

The Question of Quality in a Comparison of British and German Theatre

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Introduction

“It is a common claim and a justified one that British theatre is the best in the world,” said Chris Smith when he was head of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (Runciman 9). But many German cultural politicians and theatre practitioners are convinced that the German theatre system deserves that position. Who is right, or can both be right? And what does that imply considering that the theatre systems of the two countries represent very different types: Germany is known for its state-owned *Stadttheater* which employ permanent ensembles and keep a whole range of productions in their repertoire, while the reputation of British theatre rests to a large degree on commercial conglomerates, particularly those in London’s West End.

Within Europe, one may locate Germany and the UK at the two ends of a spectrum, with Germany as an example of a public or highly subsidised theatre system at the one end and at the other the UK – closest to the extreme model of a theatre system that rests nearly exclusively on private involvement as we can find in the US. Therefore, answering the question ‘which theatre system is best’ includes finding out whether more subsidies actually result in ‘better output’ or, contrary to this, whether stronger market competition brings about higher quality theatre productions. Theatre can also be seen as a paradigmatic case within the larger cultural field. Even though the

performing arts are a particular case,¹ finding a persuasive way to describe their quality, a framework for (not only international) comparison, would provide a starting point for other cultural sector analyses as well.

My article aims at discussing quality definitions to find out whether there are criteria for quality theatre which make such a comparison possible and at proposing a manageable framework for comparing the outputs of the two theatre systems. When speaking about the ‘output’ of a theatre system, I mean its ‘product’ in the widest sense. It embraces the general theatre supply in the whole country or a specific city as well as a single performance: what is on offer and can be ‘consumed’.

When attempting to define quality, I need to analyse what the available definitions are and discuss which criteria can possibly be used for my comparison.

Whenever the topic of quality of the arts is being discussed, two seemingly irreconcilable aspects are emphasised: artistic achievement and degree of commercialisation. In the same way, the groups involved in cultural production are said to belong to two different – and competing – camps.² On the one hand, there is the opinion that artists and theatre directors believe in the ‘noble’ objectives of their tasks, irrespective of more mundane matters. On the other hand, there is a group whose members like to consider themselves as pragmatic realists. They are interested in the actual running of a theatre and, whilst being aware of the well-known economic arguments for state intervention,³ discuss more efficient and less costly ways of

¹ This case has been extendedly and persuasively argued by numerous authors since Baumol/Bowen.

² The descriptions of the groups are based on Alan Peacock who calls the artistic group “pundits”. Cf. Peacock 12ff.

³ Economic arguments for state subsidies can rest on different assumptions which are all restricted to the economic realm and do not refer to artistic content or social impact. Firstly, in Paretian welfare economics, cultural products are considered to be public goods, so state intervention is justified by market failure and external effects. Secondly, subsidies are justified when cultural products are seen as services rather than duplicatable products. This service argument, for theatre, is enforced by the criterion of live performance that requires immediate consumption and makes a duplication without losses impossible. Thirdly, the theory of merit goods justifies state intervention because the arts are considered by society as meritorious without generating adequate private consumption. Cf. Wahl-Zieger, Throsby. A selection of major contributions to this discussion has been published in Towse. Obviously, economic reasoning can also be used to argue against state subsidies, e.g.: Sawers.

producing plays.⁴ But this self-proclaimed ‘pragmatic’ approach is not exempt from criticism. Cultural producers or politicians often fear a loss of what is not concerned solely with the economic side of culture, i.e. the content, or quality.⁵ In my opinion, the contradiction is artificial: the parties concerned should become aware of the fact that in reality good management and artistic achievement go together.

In the following chapters I will first look at more measurable criteria and discuss what the quality debates in the management and economics fields can contribute to my research question. Then I will turn to the more complex discussion in the artistic sphere. I will show that both strands do offer useful criteria – but are limited to and conditioned by different disciplinary mentalities and methods. Their different results need to be combined in an interdisciplinary effort to avoid their shortcomings and use their benefits. Therefore, I will propose a tentative solution to how theatre quality in the two theatre systems can be analysed and compared. I will argue that both quantitative and qualitative aspects need to be addressed. Results from cultural economics, arts management and related quantitative methods need to be supplemented with qualitative approaches from theatre, reception and cultural studies.

