

4-7, JULY 2025

Interdisciplinary Summer School

“Approaching Theatre Performance From
Literary Studies and Linguistics”

OVERVIEW &
IMPRESSIONS

OVERVIEW

Away from the urban hum and buzz, fourteen advanced MA and early PhD students came together for four days to participate in the Interdisciplinary Summer School "Approaching Theatre Performance from Literary Studies and Linguistics". Nested among the forest trees, the Wilhelm-Kempf conference centre, located near Wiesbaden, where the school took place, offered a calm environment for exchange, learning, and relaxation after the sessions.

The Summer School, organised for the first time in this format, hosted students from Frankfurt (6 students), Heidelberg (6 students), Dortmund (1 student) and Bochum (1 student). The majority of them came from the field of literary and cultural studies, and some from linguistics, yet all with a common interest in theatre and performance.

Organised in collaboration, Prof. Dr. Heidi Lucja Liedke (Goethe University Frankfurt) and Prof. Dr. Daniela Landert (Heidelberg University) guided the participants through the diverse and comprehensive program alongside two guest instructors: Isabel Schmier, M.A., mentored the group through a practical workshop of improvisation theatre; Sarah Busch, M.A., offered a sincere and encouraging session on what the endeavour of a PhD looks like, where participants not only received constructive information but also had the chance to share their current work and get feedback from their peers.



Wilhelm-Kempf-Haus



Seminar room in session: Group work

The program of the Summer School took place over the course of four days (Friday to Monday). Participants arrived at lunchtime, and after having had the chance to meet, the official program started in the afternoon. The first session by Prof. Landert focused on the approach and analysis of performance from a linguistic perspective, whereas Prof. Liedke introduced the group to practices from a cultural and literary perspective. Both sessions laid the foundations for the remainder of the school by means of contextualising and setting a theoretical framework.

The evening program complemented the theoretical sessions where participants had the opportunity to view a theatrical production - the National Theatre's production of "As You Like It" - which served as a case study for the next sessions.

On the second day, both professors developed further their inputs by expanding on and bringing forth concrete research approaches and tools. The morning session was nicely counterbalanced by the practical workshop on improv theatre and proved to be a meaningful practice. In the evening, the group had the opportunity to experience a production at the Frankfurt Opera.

On the third day, participants received realistic views on how they can proceed and handle academic prospects. They shared their own work in progress and received peer feedback. In the afternoon, participants engaged in practical work by choosing case studies and applying the new tools; the results were later discussed in plenum. On the last day's morning session, both professors shared useful information on where and how to find resources for theatre and performance research.



Evening program: Viewing of National Theatre at Home production



Participants and summer school instructors at Willy-Brandt-Platz, moments before attending the LA DAMOISELLE ÉLUE /JEANNE D'ARC AU BÜCHER production at the Oper Frankfurt



Participants and instructors at the Wilhelm-Kempf-Haus



From the left: Isabel Schmier, Heidi Lucja Liedke, Sarah Busch, Daniela Landert at the Wilhelm-Kempf-Haus

...an intensive and enriching experience

*The summer school provided an intensive and enriching experience for me as it brought together participants from different disciplines with a shared interest in theatre and performance. On the first day, following a very warm introduction of both lecturers and participants, two sessions of input were held, the first one by Professor Daniela Landert from Heidelberg University and the second by Professor Heidi Liedke from Goethe University. Prof. Landert walked us through the waves of linguistics research on fictional data, while Prof. Liedke's session was more focused on performance in the sense of playtext-on-stage. Afterwards, we watched the National Theatre production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, on which we could apply the key concepts from sessions earlier that day.*

The second day started with our reflections on the play from the night before, with a focus on the elements we were introduced to on day one. What followed was a thorough look at performances on Zoom- especially those produced during the Covid-19 pandemic- and how the viewers and the technological affordances of Zoom also got to be part of the production's meaning and its semiotics. To have a further understanding of performance, Andy Lavender's definition of Modalities and Modes were discussed.

