

Theatre and the University: Historical and Future Perspectives

Christopher B. BALME, PhD

Professor, Head of Institute

Institut für Theaterwissenschaft, LMU Munich

balme@lmu.de

Abstract: *This paper discusses the emergence of arts education at universities and associated institutions of higher learning after 1945. In the first part the question of the university as an institution will be discussed from the point of view of neo-institutional theory and especially the processes of isomorphism that have been frequently described in this theoretical approach. The second section examines the emergence of arts education between 1950 and 1970, i.e. at the height of the Cold War. The third section proposes a topology of arts education and the differential realisation of these models in different parts of the world. The final section discusses the emergence of universities of the arts and their somewhat hybrid position within the larger institutional framework of the research-focused university of today.*

Keywords: *arts education; theatre studies; theatre training; universities; neo-institutionalism.*

As scholars and practitioners of the arts we are well used to being denigrated, marginalized and being told that our place at the university table is a small one, compared to the important disciplines: the so-called STEM subjects of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, as well as management, law and economics, and of course the life sciences. They form, according to the current ideology, the foundation of the university-based knowledge economy, technological innovation and thereby economic growth. What we are perhaps less aware is that the university itself is under attack. An article published in *Times Higher Education* in October 2020 carried the headline: “Thomas Frank: we must challenge the worship of educational attainment” (Morgan 2020). An article published in a newspaper devoted to higher education questions the very justification of it. The article is an interview with the American columnist, and left-wing thinker Thomas Frank. His book is a critique of the critique of populism that has become so popular amongst in left-liberal circles. John Morgan, the editor of *Times Higher Education*, notes:



Following the Brexit vote and Donald Trump’s election in 2016, a slew of books have spotlighted the political divide between graduates and non-graduates, along with the iniquities and inequalities bred by the educational meritocracy that is now the driving principle of many Western societies.

Morgan 2020

The key word here is ‘educational meritocracy’, rule by the (university) educated. Indeed, a number of books and many articles have appeared in 2020 focusing on this question: British political commentator David Goodhart (2020) and Harvard philosopher, Michael Sandel (2020), both advance similar arguments. It goes without saying that all the authors are university educated. Goodhart and Frank both point to the more balanced German system as an antidote to the excesses of university education. So it is ironical, that a leading German public intellectual and former social democratic State Minister of Culture, Julian Nida-Rümelin published a book in 2014 entitled *Der Akademisierungswahn* (The Academic Mania). It is subtitled “the crisis of vocational and academic education”. He argues that the much-vaunted German dual education system is itself in crisis because of an over-emphasis on university education.

On the other side of the argument, we find many other publications that emphasize not just the importance of higher education, especially university education, but also its global expansion. It goes without saying that none of these books addresses the creative arts, let alone theatre education when talking about the university. Although the liberal arts *are* often cited as an avenue of study which leads ineluctably to below average earnings (see Nida-Rümelin 2014). For creative artists the figure is even lower.

I wish to discuss the emergence of the arts, understood as the creative fields of fine arts, music and particularly theatre, as part of university education. This is obviously a very broad topic so for the purposes of detailed discussion we will be focusing on theatre and performance but from an institutional perspective it is necessary to broaden our perspective and at least retain the fine arts and music, and sometimes even architecture within our purview.

My approach is based on institutional theory, in particular sociological neo-institutionalism, which has gained enormous influence in the broader field of studying institutions and organisations. My paper departs from recent research into what can be called the global university. This research studies the incontrovertible success story of the university as an institution and how it disseminated throughout the world, especially in the last 50 years. Sociologists David Frank and John Meyer note:

A once-parochial institution particular to Western Christendom has spread to all parts of the world—sometimes with colonialism, but often independently, as societies have voluntarily and eagerly subscribed to this institutional goose, hoping for its putative golden eggs.

Frank and Meyer 2020, 11



Although it originated in mediaeval Europe as an appendage of the church, the university has become one of the most successful institutional models to emerge from the nineteenth century. Its success story is nowhere more observable than in the so-called developing world, where universities have been founded at the same rate as in more developed countries and in some cases even superseding them. John Meyer observes that “even in sub-Saharan Africa, which enters postcolonial society with almost no tertiary education, we find the same growth pattern... Some African countries now easily have enrolment ratios that exceed European countries of a few decades ago” (Krücken and Drori 2009, 359).

