ For Simone Weil, the purpose of art—and especially of the theatre—is to make the necessity perceptible. It is the task of poetry to make terrible things lovable simply because they exist⁵—this Weilian idea is easy to recognise in János Pilinszky's post-Auschwitz aesthetics.

In the copy of *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes* that Pilinszky left for Peter Kovács, the first "dog-ear" is on page 36, at the passage where Simone Weil writes that necessity has two faces, beauty and goodness, i.e., that every misfortune is limited by earthly necessity, which makes the limitless perceptible in the delimited (*picture 1*).

The other passage, this time marked on the vertical side of pages 44–45 (*picture 2*), tells how Zeus punished man by cutting them in two. It was also common practice in ancient times, Weil continues, to cut a coin in half and give one half to a best friend. These pieces were passed down from generation to generation, and the descendants could recognise each other by them. This is the origin of word symbol. It is in this sense that Plato says—we read in the marked passage—that we are not human beings, but we are all symbols of man, and we are searching for our other half. This quest is love; Weil concludes her reflections. Love is the cure for evil, and it is in all of us from the beginning, we just have to learn to control it.

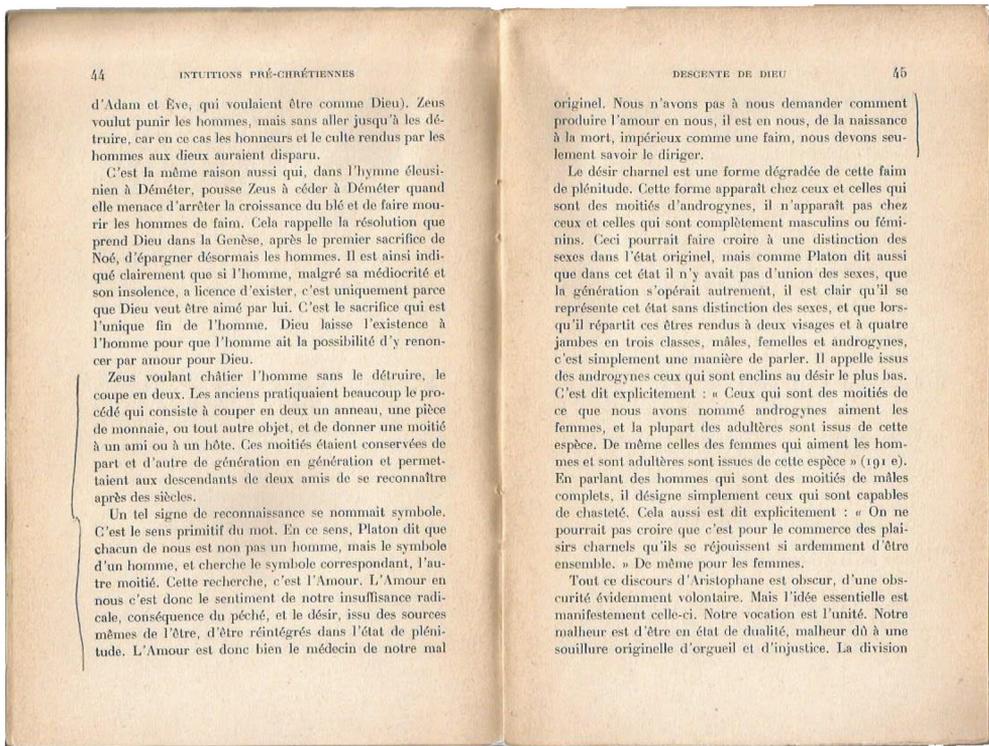
4 Cf. Little 1993. See also: "By comparing the world to a work of art, it is not just the act of creation, but also Providence that is equated with artistic inspiration. That is, in the world as in the work of art, there is finality without any representable end (fin)." (Weil 1985, 23: "*En comparant le monde à une œuvre d'art, ce n'est pas seulement l'acte de la création mais la Providence qui se trouve assimilée à l'inspiration artistique. C'est-à-dire que dans le monde comme dans l'œuvre d'art, il y a finalité sans aucune fin représentable.*") "Because Providence governs the world as inspiration governs the material of a work of art, Providence is also a source of inspiration for us." (Ibid., 40: "*C'est parce que la Providence gouverne le monde comme l'inspiration gouverne la matière d'une œuvre d'art qu'elle est aussi pour nous source d'inspiration.*")

5 "*Art. Poésie. Rendre aimables les choses horribles en tant qu'horribles, simplement parce qu'elles sont, c'est l'apprentissage de l'Amour de Dieu. Iliade.*" (Weil 1974, 69.)



