

31st Annual CDE Conference, Erfurt, Germany, June 8-11, 2023

The German Society for Contemporary Theater and Drama in English (CDE) is pleased to announce its 31st annual conference, co-hosted by the University of Erfurt and the Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg. It will be held as a residential conference at the Monastery of St. Augustine in the city of Erfurt from June 8-11, 2023.

Theater & Community: Poetics, Politics, Performances

Recent political and epidemiological events, along with social, economic, and environmental developments, and even epistemic trends (e.g., fake news) index an increasing polarization within and between nations, cultures, and people with regard to a variety of issues. What roles can theater and drama play in re/building consensus and negotiating common ground, that is, in obtaining the basic agreement on a sense of commonality or mutual interest required for social cohesion and collective action? At the same time, given that consensus and common ground are per definition exclusive and exclusionary, as well as often of a pragmatic, temporary, and unstable nature, what are the concrete politics and aesthetics at stake in performing commonality and community? How do theater and drama negotiate the relationship between commonality and difference, individuality and collectivity? In what ways do performances partake in what Rancière calls the “re/distribution of the sensible,” that is, in staking out what can be said, seen, heard, and felt (as well as what remains outside the field of perception)? While these questions about the role and relevance of theater in troubled times are not new, they have gained particular poignancy over the past few years when, during a series of pandemic lockdowns, the very physical space of theater became inoperable. This conference therefore seeks to take stock of the various ways in which contemporary Anglophone drama and theater have negotiated, troubled, and unsettled the common grounds on which communities are built—both with regard to exigent issues (such as war, racist terror, climate crisis) as well as with regard to foundational political values (e.g., freedom, participation, equality, ecological justice) and approaches (e.g., liberalism, conservatism, nationalism). We are specifically interested in discussing how the politics of commonality and community are intertwined with poetic devices, aesthetic strategies, and practices of performance as well as how theatrical practices and dramatic representation enhance our understanding of the politics and aesthetics of community and commonality.

We invite proposals for 20-minute contributions in English that consider the nexus of theater/drama and community/commonality/common grounds from a variety of thematic, theoretical, and artistic angles, including but not limited to:

- poetic and aesthetic strategies of enacting commonality (e.g., genre, form, media)
- performative negotiations of community: belonging/not-belonging, inclusion/exclusion, individuality/collectivity (e.g., Arendt’s concept of “space of appearance,” Dillon’s “performative commons,” Butler’s “assembly,” Harney and Moten’s “undercommons”)
- spatio-temporal dimensions (e.g., presence vs. absence, proximity/immediacy vs. distance, live vs. virtual, analogue vs. digital, ephemerality vs. residue)
- affective and corporeal dimensions
- theater as (self-reflexive) theorization of community (e.g., Dolan’s “utopian performative,” Román’s “temporal and conditional we”)
- possibilities and limits of communities with regard to non-human actors (e.g., climate, pandemics)

In accordance with CDE’s constitutional policy, contributions should deal exclusively with contemporary (i.e., post-1989) theater and drama in English. They can take the form of a classic paper or more performative format.

Abstracts: Abstracts (300 words) for proposed contributions should be accompanied by a short biographical note, plus full address and institutional affiliation.

Deadline: October 15, 2022

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NB: Only paid-up members are eligible to give papers at CDE conferences. Membership subscriptions should be taken out or renewed prior to the conference. For details, please contact CDE’s treasurer Martin Riedelsheimer: martin.riedelsheimer@philhist.uni-augsburg.de