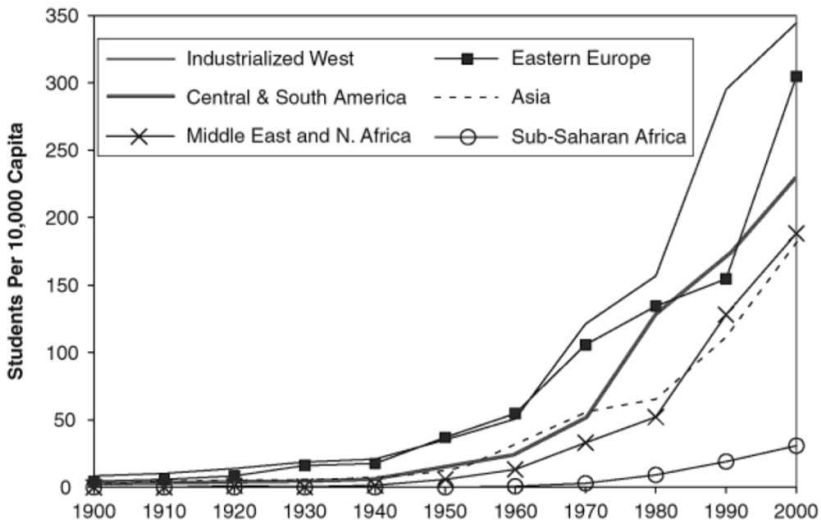


Figure 17.2. Tertiary enrollment per 10,000 capita, regional averages, 1900–2000

Figure 1. Krücken and Drori 2010, 17.2.

The university: almost always the same but not quite

David Frank and John Meyer propose the controversial thesis that the institutional model of the university is distinguished principally by its overwhelming homogeneity. They argue that as an *institution* the university is largely homogenous, whereas as an *organisation* it demonstrates high levels of heterogeneity. This observation is backed up by a large amount of empirical data going back to the late nineteenth century, the period



in which the university begins its diffusion around the (non-European) world. They define the university in neo-institutional terms as being based on common beliefs rather than on a highly differentiated and specialised response to specific problems and fields of knowledge. The university, they argue, is so successful because it is largely isomorphic: its content, the types of courses, research specialities, even the designations of professorships, vary little around the world.

Any specific university derives meaning and authority from its claim to be a particular instance of a permanent, widespread, and now global institution: “So physics and economics or sociology are presented in Kerala, India, as though they had every element in common with the same subjects in Berlin, Germany” (Frank and Meyer 2020, 22). While this may seem a somewhat outrageous claim (surely sociologists in Kerala study different sociological phenomena than their counterparts in Berlin), it is more comprehensible if we understand the theoretical foundations on which the empirical research is based.

Both authors are neo-institutional sociologists, and indeed John W. Meyer is one of the founding fathers of this highly influential strand of institutional research and has authored a number of widely cited papers (a number are collected in Krücken and Drori 2009). Fundamental to neo-institutional theory is the distinction between institution and organisation. While organisations may be highly disparate, they operate often within an institutional framework that constrains them to become isomorphic, i.e. they begin to resemble one another because they are constrained to share the same beliefs. The economic historian Douglas North explains this distinction between institutions and organisations as the rules of the game (the former) versus the players (the latter): “Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction”, while organizations “are groups of individuals bound by some common purpose to achieve objectives” (North 1990, 3f.).

The university as a ‘world institution’ and perhaps the most important conveyor of the ‘global knowledge society’ is distinguished by a number of features which the authors define broadly as “religion-like” or “cosmological”. These features include commitment to a body of knowledge that is believed to be “universally or ultimately true”. They term this a “cosmological supposition” that reality is the same everywhere and always, for example the belief in gravity (Frank and Meyer, 2020, 3). There is probably no university in the world where it is not generally accepted that gravity exists or indeed that the world is round, whereas there exist groups of individuals who do contest this (but they are not generally active in universities). This means that such knowledge can be examined and taught under one cultural and institutional frame so that it can be discussed and compared in highly distinct cultural localities.

It is equally important to assume and accept that human beings everywhere can acquire access to this knowledge through training and learning. Persons who possess an adequate level of education can begin the process of acquiring it and some may even ultimately extend this knowledge (by doing a PhD for example). It is also obvious that the



university as a place of knowledge acquisition and expansion is, or should be, indifferent to questions of nationality, race or gender. The university is quite literally universal.

The university also affects personhood and identity. The authors note that the certificates and diplomas acquired provide the holders not only with an elevated social status but that this status remains a lifelong symbol of achievement. University degrees do not have an expiry date. They can even have resonance beyond death (gravestones will often enshrine for posterity an individual's academic credentials). In Germany the doctoral degree – and in Austria even the old masters degree, *Magister* – becomes part of the holder's name, leading to changes in passports and identity documents.

