

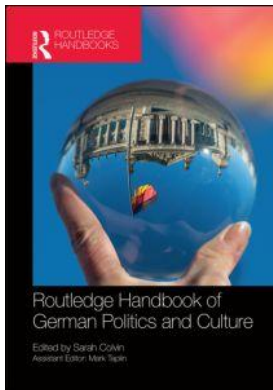
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### **Theatre and diversity in the Berlin Republic**

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# Theatre and diversity in the Berlin Republic

*Christel Weiler*

*Translation: Maud Capelle*

Theatre in Germany plays an essential role in society and public life, often mirroring contemporary conflicts and debates. In post-Wall Germany, the subject of diversity and theatre needs to be considered with an eye to three different areas: the coexistence of independent and municipal or state theatres; the unification of East and West Germany in 1990; and the question how we conceive of ‘German’ theatre in an increasingly multi-ethnic society. This chapter explores those three areas, and provides some insight into theatre’s place, achievements, and challenges in the Berlin Republic.

You will find a municipal theatre (*Stadttheater*) in almost every German town. Some larger cities number several such institutions, most of them funded by local taxpayers (i.e. by the municipalities). You will also find numerous private theatres, as well as venues funded both by generated income and public subsidies. Berlin’s Schaubühne, and Mühlheim’s Theater an der Ruhr are examples of the latter. Alongside the more traditional theatres, independent venues – such as Kampnagel in Hamburg, the Mousonturm in Frankfurt, or Hebbel am Ufer (HAU) in Berlin – are a key feature of the German theatre landscape. Well beyond the major cities, even in midsize municipalities such as Jena or Marburg, such venues now make it possible for individuals and groups to realise their visions and their ideas.

While German municipal stages, with their resident companies and specific educational mandate, look back on a long history, independent theatre groups are a relatively recent phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> They emerged against the backdrop of the student protests of the 1960s, the gradual establishment of theatre festivals (which drew theatre-makers from abroad to Germany), and the attendant increased exchange of practices, most notably regarding an experimental approach to the body. In this context, a key role was played by Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba, and by the idea, inherent in their work, of theatre as a laboratory. Well known in Germany for their books, both artists brought their performances to the country and organised workshops with their lead actors, giving German audiences the opportunity to learn more about Grotowski’s and Barba’s work.

Every year the *Deutscher Bühnenverein* – the employer association and pressure group for theatres and orchestras – records all existing venues available for the presentation of drama, music, and dance performances. It specifies attendance figures, which plays were staged, how the theatres

are funded, which segments of the population are being addressed, how many people are working at the theatres, and so on. The resulting report provides a statistical overview of developments and shifts in (especially municipal) German theatre. According to those figures, in 2012 Germany numbered a total of around 150 municipal theatres with resident companies, funded by the local authorities. Around 250 additional theatres were supported by various sources such as foundations, private sponsors, and other municipal or state funding programmes.<sup>2</sup> Although it is the association's declared aim to preserve, promote, and develop the unique diversity of the German theatre and orchestra landscape and its contribution to cultural life (Deutscher Bühnenverein, n.d.), it fails to account for independent theatres, which contribute significantly to a complex and multifaceted theatre scene. The interests of independent theatres, especially their demand for fair and adequate support, are represented by the *Bundesverband Freier Theater*.

Germany has an extensive support system for the arts and the humanities, which is also available to independent theatre practitioners. The *Deutsches Informationszentrum Kulturförderung* (or DIZK) lists 260 schemes for the performing arts alone. It shows the main financial backers to be the municipalities, the Fund for the Performing Arts (*Fonds Darstellende Künste*), the German Federal Cultural Foundation (*Kulturstiftung des Bundes*) and, specifically for Berlin, the so-called Capital Cultural Fund (*Hauptstadt Kulturfonds*), as well as private foundations. As a rule, these institutions support special ventures and projects – funding is granted on a temporary basis and applicants compete for a share of available funds. Accordingly, the future of independent theatre practitioners is anything but secure. For each new project they must find not only financial backing but also a venue, technical equipment, in short the whole production apparatus required to stage a performance. The most recent attempt to provide a secure economic foundation for theatre work is 'crowd funding', a web-based funding model that has been practised with varying degrees of success.<sup>3</sup>

Even though their economic situation differs significantly from municipal and private theatres, independent theatre practitioners have become powerful and influential cultural players. Independent theatre takes many forms: soloists who organise their work alone; collectives that have been collaborating for several years without being tied to one single establishment (such as the groups SheShePop and Showcase Beat Le Mot); production communities that form around a stage director for a limited period of time, dissolving when the project comes to an end, as in the work of stage direction team Rimini Protokoll; and venues such as Kampnagel in Hamburg, the Mousonturm in Frankfurt, Forum Freies Theater in Düsseldorf, or the Theaterhaus Jena. The independent scene contributes a lot to innovation in German-speaking theatre in general; and it has a significant impact abroad, as it very often serves as cultural ambassador for Germany's Goethe Instituts.

