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Introduction

The papers of the present volume investigate the potential of the metaphor of life as theater for literary, philosophical, juridical, and epistemological discourses from the Middle Ages through modernity proper, with a focus on traditions as manifold as those of France, England, Spain, Italy, Russia, Germany, and Latin America.

The history of the metaphorical usage of the concept of theater is a very venerable one; the idea as such seems to emerge not much later than the establishment of drama-writing and theatrical performances in classical Greek antiquity. This early presence of a metaphorical understanding of the concept may be linked to the fact that, according to Aristotle, (good) drama and theater is *mimesis*, that is, the truthful imitation of “pragmatic” human interaction on a *lieu autre* (M. Foucault) called the stage. Such a conceptualization leads almost automatically to configurations in which pragmatic human interaction on the one hand and stage performances on the other tend to become difficult to distinguish. It is not astonishing that a corresponding reverse conclusion—prohibited by the basic laws of logic, but productive in the realm of rhetoric—emerged: namely, that pragmatic (“real”) life is, in the final analysis, similar or even identical to a theatrical performance. The utilization of the metaphor was favored since antiquity by the prominent role attained by two schools of thought that are both—albeit for different reasons—committed to assessing the physical world and its enjoyments as “vain” and transitory: Stoicism and Christianity.

Given this background, it is not surprising that the tradition of this metaphor was “reborn” in an age of European intellectual and literary history that chose exactly this name with a view to fashioning itself. What is striking, however, is the high frequency the usage of the metaphor attained particularly in that period that we tend nowadays to call, with a more neutral term, early modern. Most of the essays contained in this volume are dedicated to texts from that age. One of the chief aims of the discussions at the conference from which this volume emerged was to produce convincing hypotheses concerning the reasons for this remarkable and, in comparison, outstanding presence of the metaphor.

Provisionally, we would like to suggest two different tendencies, both characteristic of the early modern age, as being at the origin of this massive presence. On the one hand, there is the importance of the religiously inflected meaning of the metaphor in an age characterized by the Reformation, the Counterreformation, and the Thirty Years’ War. In a period steeped in religious controversies

whose intensity might be hardly imaginable from a present-day perspective, the denunciation of the material world as vain—or, from a Protestant viewpoint, as radically vain—may have provoked a resurgence of the metaphor from ancient times that is far more extensive than what one might expect before having studied the relevant text corpora.

In that same age, there is a massive instrumentalization of the metaphor for aims and purposes one might consider to stand in diametrical opposition to a religiously informed conceptualization of the physical world. Starting at the latest with the tracts of Machiavelli and Castiglione, real-world life, especially life in the public sphere, becomes more and more equated with the concept of role play. In the treatises by these two theoreticians, “performing as if being on a stage” is the most important way to gain worldly success. This strand is continued, particularly in the age of absolutism, by theatrical devices and techniques whose primary function is to overwhelm the “audience” of the “play”, that is, court society, by means only available in fictional worlds, for example apotheosis understood literally or metaphorically, and to thus make its members ready to unconditionally surrender to the absolute monarch in the real world.

It is fascinating to observe that the self-same conceptualization is used in that age to denounce worldly success as futile, though, in contrast to the religiously inflected interpretation, without reference to any sort of metaphysical horizon. The lasting success of the pieces of the only dramatist of that period whose works remain at the center of the canon into the twenty-first century, Shakespeare, may not least be due to the fact that his casting of the world as a stage, but without spectators and, most prominently, without a “real”, more substantial reality surrounding this stage, is compatible with sociological theses that became highly influential in twentieth-century intellectual discussions, e.g. Erving Goffman’s theorization of social interaction as being based on permanent role play. In a certain way, this evolution might be regarded as a re-emergence of the at first sight striking classical Greek concept of *prosopon*, of the mask worn by actors that is at the same time the “real” face—there is no “real” reality beyond the confines of the play.

The huge task that the age of Romanticism set for itself, philosophically, literarily, and, partly, theologically, was to find a way to deal with the destabilization of religion and tradition in more general terms that started in the Age of Discovery and reached its apogee during the Enlightenment. How to preserve a link between the present and the past?—this was the central question which emerged as a consequence of the insight that a radical “cut” in the historical continuum, a revolution, finally leads by necessity to civil war and unheard-of bloodshed. The “solution” devised by philosophy was, more or less,

the historicization of the concept of revelation. If History, from the beginning to the end, is the “book” in which the Godhead reveals itself, it becomes conceivable to assume that there is, beyond the constant alterations of the physical world, a transcendent agency whose identity may be arcane but whose interaction with the human world is observable.

