Collective Creativity
Collaborative Work in the Sciences, Literature and the Arts

Edited by
Gerhard Fischer and Florian Vassen

Rodopi

Contents

III. Visual Arts, New Media and Internet

IV. Collective Writing

V. Collectivity and Theatre Arts

Appendix

Franz-Josef Deiters

From Collective Creativity to Authorial Primacy: Gottsched's Reformation of the German Theatre from a Mediological Point of View

Theatre constitutes a form of collective creativity. This idea is not as self-evident as one might expect. To some extent the collective character of this art form had to be rediscovered over the course of the twentieth century, as theatre emancipated itself from the primacy of the literary text and thus from the primacy of the author. In fact, the collective character of this art form was fully brought into view again only with the debates about a postdramatic theatre of the last few decades. In this essay I will turn back to the point in cultural history when literature started to dominate theatre and when the supremacy accorded the author began to annul theatre's collective character. This paradigmatic shift in the evolution of theatre occurred during the eighteenth century, and it is represented primarily by Johann Christoph Gottsched. In the following I will investigate Gottsched's efforts to reform the theatre of his age from a mediological point of view.

1

Theatre constitutes a form of collective creativity. This perception, even though one might agree with it immediately, is not obvious; rather, theatre studies had to establish itself over the course of the twentieth century as an independent discipline in its own right. Theatre as an art form was obliged to free itself from the dominance of the literary work. In fact, only the discussions of the last twenty years concerning postdramatic (that is, post-literary) theatre have opened our eyes to the long obscured collectivity of the theatrical art form.[1] The 'discovery of the audience'[2] and the re-conceptualization of the term of performance[3] did not take place until the end of the twentieth century. In the following I wish to use the knowledge gained in these debates to reflect on this very transformational process, which in terms of cultural history obscured the original view of the collectivity of the art form of theatre. My essay focuses on the eighteenth century, in which the process

---

[1] Cf. the topical and influential book by Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1999).

[2] Cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Die Entdeckung des Zuschauers: Paradigmenwechsel auf dem Theater des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen and Basel: A. Francke, 1997).

[3] See on this point the very instructive monograph by Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).

commonly described in German — and without an actual equivalent in English — as the *Literarisierung des Theaters* took place. I wish to analyse this 'literarification' of the theatre from a mediological perspective, and, with reference to Albrecht Koschorke and Niklas Luhmann, I intend to demonstrate how the institution of the theatre changed paradigmatically in the middle of its history from a sensual interaction between actors and audience, and among audience members, to what may be described as a triadically structured communication. In the course of this shift, the collectivity of the theatrical art form was obscured and the theatre was established as an institution within whose parameters the brainchild of the ingenious individual author could be generated and staged.

2

In order to trace this restructuring process by which the institution of the theatre was fundamentally altered in the course of the eighteenth century, it is first necessary to mention Johann Christoph Gottsched. Gottsched is regarded as one of the most prominent German exponents of the field of poetics in the early Enlightenment, the one who established the rules of poetry of the period, playing the role of theorist as well as that of practical reformer. In 1730 he published his magnum opus, *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen* (*Attempt at a Critical Poetics for the Germans*), a title that already revealed his fundamental and far-reaching aspirations.[4] The second part of this work consisted of an extensive discussion of the dramatic genres of tragedy and comedy. Gottsched's understanding of the function of the theatre had already been clearly expressed in a speech given in 1729, however. The title of this speech was particularly significant as a reference to Plato's condemnation of the poets in the *Politeia*: 'Die Schauspiele und besonders die Tragödien sind aus einer wohlbestellten Republik nicht zu verbannen' ('Plays and especially Tragedies should not be banished from a well-governed Republic').[5] Gottsched disagreed with Plato's epistemologically founded verdict against poetry on the basis of the Enlightenment philosophy of the Leibnitz-Wolff School. In his *Theodicee*, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz maintained that with the actual world God had achieved the best of all possible worlds, so that nature and society are in harmony according to God's will, and humans are able to recognize reality by means of God-given rationality. Gottsched defines the function of theatre in the context of this philosophical conception: theatre is meant to imitate this predetermined harmony by producing a sym-

---

[4]   Cf. Johann Christoph Gottsched, 'Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen', in Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Schriften zur Literatur*, ed. by Horst Steinmetz (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1972), pp. 12-196 (pp. 153-196). All uncredited translations by FJD.