These 'cosmological' foundations of the university are in no way at odds with its rationalised qualities. Frank and Meyer do argue however against an understanding of the university in functionalist terms as a rationalised machine as far as its educational function is concerned. Indeed they argue, whenever societies have attempted to redefine the university in terms of rationalised specialisation, it has very often failed, and the long term result has been a reabsorption of such specialised organisations into the bosom of the university. They also argue that the impact of the university on human identity has been significant, perhaps most obviously in the sense that it confers on individuals the status of personhood. The latter is "institutionalised in human rights, and it is assumed to be invariable across social groups, and indeed the whole world" (Frank and Meyer 2020, 7).

Despite the impact on human identity and the universalisation of a concept of personhood, universities have proven to be particularly ill-suited and ill-equipped to actually engineer social change on a purely functional level: "The university was relatively useless as an instrument for basic social progress" (ibid, 15). This is because much of the teaching and research done in universities seems to be irrelevant to any plausible social benefit: its very 'academic' nature almost precludes it from being an efficacious actor in the social field. The commitment to basic research means by definition that the knowledge generated does not provide immediate utilitarian benefits but is more abstract and generalised. Therefore, the authors argue, while the mediaeval church institution should have given way to much more specialised centres for research and training, and this was indeed attempted at different phases in its history: after the French Revolution, throughout the Soviet Union, and in the early period of the United States before the research model of the German university was adopted. These proved however to be relatively short lived and impractical because the functions they were designed to perform were often superseded by the development of knowledge and research and often became obsolete. Not so the university, which proved much more flexible and adept at absorbing change, integrating new fields of knowledge without fundamentally altering the institution itself.

The university as institution has been able to accommodate and even flourish under myriad organizational forms: state-financed and fee-paying, state-financed without fees, private endowment, church- or faith-based to name only some. The neo-liberal management university with its proliferation of self-assessment and evaluations doesn't



fundamentally alter the institution, only the organizational level where we see strong isomorphic forces at work, as marketization (mal)practices find purchase around the world. They are especially pronounced in those systems that are operated with a high degree of fee-paying students. Most recent discussion of the university has focused on the adoption of the neoliberal model around the world with its supposed potential to generate economic growth by collecting substantial fees from mainly foreign students, thus becoming part of a globalized economy. For Frank and Meyer even the neoliberal university is still just an organizational variation with many subforms of the still largely isomorphic institutional model.

Learning the arts: proto versus real universities

Under the broad umbrella of the isomorphic development of the university model, other institutions of higher education also sprang up, sometimes in direct competition with, sometimes broadly allied to the university. Initially they were distinct from it. These included music conservatories, art and military academies and polytechnics, whose distinguishing characteristic was an emphasis on professional training with little to no interest in basic research. Art schools have of course a longer lineage that in Europe goes back to the seventeenth century. Although the French *école des beaux-arts* was originally a highly selective and elitist institution, it was emulated wherever the French language was spoken, which, in the light of French colonialism, was in a great number of countries. The same can be said for music conservatories, which spread slowly in the nineteenth but very rapidly in the twentieth century.

TABLE 2.1. Proliferation of Universities and Other Institutions of Higher Education

<i>Minerva</i> 1895	<i>Minerva</i> 1938	<i>Minerva</i> 1969
248 universities & colleges	1,066 universities & colleges	3,892 universities & colleges
231 other institutions of higher education:	1,870 other institutions of higher education:	10,182 other institutions of higher education:
61 agriculture	187 agriculture	658 agriculture
7 art	129 art	1,734 art
6 business	124 business	1,386 business
12 education	158 education	1,280 education
33 law	251 law	690 law
56 medicine	337 medicine	1,159 medicine
32 polytechnic	237 polytechnic	2,627 polytechnic
24 theology	447 theology	648 theology

Figure 2. Frank and Meyer 2020, 26.



In fact, arts institutions are probably the most expansionist of all the various “kin institutions at the margins of the university”, as Frank and Meyer term them (2020, 27). In their analysis of higher education in the twentieth century, they calculate that schools of law, medicine and theology grew 30 times between 1895 and 1969 whereas schools of art “grew by orders of magnitude around 200” (ibid.). (See figure 2.)

If we look at this data on the arts in more detail (which Frank and Meyer do not do) we can study processes of institutional expansion, differentiation and de-differentiation.

