



The International Research Center

Interweaving Performance Cultures

On Thematic Threads and Research Practices
2008 – 2018

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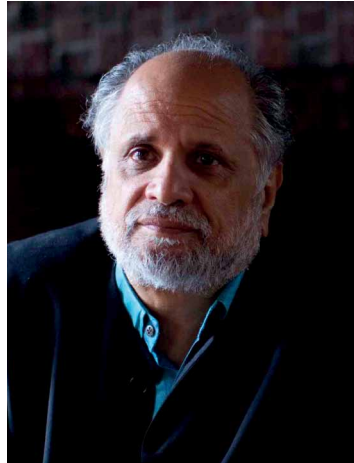
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Foreword:

All the World's a Stage

By Homi K. Bhabha

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts.
– William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII



The International Research Center “Interweaving Performance Cultures,” founded in 2008, has pioneered projects that have radically revised our understanding of cultural theory and the arts of performance. The Center’s scholarly agendas—fellowships, seminars, colloquia, conferences—provide performance studies with terms of engagement at the cutting edge of academic innovation, and frames of reference that expand the practice of performance across diverse histories and geographies of reception.

Erika Fischer-Lichte, the Center’s founding director and its driving force, provides a concise account of the intellectual ambitions and institutional challenges entailed in the work of “interweaving

performance cultures.” The international composition of ensembles, the collaboration of artists from different cultures, the circulation of training methods and artistic devices, indeed also the transmission of performance-related concepts between different cultures and the international theatre festival circuit bringing together culturally diverse artistic works and presenting them to equally heterogeneous audiences, pose a challenge to conventional theatre and performance studies, which examine such problems mainly within the context of particular national theatres—if at all.

As I understand it, the international perspective that informs the work of the Center is neither descriptive nor illustrative: the

Center does not merely aspire to represent the pluralism of performance practices and theories. To *interweave* is, in fact, to *intervene*, and to *invent* anew.

In what does this critical and creative spirit lie? In what sense does the Center’s work pose a challenge to conventional performance studies?

Collaboration ... circulation ... transformation ... convergence: these key terms in Erika Fischer-Lichte’s concept-note point us in a direction different from the general impetus of international research. Research that attempts to span the global domain—in the matter of the arts, culture or politics—functions frequently within a foundational matrix of a comparative method. However diverse cultural traditions are, or however contextually specific performance practices may be, the impetus “to compare” seeks out instances or elements that provide parallel perspectives. Parallelism functions, in the main, on the logic of comparing *like with like*. In deference to specific histories, textualities, and audiences—indeed, in order to represent their “cultural differences”—there is a disciplinary tendency to make comparisons within genres, and to draw comparisons across historical time-lines that are (roughly) synchronous. In an attempt to establish epistemological base-lines of comparison, the logic of *like with like* is a normative idea that aspires to an equity of critical judgment that places performative practices and theatrical texts “in context” with one another, to recognize their differences and, at times, to resolve them into global theories of theatre. The comparative method is

ethnographically indispensable, and the Research Center has made a significant contribution to its contemporary development.

In addition, *Interweaving Performance Cultures* strikes out in an innovative and experimental direction that engages with theatrical transformations that occur as a result of the mobility of symbolic action and performance practices. In this regard, *interweaving* intervenes in the parallel logic of *like with like*. Interweaving follows an *itinerant* itinerary in which performances develop new histories of practice and pedagogy, and innovative languages of staging and address generate agencies of performance and ritual in the *on-going* processes of cultural movement. In this sense, performance cultures refuse to be captive to nationalist theatrical imaginaries, or hostage to hierarchical tyrannies of tradition. Indeed, the International Research Center “Interweaving Performance Cultures” reminds us of something that has stood the test of time while developing an entirely new meaning for our own global times. And it is, quite simply, this: *All the world’s a stage!*



The Center

Introduction:

The International Research Center “Interweaving Performance Cultures”

In 2008, the International Research Center “Interweaving Performance Cultures” was founded at the Freie Universität Berlin. It is one of the first three Käte Hamburger Centers, which, funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), are intended to extend the scope and freedom (literally ‘free space’ or ‘Freiraum’ in German) of the Humanities. The Centers resemble Institutes for Advanced Studies, but, unlike them, they host only Fellows whose research contributes to an overarching common subject – in our case, a completely new field of research: processes of interweaving performance cultures.

1.1 Point of departure

Processes of interweaving have a long history and can be found in and between different cultures. Today they have become discernable particularly in the international composition of theatre, opera, and dance ensembles as well as in the collaborations of artists from different cultures. Most notably, interweaving can be recognized in international theatre festivals: a worldwide phenomenon, they bring together productions from different parts of the world and present them to culturally diverse audiences.

All over the world, more and more new forms and types of interweaving are currently coming into being. While some of these interweaving practices make it explicit that a diversity of strands are being intertwined, others tap into the notion of localization to an extent that the performance as a whole is barely recognisable as the result of interweaving and appears “local” through and through. With the establishment of this Research Center, it became possible for the first time to investigate these manifold and very specific dynamics of cultural processes by developing the guiding concept of “Verflechtungen von Theaterkulturen/ Interweaving Performance Cultures” and to probe its scope and its productiveness.





Director Erika Fischer-Lichte welcoming Nele Hertling for a Tea Time at the Center's library.

A significant point of departure was that these processes of interweaving inherently possess an explicitly political and social dimension—irrespective of the particular content or subject matter. Processes of interweaving can be detected where the contextualization, appropriation, or adaptation of theatrical elements comes to the fore.

But where is the political dimension of processes of interweaving obvious? How did the familiarization with 'Western theatre,' for example, affect performative practices in other parts of the world? What hegemonic interests are involved in cultural policy? How do we have to rethink the economic power and administrative agendas of funding systems? In what way is it necessary to deconstruct classical traditions as ideological categories?