[5]   Cf. Johann Christoph Gottsched, 'Die Schauspiele und besonders die Tragödien sind aus einer wohlbestellten Republik nicht zu verbannen', in Gottsched, *Schriften zur Literatur*, pp. 3-11.

bolic order that complies with the faculty of reason. The criterion of probability decides what is to be accepted as rational, where the probable is in accordance with the laws of nature as described by the modern sciences.[6] 'Ich verstehe nämlich durch die poetische Wahrscheinlichkeit nichts anders als die Ähnlichkeit des Erdichteten mit dem, was wirklich zu geschehen pflegt; oder die Übereinstimmung der Fabel mit der Natur', explained Gottsched in *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen.*[7]

   This criterion of probability is Gottsched's main point of criticism of opera, the dominant form of the theatre of the nobility of his time. Its ghostly and magical apparatus, along with many other characteristics of the genre, represented scenes of pure irrationality; a performance of signifiers that did not represent the rational order of the world, but rather distorted it — an uncontrolled semiosis without any kind of referent. Such theatre therefore constitutes an undesirable art form under the epistemological aspect of the Platonic judgement, for it brings to the stage

> [...] anstatt vernünftiger Tragödien ungereimte Opern voller Maschinen und Zaubereien [...], die der Natur und wahren Hoheit der Poesie zuweilen nicht ähnlicher sind als die geputzten Marionetten lebendigen Menschen. Solche Puppenwerke werden auch von Kindern und Unverständigen als erstaunenswürdige Meisterstücke bewundert und im Werte gehalten. Vernünftige Leute aber können sie ohne Ekel und Gelächter nicht erblicken und würden lieber eine Dorfschenke voll besoffener Bauern in ihrer natürlichen Art handeln und reden als eine unvernünftige Haupt- und Staatsaktion solcher Oper-Marionetten spielen sehen.[8]

However, not only the theatre of the nobility attracted Gottsched's acerbic criticism. He levelled the same criticism, that of a performance devoid of referent and therefore full of empty signifiers, against the repertoire of the travelling companies of players that, in the first third of the eighteenth century, to a great extent dominated the landscape of the German theatre for the common folk. Gottsched maintained that the so-called *Volkstheater* was just as much a refuge of superstition and unbridled animalistic sensuality as the theatre of the nobility, to such an extent that the institution failed in its main

---

[6]   It has to be mentioned here that Gottsched's concept of mimesis remains tentative indeed. Cf. Angelika Wetterer, *Publikumsbezug und Wahrheitsanspruch. Der Widerspruch zwischen rhetorischem Ansatz und philosophischem Anspruch bei Gottsched und den Schweizern* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1981), pp. 85-160.

[7]   Gottsched, 'Versuch', p. 129. English translation: 'By poetic probability I mean nothing other than the similarity of the poetized to what actually tends to take place; or the correspondence of the fable with nature'.

[8]   Gottsched, 'Versuch', pp. 120-121. English translation: '[...] confused operas full of machines and conjuring tricks rather than rational tragedies [...], which no more resemble nature and the true majesty of poetry than painted dolls resemble living people. Puppet plays of this kind are admired by children and the ignorant as astonishing masterpieces and thereby kept in demand. But reasonable people cannot regard them without a sense of disgust and ridicule, and they would rather see a village tavern full of drunken peasants acting and speaking in their own natural manner than an irrational intrigue performed by such operatic puppets.'

purpose, that of enabling the audience to see the *a priori* order of actuality as the best of all possible worlds.

In his efforts to convert the theatre into an institution of mimesis of the nature of the real world, he found an ally in the principal of one of the travelling companies, Friederike Caroline Neuber (better known as the 'Neuberin'). The most spectacular achievement of this alliance was a legendary meta-production staged in Leipzig in the year 1737, mentioned in every history of the theatre and, according to rumour, attended by Gottsched himself. To make a visible statement of his reformative efforts, Neuber and her troupe of players staged the festive expulsion of the traditional character *Harlequin* or *Hanswurst* from the stage. This may be described as paradigmatic or meta-theatre insofar as the programmatic regulation of the semiosis of theatre can be seen as an example of the rationalistic philosophy of the Enlightenment.

Gottsched found, in the measured drama of French Classicism, the perfect counter to the aforementioned – and conspicuously banished – unregulated semiosis, as he read the French dramatists in the spirit of his rationalistic conception of the theatre. He himself contributed to the repertoire of a new German theatre with his tragedy *Der sterbende Cato* (*The Dying Cato*; 1731).

