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MICHAEL BACHMANN/ANSELM HEINRICH (HG.)

LIVE ART DATA

NEW STRATEGIES IN THEATRE ARCHIVING
NEUE STRATEGIEN DER THEATERARCHIVIERUNG

SCOTLAND // NIEDERSACHSEN

UV Universitätsverlag Hildesheim

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unter Mitarbeit von Anne Küper und Frida Stein

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»Live Art Data« and the Pandemic: A Short Summary

Andreas Wolfsteiner/Ekaterina Trachsel/Michael Bachmann/Anselm Heinrich

In the spirit of the book sprint format, this short text was written during the workshop at Lingen. Instead of offering a conclusion or concise summary of the White Paper, its aim is to provide a series of reflections on the various contributions, and to open avenues for further thought.

In October 2021, when the book sprint took place, digital artefacts relating to theatre and performance – »Live Art Data« – seemed more ubiquitous than ever. During the global pandemic of 2020–21, supposedly more such data has been produced than ever before. As theatres and other venues for the performing arts, as well as socially engaged practice, were closed almost all over the world due to lockdown measures, artists and activists developed new ways and strategies to reach their audiences in digital space. Not too long ago, the use of digital tools in mainstream theatre and performance was in many cases limited either to operational requirements »behind the scenes« or to post-show practices. For instance, theatre collectives, ensembles, performers, artists, and producers would use digital tools to capture performances on camera. These could be used to analyse and »recollect« the dramaturgy of the event. The resulting multimedia documents would also be used to produce publicity photos, to submit performance videos to festivals and production houses, or to cut trailers for promotion on digital platforms.

In contrast, artists working specifically for and in digital space often had difficulties to obtain funding for their »digital theatre projects« or »online mixed-media events«. Today, the balance has somewhat shifted: Rather than »Live Art Data« being (or being understood as) mostly a *document* of the performative practices that precede it, diverse data is being produced that becomes *theatrical performance and live art in itself*. As a result of the pandemic, people are getting used to visit theatre online to participate in plays and performances that happen on digital or social media platforms such as Telegram, and to browse through easily accessible archives of historical performances by major theatre companies – though it needs to be noted that the situation is different in the UK (and Scotland) than it is in Germany.[1] With a few notable exceptions, e.g., the Royal National Theatre, British institutions did not have the capacity and funding to disseminate an online repertory in the German sense. However, institutions such as the National Theatre of Scotland used their funding to support artists through the crisis – a crisis that hit actors differently than in Germany due to the relative absence of ensemble structures –, for instance by commissioning a series of 55 digital art works (*Scenes for Survival*).[2]

1 During the pandemic, the German portal for theatre criticism, nachtkritik.de, created an online-schedule of theatre productions and performance videos that institutions and individuals made publicly available on the internet (often only for a limited time). The theatre platform, spectyou.com, launched their website earlier than planned in reaction to the pandemic and initially made it free of charge. Where funding was available, particularly in well-subsidized theatre systems such as the German one, all kinds of theatre makers started to work with online platforms to either create digital performances (e.g., on Zoom and Telegram) or to disseminate pre-recorded as well as live-streamed productions. See nachtkritik.org: *Online-Spielplan*. https://nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17785:sammlung-corona-theater-online&catid=1767&Itemid=100089 (accessed October 6, 2021). Spectyou: *Die digitale Plattform für Schauspiel, Tanz, Performance*. https://www.spectyou.com/de/ (accessed October 6, 2021).

2 See: National Theatre of Scotland: *Scenes for Survival*. https://www.nationaltheatrescotland.com/events/scenes-for-survival (accessed October 9, 2021).

Despite these national differences, it is true that the funding situation for digital performance has changed during the pandemic. Projects with a digital focus are booming and have become easier to find funding for. Internationally, many theatres are discussing whether a dual dissemination model – online and in person – should remain the norm, not least to make theatre more attractive to those who cannot or do not usually attend for reasons of geographical distance, class, and accessibility. For these reasons, and because of the absence of live performance during Covid, digital performances have gained momentum and legitimacy. »Live Art Data« has become something worthy of discussion – in the eyes of the public, the funding bodies, and critics.

The »Lifecycle« of Data and Questions of »Re-use«

At this crucial time, when a vast quantity of digital data is being produced by theatre and live art artists, it seems increasingly important to take a look at the »state of the archive« regarding theatre and performance in digital space. The contributions by Melissa Köhler, NOTAnARCHIVE, Tabea Lurk, Birk Schindler and Nils Bultjer, Marianne Streisand, Stephen Greer and Sarah Gambell – though not all concerned with theatre and performance in the narrow sense – ask urgent questions regarding the »lifecycle« of digital data: What do we need to consider with regard to, and how are we constrained by, issues of intellectual property, copyright, and the legal status of source code? How can digital archives help when »data« is the subject of conflict, or in danger of being destroyed? What possibilities arise when archived data is available for »re-use«?

In particular, the aspect of artistic and pedagogic re-uses of archival material is a topic that appears in many contributions to this volume (see, for instance, Tabea Lurk, Marianne Streisand, Christopher Field and Jenny Knotts). These authors show the potential of archived data to come back to »life«, to become, as it were, a different type of »*Live* Art Data«. The digital opens up new possibilities to share, copy and paste, and to re-edit archival material without damaging or destroying the original that may be stored in a physical archive. Through digitalisation, archival objects are able to develop several »bodies«. As the example of NOTAnARCHIVE shows, the digital can become a rehearsal space for different kinds of »re-use«: Performing artists are not only producing art in the digital sphere. Rather, they begin to incorporate digital structures throughout their work, e.g., for online rehearsals and rehearsal spaces.[3] This is of central interest to the emerging field of ethnographic research on rehearsal practices:[4] How does the digital become a *material* space for performing artists? Which videos, sounds, images etc. floating in the world wide web become part of these new digital rehearsal spaces?