While the so-called proto-university is by no means exclusive to socialist countries, it is without doubt a defining characteristic of them. The Soviet Union was always suspicious of the ‘bourgeois’ university. After the revolution of 1917, the needs of an emergent nation focused on workers and peasants appeared to be better served by a series of specialised training institutes, thereby “fulfilling utilitarian dreams in dismantling the university into functionally differentiated parts” (2020, 33). Indeed, the arts seem to be much better suited to such proto-universities than to the university *sui generis* with its much more generalised principles and commitment to basic research. The budding cello player, while certainly not indifferent to the history of music, has quite different and compelling requirements, than a music historian who feels happier in a university-type faculty of arts than in a music conservatory. Isomorphism is not to be found in the relationship between the proto- and the ‘real’ university but rather in the forms adopted by the many arts institutes across the world.

The following analysis is drawn from the *Minerva Yearbooks* (Schuder 1952–1969) which were published regularly, sometimes even annually from the late nineteenth century. They ended in 1969 when the task of tracking higher education from a global perspective became impossible. Here I have analyzed the data published between the early 1950s and late 1960s in respect to institutions devoted to the arts, especially architecture, music, the fine arts and theatre and dance, the categories referenced in the publication. For ease of reference I have concentrated on the proto-universities, conservatories and arts academies, and not on the programmes offered within universities as part of BA programmes because they are extremely difficult to identify with any accuracy. I will return to this question in the final section, Universitization of theatre education.

The yearbooks distinguish between Europe and “außereuropäisch”, i.e. outside Europe which includes the United States. I have disaggregated the data and created a new category for the United States because the sheer number of organizations and their institutional power in the US certainly rivalled Europe by the 1950s. It is important to note that the data recorded in the yearbooks is by no means exhaustive but is certainly representative of the relative importance of the artistic genres and disciplines.

Figure 3 shows the relative numbers of organizations in the respective art forms. Even in Europe in 1952 (bottom middle) only 15% of organizations are devoted to the theatre and dance arts compared to 33 percent for the fine arts and 46% for music. This number decreases significantly when we look outside Europe (excluding the United States): in 1956 only roughly 6% offered training in theatre and dance compared to 47%



in music, 45% in the fine arts and 30% in architecture. These numbers improve somewhat a decade later when now 9% offer theatre and dance and we see a relative decrease in the other art forms. An interesting observation concerns the importance of architecture in non-European countries compared to Europe: most of these countries are developing countries and therefore invested significantly in training and architecture.

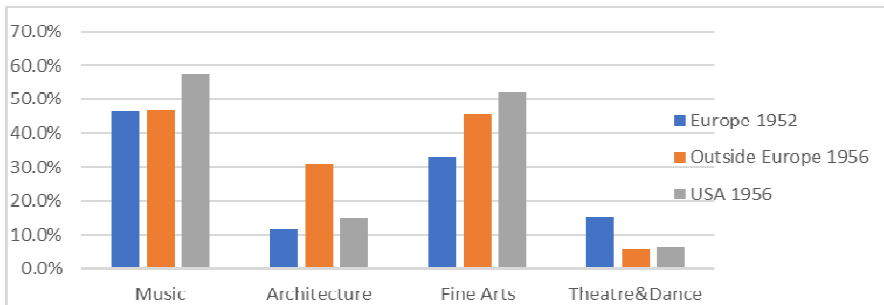


Figure 3. Arts Education worldwide 1956.

Source: Aggregated data compiled from Schuder 1952 and 1956.

If we look at the geographical distribution, we can observe a similar overall growth in the decade between the mid-1950s in the late 1960s (Figure 4). Except for Algeria, Morocco and Egypt in the North and South Africa, Africa has no institutes whatsoever (according to the *Minerva Yearbook*). By 1969 the situation had changed significantly. In West Africa we have a School of Drama at the university of Ibadan in Nigeria as well as other arts institutions such as an *École Nationale des Beaux-Arts* in Ivory Coast and a similar school in Senegal. In East Africa there is a conservatory of music in Kenya. The background to this expansion is of course decolonization and a massive effort to invest in universities both by local governments, the former colonial powers such as Britain and France and American state and philanthropic aid (especially the big foundations: R, F and C). The numbers change from 137 in 1956 to 284 in 1969, an increase of 100%.

In 1969 the *Minerva Jahrbuch* lists “the Hanoi Dance and Ballet School, the Rhodesian College of Music, the Pyongyang Institute of Dramatic and Cinematographic Arts, and the Kabul Art School” (Frank and Meyer 2020, 26). It can be safely assumed that at the Hanoi Dance and Ballet School the same *études* at the bar were being practiced as in Moscow or Leningrad.