Most significant, in terms of cultural history, is the path by which Gottsched broke new ground in the regulation of theatrical semiosis with reference to the predetermined harmony of the world. He chose the strategy of the 'literarification' of the theatre, that is to say, the restriction of the actual performance to a given literary text. Accordingly he ascribed the woeful state of the German art of theatre to the lack of printed plays.[9] To pinpoint the importance of Gottsched's theatre reform in terms of cultural history, it is essential to understand the mediological function of this reform strategy of the binding of the art form of theatre to the art form of literature. In this context it is interesting to note what Gerhard Kaiser pointed out in regard to the status of the arts in the horizon of Enlightenment thought. Kaiser asserted convincingly that the Enlightenment movement passed by the arts of architecture, fine arts and music, which continued to work on the formal language of the baroque epoch, while it had a major impact on literature: 'In der Dichtung', he states, 'findet die Aufklärung ihre adäquate Kunstform, weil Dichtung die "vernünftigste" Kunst ist'.[10]

What Kaiser describes here from the perspective of the history of ideas can be reformulated and defined in mediological terms. The 'literarification' of the theatre is not simply a matter of binding action to speech – even in pre-

---

9   Johann Christoph Gottsched, 'Vorrede zur "Deutschen Schaubühne"', in *Schriften zur Literatur*, pp. 253-275 (p. 261).

10   Gerhard Kaiser, *Aufklärung, Empfindsamkeit, Sturm und Drang* (Tübingen and Basel: A. Francke, 1996), p. 62. English translation: 'In literature, the Enlightenment finds its commensurate art form, since literature is the "most rational" art'.

literary theatre the rhetorical tradition of baroque poetry had made this a fundamental element of the stage play. It is another aspect that is vital: the constraint of theatrical action by a script, by the medium of writing. But why does the written word, more than any other medium, attest to a commensurability with rationality? I have already mentioned that for Gottsched, this has to do with the rationalistic dualism of spirit and body, with the elimination or perhaps the restraining of the seemingly bestial sensuality of humans on the stage in favour of the faculty of reason as the very faculty by which humans can be distinguished from beasts. The written word with its lettered image reduces that sensuality to a symbolic function; in contrast to other forms of art it is the role of the written word to restrain sensuality in favour of intelligibility. In writing, one might say, sensuality only prevails as far as is possible in the service of rationality. As I have already mentioned, the Aristotelian concept of mimesis acquired normative status in modern rationalism, and the medium of script is much better suited to this goal of an extensively non-sensual art than are those forms of art in which the medium itself requires and emphasizes sensuality, such as architecture, painting, music – or even non-literary theatre. The most influential formulation of this theory is to be found in the representational concepts of Early German Romanticism[11] and in particular the aesthetics of Hegel. Hegel understood drama to be a specifically written literary form, which is why it is the highest form of art – because it is the least sensual.[12]

The function of this reformative strategy can be seen once the argument is addressed in mediological terms. Gottsched's restriction of the theatrical play to the written dramatic text can be located in relation to the overall conversion from orality to scripturality which took place in the eighteenth century. This change had great consequences for the symbolic reproduction of modern society, which Albrecht Koschorke discussed forcefully in *Körperströme und Schriftverkehr*. The conversion from oral to written traditions, which, from a mediological perspective, might be regarded as marking the division between the Baroque and Enlightenment periods, Koschorke defines with reference to the terminology of Niklas Luhmann as a shift from interaction as a direct and personal contact between humans to communication as events mediated by media and institutions. The limitation of a stage play to the written text of a drama represents, from the mediological perspective, a strategy that trans-

---

11   Cf. Franz-Josef Deiters, *Auf dem Schauplatz des 'Volkes'. Strategien der Selbstzuschreibung intellektueller Identität von Herder bis Büchner und darüber hinaus* (Freiburg i.Br., Berlin, and Vienna: Rombach, 2006), pp. 63-97.

12   Hegel calls the drama 'die höchste Stufe der Poesie und der Kunst' ('the highest stage of poetry and art'). Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, 'Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III', in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Werke*, ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), XV, p. 474.

forms interaction into communication. The precondition for this, states Ko-
schorke, is the immobilization of bodily interaction.[13]

This transformation of theatre from interaction to communication neces-
sarily affected the co-presence of actors and audience, that is to say the
collectivity of the 'theatrical event', as Erika Fischer-Lichte identifies the
theatrical situation in general, although I find the term to be too broad and
therefore insufficiently precise.[14] In order to clarify this assertion, I will first
discuss the actor. If Gottsched 'literarified' the theatre, that is to say bound
the act of theatre to the given dramatic text, this means that he reduced the
actor's body to the role of a symbol, for he attempted to immobilize the sen-
suality of the actor in the body's symbolic function. In Goethe's *Regeln für
Schauspieler* (*Rules for Actors*) – certainly to be regarded as the culmination
and finalization of the theatre's transformation – we read accordingly: 'Das
Theater ist als ein figurloses Tableau anzusehen, worin der Schauspieler die
Staffage macht'.[15] In literary theatre, the bodies of the actors would be me-
diatized. They become symbolic instances of the discourse, as Koschorke
would have it,[16] or one could say that their on-stage interaction represents a
secondary interaction which is simulated in the symbolic space of the stage.
But the position of the spectator is also altered by Gottsched's radical theatre
reform. His body too is immobilized by the 'literarification' of the theatre;
more precisely, his motor function is largely shut down; or, as one could also
put it: the spectator's body becomes largely a medium of an almost entirely
mental process.