Pictures 1–3. Pages from the 1951 edition of Simone Weil's *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes* (Paris, La Colombe/Éditions du Vieux-Colombier) in the legacy of János Pilinszky (Péter Kovács)

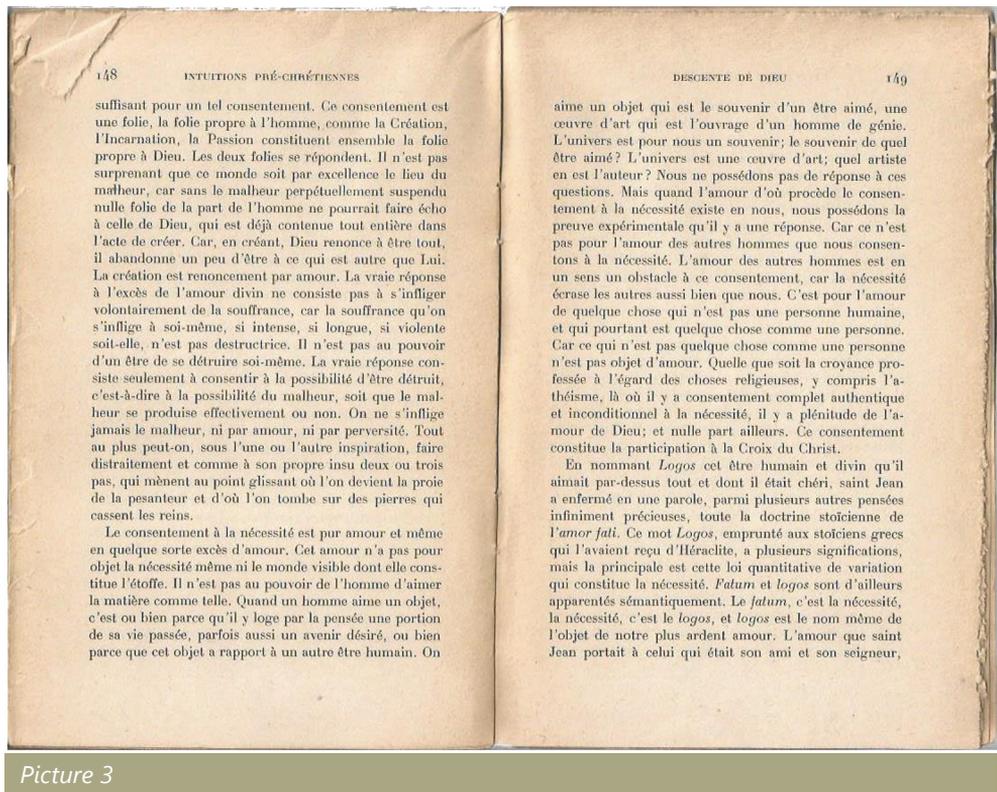
The third passage, also marked with a dog-ear on page 148 (*picture 3*), is about God self-limitation through creation, and the Passion that began with creation. Creation is renunciation out of love. Acquiescence in necessity (the possibility of misfortune) is love, even overflowing love. (However, man should not willingly seek this opportunity, for he has no power to destroy himself.) But man does not love the matter in this necessity, but the beloved being from whom necessity originates. The universe is a work of art whose author we do not know. But the love of the author is in us as an imprint, and the love of that person makes us share in that person's cross. This is as far as the reflections go. This line of thought appears in a letter of 27 March 1981 from János Pilinszky to Mátyás Domokos: "We must know that love," says Simone Weil, "is not a state of mind, but an orientation. Otherwise, it is lost in the first moment of misfortune" (Pilinszky 2021, 138).



Picture 2

It is clear from other parts of the text that, for Weil, to accept the passage of time is to accept necessity, and it is in this context—through this context—that one is able to distinguish dream from reality and thus to detach oneself from the objects of one's attachment: duration is thus a constitutive part of the act of attention. The state of decreation ("*décréation*") is thus characterised by a passive activity that Simone Weil calls "non-acting after", a term whose origins I have found in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Taoist tradition and Weil's master Alain (and Jules Lagneau): this world "deserves no respect, but only attention" (Alain 1958, 77).⁶ This attention is focused: "one must only dare and know to

6 The original text: "*et cela ne vaut nullement respect, mais seulement attention*". On the impact of Jules Lagneau and Alain, see my earlier paper: "Theatrum philosophicum: az én meghaladása", in Gutbrod and Sepsi 2011, 57–76.



