The Social Stages of the City

Vigil Raber and Performance Direction in Bozen/Bolzano (Northern Italy) – a Socio-historical Outline

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This paper deals with the sociology of the Easter plays or passion plays, that is, with the specific cultural texture of the performance practice of the late medieval-early modern era.[1] In that regard, it discusses not only understanding urban performance culture as a material receptacle of cultural and social actions, but also rudimentarily defining those symbolic spheres through which the systemic and worldly components of the old European city were loaded and charged with meanings and assessments.

Comprehending play and city as the cultural text of that which is social first of all requires more the raising of questions than the offering of answers which are not possible both for reasons of time and because of the lack of a basis for research: the social history of the Tyrolean Late Medieval Period and Early Modern Era is a field of research whose treatment is only at its beginning. This is in urgent need of being delved into more deeply: all one needs to do is think of the keywords „general public", „social inequality", „urbanization", „communication", and „production of cultural consciousness" – or rather social elements upon which a long duration has been decided – to realize that it contains topics that are very exciting and thoroughly relevant to the present day.

This paper works forward from the assumption that spiritual plays are a production by religious practitioners but likewise also portray relationships of societal structure, social mechanisms, and subject relationships of those involved. If we attempt to historically pinpoint the play activity and to define its position in life, then we therefore also get closer to a central „space" of cultural strategies. This raises a number of questions, such as:

- What values stood behind the play activity?
- What social function did the plays fulfill?
- What was shown socially (if we take an observer position of the second order)?

[1] I would like to thank Max Siller for the suggestion for these observations (see also Siller 1996, 224 et seq.). My warmest thanks also go to the Universitätsverlag Wagner (Innsbruck) for having authorized the publication of this paper which formerly appeared in a german version in GEBHARDT/SILLER 2004, 147 et seq.

Some important literary-sociological messages are to be deduced from a socio-historic or anthropological version of the plays, even if only – as a result of the absence of a broad prosopographic study – in approximate values.
The following consideration ought to occur primarily on two levels:

1. As a concise definition of the starting point: which plays provide material for a study that is related to people and takes into consideration the actors? What is the situation with data?
2. In what categories can we read these data and how can they be used for sensible assumptions?

Plays and Personnel

According to the systematization by Josef Eduard Wackernell, which continues to be the basis from which to go forward, Easter plays thematically consisted of play texts from the expanded circle of material of the Easter celebration which was described by him as the „Tyrolean Passion" („*Tiroler Passion*").[2] It is essentially a more or less connected group that at its heart presents a three-part passion play whose performance or transcription was manifested for many Tyrolean cities from the period around 1380 to 1580, with a clear highpoint being in the bridge period of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. The central units of tradition are the collection of the Bozen (commonly known as Bolzano in modern Italy) Latin schoolmaster, composer, and play director Benedikt Debs of Ingolstadt and the play archives of the painter, organizer, herald, and manuscript collector Vigil Raber of Sterzing (commonly known as Vipiteno in modern Italy). Additional connections result with the colloquial plays of other locations of the Austrian Forelands (*Vorderösterreich*) and Inner Austria (*Innerösterreich*), such as that of Freiburg im Breisgau, and those of some of the rural court towns of Tyrol.

The figure of the impresario Vigil Raber represents an important, constitutive component, one with features that are thoroughly urban and humanist. Recently, the *Neustift Herald Book* (*Neustifter Wappenbuch*) was edited, making clear the wide circle of recipients in the background of a commissioned artist and, at the same time, illuminating early forms of cultural professionalism.[3]

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[2] WACKERNELL 1897; see also the combination of DÖRRER 1943 with the new overview by LINKE 1985. SIMON 1993 and SIMON 2003 provide a good survey of late medieval European theatre.
[3] In that regard, see ARCH 1999, especially 9 et seq.

