I
POSTDRAMATIC RESONANCE BETWEEN EUROPE AND ASIA

Introduction

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> From the clay of life abandoned on the ground grow no lofty trees, only wild grass. […]
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> Wild grass strikes no deep roots, has no beautiful flowers and leaves, yet it imbibes dew, water and the blood and flesh of the dead […]. As long as it lives it is trampled upon and mown down, until it dies and decays.
>
> But I am not worried; I am glad. I shall laugh aloud and sing.
>
> Lu Xun, Wild Grass

The contributions to this publication originate in the *Beijing Topography* project, which was held under my co-direction at the Faculty of Dramaturgy and Applied Theatre at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing in the winter semester of 2018/19. The *Beijing Topography* project, initiated by Li Yinan, gives BA Dramaturgy students the task of exploring the past and present of Beijing. The project promotes the general goal of understanding how theatre performances can be generated from real materials. I invited several Asian and European artists who are pioneers of the postdramatic theatre in their specific theatre landscapes and have worked in this field for decades. I asked them to give our students an insight into their work and working methods in the form of impulse lectures, panels, and workshops. At the center of every invitation stood my request to the artists to share the fundamental convictions underlying their dramaturgies and working methods. Most of the invited artists began their seminars with introductory lectures and then presented and commented on some of their most influential works. They encouraged the students to conduct their own experiments along the lines of the questions posed in the *Beijing Topography* project and evaluated the students' scenic experiments together with them. The structure of the project is reflected in the form of the contributions published here. Most of the invited

artists are represented by a transcription of their opening lecture (together with a video link) and a script of a performance piece that is representative of their approach. It is essential to be aware that the latter are not classical drama texts and that they thus only acquire their actual function when performed.

By making these lectures public, I wish to provide a broader audience with a unique insider's impression of postdramatic theatre's artistic thinking and working methods together with a sense of the variety of its manifestations.

The theatre-thinking of all the invited theatre-makers originates from a dramaturgical impulse because it has been developed, defended, and matured *against* the established theatre landscapes in their countries. These works utilize one dramaturgical field of action in particular: the development of performance situations.[1] This is an original dramaturgical activity that deals with the questions of who gathers where, with whom, and—above all—how. Each performance creates a theatrical public sphere in its specific way,[2] one whose members are produced by the design of the performance situation. The works of the artists collected in this book are typified by the utilization of this ephemeral theatrical public performance sphere to de-familiarize the everyday public sphere, which is constituted through media representations of social and political processes. This everyday public sphere is considered less as a place than a specific set of rules that individuals who want to appear and act publicly must fulfill and reproduce. These rules are de-familiarized through the performance situations of the works represented in this volume.

The development of performance situations is one of the most important fields of dramaturgical activity, especially if, like us at the Beijing Dramaturgy Department, one understands dramaturgy as an artistic practice primarily concerned with expanding the possibilities of theatre. The permanent search for extensions of our understanding of theatre differentiates dramaturgy from the practice of directing, which rather tries to exert effects on an audience derived from an already existing canon of performance and reception.

One thing the artists presented in this book have in common is that all their works seek to break the cycle of reality construction, within which "nature" and "history" are constantly confused. By such a motion, their theatre produces aesthetic procedures that grasp reality in a complex way that classical dramatic theatre cannot create. The theatre-makers presented here do not stop at a mere gesture of deconstructing reality but rather attempt to turn beyond it—towards the fragile and non-subsumable particular of the lived experience. This attempt

1 The theatre scholar Jochen Kiefer argues for a conception of dramaturgy as a practice that expands the possibilities of theatre and encompasses five fields of action. In addition to the mentioned practice of developing performance situations, Kiefer also lists narration, economics, curation, and knowledge critique as dramaturgical fields of action. Cf. Jochen Kiefer, "Re-Vision Dramaturgie" (Zurich, February 21, 2019).

2 Cf. Christopher B. Balme, *The Theatrical Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

resonates with the program of postdramatic theatre, as described and developed by Hans-Thies Lehmann in his 1999 publication *Postdramatisches Theater*.[3] The non-mimetic approaches towards reality discussed in Lehmann's book became the starting point for the experiments of numerous theatre-makers and theatre-thinkers in Europe and Asia. While the book has meanwhile been translated into many languages, the 2002 Japanese translation of *Postdramatisches Theater* by Michiko Tanigawa and Masaya Honda was among the first. It came out even before the English translation by Karen Jürs-Munby in 2006. The Chinese translation by Li Yinan appeared only four years later, in 2010. It has become a point of reference for all those theatre-makers and theatre-thinkers who felt not entirely at home in their national aesthetics, which have been strongly influenced by Western-style mimetic theatre.

Initially, postdramatic theatre grew out of a critique of the dramatic assumption that reality can be unambiguously depicted, narrated, and morally evaluated. This dramatic assumption and the theatre that emerges from it, stretching from Aristotle to Hegel, has set up a particular regime of representation and dramatic literature that historically has privileged certain artistic strategies and political perspectives in unambiguous ways. Thus, most drama has been constructed and performed from the center of a heteronormative, Western-colonial gaze, which expresses itself in a dramaturgy that centers around the conflicts of dramatic characters. The postdramatic dramaturgies of the works presented here attempt to break free of this assumption and its techniques—and to do so in different places and times. For this very reason, they have been produced outside the mainstream, and are usually associated with the foundation of their own groups, new forms and modes of production, and the emergence of their very own audience structure.

By archiving the lectures given at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing, this volume seeks to show that the concept of postdramatic theatre is not a static one. Rather, it changes over time and is also highly dependent on its translation into the specific situations of different theatre cultures. Dramaturgy is of decisive importance for this translation process, since it is essentially identical to expanding the possibilities of theatre.

As dramaturgy scholar Jochen Kiefer points out, such an emphatic understanding of dramaturgy appears for the first time in Lessing's *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (Hamburg Dramaturgy), in which "dramaturgy" becomes a signifier for a theatre that has yet to be developed. Lessing's aim in setting up a discourse around an entity he called "dramaturgy" was to turn actors into independent artists who critically distance themselves from the prevailing rules of the drama and performance canon. Thus, even at this early stage, dramaturgy is already closely interlinked with performativity and can therefore not exclusively be related to

3 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater* [Postdramatic Theatre] (Frankfurt/Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1999).

how theatre texts are constructed. Saying this is not to deny the existence of dramaturgies before Lessing's *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*. But these belonged rather to the world of poetics, and their primary purpose was the codification of certain narrative patterns.[4] With Lessing, however, dramaturgy emerges as an independent realm of artistic thinking that starts precisely with the absence of any poetological rules. Dramaturgy is no longer the reflection of an existing *dispositif* but rather transforms itself into one.[5] Dramaturgy, as I understand it, is an action that expresses itself in the practices of narration (selection and montage of materials, discourses, and texts) and the development of performance situations. These dramaturgical practices are then aligned with the needs of the respective theatre form in which they are situated. Thus, roughly speaking, dramatic, epic, and postdramatic theatre each have their very specific modes of narration and performance development. Particularly in dramatic theatre, but also in epic theatre, the development of performance situations is not the focus of dramaturgical activity, since both strongly adhere to the classical proscenium situation (often parodied in German as the *Guckkastenbühne* or "peep-show theatre") and display of dramatic characters as a means of theatrical communication. By contrast, postdramatic theatre, because of its explicit emphasis on the reality generated between spectators and performers in the course of a performance, is permanently required to reflect on and experiment with the performance situation. Since the works and lectures gathered here repeatedly problematize theatre as a site of visualization as much as the idea of drama based on dramatic characters, the works of the artists presented here can be described as postdramatic dramaturgies.

With this collection, I wish to provide the framework for exploring the resonance that postdramatic dramaturgy has created between Europe and Asia.

On the Structure of this Book

The book is divided into three sections. The **first section** sets out to unpack the resonance of the postdramatic theatre. It contains the panel discussion ***Rethinking Theatricality—A Conversation on Postdramatic Theatre and the Chinese Juchang***, held on October 13, 2018, at the Goethe Institute Beijing and Li Yinan's essay ***Hans-Thies Lehmann's Postdramatic Theatre and the New Aesthetics of Juchang***. These two texts point to the resonance that the translation of Lehmann's *Postdramatisches Theater* has had on Chinese theatre scholarship.

4 Kiefer thus suggests reading these earlier dramaturgies "as representations of prevailing social *dispositif*." He defines the concept of the *dispositif*, in reference to Foucault, as a network between heterogenous elements, which encompasses linguistic and non-linguistical realms, such as discourses, institutions, laws, philosophies, etc. Cf. Jochen Kiefer, "Re-Vision Dramaturgie" (Zurich, February 21, 2019).