Such a re-conceptualization provokes a fundamental shift as to the usage of theater as metaphor. Since the philosophy of (German) idealism contests the strict opposition between the physical world and the beyond, the concept of theater as metaphor becomes flexibilized in a way one might consider an anticipation of tendencies observable in theater proper only in the twentieth century, in the work of authors like Pirandello or stage-directors like Mnouchkine. If there is no longer a strict separation between role play and action in the proper sense, between a (metaphorical) stage and a “real” world surrounding it, the metaphor comes to be transformed into one of the many devices applied in literary texts of Romanticism in order to illustrate the never-ending undecidability of what is “real” and what is “phantasy”, what is “original” and what is a “copy”, what is the “object” and what is its “mirror”-image, what is the “genuine” thing and what is its “simulacrum”. The controversy regarding the question of whether it is literature or philosophy that “came first” in this move towards a destabilization of the dichotomies implied in the original usage of the concept of theater as metaphor might be much less important than the fact itself. Considered from the interpretative perspective briefly outlined, it is not even particularly striking that the frequency of the metaphor decreases in Romantic times when compared with its astonishing presence in the early modern age.

Is the metaphor’s usage in twentieth-century literary texts nothing more than the aftermath of a long history that reached its peak in the early modern age and began to wane in the age of Romanticism? As is demonstrated in essays contained in the present volume that deal with outstanding twentieth-century literary texts from quite different ideological horizons, the metaphor seems to remain active in our age. Compared to the period of Romanticism, where its presence was already a reduced one, the frequency of the metaphor’s usage in modernity proper seems to recede even more. This might be due to the undeniable fact that one of the two terms of the dichotomy on which the traditional meaning of the metaphor relied was not only flexibilized in the twentieth century, but became blurred to such an extent that one might hold that it vanished almost completely. The conviction that there is a “real” world beyond the physical one whose existence alone suggests conceiving of all action in the physical world as a sort of theatrical play has evaporated more and more, for various reasons, in Western thinking of the last 100 years. At the same time, the massive problematization of the dichotomy of “sincerity” and “simulation”, initiated, with different implications, by both

Nietzsche and Freud, might have led to the insight, ratified in the works of twentieth-century sociological theory, that there is nothing but constant role playing—the distance separating the proper and the oblique, that is, the metaphorical dimension of the concept may have collapsed.

The volume starts with an essay by Peter W. Marx (“Between Metaphor and Cultural Practices: *Theatrum* and *scena* in the German-Speaking Sphere before 1648”). The argument draws attention to the fact that the metaphor existed in early modern Germany even before theater proper in the modern sense emerged there. The expression used for conveying the meaning and the message familiar from posterior times was *scena mundi*. Marx’s article proposes to investigate in more detail a terrain yet unexplored in the research dedicated to the metaphor of theater, namely the Middle Ages, which had a rich tradition of performances, mostly religious, without the strict separation of stage and audience, of performers and viewers, as it became current from the sixteenth century onward.

Julia V. Ivanova (“Spectacularity before the “Renaissance” of Theater: Visuality and Self-Image of the *Quattrocento* Papacy”) deals with an important chapter in the instrumentalization of “spectacularity” that is situated several decades before the humanist “Renaissance” of theater. Focusing on Enea Silvio Bartolomeo Piccolomini, who acceded to the papacy under the name of Pius II (1458–1464), the essay examines the “theatrical” restructuring of Piccolomini’s place of birth, Corsignano, renamed Pienza by the Pope himself. The numerous buildings (churches, palaces, public places) that the Pope had erected in his hometown are, according to Ivanova, meant to metaphorically represent his self-image as a human being elected by God with a view to leading profane and sacred history to an apogee never seen before. This self-stylization via the “stage” of the town of Pienza is corroborated, as Ivanova shows, by Pius’s textual self-interpretation in his *Commentarii rerum memorabilium quae temporibus suis contingerunt* (1463).

Sandra Richter (“Literal and Figurative Uses of the *Pícaro*: Graded Salience in Seventeenth-Century Picaresque Narrations”) makes a point that is crucial for the investigation of the metaphor of life as theater in general: It is not only in plays or on stages (in the proper or in the figurative sense) that the image is exploited. Narrative texts—and as may be said in anticipation, theoretical texts—also make use of the metaphor. Its frequency seems to be particularly high in the “new” genre of the picaresque novel which emerged in Spain and exercised considerable influence on French, German, and English early modern literature. The *pícaros* may be the first to have emancipated the concept of life as simulation and dissimulation from the courtly background from which it indubitably stems and thus may have been an important inspiration for the generalization of the metaphor observable in twentieth-century sociological theory.

