

The Geometry of Culture: Urban Space and Theatre Buildings in Twentieth-Century Berlin

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In her 1983 book, *Semiotik des Theaters*, Erika Fischer-Lichte referred to theatre as part of 'die Geometrie der Kultur', a network of relationships materialized in space that symbolizes cultural experience.¹ The concept of the geometry of culture may enable us to show how, in an urban space, different strands of human activities find their expression in the outline of urban space. Lewis Mumford demonstrates in *The City in History* that political programmes, economic interests, and cultural concepts influence the city's organization as well as the functions which individual buildings take in the urban environment.² Cultural historians and semioticians such as Mary Henderson, Monika Steinhauser, Michael Hays, and Marvin Carlson have adopted this perspective for their investigations of the history of theatre in various metropolitan areas.³ For example, Henderson studies the relationship between the theatres and the financial district in New York City; Michael Hays and Monika Steinhauser analyse particular urban monuments, such as the Lincoln Center in New York and the Paris Opera. Marvin Carlson analyses how theatre buildings have been integrated historically as public monuments in various urban settings. Within the context of such studies I will examine the spatial and aesthetic re-alignments that World War II forced upon the integration of theatre buildings in Berlin, taking as case studies four major theatres: the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, the Deutsches Theater, the Schillertheater and the Volksbühne.

Each theatre building situated in an urban environment has a cultural identity. This identity consists of several components: the location of the theatre, its architecture, its relationship to surrounding neighbourhoods, its aesthetic programme and the political support it receives from various social groups. Thus, the term 'cultural identity' stands actually for a complex system of references. However, this cultural identity is dialectical in nature when looked at over a period of time, since an urban environment is always subject to change. The dynamics of social, political, and economic changes may challenge and at times contradict a theatre's original cultural and aesthetic identity. From this perspective, the urban space-theatre equation in Berlin before and after World War II is paradigmatic. The war having disrupted the cultural landscape that had

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emerged over a period of seventy years, the original city-theatre relationships have been challenged by extreme changes in the system of reference. From a contemporary perspective, several historical layers of urban space are associated with these theatres, each disseminating different and sometimes contradictory messages about the theatres' identities.⁴ Therefore, the historically-emergent identities of these theatres inform our knowledge of the dynamic of city-theatre relationships.

Between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of World War II, Berlin had developed into a cultural and political centre with a distinct urban landscape. The city core obtained a specific outline in which political, economic, and cultural institutions had their place and were closely linked to particular residential areas (Plate I). The intersection Friedrichstrasse-Unter den Linden was the centre of business and



PLATE I Central Berlin circa 1922. The map shows major governmental, economic, and cultural landmarks. The intersection Unter den Linden-Friedrichstrasse forms the east-west and north-south axis that shapes the outline of the centre. The area presented became the city centre of East Berlin.

From: Otto Friedrich, *Before the Deluge. A Portrait of Berlin in the 1920's* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972, inserted between pages 66-67).

entertainment, crowded with beer halls, cafes, and hotels. Just north of this point was the Friedrichstrasse international station. Government buildings and embassies were located to the southwest, along the Tiergarten Park, which separated the urban core from the developing residential areas in Charlottenburg and along the Kurfürstendamm. The nobility and upper class relocated to these neighbourhoods as banks and businesses moved into their former residential areas, which were south and east of Unter den Linden. This developing business district was flanked by the Potsdamer Platz, the busiest traffic hub in Europe at the time. Finally, farther to the east, large working class neighbourhoods which had sprung up with industrialization in the late 1800s marked the city core's eastern and southeastern borders.