Picture 3

think of nothing". "Assured idleness, busy idleness. I wouldn't say that thought would always derive from it, but if it does, its nest is made" (Alain 1969, 93).⁷ Non-acting action is akin to the notion of the desire without an object and empty attention, a compromise between moral and metaphysical immobility corresponding to the decreation⁸ and movement essential for physical action (see Vetö 1971, 122; Sepsi 2015, 35–36). What is only a fragmentary idea in Alain's work becomes a system for the organising mind in Simone Weil's fragmentary oeuvre (Sepsi 2016, 36; Sepsi 2015, 39). My study "Theatrum philosophicum: transdend-

7 Ibid., 93 and 95: "seulement il faut oser, et savoir ne penser à rien [...]"; "Oisiveté assurée, oisiveté occupée. Je ne dis pas que la pensée viendra toujours, mais, si elle vient, son nid est fait".

8 See Weil 2002, 343, 346. See also: "Etre un instrument de contact entre le prochain et Dieu, comme le porte-plume entre moi et le papier." (Weil 1997, 485.) The same thought: Weil 1950, 81. "Taoïstes, le bon forgeron forge sans y penser et ne se fatigue pas. Pensée (attention) immobile, pôle de mouvements cycliques." (Weil 1997, 107; my emphasis.)

ing the self" is the first in the academic literature to discuss the occurrence of will and imagination in the oeuvre of Simone Weil's teacher, Alain (Gutbrod and Sepsi 2011, 57–76). These two concepts are also emphasized by János Pilinszky in his August 1964 *Új Ember* article, "A figyelem megszenteléséről" (On the Sanctification of Attention), which is an exposition of the chapter entitled "Réflexions sur le bon usage des études scolaires en vue de l'amour" in *Attente de Dieu*.⁹

The "autobiographies" of János Pilinszky and the Weilian notions associated with attention (decreation, necessity, misfortune, love)

Simone Weil's drama *Venice sauvée* (Venice saved) places the responsibility for the civitas on a metaphysical level: in the second act, Jaffier encounters reality when pays attention after having transcended his personal horizon. This is when the necessary events take place.

"Necessity is the obedience of matter to God" (Gutbrod and Sepsi 2011, 16). On the other hand, *Venice sauvée* is a staging of the process of decreation, a process that begins with attention directed towards suffering and leads to the immobile state of Jaffier's character, who is pure, i.e., perfect in the sense of a Greek hero, who does not change, who keeps the bad within himself so as "not to propagate it to the outside through imagination and actions that fill the void" (Weil 1968, 44). This notion of attention directed towards misfortune, which helps decreation, already appears in this 1964 essay by Pilinszky ("A figyelem megszenteléséről", see Pilinszky 1964) and permeates the texts published in the reconstruction volume entitled *Önéletrajzaim* (My Autobiographies). Among the notes published in the appendix of the 2021 edition, we read: "I am at once I, you and he. [...] The short course of an action, which might qualify as a sentence, is sufficient to begin as I, and to continue and finish as he. But this he is not identical with anyone else, and it is a thousand times more applicable to myself than the I, which is always capable of absorption. It is an unhappy moment when the I (the self) turns towards itself with the attention it ought to pay to the world and to others. I think this is the beginning of the fall" (Pilinszky 2021, 77). An example of Pilinszky's attention to the Weilian misfortune is Baby, who

9 See Weil, 1950. In Hungarian: "Iskolai tanulás és istenszeretet", transl. Barsi Balázs, *Vigilia*, Sept 1985, 748–752.

is of course an important character not only in “Ónix Beáta” (Beáta Ónix), which is part of the novel’s plot, but in the oeuvre as a whole (the diary-like book “Végre beszél” [Finally Speaks] would have been written by the two of them, had it been completed, see *ibid.*, 67). In the same text, it is Petra Ónix, who is self-identical with the narrator, who speaks of herself in the third person in a childlike way (“Have you noticed that children talk about themselves in the third person?”—reads a textual variant of “Grant kapitány” [Captain Grant, see *ibid.*, 84]) who is hit by Jánoska, the “unfortunate boy crying in the grass” (*ibid.*, 21).