Andrey Golubkov (“Theater as Metaphor and Guiding Principle: The French Anecdote Tradition from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century”) deals with the genre of anecdote, first documented in Late Antiquity and “resurrected” in the Renaissance. The article focuses on the observation that there is, in addition to the religiously inflected and the courtly interpretations of the metaphor of life as theater, a significant presence in the comic genres. The denunciation of personages’ actions as mere play or simulation, which frequently appears in the genre of the Renaissance anecdote, becomes a device that is formative for the seventeenth-century “canonical” comedy (Shakespeare, Molière).

Jan Mosch (“‘Dressed for life’s short comedy’: *Desengaño* and *convivere libenter* as Ethical Paradigms in William Shakespeare’s Plays”) highlights the omnipresence of the metaphor in Shakespeare’s plays. By drawing on medieval texts (John of Salisbury, twelfth century CE) and on texts immediately preceding Shakespeare’s own period (Erasmus of Rotterdam), the essay documents the fact that Shakespeare’s interpretation of the topos was not original at all, but rather belonged to the patrimony of a discourse that was particularly linked to milieus one might anachronistically call “intellectual”.

Joachim Küpper (“The Conceptualization of the World as Stage in Calderón and Cervantes: Christian Didacticism and its Ironic Rebuttal”) deals with the play in the Western tradition that exploits the metaphor at issue in the most detailed and systematic manner, i.e. Calderón’s *The Great Theater of the World*. It then proceeds to discuss the striking fact—one that is nonetheless characteristic of the versatile usage of the metaphor of theater in that age—that there are, even in Counterreformation Spain, additional variations of the metaphor apart from the standard religious one, namely ironic functionalizations that target in particular those dogmatic and moral-theological positions to whose divulgation the Calderonian play is committed.

Kirsten Dickhaut (“The King as a ‘Maker’ of Theater: *Le ballet de la nuit* and Louis XIV”) discusses a usage of the metaphor which aims to stabilize the system of political absolutism. By performing on stage as the sun, the (young) French king Louis XIV tried to convey that his rule over France, reasserted by the defeat of the *fronde*, was as “natural” as the predominance of the sun is in the cosmos. The entire world of Versailles may thus be assessed as a grand stage upon which the play of power is performed on a daily basis. The concept’s (political) effectuality, however, is based on the fact that there is a “real” reality beyond this stage. As soon as the king divests himself of his role within the performance, he is able—in contrast to an actor in the proper sense—to punish those who are reluctant to react appropriately to the message contained in the play.

Ekaterina Boltunova (“War, Peace, and Territory in Late Eighteenth-Century Russian Outdoor Performances”) demonstrates that “theatrical” techniques

of staging power in eighteenth-century Russia, in particular under the Tsarina Catherine the Great, constituted a continuation yet at the same time a most impressive elaboration of devices invented in Italy and France one century before. The victory over the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent annexation of Crimea, which opened the way to ice-free ports for Russia, were celebrated by a grand open-air performance festival in Moscow in 1775 whose intention was to demonstrate not only the monarch's power over her enemies, external as well as internal, but also the claim that the Tsarina is able to transform nature as if it were nothing but a theater coulisse.

Pavel V. Sokolov's "*Lucis an caliginis theatrum*: Theatrical Metaphors in the Early Modern *historia literaria*" is another one of those essays in this volume which remind readers of the frequently forgotten fact that the metaphor at issue here is present in non-theatrical texts also. Sokolov makes the striking observation that there is an intense discussion of the problem of plagiarism in an age without copyright regulations. The intricacies involved in the question of what is an "original" and what is a (perhaps plagiarized) "copy" were highlighted in contemporary treatises by drawing on the resources offered by theatrical metaphors, especially on one specific semantic strand inherent to this metaphorical complex, namely, the difficulty to decide between what is "real" action and what is (only) an imitation of real action.

Petr Rezvykh's essay ("Theater, World History, and Mythology: Theatrical Metaphors in Schelling's Philosophy") opens the second section of this volume, which is dedicated to the transformation of the metaphor in literary and philosophical texts commonly referred to as "Romantic". Rezvykh argues that the metaphor of theater holds a central role in Schelling's philosophy. Humans in their real lives continue to be conceived as actors. But, according to the transformation of the highest being from transcendent to transcendent and at the same time immanent, the dichotomy between actors and author is destabilized: the actors take part in designing their roles. It is interesting to observe that drama proper did not make use of this re-conceptualization before the first half of the twentieth century (Pirandello).

Elena Penskaya ("The Philosophical Narrative as a Semiotic Laboratory of Theatrical Language: The Case of Jean Paul in the Context of the Russian Reception") discusses a Germanophone Romantic author whose works were particularly well received in Russia, where they continued to exert influence up to the era of the avant-garde of the first two decades of the twentieth century. Especially in the *Flegeljahre*, but also in his *Ästhetik*, Jean Paul makes conspicuous use of the metaphor of life as theater. There is no longer any religious dimension linked to it, nor is there the courtly inspired concept of the necessity of simulation and dissimulation. In anticipation of phenomena observable in particular in

twentieth-century high modernist texts, the metaphor assumes in Jean Paul the function of a focal point in the problematization of the concept of reality as opposed to imagination.