Quality Concepts

Based on its Latin origin, *qualitas*, a descriptive understanding of quality could be a property, characteristic, trait or attribute that distinguishes one thing from another (cf. OED). This objective and neutral sense of quality is relevant to my discussion but not at its focus. My main concern here is the more prescriptive understanding of quality as a grade of achievement, excellence, superiority or value, which almost naturally has positive connotations. This definition automatically involves evaluating something and granting it a higher status, a special “value”. Value, too, can mean either an assigned

⁴ For example, the German economist Stefan Tobias ventures only to measure German public theatre’s inefficiency and proposes cost cutting measures without discussing the demand side – let alone content. Cf. Tobias.

⁵ To give just one example: on a recent conference, the Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen, the German umbrella organisation for foundations and trusts, claimed that quality criteria are currently being displaced by quantitative aims. Cf. Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen.

numerical quantity, i.e. something measurable, definite, unambiguous, or something considered worthwhile, desirable; i.e. something subjective.

In short, quality definitions are either determined by measurability or by value judgement. These alterations correspond with different positions adopted by the disciplines researching the cultural industries: economics or management studies on the one hand and sociology, cultural studies and the humanities on the other. In the former group one finds those who believe in the market with consumer sovereignty and pragmatic decision-taking, in the latter the individual is understood as hybrid, culturally embedded, socially dependent and hardly subject to rational behaviour.⁶ In the following, I will look at these two different practices of defining quality: the production, management and economic sphere on the one hand and the cultural or artistic world on the other.

In an attempt to systematize the existent definitions of quality in use in production and management, David Garvin distinguishes five different approaches to product quality (cf. Garvin, *Product Quality*). Following Garvin, the understanding of quality can be

- transcendent (in philosophy): absolute, universal, unanalysable, recognizable through experience; like Plato's concept of beauty, it "can be understood only after one is exposed to a succession of objects that display its characteristics";
- product-based (economics): precise, measurable, inherent, objective; enabling a hierarchical dimension – if attributes are considered preferable by virtually all consumers; the focus is here on durability; in this case follows that quality differences are actually quantity differences; here, higher quality also comes at a higher cost;

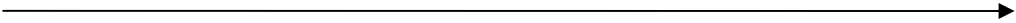
⁶ There are also differences in the research interests: whilst economists prefer to keep value judgements out of their considerations, the humanities and social sciences not only acknowledge that human activity and thinking always, "by nature" involves or necessitates ordering and evaluating, but considers it a major field of research.

- user-based (economics, marketing, operations management): highly subjective: the ability of a product or service to fulfil a specific customer's needs, e.g. Joseph M. Juran's "fitness for use";
- manufacturing-based (operations management): quality means meeting 'a priori' standards and specifications, Philip Crosby's "conformance to requirements" and "no defects", "making it right the first time"; the focus here is on reliability engineering and statistical quality control, i.e. cost reduction;
- value-based (operations management): quality depends on the (subjective) evaluation of the cost-benefit ratio or the (individual) willingness to pay.

In this list, quality definition and measurement obviously focus on "good" products or goods. But this is no longer exclusively the case today: production processes and services are under scrutiny as well. Although quality management started as ex-post control of defective output it has developed into the documentation of production processes and, lastly, into customer-orientation. Table 1 summarizes these changes and gives, for each stage, an overview of the different status quality is granted, of where the responsibility for quality management lies and who the parties involved are. It shows that the old-fashioned understanding of quality made room for a rational and, later, a more emotional understanding.

The table also includes references to the sets of norms that were developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) according to the different understandings of quality. Attempts to define quality in management have resulted in sets of standards to be followed and audits certifying their achievement which have been adapted according to new developments in quality management (cf. Zingel). This is a quasi-natural implication of the prescriptive, norm-setting aspect of "quality" itself.