During the 1970s the noble institution of the municipal theatre could still be distinguished clearly from independent theatre, but today the situation is less clear-cut. Boundaries have blurred as theatre's variety and plurality have grown. One sign of this new state of affairs is that the independent scene now has a place in Berlin's annual festival of theatre, the *Theatertreffen*. Looking at the performances staged during the 2012 festival, Barbara Burckhardt (2012) writes: 'in German theatre a structural change is taking place that has aesthetic consequences and whose end is not yet in sight.'

In the following, the term 'theatre' encompasses not only conventional theatre, but also musical theatre, dance, and all experimental forms such as performances that blur the line between theatre and the visual arts. It refers to the traditional city and state theatre system as well as to the independent theatre scene with its new forms of representation, production, and dissemination.

## Diversity and the public sphere

Germany has theatres for children, for the elderly, for dance enthusiasts, as well as for the traditional educated middle classes (*Bildungsbürgertum*) interested in the conventional dramatic canon and for urban intellectuals who prefer post-dramatic work. There is theatre that specifically addresses the concerns of women and theatre that deals with migration issues. Theatre aims to entertain, to unsettle, to question or indeed confirm commonly accepted values. There is theatre that meets the desire for audience participation, takes to the streets, peeks into courtyards, and plays in living rooms, churches, or galleries. There is dance and singing, puppets are used and music is played, people discuss and argue. Theatres have long ceased to be places that merely make stages available for plays; they have become forums for discussion, for experimentation, for exchange, and for encounters with the audience. There seems to be no limit to the variety and mix of formats and genres, and to the audience's heterogeneity.

The complex plurality of the performing arts plays an important role in and for Germany's public sphere. In a talk given in May 2010, the sociologist Dirk Baecker (quoted in Schmidt 2013) elaborated on the reflexivity of the institution and enthusiastically called the institution of the theatre 'the ideal form to give shape to the observation of man by man, and thus reintroduce second-order observation in society and there observe society's seduction and contagion, its risks and dangers'<sup>4</sup> ('die Form schlechthin, um der Beobachtung des Menschen durch den Menschen selbst eine Form zu geben und so die Beobachtung zweiter Ordnung in die Gesellschaft wieder einzuführen und dort auf ihre Verführung und Ansteckung, ihre Risiken und Gefahren hin zu beobachten'). For non-German readers this might sound exorbitant, but this second-order observation manifests itself in the specialist journals for German-language theatre such as *Theater heute*, *Theater der Zeit*, *Die Bühne*, *Der Spielplan*, *Double*, *IXYPSILONZETT*, *Opernwelt*, or *Tanz*. These provide outlets for writing and reflecting on the forms and functions of conventional theatre, of children's and youth theatre, of puppet, figure, or object theatre; for highlighting the connections to other arts; for reporting on the filling of leading positions; for feting new discoveries; for spreading gossip and scandals; and last but not least, for regularly raising the question of cui bono. The web portal *Nachtkritik* not only reports daily on premieres taking place in small and large cities, but also takes up politically relevant debates connected to theatre and invites its readers to join the discussion. This is another format in which the 'observation of man by man' is practised and takes effect, using theatrical performances as its starting point.

## Berlin – a historical perspective

This chapter has so far given a general picture of the wealth and complex diversity of the current theatre system. The focus now narrows to Berlin's varied theatre scene, which for reasons of space, but also for other reasons I will briefly outline, is central to the remainder of the chapter.