Lists of actors – that is, indices of roles with names – were in existence with the Passions of Bozen 1495[4] and 1514,[5] as well as with various Sterzing plays of 1489, 1496, and 1503.[6] In these lists, issue relationships and social relationships are clearly mixed. The social character of the actors is formally sensed with their distinguished names and functions from the urbane upper strata or from emphasized social elite groups. As shown by the lists of actors, plays were a strong cultural and symbolic capital that were effective both horizontally and vertically in the context of interactions between people, and in particular between both those who were present and those who were not present.[7]

Historical Background

Beginning in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the region of Tyrol underwent a phase of intense urbanization which thoroughly followed the trend in Europe. When the crises of the fourteenth century, which historical sources identify as a century of economic and ecological catastrophes, had been overcome, a significant economic and social thrust forward also took place in Tyrol on the eve of overseas expansion within the framework of the first colonizations outside of Europe. It was based not least upon the new extraction of raw materials in primary production that made Tyrol into a leading mining land, as well as upon the tried and true early capitalist commercial traditions of the cities. This does not need to be particularly emphasized in Sterzing, which in its urbanistic appearance – a city layout that is visible even today as a product of the thirteenth through fifteenth-sixteenth centuries – documents even more strongly than Bozen this boom phase that historically was never again attained.

In the late fifteenth century, the city of Bozen also experienced a period of strong economic and social acceleration during the long phase of the reign of Sigmund. The taking shape of urban and upper class social spheres and living circles was a broadly based process in the Hapsburg union of lands which can be described in the vertical line, working from top to bottom, with the keyword of „nationalization" (in the sense of a term of a pre-modern state) and on the horizontal level with that of „communalization". While the „state" policy was aimed at the creation of unified associations of subjects within the territory, communalization meant stronger

[4] KLAMMER 1986, 173 et seq., 349 et seq., and 366-369, as well as NEUMANN 1987, 143 et seq.
[5] NEUMANN 1987, 190 et seq.
[6] For the Sterzing play lists, see BERGMANN 1986, n. 144 and NEUMANN 1987, 647 et seq. See also ROLOFF 1988, 374 et seq. and ROLOFF 1990, 180.
[7] A similar question is pursued by the study by FREISE 2002 by using Hessian examples.

organization down to the last detail in rural and particularly in urban communities which, against the background of a strong demographic expansion and economic intensification, indicates an increased need for control on the legal-political level.

The heightened need for organization and the increasing social complexity of Bozen in the fifteenth century was clearly expressed in the increased production of regulations. The first codification of municipal laws in Bozen originated in the period shortly before the middle of the fifteenth century.[8] The settlement regarding Bozen between Trent and Tyrol in 1462 established an additional political „reallocation" before the renovations in the Sigmundian period in the area of regulations which left behind detailed rules regarding the police force, markets, and fire protection as well as marking the beginning of modern-era traditions in the form of serial records.[9]

„Public" Communication

As a working hypothesis, Easter plays are to be seen here as the realization and staging of public communication against a specific social, economic, political, and religious-ritualistic background. If we consider the play culture from such theory of action standpoints, we can start from the assumption that urban-public behavior is in and of itself realized under new conditions. It would therefore be worthwhile to attempt a dense description of this phenomenon in the sense of Clifford Geertz, that is, describing the rituals from within, thus freeing them from their philological dungeon and speaking of them as representations of social meanings.[10]

Easter as a main event in the church fulfills here the effect of a communicator by, on one hand, forming the boundaries of communal behavior and consequently confirming and at the same time reproducing them, while on the other hand also dynamically broadening them more and more. These interpersonal relationships of social actors have left behind the rosters of roles and lists of players as a sort of archeology, as has been excellently treated in Bernd Neumann's monumental documentation.[11]

A central historical category for the understanding of these interpersonal networks and the asymmetries that are stored within them could be „trust", which, in the Luhmannian sense, also always includes effective mechanisms for the reduction of

[8] See OBERMAIR 1999, 402 et seq.
[9] OBERMAIR 1997, 293 et seq.
[10] Geertz's interpretive theory of culture is developed in GEERTZ 1999, 7 et seq.
[11] See NEUMANN 1987.

social complexity, that is, helping to form procedures for the thorough coherence of the new urban confusion at the transition to the Early Modern Era.[12] Historically specific assumptions of uncertainty and contingency, as were typical for the change in the times around 1500, required the particular formation of trust in institutions and systems, allowing social actors to economize on transaction costs. In the play culture, such rituals of communication were possibly employed unintentionally, in any case, however, lastingly helping to form the urban community of values.