Table 1. Changes in Quality Management

Old Understanding of Quality ISO norms prior to 1994	Rational Understanding of Quality ISO 9000: 1994	Emotional Understanding of Quality ISO 9000: 2000 and TQM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality is one of many management functions • Specialists' responsibility • Product control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of quality in functional departments • Everybody's responsibility • Documentation, warranty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality becomes a central management task, quality manifests 'new' competitive advantages • New customer understanding • Stakeholder perspective
Development in Time 		

Source: Zingel 11.

The question is whether those management or production quality criteria can be applied to the arts. It is conceivable that in the broadly defined creative industries where material (tangible) cultural “goods” are produced – for example, in the music or film industries where CDs and DVDs are manufactured – product quality measures such as performance, features, reliability or durability (cf. Garvin, *Competing*) can be applied. To a certain degree production quality can be applied to cultural production, especially in branches such as the printing or phonogram industries. The more recent management understanding of service quality can also be useful: if theatre is understood as a ‘service’, the ideas of customer orientation or process management would be applicable. But, again, I would suggest, only to a limited extent: only for the management processes, technical production or customer service, ticket sales or the front-of-house area. The crucial question of which criteria should be used for evaluating the performance’s or the ensemble’s quality, however, cannot be answered with the help of the definitions outlined above. So we are back to square one.

Have cultural economists or economists in general developed an understanding of quality that could help answer my question of which is better, subsidised or commercial theatre? In 1992, Alan Peacock of the Scottish Arts Council claimed that

“[e]conomists have tried to circumvent [the problem of individual, differing, unmappable, untranslatable values] by a simple subterfuge. We do not need to specify a set of values at all.” (Peacock 9) The initial assumption is “that the individual is the best judge of his/ her welfare” (ibid.). In 1996, Susanne Krebs stated that the question “what is good and bad (performing) art?” has hardly interested economists so far because value judgements are beyond analysis and because there is no consensus among economists about the compatibility of aesthetic judgements with models of economic behaviour which emphasize individual evaluation, consistent preferences and rational decision-making (cf. Krebs 14).⁷

But there have always been discussions about quality or value in theoretical economic thought, from Adam Smith’s “value in use” and “value in exchange” or the “labour value” and “surplus value” of Karl Marx to the “marginalist revolution” that replaced cost-of-production theories with a model of economic behaviour based on individual utilities which is the basic assumption underlying most contemporary economic thought. Even though that had been challenged by “old institutionalists” like Thorstein Veblen with a social theory of value as a socially constructed phenomenon, utility theories of consumer behaviour and the theories of demand and supply (consumer preference based on individual needs and price determination in competitive markets) are the economic models which deal with questions of economic value today (cf. Throsby 20ff.). The two main trains of thought are costs and prices.

In the discussion of production costs, Krebs has shown that they are not a useful indicator for theatre quality. Even though one could expect stars and better trained actors or more lavish stage design and modern stage technology to be more expensive, there is no guarantee that higher expenditure will please audiences’ tastes, or that the spectators’ subjective evaluation of quality rises. It may well be that higher costs simply mean inefficient spending (Krebs 17).

⁷ In her study, the author goes on to use economic models for the analysis of quality as a determinant of demand for theatre.

Economists have also discussed the theory of price as a theory of value and found that price is only an imperfect indicator and not a direct measure. Reasons for this are the many price distortions for any commodity. Whilst price determination in competitive markets concerns the supply side, preferences on the demand side have also been looked at. Even though there have been studies on the willingness to pay for cultural goods, there is still no unanimity among economists on whether standard methods generate adequate estimates of what is their value. One could separate cultural goods and services into private goods for individual consumption and public goods for collective consumption, and one could add qualifications such as accumulated, time-dependent taste for the demand side and external effects⁸ for the supply side – but one still faces the same problems: prices are limited – though in practice probably the only – indicators (Throsby 22ff.; Krebs 30f.). In sum, neither costs nor prices seem to be useful for my evaluation of British and German theatre quality.

