

International Association of Libraries and Museums of the Performing Arts
Société Internationale des Bibliothèques et des Musées des Arts du Spectacle



A theatre museum for the citizen.

Local theatre-historiography as socio-cultural research and documentation

Some ideas for a permanent exhibition of the Theatermuseum der Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf

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Preliminary note

Theatre historiography marks three great ages for Düsseldorf: the age of Immermann (1834-1837), the age of Dumont-Lindemann (1905-1933) and the age of Gründgens (1947-1955). Though the times, the personalities and the conditions were rather different, they draw the attention of the theatre enthusiasts on themselves at their lifetimes even outside of Düsseldorf and the interest of the research in our days. The lawyer and writer Karl Leberecht Immermann (1796-1840) was initiator and artistic leader of a municipal theatre supported by a great number of citizens called the "Düsseldorf modeltheatre". The repertory was based on the world literature. A very extensial system of rehearsals was initiated under the leadership of Immermann as the first director of his theatre. Louise Dumont (1862-1932) and Gustav Lindemann (1872-1960) founded and ran between 1905 and 1933 the private "Schauspielhaus Düsseldorf" trying to reconceal their high artistic aims with the economic necessities of a private theatre. One of their élèves was Gustaf Gründgens (1899-1963) who from 1947 ran the "Städtische

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Bühnen Düsseldorf" and from 1951 the "Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus" in the difficult postwar times and who as the first actor of his theatre impressed a generation of spectators.

This brief overlook over the three ages canonized by the national theatre-historiography can of course only give some hints and shall not hide another question: has there been no theatre inbetween, before and after those periods? We are confronted - as often in historiography - with the phenomenon of waves with their ups and downs: the ups are of public interest, the downs fall into oblivion. The origin of the "Theatermuseum der Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf" is due to one of those ups in theatre history. In 1947 Gustav Lindemann gave the archives of the "Schauspielhaus Düsseldorf" to the city of Düsseldorf which runs it from that time on as the only autonomous institution for the documentation of the performing arts under municipal support in the Federal Republic. When in 1978 the house for the first time had its own exhibition rooms, the term "Theatermuseum" was added to the name "Dumont-Lindemann-Archiv". When over the years the documentary materials were enlarged over the the age of Dumont-Lindemann and the names of Dumont and Lindemann faded away out of the public consciousness, the name "Theatermuseum..." was chosen instead of "Dumont-Lindemann-Archiv". It is in fact possible, to build on the above mentioned peaks of local theatre history a documentary and much more a "memorial" museum. But above all this, we as theatre historians found during the occupation with the local theatre history a multitude of field of interest being not spectacular in the sense of great names and great events, theatre history is also aimed at. The narrow local frame guarantees - in spite of some gaps of material because of a temporary lack of interest in the documetation of theatre traditions - the existance of a distinct and proportionally intense material for the work on what I like to call the "theatre working day", which means more than the highlights of a highculture theatre, more than the theatre of the first nights, more than the great "magicians" of the theatre. Based on this understanding is a new formation of the documentation of the Düsseldorf theatre history for the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the house in 1997.

Scenes

Location and architecture of the theatre buildings

The citizen and the visitor of Düsseldorf as possible visitor of the Theatermuseum will be able to experience several theatre buildings - as far as they have remained - in direct perception walking around the city. He gets to know parts of the theatre history of the city finding out from the actual townscape. From this actual experience the visitor of the theatremuseum schould be led back to several steps of historic tradition of the theatre. The historic witnesses of the museum and the very own experience of still existing theatre buildings and the townscape can build a mental link to the not existing theatre buildings, the location of which can be still experienced. The locations of the first theatrical events visually witnessed in Düsseldorf in 1585 belong to the court area in, before and beside the ducal castle. In a street leading straight to to the castle was situated in 1696 the first ducal opera house. The change from the court theatre to the civic theatre is pointed out, when in 1747 the "ducal comedy house" was established at the centre of the civic life, the marketplace. The "new municipal theatre" was built as a symbol for the new civic selfconsciousness at the boundaries of the old town. During the remodelling of the city at the change of the century both the artistic ambitious "Schauspielhaus Düsseldorf" of Louise Dumont and Gustav Lindemann and the "Apollo Theatre", a 3000 places variété, found their new locations. The second worldwar destroyed a great deal of the stonebuilt witnesses of the Düsseldorftheatre history. On the foundation walls of the "new municipal theatre" nowadays stands the Düsseldorf operahouse. I a short distance from the crossings of the shopping streets the "Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus" was built, whose "daring" architecture represents the faith in progress and growing in the sixties and seventies.