To clarify this statement it is helpful to recall relations in the pre-literary
theatre of the travelling companies. In these theatres the division of stage and
gallery was not clearly demarcated at all. If the situation called for it, if for
example there was an unusually large and congested crowd, it certainly could
happen that the capacity would be enlarged by seating a few spectators on the
stage. Lessing himself in his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* in 1767/68 de-
scribed, in support of literary theatre, this 'barbarische Gewohnheit, die
Zuschauer auf der Bühne zu dulden, wo sie den Akteurs kaum so viel Platz
lassen, als zu ihren notwendigsten Bewegungen erforderlich ist'.[17] Lessing

---

[13]   Cf. Albrecht Koschorke, *Körperströme und Schriftverkehr. Mediologie des 18. Jahrhunderts*
        (Munich: Fink, 1999), pp. 166-167.
[14]   Cf. Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik*, pp. 63-126.
[15]   Johann Wolfgang Goethe, 'Regeln für Schauspieler', *Goethes Werke*, ed. commissioned by
        the Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen (Weimar: Böhlau, 1901), XXXX, 139-168 (p. 166).
        English translation: 'The theatre is to be regarded as a figureless tableau in which the actors
        constitute the decoration'.
[16]   Cf. Koschorke, p. 212.
[17]   Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, 'Hamburgische Dramaturgie', in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing,
        Werke ed. by Herbert G. Göpfert and others (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchge-
        sellschaft, 1993), IV, pp. 229-707 (p. 280). English translation: 'barbaric custom of tolerat-
        ing spectators on stage, where they barely allow the actors enough space to carry out the
        most necessary movements'.

states that Voltaire had spoken forcefully against this practice with regard to
the performance of his tragedies. Lessing averred that as a result,

> ward dieser Unschicklichkeit abgeholfen; die Akteurs machten sich ihre Bühne frei; und was
> damals nur eine Ausnahme, zum Besten eines so außerordentlichen Stückes [Voltaire's
> *Semiramis*; FJD], war, ist nach der Zeit die beständige Einrichtung geworden. Aber vor-
> nehmlich nur für die Bühne in Paris; für die, wie gesagt, Semiramis in diesem Stücke
> Epoche macht. In den Provinzen bleibet man noch häufig bei der alten Mode, und will lieber
> aller Illusion, als dem Vorrechte entsagen, den Zayren und Meropen auf die Schleppe treten
> zu können.[18]

At this time there were no borders between the two sections of the theatre.
The actors often followed their intuition in improvising their dialogue, and
were usually left to their own devices to develop their respective characters
and organize their costuming as they thought best, frequently performing
more in interplay with the audience than with reference to fixed characters,
since as a rule they had no prompting text. It could happen that the actor of a
bit part, incited by the reaction of the public, would seize the initiative, whe-
reupon the player of the proper leading role would be overshadowed and the
performance would acquire a new, unplanned dynamic. For the actor there
was often only one goal: to please the audience. The spectators for their part
came to the theatre to see particular performers and in a way to join in the
play themselves, whether by cheering on their favourite actor or otherwise
reacting to the play. The performed material was undoubtedly less significant
in the expectations of the audience; the performance was predom-inantly
spectacular in character. Lessing warned of this phenomenon,[19] and even

