

THE DRAMATURGY OF THEATRE FOR EARLY YEARS

The Follow up paper

This essay explores the dramaturgical principles of TEY, focusing on its aesthetic and communicative traits. It reflects on the "framing conditions" for TEY performances and outlines a "Dramaturgy of the Audience." The aim is to inspire TEY artists to reflect on their methods and encourage others to engage with this unique audience.

Prof. Dr. Gerd Taube, theatre scholar, has been Director of the Kinder- und Jugendtheaterzentrums in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Children's and Young People's Theatre Centre in the Federal Republic of Germany) in Frankfurt am Main since 1997 and Artistic Director of the biennial national festival of theatre for young audiences AUGENBLICK MAL! in Berlin. He is an honorary professor at the Institut für Jugendbuchforschung (Institute for Youth Book Research) at Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main, where he teaches the theory and history of theatre for children and young people and dramatic literature for children and young people.



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by Gerd Taube



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15 €



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Theatre for Early Years An Encouragement



Instead of a foreword

The artistic practice of Theatre for the Early Years (TEY) has established itself throughout Europe over the last three decades. This is mainly due to the commitment of the pioneers of this art form in Italy, France and Scandinavia (especially Norway). Since 2006, the network Small size – The European Network for the Diffusion of Performative Arts for the Early Years has ensured a continuous Europe-wide artistic exchange of TEY artists. It was cross-border projects funded by the European Union, such as *Glitterbird*¹, *Small size*² and

*Mapping*³ that led not only to the idea of theatre for early childhood becoming established in Europe, but also worldwide. These projects have been heavily influential in the development of aesthetic characteristics that continue to shape this form of theatre today, despite all its national and individual peculiarities.

In my essay on the dramaturgical principles and foundations of TEY, I reflect on the aesthetic and communicative characteristics of theatre for very young spectators. During the two major European projects *Small size* and *Mapping*, from 2010

1 *Glitterbird* - Art for the Very Young (2003-2006). The EU-funded project, managed by Oslo University College (Norway), aimed to produce and present art for children under the age of three in order to give them the opportunity to see and experience different genres of art. Artists were to be encouraged and given the opportunity to create and communicate works of art and performances for the youngest children in an international professional environment and to contribute to their dissemination. Project partners from Norway, France, Hungary and Denmark were involved.

2 There has been a total of four Small size projects funded by the EU: Small size (2005-2006), Small size, the net (2006-2009), Small size, big citizens – Widening of the European Network for the diffusion of the Performing Arts for Early Years (2009-2014), Small size, Performing Arts for Early Years (2014-2018). All Small size projects were managed by La Baracca Testoni Ragazzi Theatre, Bologna (Italy). A total of 18 partners from 15 European countries were involved in the four projects.

3 *Mapping* – A Map on the Aesthetics of Performing Arts for Early Years (2018-2023). This EU project was also managed by La Baracca - Testoni Ragazzi, Bologna (Italy). 18 partners from 17 European countries were involved.

to 2023 I led workshops for the directors and artistic directors of the theatres involved.⁴ In these workshops, the question of what dramaturgy means in the context of TEY came up again and again. The participants in these workshops brought together an infinite wealth of experience, artistic expertise, and passion for the very young audience in one room. Despite broad agreement on the common goal of creating high-quality and sophisticated theatre art for very young spectators, there were also many differences in the approach to theatre for children aged 0 to 5, stemming from the different cultural and theatrical traditions of the participating countries and different social ideas of early childhood.

The artistic practice of TEY initially presupposes the fundamental attitude of the theatre makers that they are prepared to fully engage with the special abilities and needs of very young spectators and thus adapt the theatre to the very young audience. This attitude goes hand in hand with a differentiated view of early childhood, in which young children are not seen as not-yet-finished human beings, but rather as people equipped with many competences who, like all other children, have a right to cultural participation.⁵ TEY and its creators have therefore adopted the mission of theatre for young audiences to not only entertain and contribute to early childhood education with their art, but also to stand up for children's rights.

However, good intentions alone are not enough to make good theatre for very

young spectators. It also requires an understanding of the modes of action and aesthetic characteristics of the art of TEY. In this essay, I therefore attempt to reflect on the effects of TEY from a dramaturgical point of view based on the diverse experiences and insights gained from my workshops and by analysing the many questions that the workshop participants raised. I also draw on the findings of academics and practitioners and their theoretical analyses of the TEY.

This essay cannot and will not provide recipes or instructions for TEY artists. I do however, want to use my reflections to encourage artists to think about their own working methods and encourage those who have not yet produced art for very young spectators to turn their attention to this particular audience. It is often fear and insecurity that prevent theatre artists from devoting their artistic work to very young spectators. I think that uncertainty is an excellent prerequisite for this work, because the artistic process at TEY will always involve a search for the most appropriate forms of expression to create the best relationship with very young spectators. At the same time, no one needs to be afraid of this audience; on the contrary, respect for very young spectators and recognition of their special abilities and needs are required. Of course, this requires excellent mastery of the craft as an actor and performer. The director's methodology must recognise that the staging has to give room for the expression and individual reaction of each audience. Knowledge

of the dramaturgical 'framing conditions'⁶ that enable successful performances in TEY is an important prerequisite for the work of directors, actors, performers, dancers and puppeteers who create productions for very young audiences.

After approaching the phenomenon of dramaturgy and its importance for Theatre for Early Years, in this essay I will reflect on material and cultural frameworks for TEY performances. In doing so, I will outline the concept of a "Dramaturgy of the Audience", which is based on the fundamental conviction that the dramaturgy of a performance is not determined by the artists alone, but rather understands the spectators as both objects and subjects of the dramaturgy. I dedicate a chapter to the principle of audience participation in TEY and the different levels and forms of participation in TEY. In the concluding chapter, I summarise the findings of the preceding reflections in such a way as to derive basic dramaturgical principles for a performance of TEY from them and, following Max Schumacher's concept, develop the basic features of an "Over-All-Dramaturgy" that encompasses the phases of pre-performance, performance and post-performance (Schumacher 2008, 83). In this way, I aim to make the theoretical reflections on the dramaturgy of TEY applicable and manageable for the practice of TEY.

In this respect, this essay is not only an encouragement for all those who have not yet dared to produce artistically for the very young audience but also an encouragement for the experienced theatre makers of TEY to constantly reflect on and optimise their artistic practice to surprise and inspire the very young spectators and their adult companions again and again.

Note on the translation

This essay, initially written in German, was translated into English by the author with the help of the Deepl app. The non-English quotations in the text were also translated into English so as not to complicate the readability of the essay with foreign-language text passages and their translation in footnotes.

The English version of this essay was proofread by Katherine Morley.

4 Cf. Appendix, pp. 52-53.

5 In her essay "Perceptive Beings: What Is It Like to Be a Baby at the Theatre?" in the Mapping Research volume (Morley 2023, 23-27), Katherine Morley describes how and at what age the visual, auditory, and haptic abilities of a young child develop. The development of these abilities is also accompanied by fundamental characteristics such as curiosity, expectation, the desire to discover and the urge to explore, all of which influence and shape a spectator's engagement through conscious reception and unconscious perception.

6 I use the term 'framing conditions' in my essay to analytically describe the conditions for a successful performance in TEY. With regard to the dramaturgy of performances in TEY, I start from the thesis that dramaturgical decisions underlie the design of the framework of a performance (the space, boundaries and rules, the time, the rhythm, the way in which actors and spectators communicate, the type of stories and narration, the attitude of the actors towards their spectators etc.). My aim with the concept of 'framing conditions' is to make the phenomenon of dramaturgy manageable in practice. In the artistic process, questions always arise as to what effects are artistically intended and by what means and within what cultural and physical framework these effects are sought by the artists. And all these questions are dramaturgical questions.

Dramaturgy and Theatre for Early Years (TEY)

An approach



What do Theatre for Early Years (TEY) and dramaturgy have to do with each other?

Is there a dramaturgy of the TEY or is it about dramaturgy in the TEY?

And what is dramaturgy in the context of TEY?

In discussions about theatre productions for very young spectators there is always talk of missing, inadequate or successful dramaturgy of the performance. The term dramaturgy is used as a matter of course. However, it seems to me that it is used more intuitively to describe something that did not work or worked very well in a performance. In this respect, the term dramaturgy can be described as a 'container' term. Various meanings can be extrapolated from a container term like 'dramaturgy'; and it is possible that everyone who uses it means something slightly different. It is therefore first necessary to define the term dramaturgy more precisely and demonstrate how it is understood and applied to TEY within this essay.

What is dramaturgy?

In his introduction to theatre studies, Andreas Kotte defined dramaturgy as follows:

"Dramaturgy has [...] to clarify the question of what can be presented in what structure for what purpose." (Kotte 2005, 203)

In this short definition, dramaturgy is both a process of analysis and reflection. In other words, as a mental process that has to clarify fundamental questions with regard to a successful theatre performance. What should be presented, in what structure and for what purpose? Dramaturgy in this sense is therefore concerned with the content and structure of the theatrical presentation and the purpose of achieving certain effects with a performance. These principles of effect are in turn also referred to as the dramaturgy of a performance.

The term dramaturgy is derived from the Greek term Δράμα (drama). According to Aristotle, δραματουργίας (dramaturgias) refers to the process of creating and performing dramas, i.e. the writing and staging of

dramatic texts or, more generally, theatre plays. Dramaturgy therefore plays a role in the writing of a play as well as in the dramaturgy of the text and the dramaturgy of the production of the theatre performance.

“Dramaturgy is concerned with the principles of composition, structures and functions of texts for and in performances as well as with the processes, structures and functions of performances themselves, with the intended effect of theatrical events.” (Kotte 2005, 206)

To apply the term dramaturgy to TEY, where performances are rarely based on dramatic texts, we need to separate the aspects of dramaturgy described in Kotte’s definition concerning *the text* in order to be able to use them in relation to the effect of a *performance* on the audience.

The Italian theatre scholar Marco De Marinis attempted to do just this in an article for the journal *The Drama Review* at the end of the 1980s by applying the aspects of dramaturgy of dramatic texts to performances without a dramatic text as a basis and understanding the performance itself as a text.

“Dramaturgy – This may be defined as: a set of techniques/theories governing the composition of the theatrical text.

