

Ambivalenzen des Übergangs

Die Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz in Berlin in den neunziger Jahren

von
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Leseprobe

The dissertation analyzes the special contribution of artistic practice in post-socialist transition in Germany. The study concentrates on the Volksbühne theater in East Berlin as a case study. Like all East-German state subsidized theaters, it faced several challenges in the transition process, above all those of surviving as an institution, finding new legitimation in a changed political context and adapting to the mechanisms of the cultural market. Under the direction of Frank Castorf, the Volksbühne became well-known not only for doing so very successfully, but also for addressing the social, political and cultural conflicts in post-unification Germany in a very provocative and aesthetically innovative way.

The five main chapters of the dissertation are dedicated to 1) the history of the Volksbühne until 1989; 2) Frank Castorf's stage production 'Räuber von Schiller' that reassesses both the history of revolutions (that of 1989 in particular) and a century of modernist and avant-garde theater in East and West; 3) the transformations of the theater landscape and cultural politics in Berlin after 1989; 4) the artistic team and profile and the marketing campaigns of the Volksbühne in the 1990s; 5) Christoph Marthaler's stage production 'Murx den Europäer' that points to an East-Western co-production of ›Ostalgie‹ (nostalgia for the East).

The cultural reorganization processes the Volksbühne was engaged in were manifold and not limited to East Germany. Besides coming to terms with post-socialist transition, they also included reassessments of the inheritance of 1968 and of transnational avant-garde movements, new alignments of high art theater and postmodern pop culture, the emergence of reunited Berlin in the international arena and reformulations of German national identity in a globalizing world. They reveal a rich and complex history of cultural entanglements, transfers and conflicts in East and West before and after the fall of the wall.

The Volksbühne's success was based on its particular function in the transition period. Its productions and marketing aesthetically transformed and distorted symbols of a controversial past and of present conflicts, without taking purely affirming or condemning positions. Due to these aesthetic techniques of producing ambiguities and of modeling unresolved social and political problems, the Volksbühne could become a space integrating – but not at all harmonizing – very different kinds of social milieus, political views and high- and lowbrow cultures. While these strategies remained disputed, the Volksbühne not only became an internationally recognized innovator of avant-garde theater, but also contributed to the cultural reinvention of Germany in the 1990s.>