

STAGING GERMANNESS IN
CONTEMPORARY BRITISH THEATRE

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Staging Germanness in Contemporary British Theatre



JOSEPH PRESTWICH



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J.P., January 2025

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A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS



Translations appear throughout the book in the body of the text in square brackets. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

INTRODUCTION



German Theatre in Britain

‘Who would have thought it — Schiller in Shaftesbury Avenue?’¹ This quotation from theatre critic Michael Billington neatly encapsulates a long-standing ambiguity surrounding Britain’s relationship with German theatre. Billington’s ironic comment, prefacing his (positive) review of Friedrich Schiller’s *Don Carlos* (Gielgud Theatre, 2005), seems to raise an eyebrow at the idea of a canonical German playwright being performed in London’s West End. Adorned with six West End theatres, Shaftesbury Avenue is an important and prominent street in London’s commercial theatre scene: but is Schiller’s presence there really that amusing or surprising? Billington refers to the playwright by surname in a way that suggests he is generally well-known to British audiences, and yet still out of place in London’s commercial theatre district. German theatre in Britain thus appears simultaneously familiar and shocking here, and this dynamic goes far beyond Billington.

More widely, critics in Britain seem to both fetishize and despise the German theatrical scene. It is experimental, innovative, well-funded, and free from commercial pressures, whilst also indulgent, auteur-driven, ‘directors’ theatre’. It draws practitioners from Britain seeking to learn from fellow theatre-makers in Germany, and yet the reception of these practitioners’ work in Britain can be mixed or, at worst, hostile. Anglo-German theatrical exchange thus feels fraught with artistic, aesthetic, and critical tensions. Furthermore, Billington’s comments foreground the positionality of theatres and institutions themselves in questions of intercultural theatrical exchange: if not in London’s commercial West End, where in Britain can German theatrical culture feel at home? What types of theatre spaces have been or are being formed to support cross-cultural, transnational cultural links between Britain and Germany?

In 2010, David Barnett addressed some of these perceptual differences in a chapter examining ‘the German and British theater systems with a view to understanding the ways in which they communicate with each other’.² Following an assertion from playwright Simon Stephens that his 2007 play *Pornography* was considered ‘too German’ for stages in Britain, Barnett investigates ‘what ‘German’ might mean in UK theater and why it might be considered a defensible reason to deny production’. With examples taken broadly from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, he compares theatre systems in both countries and finds fault with the structure of British theatre which fails to address the ‘challenges’ posed by an innovative ‘German-language dramaturgy’, and ends his chapter with

a question: will larger theatres in Britain follow the example of smaller companies and ‘be able to enter into an exchange with such [innovative] practices [to make] them viable in the major houses of the country’?³ Barnett’s challenge has been taken up subsequently by many larger theatres, although with varying degrees of success. Returning to this question a decade later and in a changed political and artistic context then, this book develops further Barnett’s interest in German theatre to investigate how British theatrical productions, institutions, and the practitioners working in them, establish an image of Germanness in Britain.

By examining the place of German theatrical culture in Britain, this study looks at Germanness in a transnational context. As transnational theatre represents not only the literal movement of productions and practitioners beyond and between nation-states, but also the exchange of ideas, perhaps most commonly through theatre translation, as well as education and training, viewing Anglo-German theatre as transnational provokes an interest in the frameworks and networks that underpin cross-cultural movement, and how these are formed, or continue to be re-formed, in a British context. James Hodkinson and Benedict Schofield have traced the contemporary ‘transnational turn’ in German studies in their edited volume investigating ‘the place of German culture in the world’.⁴ They underscore how this transnational approach challenges assumptions of an ‘easily located or defined’ sense of German culture. This becomes a ‘field of tension’ between a ‘linguistically bound notion of ‘German culture’ and an ‘overlapping with other cultures’.⁵ It is within this ‘field of tension’ that this study operates, asking how cultural difference between Britain and Germany is perceived, constructed, challenged, or upheld in the British theatrical field.

Whilst seeking to understand the transnational value and perception of Germanness in Britain, I here examine Anglo-German theatre within an intercultural theatrical framework. As two nations that certainly seem, to paraphrase Charlotte McIvor’s phrasing, relatively ‘symmetrical’ in their size, Western European location, global influence, GDP, and population, Britain and Germany are perhaps not obvious choices in a discussion of intercultural theatre, especially with this critical history in mind.⁶ Whilst both nations are often considered as subparts of a broader conception of European theatre, as discussed in the following, there remains a host of perceived cultural differences in the theatrical field. I am therefore interested in what this analysis might reveal about the role of (theatrical) culture in the balance of power between these two Western European nations. As these cultural ‘negotiations’ take place in sites of Anglo-German theatre, I explore what inequalities, or exclusions, emerge during these processes.⁷

Crucially, this study connects institutional frameworks, theatre, and performance to questions of national identity in order to ask how Germanness is constructed and conceived of outside Germany. My use of *Germanness* here incorporates primarily the ways in which various ideas or conceptualizations of German-language culture, German history, or politics, as well as aesthetic traditions conventionally related to German-speaking countries, are represented on stage. Nadine Holdsworth views theatre as ‘intrinsically connected to the nation because it enhances “national” life

by providing a space for shared civil discourse, entertainment, creativity, pleasure and intellectual stimulation'.⁸ Holdsworth here connects questions of national identity not only with plays and theatrical productions happening within theatres, but also the space created by/through the theatre institution itself: the theatre building as a social space, its geographical position within a town or city, and the educational or outreach programmes often run by theatres for their communities. As such, any analysis of how theatres shape or form national identities cannot focus 'solely' on performance and text (although this aspect is also crucial) but must incorporate wider aspects of the institution as well. Identities are, as Ruth Wodak describes it, "co-constructed";⁹ they are formed and 'shaped by state, political, institutional, media and everyday social practices'.¹⁰ This term, *co-construction*, is particularly useful in this context, as it acknowledges the position of theatre and performance within a wider system of influences on identity formation. I therefore examine how institutions' strategies, practices, and the performances that happen within them work as means of 'co-constructing' a British perception of Germanness within Britain.

Pierre Bourdieu's well-known engagement with (sociocultural) hierarchy proves a useful model for uncovering how Anglo-German theatrical networks operate in practice. The expanded sense of capital opened up by Bourdieu provides a framework for thinking about which individuals or institutions emerge as culturally valued within the Anglo-German theatrical field.¹¹ It provokes questions about the assumptions that theatres make about their target audiences when programming Anglo-German work, as well as what an engagement with Anglo-German theatre reveals about diversity and cultural division within Britain. Due to the increasingly prevalent prioritizing of issues such as diversity and inclusivity for theatres in Britain (a trend driven strongly by the Arts Councils and Creative Scotland but by no means restricted to publicly funded theatres), an institutional focus that utilizes Bourdieu's concepts of capital as tools of analysis draws attention not only to the value relationship between British and German cultures and how this is, as Charlotte McIvor puts it, 'negotiated by/through' Anglo-German intercultural theatre, but also to how this intersects with issues of cultural identity, community, and diversity within Britain.¹²

These issues are particularly potent in the contextual framework that binds the case studies in this book. I look at productions performed in Britain between 2016 and 2020, the year of, and years immediately following, the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union (EU), understanding this 'Brexit interregnum' as a 'formative' moment in the current narrative of British nationhood.¹³ Importantly, these examples pre-date the Covid-19 pandemic and its existential effect on theatrical institutions in the UK. My interest is in the role of theatres, practitioners, and productions in reiterating or contesting conceptions of national belonging in a post-referendum context, asking which communities theatrical institutions choose to address, and how they choose to address them. This book can therefore be understood in conversation with Nadine Holdsworth's *A Divided Nation: English Theatre and Social Abjection*, a study which turned to

theatre to explore English identities in a post-Brexit context, and examined the ‘rifts and fissures that pit people against each other in ways that cast particular groups as threats to the nation’.¹⁴ Holdsworth looks at how theatre can create these divisions and critiques the ways in which English theatre can set a notional ‘us’ in opposition to a provocative ‘them’. Rather than continuing Holdsworth’s gaze inwards at internal questions of English national identity and belonging, however, this study looks outwards towards Britain’s European neighbours to consider the UK’s position in a changing Europe.