---

[18]   Ibid. English translation: 'this bad habit was done away with; the actors cleared away their
        stage; and what, at the time, was only an exception, granted for the benefit of such an ex-
        traordinary play, has since become common practice. But only for the stage in Paris, by and
        large; for which, as noted, Semiramis had a decisive impact in this regard. In the provinces
        the old custom is still frequently followed, and they would rather relinquish all illusions than
        give up the right to step on the train of Zayre and Meropes.'
[19]   In the fifth instalment of his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* Lessing noted: 'Es könnte leicht
        sein, daß sich unsere Schauspieler bei der Mäßigung, zu der sie die Kunst auch in den hef-
        tigsten Leidenschaften verbindet, in Ansehung des Beifalles, nicht allzuwohl befinden
        dürften. – Aber welches Beifalles? – Die Galerie ist freilich ein großer Liebhaber des Lär-
        menden und Tobenden, und selten wird sie ermangeln, eine gute Lunge mit lauten Händen
        zu erwidern. Auch das deutsche Parterre ist noch ziemlich von diesem Geschmacke, und es
        gibt Akteurs, die schlau genug von diesem Geschmacke Vorteil zu ziehen wissen. Der
        Schläfrigste rafft sich, gegen das Ende der Szene, wenn er abgehen soll, zusammen, erhebet
        auf einmal die Stimme, und überladet die Aktion, ohne zu überlegen, ob der Sinn seiner Re-
        de diese höhere Anstrengung auch erfordere. Nicht selten widerspricht sie sogar der
        Verfassung, mit der er abgehen soll; aber was tut das ihm? Genug, daß er das Parterre da-
        durch erinnert hat, aufmerksam auf ihn zu sein, und wenn es die Güte haben will, ihm
        nachzu-klatschen. Nachzischen sollte es ihm! Doch leider ist es teils nicht Kenner genug,
        teils zu gutherzig, und nimmt die Begierde, ihm gefallen zu wollen, für die Tat.' Lessing, p.
        257. English translation: 'It is often the case that our actors, in their eagerness for applause,
        throw to the winds the moderation that art requires them to show even in the most violent

even Goethe during his practical theatre work at the Weimar Court Theatre grappled with strict rules for the disciplining of thespians.

The 'literarification' of the theatre changed all this by means of an act of regulation that extended not only to the stage but into the audience space as well. In the main, this process restricted the sensuality of the actor to a medial function, forming a kind of reference system for performance. Instead of seeking interaction with the audience, the performer – since Goethe's introduction of preliminary table-work sessions – was forced to concentrate on the secondary interaction of the dramatic figures, as set out in the text. The actor's performance was dictated by the literary configuration.[20] At the same time, a new border was imposed. The so-called fourth wall was constructed between stage and gallery, defining the stage as a symbolic space opposite the audience space. This border is to be regarded as the presupposition of Goethe's effort to ban the actors from the proscenium: 'Dies ist der größte Mißstand; denn die Figur tritt aus dem Raume heraus, innerhalb dessen sie mit dem Scenengemählde und den Mitspielenden ein Ganzes macht'.[21] However, the fact that Goethe needed to deploy this rule gives us an idea of the difficulties involved in establishing these radical changes, which would take decades to implement.[22]

The action of the theatregoer was likewise reorganized in this cooperative foundation. The spectator's motor function was suspended at the moment when he placed himself in the orderly rows of seats before the

---

passions. – But what applause? – The gallery, to be sure, is a great lover of sound and fury, and it will rarely fail to respond with loud hands to a good pair of lungs. The German parterre is likewise still much of this taste, and there are actors who are clever enough to milk it for all it is worth. The drowsiest actor pulls himself together towards the end of the scene, as he is preparing to make his exit, suddenly raises his voice, and exaggerates his part, without considering whether the meaning of his speech justifies this extra effort. Not unfrequently it even contradicts the bearing in which he should be leaving the scene; but what does he care? It is enough that he has reminded the spectators to pay him attention and applaud his exit, should they be kind enough to do so. They ought to hiss him off instead! But unfortunately they are in part too unknowing, in part too kind-hearted, and they take his desire to please them for the deed.'

[20] Cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theater im Prozess der Zivilisation* (Tübingen and Basel: A. Francke, 2000), p. 61.
[21] Goethe, p. 167. English translation: 'This is the greatest evil; for the character steps out of the space in which it combines with the scenery and fellow actors to form a whole.'
[22] Cf. Ulrike Müller-Harang anecdotal account of Goethe's efforts: 'The most effective way of dealing with offenses against the rules of theatre proved to be fines. [...] The offenses included, for example: arriving late for rehearsals or appearing late on stage; refusing to play a role or perform as an extra; wearing peculiar costumes that did not suit the play; making noise, calling out or laughing during rehearsals, as well as pulling faces and other practical jokes intended to make the actors lose their composure. Goethe fought against such nuisances throughout his time as director, but at least he succeeded in stamping out the most disruptive misdeeds.' Ulrike Müller-Harang, *Das Weimarer Theater zur Zeit Goethes* (Weimar: Verlag der Klassikerstätten, 1991), pp. 53-54.