Structures of organisation

In close connection with the changing forms of theatre buildings and the changing locations are the various kinds of supports for the theatre - a unit of building, technics, ensemble which always needed a higher expense of money. From the political power

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representing sovereign to the civic community the supporters of the theatre change. From a selfunderstanding part of the court life via an economic factor as a lease theatre to the theatre as a public cultural obligation range the functions and play their influence on theatre esthetics. Outside the theatre buildings independent theatre groups of the civic or proletarian amateur theatre were established from the political theatre of the thirties to the off-theatres of today.

Theatre works

Literature and theatre

Our actual understanding of the theatre, our image of theatre is faraway influenced by literary transmission. The high ranking of the theatre from the 18th century on is based on the programmatic writings of authors, who have been canonized as classics in cultural history. Since the "literarisation" of the theatre the author gets a special importance. As a partner of the theatre leader, the director he is more or less involved in the scenic realisation of the original copy. As the "literary conscience" he is part of the decisions for theplaybill and the adaption. Manuscripts, scenarios, correspondence between the theatre and the author give a look on the work with the staging, the importance of the theatre for the "literary market" and vice versa. Besides typical, local forms of literature can be found inthe folkloristic and the popular theatre.

Directing and acting

There is no visualisation in exhibtions more difficult than in the field of the work of the director and the actor - if you want to give more than the superficial appearance. A look into the conceptional work on the staging, the rehearsals, into the staging itself can only be fragmentarily - even if you use audiovisual documents in the exhibition. It is the same with the presentation of the achievements of the actor. Analytic functions, the visitors can follow, cannot be expected by objects like this. In the center of a historic overlook will have to be several steps of a specific history of roles and the personalities acting or directing - as they will be found in the various kinds of portraits by painting, graphic arts, sculpture and photography.

Theatre technics and scenography

The technical possibilities are based in the architecture of the theatre. In the buildings (especially in the auditorium) you will also find the expression of the specific social conditions. The scenery of the baroque theatre built with a central perspective reflects the conditions of social power in the auditorium as in life. The civic poor copy of the theatre of the nobility, the stage of wings changes step by step to the leading stage of illusion. The audience of the late 19th and early 20th century searching for reality on the stage is irritated by the swaying of the monumental wings. A scenery adjusted to the very play condenses the theatre experience to a spiritual experience. The most numerous element of the theatre collections are the pictorial representations ofspecific stagings, which as scenographic sketches or scenery photographs have their own esthetic qualities. Until now the collections have ignored the part of the direct theatre technics. (Isolated exceptions in the european countries confirm the rule.) In the museums for the history of technical inventions we admire the still working objects and ensembles, the reconstructions and models of engines or complete production units. But in the theatremuseum the field of technics is neglected as not artistic and not to preserve. The exhibition of the Theatermuseum should give some local examples for the development of the stage decorations, but should also give a knowledge of the technical conditions of the theatre work (lighting, curtains, wings, projected scenery etc.) on several historic steps.

Aims

The aim of perception for the visitor should be the consciosness of the development and the social bases of the performing arts. The immediacy of the theatre experience prevents the spectator from the reflexion of historic and social relations. Theatre architecture, location of the theatre buildings, structures of organisation, esthetic means, styles of directing and acting succumb a

historic change, which is made accessible by the overlook given by the museum.

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