*The second input of the day concerned the quantitative and qualitative approaches scholars can take up while analysing a play-text linguistically. These could range from participant observation, text-based analysis of selected passages, to making tables and collecting data and corpus analysis of frequent patterns, i.e repetition of some key words can indicate facts about the characters' personality. For example, in the case of *Romeo*, there's a lot of "I" indicating egocentrism, and in the case of *Juliette*, there's a lot of "if", indicating hesitation and insecurity.*

*After the lunch break, Isabel Schmier led a practical workshop on Improv theatre. She prepared us with some initial warm-ups so that we gained an awareness of our bodies and physiques. Then our relaxed muscles were ready to participate in the following fun and intuitive short improv performances. In the evening, we attended *La Damoselle élue / Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher* at Oper Frankfurt, which, personally, for me, provided a case to compare with Charlie Josephine's queer rendering of the story of Jeanne d'Arc in *I, Joan*.*

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On the third day, the PhD candidate Sarah Busch provided us with some very heartfelt and practical pieces of advice on how to proceed with a PhD project efficiently. In her input, besides her personal experiences, she also shared the list of conferences and journals that can be very handy for PhD candidates. This session ended with a role-play activity in which we took on the roles of potential panellists as well as participants of a conference with tricky questions.

*In the second half of the day, we were assigned a task to analyse a play of our choice, either with a linguistic or literary approach. We presented our working process and the outcomes in the second half of the afternoon session. What I chose was Table-Top production of *As You Like It*, on which I tried to apply Lavender's 4 modalities of emotional, physical, discursive and contextual. I realised that two modalities of discursive and contextual modalities were the dominant ones. To clarify the discursive modality, some random domestic objects were assigned roles of the characters and hence took a representational mode. As for the contextual modality, viewers see these plays with the contextual expectation that a table would function as the stage and that the play was being recorded. We concluded the day with a viewing of the play *Vanya*, a play from the NT home collection.*

The summer school concluded on Monday with a morning session on where to find academic resources and data. These included archives, academic journals and conferences, different publishers and a range of useful tools and software programs for linguistic approaches.

To conclude, what made this summer school unique was not only the great knowledge lecturers brought to the sessions but also the many amazing friendships that formed between participants from different backgrounds and disciplines.

*Leila Khalili,
MA student at the Goethe University Frankfurt*

Theory and practice, it occurs to me after this experience, are not meant to be separated.

If you have ever doubted yourself in a room full of academics, wondering why panel discussions and group presentations and feedback and coffee breaks felt wrong and heavy and performed, I may have an answer for you now. When I got to spend four days in this year's summer school, organized by Heidi Liedke (Frankfurt) and Daniela Landert (Heidelberg) in Wiesbaden, where the professors and most of the participants were not only trained in their respective academic fields, here: literature and linguistics, but also in practical theater, it became obvious to me that what is missing from most academic events is practical knowledge. Like how to exist in a room with other people. How to be aware of your own body as well as theirs, how to anticipate and facilitate mood shifts and energy drops, as well as utilise surges. Things theatre teaches you immediately, which academia does not. The sheer productivity and level of intellectual standard that emerged from the joining of fields, the joining of practices, if you will, was deeply shocking to me.

Not only was this the first trial of an interdisciplinary project between the universities in Frankfurt and Heidelberg, it was also a huge success. Theory and practice, it occurs to me after this experience, are not meant to be separated. You don't have to sell intellectual integrity for self-expression or the other way around. What happens instead is that the production of knowledge becomes a bodily experience. Your improv workshop informs your learnings in corpus linguistics, and a night out at the opera helps your discussions of Shakespearean text the next morning.

And also, you get to have really nice coffee breaks with people who are relaxed and brilliant and somehow feel no need to prove either to you.

*Laura Nikolich,
MA student at the Goethe University Frankfurt*

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I couldn't imagine how strongly it would revitalise and nurture me.