Historically speaking, Berlin has played a particular role in the development of German theatre, and more specifically of its aesthetic diversity. Theatre at the turn of the century and in the Weimar Republic was shaped in Berlin by personalities such as Otto Brahm, Bertolt Brecht, Erwin Piscator, and Max Reinhardt. New dramatic forms were presented and established on Berlin's stages. Brahm called for the portrayal of true-to-life stories and established a completely new acting style; Brecht put an end to illusionism and emphasised the constructedness of events taking place on the stage; Piscator used the advent of film as an opportunity to combine visualisation strategies and commentary; and Reinhardt emphasised the festiveness of theatre performances and the magic that can emanate from the stage, defining in yet another way the

relationship with the audience. National Socialism put a brutal end to this diversity. The Nazis exploited theatre for their own interests, forcing many artists to leave the country.

After 1945 and until the fall of the Berlin Wall, energies were focused on rebuilding Germany's theatres and articulating a new aesthetic and political self-conception, also among theatre practitioners. The Berliner Ensemble, under the direction of Bertolt Brecht and after his death Helene Weigel, garnered the greatest international visibility. In the 1960s, the Volksbühne, with Benno Besson at the helm, was another site for experimentation in the city's East. In West Berlin, the Berliner Schaubühne stood out internationally;<sup>5</sup> its director Peter Stein raised the bar for European theatre and gained worldwide recognition. Stein worked with Robert Wilson, at that time a relative unknown, and presented his piece *Death, Destruction & Detroit* to a German audience in 1978. In 1988 Berlin was chosen as European Capital of Culture, and the city was opened up for an aesthetically differentiated and diverse theatre when the Berlin Senate agreed to the enduring use of one specific theatre building for international guest performances: the Hebbel Theater. Nele Hertling, first as general secretary of the Akademie der Künste (Academy of the Arts) and from 1989 as artistic director of the Hebbel Theater, led the way in the internationalisation of Berlin theatre that followed.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 drastically altered the overall situation. More or less overnight, Germany and its theatre landscape underwent a radical change. Suddenly, Berlin had three opera houses (the Deutsche Oper, the Komische Oper, and the Staatsoper) and five large theatre venues (the Volksbühne, the Deutsches Theater, the Berliner Ensemble am Schiffbauerdamm, the Maxim Gorki Theater, and the Schaubühne), all competing for available funds. The list of 'Federal' theatre cities – Frankfurt, Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Düsseldorf, Stuttgart – had to be amended to encompass Leipzig, Jena, Dresden, Weimar, Anklam, and Potsdam. Meanwhile Germany was swept up in a process of transformation that went well beyond its theatre. The cards were reshuffled and a new era began, bringing profound social changes. Not only did the 'rich' west pledge to support financially the 'poor' east, it also became apparent that the country's two halves had evolved very differently over the previous 40 years and that at least two – if not more – 'German (hi)stories' were now rubbing up against each other.

With the fall of the Wall on 9 November 1989, the Bonn Republic was set to become the Berlin Republic. Berlin's official designation as the new capital took place in 1990, and in 1999 the government moved to Berlin. In a publication of the Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung (German Federal Agency for Civic Education), Manfred Görtemaker (2009: 9) identifies as the essential difference between the two republics 'the novelty of the political, economic, social, and cultural environment in which the German Federal Republic has been operating since 1989–90' ('die Neuartigkeit des politischen, ökonomischen, gesellschaftlichen und kulturellen Umfeldes, in dem die Bundesrepublik seit 1989/90 agiert'). With Berlin as capital, the Federal government, using national (not local) taxpayers' money, established the Capital Cultural Fund (*Hauptstadtkulturfonds* or HKF) to support culture specifically in Berlin. To date, the fund has allocated a total of €126.3 million. Support is given to projects in the fields of conventional theatre, dance, music, the visual arts, media art, and performance. The institution's website (*Hauptstadtkulturfonds*, n.d.) describes what seems to be a vision for Berlin as Germany's representative city of culture: 'Projects supported by the HKF make up a substantial part of what Berlin currently stands for as an international cultural metropolis' ('Die durch den HKF geförderten Projekte machen einen gewichtigen Teil dessen aus, wofür Berlin als internationale Kulturmetropole heute steht'). Such funds have meant that theatre in Berlin, in contrast to large parts of the country, has been able to develop in remarkably varied ways. Not only the success of the 'alternative' venues such as the Ballhaus Naunynstraße, Sophiensäle, Radialsystem V, or Dock 11,

but many well-attended exhibitions, music events, and theatre festivals would have been inconceivable without this support.

