

Stage
Operations

Performing
Arts in the
Making

June 5–6
2025

Institute
of Theatre
Studies

LMU
Munich

Stage Operations: Performing Arts in the Making

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Performances might be ephemeral, fragile associations of people assembled in the here and now. But at the same time, they are material arrangements, produced by organisations called theatres: assemblies of a bigger scale and of a more stable kind that bring together a diverse cast of actants and that are intricately entangled with all kinds of socio-technical infrastructures. How do these theatres work? What part does backstage labour play in the making of performances? And why does it matter whether academics care?

An ongoing interest in artistic production and its institutional frameworks has led to an uptake of empirical methods in Theatre Studies. Yet often such approaches have been reduced to an expansion of performance analysis, with research largely staying within a hermeneutic horizon. In our experience however, the epistemic benefit of researchers leaving the stalls and entering the theatre through the stage door lies instead in getting performance out of sight, opening the possibility to encounter a different kind of theatre, or rather theatres in the plural. Although still at the horizon, performance here is less of a given,

but a thing in the making, constantly fraying at the ontological edges: a fluid entity, more concrete and less defined than the demarcated spatio-temporal encounter between humans that theory has identified as theatre's essence.

In practice then, we would claim, performativity is less of a matter of post-heroic speech acts and iterative gestures but rather a matter of the entangled doings of all kinds of things and people at work in the theatre.

It is a very pragmatic matter of constant tinkering – a matter in need of empirical study. This methodological reorientation raises bigger questions about the disciplinary outlook of Theatre Studies and its epistemic position and calls for a transdisciplinary perspective.

Taking our cue from the pragmatic sociology of art and ethnography of music, the field of Science and Technology Studies and (post-)ANT, we bring together scholars who take a closer look at the practices that make theatre work: the crafting of stuff and the operation of machines, the administration of people and the logistics of things, the distribution of work and the organisation of time. We are especially interested in ethnographical or historiographical case studies that move beyond the focus on artistic products and heroic tales of their creation and instead focus on the complex socio-material and technological dependencies of performing arts in the making. The aim is, thus, to describe theatre as a site of production and a workplace, thereby moving beyond disciplinary boundaries and contributing to a pragmatic rethinking of performativity.

Event location

Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung

Südliches Schessrondell 23

80638 München.

An event of the Institute of Theatre Studies, LMU Munich.

www.theaterwissenschaft.uni-muenchen.de/index.html

The conference is part of the research project »The Art of Crafts. A Praxeography of the Theatre Apparatus.« funded by the German Research Foundation.

Hosts: Prof. Dr. Ulf Otto & Anna Raisch, M.A.

Research assistants: Lee Hiedeperring & Anna Schellkopf.

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Participation is free of charge. Please register until May 30, 2025 under: gewerke@rz.uni-muenchen.de.

