

Introduction:

Knowledge and The Worlds of Theatres in Early Modern Times¹

„All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players” so goes Shakespeare’s famous aphorism. It appears in his comedy *As You Like It* and alludes to the merging of metaphor and architecture that characterizes the notion of the world as a stage in the beginning of the 17th century. This concept of the theatre as the world known in antiquity as the ‘Theatrum Mundi’, articulates a universal and cosmological view of human existence reaching great prominence between the 16th and 18th centuries. The theoretical joining of the theatre and the world, the interpretation of the world affairs as stage affairs enjoyed exceptional popularity in the era of the Baroque and reflects its affinity to all forms of stage culture. In the mid-twentieth-century, the historians of literature Richard Alewyn and Karl Sälzle commented in their study *Das große Welttheater. Die Epoche der höfischen Feste* on the self-perception of the age in this way:

“Every epoch creates its allegory through which it gives his answer to the question of the meaning of life and in which it delivers the key to its secret. The answer of the Baroque is: The world is a theatre. [...] No age engaged more deeply with the theatre than the age of the Baroque, no age understood it more deeply. Also in no other material the Baroque revealed itself more completely than in the theatre. It made the theatre to the purely image and the perfect symbol of the world” (Alewyn/Sälzle 1959:48).

These findings are confirmed in such contemporary writings as the geographical compilation *Medulla Mirabilium Naturae* (1679) by Johann Heinrich Seyfried. Commenting on the audience in the theatre of the world he notes:

“As the life of all men [...] is suitably compared with a great setting / on which a gathering of many people resides / and deals with various performances; but these gathering is not only composed of actors but also of spectators, who / as people gifted with a higher mind / prescribe the objective, extent and order to the others / also they carefully testify the dignity and benefit of all performances and

¹ I thank Martin Döring und Gerhild Scholz Williams for the proof-reading.

judge reasonably / to give the final amplitude to everything: Thus these last ones / namely the spectator on the great stage of the world can be called god-wise people out of good reason [...]”(Seyfried 1679:Vorrede, s.p.).

The present volume contains the proceedings of the conference “Dimensionen der Theatrum-Metapher in der Frühen Neuzeit” at the Institut für Europäische Kulturgeschichte in Augsburg in March 2007. It contributes to the exploration of the theatrical aspects in the broader early modern culture which are currently experiencing renewed attention. For example, the project group *Theatrum Scientiarum* of the Berlin SFB *Kulturen des Performativen* addresses the “[...] theoretical and historical research of the performance of knowledge”² which also touch on the historical traits of the *theatrum* metaphor. A look at the research group *Theater und Fest in Europa. Zur Inszenierung von Identität und Gemeinschaft*³ explores a comparable idea – namely the assumption of a non-metaphorical, narrower concept of the theatre. This research contrasts with the contributions offered at the conference in Augsburg revealing the evolution of the knowledge-based usage of the theatre-metaphor since the 16th century. This imagery became a central (organizing) principle of knowledge in the printed texts of the early modern times as has been demonstrated by Markus Friedrich.⁴

The widespread dissemination of the metaphor of the theatre is confirmed by many ‘theatre-books’ which became a media and publishing phenomenon of the early modern period appearing in great many volumes entitled *Theatrum* or *Schaubühne* and *Schauplatz*, etc. The two earliest examples, Theodor Zwinger’s encyclopedia *Theatrum Vitae Humanae* and Samuel Quicchelberg’s theory of collecting entitled *Inscriptiones vel Tituli Theatri Amplissimi*, were published in 1565. Two conference papers are devoted to them. The present volume does not only draw on theatre-imagery as a book title; it is also centered on the question of what lay behind the popularity of the theatre-model in various contexts of knowledge. It must be assumed that the emblematic and symbolic imagery of the theatre connected varieties of media,

² <http://ubu.theater.fu-berlin.de/~theatrum/index.html>.

³ http://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/khi/forschung/drittmittelprojekte/feste_fruehe_neuzeit/index.html.

⁴ Friedrich (2004:205-232); Friedrich (in print): *Korpus der frühneuzeitlichen Wissenstheater*.

words, images, and things, the imaginary and real spaces of early modern knowledge in a broad and all-encompassing cultural, literary, and scientific dialogue.