In this project, the “vertical novel”, begun in July 1977, the author, after writing his plays, expressed the need for a novel without plot or psychologization. It is an “immobile novel” faithful to the Weilian ideal of the immobile theatre. Lorand Gaspar, the poet’s French translator, in his preface to the “*Hármasoltár*” (Triptych), recounts what Pilinszky told him about this project during his brief stay in Tunisia, “[i]t is the autobiography of a little girl of five or six, an old philosopher, a nun, and a young prostitute”, he said, “and they are all myself” (Pilinszky 1998, 13).¹⁰ He wanted to call this project *Önéletrajzaim*, which eventually resulted in the prose texts that the French translator calls “*récit*” (narratives): “*Hármasoltár*”, “*Szabadesés*” (Free Fall), previously published under the title “Simon Áron” (Áron Simon), and “*Három etűd a bűnről*” (Three Etudes on Sin). The prose, conceived as a “novel in motion”, elsewhere called “a story of attention”, contains the image of the “decreated” (cf. *décréation*) speaker multiplied in the characters, and the iconic fixation in the titles. The creatures are distinguished by the sets of signs attached to their respective “characters”: Lenke Ónix, Petra Ónix, Beáta Ónix, Captain Grant, Caffeine, etc., but they are also invoked in the spirit of the mystical “we are all one”. Weil’s Labyrinth can be interpreted as a basic human story of deception, in which God devours those who enter the labyrinth, spits them out, and they return to the mouth of the labyrinth to gently usher in the newcomers; so this basic story is evoked by a sentence in “*Szabadesés*”, “[y]ou can’t even get lost in the labyrinth anymore” (Pilinszky 2021, 26). It also appears in “*Ónix Beáta*”, “[t]omorrow I will command Caesar to take me in his mouth, break me and spit me out at your feet” (*ibid.*, 23).

It was the author’s intention to produce “*Szabadesés*” (“Simon Áron”), probably written at the end of 1979, for theatre and film soon afterwards, starring Sheryl

10 “*Il s’agit disait-il, de l’autobiographie d’une fillette de cinq ou six ans, de celles d’un vieux philosophe, d’une nonne et d’une jeune prostituée, d’autres encore, et tout cela, disait-il c’est moi.*”

Sutton or Mari Törőcsik, while Gábor Bódy planned to adapt "Hármasoltár" for film—according to the editor's afterword, as well as the letter written to Maria Baitz in the appendix.¹¹ Neither of them was produced, but they do highlight a very important aspect of Pilinszky's creative work: he was a poet who worked across genres. The short-shot montage technique, familiar from film, which had characterized Pilinszky's poetic composition from the *Apokrif* (Apocrypha) onwards, is also evident here in the novelistic design and texts of *Önéletrajzaim*. His notes from this period indicate that he always worked in the same notebook, deciding later which part of what he had written would be included in which book (Pilinszky 2021, 72; Pilinszky 1955, 144).¹² What's more, his letter to Maria Baitz also suggests that the certain living film screen (the sensitivity of a young neurotic girl in "Simon Áron") on which the hallucinatory still and moving images are projected, "this living 'film' reacts sometimes with signs characteristic of *you* (Maria Baitz) and of course of me (the poet)" (Pilinszky 2021, 115; emphasis in original).

The words he wrote in connection with Béla Kondor's exhibition "The Grace of a Single Moment", published in *Új Ember* in 1965, describe his creative method very well (here, too, he focuses on the Weilian concept of attention): "he does not wish to reassemble the divided reality, but to fuse it into one, so that everything can once again be together and in one: image, reason, desire and action..." (Pilinszky 1999, 432). For without attention, he quotes Weil, there is no love, and here he refers to Weil's interpretation of the story of the Good Samaritan: one possesses his identity, the other has lost it through misfortune. And then the one possessing his personality "turns his attention" to the other: this attention is "creative", and the action that follows is "renunciation": "he renounces himself to bring the other to life" (ibid., 433). The development of Béla Kondor's attention, which became "more and more confused, more and more detached" as time went on, could be seen as a self-confession about Pilinszky's late art, if we did not pay attention to the rather early date of 1965.

11 Speaking of the fourth part, "I would write its theatrical version in Budapest" (ibid., 114); "I am working. I have already written a 20-page film script for TV" (ibid. 116).

12 He writes this about another unpublished volume, "Appendix".

The social aspects of the Weilian attention

The creation of reality stems from the recognition of necessity, of the relations that represent necessity, through the maintenance and daily practice of attention. This idea is reflected in the social aspects of the finale of *L'Enracinement*, elevating love as a working force, which is none other than "the spirit of truth", which in no way wants to commit lies (Weil 2012, 268). Science, should also be based on this love, she continues, a love that inspires those who truly encounter it to voluntary "slavery" not to man but to God (ibid., 293). I agree with András Borbély's statement in one of his writings (Borbély 2018; emphasis in original): "According to Simone Weil, however, decreative attention is not a purely subjective meditative practice, nor is it only aimed at a better mystical or philosophical understanding of the world. Since the concept of the *person* and the *self* is rooted in the culture of the Enlightenment and modernity, and even in modern law, and is therefore both a cultural and political category, its decreation requires cultural and political practice, activism, and specific forms of language and mediation."