Most theatres maintained a close relationship with the business centre. Major private theatres developed in the area around Friedrichstrasse station. Houses for operettas such as the Metropol, the Apollo, the Winter Garden, the Scala, and the Komische Oper clustered near Friedrichstrasse. These theatres were also close to hotels such as the Adlon, thus ensuring accessibility for tourists and a mass audience from the Berlin suburbs. For these theatres there was a clear relationship between their aspirations as profit making, private theatres, depending on financial stability, and their location close to the thriving business centre of Berlin. With the destruction and the division of the city, most of these theatres lost their economic and cultural context and with it their importance for theatrical life. This process is illustrated by the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm (Plate II) which, after the war, became the home of the Berliner Ensemble and the workshop for the application of Brecht's idea of a critically and socially engaged theatre. It was built in 1892 and was located, much like the theatres mentioned above, close to the business and entertainment district. Located just north of the city core, it was also closely connected to the somewhat bohemian neighbourhood around Schiffbauerdamm, Weidendamm, Friedrichstrasse, and Maternstrasse. The building itself was architecturally integrated with the residences around it and only the small tower distinguished the building's façade clearly from the rest of the neighbourhood. Aside from the brief directorship of Max Reinhardt, between 1903 and 1906, the theatre mainly housed operettas and other light entertainments and was only one of many theatre buildings in the commercial district around Friedrichstrasse. Thus, it was culturally and spatially integrated into the middle class idea of theatre as a commercial entertainment enterprise.

During the war, however, the residential area surrounding the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm was destroyed, and, after 1961, the Berlin Wall cut through the neighbourhood close to the theatre. These changes, part of a larger disintegration in the traditional cultural and political relations of



PLATE II The Theater am Schiffbauerdamm—known also as Neues Theater (1892-1912), Monti's Operettenhaus (1912-1916), and Neues Operettenhaus (1916-1925)—as it appeared from its opening in 1892 until World War II. It is located on Schiffbauerdamm at the banks of the Spree across from the Friedrichstrasse train station.

From: Harald Zielske, *Deutsche Theaterbauten bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Selbstverlag der Gesellschaft für Theatergeschichte, 1971, p. 179).

the city, made the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm a point of reference for at least three different urban identities: old imperial Berlin, communist East Berlin, and democratic West Berlin. These identities are experienced in the physical appearance and location of the theatre. Instead of being located in the centre of a developed urban structure it stands now at the western outskirts of East Berlin, cut off from the west, north and

south parts of Berlin, with direct reference only to the communist government buildings and the working class districts in the east. The building's design, with its small tower and neoclassical lines seems to be out of place in the new context. Although the tower's outline was slightly altered through the war, the design and the original location of the theatre contradict the Brechtian aesthetic which has become the programme of the company playing there today (Plate III). Now, the building stands symbolically at the outskirts of the communist government, marking to some extent a barricade against the influence of bourgeois aesthetic. However, since time has changed the spatial context and reference of the theatre there is a mixed aesthetic message of the building's identity in the context of the urban structure of East Berlin.

The cultural identity of the Deutsches Theater has been similarly transformed. Formerly the heart of Max Reinhardt's theatrical empire, it