As in Holdsworth’s book, the examples selected throughout this book focus on institutions based in, and productions performed in, England. I focus on productions performed within London because of its dual role as capital of England and of the United Kingdom. Of course, London does not represent the whole of England just as England does not represent the whole of the UK, and focusing on productions performed within the nation’s capital might seem to contribute to a London- or Anglo-centric understanding of theatre in Britain, but the capital nevertheless remains a key site of interest for holding some of Britain’s largest theatrical institutions. Productions staged in London are often asked to speak to local, national, and international audiences. As a ‘global city’, its varying economic, social, financial, and cultural threads are tightly interwoven with the global marketplace.¹⁵ The city consistently topped the Institute for Urban Strategies’ Global Power City Index from 2011 to 2023. This brings with it its own set of inequalities, but perhaps most pertinently, it poses a problem as to how a ‘global city’ is able to respond to a more parochial national politics that favours the nation’s ‘sovereignty’ over international co-governance. Due, as well, to the large concentration of artists and theatres in London, the routes theatre-makers take to engage with cross-cultural theatrical exchange often pass through practitioners or institutions located in London. As such, a focus on the capital provides an opportunity to consider the gatekeepers for these Anglo-German journeys in detail.

Looking specifically at German theatrical culture’s place in the contemporary British theatre context provides a focused case study for analysing Britain’s wider engagement with European theatre. Germany remains a key cultural partner for Britain, with the recently instituted Cultural Bridge programme of investment specifically targeting bilateral artistic partnerships between Britain and Germany. Indeed, the two countries have a long and complex relationship embodying a ‘vast sweep of crossing points that characterize the histories and developments’ of the two countries.¹⁶ Patrick Major goes so far to suggest that ‘British identity in the late twentieth century appeared to have been profoundly and negatively informed by its encounter with Germany’, citing a number of political and historical moments, from post-Napoleonic anti-France allyship, through the rise of German industrialism in the late nineteenth century to the Second World War, that have created a ‘love-hate relationship’ between the two countries.¹⁷ As a result of Brexit, the economic, cultural, and political ties that may have bound the two nations in more recent decades have come under additional strain. In exposing ‘deep and keenly felt national divisions and competing versions of national identity’,¹⁸ Brexit

is seen as having ‘triggered an identity crisis’ for the UK, forcing the nation to ask what its new role will be in this globalized world, perhaps more so than any other political event of the twenty-first century in Britain. This political context forms the backdrop of this study.¹⁹

Throughout the following, I analyse institutional practice and theatrical productions through an ‘Anglo-German lens’ to explore how Germanness is conceptualized in the UK. The term *Anglo-German* is used frequently in critical and academic discourse to conceptualize relations between the UK and Germany. For my purposes, the *Anglo* refers here to English-language performance contexts and does not seek falsely to correlate England with the UK as a nation made up of four nation states. It acknowledges a traditional view in the British media that places German and British theatrical cultures in binary opposition to one another, whilst at the same gesturing towards what Benedict Schofield has termed the ‘porous’ relationship between the two cultural systems.²⁰ In practice, this means examining a range of performances and performance contexts for the ways in which they engage with German theatrical culture and representations of Germanness alongside analysis of institutional practice and its role in this engagement. This will involve case studies of German-language texts in translation, German-language productions touring to Britain, and the collaborative work of British directors and German practitioners. As will be seen, these three modes of cross-cultural theatrical transfer have come to dominate an understanding of Germanness in the British theatrical context.

British Theatre ‘versus’ German Theatre?

The reception of German theatrical culture in the UK balances precariously between acknowledging and advocating for the influence of German theatrical traditions in Britain and upholding cultural differences. Theatrical exchange between the two countries takes place in a variety of different forms and is closely related to how Britain engages with the wider context of European theatre. The influence of German theatre on British theatrical culture is well documented and many critics have pointed out the continued debt that British theatrical culture owes its German counterparts. John Willett, Gunilla Anderman, and Dougal MacNeill, for example, have all discussed the impact of the Berliner Ensemble’s 1956 tour of performances in German on British theatre history, linking it with the ‘Angry Young Men’ movement of the 1950s and highlighting its effect on the formation of ensemble companies such as the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company.²¹ Looking back at the history of Anglo-German theatrical exchange between this event and the mid-1990s, Anne-Marie Taylor calls it a ‘haphazard affair’. She takes issue with the fact that, despite the impact of German-language performances on British theatre history from the mid-1950s and the importance of German theatrical practices ‘to the development of post-war political and institutional theatre in Britain, no interest in German drama as a whole has developed in the British theatre’.²²

Writing in 2015 however, Bernhard Reitz identifies the 1990s as the decade from which ‘a growing interest in German drama can be observed in Britain’, highlighting the work of Michael Frayn and productions of German plays in translation at larger theatrical institutions within the UK as examples of this developing interest.²³ Reitz suggests there was a shift at the end of the twentieth century towards staging translations of German plays in the British theatrical mainstream, with performances such as Georg Kaiser’s *From Morning to Midnight* (translated by Dennis Kelly, 2013) and a series of plays by Roland Schimmelpfennig and Marius von Mayenburg at the National and Royal Court Theatres in London. Both these studies present German-language plays performed in translation as the primary mode of theatrical exchange between Britain and Germany in the late twentieth century, thereby becoming the key ‘site of encounter’.²⁴

Moving towards the twenty-first century, there is certainly evidence of a continuation of this interest in the influence of Anglo-German theatrical exchange on theatre in the UK, and in German-language theatre more broadly. This influence has not always been considered positive by industry insiders. Towards the end of an interview with Jeffrey Sweet, the British playwright David Hare worries about the potential repercussions of British theatre allowing continental European theatrical traditions to migrate over the Channel. Hare believes that ‘we’re heading in Britain towards an over aestheticized European theatre. We’ve got all those people called theater makers [...] coming in and doing director’s theatre’.²⁵ As Schofield argues, there is ‘a sort of German theatrical trace’ in Hare’s comments, with his reference to director’s theatre reflecting the German tradition of *Regietheater*.²⁶ This suggests that a suspicion of German theatrical traditions specifically lies within Hare’s scepticism toward European theatre. Michael Billington, writing towards the end of his career as a theatre reviewer for the *Guardian* in 2019, is even more explicit in his criticism of ‘directors who see themselves as creators rather than interpreters — a byproduct of the fact that many of them [...] frequently work in Germany’.²⁷ Both these writers continue to establish an ‘aesthetic tension between German “director’s theatre” and English “playwright’s theatre”’ by correlating German theatrical culture with the aesthetic of director’s theatre, and by pushing for a British theatrical culture that places authority in the hands of playwrights as the (to paraphrase Billington) ‘creators’ of a theatrical event.²⁸

