



La Despedida, a production by the Colombian group Mapa Teatro, engages with the topic of forgiveness and puts an alleged ex-guerrillo on stage. (Image: Rolf Abderhalden)

The aestheticisation of war violence in contemporary performing arts

The representation of war and war violence on stage is currently receiving a lot of attention by a Western audience. But how exactly is war performed and by which means? What role do documentary material, witnesses and witnesses' accounts play? This interdisciplinary research project will engage in an artistic/scholarly investigation to find out more about the aestheticisation of war violence.

Wie werden Kriege und Kriegsgewalt in den performativen Künsten inszeniert? Das Forschungsprojekt geht der Frage nach der Darstellbarkeit von Kriegsgewalt in Bezug auf die dokumentarisch arbeitende Theater- und Performanceszene und deren Faszination bei einem westlichen Publikum nach. Mittels einer künstlerisch-wissenschaftlichen Untersuchung widmet sich das interdisziplinäre Vorhaben der Ästhetisierung von Kriegsgewalt.

Introduction: Staging war is a challenge for the performing arts. Depicting perpetrators and victims, moments of violence and the destructions brought about by wars, can have implications for the actors, the piece and the public as well. How is violence represented, and how can one do justice to different perspectives and experiences? What documents and statements may be used as a basis for these representations, and where are they sourced?

Methods: The research is based on three interwoven subprojects to investigate questions about the representation of war violence in relation to the documentary theatre and performance scene. Subproject A, an artistic research, will focus on the recruitment of minors in the civil war of Colombia. Different performative strategies will be tested and presented for visualising experiences of violence; these will be reflected upon in a dialogue with a local research team. Subproject B will be a qualitative study of current plays on war violence while the documentary strategies of four exemplary productions will be investigated. Subproject C aims to gain insights into the inter- and transdisciplinary synergies that are possible between the artistic approach of Subproject A and the cultural studies approach of Subproject B. With its multidimensional approach, this project aims to make a contribution to discussing methodologies, especially in the field of artistic research.

Results: Performances touring through Europe adopting a documentary perspective repeatedly turn to armed conflict. They often generate strong emotions in audiences that are situated far away from the events in question. This interdisciplinary investigation aims to make a contribution to the academic and public debate about the role of (multimedia) documents and witness statements in representing war violence in contemporary theatre. The discussion of the results will be supported by two research performances and two workshops, and the results of the study will be published in the form of a doctoral thesis, a book and articles.

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