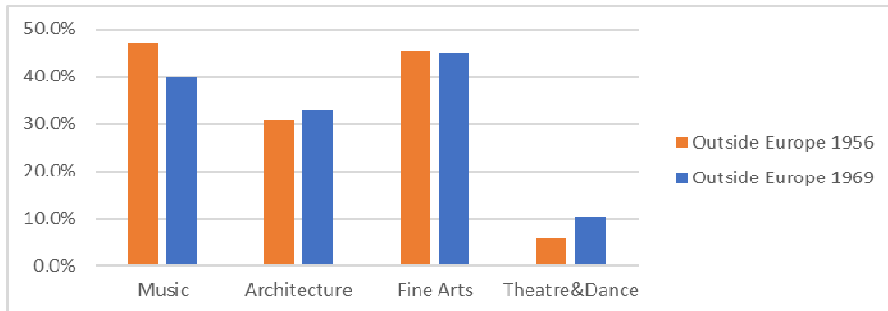


Figure 4. Arts Education outside Europe (excluding the USA) 1956 and 1969.

Source: Aggregated data compiled from Schuder 1956 and 1969.

Universitization of theatre education

As we have seen, the number of specialized theatre training institutions outside Europe and USA remains small: in the absence of professional theatre in most of these countries, except Argentine and Brazil and in the Far East (China and Japan), the need does not exist. The final part of this paper will be devoted to what I shall call the “Universitization of theatre education”. My focus is now global not just on the so-called developing world. Rather than trying to count the different organizations (Minerva discontinued publication in 1969) I propose a topological approach (Fig. 5). One can follow the evolution of theatre education and studies on the basis of an institutional typology which moves towards ever greater isomorphism.

Type	Conservatory and national drama schools	Theatre university: example GITIS	MFA	BA/MA	University of the Arts
Geographical distribution	Western Europe, USA,	Russia, China and former Socialist countries	USA	global	global

Figure 5. A typology of tertiary-level theatre education and training

Seen from a global perspective the integration of theatre studies, education and training conforms to roughly five models which we find in different countries with a particular emphasis depending on linguistic and cultural heritage. The oldest model is the conservatory, which goes back to the nineteenth century (and in some cases even further). A conservatory is by definition vocational, highly specialized and usually pays only lip service to scholarly endeavour or research. The best conservatories are highly prestigious such as RADA in London, the École Supérieure d’Art Dramatique in Paris, and various national drama schools in Australia, Canada, India and New Zealand. They



are primarily acting schools which may also include directing, design and other theatre professions, and now are sometimes affiliated with a university.

A second widespread model is the MFA (the Master of Fine Arts) which we find throughout the USA and some other anglophone countries. Here professional training is integrated institutionally into the university; departments often have an academic branch, where they are termed "theory and criticism", but the primary focus is on the 'industry'. The MFA is an institutional response to the need for high-level artistic training in the absence of state-run conservatories so the university stepped in to provide the organizational framework. The first university to admit students the degree of Master of Fine Arts was the University of Iowa in 1940.

A third model, which I term here the theatre university, emerged in Russia after the Revolution and became enshrined in the famous GITIS. In 1922 GITIS (*Gosudarstvenniy Institut Teatralnogo Iskustva*) was established in Moscow, as the name suggests, as a State Institute for the Theatre Arts. It had gone through a number of name changes in a genealogy going back to 1878 when it was part of a music school under aristocratic patronage. The new form became the model, however, of many similar institutes wherever the Soviet Union exercised influence directly or indirectly. Its current self-description reads:

GITIS is the largest and oldest independent theatrical arts school in Russia, founded in 1878. We train students in various disciplines and provide *a combination of traditional university education* and innovative up-to-date methods. More than 1500 students from various countries study at the School. GITIS is proud to be a direct heir of the famous Stanislavski's system.

GITIS 2021

Its *Modellcharakter* lay in the combination of a university-type education in the liberal arts and humanities with vocational training in different genres of the performing arts. We find imitations or approximations in most Eastern European countries including former Yugoslavia, East Germany (GDR), China, in Syria, Iraq and Mongolia. The special characteristic of this proto-university was the combination of a broad selection of specialised training for different genres of the performing arts and departments devoted to theatre history and criticism, and sometimes even dramaturgy.

With the end of the socialist system in 1989 in Europe, the GITIS model lost its isomorphic force. Although it still exists in Russia, its imitations in former East Germany, for example, were disestablished or reformed in such a way that most of the university components (especially theatre studies) were relocated to universities and the vocational training parts were consolidated as proper conservatories or as part of universities of the arts. With its 1500 students GITIS is a very small university indeed, and in fact is not really a university at all but rather an extended conservatory, a proto-university at best in Frank and Meyer's terminology.