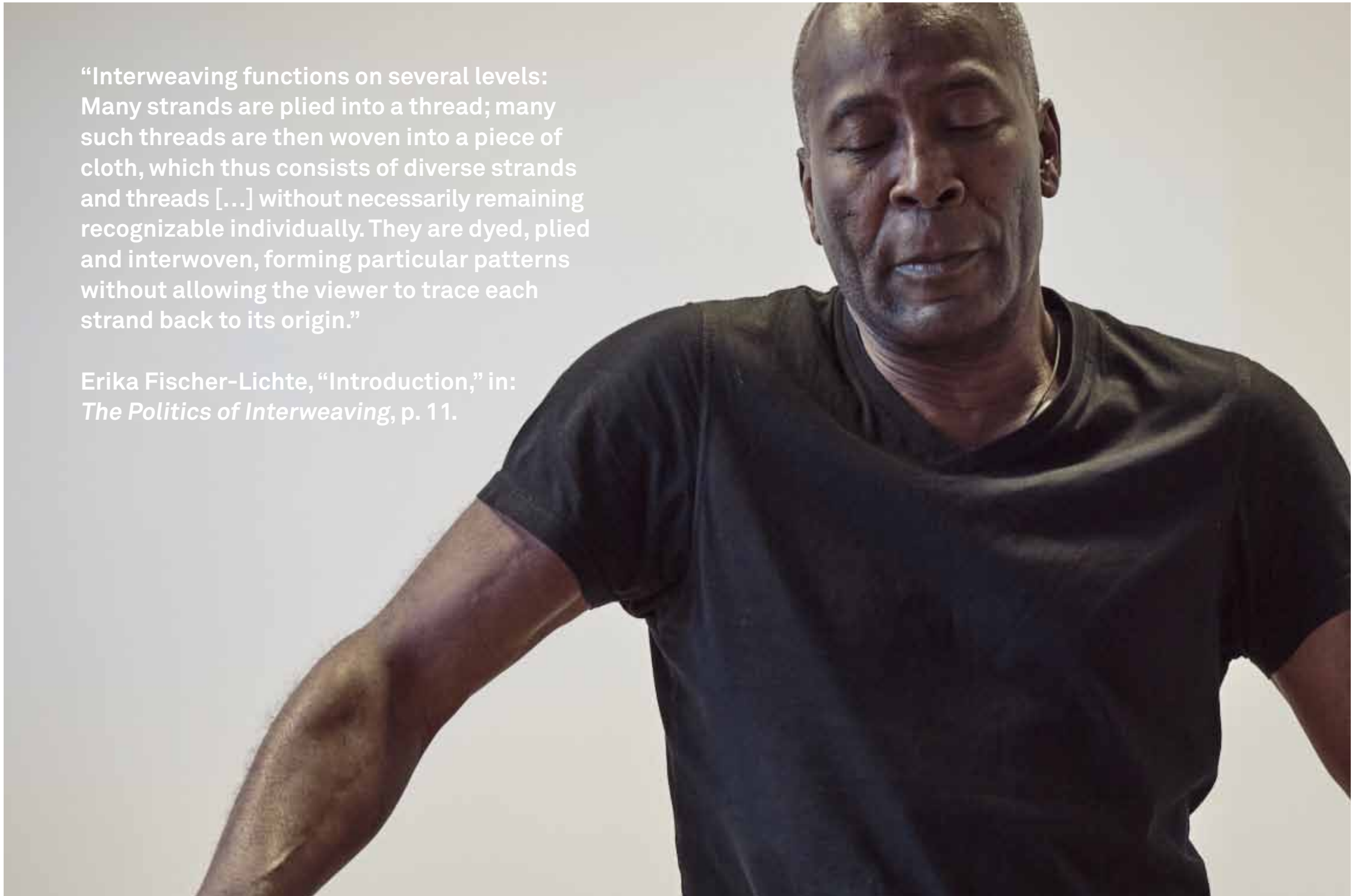
These fundamental and challenging research questions are currently accompanied by developments that show how embodied local discourses inform or counter hegemonic or national constructions: Latin American artists and their performance practices as well as practitioners, communities, and societies from the African continent and its diasporas engage with the history of colonialism. Post-migrant artists create new conceptions/concepts of the performing arts from a multi-cultural perspective. In this way, processes of interweaving refer to practices of de-colonialization especially where they create environments for alternative historiographies.

They apply and test future politics in culturally diversified societies, allowing for the aesthetic experience of successful interweaving, while at the same time addressing the question of how cultural identities are brought forth, stabilized, and destabilized. The aesthetic ultimately is the political. In this regard, theatre serves and should be explored as a cultural model.



“Interweaving functions on several levels: Many strands are plied into a thread; many such threads are then woven into a piece of cloth, which thus consists of diverse strands and threads [...] without necessarily remaining recognizable individually. They are dyed, plied and interwoven, forming particular patterns without allowing the viewer to trace each strand back to its origin.”

Erika Fischer-Lichte, “Introduction,” in: *The Politics of Interweaving*, p. 11.





1.2 Conditions of outstanding research

Since August 2008, the Research Center has been devoted to processes of interweaving on a global scale. In September 2013, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) announced that the International Research Center “Interweaving Performance Cultures” would receive funding for another six years. This federal funding enabled the Center to continue its research. The directors at that time, Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Erika Fischer-Lichte, Prof. Dr. Gabriele Brandstetter, and Dr. Christel Weiler, have since been joined by Prof. Dr. Matthias Warstat.

Each year up to twelve Fellows were invited to the Center as internationally renowned experts in their field. They came from more than thirty different countries from all five continents to work on new and emerging forms of interweaving. In addition to theatre and performance studies,

the project also included ethnology and a variety of area studies, if the researchers were working on performances or specialized in the theatre of a specific region.

Without imposing the pressures of teaching and administrative duties, the Research Center offered an ideal environment for unrestricted research. Over the years, as part of the research program, more than a hundred IRC Fellow research projects have been completed. Towards the end of the second funding phase, certain research areas emerged that we determined to be of high relevance. In this brochure, IRC Director Erika Fischer-Lichte sums up these striking thematic threads by examining their content in the context of the research field “interweaving performance cultures.”

→ Further information on the specific research projects of the Fellows can be found on our website: www.interweaving-performance-cultures.com



→ In 2007, the Year of the Humanities, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) launched an innovative funding format: the International Research Centers in the Humanities, which today bear the name of the literary theorist Käthe Hamburger. Ten Käthe Hamburger Centers have since been set up at German universities, where they conduct interdisciplinary research

on a diverse range of topics, such as religion, media philosophy, performance and legal cultures, work, or the environment. Not only have they become firmly rooted at their individual locations, they have also established extensive networks and partnerships on regional, national, and global levels.

The dancer and choreographer Koffi Kôkô, page 12–13, has been known as one of the initiators and most prominent representatives of the modern African dance scene. IRC Fellow Nanako Nakajima at a workshop on “Performance-related concepts in Japan”, top left. Every summer colleagues, friends and interwoven Fellows celebrate the end of the academic year at the International Research Center’s Summer Party, bottom.