Berlin, then, has a very particular status in cultural life and policy. The multi-ethnic capital is where the issues and social conflicts that coexist with aesthetic diversity are most clearly visible. The new frameworks for political and cultural life in Germany are most vividly noticeable there, and while the special funds available mean that conditions in Berlin are not representative of the German theatre scene, the capital remains a point of reference for theatres in other parts of the country. The *Theatertreffen*, for example, established in the 1960s, still takes place annually in Berlin, and presents to a critically demanding Berlin audience the 10 'best' performances from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Success at the festival opens many doors.

### The new frameworks

With the *Wende*, eastern and western parts of the city became equally accessible to its citizens and presented themselves in all their differences: differences in the architecture, in the clothes, in the names given everyday objects, and especially in the sudden attractiveness of certain neighbourhoods (*Kieze*) such as Prenzlauer Berg or Mitte in the eyes of tourists and art pilgrims from all over the world.

Berlin's inhabitants became reacquainted with their city at the same time as they experienced its rapid transformation. Shops opened and had disappeared one month later, streets were given new names, and memories of the era of repression in the east were erased as Berlin became a party town and a magnet for tourists from all over the world. The Wall was sold piece by piece, and today its remains are displayed in Berlin courtyards as expensive artworks. The eastern part of the city was populated by west Germans, and many former residents of East Berlin moved away because they could no longer afford the rent.

The altered economic situation, especially the generous funding of cultural activities, meant that Berlin drew creative types and artists. Referring to a *bon mot* of Klaus Wowereit (Mayor of Berlin 2001–14), by which Berlin is 'poor but sexy', Ulrich Gutmair (n.d.) has described its transformation after the fall of the Wall:

As a matter of fact, the contradiction between Berlin's economic reality and its image cannot be described any more succinctly. Compared to most other large German cities, it is a poor city. Nevertheless, since the fall of the Wall, Berlin has evolved into one of the most culturally productive cities in the world. Berlin is famous for its club scene and for the number of musicians, DJs, and visual artists who live here. Hundreds of galleries try to sell art to collectors who are as keen to visit the city as are young tourists from all over the world.

(In der Tat lässt sich der Widerspruch zwischen der ökonomischen Realität und dem Image, das Berlin prägt, nicht knapper charakterisieren. Berlin ist im Vergleich zu den meisten anderen Großstädten Deutschlands eine arme Stadt. Dennoch hat sich Berlin seit der Maueröffnung zu einer der kulturell produktivsten Städte der Welt entwickelt. Berlin ist berühmt für seine Clubszene und die große Zahl der hier lebenden Musiker, DJs und bildenden Künstler. Hunderte von Galerien versuchen Kunst an Sammler zu verkaufen, die ebenso gern die Stadt besuchen wie junge Touristen aus der ganzen Welt.)

It was clear well before the fall of the Berlin Wall that the East was home to theatre practitioners – directors and playwrights with great artistic potential – whose work did not conform to the politics of the regime under which they were living. Heiner Müller, Einar Schleaf, Volker Braun,

B.K. Tragelehn, and Christoph Hein used the stage to create space for a different view of the country. Twenty years after the event, Tobi Müller (2009), writing in *Die Welt* of the subversive potential inherent in theatre, went so far as to suggest that it was the theatres that made the fall of the Wall possible. Certainly, subtle and various forces of resistance came together, which in the end led to Germany's reunification. Theatre was one of them. As early as 1989, a West German festival of new writing called the Heidelberger Stückemarkt revealed that the East was no theatrical desert. The organisers invited theatres from Potsdam, Anklam, Berlin, and Weimar, and thus the West German audience could see with their own eyes how vividly theatre had developed in the East. Its strengths and achievements simply had to be recognised and honoured. Thomas Irmer and Matthias Schmidt were the first German scholars and journalists to document this: their joint work *Die Bühnenrepublik* (The Republic of the Stage) was broadcast nationwide on television in 2003 and is also available in book form.

Under the directorship of Frank Castorf, the Volksbühne Ost (so named to distinguish it from the homonymous venue in the west of the city) has been experiencing a formidable revival since 1992. This success has been due on the one hand to the director's stimulating adaptations of prose texts for the stage, on the other to a style of clever dramaturgy and overall programme design that has become a model and inspiration for other theatres, including the Schaubühne. Castorf's model involves expanding the programme to include discussions, readings, and music performances, collaboration with visual artists and universities, and turning the theatre building into a space able to accommodate a multiplicity of events and encounters. At the Volksbühne, former dramaturges Matthias Lilienthal and Carl Hegemann must take credit for beginning the process of aesthetic diversification, a process continued and enhanced by Christoph Schlingensiefel's work as a director at the same venue between 1993 and 2006.