Theatrical text - This is no longer meant to indicate the dramatic, literary text but rather the text of the theatrical performance (*testo spettacolo*), the performance text. This is conceived of as a complex network of different types of signs, expressive means, or

actions, coming back to the etymology of the word ‘text’ which implies the idea of texture, of something woven together.

‘Dramaturgy’ can now be defined as: the techniques/theory governing the composition of the performance-as-text (*testo spettacolo*); it is: the set of techniques/theory governing the composition of signs/expressive means/actions which are woven together to create the texture of the performance, the performance text.” (De Marinis 1987, 100)

By understanding the performance itself as a text, as “a complex network of different types of signs, expressive means, or actions”, dramaturgical principles can also be applied to theatre performances.

De Marinis developed this concept of dramaturgy in view of a development in contemporary theatre, emergent since the 1960s, in which theatre performances are no longer necessarily based on the hierarchical dominance of the dramatic text but are characterised by the non-hierarchical use of expressive means. Hans-Thies Lehmann has described this form of theatre as “Post-Dramatic Theatre” (Lehmann 1990). He has pointed out that post-dramatic theatre can also be understood as an attempt, not to aim for representation with its performances, but for a directly intended experience of the real (cf. Lehmann 1990, 241).

The French dramaturgy professor Joseph Danan sums up this observation by saying that performative theatre forms are less about the representation of *something else* than the presentation of *the real*. This can be linked to a peculiarity of TEY where performers rarely embody a character per se,

do not imitate another person and do not pretend to be someone other than themselves. They do not represent a character but present themselves in the here and now. Even the performance spaces seldom claim to be other places and the objects with which the performers act are just as real as the characters and the spaces. TEY is therefore not about the representation of an imagined reality, but about the presentation of processes that exist. The presence created by the scenic actions is balanced with the presence of the spectators. The events occurring in the stage space are as real and present as the spectators.

“This means: a theatrical scene that exists in its own right, in the here and now of the representation (or of the presentation), without seeking to evoke an elsewhere (another time, another place). The actor is also now before us in his own right: a performer who, more and more frequently, erases the concept of character. (Danan 2014, 4)

This is how Danan describes the characteristics of performance in contrast to conventional dramatic theatre. In this description, one can easily recognise the self-image of many TEY productions. In his essay, Danan points out further differences between performance and dramatic theatre: on the production side, he notes a dissolution or at least a fundamental change in the role of the director, who in dramatic theatre stages an author’s play. In performative theatre, however, we seldom see a playwright writing theatre texts or pre-written plays being brought to the stage. Dramaturgy is inevitably affected by the fundamental changes in performative theatre forms in contrast to dramatic theatre, and quite obviously “in the original sense of the word,

as ‘the art of constructing a play ‘will need to be replaced by ‘the art of constructing a show’” (Danan 2014, 6).

According to Danan, an equally radical change is taking place on the *reception* side. Since the performance is no longer about telling a story that is only to be received by the spectators, the aim of the theatre performance is no longer a one-sided understanding but a shared aesthetic experience.

“This is perhaps the most radical change. The spectator is no longer someone who, by means of more or less active contemplation, seeks to understand the work. Torn away from the realm of meaning (which can be destabilising), the spectator is invited to have an experience.” (Danan 2014, 6)

This description is also reminiscent of TEY’s basic assumption that a theatre performance for very young spectators is about creating a shared space for different aesthetic experiences of artists, young children and their adult companions as well as new opportunities for intergenerational encounters.

The concept of dramaturgy used in this essay can be summarised based on these considerations:

- Dramaturgy is concerned with the content, compositional principles, structures and functions of scenic events and the purpose thereby pursued to achieve certain effects within and beyond a theatrical performance.
- The dramaturgy of a performance is based on the decisions that define the composition and structure of scenic signs, artistic means of expression and

theatrical actions determined during the production's rehearsal process.

- In this respect, the composition and structure of the network of scenic signs, artistic means of expression and performing actions and the intended effects can be understood as the dramaturgy of a staging and a performance.¹
- Dramaturgy thus refers to the art of constructing a performance.

What does dramaturgy mean in theatre for early years?

Now that the concept of dramaturgy, as it is used in this essay, has been defined it is time to discuss the aesthetic categories underlying scenic composition in TEY. This definition of dramaturgy will be applied to TEY to arrive at questions and descriptions that are relevant and applicable when creating TEY theatre practice. The focus will not be on recipes and rules but on developing an understanding of the consequences and implications of dramaturgical decisions and thus the dramaturgical significance of shaping the 'framing conditions' of a performance.

To begin with, I would like to differentiate between the terms 'staging' and 'performance' referencing the work of Erika Fischer-Lichte. By staging we want to understand all strategies "that determine in advance the time, duration, manner and way in which people, things and sounds are released in space" (Fischer-Lichte 2012, 56). Performance is to be understood as "everything that is released in the course of the performance – in other words, the entirety of the interactions of actions and behaviour between all participants" (Fis-

cher-Lichte 2012, 56). Strategic decisions are therefore made for the staging that aim to influence and direct the spectators' perception. The scenic event aims to create particular effects to influence the spectators' experience. Such decisions can be understood as an expression of the dramaturgical intentions communicated through staging.

At the same time the performance event, at which the interaction of all those present take place (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2012, 56), is only brought about by this joint interaction of actors and spectators. Neither the actors nor the spectators can completely plan, direct or control this performance event in advance.

"An important characteristic of performances, their fundamental unpredictability, follows from the fact that all those involved in them can be regarded as their co-producers, who participate in their creation to varying degrees and in different ways, without being able to determine it alone." (Fischer-Lichte 2012, 56)

In jointly *producing* the performance it is possible for all participants to experience themselves as subjects "who are able to co-determine the actions and behaviour of others and whose own actions and behaviour are also co-determined by others" (Fischer-Lichte 2012, 56). An artistic process thus takes place in the performance, "which emerges from the intentions, intuitions and experiments of artists" (Fischer-Lichte 2012, 56). Since the spectators are also involved in this process, this artistic process must also be understood as a social process.

The prerequisite for the performance event is therefore the "physical co-presence of actors and spectators" (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 58). This means that not only the performers but also the spectators have significance within the event of the performance. In relation to TEY, this means that very young spectators can influence the scenic event with their reactions. They sit very still, marvelling, wondering, and rejoicing, laughing, clapping their hands, stamping their feet, jumping up and running or even crawling into the stage area. The spectators play their own game – interacting with the actors as well as their fellow spectators.

"Whatever the actors do, it has an effect on the spectators, and whatever the spectators do, it has an effect on the actors and the other spectators. In this sense, it can be said that the performance is created and controlled by a self-referential and constantly changing feedback loop. Therefore, its course cannot be completely planned and predicted." (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 59)

In this sense, Fischer-Lichte describes the *feedback loop* "as a self-referential, autopoietic system with a fundamentally open, unpredictable outcome that can neither be actually interrupted nor specifically controlled by staging strategies" (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 61). This suggests that the performance produced jointly by actors and spectators cannot be controlled by individual players or by individual spectators and "it is permanently beyond the control of each individual" (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 80-81).

The dramaturgy of 'performative' productions, including most within the TEY sector, comes together through the composition and combination of visual signifiers, the means of expression and the actions stra-

tegically determined by dramaturgical decisions taken by the director and actors during the staging process. Their intended effect, however, may not materialise quite as expected due to the *feedback loop* that arises anew in every performance. In short, the response to and effect of TEY performances cannot be fully controlled, even when observing the dramaturgical rules. In this respect, any such 'rules' cannot be formulated in a binding manner.

As there can be no recipe for a 'successful' performance, the only thing that can be articulated regarding the dramaturgy of TEY is a basic framework for the staging of a production that facilitates the productive interaction of spectators and performers. In her book "Ästhetik des Performativen", Fischer-Lichte also references the fact that, to the same extent that the interaction of actors and spectators creates the performance, the performance creates them as actors and spectators (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 81). This means that these two groups of people (the actors and the spectators) are assigned certain functions in the event of the performance. Some act, others watch and re-act, which in turn leads to re-actions from others and so on. These respective functions are performed by the actors and spectators due to the special conditions under which they gather in a room and spend time together. The bodies of the actors and spectators meet in a space for a certain period in order to experience the fleeting and unrepeatable event of the theatre performance.

In her dissertation "Feedbacksløyfer i teater for svært unge tilskuere. Et bidrag til en performativ teori og analyse" (Feedback loops in theatre for very young spectators. A contribution to a performative theory and analysis), the German theatre scholar Siemke Böhnisch, who teaches in Norway, discusses Erika Fischer-Lichte's thesis of

1 The difference between staging and performance is explored in pages 14-15.

the self-referential autopoietic *feedback loop*. In particular, she points out that the “bodily co-presence” of actors and spectators, which Fischer-Lichte defines as a prerequisite for the feedback loop, cannot be sufficient on its own to set the interaction of actions and reactions in motion. Rather, it is necessary for the participants to come closer together by first addressing the audience from the stage and for this address to be met with the audience’s notice and attention; the intensity of this initial address and the audience’s subsequent reactions then influence the resulting interaction.

“I have identified the mutual approach of actors and spectators as an aspect of performances that is better suited to explaining *feedback loop* phenomena than co-presence. In performances, participants encounter each other as actors and spectators. Both functions involve addressing the counterpart, since actors’ actions are shown to spectators, and spectators are present to watch and listen to the actors. The mutual address can take different forms, as well as different durations and intensities – but there will always be

some address to each other. Otherwise, we would hardly characterise the situation or event as a performance.” (Böhnisch 2010, 120)

Böhnisch undertakes her critical discussion of Fischer-Lichte’s theses regarding her research project, the analysis of a performance of TEY, and, without naming it as such, raises important dramaturgical questions that I would like to take up here.

“The way in which actors and spectators approach each other in performances is characterised by both cultural and physical conditions.” (Böhnisch 2010, 135)

By stating that the way in which actors and spectators communicate in performance is determined by the cultural and physical ‘framework’ conditions, Böhnisch points to the fundamental importance of these conditions to facilitate successful interaction between actors and spectators. In her “Ästhetik des Performativen”, Fischer-Lichte describes what Böhnisch calls ‘framing conditions’ as the materiality of the performance in view of the fact that the performance is fleeting; one could also speak of the material ‘framing conditions’ under which the performance takes place.



