

*Im Hotel in Berlin unwirklicher Hauptstadt
Mein Blick aus dem Fenster fällt
Auf den Mercedesstern
Der sich im Nachthimmel dreht melancholisch
Über dem Zahngold von Auschwitz und andere Filialen
Der Deutschen Bank auf dem Europacenter
Europa Der Stier ist geschlachtet das Fleisch
Fault auf der Zunge der Fortschritt lässt keine Kuh aus
Götter werden dich nicht mehr besuchen
Was dir bleibt ist das Ach der Alkmene
Und der Gestank von brennendem Fleisch den täglich
Von deinen Rändern der landlose Wind dir zuträgt
Und manchmal aus den Kellern deines Wohlstands*

HEINER MÜLLER, *Ajax zum Beispiel* (1994)

Aufruf / Call for papers / Appel à communications

Conference organised as part of the "Crisis and Creation" project

Staging Europe – Europe on stage

TU –Nantes (Théâtre Universitaire) / Université de Nantes

16-17 February 2018

Through what kinds of narrations, symbols and images do the performing arts represent Europe today? How do the different conceptions of Europe coexist on stage? Does the artistic confrontation with Europe and its boundaries contribute to a redefinition of this "territory" or "space"? Is the mediation of European issues via the theatre able to reinforce political consciousness? Can it become the starting point for a new form of social cohesion? What kind of linguistic policy can best respond to the needs of the performing arts? How can we approach the special challenge of multilingual theatre? What are the resemblances and what are the differences between the scientific and the artistic approaches to the broad field that is "Europe"? What could be the modes of cooperation between artists and academics in terms of research, of teaching and transmission at a European level? What are the perspectives for such methodological dialogue?

What does « Europe » mean to us?

In the field of humanities, a deeper understanding of what "Europe" means leads to the old reflex of going back to its supposed etymology. In this respect, however, linguistic roots are uncertain. On the one hand, "Europe" could be related to the assyrian *ereb*, which signifies "dark," "obscure" or "dawn"—in a sense, the term "Occident" already covers this etymology. On the other hand, we could also follow Jean-Luc Nancy and his idea of a specifically Greek origin. Nancy suggests that a combination of *eurys* ("large," "wide," "far") and *óps* ("vision") resulted in *europè* (a kind of "far-sight"). Two similar yet different points of view on the subcontinent—two visions which seem to share a certain vagueness and ambiguity. Eventually the myth of the princess Europe will guide us further in our quest. Mentioned for the first time by Homer in the 7th century B.C., in the seventh song of the *Iliad*, the tale of the abduction of the beautiful Phoenician is usually known in Ovid's version. But other interpreters also have their share in the transmission of this founding myth. Let us quickly summarize the main events: according to the Roman poet, Zeus or Jupiter fell in love with the beautiful Europe, daughter of Agenor, who at the time ruled over a kingdom which represented the territory currently known as Syria and Libya. Turning himself into a white bull in the herd of cattle, he approached his beloved who spent her time on the beach next to their pasture. By his gentle behaviour the bull succeeded in gaining the young woman's confidence so that she got on his back. As soon as he had secured her there, the bull dashed into the sea and went west, abducting the princess to the island of Crete, where, after sexual intercourse with Zeus (rape?), she gave birth to three boys. A long time after this divine affair, Europe married Asterios and ended her days in exile. Her destiny is echoed by those who were close to her. All her sons without exception became founders of cities, either in