With Thomas Langhoff and later Bernd Wilms, the Deutsches Theater, which under the East German dictatorship had also served to house political events, regained its reputation as one of the leading Berlin stages. It garnered special attention with a venue called Baracke, where director Thomas Ostermeier's career was launched with the staging of Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*. Not long after this remarkable directing debut Ostermeier became Andrea Breth's successor as director of the Schaubühne. At the Berliner Ensemble, Heiner Müller, Fritz Marquardt, Matthias Langhoff, Peter Palitzsch, and Peter Zadek briefly shared the position of director, which Heiner Müller then held alone until his death in 1995. Compared with other establishments, the Maxim Gorki Theater initially struggled to develop a profile. Bernd Wilms used it as a springboard to the Deutsches Theater, and Armin Petras attempted to put his stamp on it as both playwright and director, writing and staging mainly Berlin-related stories. Wilms's staging of Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* in 1999, featuring the actor Ben Becker, caused a major stir because of Becker's popularity as a TV star. Since November 2013, the Maxim Gorki Theater with Shermin Langhoff as director has been breaking new ground.<sup>6</sup>

Since the fall of the Wall, venues in the city's east such as the Volksbühne Ost and the Deutsches Theater have led the development of innovative aesthetic practices. Castorf's stagings of plays adapted from novels have become a model for other directors. René Pollesch, a member of Castorf's company, playwright and director in one, not only involved his actors in the co-creation of dramatic texts, but has developed the idea of post-dramatic theatre: Pollesch's plays depart from classical modes of dialogic representation, and instead offer actors the opportunity to engage in different manners of speaking – at breakneck speed, shouting, in collaboration with the prompter, and so on. Where Castorf and Pollesch seem to cultivate a more abrasive, impure aesthetics on stage, Michael Thalheimer at the Deutsches Theater tests the limits of formalism and purity. Together with his stage designer Olaf Altmann he attempts to expose the fundamental structures of both space and characters. In 2013 Thalheimer moved from the



Deutsches Theater to the Schaubühne (in the former West Berlin), where he now works alongside Ostermeier, who is given credit for introducing the complete works of Sarah Kane to a German audience.

Two venues have been particularly important in the process of internationalisation: the former Hebbel Theater, and the Haus der Kulturen der Welt. Both provided significant markers for diversity. In light of Berlin's present global reputation it seems unimaginable that Berlin audiences were introduced to the work of artists from abroad only in the late 1980s. Nele Hertling (as artistic director of the Hebbel Theater between 1989 and 2003) and her collaborators initiated Berlin's evolution into an internationally visible and recognised city of theatre and (especially) dance. The entire European and American dance avant-garde have been guest performers at the Hebbel Theater: Robert Wilson, the Wooster Group, Jan Fabre, the Belgian Needcompany, and Richard Foreman all won recognition in Germany through the efforts of this venue in the heart of Kreuzberg. The Haus der Kulturen der Welt, established in 1989, has contributed decisively to diversifying the German vision of theatre (and of the arts in general); it is under the supervision of a special agency of the Federal government (Kulturveranstaltungen des Bundes in Berlin GmbH) that works on behalf of cultural concerns and, more particularly, cultural exchange. Since it operates well beyond the field of theatre, however, its contribution to establishing cultural and aesthetic diversity should be considered separately.

All these venues have expanded their programmes to include discussions, talks, and an educational programme that reaches out particularly to schools and to university students. Each has stages that can accommodate varying audience sizes and provide space for the presentation of both the great tragedies and experimental projects. But the Hebbel Theater has a very particular history, which is worth considering in greater detail below.

### **Aesthetic and social diversity: the Theater Hebbel am Ufer/HAU**

Perhaps the most significant impulse towards a different notion of aesthetic and social diversity in theatre emanated from the former Hebbel Theater, now known as the HAU Theater. Matthias Lilienthal took on its artistic direction in 2003, offering in the first instance a continuation of what he had already successfully practised as Frank Castorf's dramaturge at the Volksbühne: the diversification of the programme via the integration of public discussions, the attempt to turn the theatre into a site of encounter, the transgression of boundaries between genres, and thus an expansion of the very notion of theatre.