This trend of setting German and British theatrical cultures in opposition to one another occurs frequently in the British arts media. There is a noticeable interest in the theatrical landscape of Germany in the British press, including frequent reports on German-language theatre performed in Germany that, in contrast to Hare’s and Billington’s comments, compare it favourably with British theatrical culture. In the *Guardian* in 2009, Mark Espiner asks ‘what British theatre could learn from Germany’. He misses a ‘culture of experimentation’ in Britain that is present in Germany, and goes on to reflect on how the funding structures for theatre in Britain, along with a firmly held belief that theatre ought to ‘serve the writer’, make experimentation difficult.²⁹ Playwright Simon Stephens, many of whose plays have been translated and performed in Germany, sees an ‘island mentality’ in British

drama, meaning that ‘we can spend too much of our energies looking inwards on our own strengths, and imagining the rest of the world is looking at us too’.³⁰

For Stephens as well, state-subsidized theatre in Germany implies that ‘theatre workers there are not concerned with the pursuit of private sponsorship, nor the possibility of a successful commercial transfer but rather with art and provocation. Their actions are to unsettle and undermine’.³¹ Whilst David Barnett would agree with Stephens here, asserting that ‘it is well known that the German *Staats-* and *Stadttheater* is one of the best-funded theater systems in Europe’, it is not the funding alone that creates space for unsettling or undermining theatrical content. As Barnett again stresses, a variety of factors also contribute to this including rehearsal time, actor training, and the decentralized German state that has historically valued the cultural and political contributions of theatres since the late nineteenth century.³²

Nevertheless, similar assumptions about Germany’s system of theatre funding continue to fuel theatre critics’ views of German theatrical culture in the UK. In his 2009 obituary of Peter Zadek, Billington suggests that the German director ‘combined the pragmatism of a veteran of British provincial rep with the experimental freedom provided by the heavily subsidized German system’, pitting a functional style of theatre that perhaps adheres closely to a guiding text (as implied by the word ‘pragmatism’) in Britain against a German theatre typified by forms of experimentation allowed through public funding.³³ This suggests that the innovation of German theatre is not transferrable to Britain *because of* the funding system. In part, this study asks to what extent British theatre can or does interact with German theatrical culture within the system currently in place.

Despite Billington’s scepticism of the effects of German theatrical culture on British theatre, he is nevertheless one of many critics to find theatre performed in Germany of interest and has highlighted aspects of German theatre to which British practitioners ought to pay attention. In a piece exploring the future of German theatre through a rather limited three-day trip to Berlin, Billington picks out design as a ‘major part of German theatre’, suggesting that one show’s design would send British actors running to complain to their union.³⁴ As such, ‘German’ stage design is presented as dangerous, risk-taking, experimental — and somehow incompatible with a ‘safer’ British theatrical culture. Discussing the 2018 Theatertreffen, one of the most well-known theatre festivals in Germany that aims to profile the most ‘remarkable productions from the German-language region’ each year,³⁵ Ian Shuttleworth of the *Financial Times* draws attention to ‘a German theatre culture which seems to value engagement much more than escapism’, using the term *engagement* to describe performances that ask aesthetic, cultural, and political questions of their audience, rather than presenting a story in which they might ‘lose themselves’.³⁶ The ‘random’ action and eclectic stage design elements of one play (Elfriede Jelinek’s *Am Königsweg*) ‘encapsulates everything about German Regietheater [that] riles Anglo-Saxon sensibilities’, according to Shuttleworth, again pitting a supposed ‘German’ way of making theatre with what we may have come to expect from British theatrical culture. Taken together, articles such as these paint a picture of a ‘German’ theatre that is experimental and provocative, virtues

bred from a system of funding that removes commercialism as a driving factor in artistic decision making.

The ways in which audiences in the UK experience German (theatrical) culture, and to what extent these experiences affirm or deny this portrait, is under investigation in this book. A key consideration will be whether funding systems and a provocatively different theatrical aesthetic affect how British theatres frame the transnational work they support. There are certainly different risk factors involved in both British and German theatre systems, with attracting large audiences and selling tickets becoming financial imperatives in the contemporary British context. How a theatrical institution in Britain markets and frames a production (and itself) thus become important aspects to consider. My aim here is not to continue a tradition of comparison of the two systems; rather, I am interested in seeing how marketing strategies (re-)contextualize examples of Anglo-German theatrical exchange and what this reveals about their own agendas, assumptions, and aspirations in the context of Anglo-German theatre.

The narrative of Anglo-German theatre established so far, which places British and German theatrical cultures as opposite ends of an innovation spectrum, continues across the British academic context. Barnett suggests that German-language productions and German texts in translation are ‘not necessarily anathema to a British audience’ and uses a short case study of the reception of Bertolt Brecht in both Britain and Germany to point towards a ‘structural conservatism’ in Britain’s theatre system that essentially stifles the sort of dramaturgical innovation he sees as prevalent in the German system. Whilst Barnett highlights some smaller companies (the likes of Gob Squad and Forced Entertainment) that operate within the British system and manage to draw ‘inspiration from theaters abroad’, he is pessimistic about larger theatrical institutions following suit.³⁷ A different set of case studies produces a less polarizing picture, as indicated by Benedict Schofield’s 2020 chapter on the ‘transnational value’ of German theatre in the UK. Schofield’s study examined interviews from five theatre practitioners and reviewers based in the UK to argue that the UK is indeed ‘open to Germany’, but suggests that this ‘porosity does not result in direct acts of cultural transfer, but rather in processes of cultural transformation’. These transformations reveal, according to Schofield, the ‘limited space for a more political dramaturgy in the United Kingdom’, the projection of cultural stereotypes of German practices onto productions and practitioners, and the value attached to certain cities (Berlin), theatres (the Schaubühne and Volksbühne), and practitioners (Thomas Ostermeier) working within Germany as ‘crucial mediators’ influencing the image of German theatrical culture in Britain.³⁸ I expand on these foundational case studies by combining performance analysis with an investigation into institutional frameworks, funding, and the networks underpinning the presence of German theatrical culture in the UK.

It is unsurprising that Schofield’s interviewees pick out the work of Thomas Ostermeier as a significant influence on their view of German theatrical culture. In recent years, analyses of the role of contemporary German and Anglo-German theatre in the UK have largely focused on the work of two practitioners: Thomas

Ostermeier and Katie Mitchell. Critical writing about both artists' work in the British context often addresses, and continues to draw out, the tension between British and German theatrical cultures and systems, and so is of particular interest here. Productions directed by Ostermeier have toured regularly to the UK (and globally) since he took over as artistic director of the Schaubühne in Berlin in autumn 1999. The director has, according to Peter Boenisch, 'come to represent German theatre to the wider world', and has been called 'das Gesicht des modernen deutschen Theater' [the face of modern German theatre] by the German weekly *Zeit Magazin*.³⁹ Nevertheless, Boenisch points out that there could be 'hardly a director less typical of contemporary German theatre than Ostermeier'.⁴⁰ As Benedict Schofield asserts, Ostermeier is viewed neither as 'an exemplar of German radicalism by his national peers, nor does he produce work solely rooted in German theatrical practice'.⁴¹ This book responds to this interest by questioning not only the extent to which Ostermeier represents German theatre in Britain, and how this status came about, but by also asking what role British theatrical institutions play in bringing his work to the UK. If Ostermeier is not in fact a good representation of 'German' theatre, I will explore in the following what his theatre does represent.