Oppression et liberté (1955), which is also part of János Pilinszky's legacy, and *Luttons-nous pour la justice?* (1943) shed light on Simone Weil's social interest, as did *Journal d'usine* (1935), based on her experience at the Renault factory, and later *La condition ouvrière* (1934–1942). In these, Weil's reflections, which turn from personal mysticism to social processes and culminate in *L'Enracinement*, the needs of humans are not only physical in nature but also moral and spiritual: order, freedom, obedience, responsibility, equality, hierarchy, honour, punishment, freedom of opinion, security, risk, private property, collective property, justice. Weil refers to order as the first among all the needs and as the closest to man's mission, but she also speaks as a spiritual person of the other needs, such as obedience, the experience of the various pure forms of hierarchy as a basic need, which is prevented by oppression, the abuse of power, which reduces motivation to the level of income and the threat of being fired, and this impedes rootedness. In an order that is attentive to our basic needs, rootedness (*réenracinement*) can be re-established, and the community is the basis for this when it makes the problem "the object of attention" (Weil 2012, 199).

Culture, according to Weil, is primarily a locus of universal truths, and these truths are reflections of perfection. The problem with bourgeois intellectual culture, according to Weil, is not that it is too "high" and can only be understood

by a narrow elite, but that it is too "low", since it contains few truths that are truly worthy of adoption by more than a narrow elite.

But the social obligations, which she classifies, are surpassed by the kind of attention that transcends all obligations and which means a relationship with God. Contemplation is the point of union of physical and spiritual work, and this educated attention played a major role in Simone Weil's civilisation project for building a post-war Europe.¹³ Being essential for survival, physical work is the spiritual centre of a society functioning in orderly conditions. In this sense, the arts, science and even philosophy are inferior in terms of their spiritual significance (Weil 2012, 318). It is this kind of work that Pilinszky, when writing *Önéletrajzaim*, allows himself as a kind of selfishness: "The only form of selfishness I can keep is its *sacrificial* form: work. Constant writing will be my atmosphere", we read in a note (Pilinszky 2021, 57; Pilinszky 1995, 47; emphasis in original).

In the context of industrial workers, Simone Weil disapproves of the alienation caused by the separation of thought and action. Simone Weil's idea is to restore the control that man has over matter and machines, so that man will finally know what he is doing. This requires the development of a "faculty of attention" ("*faculté d'attention*") specific to each trade, so that each worker can observe the material being transformed, while a previously unknown truth is revealed to him. In this way, work becomes to the intellect what prayer is to spiritual things. Work, labour, extends the incarnation of God in the world: it dies to itself (weariness, sacrifice, subjection to matter) and rises again (as a "new creation").

"Physical work, although onerous, is not in itself degrading. It is not an art; it is not a science; it is something else, but its value is perfectly equal to that of art and science. For it may likewise contribute to impersonal attention." (Weil 1994, 25.)

The greatness of man, says Simone Weil, is that he can always recreate his life. In my reading, this is what the experiment of *Önéletrajzaim* does. He can recreate what is his. Through scientific and artistic work, he creates his natural life. However, without the others, any of them is empty and futile in itself, he

¹³ Simone Weil arrived in Britain in November 1942. Shortly afterwards, the government-in-exile in London, led by Charles de Gaulle, asked her to write a report on how to reorganise France after the war. This resulted in a social utopia titled *L'Enracinement*.

states in his plan for a university for workers at the turn of 1933–1934. All three activities are based on passive action, attention, and the resulting action (act), restraining the irregular imagination. Fernand Pelloutier, founder of the Bourses du Travail, one of Simone Weil's main sources, wrote in an article in 1898 that what the French worker lacks most is the knowledge of his own misfortune ("*science de son malheur*"). The militant, revolutionary outlook of her first writings subsides in her later writings, and her posthumously published *La condition ouvrière*, inspired by her experience of working in the Renault factory, is not only an example of compassion, but also the understanding, unfolding, and incorporation of the "misfortune" that Pelloutier considered necessary into the Weilian mysticism that was evolving at the time.

Conclusion

Misfortune is not a state of mind, says Simone Weil, but "the crushing of the soul by the mechanical brutality of circumstances" (Weil 1998, 35). Only supernatural love can agree with this, according to the author's repeatedly recurring reflections. The created world is imbued with the possibility of misfortune, only the uncreated is free from it. The three texts in *Önéletrajzaim* present various scenes of misfortune, from alcohol to the alienation of the male-female, as captured in a poem. At the same time, the original plan is comparable in grandeur to the quasi-madness and desire of the Mallarméan book plan. Its formal and editorial audacity, its encounter with the many shards of misfortune, must have been guided by the Weilian thought that says, "We must will to move towards reality; then, believing we find a corpse, we meet an angel who says, 'He is risen'" (ibid., 37).

