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http://theaterrampe.de/stuecke/stageplay/

Play as Game - Spiel als Beute.
Critical making as dramaturgical strategy, a tool of digital learning and interactive engagement in performance.

This is a manuscript for symposium presentation NOT a written article. In Progress.
Please also see our powerpoint slides on the DDL website/ conferences.

“I hold on to what have been characterized as childish and immature notions of possibility...
By exploring and mapping, I also mean detouring and getting lost.” (Judith Halberstam, The Queer Art of Failure)

And I shall say: ‘games’ form a family.
(Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, §67)

“ Trade is a game, and nothing can be won from beggars.”
(Pinto 1771, quoted by Karl Marx as an example for naïveté regarding modes of monetary exchange and speculation/gambling in Das Kapital ebook, ch. 4 “The General Formula for Capital” p.204, 211)

Game: animals under pursuit or taken in hunting; especially: wild animals hunted for sport or food (2) : the flesh of game animals (Merriam Webster online)

At the centre of my ironic faith, my blasphemy, is the image of the cyborg.
A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction. (Donna Haraway, Simians, cyborgs, and women: the reinvention of nature, p.149)

Dear participants of the symposium Stage@Play. - A symposium on theatre and new media (Games) thank you very much for this great learning and networking opportunity for two representatives of the DDL Digital Dramaturgy Lab from Toronto, Monty Martin and myself.

The DDL is a nomadic networking platform for multi-disciplinary artists, creative programmers, technicians, engineers and designers with conceptual/ dramaturgical interest in dynamic/queering relationships between digital technology and live performance, the complexities of real and virtual bodies, multi-disciplinary linguality/terminology, as well as aesthetical and technological literacy in collaborative rehearsal processes in theatre, performance art, interactive installations as research.

We appreciate the labor and funding that went into this project, knowing full well how difficult it is to organize events like this in the context of funding cuts and
under-appreciation of creative labor – a global problem speaking to the evolving challenges in neo-capitalist information societies.

Recently, on July 13, the German chancellor Angela Merkel was interviewed by the Youtube star LeFloid. Merkel had realized that connecting with youth voters these days takes an effort of social networking through digital media. In terms of style and argumentation LeFloid clearly lost the game when attempting to fulfill rule expectations of “how to interview a German chancellor” game. It was sad to watch and quite revealing at the same time.

Web publications also just entered the world of high culture and literature in Germany when the German Academy for Language and Poetry awarded the Georg Buechner prize to Rainald Goertz for his 1994 blog “Garbage for all” (Muell fuer alle). The title of the blog still leaves traces of how web publications are regarded precisely as more of a “low” than of a “high” and thereby reinforcing hierarchies that become less and less productive.

At the moment we watch a crisis unfold in Europe, which has a magnitude that will have a palpable impact on the rest of the world. Much rhetoric about the Greek situation evolves around terminology of play, game and gamble. These terms are related but by no means the same. In German we only have the term Spiel and we must contextualize what exactly we are talking about as the “homo ludens”, the playing man envisioned by the Dutch Johan Huizinga and gamers/gamblers are not the same yet related concepts.

Mr. Varoufakis, a game scholar, economist and game designer recently stepped down as the Greek finance minister. The fact that he is a scholar of game theory and economics has been used from the beginning – in German media but also elsewhere – to discredit the negotiation professionalism and political pragmatism of the leftist Greek government as a whole. Apparently they, the Greeks, did not understand the rules of the EU game. A game frequently referred to as Poker. Poker is theatrical. You need to put on Poker faces/masks/persona/avatars in order to be successful through “as if” bluffing. Yet, what the Greeks attempted to do was to negotiate the set of rules. They were interested in the politics of the rules, in the power dynamics set by rules, not just in conforming to them and reinforcing them as they exist. Academics, so the stereotype, cannot possibly understand real world problems. This might be extended to the “use” of artists and the arts as a medium for discussion and simulation of real world problems. What do these “artists” really know? They are just playing at the expense of the taxpayer, aren’t they? These people should just go and find real jobs... Money making jobs, not money burning jobs.

Do we have to accept the rule and reward system as it drives capitalist economies based on efficiency, instantaneous rewards, competition, minimalizing of time and effort, motivation of exploitation (yourself and others) in order to increase profit margins?

The dramaturge Carl Hegemann recently laments in the German theatre journal “Theater Heute” (p.5-7) that game theories such as the ones developed by John Nash
impose rules of efficiency and accountability on theatre (and what he means is state and municipal theatre funded by the German taxpayer) that reduce the freedom of risk taking and failure in that environment. For him, game theory applied to economic management of cultural institutions and of theatrical exploration in combination with massive data collections (i.e. NSA) lead to destructive efficiency and totalitarianism just like the planning economy of socialism based on Marxist-Leninist ideology as a means for the perfectly operating game system. We know what happened to that system...

It should be said though that John Nash was a rather interesting and contradictory character – and so were his theories - and while not going into the depths of it the Hollywood film “A beautiful mind” about Nash at least indicates that there is more to him – than just being an enemy figure for a German state theatre dramaturge.

We should not forget that the game theory was originally introduced by two Jewish Germans, Johan (John) Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern, who were forced into emigration because of German fascism and the looming Holocaust. They moved to the US and in 1944 collaboratively published "The Theory of Games and Economic Behavior" (deutsch: "Spieltheorie und wirtschaftliches Verhalten", 3. Auflage 1973). They set the stage – so to speak - for the shared Nobel prize in economic sciences in 1994 received by John Nash but also by John C. Harsanyi, originally from Budapest, and the German scholar Reinhard Selten – born in Breslau now in Poland.

We should also not forget that strategic gaming was heavily influenced by military simulation interests. This is well known but worth mentioning regardless.