1.3 Fostering exchange and deeper understanding

At the same time, the Center pursued a working practice that was based on co-operation with numerous partners: other Käte Hamburger Centers; the Department for Theatre Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin as well as its local research institutions, such as the Dahlem Humanities Center, the Institute for Advanced Study, or the Forum Transregional Studies. Last but not least, a number of national and international institutions in the field of arts and culture, e.g. Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Akademie der Künste, Berliner Festspiele, or the German Center of the International Theatre Institute, served as additional partners. Long-standing cooperations with Berlin's numerous theatres and operas greatly contributed to its success. The

Center also managed to establish a number of international partnerships. The close contact to the International Center for Performance Studies, Tangier (Morocco), or the Shanghai Theatre Academy (China) further strengthened the university's profile as an International Network University.

With conferences and symposia, lectures, workshops, and other public events, the International Research Center "Interweaving Performance Cultures" appears to be a unique place in the world where intellectual and artistic ideas can meet on a national and an international level. By focusing on dialogue, intellectual stimulation, critical support, and empathy, the Research Center has been contributing to Germany's outstanding profile in the humanities.



Whether it is an in-house colloquium, symposium or a guest-lecture, events at the Research Center always initiate passionate debates and discussions. Tracing links and notions at the workshop "Mapping Interweaving," right.



"The Center is a unique and wonderful contribution, much needed in an increasingly fast-paced world, where time for encountering and reflectively sharing and producing knowledge is becoming rarer and rarer."

**André Lepecki
(USA)**

“Intellectual interaction with other Fellows from around the world and with the IRC staff has exposed contexts, provoked me to think more deeply about some of my assertions, alerted me to publications that have informed my own research, and generally increased my knowledge of the ways in which performance both forges and articulates cultures (in both senses of the word articulate, as in to voice and to join up) in diverse parts of the world.”

**Helen Gilbert
(UK)**





Research Program

Thematic Threads of “Interweaving Performance Cultures”

By Erika Fischer-Lichte

Processes of interweaving performance cultures per se are not a novelty. Early examples can be found in many cultures. In Japan, for instance, the elegant courtly dance *bugaku* and the masked dance theatre *gigaku* were developed during the Nara period (640–794 AD) drawing on Chinese and Korean dance and music theatre. Dancers from those regions were invited to the Nara court to teach young Japanese performers their art, while Japanese performers traveled to the courts of Silla and Tang to learn from the Korean and Chinese masters. To give another example: German professional theatre developed out of English companies flooding the continent after the end of the Thirty Years’ War, as Charles I had banned them from England with his “First Ordinance against Stage Plays and Interludes” (1642).

In this era of globalization, the encounter, exchange, and development of new forms has increasingly become a common practice that can be observed across the world. The international composition of ensembles, the collaboration of artists from different cultures, the circulation of training methods and artistic devices, indeed also the transmission of performance-related concepts between different cultures, and the international theatre festival circuit bringing together culturally diverse artistic works and presenting them

to equally heterogeneous audiences, pose a challenge to conventional theatre and performance studies, which examine such problems mainly within the context of particular national theatres – if at all.

Our Research Center is devoted to the above-mentioned phenomena and processes on a global scale. Over time we have identified six research areas that interest us the most:

- 1 The politics of interweaving performance cultures
- 2 The aesthetics of interweaving performance cultures
- 3 Knowledge generated through the interweaving of performance cultures and related epistemologies
- 4 Histories of interweaving performance cultures and related new historiographies
- 5 Dramaturgies of interweaving performance cultures
- 6 Artistic practices of interweaving as research

The projects pursued at our Center over the last ten years greatly contributed to delineating and probing these different aspects.





Participants at the international symposium “European Perspectives on Postmigrant Theatre,” organized in cooperation with the International Theatre Institute Berlin and mime centrum berlin. The leading question was: How do European countries—especially by means of theatre—address and respond to the migration phenomenon?

1. The politics of interweaving performance cultures

Entanglements between different performance cultures have a long history, and as such they did not remain unnoticed. As mentioned, they were largely included in national theatre histories and viewed from that angle alone. In the 1970s, however, a new term was coined to describe such phenomena: intercultural theatre. It should come as no surprise that it emerged during the early postcolonial period, as it suggests the idea that all cultures and artists could meet on an equal footing through forms of theatre that combine elements from different traditions. However, in Western writing, the term usually indicates the fusion of Western and non-Western components—

not of African and Latin American traditions or of different Asian cultures. It was mostly applied to Western productions that made use of elements from other traditions, such as Peter Brook’s *Iks* (1975) and *Mahabharata* (1985), or Ariane Mnouchkine’s Shakespeare cycle (1981–83), or Robert Wilson’s *Knee Plays* (1985). When it was applied to non-Western productions, it usually described productions that used a Western text, such as Tadashi Suzuki’s ‘antiquity project’ *The Trojan Women* (1974), *The Bacchae* (1975) and *Clytemnestra* (1984), or Shakespeare and Brecht productions in the style of traditional Chinese opera, such as *Macbeth* (1984) as a *kunqu* opera or *Much Ado About Nothing* (1986) as a *huang meixi* opera or Brecht’s *Good Woman of Szechwan* (1987) as a *sichuan* opera.

“My Fellowship has given me a new point of perspective to analyze how the nationality of former European colonies are projected and/or represented on global stages through improvised and choreographed actions.”

Cristina Rosa
(Brazil)

Samoan-New Zealand artist Rosanna Raymond artistically responding to the Ethnological Museum’s South Sea collection.



“Particularly coming from Africa, the residency has allowed me to discover the work going on in several other parts of the world.”

**Femi Osofisan
(Nigeria)**



A visitor scrutinizing the Center's library collection.

Clearly, the term “intercultural theatre” is in itself political. It seems to imply a notion of equality that almost always requires the involvement of the West. This raises the suspicion that the term serves as a veiled instrument to maintain power and supremacy over non-Western cultures—by exploiting and appropriating artistic heritage according to the needs and whimsies of Western artists, and by imposing supposedly universal Western texts, such as those of the Greeks, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Chekhov, and Brecht.

This implies a certain political stand charged with a number of implications that we do not share. Another term seemed necessary in order to address and deal with processes of encounter and exchange, and the concomitant transformations on a global scale. This led to the introduction of the term “interweaving performance cultures.” Of course, the term “intercultural” should not be abandoned altogether, as it can still be put to productive use in many fields as a philosophical concept. The term “intercultural theatre,” however, has become obsolete and should be avoided, not least because it hails culture as a fixed, stable, and homogenous entity—once Japanese, always Japanese; once European, always European. It denies all cultures their essential characteristic—the fact that they constantly undergo change through exchange, rendering disentanglement impossible over time.

Yet our goal is not to erase difference. Rather, the differences within and among cultures are dynamic and in a constant state of flux. They continuously reproduce themselves anew and must be recognized as such.