Ostermeier has been the subject of a monograph, and his tenure at the Schaubühne is the subject of a recent edited volume.⁴² Both these books document Ostermeier's directorial and curatorial work in detail and focus ostensibly on the director's aesthetics and politics in relation to his role as artistic director at the Schaubühne. Ramona Mosse, writing in the latter volume, draws attention to theatre's 'journeys from the local to the global', arguing for the Schaubühne's institutional role as a 'launching pad for diverse forms of mobility'. She suggests the theatre's international collaborations with a range of artists from outside Germany offer 'an urgently necessary valve for challenging the institutionally stratified and homogeneous training and career paths in the repertory system in Germany, which continues to lack diverse ethnic representation among its actors and artistic staff'.⁴³ This consideration of the relationship between Ostermeier's work at the Schaubühne and diversity within the wider context of German theatrical culture is crucial in my investigation of Germanness beyond Germany. Whilst Mosse sees the Schaubühne as offering a counter model to an institutional lack of diversity within the theatres of Germany, academics witnessing German-language theatre performed in Britain, such as Tom Cornford, have been more critical of the 'whiteness' of European theatrical culture, and how this might be 'unintentionally participat[ing] in the white-washing of history'.⁴⁴ Mosse and Cornford thereby connect German theatrical culture with wider questions of cultural diversity not only within Germany, but suggest that these issues remain prominent as productions and practitioners travel between nations, inspiring my own questions about the impact of German theatrical culture on practices relating to cultural diversity within the British context.

Cornford comes to this criticism of what he and Caridad Svich go on to term Ostermeier's 'White Eurocentricity' through British-born director Katie Mitchell's feminist theatre.⁴⁵ Mitchell is another practitioner whose work crosses between

British and German cultural contexts. Whereas Ostermeier dominates discussion of the representation of German theatrical culture outside Germany, Mitchell takes up a similarly prominent but perhaps more complex position in academic discussion surrounding Anglo-German theatrical exchange in Britain. Mitchell frequently works in both Britain and Germany, and she has directed numerous productions in the German language that have toured to Britain. Benjamin Fowler sees the director's work and career as richly paradoxical: labelled as radical whilst nevertheless enjoying production at some of Europe's 'largest and most elite mainstream institutions'.⁴⁶ Fowler explains that the 'British vs. European identifications of her method and aesthetics' have been the subject of public debate in Britain since the late 2000s, and that her work therefore 'not only produces a need to discuss cultural differences, it also exposes the inability of British versus European [...] "sensibilities" to contain and explain it'.⁴⁷ By occupying this paradoxical, or perhaps transnational field of tension, Mitchell's work is frequently read as addressing contemporary feminist concerns and 'unravel[ing] structures' in the British cultural context.⁴⁸ Fowler indeed attributes this to the director's 'move to Germany', which 'imbued her work with new forms of politicized awareness that, in alliance with the textual material she chose to stage, made personal context the generator for her most wide-reaching and provocative productions to date'.⁴⁹ Whilst Fowler rightly seeks to diminish binary formations in relation to Mitchell's work (particularly the 'British versus European'), he continues to stress the value of German theatrical practice as a means for Mitchell to develop new, innovative aesthetic and political theatre.

It is also here that we see the ease with which much of the discourse, both popular and academic, merges the European with the German. Despite dedicating a section of his book-length study of Mitchell's career almost entirely to her work in Germany or in the German language (with two notable exceptions), Fowler nevertheless uses 'British', 'European', and 'Continental' as keywords preceding the section's introductory chapter, with only the words 'Regie' and 'directors' theatre' indicating the place of German theatrical culture within the section.⁵⁰ Whilst this is only a small omission, it does raise questions about the relationship between a British perception of European theatre, and how this relates to German theatrical culture. German theatre seems to sit within the term *European theatre* in this example, just as it lurked behind Hare's comments above, with the differences and overlaps between the two not fully acknowledged. Fowler's discussions around European and German theatre thus seem to elide cultural distinctions between the two. I do not aim to use this book to assert national cultural difference per se, but I am interested in assessing the value of Germanness as it emerges from behind the image of 'European' theatre in a British context.

Katie Mitchell's specific relationship with German theatrical culture is, however, addressed by Vicky Angelaki and Kim Solga, who uncover particular value in Mitchell's German-language work due to its engagement with contemporary feminist or environmental issues. Angelaki, for example, compares productions directed by Mitchell at both the Royal Court (*2071* and *Ten Billion*) and the

Schaubühne (*Lungs*) to pose ‘questions concerning the options and responsibilities that theatres face towards promoting environmental awareness, as well as the concrete actions they take towards implementing this turn’. Seeing Berlin’s Schaubühne as offering ‘more options for spatial reimaginations’ than London’s Royal Court, Angelaki argues that breaking down the border between spectator and actor, as achieved in *Lungs*, combines the labour of both sides of the stage to make a point about environmental responsibility.⁵¹ Similarly interested in Mitchell’s approach to theatrical space, Kim Solga discusses Mitchell’s production of *Fraulein Julie* in 2010, also at the Schaubühne, in relation to her feminist approach to theatre-making. This production, a reimaging of August Strindberg’s *Miss Julie*, ‘is ultimately feminist in its (re)orientation; [Mitchell] uses a deconstructed naturalist stage to demonstrate clearly how male and female bodies, upper- and lower-class bodies, shape social spaces in relation to one other’.⁵² Both Angelaki and Solga here stress the value of Mitchell’s German-language work in providing specific opportunities for utilizing theatrical space in new ways, and how this can have a socio-political function. In Angelaki’s and Solga’s studies, the theatrical institution in Germany (the Schaubühne in these examples) offers Mitchell an aesthetic freedom that the British institution, it seems, does not. Both these studies focus on space as experienced through performance: this book extends this interest by analysing performance alongside institutional practice, asking how funding, policy, marketing, and indeed location affect the Anglo-German theatre being produced or performed in these spaces.

This book seeks to shift this discourse by considering multiple modes of cross-cultural theatre, including the role of translators and designers, in my analysis of German theatrical culture in Britain. In doing so, I aim to broaden the scope of the book to look at and beyond Ostermeier and Mitchell as dominant figures in the field and to include other artists working in large institutions in Britain. Whilst the narrative I have established so far has centred on the work of these two directors, there are, of course, many other theatres, companies, and practitioners engaging in theatrical exchange between Britain and Germany, operating, in some cases, outside of the theatrical mainstream or traditional institutional settings. Despite the limitations of focusing so much attention on these two practitioners, Ostermeier’s and Mitchell’s work remains important in exploring how Anglo-German theatrical exchange, and particularly the reception and institutional framing of German-language theatre in the UK, may have changed in the years since the EU referendum in 2016.

Whilst there is an established narrative of German theatre in Britain that binds German theatrical culture to the development of mid- to late-twentieth-century theatre in Britain, the discourse traced here shows that more recent writing turns to German theatre as a foil for British theatre.⁵³ The innovation and experimentation offered by theatre(s) and creatives in Germany becomes something practitioners in Britain can learn from, but cultural gatekeepers (such as Hare and Billington) are nevertheless still wary of how this might alter their perception of what British theatre should be. German theatre is also imbricated in discussions about diversity,

and particularly ethnic diversity, within the wider field of European theatre. These discussions cause a moment of reflection on the scholars and critics I have referenced up to this point: the field itself seems largely dominated by white, male voices. It is therefore important to reflect on the critical and academic networks that work alongside the Anglo-German theatrical networks uncovered throughout this study to form the British image of Germanness that is at the heart of this book, and my own position in relation to these networks, a situation I reflect on in my Conclusion. This thus highlights the importance of the methodological approaches I make use of in this project: approaches that provide space to investigate the role of gatekeepers, networks, and institutional frameworks in cultural production, and which communities are included, or excluded, from these positions.

As the discussion above has demonstrated, German texts in translation, coupled with the movement of productions and practitioners across borders, have shaped the contemporary image of Germanness in Britain. I aim therefore to pick out case studies that represent the movement of texts, productions, and practitioners from Germany to Britain (and at times, vice versa). What is the contemporary conception of Germanness in Britain, what value is placed on it by institutions and practitioners, and what potential future does German theatrical culture have in a post-Brexit UK?