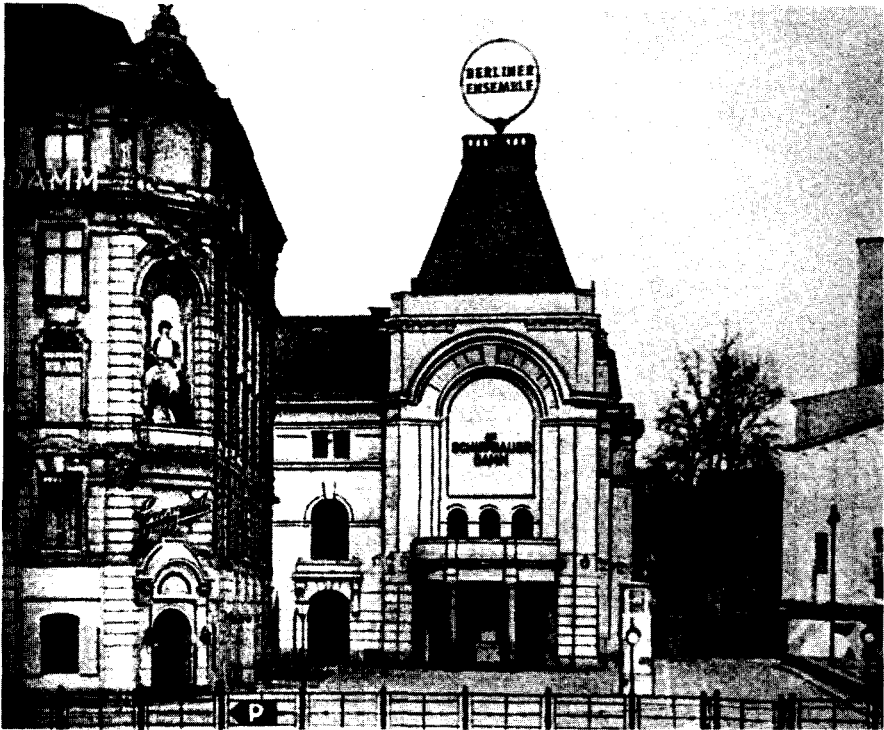


PLATE III The Theater am Schiffbauerdamm circa 1950. The altered façade stands now in a much destroyed neighbourhood close to the bend in the Spree that forms the border to East Berlin.

From: Frederic Ewen, *Bertolt Brecht. His Life, His Art, and His Times* (New York: Citadel Press, 1967, opposite p. 320.

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became the official state theatre of the German Democratic Republic. The building was located north of the commercial district of the former Imperial capital. When Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann built the theatre in 1850 he chose a location on the Schumannstrasse somewhat remote from 'official' Berlin. The building was integrated into the street architecture; it stood wall to wall with the façades of three storey houses which were common in this residential, somewhat bohemian district (Plate IV). However, with the growth of Berlin, the theatre came to be proportionally closer to the city centre. This emerging integration was emphasized when Otto Brahm, director for ten years, had to leave his post to make room in 1904 for Max Reinhardt, whom the new owner, Adolf L'Arronge, thought to be a less literary director.⁵ Reinhardt, who came to dominate the quarter around Friedrichstrasse, then bought the Deutsches Theater in 1905 and initiated the major change in its appearance: the addition of a neoclassical façade. This stood out from the residences around it and made a greater visual impact (Plate V). It was to emphasize the new cultural context, i.e. the link to the commercial district and the creation of a focal point in the neighbourhood.

The re-alignment of the cultural and political forces as well as the re-drawing of boundaries after the war caused a major shift in the integration



PLATE IV The Schumannstrasse before 1900. The street is part of a bohemian residential area north of Unter den Linden, running east to west just south of the Charité Hospital.

From: Alfred Dreyfuss, *Deutsches Theater Berlin* (Berlin (East): Henschelverlag, 1983. p. 17).



PLATE V The Deutsches Theater. The theatre is located along the Schumannstrasse between Albrechtstrasse and Luisenstrasse, one block west and one block north of the Grosses Schauspielhaus.

From: Harald Zielske, *ibid.*, p. 139.

of the Deutsches Theater into the city. The programmatic transformation of Reinhardt's flagship theatre into the East German state theatre can also be identified in the transformation of the theatre's spatial relationship to its environment. Part of the Deutsches Theater's original neighbourhood had been destroyed in the war; in addition, the construction of the Wall in 1961 cut the rest of the area off from the theatre. The building lost its function as a cultural centre within that area and as cultural focal point for Berlin generally; it became an extension of the communist culture of Unter den Linden. Although the theatre has the same location today, its position in regard to the political and cultural urban order has changed: it is located close to cultural centres such as the Palast der Republik, and attracts an audience of working class and government officials, and serves as a cultural representative of official socialist culture. Similarly, the programme of the Deutsches Theater has shifted to accommodate its identity within the new political culture.