BA/MA

The study of the performing arts, whether as a humanistic discipline or for vocational purposes, remains a hybrid affair. While the GITIS model proved attractive as long as state funding was available, it was (and is) a very expensive form of tertiary education. Across the capitalist world we find another kind of isomorphism at work, namely conservatories being either integrated into or allied with universities. This process was perhaps most observable in the UK where traditional conservatories were either associated with universities, or new universities, mostly former polytechs, opened up theatre and dance studies programmes that had a large component of practical work. Conservatories always precede university study of an art form because they supersede or perhaps ‘institutionalize’ the older master-apprentice model. What we observe in the realm of the performing arts since 1945 is an unmistakable trend towards integrating training into the university, thereby confirming the thesis that proto-universities are often eventually folded into the university proper. This led in the 1990s to major problems because the university has by definition a research component, and most of the staff engaged in providing training for the theatre arts were not research-active in the sense defined by the classical university. There were two solutions to this problem, both of which were followed in the UK and other countries. One was to set up a research department which saw the implementation of MA and PhD programmes at august institutions such as the Central School of Speech and Drama and an affiliation with an established university (e.g. the University of London). The other was to redefine artistic work as research where researchers were either practitioners reflecting on their practice or where the research component of artistic work was recognized as such rather than being distinct from it.

The discipline of drama studies in the UK had always seen itself as different and able, at least potentially, to unite “the heart and the head” (Boenisch 2020, 238) and thereby counteract the increasing specialization of academic disciplines. Ever since the foundation of the first department at the University of Bristol in 1947, practical work had been part of the curriculum without any claims to providing professional training, which did not mean of course that graduates did not go on to become artistic professionals.

The driving force behind the ‘practical turn’ in theatre and performance research emerged in the 1990s with the global move towards quantifying research and using it as a benchmark for so-called ‘excellence’. As Frank and Meyer note, the university has tilted in the past two decades away from teaching and towards research, at least at the so-called ‘research universities’ with the new denomination itself a sign of a need for internal differentiation: “The institution increasingly prioritizes active knowledge production, such that research now rivals, or perhaps even trumps, the knowledge transmission in teaching as the university’s central purpose” (Frank and Meyer 2020, 61). First world countries reacted in different ways but since the 1990s there has been an ineluctable movement towards adjudicating success and thereby access to state funds through research ‘outputs’. The decisive turning point according to David Whitton was not integration of practice itself, but rather the claim repeatedly made during the 1990s that the



creative process of the artist-researcher and their results (mostly artistic performances of some kind) should be evaluated as valid outputs analogous to peer-reviewed articles or monographs (Whitton 2009, 80). This claim has been largely accepted in the academy in the Anglo-world (excluding the USA perhaps). It is still contested in some European countries with their traditional institutional divisions between conservatories and universities and where ‘practice’ still plays a relatively minor role.

Theatre and the University of the Arts

Tertiary education in the creative arts has expanded significantly since 1945. As we noted above, 200-fold over the past century. The most recent institutional response to integrating the creative and especially the performing arts into a university-like structure has been the creation of the University of the Arts. This is a relatively new invention, at least under the current name. As a Google Ngram survey reveals (Figure 6), the term is almost non-existent before 1980.

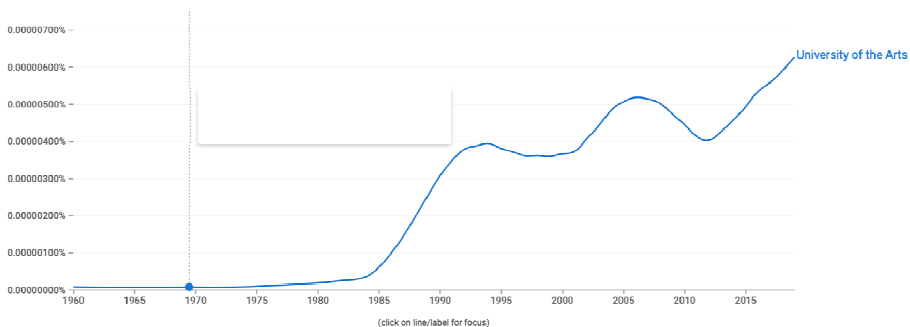


Figure 6. Frequency of the term ‘University of the Arts’ in the Google Corpus 1960–2019.

By 2000 there were already scores of organisations terming themselves a University of the Arts in some variation of the name. These range from the Universität der Künste in Berlin, the University of the Arts in London (UAL) to the Alberta University of the Arts in Canada to the University of Arts from Târgu-Mureş in Romania. The Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne is now a faculty of the university of Melbourne. The QS World University Rankings lists a total of 657 universities offering programmes in the performing arts with 102 under the term University of the Arts.