Nevertheless, cultural economists in particular have contributed to the understanding of a wide range of issues concerning the cultural industries such as economic impact, innovation or the productivity of theatres (cf. Austen-Smith; O’Hagan and Neligan). All, of course, remain within the academic conventions of their discipline and are confined to quantifiable indicators that deliver statistically valid results. They do not attempt to address any other than measurable aspects of theatre production.

Let us now see what the other side has to offer for a solution of the problem of assessing theatre quality. In the humanities, social and cultural studies and philosophy there is a long tradition of thought about art and its function; valuing the arts not for any purpose but for “art’s sake” is a rather modern invention. The term “aesthetics” from the Greek *aisthanesthai*, to perceive the external world with the senses, was coined in 1750 by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten. Aesthetics became the study of art and, particularly, of beauty: “of the criteria whereby manifestations of the arts are judged to be good or bad” (Björkegren 5). Therefore I briefly outline what

⁸ In the case of the cultural industries, externalities are beneficial effects caused by cultural production but shared by other participants in the economy who neither contribute to the production nor pay a price for it but at the same time cannot be excluded from consuming the benefits.

I consider the main developments in the philosophy of the appreciation of beauty and good taste in order to get a better understanding of the conception of what is considered artistically valid, beautiful, or pleasing.

As a concept, the “fine arts” are an eighteenth-century innovation, for the first time distinguishing different realms of artistic production. This would pave the way for a hierarchy of high and low, or popular (and later “mass”) art, of refined and vulgar tastes that underlies a large part of the discussion of art and great art to this day.

Broadly speaking, aesthetic thought in eighteenth-century Europe developed in different directions or traditions, Germany housing the idealist camp, Britain the empiricists. While much of today’s understanding of aesthetics is based on Kant’s third critique, his interest in form, the requirement of disinterestedness and so on (cf. Kant 282ff.), I think for my particular interest a dialectics between production and reception, intention and interpretation might be helpful. I am interested in meaning, content and idea of the artwork, so a location of the meaning of a work of art in a triangular relationship between artist, artefact and audience seems to me particularly useful for the discussion of theatre quality.

Aesthetic judgement, the act of deciding whether something is beautiful, can be either objectivist or subjectivist. When beauty depends on certain qualities perceived to exist in an object, as with simple objectivism, the qualities which are judged are in the object itself and everyone without exception ought to agree. That is obviously a problematic point of view. Contrary to this, a simple subjectivism bases its judgement on the reaction of the individual spectator which means that it can never be objectively right or wrong. Obviously, criticism has been voiced against and for both both views, more sophisticated versions have been put forward and there seems to be an agreement that no alternative to a sophisticated subjectivism is available.

There was a time when the “humanists” who dominated aesthetic discourse claimed to have access to universal criteria for artistic quality and absolute values for beauty. But since the second half of the 20th century at the latest, this belief has lost its persuasive

power. The so-called “anthropological” definition of culture has broadened the horizon of what are commonly considered “legitimate” art forms (incorporating popular culture, for example). What is more important, the historicity and temporality of arts evaluation, its dynamic nature and dependence on its context have been emphasised.⁹ The position has been criticised because it does not offer a satisfactory explanation why there is consensus about certain cultural works and how quality might be evaluated instead.¹⁰ In other words: the discussion has not yet reached a final conclusion or a consensus on how excellent and influential works can be evaluated.

I will therefore focus on how theatre quality could be analysed in a pragmatic way. By doing so I make use of David Throsby's lists for assessing cultural value. He splits cultural value into its constituent elements which may make it possible to evaluate an artwork (Throsby 28f.):

- aesthetic value: are properties of beauty, harmony, form visible in the work of art?
- spiritual value (religious or secular): what beneficial effects, understanding or insight can be derived from it?
- social value: does the work convey a sense of connection with others or contribute to the understanding of the nature of the society one lives in?
- historical value: does it reflect the past or illuminate the present?
- symbolic value: is one able to extract meaning from the work?
- authenticity value: is it “the real, original, unique artwork it is represented to be”?