While the act of introducing a new concept of course implies a political stance, the field of research devoted to the politics of interweaving performance cultures covers a variety of different phenomena and problems, many of them related to postcolonialism and, also, to the concept of decolonization. As our Fellow Femi Osofisan put it: “Postcolonialism talks of the ‘Center,’ and locates it in the West, our own ‘Center’ is on the contrary Africa itself, while the West is the Other, and its concerns are marginal to us.” This entails an important shift in perspective. In Osofisan’s dramatic work and theatre productions that draw on the Greek tragedies, for example, this material is reworked and shaped in a very particular manner that is guided by African concerns and the future of its cultures, thus forbidding any claims of superiority attributed to these Western texts. Such a shift in perspective and the reversal of relations that go with it constitutes a key aspect of the politics of interweaving in the context of postcolonialism.

Another important aspect of the politics of interweaving deals with the concept of decolonization, as defined by Walter Dignolo. Arguing that during the period between the years 1500 and 2000 colonial ownership “was expressed by building a system of knowledge as if it were the sum and guardian of all knowledge, past and present,” Dignolo explores a different epistemology (‘border thinking’) that he claims is necessary to decolonize knowledge and to build decolonial local histories, which challenge and undermine the myths of ‘absolute knowledge’ and a ‘universal history.’ In agreement with Dignolo, we consider ‘border thinking’ an indispensable, albeit underexplored methodology in the field

of performance and dance research. Envisioning innovative ways of engaging in 'epistemic disobedience' is, therefore, a key (political) aspect of research on interweaving performance cultures.

Other fields of research comprise rituals and festivals as particular sites of interweaving pursuing a certain political or ideological agenda, or the failure and fear of or the resistance to interweaving performance cultures. Such a fear (*Verflechtungsangst*) can, for example, be triggered by the work of Western directors, who, sponsored by their countries' cultural institutions, set out to create productions with actors, performers, or dancers from another culture. This might be regarded as yet another cultural invasion on the part of the Western director. Or it could describe the fear of one's own culture becoming 'polluted' through this entanglement with elements from another performance culture.

As these few aspects suggest, the research area "Politics of Interweaving" spans a broad range of problems around power relations that we must address and tackle.

2. The aesthetics of interweaving performance cultures

When artistic elements from different performance cultures are used in a production, this usually leads not only to the transformation of these individual components but also to the emergence of a new theatre or performance aesthetics. The latter will have a particular impact on the spectators, depending on the special traditions that gave rise to these elements, and on the culture/s in which the performance takes place. To give an example: in the Sino-Japanese production

of the *kunqu* opera *The Peony Pavilion* (2008), the celebrated Japanese *onnagata* Tamasaburo Bando, who is officially named a National Living Treasure in Japan, played the role of Du Liniang, the 16-year-old daughter of a senior government official who falls in love with a young scholar who appeared to her in a dream. Tamasaburo turned his body into a site of interweaving Japanese *kabuki* and Chinese *kunqu* performance cultures. In general, his performance was perceived as very reserved, dignified, and graceful, thus pointing to the *kabuki* style. Yet Chinese *kunqu* scholars emphasized a certain "Chineseness" in Tamasaburo's performance. They had the impression that it embodied certain aspects of Chinese philosophy and that it was in tune with traditional Chinese aesthetics on the whole. Since his acting responded and was linked to that of the other style and vice versa, this left an imprint on *kunqu* opera as a whole and, in some respects, changed it for good.

This example raises a number of questions concerning the body of the Japanese actor as the site of interweaving *kabuki* and *kunqu* opera, as well as with regard to the aesthetics of the performance that came into being, and the assessment of the Chinese *kunqu* scholars and the other Chinese spectators. In what ways did the process of interweaving transform the body of the performer and thus him as a subject? In what ways did it transform the traditional aesthetics of *kunqu* and its understanding via the performer?



Transcending boundaries: Tamasaburo Bando as Du Liniang in *The Peony Pavilion* with Yu Jiulin from the Suzhou Kunqu Opera Theatre as Liu Mengmei.



Concert “Interweaving Strings” with Amos Elkana (computer, composition, guitar), Hindol Deb (sitar), Dan Weinstein (cello), and Roy Amotz (flute) at the Werkstatt der Kulturen. Alternating between lyrical solo pieces and group improvisations, the musicians put a strong accent on the individual variety and different soundscapes of each instrument. Many of these different music fragments were sampled and re-mixed by Elkana and his versatile toolbox of electronic helpers and played back on an 8-channel sound system. Elkana created an enchanting feeling of space that completed the beautiful atmosphere. A true interweaving of (not only) strings.

As this example further demonstrates, a theatre and performance aesthetics is usually linked to certain philosophical notions or even particular philosophies, but also often to ideologies, *Weltanschauungen*, and religions.

In what ways, then, does the transformation of a performance aesthetics affect the respective philosophies, ideologies, *Weltanschauungen*, or religions? Is the impact of such a performance on spectators merely affective and emotional, or does it invite reflections on the relationship between the aesthetics of this performance and its potential effect on the underlying philosophy, etc.?

Examining many different kinds of new aesthetics that emerge out of processes of interweaving performance cultures, we found that all of them raise the above-mentioned and related questions. We called this “transformative aesthetics” because it can change existing, often even traditional aesthetics to varying degrees and thus lastingly affect certain aspects of philosophy, religion, ideology, and a *Weltanschauung*.

Our interest therefore primarily centers on the transformative potential of an aesthetics that emerges as a result of processes that interweave different performance cultures, as these can reach far beyond the performer’s actions in this process and far beyond individual and collective acts of perceiving and responding to them during a performance. In what ways does a transformative aesthetics impact the body and mind of the actor as well as that of the spectator? And what kinds of transformations are

set in motion in these processes? It takes a rather large number of case studies in order to find satisfactory answers to these questions, which is the sole basis for formulating a reliable theory. It seems obvious already at this stage, however, that the questions raised by an aesthetics of interweaving are not an aesthetic matter alone. They are far-reaching and refer to philosophy, religion, ideology, *Weltanschauungen*, and even politics. In fact, very often in such cases it is the aesthetic that proves to be inherently political.

The paradigm of transformative aesthetics that we are developing in this way differs from comparative aesthetics, although the latter can be productively applied to our approach. This field of research proceeds from the question of what happened to the brand of philosophical aesthetics developed in Europe when it was received by non-European, mainly Asian philosophers and art theoreticians. The problems emerging in this field point forward to our third research area, though in a very particular manner.