Additional questions can be associated with the keywords „publicness" and „privateness". Even if it is reasonable to refrain from the assignment of the formation of modern categories into Medieval and Early Modern Era epochs, it could indeed be fruitful to examine the conditions for public behavior in the Premodern Era. New approaches in media and communications theory have shown that what is dealt with in discourses on „public" and „private" are important cultural strategies on the thorough coherence of social reality.[13]

The Bozen Role Register of 1495

Notes, actors' names, information on props, and news of performances in the municipal records all point to the use of scripted texts with a performance and document the intense organizational and logistical goings-on of the play.[14] The register of actors of the Bozen Passion of 1495 comes directly from the practice of the performance. The following compilation offers a representative selection of role players with their social functions:[15]

Role	*Name*	*Identification*	*Source*
Tercius Judeus	Genewein	Jenewein Pignater, town bread weigher, BO under the Arcade 1491	HOENIGER 1951, 20 no. 37
Annas	Jacob Pfeffer	town barber, CR 1484 and 1495, BO on the Rathausplatz 1497, hospital director 1495-98	HOENIGER 1951, 22 no. 44; OBERMAIR 1986, 425 no. 642, 436 et seq., no. 660 and 661
Nicodemus	Maister Ludwig	Ludwig Goldschmied tax collector in the municipal court 1489	*Bozner Bürgerbuch 1956*, vol. 2, 1
Joseph ab	Hainrich Peck	Proprietor of the bakers' fief	HOENIGER 1934, 40 et

[12] See LUHMANN 1989. For an historical view on „trust" as an example of early modern era Augsburg, see the anthology of Mauelshagen 2001.
[13] The works of ALTHOFF (for the Early and High Middles Ages) and MÜLLER 1996 (on questions of performance and script) have already created a basis for this.
[14] Already extensively evaluated by WACKERNELL 1897, XL-L.
[15] According to the actors' lists in KLAMMER 1986, 366 et seq. and NEUMANN 1987, 143 et seq.

Aromathia			seq.
Zedonius	Hertmayr	Leonhard Hiertmair, tax collector in the municipal court 1495, CR and BO under the Arcade 1497, master builder and many-time M 1488-1511	*Bozner Bürgerbuch 1956*, vol. 2, 1 et seq.; HOENIGER 1951, 24 no. 50
(Homo) portans aquam	Österreicher	his son Hans Österreicher, BO under the Arcade 1541	HOENIGER 1951, 31 et seq. no. 84
Mathias	Rocker	Hans Rogker, BO under the Arcade 1497 (the inn „am Stern")	HOENIGER 1951, 20 et seq. no. 37 and 38
Judas	Duty collector on the Kuntersweg road (*Zollner im Kunttersweg*), (Johannes) Zollner at the turnpike (*an der Stangen*)	Hans Permetin, duty collector on the Kuntersweg road (inspector) 1487, tax collector in the municipal court 1495	JÄGER 1873, 444 no. 5; *Bozner Bürgerbuch 1956*, vol. 2, 1 et seq.
Jacobus maior	Hanns an der Vischpanck	Hans Forster from the Bozen fish board, enfeoffed with the town fishmongers 1468, CR 1483, BO under the Arcade 1497	MORIZZO/REICH 1907/14, 595; Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum Innsbruck, Dip. 1360, no. 79; HOENIGER 1951, 19 no. 27
Secundus Judeus	Perger	Hans Perger, cooper, CR 1473 and 1484	Stadtarchiv Bozen, Archiv des Heiliggeistspitals, Orig. doc.; OBERMAIR 1986, 425 no. 642
Famulus turris	Truefer	Christof Trueffer, councilman 1501, M 1507	HOENIGER 1951, 20 no. 32
Johannes Baptista	Martein Pader	Martin Waldner, barber 1487, tax collector in the municipal court 1489, BO on the Obstplatz 1497	*Bozner Bürgerbuch 1956*, vol. 2, 1; HOENIGER 1951, 42 no. 149
Quintus famulus herodis	Kaysersperger Vetter	Hans and Anna Kaysersperger, merchants from Augsburg, BO on the Obstplatz 1483	MORIZZO/REICH 1907/14, 610; HOENIGER 1951, 41 no. 147
Quartus miles	Moser	Sigmund Moser, councilman 1482 and 1486, M 1483	HOENIGER 1934, 91 Anm. 254
Sextus miles	Gschwán	possibly Tschwan Gadolt, spice dealer, CR 1478 and 1491, BO under the Arcade 1509	Archiv Rubein Meran, Orig. Urk.; Südtiroler Landesarchiv Bozen, Archiv Welsberg-Spaur, Orig. doc.; HOENIGER 1951, 27 no. 60 and 61