5 Cf. Jochen Kiefer, "Re-Vision Dramaturgie" (Zurich, February 21, 2019).

The **second section** includes the artists' lectures, which are followed by a script representative of their work, supplemented with a QR code linking to a video excerpt. Since Wen Hui gave a physical dance workshop instead of a lecture, the script of her dance piece *RED* is not introduced by means of a lecture but rather followed by a postscript written by the author of *RED*, Zhuang Jiayun.[6]

Since none of the materials in this section have been published before, I aim to place the foundation stone of an archive of postdramatic resonance between the German-speaking theatre landscape and that of Asia. Of course, such an archive will be a living one, and the resonances have already started to reinforce themselves mutually. Productions of Wen Hui's *RED*, Zhao Chuan's *World Factory*, and Kyung Sung Lee's *Love Story* are touring worldwide. In addition, students of the *Beijing Topography* seminar have now started to pursue their MA degrees in Europe. Among them is Gao Yinfu, who studies at the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies of the Justus Liebig University Giessen. These performances and students will alter the initial sound of the postdramatic.

Since the discourses about theatre and its relationship to reality are in constant flux, the materials collected here cannot be more than a still image from a certain place at a particular time. However, to deal with this situatedness, this book's **third and final section** invites its key contributors to reflect on their lectures and works at a temporal distance. To this end, I asked them in May 2021 to reevaluate their contributions from 2018. This final conversation, titled ***Shame and Power. A Critical Conversation on the Postdramatic Condition***, explores how the postdramatic aesthetic itself is subject to changing interpretations. Through an algorithmically controlled digitization of our communication, common reference points of reading and understanding reality are becoming more and more contested. Under this quite new condition, contemporary configurations of the postdramatic tend to overemphasize the role of the individual—often by highlighting the performer's identity as the only possible framework of meaning. This anthology seeks to intervene in the course of this development by archiving modes of postdramatic theatre dramaturgies that still value the idea of difference. Only through this approach of difference can a theatre refer to what is not there: the dead, the other, the past, the future. This perspective of difference is essential for facilitating an aesthetics that allows the audience's perception to swing back and forth between the irreducible individual *and* reality—as something historically grown and thus something that is contingent and alterable.

To ease the reader's access to the lectures and scripts printed here, I will now introduce each artist and their work with a specific focus on what kind of relationship the dramaturgies of the discussed performances have with the

6 The production *RED* is the result of an intensive collaboration between the performers and the other production participants, who lived and worked together at the *Living Dance Studio* in Beijing during a large part of the rehearsals. The original credits for this production identify Wen Hui as its choreographer, Zhuang Jiayun as its author, and Kai Tuchmann as its dramaturg.

postdramatic paradigm. In particular, I will highlight how their working methodologies and aesthetics are situated in the (recent) history of their theatre landscapes and how their underlying dramaturgies set out to develop performance situations that intervene in the routines of the public sphere. In the second part of this introduction, I will give a very brief overview of the emergence of postdramatic theatre in Germany and the context of its resonances in China.

CONTRIBUTORS

Zhao Chuan, born in 1967, is one of the most important *juchang* theatre-makers in China. His lecture ***There Is No Empty Space on Earth*** was held on November 6, 2018, at the Dramaturgy and Applied Theatre Faculty of the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing. This was the first time that he had conducted a seminar in a Chinese state-run theatre academy. In his lecture, Zhao Chuan described the guiding ideas underlying the work of his theatre collective *Grass Stage* (*Caotaiban*), which is an independent amateur theatre group that has been operating in Shanghai since 2005. Their theatre performances are created under simple conditions and with limited financial means. Since the collective was founded, it has been engaged in creative work in a range of alternative spaces, where it has given free performances and held discussions. Over the years, *Grass Stage* performances and other artistic projects have become meeting points for people from different social milieus; they represent a public space that is constantly in motion. This artistic flexibility in dealing with space is one of the most outstanding features of *Grass Stage*. The change of performance venues typical of the collective has to do, on the one hand, with their idea of bringing theatre to communities away from the large and developed cities of the east coast, and on the other hand, the refusal to perform within institutionalized theatres is the only way to undermine the censorship system, to the degree that this is possible. An important term in the context of Zhao's approach to theatre is "post-performance theatre". This concept, coined by Zhao, means that the discussion that also unfolds within the audience after the performance has the quality of a play itself. One could say that Zhao conceives *Grass Stage* performances as a trigger for these discussions between its audience members.[7] The production of a discursive public sphere in the works of Zhao Chuan thus becomes a counterweight to consumerism, which is currently being transfigured in the form of the ideology of the *Chinese Dream* as propagated by Xi Jinping. Since the amateurs in the cultural sector are freed from this production order, they have the opportunity to renegotiate hegemonies. It is this opportunity that the theatre of Zhao Chuan wants to make radical use of. Thus

7 Cf. Zhao Chuan and Tao Qingmei, "Feldmanöver," [Field manoeuvre] *Theater der Zeit*, 2015/12 (2015). See also Zhao Chuan, "There Is No Empty Space on Earth" in this volume.

one could speak of his theatre as an amateur practice with the aim of awaking from the *Chinese Dream*.

As a theatre-maker who is working in Shanghai and has many international contacts, Zhao Chuan is repeatedly confronted with the canonical thinking of the European theatre avant-gardes. Moreover, their concepts are often copied without hesitation in the institutions of the Chinese cultural industry. In his contribution, Zhao Chuan sharply criticizes the basic assumptions of Eugenio Barba's theatrical anthropology and Peter Brook's idea of an empty space. He sees in them the expression of a typical Western theatre of the 1980s that appropriates non-European theatre cultures to produce aesthetic innovations. Above all, Zhao Chuan refuses the construction of a universal performative body that lacks historical and social dimensions—something that is constitutive of Barba's theatre anthropology. Criticism of the same de-historicizing premise of human socialization lets Zhao also reject Brook's concept of an empty space. The central theme of the theatre Zhao Chuan creates is precisely the filling of spaces with experience and history and the constant struggle for public spaces. He contrasts the utopian ideas of an empty space and a timeless human expressiveness with his concrete way of working, which has developed from collective production to a process that focuses especially on the individual and contradictory solos of the group members. This method, which Zhao Chuan calls the "comprehensive method," is characterized by the fact that it does not reconcile the conflicting solo performances of the group members into a single narrative but combines them in such a way that a complex panorama of Chinese society becomes visible.

Aesthetically, *Grass Stage* attempts to revive, among other things, the performative aspects of the marginalized traditional Chinese opera. Recently, *Grass Stage* has also been experimenting more and more with circus-like techniques.

World Factory (*Shijie gongchang*) is one *of Grass Stage*'*s* most important productions. It critically intervenes in the foundational myth of the Chinese Republic, according to which the workers are an essential element of the nation and its history. By focusing on the living conditions of migrant workers, the production questions the actuality of this foundational myth. At the beginning of their research for *World Factory*, Zhao Chuan and *Grass Stage* gave theatre workshops for the Foxconn workers in Shenzhen, which has given rise to a number of Foxconn worker theatre groups that continue to operate and self-organize to this day.

The starting point of the production was Zhao Chuan's visit to the city of Manchester, formerly known as the "World Factory," and his assumption that although capitalism has entered the age of consumerism more than 200 years after its emergence, the phenomenon of the "World Factory" has not yet disappeared.

To develop the performance of *World Factory*, *Grass Stage* used, in addition to the workshops already mentioned, a variety of classic documentary sources, from historical and sociological material to first-person testimonials, such as the personal story of *Grass Stage* member Wu Jiamin, who is one of the tens of millions

of children who left their rural homes to find a paid job in urban industry. The staging and design of the script are not limited to the gesture of presenting documents. Rather the classical strategies of documentary theatre are complemented by other theatrical means, ranging from clown play to revue-like musical numbers and Beijing *xiqu* opera parodies.

The spirit of collaboration directly impacted the performance situation of the Shenzhen showcase of *World Factory*, which was held in November 2014 at the OCAT Contemporary Art Terminal in Shenzhen as part of a symposium organized by Zhao Chuan. The performances of *World Factory* were attended not just by the usual middle-class theatre-going public and students from the local university, but also by the very workers from Foxconn who participated in the workshops.