The concept of attention in *Önéletrajzaim* is based on the attention of the creating person, but does not embrace the whole Weilian social perspective. This can, of course, be explained by the constraints of the time (communism) in which the poet lived inherently within limits. It is also certain that János Pilinszky was not familiar with the entire Weilian oeuvre, and that he was less touched by the actionist Simone Weil, who was socially engaged in education, development and teaching, than by the mystical thinker. There is, however, linguistic evidence of a deep knowledge of Weil's oeuvre in terms of decreated personal attention and necessity, and it is these two optics that become the defining creative principles in *Önéletrajzaim*.

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Eszter Judit Ozsváth

War of Triangles

Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* [Kurázsi mama és gyermekei] at the National Theatre

According to the Dictionary of the Hungarian Language, the word “kurázsi” means intrepidity, resolute boldness and explicitly “daring” bravery, i.e., a set of virtues that are indispensable for successful survival in times of war. However, this “daring” does not hold water, especially if the object of our empathy and then of our alienation is a woman from the hinterland, namely Anna Fierling, a sutler, better known as Mother Courage. Bertolt Brecht, the author, said that the main message of his play was “[t]hat in wartime the big profits are not made by little people. That war, which is a continuation of business by other means, makes human virtues fatal even to their possessors. That no sacrifice is too great for the struggle against war.”¹ It was in this Brechtian spirit that on 12 January 2024 the National Theatre premiered *Mother Courage and Her Children*, directed by the world-renowned Greek theatre director Theodoros Terzopoulos, with Nelli Szűcs's benefit performance in a mystery play of a Godless religious war, in the role of the protagonist who, dressed in a flamenco dress, exchanges morality for profit.

Since the basic conflicts of the drama are concentrated in the image of a woman who wants to profit from the war while surviving and perhaps wishing the war to end, it is important to note that Terzopoulos returned to Hungary to stage *Mother Courage* directly because he had promised the title role to Nelli Szűcs. Brecht's drama originally premiered on 19 April 1941 at the Schauspielhaus in Zurich, and in 1961, a few years after Brecht's death, it was made into a film,

¹ Dalos, László. 1958. “Kurázsi mama közeleg...” *Film–Színház–Muzsika* 1: 6–7.

Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder, in which Brecht's widow, Helene Weigel played Mother Courage. Later, famous actresses such as Meryl Streep, Diana Rigg, Anne Bancroft and Fiona Shaw took on the role of the sutler. Before 1956, of Brecht's works, only the Vígszínház premiere of *The Threepenny Opera* took place in Hungary in 1930, only to be performed again in 1945, in the Solti György Hall of the Music Academy, directed by András Rácz. The first premiere of *Mother Courage and Her Children* (at that time still titled *Courage*, although the options *Mother Courage/Braveness* had already been considered for the title without mentioning the children) was held on 24 January 1958 at the Madách Theatre, directed by Géza Pártos, with Manyi Kiss in the title role. Later, the title role was played by great actresses, including Irén Psota² (Madách Theatre, Budapest, 1973), Éva Olsavszky (Csiky Gergely Theatre, Kaposvár, 1973), Eszter Szakács (Hevesi Sándor Theatre, Zalaegerszeg, 1985), Krisztina Peremartoni (Ódry Stage, Budapest, 1988), Kati Egri (Hevesi Sándor Theatre, Zalaegerszeg, 1999), Erzsébet Kútvölgyi (Vígszínház, Budapest, 2000), Eszter Vörös (Katona József Theatre, Kecskemét, 2004), and Kati Lázár³ (Csiky Gergely Theatre, Kaposvár, 1989)—with the latter's leading role being a real curiosity, since this 1989 Kaposvár production by Péter Gothár set the basic Brechtian situation in the Second World War. The play was also staged with a special solution in 1991 in the Novi Sad Theatre⁴ by Lajos Soltis, quadrupling Mother Courage's character, i.e., dividing the role among four actresses (Irén Ábrahám, Katalin Ladik, Ibi Romhányi and Júlia N. Kiss). A similar multiplication of the protagonist characterised Sándor Zsótér's second *Mother Courage* production, since this 2006 production at the University of Theatre and Film Arts, titled *Mother K*, had three Mothers Courage appearing on stage, under the names K1, K2 and K3 (Nóra Diána Takács, Diána Magdolna Kiss, Hella Roszik), in a probable intent to utilise a Brechtian alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*).