Order and Representation of Knowledge – the title of this volume is intended to highlight the central structural and narrative characteristics and the communicative performances of theatre-imagery. It also suggests conclusions about the perception of knowledge, its underlying structure and the configuring aspects and processes as some of the volume's multifaceted deliberations indicate. The concept of the theatre in the period of the 16th and the 18th centuries emerges as a flexible metaphor of order. Wherever architectural images of stage settings were present in an implicit or explicit way, it usually signaled the unlocking and accumulating of knowledge. However, it also pointed to the organization and arrangement as well as to disorder and non-systematization. Most frequently, the representation of knowledge in theatrical contexts refers to the tendency of visualization and illustration of knowledge, to its visual connotation. Actual and imaginary theatres of the early modern period represented, quite clearly, a particular segment or encyclopedic form of knowledge. More than in earlier metaphors of knowledge – like the 'speculum' or the 'tree of knowledge' – the theatre-metaphor promised the making public of knowledge on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the complete synoptic access to knowledge. Anthologies, i.e. open spaces of knowledge, could be subsumed under the metaphor as enclosed and finite knowledge forms. Theatrical metaphors of knowledge are always characterized by a high level of staging bringing the concept of performance into play. Metaphorical theatres suggest the constitution of knowledge (and cultural meaning) as performance.

This volume's broad interdisciplinary scope reflects the great variety of discourses, the heterogeneity of the contexts as well as the variety of media that made use of the early modern theatre-metaphor. Though the division of the conference sections was kept in an effort to focus on representative characteristics, this collection does not claim to be exhaustive but rather is meant to encourage future studies in the field.

The opening section „Zugänge zum (Welt-)Wissen“ approaches the plurality of early modern theatre from a macro-perspective. William N. West (Chicago) undertakes a re-evaluation of the theatre-metaphor along some of the decisive

figures of the so called 'scientific revolution' of the 17th century ("Knowledge and Performance in the Early Modern *Theatrum Mundi*"). West shows that the seemingly timeless structure of the metaphor, the ambiguity referring to a false meaning and a true substance of things, did not apply to some of the more prominent authors of the 17th century. In particular, for the empiricism of Francis Bacon the imagery of the theatre meant, so West, the idea of a process of knowledge that is supported by experience. Thus, it was less about the watching in the "*Theatrum Mundi*" but about the doing and thus about the performance in the theatre of knowledge. In his article "Das Medium ist die Botschaft. Theatra als Bühnen des wissenschaftlichen Selbstverständnisses" Andreas Gormans (Aachen) concentrates on the question of how the (book)theatres of the early modern period became the stage for scientific self-perception. Starting from frontispieces in *Theatrum*-prints, Gormans highlights theatrical and performative media of staging as a characteristic feature of the early modern access to knowledge as might be offered in books. Gormans assumes that the theatrical connotation of knowledge formed the reaction to an "essential epistemological uncertainty" precisely in the 17th century. Following Gormans we can assume that the "process of degradation" of the theatre as a model of knowledge was determined by increasingly compulsory and precise knowledge production in the 18th century.

The essay by Stefan Laube (Berlin/Halle) entitled "Die *Theatrum*-Metapher in der Wissenstradition des Pietismus" reviews the producers of knowledge focusing on the cultural limitations of the imagery. Not only positive aspects were associated with the notion of the theatre, but also rejections and reservations. In the context of pietism, these resulted from the denial of everything having to do with visualization, seeing, and with sensuality – constitutive elements of the theatre's mediality. Laube shows how the writings of various pietistic authors either suppressed the seemingly omnipresent metaphor of the theatre or adopted it in, for them, appropriate ways.

In his article "Theatralität des Wissens als Raum und als Text" Sebastian Neumeister (Berlin) accentuates the connection of knowledge and the metaphor of the theatre within a spatial and architectural context. Neumeister draws on the parallel of the theatre as a metaphor for the storing of knowledge in imaginary buildings such as libraries or cities linking it to the 16th century debate about mnemotechnic aspects. Using the example of Guilio Camillos

Idea del teatro, Neumeister reviews a canonical text in which “the normal perspective of the theatre” and thus the position of “Actores” and “Spectatores” is inverted. In Camillo’s make-believe theatre, the spectators do not form the audience, rather they are placed on the stage overlooking the knowledge presented in the audience space.

The volume’s second section (“Theatrum und Enzyklopädistik. Sammlung und Systematisierung von Wissen”) concentrates on the connection between the theatricality of knowledge and the dominant form of knowledge in early modern period, encyclopedism. This represents the ideal not only of collecting knowledge in its totality, but also to systematize, and to arrange it. This is foregrounded with particular affinity to the model of the theatre. In his article “Navigieren im Text-Universum. Theodor Zwingers ‚Theatrum Vitae Humanae’ Helmut Zedelmaier (München) explores the idea of the architecture of knowledge in one of the most extensive and influential encyclopaedias. Furthermore, he discusses the “opening possibilities” of Zwinger’s systematic “knowledge machine”.