Since 2010, Foxconn, the company that does much manufacturing for Western companies such as Apple, has repeatedly been mentioned in connection with instances of suicide among its workers, who are often poorly paid migrant workers and students. Right at the beginning of this performance, two clowns enter the stage, grotesquely exaggerating the suicides of the Foxconn workers. One of the two clowns slips into the role of the (invented) psychology professor Lü, who evaluates the psychological resilience of Foxconn workers and makes prognoses about how many of them will commit suicide in a given period. The Shenzhen showcase exemplify the strong *juchang*[8] quality of Zhao Chuan's work, which is almost always aimed at creating temporary public spaces rather than simply presenting the group's latest theatre works. If one further considers Zhao Chuan's conception of performance as a trigger for what he calls "post-performance theatre," *World Factory* is decidedly about creating a performance situation in which theatre-goers of different classes are supposed to meet: The class of the middle bourgeoisie, significant for the Chinese cultural industry, confronted with the migrant workers, otherwise banished from society's sight. The performance situation of *World Factory* thus offers a possibility of confrontation and dialogue between these classes that does not occur in the protocols of everyday public life. However, I would like to point out that the political circumstances that led to the symposium in Shenzhen were extremely favorable. Nowadays, censorship and other state interventions into the work of Zhao Chuan (and other Chinese *juchang* theatre-makers) have become more frequent.[9]

8 For the concept of *juchang*, see Li Yinan "Hans-Thies Lehmann's Postdramatic Theatre and the new aesthetics of *juchang"* in this volume.

9 For example, guest performances curated by *Grass Stage* in Beijing planned for the spring of 2019 by Foxconn workers' theatre troupes, which were established in the course of the work on *World Factory* and were directed by *Grass Stage* members, could not be shown there. This probably has to do with the interest of the authorities in keeping the degree of organization of non-governmental workers' organizations as low as possible and, above all, in preventing them from forming networks between different cities.

Hans-Werner Kroesinger and Regine Dura have been working together since 2000 and are considered among the most important independent documentary theatre-makers in Germany. They were both invited to the Central Academy of Drama, but Regine Dura had to cancel her participation at the last moment. Given the permanence and intensity of their collaboration, however, Kroesinger and Dura are nevertheless consistently discussed here as an artistic duo. Their productions are created after extensive material research, undertaken together with their actors as part of play development, on topics such as the genocide in Rwanda, the European border agency Frontex, and the South-Eastern European front of the First World War.

To this book, Kroesinger/Dura contribute the lecture ***How to Work With Things That Really Happened****,* which provides a detailed description of the techniques and contexts of the documentary theatre play *Q&A—Questions & Answers*, which Kroesinger made in 1996, and which was completely based on documents related to the Eichmann Trial. This lecture about the foundation of their documentary way of working is deepened by the script of their joint work *Stolpersteine Staatstheater.* [10]

Hans-Werner Kroesinger was born in Bonn in 1962. He studied drama, theatre, and media from 1983 to 1988 with Andrzej Wirth and Hans-Thies Lehmann at the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies of the Justus Liebig University Giessen. While still a student, Kroesinger began working as assistant director and dramaturg to Robert Wilson, who held a guest professorship at the Giessen Institute. Another formative encounter for Kroesinger was with Heiner Müller, who also taught as a guest professor in Giessen. Kroesinger worked as an artistic collaborator in Müller's legendary 1989 production of *Hamlet/Hamletmaschine* at the Deutsches Theater in East Berlin. This production is significant, not least because the state of the GDR dissolved during its development. This intervention of reality and history in the rehearsal process had a lasting effect on Kroesinger's aesthetic search. In his 1996 work *Q&A—Questions & Answers,* which Kroesinger developed while he held a scholarship at the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, he succeeded in translating this search into his later typical style. This work also marks the revival of the tradition of documentary theatre in Germany and its continuation under the entirely new conditions of the turn of the century. Since then, he has directed his own productions at prestigious municipal and state-funded theatres and on the independent scene, above all at Hebbel am Ufer (HAU) in Berlin.

10 Stumbling blocks (Stolpersteine), also sometimes referred to as "stumbling stones," are gold paving or cobble stones set into the pavements of cities in Germany, Austria and throughout parts of Europe where the Nazis once ruled that mark where Jews and other victims of the National Socialists lived before being persecuted, transported to concentration or extermination camps and/or murdered. The project was initiated by the artist Gunter Demnig in 1992.

Regine Dura studied political science, theatre, film and media studies, German language and literature, and art education in Marburg and Frankfurt/Main. as well as video at the Berlin University of the Arts. Since 1996 she has been working as a freelancer in the field of feature and documentary film, including for the European Film Academy and Wim Wenders Produktion in Berlin. Kroesinger/Dura's theatre projects usually focus on political issues and events—especially violent conflicts—and consider the role of theatre in such contexts to be one of facilitating negotiation within society.

Their work is deeply connected to questions that are constitutive to the discourse of history and their aesthetics follow the canonical definition of documentary theatre, as laid down by Erwin Piscator. For Piscator, documentary theatre is theatre in which "the political document forms the sole basis, both textually and scenically"[11] of the performance. Peter Weiss defined it in the same spirit:

> Documentary theatre is a theatre of reportage. Records, documents, letters, statistics, market-reports, statements by banks and companies, government statements, speeches, interviews […] are the basis of the performance.[12]

Kroesinger/Dura's performances and dramaturgy deeply connect with the protocols and procedures of this tradition of documentary theatre, but they also alter them to a significant extent. In contrast to Piscator's and Weiss's theatre, the document is no longer exclusively regarded as a truthful and trustworthy account of the past but rather as something that co-produces the past to the same extent as it records it. From this perspective, Weiss's formulation of a documentary theatre that "presents authentic material unchanged in content but edited in form"[13] can no longer be maintained. Kroesinger/Dura articulate their doubt about the document's neutrality through the act of montage, which in their work always facilitates a bringing together of conflicting truth claims. In contrast to Peter Weiss's documentary theatre, in which various documents are assembled to generate *one* consistent (counter-)narrative of a historical issue, Kroesinger/Dura are concerned with developing a multi-perspective view on historical or current facts.

The disbelief in the document's capacity to represent the historical truth "as it was" is typical of representatives of the third period of documentary theatre.[14]

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11 Erwin Piscator, *Das Politische Theater* [Political Theatre] (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1968), 63. Translation by Kai Tuchmann.

12 Peter Weiss, "The Material and the Models: Notes Towards a Definition of Documentary Theatre," *Theatre Quarterly*, no. 1 (1971): 41.

13 Weiss, "The Material and the Models: Notes Towards a Definition of Documentary Theatre," 41.

14 Documentary theatre in Germany is divided into three periods. The first period is dated 1924–1929 and is closely linked to the works of theatre director Erwin Piscator. The second

While most of the third period theatre-makers, as a consequence of this disbelief in the document, have banished trained actors from their stages, Kroesinger/Dura stand out in so far as they are the only ones who vehemently adhere to the use of professionally trained actors. That is very much in contrast to the works of *Rimini Protokoll*, perhaps the most famous representatives of this third period, in whose works all actors are replaced by actual people ("experts of the everyday") who tell their personal stories on stage. The documentary truth claims in their works are thus usually limited and legitimized by the emphasis on the subjective perspective of the performers. Instead of textual documents, the individual bodies of the performers and their memories, stories, movements take the place of documents. Kroesinger/Dura, by contrast, want to demonstrate how precisely the linguistic composition of documents reflects power relations and constructions of reality. For this work on language, they need actors who can work out the linguistic peculiarities and argumentations of documents and offer them to the audience for critical reflection.

For their play ***Stolpersteine Staatstheater***[15], commissioned by the Staatstheater Karlsruhe, and invited to the 2016 edition of Germany's most important theatre festival "Theatertreffen," Kroesinger/Dura have reconstructed the details of how anti-Semitic discrimination worked after 1933 from the personnel files of the Staatstheater Karlsruhe. Jewish actors, a Jewish prompter, and the artistic director were dismissed, arrested, driven into exile, or committed suicide in Karlsruhe. In this performance, actors sit together with the audience at a large work table and read files, newspaper reports, memoirs, and interviews with contemporary witnesses. Again and again, the actors enter and—after a short period—exit the characters they portray. The bureaucratic procedure that legally regulated social exclusion transforms the performance into a lesson about the functioning of state bureaucracy. The performance situation conceived by

period is dated 1963–1970 and is characterized by playwrights such as Rolf Hochhuth, Peter Weiss, and Heinar Kipphardt, whose works have in common a critical approach to German Nazi and post-war history. Documentary theatre reemerges in a third period around the turn of the millennium and is deeply linked with the works of Hans-Werner Kroesinger, She She Pop, and Rimini Protokoll. This third wave has been explicitly described as postdramatic in: Andreas Tobler, "Kontingente Evidenzen: Über Möglichkeiten Dokumentarischen Theaters," [Contingent Evidence. On the Possibilities of Documentary Theatre] in *Dokument, Fälschung, Wirklichkeit: Materialband zum Zeitgenössischen Dokumentarischen Theater* [Document, Fake, Reality. Materials of Contemporary Documentary Theatre], ed. Boris Nikitin, Carena Schlewitt and Tobias Brenk (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2014) 147-63.