Lilienthal revolutionised Berlin theatre between 2003 and 2012. He drew in a new audience and created new formats to challenge theatregoers' perceptions of space and time. He has successfully questioned labels such as 'Polish theatre', 'Japanese' theatre, and 'Latin American' theatre by grouping performances from around the world thematically (rather than by national origin); journalist Christine Wahl (2012) observed: 'One had barely formed the feeling of having nailed an alleged truth about the Polish, Latin American, or Japanese status quo, and already it was being at least put into perspective by the next performance.' Lilienthal was interested in binding certain artists to his establishment, and in accompanying and advancing their development in the long term. He supported the directing collective Rimini Protokoll, the director Hans-Werner Kroesinger, the company SheShePop, as well as Tamer Yiğit and Branka Prlić in this way (Wahl 2012). The distinctiveness of this theatre was and is recognised both in Germany and abroad:<sup>7</sup> according to Robert Berkowitz (2013), the HAU under Lilienthal's direction was 'one of the largest, best funded, and [most] risk-taking performance theatre complexes in the world'.



One key element in the HAU's success was that in its production pace, thematic sequence, and the variety of formats it was perfectly aligned with the times. Diversity at the HAU meant reacting to plurality in society with plurality in theatre, accepting a challenge, not viewing entertainment and critical thought as contradictions, and not shying away from the fact that the world is complex and requires you to make your way through the labyrinth while retaining your critical faculties. For ten years, the HAU was Berlin's intellectually most ambitious theatre, and Lilienthal's programme drew attention both to imbalances in the composition of his audience and to the fact that the majority of established theatre artists are white – that even in a multi-ethnic city such as Berlin, theatre is still a quintessentially white institution. Using aesthetic diversity, Lilienthal pointed towards issues linked to social diversity.

### Another kind of diversity

In 2006 Lilienthal co-organised the festival 'Beyond Belonging' for the first time, with Shermin Langhoff as its curator. 'Beyond Belonging' opened up the stage for stories linked to Berlin's vibrant migrant culture: families' everyday reality, children's desire for a future, street life, being foreign in Berlin. The festival presented a hip hop spectacle that highlighted some of the recesses of Berlin everyday life, and showcased Berlin-based artists with a migration background who had previously enjoyed little or no visibility.<sup>8</sup> 'Beyond Belonging' took place again in 2007 and was again curated by Shermin Langhoff, but this time it highlighted the life of migrant workers more broadly. Guest performances from Istanbul showcased facets of the Berlin-Istanbul axis. In video installations, in films, and above all in musical performances, a rich artistic culture which so far had been hidden could now be experienced as an integral part of Berlin life. The theatre directors, authors, and playwrights Tamer Yiğit, Neco Çelik, Nurkan Erpulat, and Hakan Savaş Mican made their debut at these two festivals.

In 2008 Shermin Langhoff was named artistic director of the theatre Ballhaus Naunynstrasse, whose reputation now reaches well beyond Germany. The theatre is located in the heart of the Berlin district of Kreuzberg, whose residents mainly belong to Berlin's Turkish- and Arabic-speaking communities. It has set itself the task of producing 'post-migrant' theatre: the artists involved have their roots in migrant families, but they themselves have long been Berlin residents, and they view themselves as part of 'majority' society. Shermin Langhoff (quoted in Donath 2011) has explained her desire to end a situation in which theatre practitioners with a migration background are invisible or are seen as exceptional, but also her interest in

the stories and perspectives of those who have not themselves migrated, yet carry this migration background as personal knowledge and collective memory. Moreover, in our globalised and above all in our urban lives, 'post-migrant' stands for the entire common space of diversity, beyond the question of origin.

(Geschichten und Perspektiven derer, die selbst nicht mehr migriert sind, diesen Migrationshintergrund aber als persönliches Wissen und kollektive Erinnerung mitbringen. Darüber hinaus steht 'postmigrantisch' in unserem globalisierten, vor allem urbanen Leben für den gesamten gemeinsamen Raum der Diversität jenseits von Herkunft.)