Expanding Institutional Dramaturgy

Addressing these questions, my approach throughout this study considers the ‘institutional dramaturgy’ of a variety of London theatres, combining this with performance analysis that focuses on Germanness as it arises in/through different productions. I use the term *institutional dramaturgy* in James Steichen’s sense, defined as ‘the practices through which an arts institution structures its patrons’ experiences in the service of advancing its goals or articulating its identity’.⁵⁴ Steichen’s definition is broad, particularly when thinking about the theatre as creating an ‘experience’, a term that could include any number of encounters outside and within the institutional space. However, the linking of institutional identity and goals with how the institution shapes audiences’ experiences of theatre provides a useful structure for analysing the extent to which German theatre is valued by theatres and practitioners in the UK and utilized as part of wider institutional aims.

The concept of institutional dramaturgy has since been developed (most notably) through the work of Peter Boenisch and Lizzie Stewart. Boenisch uses the term to ‘capture the “weaving” of a permeable fabric of cultural encounters and relations, of transmission, translation and negotiation, which is facilitated by theatre programming, funding, cultural policies, the institutional culture of a certain theatre or festival, and similar presentational frameworks’. This rearticulation takes place within the context of a research centre that itself reconfigures analysis of intercultural theatrical practice, pursuing ‘the idea of “interweaving cultures” through the performative and generative institutional textures of theatre programming, producing and presenting on local levels in various Europe sites’.⁵⁵

Developing this theoretical framework, Boenisch goes on elsewhere to value institutional dramaturgy as an analytic concept for its ability to ‘interrogate [...] systemic modifications’ at a time when the ‘political moment of contemporary theatre’ is located at the institutional level, and not just at the level of performance and aesthetics. Pursuing an analysis on both the institutional and aesthetic level (as this study seeks to do), thus has the potential to uncover the ‘set of aesthetic and ethical values that respond to and embed the institution within its actual situational context’.⁵⁶

Boenisch’s research project takes Erika Fischer-Lichte’s idea of interweaving performance cultures as a departure point. This term ‘captures [...] culture’s inherent processual nature with its continuous production of new differences’ and implies in its imagery a tight weaving of material threads (influences, techniques from varying cultures) that are fused together in the process of a performance, and in the institutional frameworks surrounding such productions.⁵⁷ By probing the ‘emergence, stabilization, and de-stabilization of cultural identity’, Fischer-Lichte sees interweaving performance cultures as providing scope to assess how the aesthetic merges with the political, so that performances become ‘sites of in-betweenness’ that can challenge ideas of a fixed cultural identity or citizenship.⁵⁸ Despite these aims, the concept has come under scrutiny from scholars such as Rustom Bharucha, who challenge the term’s potency in moving beyond the framework of interculturalism, asking whether the interweaving of cultures can really ‘free one from the burdens of appropriation, decontextualization, cosmeticization, commodification, and the myth of an “equal” playing field in the global cultural economy’.⁵⁹ Along with Lizzie Stewart, however, I see the term’s ‘potential to be highly productive’ in its taking of the word culture ‘as a linguistic object that brings forth performance but can also be altered through performance. It [therefore] more accurately allows for the existence of multiple theatrical cultures within, and in differently distanced relationships to, a national framework’.⁶⁰

By focusing on ‘encounter and relations’ engendered through interweaving cultures, expanding institutional dramaturgy to include a focus on performance reveals how individual practitioners shape both performance and an institution’s identity. Lizzie Stewart continues this opening up of the term in her study on Turkish-German scripts of postmigration, considering how ‘dramatic scripts provide starting points for broader rescripting of the German theatrical establishment and its associated institutional and symbolic realm’.⁶¹ She thus suggests that an assessment of performance in relation to institutional dramaturgy can reveal the ways in which theatrical productions unsettle dominant cultural trends in the field of theatre. I take this conceptualization of institutional dramaturgy further by looking not only at encounters between audience and practitioner, but also practitioners and the mediating actions of marketing departments.

Institutional dramaturgy allows for a greater focus on programming, marketing, and how both work towards articulating a theatre’s artistic policies, without excluding a focus on the theatre building and its placement within urban space from the analysis. It builds on the ‘spatial turn’ in performance studies developed

by the likes of Jen Harvie and Marvin Carlson. Within this ‘turn’, Carlson sought to view ‘the theatre experience in a more global way, as a sociocultural event’, acknowledging that, in Harvie’s words, ‘art and performance do not exist in some sort of cultural vacuum’ and cultural practice can, in fact, play a part in contesting (or supporting) ‘hegemonic ideologies’.⁶² Carlson’s work here relates to Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins’s definition of intercultural theatre that sees two cultures coming together in one performance space and raises important questions about the cultural and political implications of such encounters.⁶³ This sits alongside Doreen Massey’s questioning of how experiences of space are changing in the contemporary era of internationalization and globalization. Massey calls for a ‘global sense of the local, a global sense of place’ that rejects boundaries ‘in the sense of divisions which frame simple enclosures’, and which is constantly changing, adapting, and responding to internal conflicts.⁶⁴ With this in mind, this book considers how theatres’ institutional and aesthetic practices establish a sense of their ‘local’ place within London *and* their place within wider Anglo-German networks of theatrical exchange.

As noted above, Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital provides a further useful framework for understanding the perceived value of Germanness in the British context. Both the reception and marketing of a production reflect how certain aspects of a production are attributed value, in particular surrounding their perceived Germanness and how this plays out in the British context. Considering the power relations between Britain and Germany to be relatively similar (the two countries work ‘side-by-side’ according to former Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, suggestive of an equal political partnership if nothing else), I am interested here in using capital as a tool to think about cultural power relations in the field of Anglo-German theatre.⁶⁵ Douglas Lanier’s study of mutating cultural capital in adaptations of Shakespeare texts provides a useful model in this regard. He calls Shakespearean cultural capital ‘restless’, differing from Bourdieu’s assertion that cultural capital is a ‘relatively fixed marker of cultural difference’.⁶⁶ Lanier uses cultural capital to map how cultural authority can alter over time and place, something this study aims to achieve as well. I therefore use this book to explore which German texts, productions, or artists have cultural capital in Britain, and how this intrinsic value is accumulated, attributed, and marketed.

Connecting cultural authority with national politics, Beverly Skeggs draws on Bourdieu to explore the relationship between national belonging and culture:

Within the nation, national belonging constitutes the symbolic capital of the field, and to belong is to be legitimate. [...] the aim of accumulating national capital is precisely to convert it into national belonging, to have accumulated national cultural capital recognized as legitimately national by the dominant cultural group.⁶⁷

Skeggs focuses on how the ‘space of the nation’ inscribes its values onto specific bodies, marking certain groups as legitimate, ‘more valuable than others’.⁶⁸ If the national represents the legitimate culture, then the international represents the non-legitimate, challenging hegemonic ideas of national belonging, perhaps until

the international itself comes to accumulate national cultural capital. This further inspires a use of Bourdieu's thinking tools to assess what (or who) is presented through institutions or a production's reception as 'legitimate' in the British theatrical field. This raises questions as to how an institution chooses to frame a particular production, and what range of knowledge theatres or practitioners expect of an audience member going to see a production in the German language or in translation. If there is a sense of a 'legitimate' national culture in this theatrical field, and the hierarchy of audience members reflects this dominant culture, then the presentation of theatrical works in German might create a shift in the balance of power. Whether German theatrical culture maintains a type of 'outsider' status, or if there is evidence of it being absorbed into 'legitimate' British theatrical culture, are questions my institutional analysis will answer. I examine whether these productions 'institutionalize' an already dominant culture reflected in the audiences' cultural capital, or somehow break down or challenge this 'legitimate culture', this sense of 'distinction'.