⁹ For example, Pierre Bourdieu developed a theory of cultural taste and consumption which connects the capacity of experiencing and expressing taste to education, social background and material standard of living. Cf. Bourdieu.

¹⁰ One critic is, for example, David Throsby whose solution is to separate aesthetics and the sociology of culture (cf. Throsby 28).

Throsby claims that these criteria can always be analysed, that this framework is useful no matter whether the scales of assessment are fixed or movable, objective or subjective. Nevertheless, one must be wary: all of those components are contingent categories and depend on historical and cultural circumstances, i.e. they are not fixed and they are subjective, so that cultural backgrounds and individual dispositions of both the viewer or evaluator and the researcher have to be taken into account. Still, the methods Throsby proposes for analysing works of art are useful – only, they must be applied with a different assumption in mind: that they do not provide a objective solution. Evidently different from the approaches used in economics or management studies and beyond empirical quantitative research, he concedes that the following evaluation methods derived from the social sciences and humanities are useful (*ibid.*, 29f.):

- mapping: a contextual analysis of the object;
- “thick description”: a type of interpretation developed by ethnographer Clifford Geertz that aims at exposing underlying cultural systems of the work and at deepening understanding of contexts and dependences;
- attitudinal analysis: methods such as social surveys to assess the social and spiritual value of a work;
- content analysis: identification and codification of meaning to understand interpretations of the symbolic value of a work;
- expert appraisal: essential to judge the aesthetic and historical values of a work.

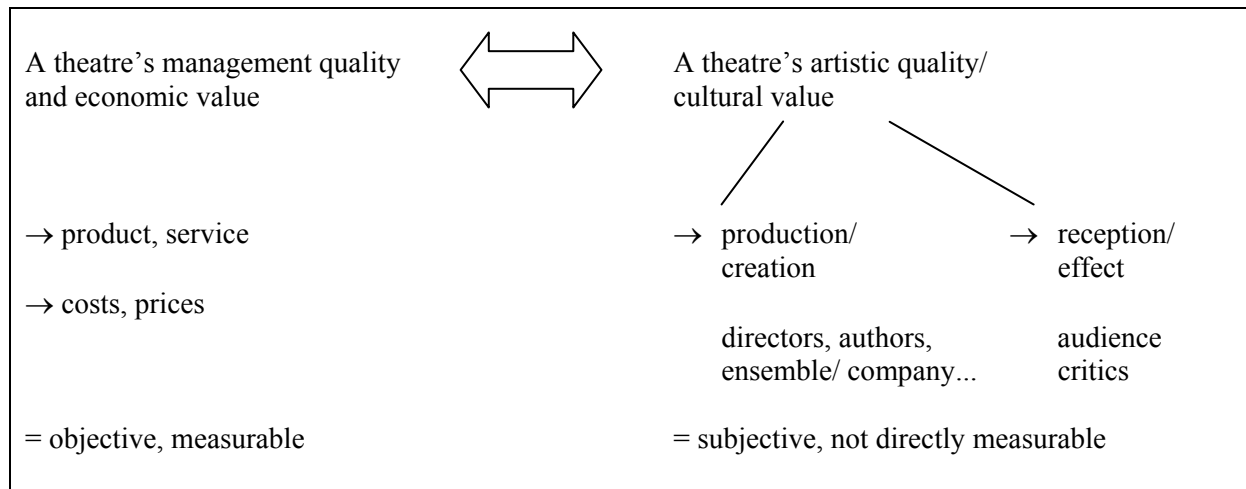
These methods provide a suitable basis for my own approach to theatre quality analysis and comparison. Together with measurable data and previous empirical research findings a pragmatic methodological mixture aiming at a rounder, a more inclusive understanding of theatre quality can be developed.

What do the two camps offer for my theatre quality comparison? Theatre is defined as an experience, an event where an actor or a group performs in front of an audience.