Digitalisation of Live Art Archives

Our White Paper brings together different perspectives on the possibilities and challenges in the creation of Live Art Data. As Tabea Lurk points out, the possibilities for »re-use« offer a huge potential when archival material is accessible online; however, we are confronted with important – and complicated – questions concerning copyright. As an art librarian, Lurk introduces basic concepts such as data management, FAIR Principles, OAIS and the TRUST framework. Likewise, the archivists Bernd Oevermann and Katharina Kolar explain how the German Archive for The-

3 For instance, the theatre collective VOLL:MILCH was granted three scholarships by KAMPNAGEL (Hamburg) in the nationwide program *#TakeCare* initiated by the *Fonds Darstellende Künste* in the year 2021 in order to develop their *nota* programme further as a digital rehearsal space. See the contribution by Melissa Köhler and Birk Schindler in this volume.

4 See, for example: Kleinschmidt, Katarina. *Artistic Research als Wissensgefüge: Eine Praxeologie des Probens im zeitgenössischen Tanz*. München, 2018; Matzke, Annemarie. *Arbeit am Theater: Eine Diskursgeschichte der Probe*. Bielefeld, 2012; McAuley, Gay. *Not Magic but Work: An Ethnographic Account of a Rehearsal Process*. Manchester, 2012. How can we imply those theories on rehearsal processes, theatre work, and artistic research in terms of digital forms of rehearsing?

atre Pedagogy (DATP), located in Lingen – in the western part of Lower Saxony – is currently in a critical phase of digital transformation and networking. Michael Bachmann and Anselm Heinrich describe how materials relating to Scottish theatre and performance history are distributed across a myriad of archives (including outside of Scotland), with Stephen Greer expressing the hope that digitalisation may be one way of reconnecting these institutions in order to rethink, or even just begin to map, the history of live art in Scotland. Based on their work in the Scottish Theatre Archive, Christopher Field and Jenny Knotts examine the potential uses and applications of visualiser technology, and how this might affect research regarding the analogue archive's relationship with emerging digital technologies.

Critical Archiving

Many articles in this White Paper focus on data that is marginalised, overlooked, or used in such a way that it supports dominant – rather than many-faceted – narratives. Martina Groß raises the question of how archives deal with documents, reports, and voices that cannot be assigned to a single nation, region, or institution. She thus shifts the focus to aspects of mobility and globalisation in the context of performance documentation and historiography. Stephen Greer analyses how live art in Scotland has repeatedly been marginalised and considers how archival material relating to its history may be recontextualised in such a way that it does not just create a counterhistory – *Scottish* instead of *British* live art – but works in a meaningful way with the dynamic of marginalisation. Katharina Kolar focuses on the *untold stories* within the German Archive for Theatre Pedagogy (DATP) and advocates an »archive for theatre pedagogical counterknowledge« – a first step towards which is to provide accessible and usable (online/digitised) »raw data of suppressed voices«. Informed by the personal experience of an accident and, as a consequence, the need for a titanium implant, Stefanie Wenner offers a historically far-reaching essay on ephemeral bodies, trauma, and the archive. She advocates practices that dis-order the relationships between human beings and nature, culture and nature, body and technology, and yet bring them into a nurturing and caring exchange. While Wenner thus focuses on personal experiences and human bodies as visceral archives, Kristiane Hasselmann is concerned with an object in relation to public histories. She looks at recent discussions on the inclusion of the so-called »Prachtboot« (magnificent boat) from the Luf island in the permanent exhibition of the newly opened Humboldt Forum. Hasselmann analyses how archived artefacts may become agents for knowledge transfer and raises important questions about ethnological collections in post-colonial times.

On the one hand, the articles in this White Paper present multiple perspectives on how archives, live art, and data are interrelated concerning history, theory, and the digital. On the other, the contributions highlight Live Art Data as a paradigmatic case through which contemporary social processes of digital transformation become legible. Furthermore, the immaterial aspect of theatrical and artistic events acquires a new material status: through processes of quantification, transformation, and storage. These processes are at the same time ›global‹ and ›local‹, with institutions in Scotland and Lower Saxony, Germany, the UK and elsewhere facing similar challenges and opportunities for change. The articles by Judith Crämer, Christoph Kleineberg, Ramona Tax and Anselm Heinrich outline institutional visions for international collaboration between Scotland and Lower Saxony, and we hope that this White Paper will become the first of many such attempts in theatre and archival studies.

This White Paper is the result of a cross-institutional collaboration between Scottish and German researchers, artists, and programmers. The volume brings together historical, theoretical, and digital research into archival practices of storing and dealing with »Live Art Data« in a comparative approach that encompasses both historical and contemporary practices. It is interested in data that is produced in theatres and other cultural venues, in theatre pedagogical projects, by performing artists, and their audiences. From an interdisciplinary perspective, the White Paper looks at archival configurations and relations of performative data in teaching and information infrastructures today, focusing on four aspects: historiography, theory, digitalization, and the international dimension.

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