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EDITORIAL

Editorial: Social Interaction and the Theater Rehearsal

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Theater and Social Life

The comparison of social life with the theater (so called *theatrum mundi topos*) can look back on a long tradition (Schulte, 2009). It goes back to Plato's allegory of the cave and has its climax in the Baroque (apparent in Shakespeare's saying that "all the world's a stage"). Theatrical concepts have been taken up in anthropology and sociology (since its beginnings in role theory, Linton, 1936; Mead 1934). In "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" (1959) (German: "Wir alle spielen Theater" (1969), Goffman introduces "performance," "setting" (including "scenery," "props," "dress," "location"), "role (distance)," "appearance," "front/façade," "actor/audience," "ensemble/team," "dramaturgy," and "back stage" vs. "front stage" to describe behavior in social situations. Instead of considering inner states (like intentions, motives, needs) or 'social laws' (internalized norms, rituals, conventions) as guiding human actions, he analyzes them as performances designed to create impressions for an audience. He thereby calls into question the boundary between acting (in everyday life) and performing (on stage), taken up in Performance Studies (Carlson, 2004; Schechner, 2006). Thus, processes of (dis)simulation become relevant (Willems, 1997, 2009). Goffman's approach – often labelled 'dramaturgical' (Hitzler, 1992; Habermas, 1981) – compares society with theater. As Burns (1992) pointed out, Goffman's take on 'theater' changed over time: While he initially used theater as a metaphor for social life, in later writings he became interested in theater as a form of social interaction. In "Frame Analysis," Goffman introduces "the theater frame" (Goffman, 1974: 124 f.), in which actions are perceived as taking place for an audience, while actors are transformed into stage-performers. In "Interaction Order,"

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performances are one of five basic analytical units (Goffman, 1983: 7). Goffman understands rehearsals as a specific kind of keying ("technical redoings"), in which actions and roles are practiced in a pseudo-reality.

The Emergence of Performances in Social Interaction

The crafts of theater, television and film industries are premised on a fundamental human interest in exploring the social world through representations of people interacting with each other (Pavis, 1992; Hazel, 2015). These representations of interaction are produced *in* interaction in creative teams, who explore practices of social interaction by trying them out in rehearsals. Surprisingly, these interactive processes of accomplishing staged interactions have rarely been investigated. Most research in sociology, theater and performance studies focuses on the product, while production and rehearsal processes are dealt with only rarely (Balme, 2008; Carlson, 2004; Leach, 2013; Fischer-Lichte, 1998, 2004; Schechner, 2006). If the rehearsal has moved in focus, then it was by way of interviews and field notes (MacAuley, 1998, 2012; Pavis/Anderson, 2013; Taft-Kaufman, 1983; Volkova, 2019). What has been almost totally absent until today is the study of rehearsals in the minute details of their production, moment by moment. The aim of this special issue therefore is to change the perspective from the product to its production, using video-recordings of theater rehearsals.

Video-based Studies of Multimodal Interaction in Rehearsals

The special issue builds on video-based studies which inquire into the multimodal details of rehearsals in other performative aesthetic settings, above all music and dance (Weeks, 1990, 1996a, b; Keevallik, 2010, 2015; Szczepek Reed/Reed/Haddon, 2013). As Weeks has shown for reading lessons in school and orchestra rehearsals (Weeks, 1985), there is a basic divide between 'regular' interactions (or: 'talk') and performed parts (reading, making music, play-acting, dancing). Their relationship and transitions have to be interactionally managed: "[…] these settings are characterized by turns at 'regular' conversation alternated with turns at 'activities' or performances of texts which are not only in oriented-to contrast with such conversation (or 'talk') but are subject to formulation by that talk" (Weeks, 1985: 195; see also Haviland, 2007, 2011 on orchestra rehearsals). "Doing rehearsal" (Keating, 1993: 414) thus requires an interactional management of two speech different exchange systems, a pre-allocated (the performance) and a locally allocated ('regular' talk) system (Ivaldi, et al., 2021; Krug, et al., 2020; Reed, 2015; Schmidt, 2014; Szczepek Reed/Reed/Haddon, 2013). Alternating performance parts and 'regular' talk parts are the basic overall organization in all rehearsals of performances and ensure the institutional goal of rehearsals, namely, to guarantee the similarity of subsequent performances (Schmidt, 2018; Sawyer, 1997, 2003). All these studies have shown how 'regular' talk and embodied conduct are deployed to (re-)start, stop, repeat, repair, alter, negotiate and discuss parts of the performance. This instructional work entails