Abbreviations: BO = building owner, M = mayor, CR = holder of citizen's rights (*Bürgerrecht*)

These examples already clearly show that as a rule, the role players were representatives from the top professions of the city from the artisan or upper class sectors. It was mayors, merchants, and church provosts, directors of hospitals and schools, tax and duties collectors, elite professions (cobblers, saddlers, and coopers) and monopolistic supply professions (bakers and butchers) who took on the roles. The

nobility, who at any rate were represented in the town council, were completely missing – they had no connection with the „service sector", with the city of consumers. This is an indication of communication connections which, within the urban sector, were clearly defined by the ruling classes. Their forms of communication were clearly allocated to the hierarchical level and, although they were grouped by religious functions, they actually lie outside of the immediate area of influence of church institutions.[16] The church monopoly on the interpretation of social reality came through again and again in the self-confident plays of the citizens. If it happens at all, then what we see here is an innovative, emancipating element: the city community does indeed convey religious models within the framework of the church, but as active associations of people, even if they are structured through the asymmetries of class and gender, poverty and ownership.

Money, position, and status function as the „currencies of social inequality".[17] The most important social capital of individuals as well as family groups is the „honor" in the sense of a bundle of factors of prestige, power, and influence that regulate the scarce good of belonging.[18] The reproduction effect with this is based upon an establishment of social inequality that expresses itself in the fact that the class to which the players belong is the ruling class of town. In this respect, it is clear that social class „occurs" as Edward P. Thompson suggested, that it is continuously being produced, and even in the period around 1500, it is not a static continuum.[19]

Furthermore, at the threshold of the Modern Era, there was a significant periphery of poverty in Bozen. The elite lived along the Arcade and in the new town district (*Neustadtviertel*).[20] In the spiritual play, as well, this periphery of the underclasses as an asymmetry of social relations is visible. The economic availability in the Max Weberian sense – the play skill as an ability to have the resource of time available – already reflects the corporative connection of the play direction which, with citizen's rights, building ownership, and eligibility for the town council, is a part of the social insignias of the city's caste society.[21] This proves to be deeply structured through effective mechanisms of rules for dignitaries and the circulation of the elite.[22]

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[16] See the case study of MITTERAUER 1990, 272.
[17] See KRECKEL 1997, 17 et seq.
[18] For the state of research, see SCHREINER/SCHWERHOFF 1995.
[19] See THOMPSON 1987.
[20] See LOOSE 1999 and OBERMAIR/STAMPFER 2000.
[21] For Max Weber, „availability from one's own private duties" is a constitutive precondition for the position of a dignitary; see WEBER 1985, 170.
[22] See the important preparatory work on the leading class of Bozen by ANDRESEN 1995.