Besides a repertory of national and international classics, previously the major focus of Reinhardt's ensemble, the company began under the leadership of Wolfgang Langhoff to focus on German and Soviet socialist literature (1946). With this change of direction, the company's goals were to educate a new audience, recruited from industrial work places, and to contribute to the discussion of issues crucial to the newly formed socialist state.

Despite the programmatic changes and the spatial organization of Berlin, the cultural identities of the Deutsches Theater and the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm have become fragmented. Politically, both theatres have established an identity within East Berlin as the symbolical vanguard in cultural and political battles with the Western system. However, there is a cultural identity which transcends the post-war context. Because of their historical association with key modern directors, Max Reinhardt and Bertolt Brecht, both theatres have become cultural institutions which attract a wider audience, comprised of both East Berliners and an international public. This internationally recognized historical significance creates the potential for a quite different cultural identity: a fragmented audience, divided by the Wall and by political systems, watches a performance in a theatre building whose fractured identity is expressed in its location at the borders of the new city and the centre of the old. The experience of a performance at either theatre is marked by this historical consciousness.

In the case of the Schillertheater in West Berlin, the change of references in the city-theatre relationship had quite a different effect. While the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm and the Deutsches Theater grouped around the traditional city core in the early 1900s, the Schillertheater was part of the newly developed residential area on the Kantstrasse, the Bismarckstrasse, a westward extension of the famous street Unter den Linden and the Kurfürstendamm. A comparison of the city-theatre relationship before and after the war in the case of the Schillertheater provides an example of gentrification: this originally anti-establishment theatre became after the war the cultural centrepiece for the middle class establishment in West Berlin.

In pre-war Berlin the development to the west of the city had been identified as a major cultural challenge to the predominance of the original city core near Friedrichstrasse.⁶ This westward movement occurred not only because of the development of the transportation system, which connected Charlottenburg and Friedenau with the city and other suburbs, but also because of the rapid growth of these districts. With the development of these districts, many artists followed the upper middle class to the west end of the city. On the Kurfürstendamm were located famous cafés such as the 'Café Grössenwahn' and the 'Romanisches Café',

the gathering place for celebrities such as Gottfried Benn and Thomas Mann. Furthermore, because the film industry preferred the Kurfürstendamm for their cinemas, this street became the centre of the German film culture.⁷ This concentration of art and audience was a very fertile ground for the theatre as well. However, in contrast to the development around Unter den Linden-Friedrichstrasse, in this district of broad long streets, small businesses, and cafés, theatres did not cluster around a core. Instead, they were situated throughout the area as artistic gathering points. The Schillertheater became only one of many theatres such as the Renaissancetheater, Theater des Westens, and the Städtische Oper that reflected in their location the steady growth of the diverse districts (Plate VI). The district council of Charlottenburg supported the construction of these theatres, in particular the Schillertheater, in order to compete with the city centre and to challenge the established culture in the Friedrichstrasse-Unter den Linden area, where the financial and political centres were located.⁸

The Schillertheater was one of the first theatres built in this new and growing area (Plate VII). Built in 1906 by the architect Max Littmann, it was located at the westward extension of Unter den Linden and Bismarckstrasse and its construction coincided with the street's extension. It was, thus, one of the first focal points of the new culture in the west. In terms of theatre architecture the building must be considered in the context of the spatial ideas of the architects Max Littmann, and, above all, Oskar



PLATE VI The Schillertheater in 1938. The theatre is located at the westward extension of Unter den Linden and Charlottenburger Chaussee (today Strasse des 17. Juni) at the Bismarckstrasse.

From: Harald Zielske, *ibid.*, p. 269.