3. Knowledge generated by interweaving performance cultures and related epistemologies

As the example of the Sino-Japanese production *The Peony Pavilion* demonstrates, an important field of knowledge constituted by processes of interweaving performance cultures concerns the knowledge of acting techniques and devices acquired from elsewhere, which are then changed through that same process, sometimes even decisively. As was the case with Tamasaburo Bando’s performance as Du Liniang, it is very difficult to clearly distinguish in the final style of acting the origin of particular

techniques. The acting revealed qualities characteristic of *kabuki* which, however, are also in accordance with fundamental aesthetic principles of *kunqu* opera. Here, the act of acquiring new knowledge on the part of the actor challenged the spectators to generate new knowledge, too.

The performer's body is the most important site of interweaving. From the concept of space that is used down to the music chosen—all of it affects the performers' bodies. They have to move according to patterns determined by the space in tune with or intentionally against the rhythm of the music. They acquire new knowledge by adjusting their bodies to the specific conditions set by processes of interweaving.

Since we are proceeding here from the philosopher Hellmuth Plessner's assumption that acquiring new body techniques not only impacts the body as an object to be dealt with at will but also the performer as body-subject, the new knowledge acquired here has far-reaching consequences. It is generated by the performer through their training and the performance, through which it is conveyed to the spectators, whose reception will of course be subjective and depend not only on the scope of their own knowledge but also on certain convictions, beliefs, etc.

Presentation at the international symposium "Actor Training: Intercultural and Interdisciplinary Perspectives" at Kunstquartier Bethanien in Berlin, bottom. Rabih Mroué in his non-academic lecture *Sand In The Eyes*, top right.



→ Art-as-Research Fellow Rabih Mroué

In Lebanon, a country experiencing upheavals since its inception, only one thing has remained stable: the continuous inter-penetrability of politics and religion, as Rabih Mroué asserts. After the end of the civil war in 1990, a new generation of artists felt the need to unpack history beyond its hollow propagandistic and political takeover. This allowed the rise of a format today widely known as the "lecture performance." With series of "non-academic lectures," Rabih Mroué, Lebanese artist and former IRC Fellow, invites artists and writers to reflect on today's ongoing eruptions of violence in the region. By using this term, his programs highlight its origins within an academic context, while deploying the format as a strategy of artistic research to question the very authority of institutional restrictions and to investigate the fabrication of truth.



Choreographer and IRC Fellow Ismael Ivo with an artistic investigation of his research project "Performance as Cultural Cannibalism."

"I would state without hesitation that the Fellowship so far has changed my life. It has inspired me not only with different approaches to the field, but also with a different attitude to how to undertake research."

**Lynette Hunter
(USA)**

Over the last years, our Fellows have analyzed a number of case studies that provide a much deeper insight into the particular ways of knowledge generation through such performances, focusing on the performers' bodies as sites of interweaving. On the basis of the research conducted so far, we even postulate that such kinds of performances follow and/or bring forth new epistemologies. In such cases, the creation of a new aesthetics lays the ground for the emergence of a new epistemology that might far transcend the frame of the performance during which it came into being.

One of the key concerns of comparative aesthetics refers to the problems related to the translation of concepts that form the core of an aesthetic theory. Since they are mostly untranslatable, any translation will necessarily push the theory into a new direction. At our Center, we are dealing with another problem of untranslatable concepts. Because of the—partly insurmountable—difficulties of translating key performance-related concepts, we initiated a very special project—to compile a handbook of such concepts from non-European languages. Of course, with regard to the resources and time allotted to us, the idea of putting together a comprehensive handbook featuring a vast number of non-European languages seemed quite illusory. Instead, we decided to restrict our

project to only a few languages, which all have a particular tradition of dealing with performance theoretically—Yoruba, Arabic, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and several Indian languages.



→ Handbooks on Performance-related Concepts

In order to explain particular processes or phenomena of interweaving within and between performance cultures, Fellows often expressed the need to introduce aesthetic concepts from other languages. Many telling examples could be mentioned here: The concept of 'yūgen,' which is central to traditional Japanese aesthetics. Or in Indian aesthetics, the concept of 'rasa' which is of vital importance as a performance category referring to the pleasure involved in tasting a particular performance through a heightened experience that transcends temporal, spiritual, and personal conditions and constraints. For these different aesthetic concepts, there are no equivalents in English, German, or any other European language. They are inextricably embedded within medical, philosophical, spiritual, political, and, of course, aesthetic discourses; to merely translate them would, consequently, be a deeply misleading simplification. Therefore, the handbook aims to assemble and explain in some detail performance-related aesthetic concepts in some non-European languages. To research processes of interweaving performance cultures appropriately with methods that similarly interweave discursive cultures, the handbook will provide a rich and instructive foundation for such innovative research practices.

“Perhaps ‘disorientation’ best captures the productive result of our engaged exchanges, leading to the re-examination of the very premises of research questions rather than to an otherwise expected accumulation of knowledge.”

**Marta Savigliano
(Argentina)**

In collaborative workshops attended by philosophers, linguists, performance scholars, and artists, ten key concepts were identified for each language and a corresponding entry was assigned to be written for the handbook. Through this process it quickly became evident that in each language group these concepts collectively form an epistemic system of their own. This gives rise to the question of what happens to this traditional system when a new concept or multiple ones are added to it as a result of changes in the respective performance culture. What are the consequences of such a shift? We shall have to deal with these and similar questions in the remaining years. They are highly fascinating and we are hoping for exciting answers that will open up new perspectives on the entire field.

Due to the novelty and importance of this research, our concluding conference from 21–24 June 2018 is mainly devoted to these questions.

→ **Closing Conference**

The conference sets out to investigate a key topic in research on interweaving performance cultures—the notion of *knowledge*. In four panels and two workshops, scholars from around the globe explore the dynamic relationship between past and present processes of interweaving between performance cultures and practices of knowledge production. With *Dynamics of Interweaving Performance Cultures*, the International Research Center “Interweaving Performance Cultures” in cooperation with the Akademie der Künste Berlin seeks to consider globally shifting conditions of performance making, to identify overarching themes and topics, and to create a new dynamic in international scholarship on performance—especially by proposing ‘epistemological interweaving’ as a new methodology.





Drawing on the central Samoan concept of 'Va' denoting the relational space of the in-between, the living and the past, the artistic work of Rosanna Raymond profoundly challenges established notions of space, time, and historiography.