The times of the big “as if” – the modernist naturalist experimental mode - are not over but we certainly reached a point where we discuss the “what if” on an entirely new level than Dada, Brecht, Piscator, Bauhaus, Black College Mountain, the Situationists and the likes did back in the day.

It is interesting that Brecht’s concept of Lehrstuecke or Learning plays – basically following a dramaturgy of collaborative and participatory learning games – is discussed in the context of first-shooter video games (Pinchbeck 399-408) interested in the politics of ethics and ethical choice in such games. In “Der Jasager” (He who says no) and “Der Neinsager” (he who says yes), Brecht sets up two possible ways of rule systems in which the players (children in this case) can experience and discover what a rule is, where it comes from, what its traditions and histories are, and how we can creatively navigate and negotiate alternative systems of rule making, rule bending and rule breaking. The cross-cultural aspect - the plays being inspired by a Japanese No theatre play - is relevant in the context of post-colonial discourse, globalization and the rise of Asian economies with an exploding gaming industry as well.

Furthermore, interesting for our discussion is Brecht’s interest in a dramaturgy of contradiction rather than just (Aristotelian) conflict. It is the interpretation of the story and/or characters (i.e the Brechtian fable) that is of interest and not the story
as such. Hence it was possible for Brecht to show a character and historical figure like Galileo Galilei as both a risk-taking and innovative pioneer of physics who truly changed our view of the world while at the same time being a weak, perhaps cowardice scientist, when it came to defending his discoveries when facing and challenging the totalitarian and absolute power of the Catholic church which imposed a rule of the game on him that forced him to either face death or to deny his discovery. Thus Galileo is not a hero or a villain but somehow both. Things are complicated.

In addition, the aspect of collaborative creation or in Brechtian terms ensemble work, are more relevant than ever. How do practices of artistic creation and its socio-economic function change in the context of digital culture and neo-liberal capitalism? What are the implications for actual practice/Praxis in creative processes of social communication be they artistic, academic, scientific or possibly all of it integrated in one interdisciplinary praxis? How do new models of collaboration and participation challenge and change established hierarchical systems and labor divisions? Who are the (social) actors, who is performing? How? Why? Questions like this led to the founding of the DDL, Digital Dramaturgy Lab. These were by no means abstract questions but they reflected conflicts, problems and power relations in the rehearsal room, in the classroom and in academic discourse. The DDL is a networking platform of artists, scientists, scholar-artists that investigates these relationships in a rhizomatic, networking manner.

**Key terms/ network of terms**

Keeping in mind the totalising danger of the map (and other spatial metaphors such as field and area), the network of terms offers a constellation of descriptive and discursive points designed not only to outline the specific dimensions of this field, but also to demonstrate the dynamic relations among them. We do not intend this map to be a totalising one, with fixed points and lines, but as an ever-shifting terrain that responds to the changes in terms, practices, and reception of contemporary intermedial performance. (Bay-Cheng, Network of Terms, p.24)

**Lab vs. studio/workshop**

- Practice as research
- The Lab - playing with notions of a laboratory for social imagination as well as with the idea of labs as testing ground
- Bauhaus School, Black Mountain College as role models

Lab: Experimentation, team work/Togetherness, questions, exploring techniques and processes, DOING/LABOR, scientific research

Studio: artistic product making

The term "lab" is short for "laboratory" and is related to the Latin verb, laborare, to labor. It commonly refers to a space used for "conducting practical investigations....

Studies appear to be spaces of personal study, of expression - labs, of labor and experimentation. Studios appear to be sites of creative production in the arts -
labs, of scientific or technical experimentation and production. But this is oversimplified.

**Studios** are imagined as sites of individual expression - labs, teamwork. (Shannon Rose Riley. *Lab/Studio*. 137-141)

**Game/Play/Gamble**
- thinking about play concept/ DDL workshops and brainstorming

**Digital Dramaturgy/Critical making**

“The Critical Engineer considers any technology depended upon to be both a challenge and a threat. The greater the dependence on a technology the greater the need to study and expose its inner workings, regardless of ownership or legal provision.” – THE CRITICAL ENGINEERING MANIFESTO, 2011. [http://criticalengineering.org](http://criticalengineering.org)

**Digital dramaturgy**, for now, is defined as the conceptual and structuring critical making (design, choreography, composition = dramaturgy) of intermedial/mixed-media performance (digital or otherwise) that informs an integrated approach to aspects of creative learning/critical thinking in the field of artistic performative production. Of particular interest is the challenging juxtaposition between the analog nature of human perception and digitally informed or organized performance practices.


(In order to better understand our current challenges with technology in live performance we will study performance dramaturgies and political aesthetics of early modern avant-garde-movements and play with a comparative approach.)

**Networking**

...networking conceived as a complex of dynamic interrelated activities, always in interactive process (171)

1. social networking (community building)
2. technical networking – technical and material process of connecting multiple entities, co-ordinate the flow of data, information, electricity in a non-linear structure
3. postmodern rhizomatic networking (Deleuze, Guattari) – analyzing cultural processes
   (Maike Wagner, Wolf-Dieter Ernst p.173ff)

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Sara Bay-Cheng et al. Mapping Intermediality in Performance


Shannon Rose Riley. Lab/Studio. 137-141

Game/Play/Gamble

play. An activity often characterized by culturally developed conventions, at least among older players (see e.g. sport). Children may use improvised games to explore serious social contact in a "safe" way: by play-fighting, for example. These issues have been discussed by Gregory Bateson. Play is also the subject of Huizinga's Homo Ludens and has been studied by Geertz (see deep play). See also wittgenstein's discussion of games with family resemblances. Further reading: Caillois (1961); Bateson (Companion to aesthetic, p. 197)

Wittgenstein definition games