Material and cultural 'framing conditions' for performances of TEY

In the following section I would like to pursue the question of 'framing conditions' in TEY performances, describe some of the aesthetic characteristics of TEY and discuss dramaturgical questions, challenges and special features of TEY.¹ In doing so, I acknowledge the theatre makers' decisions about 'framing conditions' as fundamental dramaturgical decisions made in the rehearsal process, i.e. in relation to the staging, and that these have a decisive influence on the interaction between actors and spectators. Gesche Wartemann has described this interaction as interplay (cf. Wartemann 2009b) and thus introduced the concept of *play within performance* to characterise the special quality of reactions between actors and spectators.² The aspect of play within a performance also needs to be considered when analysing the 'framing conditions'.

Space, boundaries and rules

In the previous chapter we stated, using a formulation by Erika Fischer-Lichte, that the "physical co-presence of actors and spectators" (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 58) is a prerequisite for the event of the theatre performance. Based on this, we can assume that the joint presence of performers and audience must happen in a specific place, regardless of whether it is a performance in an enclosed space or outdoors. The way in which the spectators perceive the performance and interact with the performers is essentially determined by the space. The space is a constitutive prerequisite for every theatrical event.

"The way in which players and spectators meet depends on their spatial arrangement and the nature of the location

– the relationship between players and audience is largely determined by the space." (Heinemann 2009, 131)

The special needs of very young spectators are considered in TEY in different ways. The rooms in which TEY performances take place are of a manageable size, which limits the number of spectators and at the same time allows the audience to be very close to the stage space. The playing area on which the performers act is usually at the same spatial level as the seating for the spectators. Depending on the height of the very young spectators, the seats are designed in such a way that they do not restrict their physical movement but instead help to direct their attention to what is happening on stage. Seat cushions or low benches are preferably used for this purpose.

If TEY performances are not interactive installations where the actors and spectators share the same space without physical boundaries, a clear demarcation of the playing area is often needed. This boundary usually encompasses the arrangement of audience seating in the space and the reach of the playing area. At the same time, it is necessary for the interplay that this separation between spectators and players is somewhat flexible.

Caroline Heinemann, to whose considerations I refer here, argues:

"[...] that theatre for a very small audience requires a specific spatial design that makes the separation between spectators and players permeable and allows the children intermodal possibilities of perception." (Heinemann 2009, 132)

And she poses a crucial question:

"What possibilities of perception and communication are created by the staging of the space and to what extent is the specificity of the audience taken into account?" (Heinemann 2009, 132)

Dramaturgically relevant questions for the staging would be: How can the separation between the space of the performers and the space of the spectators be made tangible and perceptible and how does the space concentrate the spectators and the performers attention on each other? What is the significance of proximity and distance between spectators and performers in this context?

The way in which performers first relate to the audience helps to set a precedent for how the boundaries might be respected in a shared performance experience. The most important question seems to be how aesthetics can communicate the boundaries inherent in the performance. This is a crucial dramaturgical research task for the artists. They must define the rules and boundaries for their chosen form of communication. In doing so, they protect their form of communication and take the child seriously as a spectator.

The question should be asked about the means of expression with which distance and boundaries are maintained, such as poetic language, which is fundamentally different from everyday language, or pictorial abstractions. How does the aesthetics of the performance assert the space that belongs to the performers, the space that belongs to the children and the space that they share together? This can be a clearly demarcated playing area, a sound space created by music or the presence of the performers within a certain radius. All

1 I also refer to my own article from 2009, in which I reflect on the artistic practice of TEY in Germany since the early 2000s with reference to several productions from other European countries. (cf. Taube 2009)

2 It thus emphasises an activity that is inherent to both the actors and the spectators. In the performance, the actors play with objects, their bodies, the space, their voices, sounds, colours, and many other sensory stimuli. Children can also be seen as experts in play, "because play is an elementary form of self-understanding for them in their dialogue with themselves and the world" (Hoffmann 2007, 174).

these artistic means create psychological barriers that are generally respected by the children.³

It is therefore a dramaturgical decision as to how firm the boundary between the playing area and the audience space should be and whether the children should be allowed to move in the stage space or in a part of it to enable them to perceive the space. In most TEY productions, it is now obligatory for the very young spectators to play in the stage space after the performance. Caroline Heinemann is of the opinion that this play in the stage space

“[...] not only serves to recreate the theatrical events, but also to independently appropriate the space, to discover and explore the performance space and to test one's own movement possibilities.” (Heinemann 2009, 136)

The spatial relationship between players and spectators forms the basis of their communication. The attention of very young spectators is drawn to the performers' physical and vocal expressions, i.e. to the essential artistic means of expression, through their spatial proximity to the performers. At the same time, close proximity to their spectators enables the performers to more clearly perceive the physical and vocal reactions of the children. The limited number of spectators and the spatial proximity “make it possible in the first place for the players to perceive their audience in a heightened way and to enter into two-way communication.” (Heinemann 2009, 137).

Close proximity can create an intimacy that enables an intense experience – celebrating the social dimension of theatre - and the possibility of an atmosphere of complicity between actors and spectators, thus enabling emotional reactions.

At the same time, the spatial arrangement should also offer spectators the freedom to escape the intensity of the theatrical experience. To this end, opportunities for retreat should be created in the space and the doors to the theatre space should be kept clear. These options must be communicated to the accompanying adults before the performance begins so that they can respond as necessary. The aim here is not to classify particularly conspicuous emotional reactions such as crying or screaming as a disruption to the performance, but to meet the needs of the children. Creating a greater distance from what is happening on stage can reduce any fears that arise. Leaving the theatre space for a short time can help to calm a child and when appropriate, encouraging reengagement at the child's pace after re-entering the performance experience.

The spatial design of the performance and the associated dramaturgical decisions are therefore not limited to the stage set but must always have the entire spatial situation of the theatre in mind.

“The question of possibilities for perception and communication, opportunities for interaction and movement, atmospheric effect, the nature of the overall situation, rules

and boundaries etc. always have a spatial anchoring.” (Heinemann 2009, 141)

In the staging process, the artists' decisions regarding the rules and boundaries of the performance are dramaturgical decisions, as they help determine the structure, composition, and effect of the performance. Analysis of the spatial situation shows that establishing these rules and boundaries is fundamental to influencing the children as spectators. The following questions are therefore of particular importance for the makers of theatre for the very young. How are the children received in the theatre? How are the children and their adult companions familiarised with the spectatorial rules or conventions?⁴ If the prerequisite for a successful shared artistic experience between players, children and adults is compliance with certain rules, this must be communicated, as the conventions of TEY may well differ from those that adult companions are familiar with.

Play and interplay The “Dramaturgy of the Audience” in TEY

We established earlier that TEY performances are rarely developed from a pre-existing text showing the representation of an acted reality, but more often, the presentation or investigation of processes in nature or human nature. It is striking that in theatre for the youngest audiences, in some countries, there is hardly any talk of performers. In the artists' discussions, reference is made to players, which at the same time refers to a fundamental process in theatre and especially in theatre for the very young: play. As a rule, there is no specific reason for the player's appearance in a performance such as the exposition of a

dramatic narrative. The player is there. He or she is present in the performance space. According to the theatre artists, he or she should be present, serious, truthful and honest for the youngest spectators.

Hans-Thies Lehmann's characterisation of the nature of the actor in performative theatre could also be applied to TEY players:

“The actor, just like the spectator, is no longer what he used to be. Nowadays, they are fundamentally less players of a role than actors of their own reality. He is more often orientated more towards the production of a play situation and the presence of the spectators than towards the idea of a representation of another fictional reality that he would have to embody.” (Lehmann 2008, 22/23)

In my opinion, two possibilities can be described from observation of TEY play practice. On the one hand: The player does not embody a character, does not represent a character, does not play a role. And secondly: the player does create a character, however, this character is not a dramatic character embodying a role that is linked to a plot, but may have clownish traits. In both cases, however, what Hans-Thies Lehmann has established to describe the actor in performative theatre applies here to the player: the player is focused on the play in the present situation and the presence of the spectators. In any case, the player is not on stage as a private person. His 'on-stage' ego differs from his private ego. Onstage, he is always in the awareness that he is a performing artist

³ Parents and other adult companions of the children are not an insignificant authority when it comes to the acceptance of rules and boundaries. The mother who decides that her child is disturbing the shared experience with its crying, restlessness or movements in the space and reacts in response to this, senses these boundaries and accepts them. The father who enters the stage area during the performance to take a photo of his daughter as an audience member has misunderstood or disregarded the rules or not understood them at all. In their behaviour and reactions, the parents and adult companions are role models for the behavioural responses of the children during a performance.

⁴ Cf. pp. 42-44.

who presents something to his audience at every moment of the performance without asserting anything other than the perceptible reality of the situation on stage.

The decisive factor in characterising the unique nature of the performer in TEY is therefore their attitude to their performance. The performer Melanie Florschütz describes different attitudes “from ‘being’, ‘playing’ to ‘overacting’ or ‘pretending something’ on stage” (Florschütz 2004, 21). In the TEY performances she has seen, she senses the actors’ fear, as well as their strategies for overcoming it and their courage to actually engage in an encounter with the audience” (Florschütz 2004, 21).

She thus describes a fundamental uncertainty but also the attitude of the actors to be willing to take risks in their encounter with a very young audience. This fundamental attitude of doubt and searching is a prerequisite for the success of the encounter because the players in TEY must continually question the known conventions and rules of the theatre and seek to renew their own ideas. The French TEY artist Agnès Desfosses described her own attitude in the announcement flyer for the 1999 “Unter dem Tisch” (Under the table) festival in Berlin:

“I work for the very young children by awakening their attention and all their senses and playing with their urge to move. I want them to slide and roll, climb and crawl, feel and touch, listen, peek, dance.” (Unter dem Tisch, 1999)

Just as artists perceive spectators as unique individuals, spectators open themselves up to the presence of other people at the performance. Spectators are naturally drawn to observe and perceive actors, and the individual’s imagination allows

them to engage with the action of the performance. The spectator does not need to *identify* with the player or the figure they encounter, nor do they endeavour to do so.

The aim of the performance and the player is to turn the theatre space into a shared experiential space for actors and very young spectators.