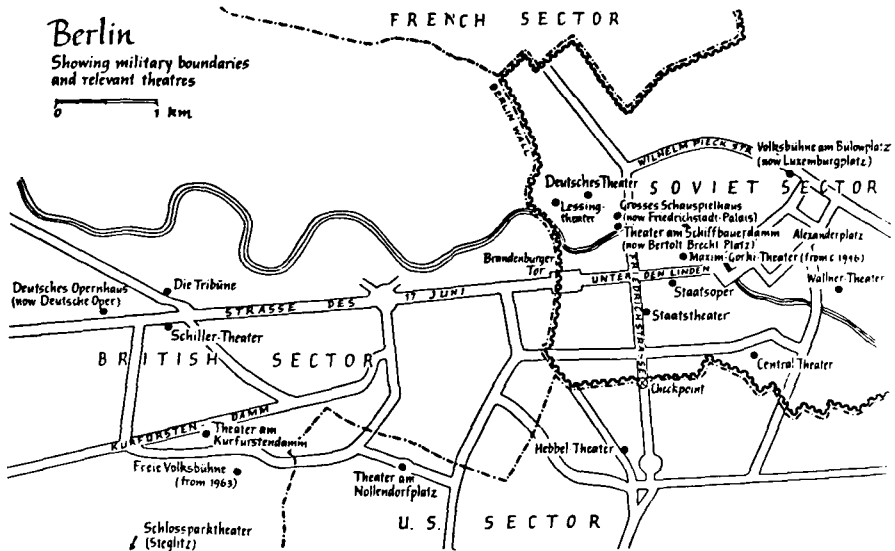


PLATE VII Current location of the theatre buildings in West and East Berlin, showing their distribution with respect to the western city centre along Kurfürstendamm and the eastern city centre at Alexanderplatz.

From: John Willett, *The Theatre of Erwin Piscator: Half a Century of Politics in the Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1978, inside the cover).

Kaufmann, who shaped the theatrical landscape in the west. Kaufmann, in particular, left a distinct mark on the city. His theatres are characterized by their tall fly towers and their façades with stripes of stone and glass, arranged in long ovals. All of his, and Littmann's, designs give emphasis to the theatres' entrances, thus focusing on the building as an independent cultural area. Kaufmann designed the Hebbeltheater (1907), the Volksbühne (1914), the Theater am Kurfürstendamm (1921) and the Komödie (1927).⁹ The buildings of these architects were located as cultural landmarks, distributed over a relatively wide area in accordance with the development of the west of Berlin.

After the war, the Schillertheater rose to a dominant position, a focus for the new city centre of West Berlin at the expense of other theatres. The rise to prominence is a striking case of the effect of the geometry of culture, in that economic, geographical, and cultural considerations played a major role in determining the integration of this theatre building into the network of urban space.

There are two major reasons why the Schillertheater could assume the leading position it has maintained in the considerations of cultural

politicians until today. The first was the rise of the Kurfürstendamm as the virtual centre of West Berlin. Although West Berlin lacks a central political authority and although the western part has several smaller important centres such as Steglitz, Schöneberg, and Spandau, the Kurfürstendamm could assume this leading function due to its excellent accessibility to highways, airports, and stations.¹⁰ The location of many cinemas on this street must be counted as another supporting factor. Furthermore, the banks which had left Berlin immediately after the war have re-established branches behind the Kurfürstendamm, so enhancing the economic significance of the area.

The second reason was a decision by the city council with major implications for the cultural geography in Berlin. In 1951, Mayor Ernst Reuter, who had sought a cultural centrepiece for West Berlin, envisioned a dominant theatre with the specific function of being a bridge between East and West Berlin as well as being a national theatre.¹¹ In search for a theatre building which could fulfil that function, the city council had decided against the Hebbeltheater, which had survived the war but stood in the rubble close to the newly drawn border with the east. Consequently, the Hebbeltheater, which had opened immediately after the war, was closed and a decision was made to rebuild the Schillertheater because, as the authorities reasoned, the wealthy neighbourhoods in Charlottenburg would be a more appropriate environment for the proposed national theatre. When the building was reconstructed, the architects Heinz Voelker and Rolf Grosse provided an imposing oval façade facing Bismarckstrasse, the main thoroughfare. This façade is a striking focal point at night, emphasizing the open lobby area as a social gathering place and enhancing the theatre's intended function as a national theatre (Plate VIII). Thus, the political leadership of Berlin transformed the cultural identity of the Schillertheater as an expression of their political and cultural will.