---

stage.[23] Instead of interacting in manifold physical ways with the performers as well as with his fellow spectators, his activity was confined to the mental sphere. Physically still, the spectator had to concentrate on following the performance of recognized dramatic texts of a literary configuration. Peter Szondi described the receptive state of the theatre audience – without adding further to the mediology of the theatre (an example of the narrow scope of his hermeneutics) – with an illustrative metaphor, writing that the public attended the theatre in silence, with their hands chained, paralysed by the impression of a second world.[24] In the literary theatre the immobility of the audience is like that of the reader, who forgets the world around him in order to immerse himself in a different world that is displayed through the communicative medium of the stage. Regarding the institution of the literary salons of the eighteenth century, Albrecht Koschorke stated that the community in the emphatic sense of this word was an association of isolated individuals, of loners.[25] This dictum can be applied without reservation to the association of theatregoers as well. They too would come together for the purpose of forming an association of loners. The receptive nature of this situation is marked clearly through the darkening of the venue during the performance. In place of direct interaction between actors and audience, and among the spectators themselves, we find a communicative situation which can be described as a triadic structure. In literary theatre the author, who is physically absent, communicates the dramatic text to the audience, and the actor is reduced to the function of a medium used by the author to communicate with the audience. More concisely, literary theatre produces an authorial effect which is absent in non-literary theatre.

Gottsched's strategy of reform for the theatre, as he expounded it in 1730, displays not only his subjective goal of transforming the theatre in the context of Enlightenment philosophy, it further implemented in the realm of theatre the widespread conversion of symbolic reproduction from orality to scriptuality which took place over the course of the eighteenth century. In this way the collectivity of the theatrical event was endowed with a new seriousness and restructured into a clear hierarchy: in literary theatre the performance of the given drama text was under the authority of the author, to which the roles of director, actors and stage-designers (not to mention the technical staff!) were subordinate. Finally the collectivity of the theatre event became disconnected from the interaction between performers and spectators: the actor was reduced to his medial function and the onlooker to an isolated and passive member of a crowd who could no longer interact either

---

[23] Unfortunately, I cannot deal here with the major impact those changes would have on the architecture of theatre buildings.
[24] Cf. Peter Szondi, 'Theorie des modernen Dramas 1880-1950', in Peter Szondi, *Schriften*, ed. by Jean Bollack and others (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), I, 11-153 (p. 17).
[25] Cf. Koschorke, p. 177.

with the actors or with his fellow audience members, but only marvel at the work of the dramatic poet as the *deus absconditus*.

3

In the course of the cultural-historical transformation of the theatre from interaction to communication there was a radical change in the perspective from which this art form was seen. Not only was non-literary theatre, based on the principle of direct interaction, devalued and barred from the stage, but in historiographical terms the *deus absconditus* of literary theatre began to predominate over all other entities. Gottsched in his *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen* explains the evolution of the European theatre as a deliberately ordered procedure, one that from the earliest times onwards headed with a kind of internal necessity towards the transformation of the art form from interaction to communication, and he locates this medial change in Ancient Greece. It is his strategy to put forward this epoch as a role model on the threshold of the modern media-age; in reference to the implied *querelle* he evidently stands on the side of the *anciens*, not on that of the *modernes*. In characterizing the ritual character of tragedy, beginning with its origins in Dionysian (or Bacchanalian) rites, he asserts succinctly:

> Man ward aber des beständigen Singens mit der Zeit überdrüssig und sehnte sich nach einer Veränderung. Thespis, der mit seinen Sängern in Griechenland von einem Orte zum andern herumzog, erdachte was Neues, als er die Lieder in Teile absonderte und zwischen zwei und zwei allemal eine Person auftreten ließ, die etwas ungesungen erzählen mußte. Mehrerer Bequemlichkeit halber machte er seinen Wagen zur Schaubühne, indem er Bretter darüber legte und seine Leute droben singen und spielen ließ, damit sie desto besser zu sehen und zu hören sein möchten. Damit man aber dieselben nicht erkennen könnte, salbte er ihnen die Gesichter mit Hefen, welche ihnen anstatt der Larven dienen mußten. Um dieser Veränderung halber wird Thespis vor den Erfinder der Tragödie gehalten.[26]

From a mediological perspective this passage is noteworthy in three respects. Firstly, the paradigmatic transformation of the theatre-event from an interactive ritual act to a spectacle in which the author communicates with the audience through the medium of the stage play, is attributed to an individual author ('Thespis [...] came up with something new'). The establishment of the medial situation of the literary theatre is therefore already described in the context of the paradigm which first demonstrated the outcome of this change.