4. Histories of interweaving performance cultures and related new historiographies

As already mentioned, the phenomenon of different performance cultures becoming entangled with each other is nothing new. In fact, developments within specific theatre traditions were often prompted by exposure to other cultures. The interaction of performance cultures has been a perpetual instrument and vehicle of change and renewal. Yet the histories of such processes are usually dealt with only within the context of national or continental theatre histories: Max Reinhardt's use of the Japanese *hanamichi* in *Sumurun* (1910) is highlighted in histories of German theatre. Histories of European avant-garde theatre usually refer to Brecht's indebtedness to Chinese theatre as regards his concept of alienation or to Artaud's reception of Balinese theatre in the development of his theatre of cruelty. Histories of Japanese theatre state that the introduction of *shingeki*, spoken theatre, resulted from the reception of European drama theatre, and histories of Chinese theatre point out that the exposure to European theatre led to the introduction of *huaju*. Western theatre

historians often celebrate the European and American artists for their productive incorporation of elements from non-Western theatre forms and hail them as creative geniuses who introduced new forms of theatre. In contrast, the achievements of the non-Western—such as the Japanese and Chinese—artists are not praised as moments of ingenuity but rather downplayed as imitations of European theatre ('Westernization').

The histories of interweaving that are being written at our Center and cover the period from the 19th century onwards but focus on the 20th century—and especially on the last fifty years—follow quite another route. Since the interweaving of performance cultures increasingly has been taking place on a global scale during the last five decades, it is rather pointless to strive for a comprehensive—"world"—history of such processes, even if we look at just the last twenty years. In fact, any history of a single aspect of interweaving will be partial in the double sense of the word. It can only cover certain fragments of this aspect, and will inevitably approach it from a specific angle.

"The whole cultural atmosphere I was immersed in was quite influential in terms of the direction my research took."

**Farah Yeganeh
(Iran)**

“In essence the Fellowship allowed me the space to think about my research far more deeply and in conversation with others from around the world that I could not have achieved otherwise.”

**Brian Singleton
(Ireland)**

A particularly interesting example is a comparative history of migrant theatre. Do such theatres function as substitutes for lost homes, following a traditional aesthetics and addressing the spectators in their own language, thus representing a lost world? Do they serve as agents for integration by gradually shifting towards the problems migrants face in their new homes, developing a new aesthetics that interweaves traditional with new devices and perhaps adopts the language of the host country? Is migrant theatre seen as a space to give voice to and demand respect and attention for special concerns? Does it seek to highlight the division or the commonalities? In this case, the history of interweaving performance cultures is written as a particular form of social history.

A rather different kind of history of interweaving examines international theatre festivals. During the first half of the 20th century, their internationality mainly derived from the audiences that hailed from different

countries, as was the case with the Bayreuth and Salzburg festivals. The second half of the 20th century saw productions from different cultures being invited to such festivals, which then became a highly specific site of interweaving. Productions from various parts of the world, each with their own particular aesthetics, are presented to audiences that are just as diverse. The most telling aspect is the selection of productions invited to these festivals. What kind of aesthetics do they realize? What kind of topics and problems do they address? What is the relationship between the chosen productions? A history of a range of such festivals over the last thirty years investigating these and related questions will simultaneously provide a comparative history of cultural politics.

These are just two examples of particular histories of interweaving being written at our Center. There are many more that are still forth-coming.



The 3rd edition of Tanzkongress, the Congress on Dance held in Düsseldorf in 2013, proved to be a thought-provoking and intensive experience for over 1000 participating dance professionals and people interested in the subject. Under the title “Bewegungen übersetzen – Performing Translation,” over 250 speakers, in more than 100 events, discussed issues regarding translation processes within and between different cultures in relation to dance and movement. In addition to various individual lectures and keynotes by our Fellows, the Research Center presented also the format called “Tea Time,” in which the members of the Research Center, together with guests and other participants of the Tanzkongress, reflected upon each day’s current topics.



“Dumb Type Symposium. The Birth of New Media Dramaturgy” was held at the Institute of Theatre Studies at Freie Universität Berlin.

5. Dramaturgies of interweaving performance cultures

Even though the concept of dramaturgy is defined and used differently in various contexts today, we propose one basic definition of the term: Dramaturgy refers to the *outcome of practices of composing (aesthetic) experiences for anticipated (‘ideal’) audiences*. That is to say, dramaturgy refers to spatial-temporal arrangements or schemes of presentation developed with the aim of generating (aesthetic) experiences for anticipated audiences. Nowadays the work of creating dramaturgies—which involves mental as well as physical labor and can be performed individually as well as collectively—not only takes place in conventional theatres, but also in museums, concert halls, dance venues, movie theatres, shopping malls, restaurants, theme parks, bars, clubs, and even on cruise ships. Whenever something is carefully and thoughtfully prepared for presentation to an anticipated

audience; whenever audience expectations are planned; whenever actual audience reactions are carefully observed and modes of presentation (re)adjusted accordingly, *dramaturgies* are being developed, regardless of whether the term is used to describe these phenomena or not.

At the Center, we want to consider ‘dramaturgy’ from an intercultural perspective. Our most basic questions could be summarized as follows: *How have processes of interweaving changed dramaturgies around the globe?* Of course, everywhere around the world the ways in which bodies, movements, and objects are dramaturgically prepared for presentation to an anticipated audience are strongly influenced by traditional models and established conventions. Stories are told differently in different places. Audiences are imagined differently in the US, France, Nigeria, or China. Aesthetic experiences are brought forth differently in Korea,

Morocco, Chile, or Aotearoa/New Zealand. Current practices of developing artistic performances vary in Russia, Brazil, and Singapore. But what happens when performers—educated and trained in different performance cultures—start collaborating? What happens when performances travel and when audiences become more diverse and, therefore, their expectations and habits of perception and appreciation are rendered less familiar and predictable? What happens when well-established forms of presentation are suddenly no longer easily

—→ Dumb Type Symposium

“Dumb Type Symposium. The Birth of New Media Dramaturgy” took as its departure the topic of the influential and globally significant work of Dumb Type, whose performances from the mid-1980s until the early 2000s offer an important historical record of the progression of new media performance. The symposium made new connections between Dumb Type and the critical and theoretical stance of new media dramaturgy. It offered new perspectives on Dumb Type’s work – locating their work in the historical context of the 1980s and 1990s and also showing their legacy in contemporary performance and visual arts. The focus on hybridity that was a factor in Dumb Type’s pioneering work was also extensively discussed in relation to politics, Japan, globalization, interweaving cultures, sexuality and gender. The papers and presentations will now be gathered for publication as a book of essays and documents about Dumb Type’s work.

“I can say that my Fellowship has enabled me to develop as a scholar in an environment where I received excellent, supportive, and intellectually rigorous feedback and where my international research network has expanded.”