Rainer Bayreuther (Frankfurt/Halle) („Enzyklopädik der Affekte als Dispositiv musikalischer Affektation“) reviews the correlation between encyclopaedic book-theatres and the musical theatre. In the instance of the very first opera, “Rappresentatione di anima et di corpo” (Rom 1600), Bayreuther notes that the disposition of affects in the musical theatre of the 17th century can be seen as analogous to the order of knowledge in contemporary encyclopedias.

The section’s third contribution returns to the textual theatres. In her article “Modellierung von Weiblichkeit in enzyklopädischen Wissenstheatern” Nikola Roszbach (Darmstadt) identifies a specific sector of the encyclopedic culture, namely the relationship of early modern order of knowledge and the conceptualization of the gender. Roszbach discusses the moralizing gender programs of four *Theatrum*-titles which reproduce an imagination of femaleness dominated by negative stereotypes.

The volume’s third section deals with the relevance of the theatre-imagery “im Kontext von Krieg und Architektur”. On the basis of the figure of the Ulm master builder and architect Joseph Furttenbach (1591-1667) Jan Lazardzig (Berlin) illustrates the interrelations between architectural practice and the architecture of knowledge during the Thirty Years’ War (“Theater- und

Festungsbau. Zur Architektonik des Wissens im Werk des Kriegs- und Zivilbaumeisters Josph Furttenbach”). Lazardzig assesses the oeuvre of Furttenbach as a “medial stage of knowledge“, dedicated to the entertainment of his patrons and his audience. In an “architectural theatre” designed as an integration of a *Kunstkammer* and a hall-theatre Furttenbach suggests, in a playful way, the release of the creative potential of the architect.

The metaphor of the theatre was not only significant for the representation of knowledge but also for the culture of war in the early modern period, an aspect emphasized in the article by Marian Füssel (Münster) (“*Theatrum Belli. Der Krieg als Inszenierung und Wissensschauplatz im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*”). Starting with the use of theatrical-metaphorical language in early modern journalism of war, Füssel shows the crucial role played by the theatre as a model of describing and representation war in textual and visual documents. This significance proved remarkably stable even when the metaphor of the theatre began to decline in the 18th century. The imagination of war as a staged scene not only paralleled the aesthetics of war and the art of warfare but also the patters of perception of the involved actors.

The volume’s fourth section (“*Theatrum und frühneuzeitliches Sammelwesen: Wissenskommunikation in der Kunstkammer*”) brings together aspects of the virtuality and materiality of knowledge and the role of theatrical metaphors within the early modern archetype of collection, the *Kunstkammer*, or cabinet of curiosities. The staging of knowledge becomes particularly evident in these ‘museums’ of the time which were often called theatres. Already the first theoretical writings on collecting in the 16th century paid attention to the stage-like arrangement and disposition of the rooms of knowledge and representation, for instance Samuel Quicchelbergs (1529-1567) treatise “*Inscriptiones vel Tituli Theatri amplissimi*”. This is discussed by Stephan Brakensiek (Trier) in the first article of this section (“*Samuel Quicchelberg: Gründungsvater oder Einzeltäter? Zur Intention der ‘Inscriptiones vel Tituli Theatri amplissimi’ (1565) und ihrer Rezeption im Sammlungswesen Europas zwischen 1550 und 1820*”). Brakensiek offers a reassessment of Quicchelberg’s treatise that remains the founding document of museology. Brakensiek shows, however, that the contemporary reception of Quicchelbergs treatise was slight.

The two following essays turn to the most prominent theatre of knowledge in the 17th century, the “*Museum Kircherianum*” of the universal scholar and

scientific star of the Baroque, Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680). Lucas Burkart (Basel) looks behind the scenes of Kircher's *Kunstkammer* ("Wissenstheater in Rom. Athanasius Kircher und die Sichtbarmachung der Welt"). Burkart suggests that Kircher's magnificent collection was more than a mere theatre of representation of wonders. Part of the staging was also a performative unveiling of the collected curiosities. Thus, in one instance, Kircher delivered a tutorial about reproducing the artificial wonders of his *Kunstkammer*, for a sensational artificial sunflower-clock. A complementary facet to this essay is provided by Angela Mayer-Deutsch (Berlin) whose contribution analyses the printed catalogue of Kircher's collection ("Athanasius Kirchers Theater der Natur und Kunst als idealer, synoptischer Blick auf ein Wissenstheater"). Mayer-Deutsch underlines the semantic affinity between the *Museum* and the *Theatrum* as contemporary modes of collections emphasizing the synthesis for the reader and observer within the communicative frame of the metaphor of the theatre. The "book spectacle" of the printed catalogue of the *Kunstkammer* made a "virtual" visits to the collection possible; the reader could not only experience the material collection, rather, the book also provided a "complementary semantic carrier" to the primary collection.