15 Stumbling blocks (Stolpersteine), also sometimes referred to as "stumbling stones" are gold paving or cobble stones set into the pavements of cities in Germany, Austria and throughout parts of Europe where the Nazis once ruled that mark where Jews and other victims of the National Socialists lived before being persecuted, transported to concentration or extermination camps and/or murdered. The project was initiated by the artist Gunter Demnig in 1992.

Kroesinger/Dura in *Stolpersteine Staatstheater* transforms the history of the performance site into an essential element of the performance. The history of the Karlsruhe theatre's involvement in National Socialism, reconstructed from archival material, thus becomes an omnipresent frame for the encounter between spectators and performers, who meet in the very institution whose collaboration with the NS regime is elaborated in the performance. Dramaturgy thus also reveals itself here as a specific way of thinking about theatre art, in this case as a reflection on its history, since dramaturgy in German theatre owes much to the widespread introduction of dramaturgical offices at German municipal theatres during the Nazi period. These dramaturg positions were established with the sole purpose of bringing theatres into line with the Reich Ministry of Propaganda.[16] The selection of the play *Stolpersteine Staatstheater* for this book is also due to the fact that this production was invited to the 2017 edition of "Theatertreffen in China" and thus led to a strengthening of interest in documentary forms in Chinese theatre.[17]

At this point, it might be interesting to speak about the very different starting points of Kroesinger/Dura's and Wen Hui's documentary theatre. Kroesinger/Dura's documentary theatre rejects the discourses on authenticity of the first two periods of German documentary theatre. Yet, the contemporary theatre-makers share with the practitioners of these two earlier periods their stock of material, which consists mainly of published texts from newspapers, essayistic articles, or archive material. Thus, the material backbone of Kroesinger/Dura's work consists of the products of the free press and freely accessible archives. Wen does not find this kind of material in the People's Republic of China. Her documentary theatre cannot be text-based, since neither counter-narratives nor multi-perspective reflections would arise from published texts in China. Archives are not easily accessible to the public in China either. Furthermore, the official relationship of the People's Republic to its history is a very special one: For example, in the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Games, there is not a single reference to any event of the 20th century.[18] This absence of a published historical discourse almost inevitably leads to a preoccupation with personal and embodied histories, as these are the only freely accessible, uncontrolled archives in China. The two documentary approaches of Kroesinger/Dura and Wen thus stand almost crosswise to each other: Kroesinger/Dura are taking textual documents but believe in their

16 Cf. Evelyn Deutsch-Schreiner, *Theaterdramaturgien von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart* [Theatrical Dramaturgies from the Enlightenment to the Presence](Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2016).

17 The "Theatertreffen in China" was founded in 2016 as a cooperation between the Goethe-Institut China and the Berliner Festspiele. As part of this program, which is curated by experts from the culture sector, two to three productions from the Theatertreffen are invited to China each year.

18 I owe this observation to Peter Eckersall.

representational possibilities only to a limited extent, while Wen regards the body and its experiences as a document, and she follows its claim to truth without reservation.

Wen Hui was born in 1960 and is regarded worldwide as the leading representative of modern dance in China. She studied dance and choreography at the Beijing Dance Academy and was especially influenced by her collaborations in the 1990s with Trisha Brown and Pina Bausch. As a form of increased liveliness, her understanding of art is the focus of the *Living Dance Studio* (*Shenghuo Wudao Gongzuoshi*) that she founded in 1994 in Beijing.

The documentary dance performance ***RED*** (*Hong*) serves as a paradigmatic example of Wen's theatrical approach. *RED* premiered on December 25, 2015, at Shanghai Power Station of Art and takes its point of departure from *The Red Detachment of Women,* which was one among the eight model operas (*yangbanxi*) during the time of the Cultural Revolution in China (1966–76).

The Red Detachment of Women takes place on the southern Chinese island of Hainan. It tells the story of the peasant girl Wu Qinghua, who is kept as a slave by the landowner Nanbatian. Wu manages to escape and joins the battalion of an army led by General Hong Changqing, which consists only of female soldiers. After some entanglements, the all-decisive battle between the women's battalion and Nanbatian's army takes place on the island. The battalion wins. It is worth mentioning that a battalion stationed on Hainan Island consisting exclusively of women very likely did exist in the 1930s. Liang Xin wrote a novel about this army, which again became the basis for a film adaptation under the personal aegis of Prime Minister Zhou Enlai. Novel and film were then the sources from which the plot of the ballet, which premiered in 1964, was assembled. Interesting discoveries can be made by comparing these different representations of history, such as the fact that the figure of a male commander of the Women's Army was only developed for the model opera version. *RED* has dealt with all these different historical representations of the material and has incorporated them in the rehearsal and staging process.

I want to give some brief remarks on the historical context and concept of the model opera, as they will deepen the understanding of an existing dramaturgy *avant la lettre* in mainland China. In 1963, in reaction to the de-Stalinization that was taking place in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev, Mao gave a speech in which he expressly warned against a "counter-revolutionary restoration" in China that would completely change China's essence and, of course, threaten his power base.[19] To counter this fear of China's "drifting" into capitalism, Mao, in the

19 Chen Xiaomei, "Performing the 'Red Classics.' From 'The East Is Red' to 'The Road to Revival'," in Li; Zhang, *Red Legacies in China*, Cultural Afterlives of the Communist Revolution (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016) 151.

same year, launched the socialist education campaign, whose battle cry was "Never forget class struggle!" This campaign became the starting point of cultural production on a massive scale, especially of works that were later called "Red Classics," such as *The East is Red* (*Dongfang Hong,* 1964) and *The Red Detachment of Women* (*Hongse Niangzi, Jun* also 1964). This state-controlled planning and execution of artistic production that goes hand in hand with the intertwining of political campaigns and cultural production can be very well described with the term "dramaturgy in the mode of policing" [*polizeiliche Dramaturgie*], a phrase coined by the theatre scholar Nikolaus Müller-Schöll.[20] Such dramaturgy safeguards narratives that privilege a few groups in society while simultaneously preventing the entry of certain other groups and their experiences into the public sphere. Opposed to such police dramaturgy is political dramaturgy that seeks to use theatre to change the dynamics of public space by initializing a new "distribution of the sensible".[21] Chinese theatre has been deeply affected by the approach of police dramaturgy since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, as it has assured the state authorship and control over the products of the theatre. *RED* rejects this claim of police dramaturgy and sets out to use the production and performance of theatre to collect, interpret, and publish alternative perspectives on the Cultural Revolution.

The Cultural Revolution itself had one of its starting points in a controversy over Wu Han's play *Ha Rui Dismissed from Office*, which was published in 1961 and then read years later by Yao Wenyuan as a critical commentary on Mao's responsibility for the Great Famine. In defense of Mao, Yao published an article criticizing the play. This criticism led to the imprisonment of Wu Han and the first campaigns against so-called right-wing extremists. This circumstance alone shows how relevant theatre was in the political debates of the 20th century in China. The model operas that emerged from the Cultural Revolution probably reflect an attempt to regulate performances that was unprecedented in theatre history. The selection and dramaturgy of these model operas was carried out by Mao's wife Jiang Qing, who herself had been an important actress in the 1930s and who, in the context of the introduction of socially critical naturalism and spoken theatre in China, played the leading role in Ibsen's *Nora*, among others. The dramaturgy of these plays, typical of the Cultural Revolution, is based on the "Three Prominences" concept. This concept states that of all the characters, the positive ones should be emphasized; among these positive characters, in turn, those with a heroic character should be highlighted; and among the heroic characters, the most heroic figure should be emphasized. Overall, the dramaturgy of

20 Nikolaus Müller-Schöll, "Polizeiliche und politische Dramaturgie," [Policing and Political Dramaturgy] in *Postdramaturgien* [Postdramaturgies], ed. Sandra Umathum and Jan Deck (Berlin: Neofelis, 2020).

21 For a discussion of the concept of the political understood as a particular distribution of the sensible, see: Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2011).

Revolutionary Model Theatre aims to create beautiful, fully developed worker-peasant-soldier figures. In terms of staging, the positive figures brought into focus by the dramaturgy should be further emphasized by being presented in the middle of the stage with full lighting. In contrast, the negative characters should be placed in the corners of the stage in the shadows.[22] The dramaturgy of the model opera was fixed. Acting, sets, and costumes were so detailed that they hardly offered the performers any room for improvisation.