In 2009 'Beyond Belonging' was organised for what was probably the last time, this time in collaboration with the HAU. The festival once more expanded the possible meanings of 'post-migrant'. While events and performances focused largely on German-Turkish topics, attention was drawn to Berlin as home to a growing community of Asian Berliners, who help

shape the urban landscape; for example, a staged ‘exploration tour’ was conducted through Europe’s largest Vietnamese trade centre, the Dong Xuan Centre in Berlin-Lichtenberg. At the same time, a curious audience was able to get to know the Naunynstrasse in more depth. Residents threw open their courtyards, their cellars, and their empty shops for theatre and music. Turkish coffee houses usually open only to men invited mixed audiences in. For one special evening, theatre brought people closer. At the very least, audiences could go home with new insights, also in the literal sense.

Cultural education, along with theatre, is part of what makes the Ballhaus Naunynstrasse remarkable. The venue produces theatre at an ever more professional level – for example, Nurkan Erpulat’s extremely successful production *Verrücktes Blut* (Crazy Blood).<sup>9</sup> At the same time it encourages audiences to appropriate means of representation – to learn, that is, to represent themselves – a form of empowerment is thus also at stake. But the Ballhaus Naunynstrasse rejects labels such as ‘intercultural education’ or ‘cross-cultural understanding’. Langhoff (quoted in Donath 2011) says:

No-one I know belongs to a single, closed cultural space. Our real life has long been transcultural and translocal, regardless of origins. [. . .] We must learn to express ourselves beyond affiliation and origin. If anything, in a country like ours cultural education should now be and be understood as intercultural per se, even without naming it as such’.

(‘Kein Mensch, den ich kenne, gehört einem einzigen, geschlossenen Kulturraum an. Unser wirkliches Leben ist schon längst transkulturell und translokal, und zwar jenseits von Herkunft. [. . .] Wir müssen lernen, uns jenseits von Zugehörigkeiten und Herkunft zu artikulieren. Wenn überhaupt müsste kulturelle Bildung in einem Land wie dem unsrigen heute auch ohne Benennung doch per se interkulturell sein und verstanden werden’.)

It would, then, be wrong to think of the Ballhaus Naunynstrasse as Berlin’s theatre for the Turkish community. While it began by calling public attention to phenomena that go hand-in-hand with, for example, Turkish migration and a multi-ethnic population, in its daily work it is a place where social and aesthetic diversity are consistently practised and performed. The team of directors, the artists who work there, the guests who are invited are, like the audiences, multi-ethnic. German, English, and Turkish are spoken in equal measure. In this it differs clearly from most other theatre venues, even though it is by now common for guest directors from all over the world to work temporarily at German municipal theatres.

## New impulses

With the establishment of post-migrant theatre, the independent scene has provided an important impetus towards a reorientation of German theatre as a whole, challenging previous assumptions about what theatre is. The Dramaturgische Gesellschaft, ‘an open platform for the exchange on artistic work, further developments of aesthetics, methods of production and, last but not least, on the social function of theatre’ (dramaturgische gesellschaft, n.d.) devoted its January 2011 general meeting to the question ‘Who are WE?’ It invited sociologists, psychologists, politicians, and theatre practitioners to address this issue together.

Looking at the composition of casts and companies, at appointments to directorships, or at the staff who administer German municipal theatres, it quickly becomes apparent that we are dealing with an almost exclusively ‘white’ institution. While on stage theatre may be asking critical questions about social togetherness, those questions are only hesitantly being addressed

in practice i.e. in the conditions of production. The institutions themselves – and with them, the production of culture – have, therefore, become a target for criticism. Mark Terkessidis writes: ‘One must [ . . . ] interrogate the core of the institutions, probe them to establish whether their venues, guiding ideas, rules, routines, leadership styles, distribution of resources, and external communication are fair and effective as regards diversity’ (‘Es gilt [ . . . ], den Kern der Institutionen zu befragen, sie daraufhin abzuklopfen, ob die Räume, die Leitideen, die Regeln, die Routinen, die Führungsstile, die Ressourcenverteilungen sowie die Kommunikation nach außen im Hinblick auf die Vielheit gerecht und effektiv sind’; Terkessidis 2010: 5).