**Peter Eckersall
(Australia)**

understood and, because the composition of the audience has changed, might even be deemed offensive?

Contemporary processes of interweaving between performance cultures raise a host of difficult questions especially with regard to their dramaturgies. Has interweaving meant the creation of dramaturgies that specifically cater to (aesthetic) experiences for culturally diverse audiences? Has interweaving facilitated the development of new collaborative dramaturgical practices? Has interweaving altered the status of materials and events that frame and accompany performances—such as Q&A sessions or the program booklet? What is the influence of the new media on dramaturgies of interweaving? Have there been new dramaturgical strategies for the use of subtitles?

Correspondingly, we are investigating new dramaturgies in theatre, performance, dance, and installation art that are trying

to attract, address, and please culturally diverse/heterogeneous audiences. We are exploring the ways in which dramaturgies try to create experiences of participation and belonging for all members of the audience. Last but not least we are analyzing dramaturgies that work against cultural processes of marginalization and forgetting—for example by zooming in on disregarded forms of (body) knowledge or by addressing neglected histories.

6. Artistic practices of interweaving as research

Due to the continuously growing interest in art as research, the Center invited artists to enter into a dialogue with academic researchers from the very beginning. Among these artists were musicians, dancers, choreographers, visual artists, playwrights, directors, and filmmakers, such as Nora Amin, Nikhil Chopra, Johanna Devi, Amos Elkana, Ismael Ivo, Yuko Kaseki,



Unsettling beauty: San Franciscan photographer Sharon Beals is portraying nests whose insights also show the dark side of interweavings.



Koffi Kôkô, left, and Johannes Odenthal, right, in a presentation at the Center. Dancer and choreographer Johanna Devi, bottom, and participants in an artistic workshop.



Koffi Kôkô, Tian Mansha, Rabih Mroué, Ayat Najafi, Kaite O'Reilly, Femi Osofisan, and Michael Roes (in alphabetic order), among others. Working in the above-mentioned artistic fields means that a very specific kind of knowledge is constantly generated, which is not to remain hidden behind the artistic work but is to be shared and acknowledged by academia as being of equal value. This specific knowledge refers to body techniques, basic principles of production, differences of reception, resistances as well as misunderstandings, negotiations, and power relations, etc.

All this should be recognized as an enrichment and a corrective to academic

research, especially in those cases where it is difficult for scholars to get an insight into processes of production and the appropriate treatment of cultural nuances and subtleties. Moreover, entering into a dialogue with artists could be seen as a matter of practice. Even more so as interweaving at the Center was never conceived of as a subject exclusively pertaining to academic research, which in itself is not a clearly defined area or practice. We should rather speak of a variety of academic cultures, each with a slightly different relationship between theory and practice.

“Without this invitation, I never would have had this opportunity to be able to think free and to express my views freely.”

**Tian Mansha
(China)**

“Something very strange happens here: a very unpretentious listening to each other, which allows all Fellows to entrust even their works in progress, their as yet unfinished and bold thoughts and projects to their colleagues, and to receive suggestions, more interweavings, and also critical but always constructive questions in this collegial atmosphere.”

**Michael Roes
(Germany)**



Students from the *Spring Awakening* theatre project, left and right, directed by Michael Roes in Tangier, Morocco. Christel Weiler, bottom, opens the international conference “Performing Tangier.”



→ Cooperations:

During the now nearly ten years of our Center's existence, we have initiated a number of international cooperations with other research centers and universities. In three cases this has grown into long-standing partnerships with different focal points. The cooperation with the Abdelmalek Essaâdi University in Tétouan, Morocco, led to the establishment of the conference series “Performing Tangier,” held annually in Tangier, while the cooperation with the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India, and the Shanghai Theatre Academy in China resulted in a regular exchange program for scholars and doctoral students, often accompanied by joint conferences. It is our hope that these three cooperations will be continued by the Institute of Theatre Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin after the conclusion of our Center.



Research Practice

The Art of Interweaving as Research and Practice

All issues concentrated in the term “interweaving” and challenging dimensions of interaction, congress, and discussion are also reflected in the program of the International Research Center. The numerous events and varied formats of the special program show how the Center’s practice itself is contributing to create a very specific atmosphere of academic research that influences how encounters, stimulating disputes, and enabling dialogues take place.

Interview with IRC Senior Advisor Christel Weiler

IRC Senior Advisor Christel Weiler was the Program Director of the Center since its inception and over the years has become well acquainted with those aspects that are important to encourage lively discussions in the search for common ground. What efforts are required to promote exchanges that shift the frames? In this short interview with Antje Paul, she reflects on the mode of practice at the Research Center from her own perspective.



Christel Weiler

Besides the presentations of the Fellows, a substantial part of the program consisted of lectures given by guest speakers who presented their work and discussed related topics and questions. Considering the founding principles and objectives of the Center, how and to what end did you put together the program?

When the International Research Center “Interweaving Performance Cultures” began its work in 2008, we had the ambition to add new impulses to academic discussions through different event formats. The idea was to establish additional formats for exchanges through conversation besides the Fellows’ scholarly presentations of their projects. It seemed to make sense to complement the research on interweaving with a series of events that at first primarily aimed at familiarizing our guests from across the world with the diversity of German theatre and with the specificities of the cultural politics of Germany and Berlin. This grew into the idea that it’s possible to have stimulating conversations in informal sessions over tea and biscuits, which, in addition to sharing knowledge, would also allow for establishing contacts in practical fields, thus extending the work of the Research Center into non-academic areas. Unlike the weekly scholarly presentations, which were scheduled for the late mornings, these gatherings take place in the afternoons. The designation Tea Time therefore seemed appropriate. The starting point for it always was the assumption that during these Tea Times

something will be discussed and presented that the majority of participants is not at all or barely familiar with: Berlin's theatre history, dramaturgical practices at German theatres, the role of the German Federal Cultural Foundation (Bundeskulturstiftung), and other institutions, etc., but also conversations with directors, choreographers, and writers whose work is relevant to the research on interweaving. Ideally, the Tea Times would thus broaden the horizons of the participants and enable new collaborations, which in turn might lead to new processes of interweaving. Over time the Fellows themselves participated in shaping and planning the program: they made requests and suggestions, and used the format to enter into a dialogue with their colleagues. The planning of the program did not follow a rigid course but tried to remain open to ideas, inspirations, and possibilities that would grow out of the conceptual orientation of the Research Center, the needs of the Fellows, and all that the theatre landscape of Berlin has to offer.