---

[26] Gottsched, 'Versuch', p. 154. English translation: 'Eventually, people got fed up with all the singing and thirsted for a change. Thespis, who moved around with his singers from one place in Greece to another, came up with something new when he divided songs into parts and assigned one of his troupes to recite something between every two choruses. For the sake of comfort he turned his wagon into a stage, laying boards on top of it and getting his people to sing and act from on high so they could more easily be seen and heard. In order that they could not be recognized, however, he rubbed their faces with yeast, which had to serve them instead of masks. Thespis is considered the inventor of tragedy due to this change.'

Only the confusion of paradigmatic and syntagmatic levels that now emerges allows Gottsched to construct his narrative of the evolution of European theatre teleologically, as the genesis of literary theatre. Only in the context of this confusion can he ascribe to the legendary Thespis the 'invention' of a) tragedy as a literary genus and b) theatre as an act of communication, and so cut out all other entities and factors in the theatrical event. Secondly, he describes the demarcation of the stage as a purely symbolic space separated from the audience space, when he identifies the mythical wagon of Thespis as the first stage in the history of European theatre. Thirdly, he asserts the systematic doubling of reality onstage and links it with the construction of the dramatic configuration, when he identifies the first actor to step out from the Chorus, and speaks plainly of the medial function of the actor ('In order that they could not be recognized [...] he rubbed their faces with yeast'). This passage clearly concerns the establishment of the difference of level between actor and role. According to Gottsched the actor in his sensuality is personalized or mortified and in a way mediatized by Thespis; that is to say, the actor is reduced to the role of symbol-carrier in an act of communication, as required by the medial situation of literary theatre. It is of no account whether Gottsched's narrative of the genesis of European theatre conveys the actual historical facts or not; it is much more significant that he describes its evolution in the context of the medial situation of modern literary theatre, whose practical implementation and theoretical conceptualization he first worked on.

The progress of his narrative is also teleologically connected in the sense of this confusion of paradigmatic and syntagmatic levels, for which Friedrich Schlegel in his *Athenäums-Fragmenten* coined the brilliant metaphor of the historian as a retrospective prophet.[27] The next stages of the evolution of the European theatre are, in Gottsched's account, likewise labelled in the context of the paradigm of literary communication. He credited Aeschylus with the introduction of dialogue and therefore the definitive establishment of the dramatic configuration and the authorial voice:

> Aeschylus nämlich, ein neuerer Poet, sahe wohl, daß auch die Erzählungen einzelner Personen, die man zwischen die Lieder einschaltete, noch nicht so angenehm wären, als wenn ein paar miteinander sprächen, darinnen sich mehr Mannigfaltigkeit und Veränderung würde anbringen lassen. Und da ihm solches nach Wunsche ausschlug, dachte er auch auf mehrere Zierate seiner Tragödien. Er erfand die Larven, gab seinen Leuten ehrbare Kleidungen und bauete sich eine bessere Schaubühne. Ja welches das Merkwürdigste war, so machte Aeschylus, daß die Gespräche seiner auftretenden Personen miteinander zusammenhingen, ja

---

[27] Cf. Friedrich Schlegel, 'Athenäums-Fragmente', in *Kritische Schriften und Fragmente. Studienausgabe in sechs Bänden*, ed. by Ernst Behler and Hans Eichner (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1988), II, 105-156 (p. 111, no. 80).

er erfand zuerst die Idee der Hauptperson in einem solchen Spiele, welches vorher nur ein verwirrtes Wesen ohne Verknüpfung und Ordnung gewesen war.[28]

The progressive construction of the dramatic configuration, on which the Enlightenment author organized his narrative, corresponds to the closing of the stage-space. In this format the action of the actor is strictly limited to the feigned interaction required by the literary configuration, while the audience is excluded from the action and constrained to the role of the physically passive receptor whose attention is devoted to the contents of the message of the dramatic author. This message is communicated through the medium of the stage play: the plot.

The European theatre's process of becoming an institution of literary communication finds its climax and conclusion in Gottsched's narrative primarily through Sophocles. He ascribed what one might call epochal status to his tragedies, because they reflect the medial situation of the literary theatre: 'er richtete', Gottsched remarks of Sophocles, 'auch die Lieder des Chores, die allezeit zwischen jeder Handlung gesungen wurden, so ein, daß sie sich mit zu der Tragödie schicken mußten: da sie vorher von ganz andern, mehrenteils lustigen Materien zu handeln pflegten'.[29] In terms of the mediological aspect this perspective is most interesting because Gottsched conceptualizes the form of Sophoclean tragedies as a reflection on the medial situation of the literary theatre. He emphasizes in particular that the songs of the Sophoclean chorus respond reflexively to the plot, in that they do not engage with it, but are instead reflexively oriented towards it. He asserts that in Sophocles' tragedies the audience which is excluded from the action is represented on a textual level. The theatre audience can recognize itself in the persona of the chorus. The chorus, according to Gottsched's reading of Sophocles represents the exclusion of the audience from the stage play and their restricted role in the act of communication, which is fundamental to the 'literarification' of the theatre. It is accorded, that is to say, the position of a recipient who is active only in mind, to whom the privileged voice of the playwright speaks with didactic intent:

---

[28] Gottsched, 'Versuch', pp. 154-155. English translation: 'It was Aeschylus, a more recent poet, who saw that having individuals recite speeches between choruses was not so pleasant as having two people talk to each other, which would allow for more variety and change. And because he got his way, his mind turned to several adornments of his tragedies. He invented masks, gave his people respectable costumes and built a better stage. Most remarkably of all, Aeschylus made sure that the dialogues spoken by the characters on stage were interlinked; indeed, he first came up with the idea of having a protagonist appear in such a play, which had previously been only a confused entity without connection and order.'

[29] Gottsched, 'Versuch', p. 155. English translation: 'He reorganized the songs of the chorus, which were always sung between each act, in such a way that they had to conform to the tragedy; since these had previously dealt with quite different, mostly ribald matters.'

Ja weil sich die Poeten in allen Stücken der Religion bequemeten und die vortrefflichsten Sittenlehren und Tugendsprüche darin häufig einstreueten: so wurde diese Art von Schauspielen eine Art des Gottesdienstes; die auch in der Tat vors Volk viel erbaulicher war als alle die Opfer und übrigen Zeremonien des Heidentums. [...] Der Poet will also durch die Fabeln Wahrheiten lehren, die Zuschauer aber durch den Anblick solcher schweren Fälle der Großen dieser Welt zu ihren eigenen Trübsalen vorbereiten.[30]

4

The play of representation can be extended still further at this point, however. In Gottsched's narrative of the evolution of the European theatre, the audience uses the figura of the chorus as the medium in which its position in the theatrical act of communication finds representation and is reflected, just so the theatre reformer and theoretician Gottsched used his own story-telling as a medium to reflect and assert his own position in the process of the 'literarification' of the theatre. One might even say that by giving his account of the evolution of the European theatre as a medium for instruction, the author of *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen* creates the position from which the planned reform of the institution of theatre and a classification of the available inventory of German language drama texts becomes possible, as he projects in his 'Vorrede zum "Nöthigen Vorrath zur Geschichte der deutschen dramatischen Dichtkunst"'.[31] With Walter Benjamin one could express it polemically, saying that Gottsched, with his story-telling, engineered for himself an 'ungefüge[s] Postament der eigenen Statuette'[32] (in Benjamin these words are directed against Friedrich Gundolf and his book on Goethe). The necessity of ascribing himself an authorial position and standpoint from which the Enlightenment author is able to command a view of everything may be seen as the primary reason why the *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen* is surprisingly historically orientated. Its historical orientation is surprising insofar as this work in its basic attitude – especially as regards the theatre – is marked by its breach with a past deemed irrational. The development of the European theatre is not only nar-

---

[30] Gottsched, 'Versuch', pp. 156-157. English translation: 'Indeed, since the poets honoured religious feeling in all of their plays, often peppering them with the most excellent moral apopthegms and virtuous sayings, this type of play became a kind of divine service; this proved far more edifying for the people than all the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the heathens. [...] The poet thus aims to teach truth through his fables, and to prepare the spectators for their own misfortunes by showing them the difficulties faced by such great personalities.'

[31] Johann Christoph Gottsched, 'Vorrede zum "Nöthigen Vorrath zur Geschichte der deutschen dramatischen Dichtkunst"', in *Schriften zur Literatur*, pp. 276-290.

[32] Walter Benjamin, 'Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), I, pp. 123-201 (p. 163). English translation: 'ungainly pedestal for its own statuette.' 'Goethe's Elective Affinities', trans. Stanley Corngold, in *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings. 1913-1926*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 2004), I, p. 326.

rated by Gottsched and thereby shifted to the level of representation (in other words, the medium of communication is now the topic of the communication), but in addition Gottsched's historiographical representation of the theatrical representation acquires the status of a function in the self-legitimization process of the modern author. It is all about the assertion of his privileged right to a voice, in contrast to the collective of non-authors condemned to passive reception. That is to say, Gottsched is concerned with establishing a social distinction essential for the modern media age.