If we look at a constant-case sample of 4 organisations using the title ‘University of the Arts’ or a variation of it, we can observe the historical evolution that documents an expansion from one specialized art form, often a music conservatory, to a much broader church encompassing many denominations and disciplines. It is noteworthy that the university status was in the most cases only granted after 2000. This is a sign of broader isomorphic trends that pushed various ‘schools of arts’, academies and such-like, even if



they were state-funded, to become universities in their own right or to come under the wing of an established university as an additional faculty.

Name	Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne,	University of Arts Târgu-Mureș, Romania	University of the Arts, Berlin	University of the Arts (Philadelphia)
Established	1972	1950	1975	1985
Predecessors, mergers and incorporations	Victoria Art school (1867); School of Music (1974);, the School of Drama in 1976 the School of Dance 1978 i Film and Television (1992).	Hungarian Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Arts in Cluj-Napoca (1946); Art Institute in Romanian in Cluj-Napoca (1948); Szentgyörgyi István Theatre Institute (1950); Studio Theatre (1972); Acting department in Romanian (1976); Academy of theatre (1991);	<i>Staatlichen Hochschule für Bildende Künste and der Staatlichen Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst 1696 (die Kurfürstliche Academie der Mahler-, Bildhauer- und Architectur-Kunst); 1822 das Königliche Musik-Institut Berlin; 1951 Max-Reinhardt-Schule für Schauspiel</i>	Philadelphia College of the Performing Arts; Philadelphia College of Art, (1870), the Philadelphia Musical Academy (1877) the Philadelphia Conservatory of Music (1944), the Philadelphia Dance Academy.
University status	2007 Faculty of University of Melbourne	2009 University of Arts Târgu Mureș	2001 (UdK)	1985
Programs and disciplines	18 disciplines from acting to social practice and community engagement	8	70 degree courses	41 programs in 6 six schools (Art, Design, Film, Dance, Music and Theater Arts.)
PhD	yes	Yes in Theater Studies (2005)	yes	PhD in Creativity
students	1300	530	3500	1700

Figure 7. Four Universities of the Arts.



Despite enduring cultural and geographical differences, the four featured examples have a number of factors in common. Firstly, none was founded *ex nihilo* but rather they emerged from various predecessor organisations, through incorporations and mergers. Each organisation is usually proud to point to its lineage, claiming in some cases a pedigree going back to the seventeenth century as in the University of Arts, Berlin. The usual foundational narrative sees them being set up as training academies for the fine arts or as music conservatories. The theatre arts are seldom seen before the twentieth century and often not until after 1945. In most cases we can also observe a constant process of restructuring, renaming, mergers and incorporations before the final (ultimate?) university status is achieved. Usually there is an intermediary proto-university status, a common feature of the 1960s and 1970s when private academies come under the wing of state.

Reframing the university of the arts

The fractured institutional history (the seemingly constant mergers) is one factor that distinguishes arts universities from universities in the true sense that tend to demonstrate a high degree of denominational and organisational stability. The names of universities seldom change even though the location might. Arts universities on the other hand are continually being restructured and renamed, especially in respect to the art-forms themselves. Each begins as a specialized programme of training (learning to paint has little in common with learning to play the violin or training to be an actor), yet institutionally they have in the most cases been coerced into organisational proximity and propinquity under the umbrella term ‘arts’.

The unifying factor is the term ‘art’ itself or, as Frank and Meyer might phrase it, it is the ‘belief system art’ which has established itself globally and which justifies the unification in education and (latterly) research of very diverse practices. If the university *in sensu strictu* is predicated on the “cosmological assumption” that an expanding body of knowledge is “universally or ultimately true” and that “individual humans anywhere can in principle acquire true knowledge” (Frank and Meyer 2020, 2–3) and that this knowledge can be verified as such by various agreed upon techniques, then the university of the arts is, I would argue, clearly framed on different assumptions. The question poses itself: is it a university at all in the sense we have defined it here or is not rather a new institutional frame. If the search for “true knowledge” defines the university, then what framing principles define the university of the arts?