“In order to describe how the potential quality of theatre as an experiential space of community can unfold, it is therefore necessary to reflect more precisely on the respective conditions and staging strategies. Which procedures are used to enable or prevent the spectators’ participation and productive reception in a particular way? Which specific strategies and play arrangements promote the interplay between artists and children up to the age of three?” (Wartemann 2009b, 175)

Geesche Wartemann links the question of conditions and staging strategies – to enable the participation and productive reception of very young spectators – to questions of dramaturgical decisions made in the staging process. The shared experiential space can only be created if an interplay develops between the actors and the spectators.

In her reflections on the interplay in TEY, Wartemann refers to the concept of the “Dramaturgy of the Audience”, which was developed by Volker Klotz with regard to literary-dramatic theatre (cf. Klotz 1979). Even though Klotz’s considerations refer to dramatic literary theatre for adult spectators, it is worth taking a closer look at his concept of dramaturgy.

In line with the understanding of dramaturgy on which this essay is based, Volker Klotz defines the object of dramaturgy as “the material and construction process of the dramatic-scenic event text”. (Klotz 1979, 14). The activity of dramaturgy consists of applying the materials and construction methods when writing the text and realising them when staging the text on stage. The aim of dramaturgy is “to publicly actualise certain possibilities that are inherent in the material and construction methods of the respective dramatic-scenic text as a meaningful context” (Klotz 1979, 14/15). He thus understands theatre as an event in which something is made visible and dramaturgy as an activity that is done for the receiving audience. He also sees the spatial relationship between stage and auditorium as a framework condition through which “the possibilities for shaping the play are determined and the spectator is assigned his ‘role’” (Klotz 1979, 16).

He sees the audience as the *object* of dramaturgy, to whom the specially constructed processes of the production are presented, and at the same time as the *subject* of dramaturgy, because by processing what it sees and hears on stage as a meaningful context, the audience itself carries out dramaturgical activities (cf. Klotz 1979, 17).

“In general terms, ‘Dramaturgy of the Audience’ is therefore to be understood as dramaturgical measures that are carried out on and by the audience. The audience becomes the object of dramaturgical measures – with the purpose of involving it as a dramaturgical subject.” (Klotz 1979, 17)

In this sense, he describes theatre as an

“exchange of living beings” (Klotz 1979, 17). In order to emphasise the playful aspect with regard to Theatre for Children in general and Theatre for the Early Years in particular, Geesche Wartemann adapted Klotz’s concept of “Wechselverkehr” (intercommunication) in her concept of “Wechselspiel” (interplay). As the very young spectators have little or no experience of theatre and no concept of this art form, the “task and challenge of a ‘Dramaturgy of the Audience’ [...] arises in TEY in a much more radical form: How does theatre become theatre at all for these very youngest spectators?” (Wartemann 2009b, 177).

One consequence of this special task and challenge can be to understand the rehearsal process, i.e. the process of constructing the events of the production, not exclusively as a process of implementing the intentions and ideas of the theatre makers but to understand the staging process as research and experimentation. An example might be to regularly invite the intended age group of children to rehearsals to partner the artists who are developing the production. In this way, knowledge about the effects of the scenic process can be accrued during the rehearsal process. “In this way, staging ideas are already scrutinised, changed or discarded during rehearsals” (Wartemann 2009b, 177). Artists see the “encounter with the children as an opportunity to review their own understanding of theatre and put it up for discussion. Which performances turn out to be interesting? How does the theatre begin and end? What room for manoeuvre do the children have in the performance?” (Wartemann 2009b, 178). In these experimental spaces, the artists come to a closer understanding by analysing the rehearsal processes that involved a rehearsal audience, “[...] what is to be understood as theatre, how the roles

of performers and spectators are assumed and what scope for action is associated with this [...]” (Wartemann 2009b, 178).

These fundamental agreements are therefore not simply assumed, but investigated and tested. The players must carefully consider the fundamental fragility of the ‘play-agreement’ between them and the infant spectators: their attention and focus on the actors and the action of performance does not emerge from known and practised spectatorial conventions, but from the fact that the play and the stage processes genuinely arouse the interest of the audience. The claim to respect TEY as a process of collective creativity between performers and spectators can only be implemented if very young spectators are taken seriously in their respective reception skills and reception needs. No rigid rules of behaviour should be established because this places limitations on the spectators’ modes of interpretation, not only on the content but also in defining their role as spectators. In this way, they can become the object of the dramaturgy and at the same time the dramaturgical subject.

With regard to the process of collective creativity between performers and spectators, the “institutional asymmetry” inherent in every form of children’s theatre must be considered.

“Collective production and reception is determined by an ‘institutional asymmetry’ in favour of the producers.” (Wartemann 2005, 91)

In children’s theatre, however, the inexperience of the audience in adhering to any spectatorial conventions and the developmental psychological disposition of the spectators counteract the asymmetry, because the children express themselves

spontaneously and without regard to conventions. At the same time, this asymmetry is reinforced by the age difference between performers and young spectators (generational difference) and causes an irresolvable status gap. (cf. Wartemann 2005, 91)

“And although the division into a frontal playing area and a spectator area opposite is generally maintained, the intimate theatre space tends to reduce the asymmetry between actors and spectators and to dissolve conventional reception attitudes.” (Wartemann 2005, 98)

In addition, the “institutional asymmetry [...] is suspected of blocking two-way communication and thus the *feedback loop*” (Wartemann 2005, 92). This means that theatrical communication in performances for the very young is particularly fragile. Wartemann shows two possible consequences that can follow from these observations and summarises them in the question:

“[...] is a lack of spectator focus precisely an expression and part of collective creativity, as in this case the asymmetry of theatrical interaction is broken? Or is it an indication of the failure of collective creativity, as those present do not relate sufficiently to each other?” (Wartemann 2009b, 183/184)

Because very young spectators have no or little experience of theatre and the social conventions associated with it, any reactions from this audience that influence or interrupt the sequence of on-stage events, or the structure of the per-

formance, should not be perceived as conscious disruptions. At the same time, the artists performing on stage can feel disrupted by such reactions because the performance can become randomly and individually influenced and seemingly damaged.

In this context, however, Geesche Wartemann points out that “the general rules of interaction established in the staging process [...] must be negotiated once again in the performance according to the current situation and current needs “because TEY “must claim to be a theatre [...] that enables and takes up the unforeseen and individual reactions of the children” (Wartemann 2009b, 183). In his dissertation “‘More Like A Poem Than A Play’: Towards A Dramaturgy Of Performing Arts For Early Years”, Ben Fletcher-Watson points out that the very young spectators of TEY should be treated in the same way as adult spectators, namely with respect, and speaks in this context of a dramaturgy of equality.

“TEY artists are actively interested in children and child development, embodied in the care they take to accommodate their audiences [...]. They are also self-motivated, finding personal reward in unconventional responses rather than applause or verbal feedback, acknowledging their audiences’ unfamiliarity with dramatic semiotics rather than aiming to educate them. Equal treatment is reciprocal, feeding back into the experiences of adults – just as children are encouraged to explore new ideas and sensations [...]” (Fletcher-Watson 2016, 176).

The aim should therefore be to view the unconventional reactions of the very young audience, which could be perceived as disruptive, rather as enriching and an expression of reception, namely the creative way in which the performance has been received. The dramaturgy of equality is less an aesthetic than a social category as it describes a very important prerequisite that TEY artists must fulfil to successfully create shared aesthetic spaces of experience through their performances. One could also say that the dramaturgy of equality describes a special attitude on the part of the TEY artists, who are focused towards the very young spectators, open to their reactions and cognisant that artistic design should be flexible and adaptable. This does not eliminate the fundamental asymmetry of interaction in TEY but encourages an awareness of the creative power that actors have in performance, and to use this power to strengthen children’s right to be present and react in a way that suits them. The basis of this attitude sits at the heart of the mastery of the craft as an actor or performer, “but also a high degree of concentration, great permeability and high sensitivity towards the audience” (Hess/Droste 2009, 161).

From all this follows what I call the aesthetic imperative for TEY: theatre for the youngest must always be a shared artistic experience for actors and spectators. Although observing myriad TEY performances reveals that more differences than similarities will always be identified, a fundamental prerequisite for the success of TEY is the shared artistic experience based on a fundamental equality of all those involved in the process of collective artistic creativity.

Stories and narration

Most productions of Theatre for Early Years do not follow the classical structure of drama and often do not tell a linear story. The stories are characterised by simplicity rather than complexity, whereby simplicity is to be seen as an aesthetic category. Theatre for Early Years is a minimalist art, an art of concentration of means, but not an art of simplification or even trivialisation. In stories staged for TEY, conflict is seldom represented through the collisions of characters and their individual interests, but rather through the performers themselves and their situation. Occasions may arise for the actors to play between themselves and the material they are acting with. The stories are often based on elementary concepts and relationships of world exploration concerning for instance; natural phenomena such as stars, clouds or rain; natural materials such as stones, wood or water; elementary and polar conceptual relationships with which the world can be described such as big and small, round and square, here and there, above and below, in front and behind or mine and yours.

It is true that the performances can be described analytically using the categories of conventional dramaturgy: there needs to be an initial impulse for the play, which has the function of *exposition*. *Tension* is built up in the play and there are *surprising twists and turns*. The actors' actions and scenic processes arise from *contradictions and conflicts*. In turn, these processes lead to an ending in which *contradictions* are often *resolved*. There is no continuous plot but rather the performances take place in an episodic structure.

“Narratives, where present, have a tendency to repeat or recur within themselves, forming chains of mini-arcs which define the course of

the performance [...]. They are open, welcoming varied interpretations, and posing questions rather than necessarily providing logical or didactic answers.” (Fletcher-Watson 2016, 177)

TEY performances therefore usually consist of a chain of small arcs of suspense (mini-arcs), each of which can tell small stories in their own right. The chain of mini-arcs must in turn be held together by a basic idea. One could also speak of a ‘common thread’ that connects the individual episodes. In a performance in which a certain material or objects are explored in their materiality and functionality, it is precisely this basic idea of experimentation and research that forms the ‘common thread’. However, it can also be a dream or a journey that connects the individual episodes in a meaningful way and creates a story for the spectators. But what is a story? Following the definition used in literary studies, the category of story should be defined as a purely chronological sequence of events and processes, while the category of plot includes the meaningful or causal connections between events. Strictly speaking, we should therefore be talking about the plot when we think about stories in TEY. In this attempt at a definition, we must be aware that the categories of story and plot are categories of scientific analysis and differ in their meaning from the everyday use of the same terms. For the sake of clarity, however, we will not differentiate between story and plot in relation to the TEY. We will therefore continue to refer to the story in the following, even if we actually mean the plot. Another reason for continuing to speak of story instead of plot is the fact that the plot is always subject bound. In the context of drama theory, this means that action is always linked to dramatic characters who, through their

deliberate actions, transform one situation into another. However, as we have already established, the players in TEY do not embody any dramatic characters or roles, so we will dispense with the concept of plot here.