Crete or during their journeys. And the same goes for her brothers, who also became founders of cities and tribes during their long search for their lost sister. Read in this manner, the myth triggers a certain number of associations. The apparently “noble” Europe is first of all associated with desire and transgression (moral, physical, territorial, etc.). In addition, we relate her to political will and action, to movement and migration, but also to cultural transfers. Finally, the myth underlines the idea of some kinship between the peoples of Europe.¹ Raising this question of a “European” identity that would be shared by all leads us to the multiple interpretations and representations of Europe that have emerged in the past centuries. For some, the image of Europe is mapped in the features of a naked white female body. Others entertain the ideas of an “old continent,” of the “cradle of civilisation,” which implies proselytizing. Some faithfully define Europe as the sum of its national cultures according to the official motto “*in varietate concordia*.” Some consider Europe emerged from a common cultural heritage. Others just see Europe as the expression of a political and economic compromise, which manifests itself most evidently through the existence of a common European currency. And some still support the utopian idea expressed by Friedrich Schiller in his ode *To Joy* :

“Your magic binds again
What convention strictly divides;
All people become brothers,
Where your gentle wing abides.”

The continent as we know it, as we experience it every day, is of course the result of a series of historical, political, economical, cultural and conceptual evolutions. Nevertheless, these days we constantly face the territorial aspect of what Jacques Delors once called an “unidentified political object”. Described by the ancient Greeks as a “foreign land,” Europe has unremittingly questioned its outline, its limits. The “Fortress Europe”, that is to say the idea of internal unity at the expense of isolation from the outside, and the long debate about the Schengen or Amsterdam agreements still testify to this tendency today. According to the historian Franco Cardini, Europe was even born in the margins of the Roman *limes*, north of the *pars Occidentis*, in an overflowing of itself; and only subsequently consolidated itself in the remembrance of its ancient historical roots through several movements of Renaissance.² Thus Europe seems to be the product of a disintegration, of an overcoming, and of its commemoration—a history of destruction and violence, as W.G. Sebald would have probably pointed out. In the face of the events that shaped the last century, this point of view seems to be inevitable. Indeed, it must have been European history above any other that Walter Benjamin had in mind when he wrote his essay *On the Concept of History*, centred on the allegory of the angel of history inspired by a painting from Paul Klee:

“This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.”³

¹ Elisabeth Tropper, « Tanz um den weißen Stier : Europa und das Theater der Gegenwart », in : Natalie Bloch, Dieter Heimböckel, Elisabeth Tropper (hg.), *Vorstellung Europa.Performing Europe. Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf Europa im Theater der Gegenwart*, Berlin, TdZ 2017, p. 10-26.

² Franco Cardini, « La construction de l'identité européenne » in : Julia Kristeva et Frédéric Ogée (éds.), *Europe des cultures et culture européenne : communauté et diversité*, Paris, Hachette 2008, p. 46.

³ Walter Benjamin, *Sur le concept de l'histoire*, IX, 1940, Paris, Gallimard Folio/Essai 2000, p. 434. (Traduction personnelle)

The term “catastrophe,” as employed here by Benjamin, used to belong to the realm of theatre until the 18th century. It is the subject of shows, a dramatic object, the basis for narrations and comments that affect our collective memories. This remembrance, however, has its limits: lately the “normalisation of catastrophes” has led to the progressive disappearance of what is no longer considered an event, and even if these “catastrophes” are echoed in the media, they have long ceased to make headlines.

Europe—a challenge for the theatre

Here starts the challenge for the theatre, which is itself part of this history, a product of a permanent inter- and intra-continental exchange, a place for debates and narrations. At the same time, theatre endlessly contributes to the writing of this history. The recent confrontation with this heritage, with this responsibility, manifests itself in different manners. One manner of responding to this challenge is to reinterpret the repertoire—the ancient and classical plays—and to adapt them to contemporary contexts. One can also identify strategies of re-appropriation of European history by means of fictional or documentary theatre, which demands more attention from the audience and from the academic community. In this context the stage gradually becomes a kind of laboratory where performers even leave the spatial limits of the stage itself with the aim of exploring the external frontiers of that *terra constructa*, as can be observed with the performing group “Zentrum für politische Schönheit”.⁴ The number of artists working within this kind of new “political theatre” is growing, among other things due to the multiplication of political crises after the financial crisis in 2007/2008. But this observation should not lead us to the conclusion that the academic community is no longer concerned by the question of “Europe and the Theatre.” On the contrary, it is our task to find the answers together. Through what kinds of narrations, symbols and images do the performing arts represent Europe today? How do the different conceptions of Europe coexist on stage? Does the artistic confrontation with Europe and its boundaries contribute to a redefinition of this “territory” or “space”? Is the mediation of European issues via the theatre able to reinforce political consciousness? Can it become the starting point for a new form of social cohesion?

