

CONCLUSION



Maintaining Routes

This book has identified three differing modes of Anglo-German theatrical exchange to illuminate how theatrical institutions in Britain co-construct an image of German national culture in contemporary transnational theatrical practice, following travelling texts (*The Threepenny Opera* and *Woyzeck*), travelling productions (*Ophelias Zimmer* and *Richard III*), and travelling practices/ practitioners (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Doctor*) on their varying journeys within, between, and through British and German cultures. Brexit and the subsequent redrawing of Anglo-European relationships pointed to potential shifts in Anglo-German cultural ties, thus providing an intriguing context in which to examine where German theatrical culture in particular might feel at 'home' in the British context and for thinking about how performance, institutional frameworks, and transnational practitioners figure in the processes behind Anglo-German theatrical exchange. In so doing, I have uncovered how the idea of 'German' culture is valued in Britain, following these intercultural 'routes' between two nations that seem, on an economic level, relatively equal partners. However, as argued throughout this book, the cultural dynamics between Britain and Germany are more uneven than might have been expected, especially in terms of theatrical aesthetics and issues around cultural diversity.

Whilst academic and media discourses have viewed German theatrical culture as providing useful lessons to theatre practitioners working in Britain, this study shows it is nevertheless continually pitted as a foil to British theatre. This perception of German theatrical culture — at once reverent and suspicious — persists in being actively institutionalized. Yet, as my case studies have shown, this perception of German theatrical culture continues to shift in the second decade of the twenty-first century. The journey taken to explore these shifts started with productions that sought to domesticate German theatrical culture to British tastes, and continued with productions that utilized Anglo-German theatrical exchange to offer critical perspectives of British theatrical culture, without necessarily eliding Anglo-German cultural difference in the process. This Conclusion reflects further on the strategies used to consider how Germanness is configured in contemporary British theatre, what the place of German theatrical culture is and could be in post-Brexit Britain, and what has been gained by looking at Anglo-German intercultural theatre through the methodological lens adopted for this study.

Positioning Germanness in Britain

The concept of Germanness has been at the centre of my performance analysis throughout this book. Each case study consisted in part of asking whether the productions were specifically referencing ideas of ‘German’ culture, cultural products from Germany, histories of the multiple incarnations of the German state, German politics, or drew on aesthetic traditions conventionally related to Germany. In *Woyzeck*, the mid-1980s setting allowed Germany to be represented as an enemy state, with East Germany a barbaric ‘other’. The German language was a joke language, and the trope of the mad German doctor was set in opposition to the order of British military authority. In both *Woyzeck* and *The Threepenny Opera*, German and British cultures were consolidated through production choices that emphasized cultural and aesthetic difference on an Anglo-German level, but also in relation to class difference within Britain, with both productions perceiving their potential audience in differing ways.

Turning attention from the stage towards the institutional framework for each production revealed further divisions. The National Theatre framed Brecht as a radical political playwright nevertheless imbued with high levels of cultural capital — yet this radicalism was not translated onto the stage. In fact, the production demanded relatively high levels of cultural literacy in order to make connections between its set, costume design, and political themes. The institutional framing of *Woyzeck* used the image of two ‘crowds’, an ‘Old Vic crowd’ and lead actor John Boyega’s ‘crowd’, to demarcate its target audience. This framing presented Anglo-German theatrical exchange as a means of addressing cultural differences within the British context. However, in the process, German theatrical culture became associated with a notionally white, non-working-class, culturally literate audience (the ‘Old Vic crowd’). This association became a consistent theme in my second and third chapters and highlights a tension not only in the practices behind Anglo-German exchange, but also in the reception of German theatrical culture in a British context that places an increasing emphasis on cultural diversity. Whilst translation can be understood as a means of building bridges between cultures then, my first chapter showed that translation can build borders too: both between national cultures, and between more local communities living within one national context.

With my second pair of case studies, I argued that the relationship between British and German theatrical cultures is often much more porous than these initial productions suggested. Whilst many theatre reviewers felt Mitchell’s production of *Ophelias Zimmer* was ‘boring’, I read these audience responses through a postdramatic framework, which revealed Mitchell’s approach to time and repeated movements as vital aspects of her feminist re-framing of Shakespeare in performance. In parallel, through his productions of *Richard III*, I traced Ostermeier’s transition from ‘bad guest’ to ‘good guest’ in the British theatrical field, whilst at the same time highlighting Mitchell’s position as ‘bad guest’ in both the British and German contexts. Mitchell’s work, interweaving British and German performance cultures and theatrical traditions, shows how gendered dynamics influence perceptions of Germanness, and reactions to Anglo-German theatrical practice, in Britain.