In any case, within the context of TEY, the act of storytelling through use of a wide variety of artistic means of expression is prioritised over the narrative – i.e. a story. This makes sense in view of the perception of very young spectators who are focussed on everything shown and presented.

“Additionally, stories are told by means other than words, even where text is present – they may be communicated or reinforced in visuals, movement, music, scent, taste, or kinaesthetic modes, shared between performers and audiences [...]. Experiences are designed to enhance connectivity – between actor and audience, between spectators, between a spectator and an object – to generate the possibility of meaning, instead of presenting a linear narrative with a preconceived message identical to each audience member [...]” (Fletcher-Watson 2016, 177).

Both the narrative stance of the actors and the means used are therefore of crucial importance for conveying the story. The narrative stance is created primarily through physical expression, turning towards the audience and addressing them directly. Words, singing, sounds and movements are addressed to the spectators. The verbal language can be orientated towards everyday language but can also develop a poetic dimension. Through the poetic, the language can be lyrical or rhythmic and

the intention is conveyed less through the meaning of the words than through their sound and the feelings they create.

Another crucial fact is that TEY is not a theatre of illusion. The artificial stage worlds that are created can be experienced and seen as artistic spaces. The creation and making of this special world is not concealed, but shown. The worlds are asserted, and this assertion is accepted by the spectators. The spaces form, as it were, the basis and the foil for the spectator's imagination. If the the spaces were based on a sense of illusion, there would be little room for the spectator's own imagination.

Nevertheless, as already mentioned, stories are told in TEY, but often through linear narratives, but rather as episodes, i.e. as a chain of small arcs of suspense (mini-arcs). Even more than in performance genres that follow a more conventional dramaturgy, they require the spectator's imagination. In this respect, the means of expression used in theatre for the very young are not always designed to create a specific meaning. The objects, materials, sounds or movements in TEY are not symbols for something else, but signify what they are: a ball is a ball, water is water, a sound is a sound and movements in space are movements in space. The forms of expression in TEY each stand for themselves in their materiality and their special ways of being and not metaphorically for something else. However, something else can be made of them through how they are used. The ball is used as a football, or the water surface is used as a mirror. The materials are often used as forms of expression with which something is represented. Silvia Brendenal, artistic director of the Schaubude Berlin puppet theatre for many years and one of the pioneers of theatre for very young spectators in Germany, speaks of the actors' “staged search” for their own theatri-

cal language regarding the choice and use of artistic means of expression in TEY.

“The actors or puppeteers who have decided to make theatre for young children are – and above all – embarking on a search for their own, often unknown, theatrical language. It is an archaic language of images, soundscapes, plays of light, melodies, tones and poetic words that demands a completely new attention to what is being told.” (Brendenal 2009, 198)

Every spectator, child and adult alike, ‘receives’ the process and events of the show through the eyes of their own experiences. Everyone sees a different story or even just processes in which the actors do something with things, materials, and their bodies. There might be similarities of interpretation when the ways objects are used in individual episodes are so clear that they cannot be interpreted in any other way. Generally however, the spectator’s imagination creates meanings and perhaps stories from even the most abstract forms of expression. In any case, the stories and plots told with different means of expression should be about maintaining the connection between the players and the very young spectators.

Duration, time, rhythm

Another decisive ‘framing condition’ for TEY and thus also a dramaturgical category is time, because theatre for very young spectators has its own way of dealing with time. The most striking aspect of TEY is the duration of a performance. In most productions of this genre, it varies between 20 and 45 minutes. However, one of the most

important temporal categories of a performance is rhythm, which is of particular importance for the organisation and structuring of time in a performance. Rhythm as a dynamic principle of order arises through repetition and deviation from repetition and presupposes a permanent transformation. Erika Fischer-Lichte points out that rhythm is a principle “that is set with the human body.” (Fischer-Lichte 2012, 64)

“Not only do the heartbeat, blood circulation and breathing follow their own rhythm, not only do we perform the movements that we carry out with our bodies [...] rhythmically and produce sounds rhythmically when we speak, sing, laugh and cry. The movements that are produced in our body without us being able to perceive them are also performed rhythmically. The human body is indeed rhythmically tuned.” (Fischer-Lichte 2012, 64)

People are therefore also in a special position to perceive rhythms and “tune into” them. In a performance, the rhythmic systems of the actors and spectators meet, and since each spectator is rhythmically tuned in, in a different way, it is in principle unpredictable whether the actors will succeed in drawing the audience into the rhythm they have set. These observations and considerations lead us to the idea that Theatre for Early Years must have its own rhythm, which should correspond to the rhythm of the audience. Very young spectators, in their interplay with actors help to determine this performance rhythm. Once again, the crucial importance of the connection between actors and audience becomes clear. The rhythm of the play, the sequence of events and their respective

durations laid out in the staging process must, like the entire dramaturgical structure of the production, be flexible and permeable so that the players in the performance can react to the needs of the very young spectators without breaking the overall dramaturgical structure.

The shared breathing of actors and spectators, as well as the eye contact of the players with their audience, can manifest a clear turning of the players towards the very young spectators, because breathing is part of the physical rhythm of every human being. Focussing on breathing is therefore an important prerequisite for the rhythm of the performance to pick up on or influence the rhythm of the audience and thus create a shared rhythm. If the dramaturgical goal of every performance is to enable a shared aesthetic experience for the actors and the audience, then the actors and the very young spectators must harmonise with each other and find a common rhythm. This harmony gives the children a feeling of security. The shared breath is also the thread between the players and the audience that maintains the tension of the players and the spectators.

“Very young children communicate with their eyes... this is why you need to have them close to you and to learn how to tell stories with your eyes, without overacting... They talk with their body and you need to be able to decipher body language, listen to their breath, interpret the movement of a hand, a start of laugh which you did not plan while calculating your theatrical time...” (Frabetti, V. 2009, 36).

The basis is the mutual perception of actors and spectators. Spatial proximity, eye

contact and breathing together are ‘framing conditions’ that enable this perception. The players need a finely tuned sensorium to read the emotions and reactions of very young spectators – for whom all sensory stimuli are equally important in perceiving an environment. This is why a varying pace of body movements, the change of lighting moods, the rhythm of sounds and music must be adapted to the needs of very young spectators. The decisive factor here is exactly where the spectators’ interest should be focussed. The actions and events on stage should therefore ideally follow each other in an appropriate rhythm. The rhythm of a performance can also be structured by moments of acoustic silence, e.g. silence accompanying physical stillness – physical immobility, allowing the audience breathing space in which emotions can be experienced. Additionally, repetitive moments, the repetition of processes or verbal repetition help to structure a performance with regards to time and give a very young audience great pleasure, thus helping to maintain and direct their attention.

Spectators, perception, feeling

A theatre for young audiences must always have its spectators in mind, in every decision about the repertoire, in every production, in every performance. This imperative of the TYA naturally and particularly applies to the TEY. Theatre art is made for very young spectators and their interests and needs take precedence over the interests and needs of the adult theatre makers.

As with any form of theatre, the actors’ play only becomes a performance when the spectators are present and the interplay between actors and audience unfolds. Just like all theatrical communication, communication in Theatre for Early Years is based on the joint presence of players and

spectators in a space and their direct or indirect interaction. Communication is based on mutual perception.

Siemke Böhnisch emphasises that the joint presence of players and spectators in the same space is not on its own sufficient to initiate mutual perception and the *feedback loop* or *interplay* between the actors and the audience. She is convinced that TEY in particular requires and encourages a kind of mutuality or converging of all participants as they encounter each other in their roles as actors and spectators during the performance. Mutual perception implies that actors and spectators enter into a relationship with each other and in this, there is initially no dominance. Eye contact, which many actors have described as a prerequisite for the success of a performance in TEY, is one method to encourage and initiate mutual perception. Perception in theatre for the very young means not only hearing and seeing but perceiving with all the senses. The children relate to what they see and hear: they respond to sounds, movements, gestures etc. either by imitating, i.e. repeating what they perceive, or with something complementary, i.e. they perceive physically and react physically. This also describes an extension of conventional perception in theatre for adult spectators, which is limited to seeing and hearing, perhaps even smelling. This is another point of contact with theatre forms that work with performative elements. Here, too, the possibilities of perception are expanded, but often with the motivation to break with convention to be able to perceive the familiar in a new way. This motif does not play a role in theatre for the very young, because children do not (yet) have this conventional conditioning.

Erika Fischer-Lichte describes two modes of perception in performative theatre and assumes that the perception of the

performance by others has a theatrical and a performative dimension.

“While it can be considered theatrical that what is being released is to be perceived by others, performative can be understood as the way in which and as what it is perceived and what effect this type of perception may have on the perceiver himself.” (Fischer-Lichte 2012, 65)

Effect follows from perception. In TEY, these effects can manifest, for example, in the physical reactions of the very young spectators mentioned above. Again, the effects of the perceived scenic actions on very young spectators are unpredictable and will be different in every performance. The aim of the approach is therefore to bring actors and spectators into contact with each other and to generate attention among the spectators so that mutual perception and communication is made possible.

In the chapter on space, several principles that encourage mutual perception and communication between the performers and the audience have already been noted. These principles include the size of the space in relation to the number of spectators, the arrangement of the stage and auditorium, the type of seating for spectators (cushions or benches allow the physical flexibility of very young spectators and give them room to move). In addition, acoustics and lighting play a decisive role in how the actors are perceived by the spectators, but also how the spectators are seen by the actors; a completely darkened auditorium, for example, makes it difficult for the actors to see the audience in the backlight of spotlights and can hinder the establishment of contact between the actors and the spectators (cf. Böhnisch 2010,

137-138). Caroline Heinemann therefore states that perception and communication possibilities, interaction and movement opportunities, atmospheric effect, the nature of the overall situation as well as rules and boundaries in TEY are always determined and influenced by the spatial conditions (Cf. Heinemann 2009, 141).