The debate over ‘blackfacing’, which has been raging since 2012, is an example of how problematic and precarious the situation can be. It was sparked by what can only be described as an extremely naïve course of action at the Schlosspark Theater Berlin, where director Dieter Hallervorden cast a white actor in the role of a black man in his production of *I’m Not Rappaport* and had him perform in blackface. The explanation that this had been done because no black actor was available and that artistic freedom justified such an approach sparked a wave of criticism, with accusations of racism in Germany’s theatre system. The debate was intensified by another instance of blackfacing shortly afterwards, in a production of Dea Loher’s *Unschuld* at the Deutsches Theater. Again, white actors were cast to play black people; again, their faces were blacked up. Protest, initiated online mainly by the organisation *Bühnenwatch* (n.d.), was soon joined by *Nachtkritik* (n.d.), which provided a platform for those who criticised this practice as racist. The debate exposed the limited awareness of the theatre practitioners concerned: their apparent failure to recognise that, these days, ‘when we consider which kinds of communication to engage in – political or economic, artistic or scientific, athletic or intimate – a “world horizon” [ . . . ] plays a role, and determines what options may even be entertained’ (‘bei allen Überlegungen, auf welche Kommunikation man sich politisch oder wirtschaftlich, künstlerisch oder wissenschaftlich, sportlich oder intim einlässt, ein “Welthorizont”, wie Niklas Luhmann dies genannt hat, eine Rolle spielt, der bestimmt, welche Möglichkeiten überhaupt in Frage kommen’; Baecker 2011a). Theatre audiences in Germany (and elsewhere) are heterogeneous, also in the sense that they are multi-ethnic; and theatres find themselves called upon to (re)consider notions of artistic freedom in the light of the question: freedom for whom?

## Outlook

This chapter has illustrated the different ways in which theatre and diversity may be understood. In German municipal theatre, diversity means first and foremost a varied aesthetic programme whose function in society has long ceased to consist solely in celebrating (or deconstructing) dramatic high culture, but instead meets a wide range of audience requirements. The independent scene further expands that variety, and tends to take a far more critical approach to its own practices or methods of production. The evolution of the independent scene has called greater attention to the multi-ethnic composition of German society. It has sharpened awareness that ‘German’ theatre is a white institution that, in spite attempts to change, is still far removed from equal participation from those with a different skin colour. The structural changes with which I began this chapter are, therefore, to be seen as the beginning of a process that is far from complete. At the same time, change is happening: not only has the independent scene found its place at the *Theatertreffen*, but more importantly the primacy of the German language on stage has been broken, theatre companies include people of colour, and it is more broadly acknowledged that there is more than one version of (hi)stories for the stage.

Theatre, then, is much more than an effective means for the observation of man by man. It sparks important debates – even when it does so through its own blunders and misconceptions.

This makes it on the one hand a forum for public debate in a society undergoing upheaval and change (one way or another, theatre always contributes to society's evolution). More importantly, however, theatre reflects how far a society is willing to be serious in its recognition of diversity. With that in view there is still a lot to be done.

## Notes

- 1 On the history of German theatre, see Fischer-Lichte (1993).
- 2 For details of German funding policies, see Fonds Darstellende Künste (2007).
- 3 For details on crowd funding, see [www.crowdfunding.de/plattformen/](http://www.crowdfunding.de/plattformen/).
- 4 Unless otherwise stated, all translations are the author's own.
- 5 For details, see Fischer-Lichte (1998).
- 6 The theatre tries to acknowledge distinctly the diversity of Berlin inhabitants. Most of the actors come from the Turkish community, and the programme explicitly addresses citizens with experience of migration and tries to reflect on issues of identity.
- 7 Under the heading 'Five Big Names in the World of German Theatre', Hannah Pilarczyk, arts writer for *Spiegel Online*, wrote in *The Guardian* on 13 March 2011: 'As artistic director of Berlin's three-theatre ensemble HAU, Lilienthal's output is nothing if not diverse: from a musical by raunchy electro pop star Peaches to the latest work by barrier-breakers *Rimini Protokoll*, as well as a conference asking: "What is queer about queer pop?"' (Pilarczyk 2011).
- 8 Since the 1960s, following the erection of the Wall, Berlin has experienced a high influx of workers from Turkey. Although the Turkish community now numbers around 170,000 members, it was hitherto barely represented in theatre and more generally in the cultural field.
- 9 *Verrücktes Blut* is remarkable inasmuch as it deals with the attempt to confront the German classics – so-called *Bildungsgut* – with migrant youths. A teacher tries to make her class read and act Friedrich Schiller's drama *Kabale und Liebe*, but this proves to be a not only a dubious endeavour but also a challenge in a number of ways.

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