Similarly, in my analysis of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the final chapter I read the use of stage mud as a key scenographic feature for probing binary views of theatrical traditions seen as either 'German' or 'British', and for representing the ways in which practitioners from Germany working collaboratively with London-based artists can become a means of exploring themes of cultural and class divides within the British context. The performance space created for *The Doctor* was noted for its relation to an elite, institutional, neoliberal, and Western European aesthetic, and a variety of scenographic features placed the production within what Fowler has called a 'translocal' network of European theatre-makers. I argued nevertheless that the casting of the show probed naturalistic forms of character representation by distancing the actor's ethnicity and gender from that of the character they were playing. These casting choices can therefore be understood as alerting us to how certain minoritized voices, or bodies, are excluded from such networks. I was able to read this as an extended critique of the male-dominated, predominantly white European network that Fowler describes. At the same time, I acknowledged the production's 'top-down' approach to interculturalism and diversity in theatre.

Whilst intercultural theatre is often understood as the coming together of two cultures within one (performance) space, my research highlights the value of reading this space as existing within a wider, Anglo-German performance network. This manner of reading exposes the ways in which Anglo-German theatrical exchange is used as a vehicle for addressing social and cultural division within Britain. As discussed across my three case studies, Germanness has also become associated with whiteness and a troublesome lack of diversity by institutions and academic critics alike. Focusing, as this book has done, on the networks and practitioners involved in these productions, and assessing critically which institutions and practitioners act as gatekeepers in these networks, is crucial for thinking about how a desire to diversify the theatrical field in Britain can influence the ways in which international exchange can function.

These questions of difference were also reflected in my exploration of theatre in translation in Chapter 1, where I looked at what is a prominent mode of cross-cultural exchange and historically a crucial way for German theatrical culture to travel to Britain. Both *Woyzeck* and *The Threepenny Opera* created the sense of a shared Anglo-German space. In the former production, this was achieved through setting the play in a pre-unification Berlin border zone, and in the latter, through the geographic backdrop of London merging with a set and costume design scheme that indicated Weimar-era Berlin to create what I called 'Ber-London'. However, this spatial proximity did not translate to cultural cohesion. Indeed, Britain was presented as the more powerful nation in both productions, with British dominance being reified both onstage in *Woyzeck*, in the form of its military presence in Berlin, and behind the scenes with the use of British-based creatives in all aspects of the production. Furthermore, these productions ultimately reinforced divisions between British and German culture and aesthetics, creating a sense of border-making in the processes of translation which also seeped into the institutional framing of these productions.

In both productions, interventions were made into the original German-language texts by British practitioners, utilizing styles familiar to the target culture: something that was seen as necessary to make the scripts more ‘accessible’ to British audiences. Value was placed on star casting and British playwrights writing in a naturalist or in an ‘in-yer-face’ style as mediators between German and British cultures. These domesticated scripts formed the basis for aesthetic divides between British and German cultures, with the ‘accessible’ texts offering a stark contrast to the ‘inaccessible’, non-naturalistic original texts and scenographies of each production. Whereas some of the case studies in Chapters 2 and 3 also produced new readings of canonical texts by offering ways of engaging in Anglo-German intercultural practice, the productions discussed in Chapter 2 maintained a sense of aesthetic distance between German and British theatrical cultures. We can therefore see how a domesticated text in translation became a means of achieving ‘accessibility’, in the British context, for these productions. In making such assumptions about what is acceptable to their audiences, these productions effectively reject the formal innovation offered by these German-language texts. This has the effect of upholding a perception of British theatre that is dominated by, and centred around, the work of the text, as advocated for by the likes of Michael Billington and David Hare, as discussed in the Introduction. If the influence of German theatrical, cultural, or aesthetic traditions on text as well as on scenography can be embraced by theatre practitioners working in Britain, then theatre in translation could become a means of introducing audiences to different textual forms beyond the naturalistic styles so advocated for in these productions.