Erika Fischer-Lichte describes the atmosphere as being influential in how the space and the performance are perceived.

“For in the atmosphere that the space and the things – including the odours they exude and the sounds they make – seem to radiate, they become present to the subject who enters them in an almost emphatic sense. They approach the perceiving subject in the atmosphere in a certain way, even penetrate it – as can be experienced above all with light, sounds and odours. For the person present in the space does not find himself opposite the atmosphere, not at a distance from it, but is embraced and surrounded by it; it immerses himself in it, thus becoming part of the atmosphere in a certain way and, through his reactions, contributes to intensifying, attenuating or even making it disappear – and thus, if necessary, creating spatiality anew or differently” (Fischer-Lichte 2012, 60).

Atmospheres are thus moods that emanate from a space and the objects, sounds and lighting in it. This means that atmosphere is something that “neither belongs solely to the person or thing nor is it just our subjective projection but must be lo-

cated between the perceiver and the perceived” (Pinkert 2009, 127).

“Atmospheres play a decisive role in theatre for the very young. They can create familiarity and security, but also expectation, strangeness and, of course, fear. They are what get the children in the mood for the theatre performance before the first actor even steps onto the stage. They cannot be planned, yet they are something that is produced and arises from the interplay of the ‘moods’ of the theatre space, the materials used and the bodies of the actors and spectators.” (Pinkert 2009, 127)

The way in which the performance is presented therefore organises and shapes perception.

Cultural ‘framing conditions’

In view of the special characteristics of the TEY audience, the cultural ‘framing conditions’ for TEY performances should also be considered. These include the fact that, already mentioned several times, very young spectators have little or no theatre experience, or knowledge of the social conventions of theatre in general or the appropriate and socially expected spectator behaviour.

“With such an unprepared audience, a special situation arises with regard to the cultural framework: The theatre artists here can rely very little on pre-established conventions, since many of the youngest children are attend-

ing the theatre for the first time” (Böhnisch 2010, 135).

Another special feature is the fact that very young spectators do not come to the theatre alone but are always accompanied by adults (parents, grandparents, educators) who look after them. This is a decisive difference between the TEY and the TYA and this socio-cultural peculiarity results in a ‘framing condition’ that influences the interplay and communication between actors and spectators in the performance: the relationship between actors and spectators is not linear, as in TYA, but is a triangular relationship (Desfosses 2009, 103 and Morley 2022, 38) or even reticular (cf. Fletcher-Watson 2016, 174), connecting parents, children and performers in a complex network of reciprocity. The children perceive the performance and the adults perceive the performance alongside the reactions of their children as well as perceiving the reactions of other children and their parents. As a result, the interplay described in the chapter about play and interplay also takes place in a network. This means that TEY must address the children and their adult carers in equal measure. However, although the necessary presence of accompanying adults for very young children makes the interplay and communication between actors and spectators more complex and the TEY actors have to take this into account, their interest, their perception and their address are directed at the very young spectators. Through this experience, children and adults can undoubtedly get to know each other in new ways in TEY. They might experience impulses differently to one another or react similarly to one another. The actors’ task is to encourage children and adults into a state of discovery, although it is sometimes the case that adults will shy away from surrendering to this kind of unknown experience involving uncertain outcomes.

However, the fact that the accompanying adults, especially parents and grandparents, attend the theatre performance with their children indicates a fundamental expectation that this experience can be beneficial for children. They attend the experience with the expectation that their children are capable of receiving a theatre performance and that it will be a special, shared experience with their children. This means that, like TEY artists, accompanying adults assume that young children are already fully-fledged human ‘beings’ and not adults in-waiting who only become human beings through their further development. This attitude of the artists and the accompanying adults is a decisive cultural ‘framing condition’ of TEY and fundamental to the existence and development of TEY as serious art. That is the political dimension of TEY. The German director and theatre manager Brigitte Dethier summarises this idea concisely.

“Theatre is not only political through its content but – in this particular case (of TEY – gt) through its pure existence. It is a highly political task to facilitate aesthetic collective experience for the youngest as early as possible. Through these experiences they are better prepared for the manifold challenges of life.” (Dethier 2016, 89)

Through their work, TEY artists contribute to fulfilling the mission of Theatre for Young Audiences by using their practical theatre work and performances to promote the human right of infants to participate in culture, and furthermore, to enable young children to exercise this right. With their work, artists and organisers create public spaces of encounter for these young children and their parents. Within family and

day-care centres, spaces can also become places of aesthetic education. These places contribute to creating the social public sphere and enable young children and their parents to participate in social and cultural life. Cultural and artistic programmes for young children and their parents should therefore form the basis for aesthetic education concepts in early childhood. In this

way, art and creativity can become a natural part of family life and the educational work of day-care centres can simultaneously create the conditions for strengthening the cultural competence of parents and enabling children from all social backgrounds to participate in educational opportunities on an equal footing.



“Dramaturgy of the Audience” as a dramaturgy of participation

The material ‘framing conditions’ for TEY performances described in the previous chapter are based on dramaturgical decisions, each of which can be part of a staging strategy. In her “Ästhetik des Performativen”, Erika Fischer-Lichte has identified three closely interrelated factors that the staging strategies of performances are based on, and which can be found in the ‘framing conditions’ and dramaturgical decisions described above. According to this, the staging strategies are aimed

“[...] (1) on the *change of roles* between actors and spectators, (2) on the *formation of a community* between them and (3) on different modes of *mutual contact*, i.e. on the relationship between distance and closeness, between public and private/intimacy, gaze and physical contact.” (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 62) (emphasis in original)

In TEY, the (1) *change of roles* takes place

in different forms of spectatorial participation during the performance event. Earlier in this essay, the concept of a “Dramaturgy of the Audience” was already mentioned. The foundation of this concept, which is based on the considerations of Volker Klotz, is the thesis that the audience is made the object of dramaturgical decisions by the theatre artists in the performance, whereby they pursue the goal of involving it as a dramaturgical subject (cf. Klotz 1979, 17). Geesche Wartemann has taken up this idea of the audience’s participation in the performance by describing the communicative relationship between actors and spectators as an interplay.¹ From this concept of the “Dramaturgy of the Audience”, which is based on a permanent change of roles between actors and spectators, it can be suggested for TEY that it is not initially necessary to actively involve very young spectators in the play of the actors in order to create interplay. This is because the interplay of action and reaction is not linear. Impulses (i.e. actions) can come from both the players and the spectators, and the reactions do not exclusively come from the audience. Erika Fischer-Lichte has

1 Cf. Above, pp. 21-25.

described this mutual influence between the actors and spectators in a performance as a *feedback loop*.² It follows that any theatre performance is inconceivable without the participation of the audience because the mere presence of the participants in a space and the addressing of the audience by the players creates a form of participation. Nevertheless, this chapter aims to address the concept of audience participation beyond an involvement as active spectators by discussing different levels of audience participation.

The (2) *formation of a community* has already been identified as a basic prerequisite for the performance event in TEY, which should help facilitate a shared aesthetic experience between very young spectators and artists. To this end, artists in TEY must pay special attention to very young spectators and consider them as equal partners in the performance process. At the same time, they must always be aware that, as actors and adults, they have the power to influence the rules of interaction and the course of the performance, and thus also the means and variance of interaction with the audience. So how can the influence of the very young audience on the performance be made possible? Do the artists even want to allow the audience to gain influence? The age difference between the adult performers and the young children, and thus the fundamental institutional asymmetry and associated status gap, are facts that cannot be resolved even by the greatest endeavours to achieve equality. However, the artists' awareness of these facts and her power associated with them can point to ways that, while not abolishing the asymmetry, can create situations in which very young spectators can become

a co-determining force in the artistic encounter. The 'framing conditions' of the artistic encounter set by the artists, and thus dramaturgical decisions, are also of decisive importance for such forms of participation. The (3) *relationship between distance and proximity* is, as has already been shown in particular regard to the spatial situation of TEY performances, also part of the staging strategy linked to the dramaturgy of the audience.³

The varying intensity of participation in the very young audience can also be described based on the three objectives of performative staging strategies mentioned by Erika Fischer-Lichte. The participation of very young spectators and the varying degrees to which they are involved are also dramaturgical factors. For this reason, the dramaturgical function of participation in terms of the "Dramaturgy of the Audience" and the extent of the influence of very young spectators on the performances will be discussed below.

Typology of participation in TEY

The following attempt at a typological description of the possible forms and extent of participation in very young spectators at a TEY performance should by no means be regarded as complete. I am basing this on my own experiences with TEY performances. There are certainly other forms and the types of participation presented below can also be differentiated in detail. Additionally the 'intensity' of participation, both in terms of a time frame and the nature of the participatory actions, can vary across actual performance practice.

We have already discussed the fundamental (a) *participation of the spectators as recipients* of a performance and the constant change of roles associated with this in the interplay between actors and spectators. Since the artistic practice of TEY has now become extensively shared and differentiated, it is possible to identify different intensities with which artists encourage the interplay and participation of recipients. For toddlers up to the age of three or four, it seems that the direct address of very young spectators is an indispensable tool to influence reception. In performances for older children, around five to six years of age, it can be observed that even the more self-contained productions that dispense with addressing the audience directly can direct the young spectators' interest in the performance via sensory stimuli and a plot with characters function as shared aesthetic experiences for the actors and spectators. A distancing can be seen both in the spatial arrangement of spectators and onstage action as well as in the self-contained plot on stage, which does not directly address the spectators through eye contact, physical proximity or verbal address. In such cases it is not that the spectators are uninvolved as recipients but that the intensity of the interplay between stage and auditorium can be significantly lower than in performances where the actors are very close to the very young spectators.

Inviting the audience to (b) *play in the stage area after the performance* can now be described as a TEY convention. This is because the invitation for spectators to stay in the theatre space after the performance and play with objects used by the actors is now a widespread form of direct participation for very young spectators attending TEY performances. Although the performance has already ended, these actions

can be considered part of the "Over-All Performance" as characterised in the concluding chapter of this essay.⁴ An important question that actors should ask themselves about this final part of the performance experience is the nature of their role here. What is the role of the performers in this epilogue? Are they still the people they presented during the performance? Are they now themselves? Are they somewhere in between? The fact is that the attitude and presence of the performers changes. This is, in part, due to shifts in the spectators' focus. The performers must now have a different form of attention for the children, who as activated spectators now become players themselves. They will often act out experiences, emotions or scenarios from the performance by imitating what they have seen or, explore onstage objects for characteristics that have been 'out of reach' until then, exploring how they feel, or smell, or sound or how heavy or light they are.