Added to this is a far-reaching aspect of sexual inequality in the sense of gender, in other words, in the social construction of gender roles: the manifested mutual trust of a prestigious performing group becomes visible in gender-specific forms which bear the signs of male organization through the tendency to exclude female casting. The by far predominantly male casting – but was that also the case in the guilds, brotherhoods, and top public officials? – forms a stable gender asymmetry that corresponds to an actually existing monopoly of the public.[23]

Are we therefore to also imagine the plays as a rite of initiation for men in the public sphere? Unfortunately, we hardly know anything about the age of the players and whether seniority represented a criterion, and likewise we know little about the actual communication and its rituals, gestures, facial expressions, drama, customs, voices, or music. In a similar way, the monastic tradition of Latin ceremonies and plays that was already centuries old continued to have an effect in the fixedness of male role players.[24]

The urban society was constructed in a hierarchical, nearly caste-like manner. This did not preclude social mobility, but that occurred repeatedly through relationships of patronage and clientele and was only to be achieved through proximity to instruments of power and knowledge of interpretation. What was decisive were the ownership structures, and building ownership remains a reliable indicator of the social positioning of individuals. One's „inherited knowledge" – frozen in the indications of one's position – determined economic and social opportunities. [25]

Vigil Raber was also a generator of cultural consciousness for such specific circles of recipients against a relatively unified social background. Society around 1500 found itself on the threshold of the „Gutenberg galaxy", whereby it would be worthwhile to discuss at some point why all of the Raberian records remained exclusively handwritten and could not exploit the functional added value of typography. It would certainly not be in error if the play texts were to be interpreted as „orders of knowledge" with a high level of inertia with relatively little social flexibility. The static moment is certainly also a reflection of the quick dying away of the Easter play culture in the time of denominationalism, which is why the plays did not enjoy a culture of long duration. The technical change in media of the Early Modern Era

[23] See the thesis of LABOUVIE 1997.
[24] In this regard, see, for instance, BERSCHIN 1999.
[25] For the Tyrolean area, see the programmatic sketch by BRANDSTÄTTER 2000; for Bozen see OBERMAIR/STAMPFER 2000, 403 et seq.; the example of the city of Hall, which is instructive in an intraregional comparison, is elucidated by BRANDSTÄTTER 2002, 36 et seq.

ignores them as it were, even if with the recipients, new economies of understanding must presuppose accelerated apperceptions.[26]

The Urban Area As a Social Stage

With this topic, we can take up the clever considerations of Peg Katritzky on the stage plan of the Bozen Palm Sunday Play of 1514.[27] This unique memorial – in actuality, a relatively primitive architectural drawing which, however, has no comparisons –immediately makes clear the occupation and taking possession of the public space. The stage in proximity to the church is at the same time the social stage of the city. Its actors, the *dramatis personae*, are social actors, the *civitatis personae*, if the wordplay may be permitted. In the ubiquitous public processions of premodern Bozen, these societal functions of communal walking, singing, and praying shine out.[28]

Social inequality is reproduced in the area:[29] the process of the constituting of the area by the public plays includes apparent separations and discriminations and reflects lasting disadvantages or, in the inversion of the argument, preferences. Along those lines, the institutionalized discrimination against partial groups of society (women, economically pauperized classes, and Jews) cannot be overlooked, as underscored, for instance, by the strongly anti-Jewish component of the Good Friday liturgy and the passion plays.[30]

In this context, the all-encompassing power of religion proves itself as a social force of interpretation. On one hand, it has an effect as a medium of a force that is strongly disciplined and that forms social character, one which permeates all areas of life and inundates body and soul. On the other hand, however, it also provides attractive offers of salvation and an orientation toward a release from social misery.

In the Easter plays, these offerings are filled with added value in an attractive manner:

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[26] For the problem area of the early modern transcription processes, see, for instance, the anthology by WENZEL 2000.
[27] See KATRITZKY 2004, 85 et seq.; see also ROLOFF 1990, 95.
[28] See DÖRRER 1957 and PAOLI PODA 1999, 45 et seq. (with a topographical reconstruction of the Christmas processions in the urban area of Bozen from the middle of the fifteenth century).
[29] See LÖW 2001.
[30] For the role of Jews in the Bozen passion of 1495, see the study by KLAMMER 1983. For the long tradition of Christian anti-Judaism, see ALTERMATT 1999, 26 et seq.