Across the case studies in this book, translation has in fact emerged as a key concern in processes of Anglo-German theatrical collaboration and exchange. Whilst translation only became a central point of analysis in Chapter 1, almost all the productions studied here engaged with translation either from German to English, or, as was the case for *Ophelias Zimmer* and *Richard III*, English to German. Despite being of critical importance to cross-cultural theatrical work, the labour of theatre translators nevertheless frequently remains in the background, their names hidden in programmes or overshadowed by big-name playwrights. Indeed, Aneta Mancewicz’s chapter-length appraisal of *Ophelias Zimmer* presents the piece as an English-language play, and readers would be forgiven for not realizing that audiences in Britain experienced the show in German, and so in translation. With AI-assisted intermediary translation becoming a norm, this study thus offers a moment to highlight the crucial role of (human) translators as creative mediators across cultures, as well as reminding academics and practitioners on both an artistic and institutional level to make the work of translators continually visible, whilst still remaining the object of critical evaluation.

If not Shaftesbury Avenue, then Where?

The opening quotation for this book, taken from Michael Billington, signified the uneasy position of German theatrical culture in Britain and drew attention to the importance of institutional space in processes of cross-cultural theatrical exchange. By focusing on institutional contexts, the material conditions of making theatre for audiences in London, the geographic positioning of theatre buildings themselves, and how these contribute to the meaning-making of a production, what has emerged across this study is not only that Anglo-German collaboration is valued by institutions, but also the limits of this collaborative work. Analysis of Hill-Gibbins's work with Schütz and Barth on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, allowed scrutiny of the binary division between innovative, non-naturalistic German theatre design and a more placid, 'realistic' British tradition. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* therefore represents a model for Anglo-German cultural exchange that does not allow one culture to be subsumed into the other, or the otherness of German culture to become a culturally divisive element, as was the case in my first set of case studies of German-language theatre in translation. Nevertheless, the Young Vic hosted a companion workshop to this production on so-called 'German theatre design'. The framing of this workshop continues a trend of viewing theatrical practice through a national lens. The Young Vic's educational programme thus places value on a notional 'German' method of stage design, despite running alongside a production that I read as playfully probing this point of view.

My case studies thus draw attention to an imbalance of forms of capital within Anglo-German collaboration. Despite the high levels of cultural capital associated with German theatrical culture in Britain, this does not necessarily convert into economic capital, or indeed the provision of space and time for these practices to unfold fully. Analysis of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* alongside Icke and Bechtler's work on *The Doctor* highlighted the now more precarious position of German artists as economic migrants in Britain in a post-Brexit environment. As my interview with Michaela Barth highlighted, the pay for artists working in Britain is considerably lower than those working in Germany, and the resources available to creative artists are noticeably fewer. This particular point draws attention to how economic capital may affect the desire of artists from the EU and without Settled Status to work in Britain in the post-Brexit context, especially if the travelling artist is responsible for supporting themselves during the period of their engagement.¹ If a British institution such as the Young Vic, with high levels of social, economic, and cultural capital and an agenda to promote cross-cultural and international theatre exchange, cannot provide mobile artists an institutional 'home' suitable to their economic or creative needs, how can the British theatrical field collaborate internationally in the future when additional costs and administrative burdens arise through new, post-Brexit immigration legislation?

New networks and advocacy groups are being created to support artists with the administrative and financial burdens of cross-border mobility, and the work of Migrants in Theatre, a group that organizes monthly meetings to discuss issues and also provides cost-saving performance and creative opportunities (including

free rehearsal space) for migrant artists, is an important example of how social professional networks can address how both EU and non-EU migrant theatre artists are represented in Britain. This type of network is crucial in moving forward to create new spaces for collaboration to happen both inside, and outside, the institution.

British funding bodies have also specified a focus on supporting institutions and individuals in facilitating international theatrical exchange. As announced in Arts Council England's most recent 'Delivery Plan 2021–2024', the funding body will seek to 'help individuals and organisations adjust to the new trading and exchange arrangements that have come into play as a result of [the UK's] departure from the European single market and customs union and support them to take advantage of new international opportunities as they open up'.² Working with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, British Council, Creative Scotland, Fonds Soziokultur, Goethe-Institut London, and Wales Arts International/ Arts Council of Wales, Arts Council England launched the Cultural Bridge programme in 2021. This provides funds for bilateral partnerships between British and German theatre organizations, with a focus on socially-engaged practice. Now in its third year, this fund's most recent programme of support provided £310,000 across twenty partnerships.³ Evoking the familiar imagery of the arts as a 'bridge' between cultures, this scheme highlights the UK's continued interest in collaborating with Germany in particular as a theatrical and cultural partner, as well as the value continually placed on Germany's symbolic and cultural capital by the British theatrical community.