Thus, the requirement for defining the performing arts is that someone who acts is in the same place at the same time with someone who watches (cf. Wahl-Ziegler 18). This feature – and not any particular institutional form – defines theatre.¹¹ The existing institutional practice can be subject to an analysis of efficiency or economic impact with quantifiable criteria and measurable outcome. But there is something important that cannot be understood in terms of management studies or economics: the artistic (or aesthetic) part of theatre quality, or, its cultural value. Therefore, two clusters of indicators have to be taken into account: those measuring management quality and economic value on the one hand and those referring to artistic quality or cultural value on the other. Figure 1 schematically illustrates the two sides that need to be taken into consideration in any analysis of theatre quality. Management and economics definitions of quality can be used for analysing quantity indicators such as in-house services or the profitability of a production. Processes of production and their effects on audiences belong to the realm of cultural or artistic quality. Even though the artistic aspects may not be directly measurable, it does not mean that they cannot be analysed at all – one just needs different methods and assumptions that are offered by other disciplines. As David Throsby has pointed out, economic and cultural values have to be separated from each other. But they both have something different to tell us about a theatre's (or a theatre system's) quality (cf. Throsby 20ff.).

¹¹ That is why those involved in the discussion of the theatre crisis in Germany should not bemoan the death of theatre – if anything, they should lament the danger to the three-tier, state-funded city theatre as practised in Germany which is indeed under threat because of significant cuts to community budgets. Theatre as such will certainly continue to exist as it has always existed in the history of mankind. Thus, the German stage association's (Deutscher Bühnenverein) call "Theater muss sein!" is absurd.

Figure 1



After this graphic summary of the main points of my argument so far, in the last section, I will outline the research design which I have used for my comparison between the British and German theatre systems.

A Modest Proposal Towards a Definition of Theatre Quality

My dissertation project aims at finding out whether German or British theatre supply is “better”. I understand both “supply” (or “output”) and “theatre quality” in a broad and inclusive way: Whilst the former includes the supply of theatres on a national level but also the artistic product of a single theatre group, the latter encompasses a range of measurable criteria on the one hand and unquantifiable, but analysable characteristics on the other. Thus, beside the national theatre systems of Britain and Germany and the regional theatre landscapes of London and Berlin, my thesis focuses on case studies selected according to the type of theatre organisation. For each country, a subsidised (or state-owned), a commercial and a small independent theatre company will be treated in depth. When analysing “quality”, I will be working my way from the more objective criteria towards the more ambiguous ones, and, at the same time, from the national level down to the level of single productions. The national theatre systems reflect to a certain extent substantive differences in the degree of commercialisation or

state involvement which can be gathered from a comparison of organisational structures and processes of theatre production in the two countries. With the help of case studies that represent certain theatre types, one can see how the “typical” features of organisation and funding are actually put into practice. Additionally, the case studies enable a comparison on the individual theatre level when it is necessary to make up for lacking national data.

As a general design for such a comparison, a “bottom-up” approach would theoretically be conceivable. This would require starting with evaluating single performances,¹² and then collecting all evaluations of all productions¹³ and theatre characteristics¹⁴ to come up with this specific organisational type’s quality. This is, of course, practically impossible.

Instead, in order to analyse each theatre system’s quality, one is compelled to selectively work “top-down” and to explain the criteria for selection on the one hand and for evaluating certain features as higher on the other. The final judgement on which system works best, German or British theatre, will be based on accumulated intermediary results of a step-by-step comparison of fifteen different criteria. These include both quantitative and qualitative aspects so that the comparison requires an interdisciplinary approach that makes use of cultural policy research, statistics and findings from cultural economics studies. I will also generate and analyse new data and texts for the evaluation of artistic quality on the level of individual theatres or productions. Six assumptions about theatre quality inform my selection:

The most basic assumption is simply that the more theatres there are in each country, the better the theatre supply. Therefore, a first quantifiable indicator of Germany’s or Britain’s theatre quality is the number of theatres (1). As this does not discriminate

¹² The reason is that in each performance (even of the same production) errors or events “marring” the quality can occur which depend on each actor’s daily form etc.