Taking as a starting point the works of Karamzin, Tatiana Smoliarova (“Theatrical Metaphor and the Discourse of History: Nikolai Karamzin”) demonstrates the presence of pan-European Romantic concepts in nineteenth-century Russian literature. In Karamzin, whose texts are paradigmatic of Romanticism, the metaphor of life as theater is functionalized with a view to questioning the dichotomies of sensory perception and phantasy, of representation and (mere) imagination, of—as may be said in anticipation of Freud’s theorizing—the conscious and the unconscious, the real and the unreal which is, however, real at the same time.

Olga Kuptsova (“Theater and Metaphor in the Drama of Alexander Ostrovsky”) presents the meta-theatrical dramas of Ostrovsky as an intermediate stage between the functionalization of “theater as metaphor” to be found in plays by Lermontov on the one hand and that to be found in the plays of Chekhov on the other. Focusing in particular on *The Forest*, Kuptsova shows that the extent of its meta-theatricality is astounding, even if measured by the standards of Romanticism: the play references at the same time *Hamlet*, *The Robbers* (by Schiller), and archetypes drawn from Molière’s comedies, Sganarelle in particular. The surprising result of this—at first sight—erratic mix of meta-theatrical structures is, as Kuptsova argues, not only a “hymn to Romanticism”, but at the same time “a sober recognition of its problematic effects”.

There are three articles dealing with twentieth-century texts in the present volume. They demonstrate the extremely high versatility of the metaphor in modernity proper, a phenomenon that is accompanied by the fact of its receding overall frequency.

Putting Ionesco’s pieces at the center of her essay, Juana Christina v. Stein (“The Theater of the Absurd and the Absurdity of Theater: The Early Plays of Beckett and Ionesco”) introduces the thesis that in many avant-garde pieces, the metaphor no longer serves as a means of illustrating what (“real”) life is, but rather as a device for the self-reflection of theater. Briefly put: in contrast to the assumptions dominant in current research, v. Stein argues that Ionesco’s and also Beckett’s early theater is meant to demonstrate not the absurdity of life, in the sense of the human condition, but rather the absurdity of traditional theater. The metaphor is utilized with a view to providing a meta-theatrical comment on what (traditional) theater is.

Susanne Zepp (“Chico Buarque’s *Gota d’água, uma tragédia carioca*: Theater as Metaphor in Brazil during the Military Dictatorship, 1964–1985”) demonstrates, however, that twentieth-century literature also exhibits a sort of continuation of

the early modern usage of the metaphor. By recourse to the famous play *Gota d'água* (1975) by Chico Buarque, Zepp shows that much of twentieth-century Latin American literature (or, as may be said, literary texts produced under authoritarian regimes in general) makes use of famous dramas, in this case, dramatizations of the story of Medea, in order to comment on political and societal problems pertaining to the present. The intention is, however, not Nietzschean; it is not about conveying that reality consists of nothing but the “eternal recurrence”. The play, including the metaphor implied by its dramatic plot, is meant to problematize the productive role of theater, and of art in general, within political processes.

The last article of the present volume is linked to theoretical explorations and their relation to the metaphor of life as theater. Erika Fischer-Lichte's essay (“From *theatrum mundi* to Theatricality”) pays homage to the (frequently “forgotten”) theoretician who first created a term that is linked to the traditional usage of the metaphor but at the same time transcends its limits: “theatricality” or, in the original wording: *teatraln'ost'*. The expression coined by Nicolaj Evreinov is contextualized in Fischer-Lichte's essay by reference to the Foucauldian concept of a “crisis of representation” that emerged at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. While the episteme of analogism, dominant in medieval times and partly in early modern times also, provides a quasi-ideal terrain for a strictly allegorical interpretation of the metaphor of *theatrum mundi*, the episteme of representation—substituting the concept of (arbitrary) sign for the concept of (God-given) “signatures”—leads to a new and highly multi-faceted functionalization of the metaphor. As is evidenced by texts such as Hofmannsthal's *Lord Chandos Letter* and Nietzsche's *Fourth Untimely Meditation*, the conviction that there is a tenable differentiation to be made between sign and signified becomes, however, unstable at the beginning of the twentieth century. A blurring of the distinction between life and stage, as is implied in the concept of theatricality, thus seems to suggest itself. Evreinov's concept may also owe its conspicuous popularity in present-day intellectual discourses to the fact that an essentialistic theorization of “selfhood” has become more and more obsolete.