2 Before Psota had matured into the role of Mother Courage by 1973, in the 1958 Hungarian premiere she played Katrin, the mute daughter, with Manyi Kiss as Mother. Psota's Katrin was Anna Nagy, while the two sons of Mother Courage were played by János Papp (Eilif) and Miklós Kalocsay (Schweizerkas). A special feature of the 1973 production was the oak tree, symbolic of the vulnerability of the little man, from which the leaves almost completely disappeared by the end of the performance—as did the suspicion of the audience that Mother Courage was responsible for all that she was destined.

3 Alongside Kati Lázár as Mother Courage, Judit Pogány played Katrin.

4 A few days before the premiere in Novi Sad, a private theatre in Belgrade also performed *Mother Courage and Her Children*, with some dramaturgical alterations, as they wrote Brecht himself and his wife Helene Weigel into the framework of the performance.



Picture 1. Ágota Szilágyi, Raul Gabriel Ionescu, Bence János Bognár, Benjámín Dominik Kerék, Dániel Séra, Tamás Jakab, Péter Juhász, Márk Wettstein and in the foreground Roland Bordás in National Theatre's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, January 10, 2024 (Photo: Eöri Szabó Zsolt)

The primary aim of this kind of alienation is for spectators not to identify emotionally with the characters, but to distance themselves from them and think critically about what they see, thus interpreting war and the way people are treated in a given social and political context. As Terzopoulos believes, “[t]oday we are again living through a series of wars, which, for the first twenty-

four hours of their outbreak, shock us, shake us, then we forget about them and no longer care. The aim of this production is to help sustain remembrance in a system whose machinery is entirely based on forgetting. Hybrid warfare goes hand in hand with oblivion, so it is imperative that we all become aware and see what is happening around us, how far man has devolved, and what human nature is capable of".⁵ Terzopoulos has previously directed Brecht's work, first at the National Theatre of Northern Greece in 1983 and most recently seven years ago at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, the memory of which permeates the black and red stage design at the Nemzeti (Hungarian National Theatre), the wagon-coffin, the spectacle of Kattrin colouring with red paint in her nightgown and boots, dyed red, and the rhythmic movements changing from scene to scene of the soldiers marching diagonally across the stage, dividing it into two triangles. While *Mother Courage* in the St Petersburg production was at the same time less rambunctious, but much older and more demonic, and her children were also captured by older soldiers (the soldiers of the National Theatre are students of the Rippl-Rónai Faculty of Arts of Szent István University, majoring in acting), the knives, military tunics, ugly dolls, books and pictures⁶ hanging⁷ in the back of the stage are already adapted not only to the historical context of Hungary but also to a "more intimate" *Mother Courage* production compared to the one in St Petersburg. Beyond the grand-stage production, it is practically a chamber piece, and would be better suited as a valid and shocking drama in its own right, without stylisation, in addition to the expressive excess of the conflict tableaux and their static cacophony of meaning.

Apart from the coffin-shaped wagon and the red, perhaps blood-soaked banknotes with a female portrait bearing resemblance to Elizabeth II, the starkly stripped-down stage set, devoid of utilitarian objects, evokes the nihilism of war, in which there are no ruins to tear down or repurposed, and in which only the military presence and the repetitions of violent motifs symbolise

5 Lukácsy, György. 2023. "Az ember mint tőzsdei áru – Theodórosz Terzopulosz a Kurázsi mamáról, az árulások hasznáról, a pénz fétiséről és a színészek lelkéről". *Nemzeti Magazin* XI, 4: 8–11.

6 The performance features portraits from 1956, courtesy of the VERITAS Historical Research Institute and Archives.

7 Terzopoulos' visual world is characterised by a multitude of symbolic objects hanging in the background with the basic function of multiplying and magnifying the object(s) displayed on the stage, thus demonstrating the infinite possible variations in the outcome of a situation (for example, in *The Bacchae*, also presented at the National Theatre in 2022, Terzopoulos used bottles containing red liquid, resembling wine sampling thief-tubes and/or infusion bags).



Picture 2. Ádám Schnell, Nelli Szűcs and József Varga in National Theatre's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, January 10, 2024 (Photo: Eöri Szabó Zsolt)

everything that is happening in the “outside world”. The scenes with circus-like processions combined with elements of movement theatre, the money thrown as confetti, and the whole *danse macabre* is united—as if by a ringmaster—by the character of Death/Narrator, played by Roland Bordás,⁸ who grins devilishly at the front of the stage or in the orchestra pit. Although the time of the stage events passes, it remains unchanged, and it is not until the very end of the performance that the audience breaks out of the tense monotony with the silent lamentations of the Second Peasant Woman (Mari Nagy), forced to watch her son being tortured. All this is the result of a workshop based on Terzopoulos’s method of exploration, experimentation and self-awareness, focusing on elementary concepts such as *breath*, *energy* and *time* as pillars of the physical and scenic presence of the actor’s (body). It is the combination of these components that is the basis of Terzopoulos’ method, summarised