- Social added value: making social distinctions visible within the framework of a festivalized urban public;
- Religious surplus: proximity to the expectation of salvation, therefore self-healing functions with a strong sacred radiance that must have been considerable and which also appears in the cares for the memory of the dead, with recalling the departed through prayers of remembrance, in testamentary dealings, and memorial foundation donations (*Seelgerätsstiftungen*) with their expressive arengas (preambles);
- Emotional aspect: a total experience that appeals to all senses, which is inherent in all mystery plays throughout the history of humanity, even with its inhibition-freeing function that channels and sublimates aggression.

We also must not forget what the central content of the Passion events was, which, so to speak, was accepted by everyone a thousand times over in the Credo and was renewed over and over again in the core of action – the cruel torture and murder by a judiciary directed by the state that eliminated a social rebel and also had the theme of subversion and non-aggression versus the monopoly on the use of force. But also the function of horror that is purifying, inhibition-freeing, and at the same time strengthening of the community, and the power that it holds.

Within this bundle, a variety of interests and emotions are connected which must have made the so-called „*Große Aufführung*" („Great Performance") of 1514 – the seven-day Bozen play cycle that at any rate lasted an entire week – into a religious-urban Woodstock for the city's public. We must think of the entire thing within the highly explosive area of conflict of looking forward to salvation, of the social dynamics of the urban society and the urban-rural tension, of the gathering denominationalism crises, and of the worsening of the policies of territorial order of the Maximilian phase.

For such an experience of social and political uncertainty of ideal receptacles and sounding boards, the area of the city was the church legitimation of the history of ideas and ideological background of the play. As a more or less deliberate generation of consciousness for city recipients, there was a strong reference back by texts and plays – that are indeed systems of interpretation of the social reality – to early modern life.

The Easter plays are an interesting display window on a situation of radical change: we are standing at the beginning of the urban public, and thus at the beginning of the modern experiencing of the world. In that respect, the plays and their practice are dense sources upon which the interactions of political, economic, and social factors in cultural processes and artifacts can be paradigmatically analyzed. The staging of

religious culture within the framework of the „upper class" play culture does not only increase the possibilities of cultural self-representation and autonomy, but it also leads to new potentials for conflict and to social inequalities that are reflected in the differences of social groups, lifestyles, and territory.

Conclusions

The play practice and the staged performances cannot be imagined without the demonstration of fine differences. It was not *l'art pour l'art*; what was played and reflected was a slice of social reality. Nowhere was this as clear as in the absence of women who, in the best of cases, were spectators, while it went without saying that women's roles were filled by men. This is the consequence of a varied, premolded „Talibanization" of the public, of a representative public that was structured by ritual (in the sense of Jürgen Habermas),[31] and for women – within the framework of a public ritual that was appealing in many senses – it had to remain generally visible and, as exclusion, painfully noticeable and perceptible.

This was the central reproduction achievement of the Easter plays – the solidification of societal-social roles through their representation. The intention of staged religion was the very profane expectation of salvation in this life of the urban world around 1500. At its heart, the play culture was an affirmative consensus model for the urban public that stabilized social relations. We can well imagine that precisely in the year of the imperial tax of the common *pfennig* and the imperial reform of 1495, high demands for stabilization were brought to urban life.[32] Even from such contingency experiences, the peculiar double character of social warmth and social coldness of the urban play culture is inferred: warmth as the experience of closeness within the circle of others who belong, coldness as the establishment of social exclusion and marginalization within the framework of one out of all of the societal dimensions and the religious-ritualistic staging that penetrates the urban sphere.

[31] See the theory of public references in HABERMAS 1990, 14 et seq.; for the historical view, see also WILLOWEIT 1999 (with bibliography).
[32] See MORAW 1995.

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