¹³ This part of analysis would take into account each production’s overall characteristics such as lavishness of decoration, set and stage design, number of actors etc.

¹⁴ Those overall characteristics could include, for example, type and amount of stages, existence of a permanent ensemble or guest artists, doing touring etc.

between the output produced at those theatres, production and performance figures need to be looked at to measure the actual productivity of theatres (2).

Secondly, I suppose that when theatres are geographically well-distributed, i.e. as equally available and easily accessible as possible, the theatre provision is better. This reflects cultural policy requirements and looks at regional spread of theatres (3). Of course, these indicators need to be regarded in relation to population size and distribution. My analysis will therefore be based on theatre statistics and reports even though German and British statistics collect different data, in different ways and for different reasons.¹⁵

Thirdly, diversity (in the sense of variety) is used for the evaluation of a nation's theatre supply. The assumption is that a theatre system is better, the more different types of theatre offer their productions and the more diverse the output is in terms of genres, play categories and authors (4). This analysis of theatre programmes will also not be easy because in Germany, for example, only genres are represented in statistics, play categories are not, and because generating new empirical data that matches British statistical findings is beyond the scope of my research project.

My fourth assumption concerns innovation, an important feature in the creative industries: more original theatre output is considered to be better. Of course, one needs to discuss the different understandings of innovation or originality. The evaluation of artistic innovation needs to be discussed on the level of individual productions. For the national and regional levels, I propose to look at four measurable indicators of different degrees of newness: new productions (5), adaptations (6), translations (7) and new work (8).¹⁶

¹⁵ For Germany, I mainly rely on the annual *Theaterstatistik* of the Deutscher Bühnenverein (DBV) and a few general surveys such as Institut für Länderkunde. For Britain, official statistics are irregular, incomplete and partly contradictory, e.g. DCMS, *Mapping Document 1998* and DCMS, *Mapping Document 2001* so that a selection of reports by Arts Councils and theatre management associations must be used. The first two assumptions are tested in Gerlach, *Money*.

¹⁶ In Germany, new work and translations are covered as Ur-/Erstaufführungen by the Werkstatistik of the DBV. For British information, one has to contend oneself with sporadic surveys such as Feist et al. or the reports from the Society of London Theatre or the Theatrical Management Association, cf. Gardiner or Tayleur. There are also a few empirical studies about the innovativity

Next, another quantifiable variable important in the discourse about theatre quality needs to be regarded: success in the market. Here, it is assumed that good theatre is valued and in high demand whereas bad theatre fails. Thus, the fifth assumption establishes a link between the unmeasurable artistic quality or individual theatre experience and quantifiable indicators. This proposition needs to be discussed: Does success really mirror quality? And do production numbers, i.e. the plays performed most often (9) and audience numbers, i.e. the plays visited by most people (10) provide adequate success criteria? Can turnover or intake from ticket sales (11), or a theatre company's success in acquiring additional funding either from the state or from private sources (12) form useful measures?

As I have stated earlier, any comparison of theatre quality needs, as a prerequisite, an analysis of the discourses on theatre quality in the two (national) cultures. How do British and German theatre producers, directors, etc. define "good theatre"? What do audiences expect of theatre in the two countries? And how do those who dominate the discourse about evaluating theatre, the critics, arrive at their judgments? This method bears reference not only to discourse analyses but also to Throsby's attitudinal and content analyses in order to uncover the social and symbolic components of the value of each country's theatre system.¹⁷ Such analyses do not exist yet, a fact which urgently requires more research. On the basis of interviews (13) a selective investigation into these national differences should be undertaken to answer the question whether both statements about "the best theatre in the world" may be right when they reflect completely different definitions of "good theatre".

of theatre programmes. However, these are scarce, often outdated, and out of the half dozen studies I found, only Austen-Smith, and O'Hagan and Neligan) concern themselves with Britain, none with Germany. Usually, not innovativity but productivity or variety are measured. For preliminary results of a comparison of British and German theatre innovation cf. Gerlach, *Money*.