⁸ His character is an exciting choice, as Bordás played the role of Dionysus in *The Bacchantes*.

in his book *Dionüszosz visszatérése* (The Return of Dionysos) published by the University of Theatre and Film Arts in 2023. During the training sessions mentioned in the book, the actor's body is divided into "triangles" with energy flowing across them, and although Terzopoulos perfected his exercises in the context of staging ancient drama, they are also reflected in the performance of the actors in *Mother Courage*. Nelli Szűcs's modern, pantomime-painted sutler is depicted as a flamenco dancer holding her bent arms towards the sky, wearing a military belt pouch. It is only in a "formation" that she can coexist on the stage with her children, Eiliff (Péter Herczeg), schematised into a "robot", and the manipulable Schweizerkas (whose name is shortened to Stüsszi in other Hungarian performances, played here by József Kovács S), as well as Katrin (Anna Gizella Kiss, student), who has been diminished into an angel-like figure, and Mother Courage's cynical figure, who crosses moral boundaries, seems closer to the character of Death or Yvette,⁹ the prostitute (Anita Polyák, student). In the escalating aggression of the war, the image of the trio of children left to their own devices is replaced by this trio of profit-seekers, and alongside them, the three characters with the most lines and equally painted faces are present as another "triangle": Mother Courage, the sexually overheated, petty Priest (Ádám Schnell) and the clodhopping Cook (József Varga), who is eager to make profit.

An excellent example of Brechtian alienation is also associated with these figures. In the third scene of the drama, the Cook and the Priest are discussing the politics of the Thirty Years' War with Mother Courage. The cook already strikes a critical note here, cleverly detecting the ironic overtones of the priest's remarks. Alienation in this episode, in fact, is originally present as a means of spatial organisation, as Brecht places the three characters (or one of the triangles) behind Mama Courage's wagon. Simultaneously Katrin tries on Yvette's red hat and shoes. Here Brecht originally moves the trio with Mother Courage behind the wagon to prevent the spectator from identifying with their argument, while Terzopoulos places them in the focus, and Katrin and Yvette's interactions (which in this version are more of mutual sympathy) take place either offstage or on the edge of the stage. This 'shift of focus' also shows how the staging focuses on a kind of critique of the system of capitalism, rather than on an

9 The main symbol of Yvette's monetised sexuality is her red clothing, especially her red stilettos, which were also used in a similarly prominent way to emphasise essential femininity in Silviu Purcărete's *Az ember tragédiája* (The Tragedy of Man, 2021), where the red patent-leather stilettos were the accessory of the ever-present Eve.



Picture 3. Nelli Szűcs in National Theatre's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, January 10, 2024 (Photo: Eöri Szabó Zsolt)

individual's 'quest' (Katrin, influenced by Yvette, is trying out her femininity, once this is not how her own mother makes "profit" from it in the war).

The big red cross, a symbol on the poster of the performance, is also a recurring symbol of the performance. It is a fascinating addition, since the war, waged for religious motives, has lost all religious qualities, and its participants are engaged in a kind of godless crusade for material goods. Accordingly, the twelve scenes of the drama are not separated by psalms, but by the somewhat off-pitch songs also used in the original Brechtian concept. However, instead of accompanying the plot or being integrated into the dramatic illusion, music in Brecht's theatre takes on a reality of its own, sometimes completely separated from the other elements of the play. This placing of music in its own reality breaks the dramatic illusion, breaking it down into its components. The events are accompanied throughout by Paul Dessau's classical melodies, composed for the play, in live musical form, with the only melody that fits the illusion, a lament sung at the end of the performance by Theodoros Terzopoulos.

The National Theatre's 2024 production of *Mother Courage and Her Children*, while not offering a way out of the labyrinth of war horrors, does not attempt to moralize the story of the mother who ultimately pays the highest possible price. It is an objective and long war, also drawn out on stage, broken down into short revolutions, with perhaps the most frightening thing about the whole grotesque pantomime being its episodic, stale topicality. Brecht's original intention was to reflect upon the tragic duality of war and the ensuing social injustices, and also to draw the audience's attention to the general failings of human nature, which not only cause physical destruction but also result in moral and ethical loss, and as Miklós Szinétár once pointed out, "Brecht's plays are more successful than the theories on which he based them".¹⁰

¹⁰ Szinétár, Miklós. 1958. "Brecht és a modern színház". *Nagyvilág* 10: 1538–1539.

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