When considering theatre institutions and practitioners operating within an international theatre network, social capital emerges as a key component of analysis as well. What networks are traceable between British theatres themselves, and between British and German theatres and practitioners? In order to uncover the social networks that exist between theatres in Britain and theatres in Germany, and the role of these networks in cultural production in Britain, I look at institutional histories and practitioners' biographies alongside the memberships and contributions of British institutions to international organizations and festivals in order to investigate what institutional connections helped create these theatrical productions and to what extent these agents connect with a larger Anglo-European network. Marco Serino, Daniela D'Ambrosio, and Giancarlo Ragozini successfully argue that the theatrical field is a social space and social capital remains 'an asset managed by company members exploiting their social contacts in the art world of theatre'.⁶⁹ As a result, I ask whether the manifestation of these networks in Britain aides or complicates a British view of Germanic culture. And finally, if, as Skeggs contests, 'some cultural characteristics fix some groups and enable others to be mobile', which characteristics are shared by those operating, or included, in this Anglo-German network?⁷⁰ In this sense, I intend to follow Bourdieu's concept of social space as relational, shaped by 'symbolic relations of power', to uncover how agents within this network relate and respond to each other, and how this, in some cases, might alter how Anglo-German theatrical exchange is conceptualized.⁷¹

In order to support an understanding of individual practitioners' roles in Anglo-German cultural production, in my final chapter I make use of qualitative interviews with German costume, lighting, and set designers working in Britain. I take inspiration from Geraldine Brodie's recent study on collaborative translation practices in contemporary British theatre, where interviewees were selected based on Jennifer Hochschild's concept of the 'elite interview', by which she means 'discussions with people who are chosen because of who they are or what position they occupy' as opposed to randomly or anonymously selected participants.⁷²

Hochschild's work was originally related to governance, and she recommends using elite interviews to uncover 'the role of elites (broadly defined) in a political, social, or economic process'.⁷³ Whilst my interest is not necessarily in the governance of theatrical institutions here, Hochschild's model offers a useful framework for selecting interviewees based on their roles within a production's creative team. I make use of these interviews in my final case study, with its focus on individual transnational practitioners, as they provide crucial context for the material conditions of Anglo-German theatrical exchange and allow me to understand how the practitioners themselves position themselves within this cross-cultural network.

For each case study, my examination of institutional dramaturgy is joined by analysis of a performance within the theatre itself, focusing on how different aspects of the production contribute to the construction (or dismantling) of a British view of German culture. My approach to performance analysis has taken inspiration from Erika Fischer-Lichte, who suggests:

Depending on our research interests and theoretical premises, we formulate questions concerning a particular performance — of whatever kind; proceeding from these questions we choose our focus as well as our perspectives and methods of analysis. Since all these conditions and prerequisites are subjectively determined, the process of performance analysis, quite consistently, is carried out as a process of subjective construction.⁷⁴

Fischer-Lichte's comments usefully incorporate an individual's emotional or physical responses to a performance in analysis. The questions, and therefore the approach, will thus vary from production to production. Broadly speaking however, I will consider how the selected performances are influenced by, comment on, or engage with elements of German and British national theatrical cultures.

Although a consideration of text is therefore vital to this project, within my analysis of performance there will be a strong focus on the scenography of each production. As argued above, German stage design has been particularly singled out in the British press as exemplary, and a 'major part' of German theatrical culture.⁷⁵ Both Andrew Haydon and Matt Trueman have suggested that the 'influence of German direction and design on the best recent British theatre is already clear'.⁷⁶ This reflects, in a contemporary context, Martin Esslin's contention that the impact of the Berliner Ensemble visit to London in 1956 'manifested itself [...] in stage design and lighting and in the use of music'.⁷⁷ Furthermore, these writers presuppose a binary between British and German stage design: namely that the former remains 'pictorial' and 'realistic' whilst the latter offers innovation, experimentation, and 'revolution' for practitioners within Britain.⁷⁸ As such, I turn my attention across each chapter to aspects of stage design and scenography.

Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth define scenography as:

The manipulation and orchestration of the performance environment [...] typically through architectonic structures, light, projected images, sound, costume and performance objects or props. These elements are considered in relation to the performing bodies, the text, the space [...] and the placement of the audience. Scenography is not simply concerned with creating and

presenting images to an audience; it is concerned with audience reception and engagement.⁷⁹

This description identifies specifically the broad range of stage aesthetics covered by the term *scenography* and is suggestive of where I will be directing my performance analysis throughout this study. Inspired by the importance that McKinney and Butterworth place on ‘audience reception and engagement’ here, I also consider my own experiential encounter with each production studied, thinking about how audience reactions can steer an evaluation of performance and its effects. This methodological approach allows for a more holistic consideration of performances, allowing me to read costume, lighting, and stage design alongside the placement of actors’ bodies, gesture, and their actions on stage through an ‘Anglo–German lens’. Reminiscent of the interest of critics such as Billington, already explored above, McKinney and Palmer also seem to link the development of scenographic practice with familiar figures or aspects of German theatrical culture. As such, performance and institutional analysis that pays particular attention to scenography seems apt for this study as a means through which to ask whether these Germanic theatrical traces are still visible in the scenography of the Anglo–German productions I have chosen to study, and what role a so-called ‘German’ scenography plays in an institution’s understanding or valuing of German theatrical culture.

Expanding the concept of institutional dramaturgy to include elements of institutional and performance practice, and the use of capital to cut across both, reveals how Germanness is conceived and valued in the British context from both an institutional and aesthetic point of view. This methodological approach builds on Brandon Woolf’s argument that ‘aesthetic formations cannot be separated from institutional and broader social formations’,⁸⁰ and by deploying it throughout this study, I aim to draw attention to how large producing theatres in London manoeuvre around Anglo–German (and Anglo–European) theatre, how these theatres present their ‘own core values and [...] what their impact is’, and, ultimately, seek to make ‘theatre accountable for its projects through its practices’.⁸¹

Travelling Texts, Travelling Productions, Travelling Practices

Applying this methodology, this book is structured around six case studies spread over three chapters. Each chapter places two productions side by side and analyses institutional factors in the first instance before moving onto performance analysis. Chapter 1, ‘Travelling Texts: Brecht, Büchner, Borders’, examines Jack Thorne’s adaptation of *Woyzeck* by Georg Büchner (Old Vic Theatre, 2017), and Simon Stephens’s adaptation of *The Threepenny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht (National Theatre, 2016). Given the significant role that translation has played in the development of a British understanding of Germanness, these examples demonstrate how British theatre institutions frame and utilize German texts and playwrights to construct an image of German (theatrical) culture in Britain. As two playwrights well-known in a contemporary context for their commitment to political theatre, Brecht and Büchner seem, on the surface, to offer British practitioners a platform from which

to address contemporary political issues. Drawing on Lawrence Venuti's well-established domestication/ foreignization framework however, this chapter reveals that whilst theatre in translation can be seen as a bridge between different national cultures, both these productions utilize a variety of translation strategies that ultimately highlight, and indeed propagate, divisions within, and between, British and German cultures.⁸²

In Chapter 2, 'Travelling Productions: The Transnational Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier and Katie Mitchell', I consider two of the main ways in which international work travels across borders: co-production and touring. Thomas Ostermeier's production of *Richard III* was produced by the Schaubühne in Berlin and has toured internationally since 2015, coming to London's Barbican Theatre in 2017. This will be considered alongside Katie Mitchell's *Ophelias Zimmer* (2016), a co-production between the Schaubühne and Royal Court in London. The chapter examines how Mitchell 'interweaves' performance traditions typically associated with German theatrical culture in order to draw out the feminist message in her production. Viewing the two productions side by side, I build on the work of Benjamin Fowler and Aneta Mancewicz to argue that *Ophelias Zimmer* critically reassesses Ostermeier's approach to Shakespeare in performance, suggesting that Mitchell 'performs back' aspects of Ostermeier's work — primarily the mobile, maverick, male actor — to question both a gendered imbalance in the German director's *œuvre* as well as Shakespeare in performance in Britain. In a British context that continues to prioritize diversity in the arts, Ostermeier's staging reveals the limits of his brand of Shakespeare in Britain. My reading of Mitchell and Ostermeier thus reveals how productions operating within the Anglo-German context can feed back to each other to uncover new ways to read productions as they travel across borders.