It is important to emphasize that Chinese society in 1966–76 was largely a rural society, and that media such as radio and television were not widespread at that time. For ten years, therefore, the state-directed performance practice across the whole country, from urban factories to village communities, made these model operas the privileged tool of political propaganda and the cultural-ideological symbol of the Cultural Revolution period. It is estimated that 36 million people were sentenced alone in rural areas, of whom between 750,000 and 1.5 million were killed. The same number of people suffered life-long injuries during this time.[23] Phenomena of denunciation, self-incrimination rituals, and even public torture/killing characterized the public life of the Cultural Revolution, as shaped by the Red Guards. The Red Guards were usually composed of young urban men and women who had never experienced a political period other than Mao's China. Taking Mao's doctrine of the permanent revolutionization of all cultural institutions literally, these young people rebelled violently against any form of authority, both Confucianist and right-wing. It was thanks to the emergence of the Red Guards that Mao's rule could be maintained after his disastrous experiment of the so-called Great Leap Forward (1958–62).

In the decade after Mao's death in 1976, the Cultural Revolution became an important subject of literature, art, and cinema. Still, these unofficial historiographies of the arts always remained controlled by censorship and were therefore never able to deal with the essential questions of guilt and responsibility. The increasing criticism of the effects of China's market reforms under Deng then even prepared the ground for a posthumous Mao cult in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and commodification of the memory of the Cultural Revolution period began.[24] At the same time, the Central Propaganda Department in Beijing had explicitly prohibited the publication of further works on the Cultural Revolution. This has resulted in the absence of debate about the reasons for the Cultural Revolution, marked by censorship and commodification of memory.

RED opposes this absence of debate about the reasons for the Cultural Revolution by publicly discussing the different experiences of the performers. In

22 See the script of *RED* in this volume.

23 Cf. Andrew G. Walder and Yang Su, "The Cultural Revolution in the Countryside: Scope, Timing and Human Impact," *The China Quarterly*, no. 173 (2003).

24 Cf. Li Jie, "Introduction: Discerning Red Legacies in China," in Li; Zhang, *Red Legacies in China*, 3.

contrast to the Scar Literature[25] of the 1980s, however, the focus is not exclusively on the personal accounts of eyewitnesses but also includes how the time of the Cultural Revolution is interpreted in the cultural products of *The Red Detachment of Women* and their equivalents in popular culture. This question is all the more relevant because our current moment marks the time in which, in Aleida Assman's terms, the communicative memory of the Cultural Revolution is transformed into cultural memory.

The performance situation of *RED* is significantly shaped by the casting practices underlying the dance performance. Thus, with the dancer Liu Zhuying, who danced *The Red Detachment of Women* several hundred times during the Cultural Revolution, a person enters the stage whose specific experiences with the Cultural Revolution hardly receive any attention in today's China. In addition, Li Xinmin, a migrant worker, tells her life story by unfolding it in associative proximity to the title heroine of *The Red Detachment of Women*. In the context of this cast, Wen Hui's choreography technique is significant. It understands the dancer's body as an archive of forgotten stories and suppressed history—and attempts to tap into these memories to facilitate their public communication to an audience.

Despite all the influences of modern dance, Wen Hui's relationship to dance is strongly influenced by the physical imprint of Maoism on her body. She has talked about this ambivalent relationship to Maoism on several occasions.[26] For Wen Hui, this experience of a body that is the agent of her own identity and yet at the same time is always ideologically overwritten becomes the starting point and the aesthetic foundation for all her productions. Wen Hui tries to discover personal and social stories from her body and its memories. Her rehearsal design and theatre work are derived from exactly this understanding—diametrically opposed to the dramaturgy of the "Three Prominences." In the *Living Dance Studio,* the guiding principle is that no characters are embodied, no roles are played, and

25 The term *Scar Literature* refers to works written immediately after the Cultural Revolution, in which the crimes of the Cultural Revolution are settled/recounted. It is often claimed that the name for this literary movement is derived from the story *Scars* (*Shanghen*), by Lu Xinhua.

26 "Back in the 1960s and 1970s, it was a common sight for us kids to express our admiration and appreciation for various political leaders through our bodies; it was even a source of pride. As a kid, I remember, in our yard each morning and evening, young and old alike gathering around a portrait of Chairman Mao to pay our respects. After we gathered in front of that portrait and reflected on all the bad things we had done that day, we would then perform an affectionate song in Mao's honour. And that's how I began dancing, with this 'Loyalty Dance'. At that time in China, everyone danced more or less the same type of dance; there was no real distinction between the individual sense of body and the collective body [...] In other words, any sense of an individual body vanished." Wen Hui, "Female Memory Begins with the Body," in *The Body at Stake: Experiments in Chinese Contemporary Art and Theatre*, ed. Jörg Huber and Zhao Chuan (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), 133.

therefore no one is highlighted. Everyone brings their identity, memory, and personality equally onto the stage. Performing means sharing the rehearsal experience with the audience.

The script of *RED* will be followed by the essay ***From the Red Detachment to the Women: A Postscript*** by the author of *RED*, **Zhuang Jiayun**. The impulse for this postscript was Zhuang's regret that the last part of *RED* "could not be developed as planned, due to inadequate initiatives, opportunity, budget, and rehearsal time". In her text, Zhuang especially highlights the feminist potential associated with the afterlife of *The Red Detachment of Women.*

Boris Nikitin, born in 1979 in Basel, where he is also currently based, is the son of Ukrainian-Slovakian-French-Jewish immigrants. He is active as a director within the international independent theatre scene and at German-language municipal theatres. As an author, director and essayist, he has been exploring the representation and production of identity and reality since he graduated from the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies in Giessen in 2008. His production *Hamlet* received the greatest acclaim and toured worldwide. Nikitin is also the founder and curator of the international festival "It's the real thing," which devotes itself to exploring documentary works. In his contribution, ***Don't Be Yourself. Notes on the Impossibility of the Documentary***, Nikitin is primarily concerned with how mutual observation generates reality in everyday life and theatre. I see Nikitin's aesthetic importance in the unique way his theatre criticizes and plays with what Roland Barthes calls "reality effects," which are a fundamental constituent of certain branches of documentary art. Barthes defined this notion, with regard to literature, as follows:

> By "effect of the real" I mean: language fading into the background, to be supplanted by a certainty of reality: language turning in on itself, burying itself and disappearing, leaving bare what it says.[27]

As characteristics of this transparency of linguistic signs, Barthes mentions their brevity and simplicity as they are given in the form of the *haiku*. Through its literary means, the *haiku* virtually forces the signified to flash. The reality effect is understood by Barthes as a specifically receptive experience: The certainty of an evident given. Applied to the theatre situation, the reality effect can be understood as a moment of reception in which the sign system of the theatre seems not to represent something else (a fictitious role, historical figure, place, etc.), but recedes in favor of "real" being (the concrete performer, this concrete place here and now, etc.). The relevant theatrical means of producing this reality effect are hardly different from the literary means discussed by Barthes in connection with

27 Roland Barthes, "February 17, 1979," in *The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège De France, 1978–1979 and 1979–1980* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 70.

the *haiku*: Brevity, simplicity, and above all, focus on details (not essential to the plot).[28] Therefore, in documentary theatre works, detailed accounts of intimacy are often shared between performers and spectators.

Nikitin's works create performance situations that intervene in the naïve belief in reality as something self-evident by displaying reality construction as an effect of perceptual biases. Nikitin expresses this very clearly when he puts documentary theatre and illusionary theatre in a surprisingly direct relationship:

> Every reality report reproduces its own premises. Premises and norms are collectively recognized fictions, which in their repetition create the illusion of reality. Precisely when documentary theatre claims to represent reality, it must be considered a radical form of illusion theatre, even more so than fictional theatre, in which the fictional character of what is shown and said is always revealed.[29]

So for Nikitin, there is no doubt that human perception, and thus aesthetic experience, is determined by social and historical factors. Therefore, reality effects are always socially and historically situated experiences and depend on a sensibility shared by the theatre-makers and the audience. It is this sociological foundation of perception and aesthetic experience around which Nikitin's theatre circles.