The consequences of this cultural decision are still felt today. The Schillertheater has strengthened its position as the theatre of the middle class. The idea of the Schillertheater as a national theatre was reinforced in 1983 by the then acting mayor Eberhard Diepgen, from the conservative CDU and his minister of culture, Volker Hassemer, when Heribert Sasse was appointed as its new director. Sasse, who had been the director of the Renaissancetheater, was not considered to be one of Germany's leading directors. However, Sasse applied for the position specifically with the goal of making the Schillertheater a national theatre. This goal made him a more attractive candidate to the city officials than directors such as Claus Peymann, who were artistically more successful, but politically more liberal.¹²



PLATE VIII The Schillertheater at Bismarckstrasse, remodelled in 1951. The oval glass structure reflects the upgraded cultural position of the theatre.

From: Boleslaw Barlog and Albert Bessler, eds, *Theater in Berlin 1951-1961, Zehn Jahre Schiller-Theater, Schlosspark-Theater und Schiller-Theater Werkstatt* (Berlin: Rembrandt Verlag, 1962, p. 13).

The beautiful Hebbeltheater, on the other hand, has all but been abandoned and is only used occasionally for small theatrical events or receptions. Ironically, the area surrounding the Hebbeltheater has been upgraded in the 1980s through the projects of the Internationale Bauausstellung and the move of young professionals, intellectuals, and artists to this area. This gentrification is already changing the cultural context, so that a new theatrical function for the Hebbeltheater may be expected in the near future.

Finally, the Volksbühne represents an excellent example of how the urban-theatre equation may change as a theatre's spatial relationship to the centres of government authority changes. The location of the original Volksbühne at Bülowplatz was largely determined by its specific needs and aims. The Volksbühne's financial foundation was a large subscription system supported to a great extent by industrial workers. Its major goal was to bring art to the working class. This was expressed in the large inscription on the theatre building itself: 'die Kunst dem Volke'. From the 1890s up to 1914 the Volksbühne lacked its own building. For performances it was forced to rent existing buildings such as the Ostendtheater.

These rented theatres, however, were very small for the growing audiences. Therefore, the Volksbühne and the Neue Freie Volksbühne, which had earlier divided the Volksbühne movement, agreed to unify again to finance a new house. The building at the Bülowplatz was completed at the end of 1914. It opened in 1915 and became the only major theatre in the east of the city. Located just outside the city centre, the Bülowplatz was part of the district of Prenzlauer Berg, a residential area predominantly for industrial workers (Plate IX). The relocation, remote from the political and economic centre of Berlin, was based on the movement's commitment to the workers' access to education and culture, but also may have been an expression of the fact that the Volksbühne had run into trouble with political authorities who were suspicious of its aims and the plays being performed.

The Volksbühne, designed by the architect Oskar Kaufmann, was one of Berlin's largest and best equipped modern theatres. The clear and simple lines of the building's façade as well as its dominant free-standing position within the triangle formed by the major streets made it the focal



PLATE IX The Volksbühne in 1935. The theatre is located at the eastern end of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Strasse (today Liebknechtstrasse), an extension of Unter den Linden, at Bülowplatz (today Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz). The building is surrounded by working class residences.

From: Hans-Norbert Burkert et al., *“Machtergreifung” Berlin 1933* (Berlin: Rembrandt Verlag, 1982, p. 60).

point in a neighbourhood of five and six storey working class apartments. Thus, the placement of the Volksbühne emphasized the theatre's close tie to the workers as well as its role as leader of an aesthetic and cultural movement independent of the state supported and commercial theatres.