¹⁷ As Pierre Bourdieu and others have shown that the milieu of the speaker, the educational and social background, class and family, the exposure to the arts and theatre, influence the way one defines what one considers good theatre, it is only logical to suppose that quality concepts vary between national cultures as well – in the way national institutions and histories, values and norms frame and influence people's ways of thinking and conceptualizing reality, and the part of reality called the arts. For example, German definitions are conditioned by the existence of a mostly state-owned and -funded theatre landscape considered to be unique in the world: good theatre is almost always characterised by features "only" ensemble work and repertoire can provide.

Furthermore, the criteria and processes of evaluation in expert appraisals need to be analysed. Theatre is considered by cultural economists as an experience good, and aesthetic judgement is generally held to be an acquired taste which requires a certain exposure. Thus, the sixth assumption I work with is that aesthetic aspects, artistic originality and other unquantifiable aspects which require subjective evaluation call for a certain knowledge and expertise about the work, its genre, its context and the existing culture of theatre criticism.

Here, I first look at British and German theatre awards (14) because they claim to reward the “best” of the theatre professions and thus serve as a “quality test” for the theatregoing public.¹⁸ The award-granting criteria and processes, the composition of juries and their actual relevance need to be discussed, and the results analysed: which theatres receive the highest acclaim and is there any tendency as to the type of theatre more successful in this regard? Secondly, I study expert appraisals on the micro level and intend to analyse individual reviews of single productions (15). As the aesthetic theatrical aspects are not measurable but can be described, reviews can be analysed as textual embodiments of the critics’ evaluation. Thus, detailed text analysis is a legitimate method for my research question and adds considerable results to its qualitative part.¹⁹ Both analyses of experts’ appraisals cannot go without a critical assessment of the reliability of critics’ and opinionmakers’ views, their limitations and problems.

Thus, by defining theatre quality relatively broadly and by addressing a range of measures or, as I prefer to call them, auxiliary criteria on different levels, I hope to come up with a less judgemental and one-sided result about the overall quality of

¹⁸ For the United Kingdom, I analyse the Lawrence Olivier Awards, the Evening Standard Awards, the Critic’s Circle Awards and the TMA/ Barclays Theatre Awards. For Germany, with its wealth of very small, artistic awards, and only one national theatre award, Faust, newly established and be presented for the first time in November 2006, I need to determine equivalents to the popular British awards. For example, the results of the the annual polls by German theatre magazines such as *Theater heute* and *Die deutsche Bühne* and the invitations to the prestigious theatre festival *Theatertreffen Berlin* have to be discussed. So far, there are no publications on theatre awards in the two countries except for my own account of British awards, cf. Gerlach, *Theater*.

¹⁹ The selection criteria for “representative” reviews take into account theatre goers media preferences, the influence and backgrounds of critics, theatre types, case study theatres, productions having received awards, and particularly positive vs. particularly negative reviews.

German and British theatre: it will neither be based on just numerical evidence nor will it voice only subjective opinions of individual people.

Conclusion

To sum up, the discussion of quality in management and economics concentrates mainly on objective, measurable criteria but is opening up for other considerations. For answering questions about the connection between theatre type and output the research tools and designs of these disciplines alone are not sufficient.

Aesthetic thought has been shown to be a more complex matter where objectivist and subjectivist approaches are discernable, as well as approaches claiming universality versus those acknowledging context dependence. My own position is that the evaluation of quality depends on the socio-cultural and historical context and that it is subject to change. As there is no alternative for a sophisticated subjectivist approach which calls for other qualitative methods, they need to be incorporated into a holistic analysis and comparison of British and German theatre supply.

The different methods and indicators of the two competing camps deliver productive results for each facet for which they have been developed. As a result, I decided to choose a step-by-step approach that combines the useful findings of each discipline. This combination will produce an overall result which will enable scholars to answer the question which theatre system – the British or the German one – is “best”.

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