The premiere of ***Hamlet*** took place on September 24, 2016, at Kaserne Basel and it has since been performed over 60 times worldwide. *Hamlet* is not a retelling of Shakespeare's material but rather an attempt to develop a theatrical vision concerning identity, illness, and reality. At the center of this vision is the performer and electric musician Julia*n Meding, who, as the dazzling Hamlet figure, exposes themselves, their body, and biography to the audience's gaze. For the spectator, the central experience in *Hamlet* is usually one of initially rejecting Meding because their address is perceived as a never-ending, self-referential monologue by a weird, narcissistic person. According to Nikitin's statements, this beginning leads almost a third of the audience to mentally or even physically drop out of the evening. For the rest, after about 45 minutes, something gradually sets in that even they had not expected: Namely, empathy and identification. *Hamlet* stages a temporal experience that gradually turns something foreign into something familiar. The same reality—that of Meding—is experienced twice. *Hamlet*

28 In *The Reality Effect,* Barthes explicitly explores the narrative significance of the seeming insignificance of "*détails inutiles*" (useless details) as a means of constructing the reality effect. Cf. Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 143.

29 Boris Nikitin, "Der unzuverlässige Zeuge: Zwölf Behauptungen über das Dokumentarische," [The Unreliable Witness. Twelve Assertions about the Documentary] in *Dokument, Fälschung, Wirklichkeit: Materialband zum Zeitgenössischen Dokumentarischen Theater* [Document, Fake, Reality. Materials of Contemporary Documentary Theatre], ed. Boris Nikitin, Carena Schlewitt and Tobias Brenk (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2014), 14. Translation by Kai Tuchmann.

intends to create permanent doubts about the authenticity of its performer and their biography.

Hamlet creates a performance situation that questions the general condition of the possibility of communication situations and investigates the dynamics of stepping into the public eye, the breaking of social taboos, and the vulnerability that arises when people start to make themselves visible and audible. It is not least a plea for a utopia of a vulnerability that is not a deficiency of being human but a revolutionary ability.

Lee Kyung-Sung was born in Basel in 1983 and studied directing at Chung-Ang University in Seoul before completing his postgraduate studies at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London. In 2007, he founded the theatre company *Creative VaQi* and has been its artistic director ever since. He and his troupe are among the most influential representatives of the "younger" South Korean theatre-makers that have increasingly drawn attention to themselves since the turn of the century. This generation has permanently shifted the coordinates of South Korean theatre by clearly breaking away from the questions and working methods of their predecessors, whose works were primarily determined by the struggle to reconcile the concept of drama imported from the West with traditional Korean performative practices, such as the *gut* (shamanic rites). Lee's artistic generation has replaced this approach, which revolves around one's own artistic identity, with a rigorous exploration of contemporary issues. Lee explains his artistic approach in his contribution ***Practice of Theatre—Rehearsal of Life*** and comments on some of his works, such as *Let Us Move Your Sofa* (2010), which deals with the commercialization and anonymization of Seoul's public space, and his examination of the Sewol ferry disaster in *Before After* in 2015. This work focuses not so much on a documentary re-enactment of the ferry disaster but rather on the question of how pain turns into narration and eventually ends up being a commodity. The tragedy, in which 304 people lost their lives in April 2014, becomes a starting point for investigating the specific vulnerability of the modern human condition, which results from its increasing entanglement with technological agencies. The production pays special attention to the impact the mass media's handling of such technological catastrophes has on the social consciousness. In *Before After,* a fundamental component of Lee's work becomes visible: It repeatedly deals with questions of the ethics of perception and representation—especially in the face of the pain of others.

Lee's first works took place at sites of everyday life, such as pedestrian crossings, public squares, and hotel rooms. Since the production *Namsan Documenta* in 2014, which was based on research into the history of the Namsan Arts Center, he has increasingly conceived his works for the more concentrated situation of the theatre. A salient characteristic of these works is the intensive research that the *Creative VaQi* collective undertakes in developing their plays. This research goes far beyond desk work. It almost always involves the entire ensemble and takes the form of long-term on-site visits. The impressions gained in this way are

evaluated as autonomously as possible by the performers and processed aesthetically by them trying to develop a personal attitude to the material. In this way, the rehearsals become a process in which an attempt is made to work out the lines of connection between the different materials and the performers' views of them. The rehearsal thus becomes a method that is not concerned with developing a generalized reading but, on the contrary, with discovering the contradictions in the material and finding ways to let them coexist unreconciled. The aim is thus to produce a social panorama of contradictions rather than a smoothed-out reading. Lee understands his role as that of a mediator, which is very similar to Zhao Chuan's working method.

Love Story by Lee and his collective dates from 2018. It illustrates very well how the collective research work leads to the development of a performance piece. Moreover, *Love Story* shows how Lee never relies merely on the reality effect but always irritates or intensifies it through revealed acts of imagination and fiction.

Love Story tells the stories of relationships among North/South Korean couples from the time when South Korean companies were still operating in the Kaesong Industrial Complex. The Kaesong Industrial Region in North Korea served as a symbol of collaborative economic development with South Korea. In 2016, this park was closed in protest against a North Korean missile launch, and all South Korean companies had to leave. The play tells the story of the suddenly separated tragic couples, who are also a symbol for the situation of the two Koreas. Developed from research and interviews with South Korean businesspeople, among others, the play attempts to bridge the irreducible distance between the couples and states by means of the imagination. A central aspect of this is the invention of North Korean characters with whom the audience is supposed to empathize on a personal level. To do this, the cast members have developed a performance style that constantly enters and exits the characters to provide information about how their background knowledge of the characters was researched and where their own fantasies were incorporated into the performance.

The performance situation of Love Story is that the South Korean actors demonstrate to their audience in South Korea how they imagine their neighbors in North Korea. The transformation of the actors into their North Korean characters is revealed, and the research underlying this acting process is also made visible. Through this performance situation, which relies on strong alienation effects, the very mechanism of projecting oneself onto the other is made visible and placed in the context of the South's North Korea policy.

RESONANCES

In physics, the term resonance (from Latin *resonare*: to reverberate) refers to the relationship between two bodies, where one excites the other to vibrate. The essence of the resonance phenomenon is that the reverberation of this other body takes place in its *own* frequency. Resonance is therefore a response to another *expressed in a body's own frequency*, as opposed to an echo, where the body would reverberate in the same frequency of the body that excited it.

This volume aims to depict a specific theatrical resonance by tracing how the ideas of the postdramatic and dramaturgy stimulated the theatre scenes in Korea and, especially, in mainland China. I will show that the institutional and aesthetic beginnings of discourses around dramaturgy and postdramatic theatre in China and Germany are closely interwoven.

When it comes to postdramatic theatre in China, the Faculty of Dramaturgy and Applied Theatre at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing is the driving force of its practice. Li Yinan founded the faculty in 2015 and oriented it from the beginning towards a German model of dramaturgy that would work radically on expanding the possibilities of theatre. That is very much in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon understanding of the dramaturg, which is identified with the figure of a literary manager. Since Li, as the translator of Lehmann's book into Chinese,[30] introduced the concept of postdramatic theatre into the Chinese theatre discourse, postdramatic dramaturgy played a leading role in the faculty from the very beginning. This concept of a specifically postdramatic dramaturgy has been translated into Chinese theatre studies and theatre practice by Li with the term *juchang*. *Juchang* has thus become the central term of resonance of the postdramatic in China. Li originally established the term in the course of her translation of Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatisches Theater*. In 2010, she translated the title and term as *Houxiju Juchang*. The word *juchang*, which was neglected in mainland Chinese theatre studies at the time, served primarily as a counter-term to the established term for drama, *xiju*. The term *juchang* thus had the purpose of pointing to the dimension of theatricality/performativity. Since then, Li and I have also repeatedly emphasized the dramaturgical practices of narration and the development of performance situations as crucial aspects of *juchang* within our artistic and academic activities. In this regard, certain Chinese theatre-makers working since the late 1990s, such as Wen Hui and Zhao Chuan, have been a particularly prominent point of reference for us. Our pedagogy results from an experiment with a certain form of German theatre that has resonated with artists, scholars, and students from China.

In physics again, resonance can also lead to mutual amplification of vibration, and in fact, such amplification of postdramatic thought is what has been going on

30 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Houxiju Juchang* [Postdramatic Theatre] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chuban she [Beijing University Press], 2010).

in the last decade between Europe and Asia. The appropriation of postdramatic dramaturgical thought by Asian theatre-makers will surely significantly alter the sound of postdramatic practice in the world.