In practice, it can be observed that after performances in which the actors play a clown-like role, they often maintain this persona in the epilogue stage of the performance and do not revert to becoming 'themselves'. Perhaps the intensity of presence changes in the performers, given the number of children on stage and the shift in audience focus. When they play alongside the children, they basically remain the clownish characters they played before. Even if the performers have not played a character role, they still cannot fully become private characters in the epilogue. In these cases, a reduction in the intensity of their presence can be observed but they are still perceived as the ones who have just created the performance through their physical actions and object play.

A variation of playing onstage after the

2 Cf. Above, pp. 15-16.

3 Cf. Above, pp. 18-21.

4 Cf. further below pp. 41 et seqq.

performance might involve (c) *invitations to play in another room*. The reasons for choosing a secondary space could be because of the fragility or special construction of the stage space, which would prevent children from playing freely. The theatre artists' may also prefer not to destroy the 'magic' of the performance by children taking possession of the stage space. The alternative space could be designed in a scenographically complementary way and may be equipped with objects similar to those used in the stage space during the performance. A change of space also raises the question of the performers' identity. Their attitude and approach to the children will necessarily change. They have a different form of attention for the spectators here, who are invited to become active in the telling of their own stories. Moving to a different space after the performance avoids the risk of destroying the 'magic' of performance by having the children play in the same space. There can be a perceived danger that the aesthetic stage space might become an irreverent playground. Such a justification also allows conclusions to be drawn about the artists' attitude to their production because the question of whether playing in the stage space preserves or abandons its aesthetic character reveals a conviction that the performance space is an artistic environment and not an everyday space and that this quality must be preserved. Moving to an alternative space is thus a kind of compromise to the convention of playing onstage after the performance. It allows the theatre space to remain preserved in its aesthetic character and also offers a kind of transitional space into everyday life.

The most intensive form of participation is made possible by the concept of (d) *performance as a space of collective creativity*. In this form of shared artistic production and experience, the roles of performers and spectators change in an obviously percep-

tible way. Performers and spectators share the space and are jointly involved in the artistic creation of the performance. Gradual differences in participation result from the actors' decision as to when they share the performance space with the spectators. For example, in an interactive installation are children invited into the shared space from the beginning or are they invited at to participate at a certain point, to further the development of the performance and conclude the performance together with the performers? Since, in this concept, participation is part of the dramaturgy of the performance – even less possible for artists to predetermine or control – the question of whether the character of the space as an aesthetic environment is maintained or abandoned does not arise at all. The theatre space is conceived from the outset as an aesthetic space of collective creativity and is designed to be shared by actors and very young spectators. The artists very obviously see the spectators as equal counterparts and co-creative partners in the performance. The setting of the space and the staging must make it possible for the children to participate in the performance in a self-determined way. They must be able to make independent decisions about when and how they want to participate. The decision not to participate must also be allowed as an expression of self-determination. In order to realise these demands, the artists must make responsible decisions in the staging process that enable the children to become the determining force in an artistic encounter at their own physical eye level.

Another form of children's participation in the theatre is not related to the "Over-All-Dramaturgy" of the performance but rather precedes the performance and is located in the process of creating the production. In the (e) *participation of children in the process of staging*, the children are involved in the staging process and their

wishes or ideas about certain characters or the course of the story are taken into account and included by the artists in the design. For such forms of participation to genuinely contribute to the development of collective

creativity, however, as with all other forms, an adequate method is required in order to understand very young children as equal counterparts and artistic partners, and not simply part of the performance research.

Dramaturgical cornerstones of TEY



As a practical summary of my reflections on the dramaturgy of TEY, I would like to describe the basic dramaturgical principles that apply to all performances of this genre, regardless of the specific artistic choices made. These principles are not to be understood as recipes, but as the conclusions of my reflection on the artistic practice of TEY.

My argument in this essay has so far followed a systematic approach that is orientated towards the material and cultural 'framing conditions' for TEY performances. To make my theoretical reflections on the dramaturgy of TEY applicable and manageable for practice, the insights gained so far will be applied to the concrete situations of a TEY performance. I have not chosen a specific performance as an example, but will rather construct the course of a performance as a model, so to speak. This is particularly because one of the questions frequently asked in my workshops with TEY directors and actors is, when the per-

formance in TEY begins and when it ends. I follow Max Schumacher's concept of an "Over-All-Dramaturgy" (Schumacher 2008, 75), which likewise modelled the event of the performance in the phases of pre-performance, performance and post-performance (Schumacher 2008, 83). He describes the concept of "Over-All-Dramaturgy" as an extension of the concept of performance, which encompasses not only the aesthetic experience during the performance, but also the experience before and after. As Max Schumacher did not develop this concept for TEY, but for performative theatre for adults,¹ I am primarily using the basic idea of the temporal extension of the concept of performance to the 'before and after', because here I see parallels between the performance practice of TEY. Schumacher's thesis asserts that the aesthetic experience of the performance does not only begin when the spectators enter the auditorium and also does not end when the lights in the auditorium go on again.

¹ Max Schumacher's contribution is primarily concerned with communication strategies in the public sphere related to a specific performance (e.g. marketing and theatre criticism). "If dramaturgy is the organisation of action on a timeline, then the organisation of communicative actions on a timeline would be that which begins with the first idea for a production and ends with the final forgetting of a production (or at least the definite removal from the repertoire: something I would like to call 'Over-All Dramaturgy [...]'" (Schumacher 2008, 75)

Pre-performance

How is the theatre situation created?

Theatre scholar Geesche Wartemann and ethnographer Bina Elisabeth Mohn have conducted ethnographic research questioning how the situation of very young spectators arriving at the theatre and waiting for performance to begin, transforms into the theatrical situation in which the roles of the participants as 'performing adults' and 'watching-children' manifest (cf. Wartemann 2009 b). I use the experiences and observations that Wartemann gained from a concrete production and performance situations to derive generalised indications of how the establishment of the theatre situation in the pre-performance contributes to constituting the community of the audience in its role as a community of spectators and, how the spectators can thus become dramaturgical subjects.

How might the theatre situation be created in pre-performance? This occurs through the design of the pre-performance segment, i.e. the activities of the spectators and actors from the arrival of the audience at the theatre until the start of the performance. The situation in the theatre foyer is transformed into a theatrical scenario with performing adults and attentively watching children by means of verbal, musical, gestural and spatial markings. In analysing her audio-visual ethnographic research, Wartemann has described four stages of this transformation process, which I will use as a guide in the following: (a) Preparing; (b) Receiving; (c) Inviting; (d) Changing space; (Wartemann 2009 b, 179-181). In the context of an "Over-All Dramaturgy" the structure and design of the time from the spectator's arrival at the theatre to the beginning of the performance is already part of the dramaturgy of the performance.

(a) Preparation

The pre-performance begins when the children and their adult companions have arrived at the theatre and are in the foyer. The foyer should be understood as a kind of transitional space to move from everyday life to the 'reality' of the performance space. The door to the theatre space usually remains closed and, in most cases, the youngest spectators have no idea or expectation of what they are about to experience. It is crucial for the success of the pre-performance and thus the entire theatre experience that all spectators have arrived at the theatre on time so that the transition to the theatre can be made smoothly, and together. Some kindergarten groups even plan enough time so that they can have breakfast together in the foyer. After the children have put down their jackets and bags, they can take a seat in the foyer. Some children explore the foyer, move around the room, and run around. This exploration is often then interrupted by a theatre employee (theatre pedagogue, front-of-house staff) announcing the imminent performance. The children are welcomed to the theatre venue, and everyone is informed that they have the opportunity to visit the bathroom before the performance starts. This is the beginning of the actual preparation for the performance.

(b) Reception

When everyone is back in the foyer, a short speech is given to the children, ideally by a person involved in the production. This can be the director, a theatre pedagogue or another artist or member of the theatre staff – the decisive factor is the gesture of addressing the spectators and welcoming them. The children are told that everyone is about to go into the theatre: the door to the theatre space becomes the focus of attention. The players may

also be introduced, or it may be pointed out that X and Y are about to perform for the children and are already in the performance space behind the door. These verbal explanations contextualise the imminent events in the stage area, as 'theatre' ("X and Y are about to play for you."). With this preamble, the children are welcomed and greeted. The aim is to establish trust and convey a sense of security so that the children can get involved in something as yet unknown, referred to in this context as theatre.

(c) Invitation

The children are now invited into the theatre space, which can be done by the actors or those who gave the welcome speech. There can be a ritual for this, such as a chime or another acoustic signal, or it can be left to an inviting gesture to enter the room. The people who invite the audience in are friendly and welcoming to both children and adults, smiling at them and addressing children directly.

(d) Changing room

Crossing the threshold from the foyer into the stage space marks the beginning of the "fourth and final stage of transformation from a situation not intended as theatre to theatre with its distribution of the roles of performer and spectator" (Wartemann 2009b, 180). This last stage "extends to the moment when the children take their seats on the audience benches" (Wartemann 2009b, 180). A pathway to the seating area may already be marked with the materials used in the performance. Alternatively, the actors or other staff members may guide the children to their seats. The actors may already be waiting in the theatre space. They then greet the children with friendly glances and encouraging gestures to indicate their seats. Often, however, the educators or

parents also need to support the children by taking them by the hand and leading them to their seats. However, it is also possible that the players are not yet present, in which case the beginning of the performance requires a moment of mutual recognition and the establishment of a relationship between the performers and the children. Entering the performance space, as part of the pre-performance, can therefore also be dramaturgically structured through verbal, musical, gestural and spatial markings. This creates a framework that emphasises the performance as a special event, called theatre.

Even in the foyer fears should be allayed and uncertainties absorbed by establishing an atmosphere for what is to come. Conveying the role of spectatorship upon young children can be a particular challenge.

"The role of spectator, especially in a collective reception process, also requires certain rules of behaviour, so that attention to the play of others is possible, while one's own, above all physical needs and the urge to move are disciplined." (Wartemann 2009b, 181)

The aim of the entire pre-performance is to enable the very young spectators to be seen as subjects of the dramaturgy from the very beginning by granting them independence and individuality. With this basic attitude, the artists not only convey security and trust, but also encourage the very young spectators, who have no idea about theatre, to be in a receptive mood for the upcoming performance.