Chapter 3, 'Travelling Practices: Designers and Directors Working in Britain', takes the binary construction between innovative, non-naturalistic German theatre design and a more placid, 'realistic' British tradition as a provocation to explore the work of German designers working in Britain. Furthermore, I consider to what extent these designers can be seen as embodying, or complicating, an idea of a German theatre design aesthetic. The chapter assesses Joe Hill-Gibbins's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Young Vic, 2017) and his collaborative work with German designers Johannes Schütz and Michaela Barth, as well as German-born designer Hildegard Bechtler's work with British director Robert Icke on his 2019 production *The Doctor*, adapted from Arthur Schnitzler's *Professor Bernhardt*. Here, I will be narrowing the analytical lens to consider Bechtler's and Schütz's design work in particular and how this affects the meaning-making of each production. These productions provoke concerns about how Anglo-German cultural differences can be incorporated both on stage and off. They also reveal how debates about identity politics and the role of diversity within theatrical institutions and transnational theatrical networks come into contact with Anglo-German theatrical exchange in the UK.

I take two case studies per chapter as a means of bringing two productions into

productive dialogue with each other in order to explore broader tendencies in how Germanness is represented on British stages: how divisions between Britain and Germany can be upheld on stage; how Anglo-German theatrical exchange can be used to address cultural division within Britain; how British practitioners can remain critical of international networks; and most notably, how Anglo-German theatre in Britain becomes enmeshed in questions about diversity, race, and interculturalism. Bringing together the various ‘routes’ taken throughout this book, the final concluding chapter addresses these issues head on, and considers the future of both German theatrical culture in Britain and Anglo-German theatrical exchange in the post-Brexit environment.

Notes to the Introduction

1. Michael Billington, ‘Don Carlos’, *Guardian*, 4 February 2005 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/feb/04/theatre>> [accessed 21 May 2024].
2. David Barnett, “‘I’ve been told [...] that the play is far too German’”: The Interplay of Institution and Dramaturgy in Shaping British Reactions to German Theater’, in *Cultural Impact in the German Context: Studies in Transmission, Reception, and Influence*, ed. by Rebecca Braun and Lyn Marven (Boydell & Brewer, 2010), pp. 150–66 (p. 151).
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 151, 162.
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CHAPTER 1



Travelling Texts: Brecht, Büchner, Borders

Theatre translation is not a neutral act. As Margherita Laera has argued, equivalence, the transfer of a ‘fixed meaning to a different context’, is a ‘mirage’; a performance of a play in translation is the result of an accumulation of choices from a team of practitioners that draws upon, alters, or highlights specific aspects of a source text.¹ How these choices start to affect the way one culture views another is at the heart of this chapter. Theatre translations in Britain are important sites of cross-cultural exchange and form key routes for international writers to be introduced to, and to influence, British audiences and theatre-makers. These ‘routes’ might allow texts to travel across geographical borders, but the journey is not necessarily a smooth one. This chapter will travel along the ‘routes’ formed by two case studies of German plays in translation performed in London in 2016 and 2017: Rufus Norris’s production of Bertolt Brecht’s *The Threepenny Opera*, adapted by Simon Stephens for the National Theatre, and Joe Murphy’s production of Georg Büchner’s *Woyzeck*, adapted by Jack Thorne for the Old Vic Theatre. My analysis will consider how these institutions use marketing materials and purchasable programmes to frame the productions, assessing whether these works of theatre in translation connect to each theatre’s institutional aims, particularly as these relate to questions of interculturalism and internationalization. Drawing on Lawrence Venuti’s well-known ‘domestication/foreignization’ framework, I consider the creatives’ translational and scenographic choices and ask how they work together to ‘co-construct’ an image of German theatrical culture on stage.

Academic writing on German plays translated into English and performed in Britain often focuses on the work, history, and influence of one major figure: Bertolt Brecht. Ever since the Berliner Ensemble came to London in 1956 — an ‘event that changed the face of the English theatre’ according to John Willett — critics have linked Brecht’s ideology and methods to major shifts in the British theatrical landscape.² In the subsequent years, Brecht’s plays have even entered the British education system, earning the ‘status of “classic” texts’.³ Critical discourse has since moved towards defining and then challenging the idea of a ‘British Brecht’, looking at both Brechtian and post-Brechtian methods adopted by creatives working within the British theatrical landscape and the extent to which Brecht’s legacy is of continued relevance to contemporary British theatre-makers.⁴

In this chapter then, I consider a production that faced the challenge of addressing this canonical legacy: how can the translation of *The Threepenny Opera*, as a site of cultural transfer, present and manipulate ideas about Brecht and the Brechtian, which by extension connect to a particular image of German theatrical culture in Britain? If ‘the history of the development of “English Brecht” shows the playwright’s work registering swings in popularity like a barometer, reflecting the political climate at a particular point in time’, what climate do we see mirrored in contemporary translations and adaptations of his work in Britain?⁵ Dougal McNeill rightly argues that ‘translation plays a key role in the unfolding of Brecht as a figure in English and the English-speaking world’, and yet early translations of Brecht’s texts were found lacking.⁶ Academics such as Gunilla Anderman and Andre Lefevere bear witness to the misconceptions around the image of Brecht that arose through poor early translations of this work.⁷ An ‘effective production’ in Caroline Summers’s eyes must complete ‘the seemingly impossible task of providing both linguistic accuracy and a site of encounter with “the Brechtian” that can be demonstrated through performance’.⁸

Brecht’s Marxist politics have often been seen, according to Margaret Eddershaw, as a ‘stumbling block to his full acceptance in Britain’s theatre environment’, surprising considering his influence on the Angry Young Men movement, a group noted for its ‘vaguely lefty’ politics, as described by Aleks Sierz.⁹ There are, as Eddershaw and Summers have both noted, economic factors that have influenced the adoption of Brechtian working practices as well: ‘the lack of funding and resources for long rehearsal schedules, for example, has demonstrated how the economic patronage of institutions determines production values’.¹⁰ Eddershaw posits a way of making Brechtian theatre in present day Britain that recognizes Brecht’s ‘historicity and his continued relevance to contemporary culture’, and that builds on and develops Brechtian theory, rather than attempting to reify this ‘received’ image of his methods and politics.¹¹ Indeed, authors use Brecht for their own aims and purposes, and McNeill sees British Brecht as ‘always someone else’s, always a comment on Brecht as much a presentation of him’.¹² Norris’s high-profile (and big-budget) *Threepenny Opera* will thus provide an intriguing example as to how institutional and aesthetic representations of Brecht and his work might influence perceptions of the playwright’s continued relevance, and of wider German theatrical cultures in the British theatrical field.