Postdramatic Theatre in Germany

The beginning of the institutionalization of postdramatic theatre in the German-speaking world is, on the one hand, linked to the revival of the genre of documentary theatre in the 1990s and, on the other hand, to the foundation of the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies at the Justus Liebig University Giessen in 1982 by Andrzej Wirth and Hans-Thies Lehmann. Lehmann highlighted the Institute's basic aesthetic assumptions in dialogue with a detailed analysis of avant-garde theatre in the 1980s and 1990s in his publication *Postdramatisches Theater* in 1999. It is no coincidence that the representatives of the latest period of documentary theatre in Germany are mostly graduates of the Giessen Institute for Applied Theatre Studies. This Institute has made a significant contribution to expanding the formal language of classical documentary theatre. This can be traced back to the specific research practiced at the Giessen Institute, which sought to discover "theatre forms beyond drama and beyond acting".[31] This research approach was accompanied by an absence of actors and classical theatre repertoire during training. The students in Giessen were therefore referred back to themselves as material and performers from the very beginning, and they experimented early on with alternative forms of text and authorship. Schlewitt and Brenk write about the methods used by the students of the Giessen Institute:

> Early on, experiments were carried out with documentary material, among other things; pieces were developed on the basis of specially collected interview material; the students, as performers, used their biographies as material. Rimini Protokoll's theatre, which can function entirely without actors, is rooted in the structures of the Giessen rehearsal stage.[32]

This educational practice explains the paradigmatic concept of the body as an archive of personal memory that took the place that documents had in the classical documentary theatre of Piscator and Weiss.

These developments, strongly connected to changes in theatre education, have found buyers in the theatre market and have thus been able to spread. In the Berlin HAU under the directorship of Matthias Lilienthal (2003–2012), the grad-

31 Boris Nikitin, Carena Schlewitt, and Tobias Brenk, "Vorwort," [Preface] in *Dokument, Fälschung, Wirklichkeit: Materialband zum Zeitgenössischen Dokumentarischen Theater* [Document, Fake, Reality. Materials of Contemporary Documentary Theatre], ed. Boris Nikitin, Carena Schlewitt and Tobias Brenk (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2014) 8. All translations by Kai Tuchmann.

32 Nikitin, Schlewitt and Brenk, "Vorwort," 8.

uates of the Giessen school have found a production and performance venue that has effectively implemented their new way of dealing with reality. Lilienthal's dictum of the "hysterical addiction to reality"[33] has been the programmatic guideline that has bound groups and artists such as Hans-Werner Kroesinger, Rimini Protokoll, She She Pop, and Boris Nikitin to itself for a long time. The networking of production sites on the independent scene then led to a multiplication of these forms. In addition to the HAU, this network consists of TAT (Frankfurt/Main), Mousonturm (Frankfurt/Main), Kampnagel (Hamburg), Podewil Berlin, Sophiensäle (Berlin), FFT (Düsseldorf), and Gessnerallee (Zurich) as well as a diverse range of festivals. However, this narrative only represents one (if probably the most powerful) line of tradition in Germany's younger postdramatic theatre. Since then, new theatre schools such as Hildesheim have joined the Giessen Institute. Furthermore, the history of theatre in the GDR also provided important impulses for the development of postdramatic theatre. In the production *Dreamland* (*Traumland,* 1985), the East Berlin theatre group *Zinnober* presented their dreams—after months of dealing with them—as a personal document, an "imprint" of their subjective state of mind with all the anxieties typical of GDR society.[34]

The presence of postdramatic theatre on the stages of the independent theatre scene in the last twenty years has also had a major impact on the German municipal theatre system (*Stadttheater*). This influence is manifested in the rapid increase in documentary procedures and the exploration of new ways of collaborating, such as play development (*Stückentwicklung*). The critique of representation, which is constitutive of postdramatic theatre, is also moving into the municipal theatre system, which is reflected in the increase in debates about diversity and inclusion in theatre.

One can conclude that in Germany, postdramatic theatre works have long since found their way out of the independent scene and embarked on a march through the institution that eventually will lead to new hybrid forms. Even the aesthetics of realism, and the ways of acting based on it, have been lastingly changed by the arrival of postdramatic theatre in Germany.

Dramaturgy in China

Dramaturgy *avant la lettre* in China started already with the *Movement for a New Culture* (*Xin wenhua yundong*), which was active in the 1910s and 20s. The movement's affection for and involvement with Western spoken theatre was an important building block for the modernization movement in China. As early as 1918, the movement dedicated a special issue of its journal to Ibsen's realism. Further important marks in the development of dramaturgical practice in China

33 Nikitin, Schlewitt and Brenk, "Vorwort," 11.

34 Cf. Nikitin, Schlewitt and Brenk, "Vowort," 7.

are Mao's *Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art* in May 1942, as well as the activities of Tian Han after the founding of the republic in 1949 and eventually the theatrical practice of the model operas (*yangbanxi*) in the Cultural Revolution. In all these cases, as with Lessing, dramaturgy can be understood as a *dispositif* that, after the collapse of the rules of art of the imperial era, attempts to redefine the relationship between art, war, revolution, and people. Shanghai theatre scholar William Sun also assumes the existence of a dramaturgy *avant la lettre* in China in his article "Official and Unofficial Dramaturgs: Dramaturgy in China." However, he dates its beginnings a little later, with the foundation of the state in October 1949:

> It [dramaturgy] was badly needed by the new regime eager to overhaul the entire theatre system. Without knowing the term "dramaturgy," or the exact meaning of the word, they usually set up an office, or a department called the Artistic Office or Office of Artistic Creation, into which they assigned playwrights, directors, and critics/editors.[35]

In this context, the activity of the playwright Tian Han, who headed the Bureau of Chinese Opera Improvement shortly after the founding of the People's Republic, is of particular importance. Mao commissioned Tian Han to reform the Chinese Opera. This project, which is enormous in significance and scope, made Tian's activity very influential. Sun describes him as China's chief dramaturg and compares his work with that of Goethe at the court of Weimar. However, during the Cultural Revolution, Tian Han was politically persecuted, and he died in prison in 1968. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, developments from the pre-revolutionary period were revived, and the decision-making authority then united in Tian Han was decentralized. The chief dramaturgy of China, formerly linked to his person,

> has been loosely taken over by various Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and government officials. Their work includes conceiving and announcing dramatic themes periodically according to the needs of the CCP and governments on different levels, oftentimes to coincide with specific anniversaries.[36]

Although Sun acknowledges the existence of such an "unofficial dramaturgical activity"[37] in China, he concludes that dramaturgy is still not an established profession in China, and he implies pretty much that it shouldn't be one, since the dramaturgical activity could still be carried out by the unofficial dramaturgs,

35 William Huizhu Sun, "Official and Unofficial Dramaturgs: Dramaturgy in China," in *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy*, ed. Magda Romanska (London: Routledge, 2015), 81.

36 Sun, "Official and Unofficial Dramaturgs: Dramaturgy in China," 82.

37 Sun, "Official and Unofficial Dramaturgs: Dramaturgy in China."

working mostly in state-administered organizations as "archivists, critics, playwrights, directors, and/or administrators."[38]

Such a claim is what the training approach at the Dramaturgy Faculty in Beijing under Li Yinan's aegis contradicts. It is symptomatic that Sun, very early on in his article, claims that Lessing's Hamburg Dramaturgy is "no longer a relevant use"[39], whereas it is precisely Lessing's approach to dramaturgy as a questioning of power structures that underlies the work of the Beijing Dramaturgy Faculty.

Juchang as a Specific Mode of Postdramatic Theatre in China

As in Giessen, it was also true of the faculty in Beijing that the theatre training was intended for a theatre that did not yet exist, i.e., one that had to be significantly shaped by the (later) works of the students. In the field of theatre education, it was the Faculty of Dramaturgy and Applied Theatre at Beijing's Central Academy of Drama that was the first training institution in mainland China to include aesthetic discourses and creative procedures around a postdramatic theatre practice in its curriculum, especially by relating to the tradition of the German documentary theatre. To understand the massive resonance that the postdramatic theatre eventually created in mainland China, I want to focus on the practice of the so-called *juchang* theatre-makers and their situatedness within the Chinese theatre history of the early 20th century, when spoken theatre (*huaju*) reached China via Japan.[40]

The already mentioned *Movement for a New Culture* (*Xin Wenhua Yundong*), supported by young intellectuals, saw in spoken theatre (*huaju*) a means of reforming the old "feudal" culture, which it held partly responsible for China's lack of modernity. In 1918, the magazine of the *Movement for a New Culture* published an issue on theatre reform as well as on Ibsen, which shows how much the movement's focus was based on the aesthetics of Western realism. The movement's attacks were directed against the traditional *xiqu* opera—in the West also often referred to as "Chinese opera"—which they accused of being distant from life. In contrast, the movement ascribed to spoken theatre a potential for social renewal. The actors of the *Movement for a New Culture* overlapped in many ways with those of the so-called *May Fourth Movement* (*Wusi Yundong*),[41] which has been described (including by Mao himself) as the forerunner of the Communist Party

38 Sun, 84.

39 Sun, 82.

40 In 1907, the *Spring Willow Society*, founded in Japan by Chinese foreign students in 1906, staged the first spoken theatre play in Chinese theatre history in Tokyo: An adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* entitled *The Black Slaves Sigh to Heaven (Heinu Yutian Lu)*.