When I applied for the interdisciplinary summer school, I couldn't imagine how strongly it would revitalise and nurture me. I used to perceive studying theatre and drama as part of literary studies, but these four days showed me that it is a whole autonomous field of different approaches and possibilities. In the course of the summer school we studied theatre from perspectives of literary studies and linguistics, but also got to practice theatre, be part of it, stage a theatrical piece and see how it functions from the inside. We also went to see a theatre and watched a theatrical piece at the school.

It was a great experience and an opportunity to talk about your project with both teachers and peers and rethink it. But most importantly, to exchange ideas and experiences with other participants and learn so much from one another in a very open and appreciative environment, surrounded by the forests and vineyards of Taunus.

*Ilia Skrigan,
MA student at the Goethe University Frankfurt*

I would love for this summer school to happen again...

The summer school has left me with great impressions and confidence. It has provided me with clarity and motivation, especially for this stage of my academic journey. The program was rich and balanced, a proportional mix of theory and practice. In just a few days, we received new useful insights, had enthusiastic and sincere exchanges, experienced performance firsthand, and even got busy with a practical workshop.

Prof. Liedke and Prof. Landert have guided us with earnestness and attention. It was remarkable how they managed to create a welcoming environment yet engaging and productive. The session with Isabel Schmier on improv theatre was daunting but so rewarding, whereas the session by Sarah Busch was so significant and informative.

I would love for this summer school to happen again so that other students and researchers can benefit from this impactful experience.

*Mevlude Skuroshi,
MA student at the Goethe University Frankfurt*

The variety of ways of interacting with our subject matter was impressive.

Upon arriving at the site for the Summer School, I hadn't really known what to expect and was from the beginning warmly surprised by the open yet demanding atmosphere in the room.

Structuring the days as they were, first providing a lot of input from the literary as well as the linguistic perspective, and then progressing towards more interaction with research and media of the students, made a lot of sense and enabled everyone to handle the given objects of study with balanced starting conditions. Since all similar events that I had taken part in before had included multiple months of preparation and in-depth presentations on the students' side, I wasn't really sure how fruitful a summer school with lower maintenance in the weeks and months beforehand could be - I was proven that it could open up a whole new field and a multitude of fresh perspectives. This, I think, was not only thanks to the structure of the seminar but also a consequence of staying at the Wilhelm-Kempf-Haus, thus sharing meals and spending time with each other outside of the seminar setting and, just as importantly, staying with the matter at hand from morning until afternoon. The variety of ways of interacting with our subject matter was impressive, but it was also fun and challenging and, in that way, only possible within the structure of a concentrated summer school. My biggest takeaway from this summer school, though, remain the people I have met there, combining different academic as well as biographical backgrounds to create a singular learning experience.

*Pauline Scholz,
MA student at the Goethe University Frankfurt*

OLIVER Now, sir, what make you here?

ORLANDO Nothing. I am not taught to make anything.

OLIVER What mar you then, sir?

ORLANDO Marry, sir, I am helping you to mar that which God made, a poor unworthy brother of yours, with idleness.

OLIVER Marry, sir, be better employed, and be naught awhile.

ORLANDO Shall I keep your hogs and eat husks with them? What prodigal portion have I spent that I should come to such penury?

OLIVER Know you where you are, sir?

ORLANDO O, sir, very well: here in your orchard.

OLIVER Know you before whom, sir?

ORLANDO Ay, better than him I am before knows me. I know you are my eldest brother, and in the gentle condition of blood you should so know me. The courtesy of nations allows you my better in that you are the first-born, but the same tradition takes not away my blood, were there twenty brothers betwixt us. I have as much of my father in me as you, albeit I confess your coming before me is nearer to his reverence.

OLIVER (threatening Orlando) What, boy!

ORLANDO (holding off Oliver by the throat) Come, come, elder brother, you are too young in this.

OLIVER Wilt thou lay hands on me, villain?

ORLANDO I am no villain. I am the youngest son of Sir Rowland de Boys. He was my father, and he is thrice a villain that says such a father begot villains. Wert thou not my brother, I would not take this hand from thy throat till this other had pulled out thy tongue for saying so. Thou hast railed on thyself.

William Shakespeare, "As You Like It"