It may help if we accept for the moment Frank and Meyer’s comparison of the university with religion and belief rather than as a “technical-functional apparatus” (2020, 5). Firstly, academics and artists might agree that they are both in pursuit of truth. After all, art is often attributed the privilege of creating and defining truth after its own fashion. Once art (defined here to include theatre) freed itself from the obligation to represent nature mimetically, it redefined its frames of reference and values: art is beholden to truth, not to nature, and in the world of art truth is fundamentally subjective, defined by the artists themselves and their artistic vision. This becomes an essential component



of the modernist credo. In Adorno's reading the "truth content in art works is the materialization of the most advanced consciousness" (Adorno 1997, 176). Stanislavsky makes the search for and performance of "truthfulness" the guiding principle of his pedagogy (1989). There are however fundamental differences on the cosmological level between scientific and artistic truth; the most important is the degree or status of inter-subjective verifiability. Verifiable is nothing, except perhaps the accolades or opprobrium of the 'art world', which comprises, in sociologist Howard Becker's tautological definition, "the network of people whose cooperative activity [...] produces the kind of artworks that the art world is noted for" (Becker 1982, xxiv).

The second difference concerns attainability and participation. The knowledge produced at university is potentially accessible to anybody who brings the necessary qualifications obtainable through schooling. Today universities are attended by an average of 45% of the school-leavers in OECD countries (OECD 2020). Universities of the arts are predicated on different principles: they are only accessible to and indeed designed for specially gifted and or motivated individuals who reveal to high-degree qualities that are defined in different terms at different periods – genius, talent, creativity – but mean essentially the same thing. In cosmological terms we are talking about an institutional frame defined less by truth than by divine inspiration: special individuals kissed by the muse.

Third point concerns creativity, the current term that has superseded nineteenth century genius and twentieth century talent. Today it forms probably the underlying cosmological principle for universities of the arts and indeed the creative arts within established universities. Creativity is both an imperative (thou shalt be creative or innovative) and a guiding concept, which is at home in the semantic field of aesthetics. The artist is by definition 'creative', and his or her actions are objects of both sacralization *and* a neoliberal logic of economization (Richard Florida's [2004] creative class and the creative industries). The connecting principle between the two seemingly disparate and mutually exclusive worlds is the dimension of the future.

Artistic work is by definition projective. Indeed, the project is the default mode of almost all artistic activity. The close connection with future thinking is obvious. The creative person designs and projects, as it were, into the future. Today's omnipresent project-thinking has both the arts and science firmly in its grip. It is based on a common etymological root: *pro-ject* derives from the Latin *proiectum*, (= that which is thrown forward). Terms such as *projetto/projet/project* all enter the European languages in the sixteenth and seventeenth century in the area of administration as suggestive terms for plans, proposals and ideas of order, signalling a gradual shift in governmentality from merely sustaining the normativity of the present to an active shaping of the future. Projection is thus itself an indicator of the initially still fragile constitution of the constellation "modernity".

Concern with the future links religion, the arts and the university. Whereas the future dimension of religion is eschatological, the future dimension of the modern and hyper-modern research university is secular, a realm that can be calculated and prepared



for, the contemporary version of the old socialist five-year plans. The future realm of the arts is different again and is perhaps a combination of both. The arts prefer the notion of the utopian to the eschatological, and concepts such as chance, eventuality and possibility, i.e. the principle of aleatorics, to the economic scenarios of calculable risk and contingency plans. The artistic project has a shorter temporal perspective and can perhaps accommodate unforeseen developments better than the research project of today, which, at least in its rhetoric, needs to provide for all contingencies over a five-year period. It is indeed more a rhetorical gesture than an actual, calculable scenario (ask any researcher today in the middle of a five-year project who needs to take account of the Corona crisis). There is, however, a clear tension between the guiding principles of artistic creation, its focus on the utopian and aleatoric, and those of the planned contingency of academic research.

The future is uncertain

The university has been a global success as an institution. Its development from medieval Christianity to today’s world-wide distribution is spectacular both in terms of its cross-cultural reach and its isomorphic similarity. It has absorbed most other competing forms of tertiary education, including arts education, although as I have argued, there are good reasons why they are in many ways incompatible. The university has definitely found ways to accommodate the arts, as we can see in the proliferation of MFA programmes, BA/MA degrees, and the integration of conservatories into Universities. The university of the Arts is the most recent of many mutations of institutionalized artistic training. It is both a university and it is not, at least according to the neo-institutional categories discussed here. The path ahead in a post-pandemic world is uncertain. The pandemic exposed very clearly the differences between the research and the arts university. It was surprising to observe how quickly universities adapted to the new situation of online teaching: it was almost as though, the switch to online transmission was a minor adjustment rather than structural change. The software (Zoom, Teams, Webex) already existed. This was not the case, of course, for practical courses predicated on rehearsals and one-on-one teaching. From a corona perspective, education in the performing arts looks remarkably old-fashioned, not having changed much since the pre-modern period.

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