"As subjects, the spectators can direct their own attention and interpret meaning, the

asymmetry of theatrical interaction is reduced, and the theatre becomes an interplay of equal partners. The theatre makers thus always retain an observing position.” (Wartemann 2009b, 181)

In the ‘staging’ of the pre-performance, it is crucial for artists to ascertain what kind of communication and impulse ensures that each child willingly leaves the ‘everyday space’ in a self-determined manner and enters the theatre space as an ‘aesthetic space’. Is it an impulse with artistic means? A sound, a movement, a pathway lined with objects into the auditorium? In other words, an aesthetic impulse. Or are the children directed with clear (non-artistic) cues? The pre-performance segment can help raise expectations and focus the spectators’ attention. The actual performance can then begin in this focused atmosphere.

Performance

Basic principles of interplay during the performance

The beginning of the performance must be clearly marked so that very young spectators are aware of the change in situation. If, after the stages of the pre-performance described above, a new announcement is made shortly before the start of the performance, e.g. to point out rules of behaviour during the performance, everyone involved must be aware of the fact that the children’s expectations and attention may diminish because the pre-performance steps are not being seamlessly transferred to the performance situation. However, where the various steps of the pre-performance have

not been completed, it can be useful to use an announcement shortly before the performance, to draw the attention of the very young spectators to what is to come.

Ideally, however, after the pre-performance segment, the performance should begin with a clear sign. This can be signified by dimming the lights in the auditorium and brightening the lighting of the stage area. It could be with sounds or music, or by the performers turning directly to the audience. As Siemke Böhnisch and Geesche Wartemann have established, it is not enough for the *feedback loop* and the associated interplay between spectators and actors to occur, for everyone to be gathered in one room; instead, the actions on stage must be clearly addressed to the very young spectators and the actors and spectators must come closer to each other.²

(a) Addressing the audience

The forms of audience address can be manifold and are of course related to the basic intention of the performance and the chosen means of expression. The simplest and clearest way to mark the beginning of the performance and to address the audience directly is for the actors to address the children directly, which is often associated with an emphasised physical turn towards the very young spectators. However, the audience can also be addressed through singing or sounds produced by the actors, which in turn should be clearly directed at the audience. It can also be achieved by exhibiting a clown-like situation in which the clown characters are apparently, initially unaware of the spectators. The humour that is created can be a way of addressing the audience. The children laugh at the funny actions and

contact is established through this emotional reaction without the children being addressed directly. However, to set the interplay in motion, which is a prerequisite for the success of the performance, the actors must make it clear at a certain point that they are aware of the spectators and then address them in their roles as clownish figures or present themselves, as performers, to them. However, this form of indirect address only seems to be suitable for older children between the ages of four and six, who do not perceive the clown-like characters or their dynamic actions as a threat, but as fun to make them laugh.

The artistic means of contacting the very young spectators are diverse and might involve movement, dance, sound and presence in space, play and song, speech melody, musical rhythm, images or light. With these and other means, many more possibilities of a direct and an indirect approach can be used in the staging process. The forms described here can only be used to illustrate the basic principle of performer-to-audience address and approach.

(b) Boundaries and rules

The spatial boundaries assigned to the performers and the spectators are usually marked by the stage design. The significance of the spatial arrangement of stage and auditorium has already been discussed in detail above.³ The rules of interaction and play can be communicated verbally in the pre-performance phase or defined during the actors’ play. It must be communicated in this ‘agreement’ how the play will unfold. Are the spectators invited to actively participate or are they attentive observers of the actors’ play? Is

it intended that they touch or even keep objects that are used on stage or do these objects ‘belong’ to the actors for the duration of the performance? Are they invited to sing along, clap along or move? Are they allocated a fixed place in the auditorium or are they allowed to move around the room? Do they share the space with the actors or are the spheres of the stage and the audience separate? The artists must agree on such questions during the development phase of the production and develop appropriate strategies to communicate this with their staging.

(c) Partnership between artists and children

Every performance in a TEY context should create a space in which multiple generations can experience and discover things together. However, as the relationship between children and adult artists is characterised by an imbalance of responsibility and competence that remains hierarchical in certain aspects, the adult artists have a dual responsibility in the performance (cf. Domrös 2015, 35). They have conceived the encounter and associate their staging with expectations and ideas about what might happen; they feel responsible for the ‘success’ of the artistic event. At the same time, they enter into contact with the participating children and adults as equal partners, want to be open to reactions and impulses and may have to accept if the programme is understood, used, interpreted and unfolds differently than intended.

“One’s own legitimate will to create and the associated vulnerability runs parallel to the willingness to truly engage with the other person

2 Cf. Böhnisch 2010, 120 and Wartemann 2009a, 151.

3 Cf. pp. 18-21.

and allow them to relinquish their creative sovereignty.” (Domrös 2015, 36)

The artists therefore need to pay particular attention during the performance, which could be described as a pendulum movement between directing and guiding on the one hand and receptiveness and openness on the other.

Post-performance

How are the spectators released from the theatre situation?

The end of the performance should be as clearly marked as the beginning. The action of performance should conclude with an intensity that makes it clear that it has reached an end point. This strongly relates to how the overall performance has been structured. By the end, it must become clear that the processes and actions of the performance cannot continue. This can be achieved, for example, by increasing the number of objects present onstage and eventually preventing any more objects finding a place. Alternatively, the starting point of the performance can be repeated to emphasise that the joint journey of actors and spectators has come to an end. The end point of the performance can also be emphasised by returning the lighting to the mood created directly before the performance began. It is important that this end point is marked clearly and, if possible, using an extension of the artistic language of the performance. In contrast, it is irritating when a performance stops rather abruptly, and the presence of the performers changes abruptly, switching from their playing and presentation posture to applause mode and taking a bow. Of course, this also marks the end of the performance, but applause is not aesthetically inherent to the

performance, rather it follows a theatrical convention that very young spectators are probably not familiar with at all.

However, the moment of applause and thus the appreciation of the actors' performances should not be avoided. It is a moment of transition into post-performance. Often it is the adult spectators who start the applause, and the very young spectators then join in. Since young children are often unaware of the value of this gesture towards the artists and unfamiliar with the convention of strong or weak applause as an evaluation of the artists' performance, they only clap very briefly.

After the applause, the post-performance can be continued in different ways. In the simplest case, the spectators now simply leave the theatre space and may be wished farewell individually and personally by the actors. Another way of bidding farewell to the audience is a kind of encore by the players, who instead of inviting the audience onto the stage, play with objects and items from the performance in a way that was previously unseen. They might also repeat a song, a piece of music or a dance from the performance as an encore, as in a concert. In another case, the players leave the stage area and come into the auditorium to give each spectator, children and adults, a gift to take home. This is usually based on an element that played a decisive role in the performance, such as a paper boat, a stone, a marble or a feather. In a way, this helps to prolong the experience of the performance as the objects accompany the spectators on their way home and remind them of the performance experience days or weeks into the future.

However, as we have already noted in the chapter on audience participation, it is now a TEY convention that after the performance, as part of the post-perfor-

mance, there is a time of play for very young spectators in the stage space. This final play is not part of the performance but part of the artistic experience and should also be considered and designed as part of the “Over-All-Dramaturgy” in staging the work. The invitation to play is a ritual with which the theatre visit is concluded. The spectators' play forms a bridge from the theatre world to the everyday world and can also be seen as a ritual celebration of leaving the theatre.

The stage space remains an artistic space when the children play after the performance; its aesthetic quality is not devalued by children's play. Rather, children appropriate this space with their creative play, using the objects and items

with which the performers had previously played. Meaningful actions take place in the stage space in post-performance in a similar way to how the performers used it during the performance. The children's play can be immersed, absorbed and imitative – even presenting themselves as players. In this way, the after-play and the behaviour of the children – many of whom are not yet able to express themselves verbally – can be valuable feedback for the players. The transition from the theatrical reality of the performance to everyday reality is marked by the discovery and exploration of the stage space with the children's very own means of appropriating the world – play.

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Appendix

Subjects of the Artistic Directors Meetings in the Small Size Projects (2010-2018)

1st Artistic Directors Meeting
Hamm (Germany) 2010
The performer's relationship to the audience
The interplay of performer and spectator from the performer's point of view

2nd Artistic Directors Meeting
Budapest (Hungary) 2011
Words and stories in the theatre for the very young
A dramaturgy of the theatre for the very young

3rd Artistic Directors Meeting
Helsinki (Finland) 2012
The construction of meaning by the spectator
Analyzing performance

4th Artistic Directors Meeting
Ljubljana (Slovenia)
Initial points and final purposes
The artistic approach to the very young audience

5th Artistic Directors Meeting
Newry (UK / Northern Ireland)
Artistic Positions in the Theatre for Early Years
The artistic work of directors in dialogue

6th Artistic Directors Meeting
Charleroi (Belgium) 2015
Practices and formats of artistic research in the aesthetic practice of TEY
Finding individual questions for artistic research

7th Artistic Directors Meeting
Poznan (Poland) 2016
Define what Theatre for Early Years is!
A reflection of the present practice of TEY in Europe

8th Artistic Directors Meeting
Ljubljana (Slovenia) 2017
Simplicity in Theatre for Early Years
A reflection on a characteristic feature of TEY

9th Artistic Directors Meeting
Vitoria (Spain) 2018
Dramaturgy in Theatre for Early Years
Analysing Performance

Subjects of the Follow up Meetings in the Mapping Project (2019-2023)

Follow up meeting 1
Bologna (Italy) 2019
The role of Dramaturgy in Theatre for Early Years

Follow up meeting 2
Online-Workshop March 2022
The setting of rules, boundaries and limitations (Dramaturgy of frames)

Follow up meeting 3
Online-Workshop October 2022
Playing with expectations (Dramaturgy of surprise)

Follow up Meeting 4
Charleroi (Belgium) 2023
Dramaturgy of the audience as dramaturgy of participation (Concepts of participation in TEY)

Mapping. A Map on the Aesthetics of Performing Arts for Early Years

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The Mapping partnership is formed by theatres, cultural institutions and artists who have established a deep relationship with early years over time, and who are willing to offer their specific know-how in developing this piece of Research.



The partnership is spread across the entire territory of the European Union, involving **18 partners from 17 European countries.**

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