The Volksbühne at Bülowplatz was destroyed during the war. The re-establishment of the movement became a primary goal in both parts of Berlin. The authorities in each area conceived of it as a reflection of the different visions in east and west of the renewal of society and culture after the war. In East Berlin the Volksbühne was merged into the state-organized union, the Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, which considered the Volksbühne as a representative social class organization. In practical terms, that meant that anybody in East Berlin was eligible for the services which the Volksbühne had specifically set up for its members. In a symbolic gesture, it was rebuilt at its former location and opened at the now renamed Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz in 1954. However, through the division of the city, the political centre and the residential quarters of East Berlin moved farther to the east after the war. Due to this realignment, the Volksbühne at Bülowplatz, which originally had kept a distance from the political and economic centre of the city, acquired a close physical orientation toward political power which simultaneously reflected its close ideological connection with the government. In this way, the building's spatial reference changed through a reform of the urban context in the east.

The integration of the western version of the Volksbühne into the urban structure of West Berlin stands in striking contrast to that in the East. The Volksbühne movement in West Berlin regrouped around Siegfried Nestriepke, who had been a key figure of the Volksbühne movement since World War I. Nestriepke founded a special limited liability company, which began performances at the Theater am Kurfürstendamm in 1949.¹³ The use of this building illustrates the movement's small scale beginning after the war: in contrast to the imposing setting of the original Volksbühne in the east, the plain façade of the Theater am Kurfürstendamm was integrated into the ornate exteriors of the buildings surrounding it, making no dominant cultural and aesthetic statement. To some extent, however, the choice of this location may be interpreted as an attempt to integrate the movement into what had been, before the war, an anti-establishment neighbourhood. As the organization grew — it must be remembered that until the construction of the Wall in 1961 the organization also had about 25000 members in the East who came to the West to see performances — it sought an appropriate location within the western half of Berlin. The Volksbühne chose as its new location an open area just two blocks away from the Kurfürstendamm, where it opened on 1 May 1963 under the direction of Erwin Piscator, giving Charlottenburg yet

another important theatre building within its already existing network (Plate X). Although the building lies close to the business centre of West Berlin, it is somewhat isolated, set back within a park which shelters the theatre to a great extent from city traffic and noise, as well as from close physical orientation to other buildings.



PLATE X The Freie Volksbühne in West Berlin after 1963. A small parklike area surrounds the building at Joachimstaler Strasse and Schaperstrasse, two blocks south of the Kurfürstendamm.

From: Walther G. Oschilewski, *Freie Volksbühne Berlin* (Berlin: Stapp Verlag, photo No. 45, no page).

The new building and the new location have become the symbol of the declining connection of the western Volksbühne to the workers' movement. The integration into the city centre of the west proved to be culturally and spatially a step in a different direction for the Volksbühne, reflecting the gradual change in its membership. When the wall was constructed, the organization lost the majority of its members in the East, who could no longer attend the performances in the West.¹⁴ As a consequence the new building proved to be too large for a declining membership and the repertory system had to be abandoned by the mid-1960s. Since then, the concept of the Volksbühne has shifted to serve a mostly middle class audience and the theatre has also been used regularly to stage the annual Theater Festival, at which the best productions of the

German speaking countries are presented. Thus, the purpose and function of the theatre has been gradually adjusted to its location: the building has more and more become the focal point for the cultural pursuits of the middle class, and this function is reflected spatially in the building's central position in the economic and cultural geography in West Berlin.

The four examples of the city-theatre relationship presented in this essay reveal different kinds of shifting identities in the urban environment and provide us with a perspective on Berlin's cultural geography as a whole. The analysis of the location of the theatre buildings within Berlin's spatial organization shows that the theatre building is not an autonomous and static space, but the physical nexus at which many cultural and political influences converge. Within the overall cultural geography a building's relationship to the city environment is highly dynamic: as the theatre's identity is redefined by the changing urban context, the theatre building preserves signs of its former function. The analysis of the city-theatre relationship is part of the larger question of the audience-stage relationship: the physical setting provides a symbolic representation of a theatre's identity which, consciously or subconsciously, affects the reception of the performance. Particularly, in urban-theatre relationships which have undergone drastic redefinitions in a short period of time, such as the ones brought about by World War II or the ones which will possibly accompany the current upheaval in East Germany, this effect may be very strong and must be considered by the resident theatre company.¹⁵ The case of Berlin has demonstrated that the theatre space-urban space relationship at any particular moment is the crystallization of ongoing historical processes. These processes are part of our historical consciousness. Therefore, the urban-theatre relationship can only be understood by cross reference to its temporal, spatial, and cultural dimensions.