41 This movement, which called for a radical modernization and democratization of China, arose from the protests of Chinese students against the transfer of German concession areas to Japan, which began on May 4, 1919.

of China (CPC). This intertwining of the two movements with the founding history of the CPC shows how important the form of realistic spoken theatre has been and continues to be for nation-building in China.

The distinction between spoken theatre (*huaju*) and the aforementioned *xiqu* opera was then institutionalized after 1949 by the founding of training schools and companies that kept the two practices separated. Realism of Western European provenance mixed with Soviet realism of the Stanislawski style was implemented as the educational norm for theatre education. Li Yinan's translation of *Postdramatisches Theater* has intervened in this aesthetic and ideological dominance of realistic spoken theatre. She expressed the difference between the words "drama" and "theatre," which is constitutive for the translation of Lehmann's text, with the words *xiju* and *juchang*. The term *xiju* represents the dramatic with its focus on text and literature, whereas *juchang* emphasizes, among other things, the reality of performance. The term *juchang* has been heavily criticized because, in its last consequence, as intended by Li, it aims to represent an understanding of theatricality as performativity that did not exist in the academic discourse on the theatre in China before Li's translation. In this context, it is important to emphasize that the term *juchang* was not invented by Li but is linked, on the one hand, to academic theatre discourse in the 1930s and 1940s in China, and on the other hand, to the self-descriptions of independent Chinese contemporary theatre-makers.

In defining *juchang,* Li builds extensively on statements by contemporary Chinese theatre artists. These artists use the term *juchang* for self-designation or to describe their theatrical work to distinguish themselves from *xiju*, which is connected with textuality and thus, due to a censorship practice that focuses mainly on text, with ideology and suppression. Among these artists are the founding figures and exponents of experimental theatre in China (Mou Sen, Wu Wenguang, Wen Hui, Zhao Chuan, and Zhang Xian) and the generation that followed them (Li Jianjun, Li Ning, and Wang Mengfan). Li emphasizes that the spatial dimension is crucial for the performance practice of these *juchang* artists. She highlights this spatial dimension through her translation of theatre with the word *juchang*, since the semantic field of the Chinese character "chang" is formed around the term "space." Space has always been a contested resource for *juchang* artists, as the majority of resources have been put at the service of the aesthetic practice of spoken theatre. As a result, the struggle for public space for performance has become a central theme of *juchang* theatre. Quite a few of the *juchang* artists have therefore founded their own studios on the outskirts of Beijing, for example, Wu Wenguang and Wen Hui's *Caochangdi Workstation/Living Dance Studio* (*Caochangdi Gongzuozhan/Shenghuo Wudao Gongzuoshi*) and Tian Gebing's *Paper Tiger Studio* (*Beijing Zhilaohu Xiju Gongzuoshi*),[42] or *Grass Stage* (*Caotaiban*) around Zhao Chuan, who developed theatre forms that make repeated brief in-

42 The workshops and studios of these groups no longer exist.

terventions in state-controlled space. In view of China's enormous size, the number of *juchang* theatre-makers is remarkably small, and they are mainly concentrated in the metropolises of Beijing and Shanghai. The catalog of the MCAM Museum in Shanghai, published in 2015 for the special exhibition on *30 Years of Experimental Theater in China*, lists 29 names of experimental theatre practitioners—and this includes Danny Yung from Hong Kong.[43]

Since *juchang* works are largely determined by their positioning beyond the official theatre landscape, it is appropriate to briefly sketch this official theatre landscape here to provide the background *against* which *juchang* theatre stands out in its specific modes of production.

The official Chinese theatre landscape is clearly marked by the state's influence. This influence takes two main forms: first, the form of censorship (*shencha*), which denotes the direct intervention of official authorities in creative work, and second, the mode of state-led commercialization. Shannon Steen gives a very good description of how censorship is situated within the Chinese theatre system. I quote her here in detail:

> Contrary to popular accounts in the international mediascape, censorship in China is at once more institutionally specific, inconsistently practiced, and deeply internalized by its artists than is easy to comprehend from the outside. Expressive controls are primarily content-driven (in other words, they tend to be exercised over certain topics, leaving formal experimentation largely open), and operate largely within state-sponsored arts organizations and training schools. Artists learn to avoid certain topics (the Tiananmen protests, Tibet, ethnic separatism, sexually explicit material, and so forth) while training for their prospective fields, with the result that they often self-censor when creating new work. In this way, the operation of censorship in China looks more like the forms of Gramscian soft power that we generally associate with liberal democracies than we might expect, and even the top-down organization of expressive control is more inconsistent than is often understood. The state censorship office will sometimes allow performances of shows that might fall foul of taboo topics, but that they think generate a useful discussion: They will sometimes, for example, send a representative on the closing night of a performance who, after the show, will declare the production out of bounds and closed—but only after the run has been completed, thus retaining the external impression of state control while also allowing distribution of nonexplicitly endorsed ideas.[44]

However, in recent works that deal with the Chinese theatrical landscape, as well as in the words of the independent theatre-makers themselves, the state influence in its second form is increasingly emphasized: namely the state-controlled commercialization of the theatre. To make this specific "connection of state, market

43 Qiu Zhijie and Wang Ziyue, eds., *Shiyanjuchang Sanshinian* [30 Years of Experimental Theatre] (Shanghai: Shanghai Mingyuan Contemporary Art Museum, 2015).

44 Shannon Steen, "World Factory: Theatre, Labor, and China's 'New Left'," *Theatre Survey* 58, no. 1 (2017): 28f.

and culture in China",[45] which began after the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), nameable, the cultural journalist Mark Siemons uses the term "culture industry".[46] He argues that, in contrast to the rather pragmatic use of the term in English, the term culture industry, as the Communist Party of China uses it, takes on exactly the polemical meaning that Horkheimer and Adorno gave it, namely that of "a plan condensed into a seamless system."[47] The term culture industry was first used officially in 2001 in a five-year plan. Subsequently, research institutes for the national culture industry were established at Beijing University and Shanghai Jiaotong University. Since 2005, Shenzhen has hosted several culture industry fairs, and the eleventh five-year plan in 2006 gave the culture industry paradigm almost hegemonic status.[48] It calls for the "continued transformation of state cultural institutions into commercial enterprises,"[49] regardless of whether they are "film studios, television production facilities, theatres or intermediary organizations".[50] Siemons interprets the emergence of a Chinese culture industry as a necessary consequence of the erosion of central political concepts associated with the Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution produced an ideological nominalism that made everyone who did not use the right words a victim of the political elite that was currently ruling. In particular, this nominalism eroded the term "people", which, due to its career in the Cultural Revolution, has lost its compelling nature and brought the party into a troubling situation, since it conceives of itself as the representative of the people. By implementing the concept of a "culture industry," the Party enabled itself to redesign what formerly was "the will of the people" as the will of culture consumers in the new millennium. That can be seen especially in statements like that of the former deputy minister of culture and vice president, Li Yuanchao: "It is popular culture that makes culture accessible to ordinary people and that really puts the right to consume culture in the hands of the people."[51]

Purely in terms of production, one could characterize the *juchang* theatre workers as trying to escape the influence of the culture industry described above. Many *juchang* works are therefore inevitably created as international co-productions. In the 1980s, international co-productions were still being made mainly within the framework of highly official bilateral cultural programs without the participation of *juchang* theatre professionals. Today's theatre cooperations are

45 Mark Siemons, "Über die chinesische Kulturindustrie," [On the Chinese Culture Industry] in *Zeitgenössisches Theater in China* [Contemporary Theatre in China], ed. Cao Kefei, Sabine Heymann and Christoph Lepschy, (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2017), 73. All translations by Kai Tuchmann.

46 Siemons, 62.

47 Siemons, 62.

48 Cf. Siemons, 71–73.

49 Siemons, 72.

50 Siemons, 72.

51 Siemons, 65.

highly dynamic compared to those of that earlier time and have been supplemented by various new formats. The residency programs of national cultural institutes, cooperation between Chinese theatre-makers and international theatre festivals, or directly with municipal theatres or theatre academies and universities are only the most important phenomena showing how much cultural exchange with China has changed. The diversification of formats has been accompanied by rapid growth in the number of collaborations. In terms of production, the *juchang* works thus oscillate between the extremely limited performance opportunities granted by the Chinese culture industry and the international theatre market, mainly European and Asian theatre festivals.

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