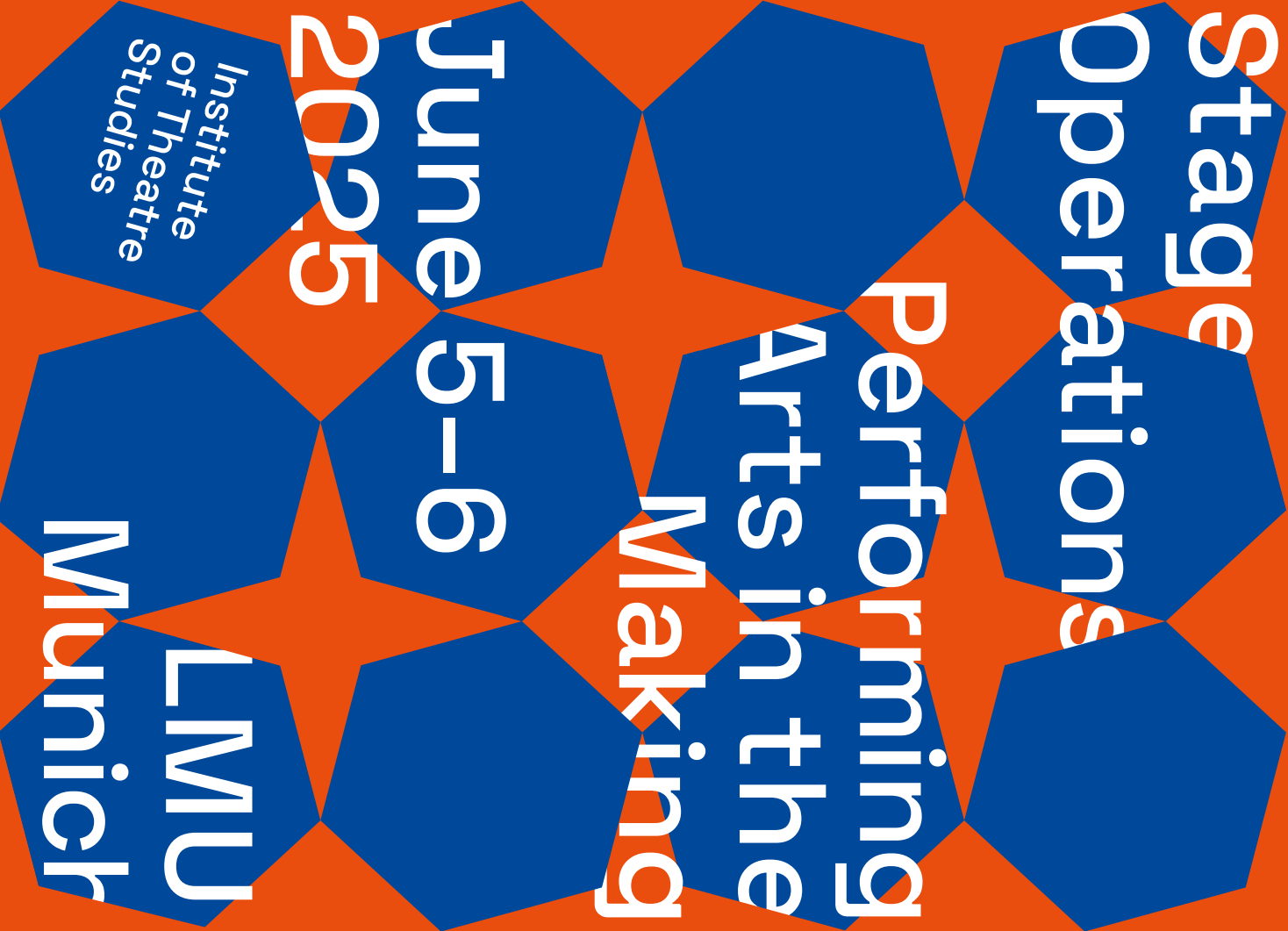
Concept & Design: Bureau Johannes Eiler

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Thursday, June 5

09.00–09.15	Welcome & opening
09.15–10.45	Alison Calhoun: »Rethinking Networks in Early French Opera: From the Passion of Wonder to Machine Psychology.«
10.45–11.00	Jochen Lamb: »Stage Technology as Operation and Artifact.«
11.00–13.15	Gundula Kreuzer: »Wagner's Creators.«
13.15–14.45	Halvard Schommartz: »Technology, Bureaucracy, Art. Theatre Technical Knowledge and the Operational Condition of Theatre in the Weimar Republic.«
14.45–15.45	Douglas Echo: »The Paradox of Memory Control: The Liberation and Degradation of Lighting Work.«
15.45	Maximilian Haas & Sandra Unathum: »The Art of Making More Sustainable Art: Postoperational Ecologies of Performance.«
17.00–18.00	Coffee break & transfer to the Deutsches Theatermuseum (DTM)
	Guided tour of the exhibition »making THEATRE. Wie Theater entsteht«, DTM.

Friday, June 6

09.30–11.00	Derek Miller: »Guides to American Theatre, ca. 1900.«
11.00–11.15	Jan Lazardig: »Technologies of Paratext.«
11.15–12.45	W.B. Worthen: »The Actor's Tech.«
12.45–14.15	Chris Salter: »Performing AI: Material Agencies in the Flux of Action.«
14.15–15.45	Lunch break
15.45–16.00	Paul Rae: »Mainstream Methods: Researching Theatre Making at Scale.«
16.00–17.30	Ulf Otto: »Making Theatre Work. Questions of Technology and a Pragmatic Sociology of Art.«
17.30–17.45	Coffee break
17.45–18.30	Anna Raisch: »Drawing Things Together.«
	Christin Essin: »The Technical Skills and Cultural Competencies of Theatrical Hairstyling.«
	Final discussion & publication planning