Notes

1. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Semiotik des Theaters*, Vol. 1 (Tubingen, 1983), p. 135.
2. Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (New York, 1961).
3. Monika Steinhauser, *Die Architektur der Pariser Oper* (Munich, 1969); Mary Henderson, *The City and the Theatre* (New Jersey, 1973); Michael Hays, *The Public and Performance: Essays in the History of French and German Theater, 1871-1900* (Ann Arbor, 1981); Michael Hays, 'Lincoln Center and Some Other Cultural Paradigms', *Theater*, 18, No. 1, Winter 1983, 25-29; Marvin Carlson, 'The Theatre as Civic Monument', *Theatre Journal*, 40, No. 1, March 1988, 12-32; Marvin Carlson, *The Place of Performance* (Ithaca, 1989).
4. I am indebted for this critical perspective to Roland Barthes' essay 'The Eiffel Tower'. Susan Sontag, ed. *A Barthes Reader* (New York, 1982), 236-250.
5. Alfred Dreyfuss, *Deutsches Theater Berlin* (Berlin, East, 1983), p. 138.
6. Klaus Wieck, *Kurfürstendamm und Champs-Élysées* (Berlin, 1967), p. 32.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

8. The only major official or artistic connection with the theatres in the city centre came when Leopold Jessner, the director of the state theatre, took over the directorship in 1919 and brought Expressionism also to the Schillertheater.

9. Harald Zieske, *Deutsche Theaterbauten bis zum zweiten Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 1971), p. 67. Max Littmann also designed the Prinzregententheater, Munich (1901) and the Künstlertheater, Munich (1908).

10. Rudolf Krause, *Die Berliner City* (Berlin, 1958), p. 73.

11. Henning Müller, *Theater der Restauration* (Berlin, East, 1981), pp. 173–174.

12. Michael Merschmeier, 'Kühn oder Tollkühn? Heribert Sasse, der Aufsteiger des Jahres'. *Theater Heute*, 8, August 1983, p. 2.

13. Cecil Davies, *Theatre for the People: The Story of the Volksbühne* (Manchester, 1977), p. 127.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

15. The former director of the Schaubühne Berlin, Peter Stein, may have felt this effect. He resigned from his post after the company had been relocated from a building in Kreuzberg to the representative Mendelssohn building on the upper Kurfürstendamm.

Chronicles of the Time: Acting as Applied Criticism in *Hamlet*

Geoffrey Bent

It is common to describe the end product of an actor's labour as 'an interpretation', but somehow the expression's serious, critical dimension is never fully intended. Only a scholar with his pipe and tweeds would seem to possess the appropriate gravity to render judicious overviews of this kind. When one wants to know what *Hamlet* is 'about', they naturally turn to heavily footnoted exegesis found in periodicals with circulations under a thousand. What could someone prancing before a number greater than this in a single evening, wearing grease paint and tights no less, possibly add to such an exalted investigation?

Actually, quite a bit. More than anything else, *Hamlet* is a piece of theatre, written by a man who probably spent more of his life on the boards than at his writing desk. All the world may be a stage, but this is nowhere more true than in *Hamlet*. The theatre permeates the play: characters identified as actors come and go, gossip; theories about acting are voiced, a play is performed that proves a turning point in the action. There is much in the very nature of acting that commends itself to this hermeneutic task. The best acting, like the best criticism, is distinguished by an overall grasp of the character that also allows for the vagaries and contradictions that lurk in the particulars. A challenge that performance