As a 'global city' where theatrical productions are often asked to speak to local, national, and international audiences, London has proved a key node in networks of Anglo-German exchange.⁴ Reviewers such as Michael Billington, Lyn Gardner, Sarah Hemming, Susannah Clapp, and academics such as Tom Six (previous Tom Cornford) and Aneta Mancewicz form a network of writers based at institutions located in the capital and interested in Anglo-German theatrical exchange, playing their own part in managing its cultural capital in the British context and themselves serving as gatekeepers to the field. Whilst aware that I am adding my name to this network, and thereby perhaps continuing a London-centric, white, and male-dominated trend, I have remained critical of these writers' work throughout this project to understand how public discourse shapes receptiveness of (and, at times, resistance to) German theatrical culture in the British context. Institutions such as the Schaubühne in Berlin and the Royal Court in London also resurfaced frequently throughout this study and represent key nodes in the Anglo-German network. Working together, these institutions have developed forms of collaboration and co-production across borders that have introduced audiences and practitioners working in Britain to artists working in Germany, and vice versa.

Paradigmatic for a British understanding of German theatrical culture, I have argued, is the figure of Thomas Ostermeier. Whilst, on the one hand, this comes as little surprise given the extensive attention he receives in both press and academia, I have nevertheless shown the ways in which practitioners in Britain are reappraising his work in new, critical ways. Viewing *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* muddy stage as haunted by the ghost of Ostermeier's 2008 production of *Hamlet* gave this

aesthetic choice new significance, revealing a connection between, and attempt to query, perceived ideas of ‘British’ and ‘German’ theatre-making traditions. In Chapter 2, it was argued that Mitchell ‘performs back’ the Ostermeier brand of theatre, questioning both a gendered imbalance in the German director’s *œuvre* as well as the positioning of Shakespeare in performance in Britain. Ostermeier’s own attitude to space, as in his reconstructed Globe, was, in turn, understood as challenging any British sense of institutional ‘ownership’ of Shakespeare as a global brand. In a British context that continues to prioritize diversity in the arts, though, Ostermeier’s performance space further highlighted the limits of the director’s style of theatre in Britain when compared to the inclusive and diverse work of Michelle Terry at London’s own Globe Theatre. As such, these case studies demonstrate that an awareness of a practitioner’s place within international theatrical networks can in fact provide opportunities to challenge and critically reassess these networks.

Intercultural theatre between these two large, Western European nations has therefore provided an opportunity for practitioners and institutions to look more closely at the relationships between different cultures and communities within Britain. Not only that, but German theatrical culture also offers the means with which practitioners address these concerns, whether that be by reconfiguring German theatre texts to address contemporary metropolitan inequalities, as was the case with *The Threepenny Opera*, by embracing the interventions of German practitioners working in Britain to think about British class culture, as was the case with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, or by tapping into theatrical traditions associated with Germany to uncover feminist readings of British canonical texts, as was the case with *Ophelias Zimmer*. These intercultural connections between Britain and Germany thus become a way of crossing national borders as well as the social, political, or cultural divisions that exist within one nation. However, these ‘intra-intercultural’ border crossings throw up their own set of questions about the positioning of international theatre in Britain. In particular, we might ask who has access to these forms of theatre-making, where and in which contexts international theatrical exchange takes place, and how the cultural capital associated with German theatrical culture affects the ability of practitioners and institutions to address convincingly these concerns.

New Routes for Anglo-German Theatre

My methodology, expanding the framework of institutional dramaturgy to incorporate performance analysis and Bourdieu’s concepts of capital, has given fresh attention to the role of larger institutions in Anglo-German theatrical exchange, their responsibilities, and also the possibilities open to them. Both the Royal Court and Young Vic have offered models of international theatrical exchange that accept difference whilst welcoming new methods of working. Looking towards institutions in Germany, whose own economic capital opens up new possibilities, can offer fruitful ways of working with new performance methods and within a different performance tradition.