The book's fifth section "Theatrum und Literatur: Wissensinszenierung auf der Bühne und im Roman" opens with the Anna Schreurs' (Florenz) essay on the relation of text and image in one of the most successful printed 'stage' of the 17th century, the chronicle *Theatrum Europaeum* ("Der Vesuvausbruch von 1631, ein Spektakel auf der Weltbühne Europa. Anmerkungen zu Joachim von Sandrarts Beitrag zum Theatrum Europaeum von Matthäus Merian"). On the basis of Sandrart's copperplate which shows the eruption of the Vesuvius in 1631 Schreurs illustrates this media event of the 17th century as it is reflected in the *Theatrum Europaeum*. Schreurs demonstrates that Merian's *Theatrum* generated a deeper knowledge of the natural disaster than generally assumed. It moves from sober description to the interpretation of wonders. Schreurs indicates that the integration of the natural disaster in a series of incidents established a distinctive European view on the *Theatrum*.

The article by Christian Weber (Berlin) returns to the theatre as the precise spatial space of play. Weber examines the implementation of the theatre-metaphor in Calderón's drama *El gran teatro del mundo* ("Wissen und Öffentlichkeit im Fronleichnamspiel. Zur Theatrum-Metapher und Calderón

de la Barcas El gran teatro del mundo”). Weber argues that Calderón did not only use the imagery of the theatre of the world to mediate theocentric and cosmological conceptions of existence and order. To him, the metaphor also implied a performative dimension insofar as the Feast of Corpus Christi dissolved the borders between the staged events and the spectators, on one side, and the reconfigured biblical and mythological contents of knowledge, on the other side.

This section closes with an essay by Gerhild Scholz Williams (St. Louis) who explores the use of the theatre metaphor in one of the most successful journalists, novelists and polyhistorians of the 17th century, Eberhard Werner Happel (1647-1690). Scholz Williams demonstrates that metaphorical references in language use also influenced an imagery of spatial presentation of the contents in the productions of novels in the 17th century (“Staging Novelties: The Theatre of Passions and Politics in Eberhard Happel’s *Eduard*, 1690/91”).

The volume’s sixth and last section investigates the imagery of the theatre in the context of ceremonial and symbolic knowledge (“*Theatrum und symbolische Repräsentation*”). Thomas Weller (Münster) highlights the significance of the *Theatrum*-metaphor in the field of printed works about the ceremonial (“*Kein Schauplatz der Eitelkeiten: Das frühneuzeitliche Theatrum Praecedentiae zwischen gelehrtem Diskurs und sozialer Praxis*”). Weller points to the affinity between the conception of the ‘*Theatrum Mundi*’ and ceremonial suggested by the fixation on personal relations and normative hierarchies within the ‘ceremonial science’. Furthermore, the ceremonial was employed to reproduce and stabilize a social order that was seen as a reflection of a higher (divine) order within the theatre of the world.

In the closing article Stefan Römmelt (Münster) traces the reception of the *Theatrum*-metaphor in the early modern panegyric (“*Theatrum Gloriam. Zur (begrenzten) Karriere einer Metapher im frühneuzeitlichen Fürstenlob*”) and addresses, as does the essay by Stefan Laube, the discursive borders of the imagery. The popular and sensual dimensions as well as the fictional potential of the theatre metaphor proved, according to Römmelt, most likely incompatible with the claims of exclusiveness and variety of panegyric literature. In the analysis of representative copperplates and their recurrent

theatrical elements, Römmelt is able to show, however, that the panegyric remains a genre under the influence of the paradigm of the theatre.

The contributions to this volume are meant as building blocks for the construction of a wider “semantic field” (Lucas Burkart) of the early modern theatre of knowledge. The long lasting attraction of the theatre-model was, as the stimulating discussions during the conference demonstrated, based on its flexibility and inclusiveness. Alongside the notions of order associated with the metaphor of the theatre, disorder and the absence of systematization were equally present. The theatre as a metaphor formed a significant factor of the early modern cultural knowledge. The discourses referring to this metaphor support a similar heuristics relating to the access to and the production and handling of knowledge. This fact is most notable in the tendency to visualize knowledge that went along with the suggestion of a synoptic, complete overview. Before the specialization and fragmentation of knowledge in the late 18th century the Theatrum-Metaphor thus offered an superb model of understanding a universal and all-embracing ideal of knowledge.

Augsburg, April 2008

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