

Mundus theatri?

Theatrical metaphors in the humanities and social sciences. Inquiries into representation and critique.

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A workshop organized by
Dr Alexei Evstratov (Université de Lausanne/Switzerland) and
Dr Paul Sorrentino (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales/France)

The images of drama, stage, and other components of theatrical event have been used in European thought, from the Renaissance to our days, to both represent society and knowledge about it and articulate a critique of forms of representation. While much cited scholars like Erving Goffman (1956) and his followers have famously used a theatrical metaphor in order to transcribe social interactions, others have included theatre in their models of society as an element indexical of historical dynamics or political transformations (Debord 1967; Sennett 1976). A third of the many ways theatre was mobilized for was comparative analyses of practices that would share the stage's specific phenomenology (Leiris 1958; De Heusch 1971), or be understandable in a conceptual or historical continuity with it (Turner 1974; 1982).

The success of these analytical idioms might be related to the continuous currency of the theatrical metaphors in the languages of educated communities, from the early modern period onwards (Yates 1969). Indeed, the notion of *theatrum mundi* was then deployed alongside the genre of *theatrum*. Abraham Ortelius's *Theatrum orbis terrarum* (1570), for instance, is considered to be the first modern atlas. Early modern playhouses also emerged in the 16th century -- to become a model for the organisation of political representation two hundred years later (Manow 2010). In a parallel vein, to refer to a situation as to a comedy or a melodrama or to call a person an actor became a disqualifying trope, reiterated by the antitheatrical writings from Plato to Rousseau and beyond.

This workshop intends to bring together this variety of uses of theatrical metaphor in such fields as sociology, history and art history, anthropology, literary studies, philosophy, political science and, of course, performance studies, in order to identify and assess the investigatory potential of this trope for various forms of representation and critique.

Overview and topics for discussion.

The vocabulary of theatre has infused throughout our disciplines in ways that go beyond explicit references to the stage. Many notions, such as 'role' or

‘actor,’ have set sail away from the study of theatre *per se* and are travelling their own intellectual routes. How can their genealogies be traced back? Do they carry unquestioned meanings and unforeseen conceptual consequences? And have notions that explicitly assume this genealogy, such as performance, *mise en scène* or *Theatralität* (Fischer-Lichte 2004) been sufficiently contextualized? The workshop will aim at considering the relevant vocabulary in different languages: does the fact that Goffman’s seminal study is translated in German as *Wir alle spielen Theater* and in French as *La mise en scène de la vie quotidienne* help us understand how and why theatrical metaphors inhabit scholarship in these languages?

What happens when one compares society or a fragment of the social world to theatre? Is it a descriptive tool, a visualising device, helping to bring order in a chaotic flow of agents and events? Is it a way of creating and directing social dynamics that otherwise escape surveillance and discipline?

Or, perhaps, it is a form of critique, aiming at revealing what was previously hidden? Major works have used theatrical metaphor as a keystone in the construction of social analysis, taking leverage from notions such as ‘theatricality’ or ‘spectacle,’ with more or less critical agendas (Rousseau 1758; Debord 1967). But have such works been critical enough of these very notions? If they have, how exactly? And if theatrical metaphor has something to do with critique, is it – as Latour may ask (2004) – as a way of getting away from facts or closer to them?

More generally: how can one distinguish between these workings of theatre as a set of heterogeneous notions and practices? Is a tautology always the price to pay for such reductionism? Central to these concerns are the notions of *representation* and *critique*.

Although abstract conceptual proposals are welcome, we invite contributors to question the social sciences and humanities’ uses of theatrical metaphor as *sources*. How did these notions shape and circulate through texts, conferences, seminars, curricula, professional associations, exhibitions and other practical encounters? How has theatre been written into the social sciences and humanities? How has it been read by researchers? What kind of spectators – or, in some instances, practitioners – of theatre have they been? What ideas and practices of theatre informed the contexts of production of those descriptions and theories? In other words, the way we want to question references to theatre in academic accounts of society or social theory goes beyond a philology of theatrical metaphor, and asks which lines it may draw in the fields or institutions of our disciplines. To which scholarly positions is it connected in these fields and institutions? What kind of social class or geographical trajectories does it draw?

What forms of art did anthropologist Jade Belo have in mind when she saw a ‘puppet complex’ in Balinese rituals? What theatrical experience informed

Michel Leiris's articulation of 'théâtre joué' and théâtre vécu' in his ethnography of Ethiopian spirit possession practices? What is common to the performance of gender in contemporary society (Butler) and of power in Imperial Russia (Wortman 1995/2000)?

Beyond their genealogies, this workshop also intends to interrogate the destinies and legacies of the uses of theatrical metaphor, be they seminal or unnoticed. The references that follow can be thus viewed as primary sources and secondary literature.

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The workshop is designed as a discussion of precirculated papers written and presented in English. We aim at publishing the selected papers presented at the workshop following the usual peer-review process. We invite paper proposals from scholars interested in the outlined issues to be sent by September 13, 2019 to both email addresses :

alexei.evstratov@unil.ch

paul.sorrentino@ehess.fr

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