As my focus here has been on large theatrical institutions in Britain, future studies may be interested in exploring the place of Anglo-German theatrical exchange in smaller or fringe venues and festivals as a means of investigating how more experimental, community-focused, or less risk-averse institutions engage with different modes of intercultural and transnational theatre, and how this alters the cultural make-up of Anglo-German networks. There are two examples that immediately spring to mind: the Gate Theatre, in London, has historically struck a balance between the local and the global, committing to ‘international theatre that is representative of [their] diverse local communities’ and thereby producing work (particularly German-language plays in translation) that challenges notions of international theatrical exchange as a predominantly white, male field.⁵ This theatre embraces reflexive practice, positioning its process and the form of its theatre-making as politically charged, embracing open rehearsals, ‘mess’, ‘liveness’, and multilingualism.⁶ Working outside one specific institutional context and therefore sitting just outside the remit of this study, British-German theatre collective Gob Squad, based in Nottingham and Berlin, also experiments with aesthetic form and collaborative theatre-making, with long rehearsal processes and a repertoire of productions that tour over the course of many years. Applying my methodology to their approaches to international collaboration would form an exciting extension of the work started in this book.

My own ‘route’ to this research was as a practitioner. I have worked as an actor in both Britain and Germany and have engaged in varying forms of international theatrical exchange since starting my career in 2017. This project has invited me to think more critically about my own practice and how I, too, in my own way, might shape representations of German theatrical culture both through my academic work and my work as a theatre-maker. My work on this book has also uncovered gaps in my own vocational actor training. Whether that be utilizing translated theatre texts without engaging in the processes of translation that create such texts, studying acting techniques from non-British practitioners without understanding the different cultural contexts from which these practitioners emerge, or simply the fact that my actor training was built on a foundation of interculturalism but did not invite an intellectual engagement with this term, vocational training need not exclude academic approaches to theatre and performance practice. My methodology then, by thinking about performance in relation to institutional frameworks, has also revealed wider interconnecting threads that play a part in how international theatrical exchange is perceived and represented in the British context that includes educational, institutional contexts as well. This has fed into my own teaching and invites academic interest in the wider positionality of educational institutions in relation to intercultural theatre, as well as that of theatrical institutions.

I began the research for this book when Brexit was still an unknown entity, a vague yet firm concept that seemed a long way away from becoming a reality. Today, with the UK having left the EU (and with British theatres enduring the closures and economic uncertainty brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic), theatrical institutions in Britain are at a turning-point: what (new) forms Anglo-

German or Anglo-European theatrical exchange will take now that freedom of movement has ended and institutions in Britain can no longer access EU funds directly will be seen in the coming years. Anglo-German theatrical exchange in the period between the EU referendum and the UK officially leaving the EU, however, has shown itself to be interested in reassessing, and being critical of, the networks that facilitate exchange between both countries. Nevertheless, in the British theatrical field, binary divisions between British and German culture still remain, often establishing cultural borders, rather than exploring ways to question them. I have demonstrated a way of reading productions that uncovers their awareness of the inequalities and exclusions that emerge in the processes of cross-cultural exchange, even in the context of texts, practices, and practitioners moving across national contexts which exist in a relatively equal power relationship to one another. Whilst the various 'routes' between British and German cultures mapped out in this book ultimately lead to aesthetically intriguing and politically engaged destinations, they will nevertheless require continued, and vigilant, maintenance to keep cultural borders open once national ones tighten.

Notes to the Conclusion

1. See 'Visit the UK as a Standard Visitor', HM Government <<https://www.gov.uk/permitted-paid-engagement-visitor>> [accessed 24 April 2024]. This applies for artists invited to work in the UK for one month or less. Longer engagements require different rules. For a more in-depth analysis of the negative impact of Brexit on artists travelling between the UK and the EU, see Mattocks, 'Brexit'.
2. 'Delivery Plan 2021–2024', Arts Council England <<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/lets-create/delivery-plan-2021-2024>> [accessed 3 March 2022].
3. 'About', Cultural Bridge <<https://www.cultural-bridge.info>> [accessed 24 April 2024].
4. Future studies might focus on productions staged in other locations within the UK, especially in cities like Manchester or Edinburgh, which, through annual international festivals (amongst other things), form similarly important nodes within Anglo-European international theatrical networks.
5. 'Our Missions and Values', Gate Theatre <<https://www.gatetheatre.co.uk/about-us/our-missions-and-values/>> [accessed 7 October 2021].
6. 'Manifesto for our Future', Gate Theatre <<https://www.gatetheatre.co.uk/manifesto-for-our-future/>> [accessed 7 October 2021].