The occasion for students, academics and artists to come together

Such are the questions that may be raised on the occasion of the International Research Workshop “Staging Europe – Europe on stage” that will be held on 16-17 February in Nantes, France. Through conferences, testimonies and artistic contributions, we aim at launching the debate about this “old” couple of “Europe” and the “Theatre”. Taking for granted that theatre is at once a place and a form of mediation, as well as a space for research, we intend to focus especially on its potential to become a gateway, a crossroad, a meeting point for artists, researchers and students. That is the reason why we are already happy and honoured to announce the participation of the performing group „**Birgit Ensemble**“, of the artistic collective „**étranges miroirs**“, as well as that of the German playwright **Konstantin Küspert**. Needless to say, other artistic propositions are also very welcome.

Themes and topics

⁴ <http://www.politicalbeauty.com/mauerfall.html> (Letzter Zugriff 01.08.2017)



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH-WORKSHOP „STAGING EUROPE – EUROPE ON STAGE“ 16/17TH OF FEBRUARY 2018 NANTES / FRANCE

Contemporary trends: What trends exist in the contemporary performing arts concerning the representation of the recent European crisis? What interdependencies between moments of crisis and contemporary creation or production may be identified?

Theatre and history / History of the theatre: What kind of historical representations and ideas about Europe has the theatre produced until now and what lessons may be learnt from them? To what extent is the history of theatre a European history? How should we handle the ephemeral character of the theatrical medium if we want to benefit from its achievements in the future?

Language / Translation / Multilingual theatre: Be it in relation to classical drama or mediation, the questions of language and translation cannot be avoided. What are the translating practices in the theatrical world? What kind of (linguistic) access do theatres offer their audiences? What kind of language policy best responds to the needs of the performing arts? How can we approach the special challenge of multilingual theatre?

Dialogues and transfers: What are the resemblances and what are the differences between the scientific and the artistic approaches to the broad field that is “Europe”? What could be the modes of cooperation between artists and academics in terms of research, of teaching and transmission at a European level? What are the perspectives for such methodological dialogue? What common projects can we imagine?

Theatre as learning context / theatre and didactics: In relation to the idea of an exchange of experiences and practices, we also intend to concentrate on theatre as a learning context. To what extent can theatre become an educational facility? How can we use theatre to improve transmission/mediation? Where are the limits of this kind of method? What experiences are there concerning the acquisition of language, of social patterns, or project-based learning?

Practical information: The International Research Workshop will take place on 16-17 February 2018 in Nantes at the Université de Nantes and at the TU Nantes (Théâtre Universitaire). Accommodation will be provided by the organizer. Depending on the distance and the amount, travelling costs can also be partly reimbursed.

Mode of participation: Applicants are asked to submit their proposals (max. 300 words / languages: English, German, French) via e-mail by 1 December 2017. Notification will be sent by 10 December 2017.

Selection committee:

- Marielle Silhouette (Professor in Performing Arts, Université Paris Nanterre)
- Werner Wögerbauer (Université de Nantes)
- Günter Krause (Université de Nantes)
- Elisabeth Kargl (Université de Nantes),
- Maren Butte (Heinrich Heine Universität Düsseldorf)
- Nolwenn Bihan (TU-Nantes)

Organisation:

- Karsten Forbrig (Université de Nantes), Geneviève Barillier (TU-Nantes), Laetitia Perrin (Université de Nantes / Alliance EUROPA)

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