that aesthetic questions are verbally formulated and publicly negotiated. Instead of focusing on the aesthetics of the product or its reception, dealing with rehearsals shifts the focus to "practical aesthetics" (Heath & vom Lehn, 2004) and asks how theater producers make aesthetic decisions.

The Aim and Approach of the Special Issue

This special issue gives insights into a new field of research for Ethnomethodological Conversation Analysis, Gesture Studies and Microethnography, exploring Performing Arts practitioners' practices. Using video recordings from theater rehearsals, the studies show how practitioners develop theater performances through talk, intonation, body movement, gaze, posture, gesture, space and objects such as props and stage architecture, in order to establish representations of the human condition, and how they use them in producing the particular aesthetic qualities of the performance.

The contributions study theater rehearsals as interactively organized, social events. This approach allows us to zoom in on the practices directors and actors use to devise, develop and implement scenes of a play. Rehearsals are both institutional and artistic events: They are institutional in being an activity type informed by role-relationships, which are characterized by rights, duties and kinds of contributions of the parties involved. They are artistic in being creative settings in which new artistic solutions are sought for, tried out and assessed. This creates a tension between the orientation to and implementation of pre-established aesthetic objectives and scripts and the collaborative emergence of creative practice, which is unplanned and, what is more, unplannable to a large degree.

In developing a performance, scenes are instructed by entitled role incumbents (directors), and co-developed by the actors, each party drawing on their distinctive professional skills. In rehearsals, scenes are repeated multiple times, often involving revisions of their aesthetic interpretation and changes in focus (vocal realization, physical distance, use of props, light design, etc.). This enables longitudinal analysis of how performance parts, deployed resources and instructions change over time, and how, by which processes and criteria, the public performance takes shape (Hazel, 2018). Since a fixed group of people create shared standards within a bounded timeframe (usually 6–8 weeks), rehearsals allow us to track the emergence of "communities of practice" (Wenger, 2008), which develop their own distinctive style and routines.

This special issue brings together researchers following an EMCA-paradigm from different disciplines (linguistics, sociology, pedagogics) and with different linguistic backgrounds (German, Finnish, French, Swedish), who work with video-recordings from amateur and professional theater. They are all interested in the multimodal practices that participants adopt to accomplish rehearsals as social events.

The Structure and Contributions of the Special Issue

Part 1 "*Technical and aesthetic resources in theater production*" sheds light on key means used in staging a theatrical production.

Stefan Norrthon looks in "*Cueing in theatre – timing and temporal variance in rehearsals of scene transitions*" at cues being used to accomplish transitions between scenes. The article shows how cues are developed, how they are used to realize transitions, and how precise timing of transitions to next actions or parts of the performance are achieved through cues. Data is drawn from a professional play at Sweden's largest touring theater. Norrthon shows how, in negotiating cues, participants follow a systematic procedure: Transitions are problematized, candidate cues are proposed, and finally a certain cue is specified and confirmed. Since cues are reflexively linked to observation and interpretation of other actors' actions, interactional time is more important for their use and interpretation than objective, mechanical time.

Maximilian Krug's "*Overcoming blanking: Verbal and visual features of prompting in theatre rehearsals*" focuses on moments in which actors get stuck in the play text, referred to as blanking, which recruits prompters to help overcome the textual difficulty. The data are from a professional play in Germany. Krug shows how prompters anticipate and resolve blanking situations (in 'regular cases') and how actors/prompters negotiate or sanction prompting actions (in 'deviant cases') when the prompting occurs 'too early' (there was no blanking, but a dramatic pause) or 'too late' (the dramatic performance is interrupted due to a missing prompt). Special attention is paid to the role of verbal and visual cues used to accomplish prompting interactively.