Nele Hertling, bottom, shared her outstanding knowledge and experience of Berlin's cultural scene. The former Artistic Director of Hebbel Theater and Vice President of the Akademie der Künste Berlin was a Tea Time guest at the Center. Butoh dancer and choreographer Yuko Kaseki, top right, interacting with independent performer/author Roland Walter in the performance *surature – anatomie du erdboden*.



The dialogue between artists and scholars had a special place in this context. Can you explain this briefly?

I consider it a fundamental necessity as a theatre scholar to keep in touch with the concrete practice of theatre, because insights into artistic processes deepen our understanding of the functioning of theatre in a very basic manner and allow us a better grasp over a performance as an aesthetic event. Therefore, in the context of the Center, the dialogue with artists first and foremost served to inspire the research. On the one hand, this opened up new perspectives on staged events while also re-calibrating the formulation of theory. On the other, the artists' encounter with the Fellows often posed a challenge for the first group, as they were confronted with a 'foreign language' and its concomitant different way of thinking. Both sides could learn from this experience of friction and resistance. The artists further have the possibility to tap into the knowledge pool of the Center for their own artistic projects.

Another aspect to keep in mind is that Fellows from other academic cultures often maintain much closer ties to the practice of theatre than we have here in Germany. In other words, this separation of theory and artistic practice must really also be thought of as a culturally specific phenomenon. In this regard, the Center served as a site for a very special interweaving of these two fields.

Was the Center also experimenting with different event formats?

What sets different forms of events—such as the Tea Times—apart is their inherent versatility. They are open formats, tied neither to a particular space nor to specific forms of presentation. The spectrum of event formats at the Center was quite broad. This also fitted our vision to use diverse means to help create a lasting community of researchers. This certainly included moving away from the desk and entering alternative spaces of encounter.

Traditional formats such as academic lectures, however, had proved to be rather immune to experimentation. An invitation to participate in a collective breathing exercise at the beginning of the ‘actual’ lecture, for example, was not necessarily met with universal enthusiasm, even though it could indeed have made sense to personally experience what the lecture deals with in an abstract way.

Playful exercises at the workshop “Dialogue as Working Method,” bottom and top right, held by Mieke Matzke, member of the performance group She She Pop and Professor for Performance Studies.



New collaborations and joint projects frequently emerged from these personal and scholarly encounters. How could this effect influence the Fellows’ projects and discourses at the Center? How did they shape you and your own discourse?

Personal feedback and the evaluations received show that a stay at our Center is seen as a big boost by most of the Fellows. For many of them, their time in Berlin meant a complete overhaul of their planned projects, the integration of critical objections to their field of research, and the consideration of wholly new arguments that emerged in the discussions through the sheer diversity of presentations. On a less individualistic level, the work of the Center focused on creating new networks and taking on long-term projects, such as through our participation in the annual conference in Tangiers.

On a personal level: after ten years and the corresponding number of interactions with Fellows from all over the world, my questions are more nuanced than they were at the beginning, and my appreciation for my own working conditions and the wealth of



Annemie Vanackere, Director of the Hebbel am Ufer (HAU) theatre in Berlin since 2012, presenting the organizational structure of the HAU and its programmatic orientation in the context of the Berlin theatre landscape.

theatre forms here in Germany has grown immensely. At the same time, our society and with it our theatre has changed a lot during this period. Right now, we are witnessing how the institution of theatre in Germany is contributing to the interweaving of cultures in a very concrete manner. In this regard, we are faced with a compelling topic of research that has yet to be explored. Without my work at the Center my view of contemporary theatre would no doubt be different.

To what extent was the program of the Center also made accessible to an interested public?

There are several options for the Center to communicate with an interested public: social media, our publications on the Online-Platform *Textures*, the books that we bring out, and bigger public events such as film screenings, events for students, debates, co-operations with theatres, or other institutions that deal with the performing arts.

All this was as much part of the program as our academic lectures, workshops, symposia, guest lectures, or the Tea Times, which often consciously took place within a smaller framework.



→ **Textures**

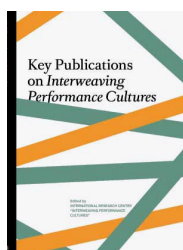
Textures, the online platform for “Interweaving Performance Cultures,” serves as an online publication platform of the Research Center. It brings together contributions by IRC Fellows, guest lecturers and artists under four

broad categories: Patterns – Threads & Knots – Travelogue – Impulses. If you want to comment on any of those posts, add your view on the subject, enter into a discussion, or contribute some thoughts yourself: Please write us and send us your texts, videos, photos! Have a look at *Textures* from time to time to read what our IRC-Fellows have to say under: www.textures-platform.com.

A special kind of “un-boxing” took place during a joint two-day workshop organized in collaboration with the Julius-Hans-Spiegel-Center, hosted at Sophiensaele, Berlin. IRC Fellows and staff members together with artists-in-residence and organizers inspecting photographic reproductions from the archive box.



The reasons for this pertain to our location, the space, and to content. The latter was, in fact, the primary reason for this ‘reticence’: the presentation of the Fellows’ ongoing research projects was meant to foster an exchange with the other colleagues, and the Tea Times, too, were conceived to have a rather inward effect, though from time to time we did have a few guests who also attended. The goal of the Center is to create a ‘research community’ that avails of the privilege not to have to publish everything immediately. Its effect on theatre studies, particularly in Germany, is nevertheless felt clearly.



→ Publications:

In addition to supporting books by single authors, edited books and articles by our Fellows, the Directors, the Advisory Board and staff members, the Research Center is publishing a multi-volume series on specific aspects of the interweaving of performance cultures in cooperation with current and former Fellows. The first volume in the series, *The Politics of Interweaving Performance Cultures: Beyond Postcolonialism* (2014), was released by Routledge. Since then, numerous other books were published, among them: *Transformative Aesthetics* (2017), and most recently *Regiekunst Heute: Stimmen und Positionen aus China* (2018). Some of the titles that we are currently working on include *Movements of Interweaving*, *Theatrical Speech Acts*, *Generating Knowledge*, *Handbook on Performance-Related Concepts in non-European Languages*, etc. In this way, the research conducted at our Center has already resulted in over a hundred books written by our Fellows, our Directors, and even by our doctoral students as their dissertations. Further information on the Center’s key publications can be found in the additional brochure “Key Publications on Interweaving Performance Cultures,” or on our website: www.interweaving-performance-cultures.com.



The Center’s library assembles an excellent selection of publications suggesting what also will be preserved as a result of our own research.

Published by

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June 2018

Printed by

Europrint Medien GmbH, Berlin

Layout

Laura Wiederhold, Jens Pieper, Klute Agency Berlin

Photo credits

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