The article "*Displaying inner experiences through language and body in community theater rehearsals*" by Katariina Harjunpää, Arnulf Deppermann and Marja-Leena Sorjonen studies how the Chekhovian acting technique is adopted by novice actors. The authors investigate group discussions in which participants account for their experiences of acting exercises designed to engender body awareness as a prerequisite for portraying characters on stage. Data come from a community theater project in Helsinki. It is shown how sensorimotor and affective qualities are made tangible and recognizable by the coordination of rather fragmentary descriptions with embodied actions. The authors show how the basically ineffable experience is incrementally conveyed by syntactic projections of verbal descriptions of experience that are fulfilled through embodied depictions. The study extends recent research on sensoriality in interaction by focusing on proprioception and interoception.

The three papers of the first part of this Special Issue deal with theatrical practices that are developed in rehearsals to enhance the performance, but which are hidden from the audience. When focusing only on the final product, the performance, these phenomena are not apparent. Rehearsal data are needed to understand workplace practices that create theatrical performances and bring about immersion and illusion for an audience.

Part 2 "*Micro histories in theater rehearsals*" adopts a longitudinal perspective and asks how the development of scenes is interactionally organized.

Axel Schmidt and Arnulf Deppermann's contribution *"On the emergence of routines: An interactional micro-history of rehearsing a scene*" shows how routines for

playing a scene emerge during rehearsals and how these routines affect interactional organization. With each repetition of an embodied figure, knowledge is accumulated over interactional histories that participants draw on in later trials. Data come from a professional theater play in Germany. The authors show how, during rehearsing a part of a scene, instructions become shorter, the timing of responses becomes increasingly compacted, and long negotiations are reduced to a two-part sequence of instruction and implementation. As a result, the cumulative interactional history provides grounds for projecting relevant next actions which allow actors to anticipate and perform relevant next actions, leading to increasingly smooth and efficient joint action.

Augustin Lefevbre and Lorenza Mondada deal in their contribution "*Interactional contingencies in rehearsing a theater scene: The consequentiality of body arrangements as action unfolds*" with the change of body formations when repeatedly rehearsing the same lines. The authors reveal how variations of the scene are performed, explored, and found by chance by the actors focusing on embodied activities like walking, sitting, hugging and kissing, as well as the sequential positions in which they co-occur with the lines of the script. Data are in French and come from a professional play by a Japanese writer and director inspired by Kafka's novel *The Metamorphosis*. The authors show how rehearsing a scene is a situated interpretation of the script and a contingent result of the moment-to-moment unfolding of embodied movements, constituting a course of action, which is generally not scripted. The analysis shows the interplay between the indexicality of the script interpretations and the creative contingencies of the actors' embodied work.

In "*Knowledge accumulation in theatre rehearsals: The emergence of a gesture as a solution for embodying a certain aesthetic concept*," Stefan Norrthon and Axel Schmidt show how a gestural form ('rubbing one's hands') emerges and is stabilized as an embodied solution for an aesthetic concept ('playing the scene adopting a gambler attitude') over the rehearsal process. The data is taken from a professional play at the National Theater Mannheim. The authors show the practices through which shared knowledge is built during the rehearsal process and how the accumulation of knowledge in turn contributes to a change in the interactive practices themselves. The emerging gesture eventually becomes a 'sign' that indexes accumulated knowledge in conjunction with the corresponding aesthetic concept developed in parallel. The study also points to the crucial importance of gestures as means and products of theatrical production.

In sum, Part 2 shows how theater rehearsals allow accessing the emergence of shared interactional histories and routines on which performances are based. The longitudinal design of theater rehearsal data enables researchers to go beyond simply assuming the relevance of interactional histories for interactional organization to show how interactional practices change step by step in the process of their emergence. In contrast to ordinary interactions, performances are constrained by an underlying script to which participants orient, their repeated local realizations permanently producing variation. Their embodied realizations implement unique courses of action, which are always sensitive to local contingencies.

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