Of course, other German authors have been translated and produced in Britain, but few have received comparable levels of academic attention. Alongside *The Threepenny Opera*, I wanted to find a production that was staged later on in the UK’s Brexit timeline, at another large London theatre, by an author whose political and cultural legacy could provide a comparable challenge to any would-be translator or adaptor. In British (and German) academic and critical contexts, Georg Büchner (1813–37) is considered a politically radical writer, a ‘convinced revolutionary’, according to Victor Price.¹³ He is seen as a forerunner to multiple theatrical movements often associated with Germany: ‘the Naturalists, the Expressionists, Brecht and his followers, and the playwrights of the absurd all admired [Büchner]

as a model and kindred spirit', suggesting any translation of his works must balance a complex cultural legacy.¹⁴ At the same time, Büchner is frequently related to, and compared with, Shakespeare, who, as we shall see, is a key figure in Anglo-German theatrical exchange. Although Büchner has not been traced back, like Brecht, to having such a seismic effect on British theatrical culture, his *Woyzeck* is highly regarded in the British context. Michael Billington has called *Woyzeck* a 'seminal masterpiece', and fellow critic Matt Trueman considers it 'unfinished, but unimprovable'.¹⁵ The extent to which a translation of *Woyzeck* can carry the weight of this influence and legacy will be explored in the second production studied in this chapter, Joe Murphy's 2017 version of *Woyzeck*. The Old Vic's historical connection with the National Theatre movement and Shakespeare, as well as its commercial financial imperative, provide an interesting contrast to the National Theatre in terms of institutional context for the discussion here.

My analysis of *The Threepenny Opera* will triangulate between three sources: the original German-language text, Stephens's adaptation as documented in the National Theatre live camera script, and the National Theatre live broadcast recording (NT Live Recording), filmed on 22 September 2016. Although there is no published play text, the camera script nevertheless offers a comprehensive and convincing copy of the final rehearsal script, albeit with additional notes on beats, timing, and camera movements. Performance analysis, based on the NT Live Recording and notes from my own viewing of the performance on 23 May 2016, will run alongside the work on the text and be referred to where relevant. For *Woyzeck* my sources will be the published play text by Jack Thorne, and comparisons will be made based on the German language edition of *Woyzeck* edited by Henri Poschmann, part of his 2006 Deutscher Klassiker Verlag edition of Büchner's collected writings, thus making his edition of *Woyzeck* one of the most modern and easily accessible versions. Performance analysis will be based on production stills taken from the Old Vic website and, as no video recording of this production is available, also on my own observations and notes from watching the performance on 20 May 2017. I will also analyse each production's institutional framing, posters, and purchasable programmes.

Institutional Practice: Diversity, Accessibility, and the Converging of 'Crowds'

The choice to programme a play by Büchner in the 2017 season at the Old Vic can be usefully situated within a layered image of this theatre as a site of nineteenth-century theatrical heritage, but also as a modern theatre company, balancing this legacy with contemporary concerns about openness, diversity, and class. Built in 1818 as the Royal Coburg Theatre, a Germanic title referring to the House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, the Old Vic took on its current name in 1912 after being taken over by theatrical manager and producer Lilian Baylis. Despite its 'somewhat unsavoury' early associations as a temperance and coffee house based in Lambeth, the Old Vic came to be closely associated with Shakespeare and opera in the early twentieth century, drawing many of Britain's most well-known actors,

from John Gielgud to Peggy Ashcroft, to its stage.¹⁶ From 1963 to 1976, it served as the temporary home of Laurence Olivier's National Theatre Company before they moved into Denys Lasdun's National Theatre building just down the road on the South Bank. In 1983, the Old Vic was bought by American businessman Ed Mirvish who oversaw extensive renovations, work Marvin Carlson saw as 'seeking to appeal to widely accepted public images of Victorian culture, rather than to the unique history of [the Old Vic's] structure'.¹⁷ The building was acquired by the Old Vic Theatre Trust in 1998, who appointed Kevin Spacey as the first artistic director of the Old Vic Theatre Company. His tenure saw him labelled the theatre's 'saviour' by the British press at the time of his appointment,¹⁸ bringing with him an 'aura of Hollywood glamour'.¹⁹ Matthew Warchus has been artistic director of the Old Vic since 2015. As a commercially successful director, Warchus sought to give the theatre a new purpose. In the British press, he expressed his hope to use his tenure to 'shake off its image as a "posh theatre"' and rebrand the theatre as 'an artistic powerhouse that is unintimidating and unpretentious'.²⁰ *Woyzeck* arrived as part of Warchus's second season as artistic director in May 2017 and, as we shall see, occupies an interesting place in this desired shift within the Old Vic's image from 'posh' to 'unpretentious'. In the context of this shift of artistic focus, this section examines how the Old Vic framed *Woyzeck*, considering the discourse surrounding the play as it is presented through its production programme, poster, and preproduction media articles.

Described by academic Ric Knowles as a 'semiotically rich theatre', the Old Vic's history, and Warchus's more recent artistic aims, are visible in and on the theatre building itself.²¹ Having branded the upper circle as the Lilian Baylis Circle, and named the boxes in the auditorium after Laurence Olivier and director Tyrone Guthrie, these titles act as continuing reminders of the theatre's historical associations with the National Theatre movement and its legacy as the 'leading home' of Shakespeare in the early twentieth century.²² A visit to the theatre in 2017 then has the potential to be an encounter with this specific legacy and history. Warchus's new artistic direction is equally visible. The building's north-facing front façade, for example, is decorated with the theatre's name in a gold, embossed frame above the pillared porch entrance. Under Warchus's rebranding, the theatre took on a new visual identity which saw this embossed logo still visible, but painted over in white with 'The Old Vic' in Akzidenz Grotesk Bold Extended, a typeface that dates back to the nineteenth century and was historically associated with nineteenth-century pubs.²³ From the outside then, visitors to the Old Vic from 2017 to the present day can see the visual layering of the theatre's Victorian origins with its modern-day agenda, something that continues inside the venue as well.

The theatre's artistic mission under Warchus is 'to be a surprising, unpredictable, ground-breaking, rule-breaking, independent beacon of accessible, uplifting and unintimidating art'.²⁴ This is reflected in the theatre's two main slogans: 'Entertain Something New' and 'Dare always Dare', the latter of which could be found throughout the 2017 season above the entrance to the stalls in the form of a cursive, pink neon sign. Both slogans suggest a focus on risk and experimentation, whilst

not forgetting the importance of creating work that entertains. What constitutes ‘entertaining’ theatre seems to be productions that have a broad audience appeal, inspired by the values of accessibility mentioned in the theatre’s mission statement. On its website, the Old Vic is described as ‘London’s independent, not-for-profit theatre’, meaning it receives no public subsidy and is dependent on ticket sales as well as individual and corporate donations for its income.²⁵ Programmed work must therefore strike a balance between drawing large audiences and reflecting Warchus’s desire to present cutting-edge, ‘ground-breaking’ theatre.

In the production programme, Sarah Crompton calls *Woyzeck* ‘the original working-class tragedy’, a view echoed by adaptor and playwright Jack Thorne, cited in the same article.²⁶ Crompton and Thorne’s description reflects a common opinion in British academic discourse.²⁷ This reading of the play — as one which brings a lower-class tragic hero into the Aristotelian tragic model — reflects Warchus’s mission statement: just as *Woyzeck* is seen as a play which altered the relationship between theatre and class in its own time, Murphy’s contemporary production aims to play a part in shifting the image of the Old Vic from ‘posh’ theatre to a more class-conscious, ‘accessible’ theatrical space.

Director Joe Murphy had wanted to work on *Woyzeck* for a while: “I loved the bones of it but no translation had got me really excited”.²⁸ Murphy here partially dismisses the work of previous translators of Büchner’s text and reveals the value he places on the playwright/adaptor Jack Thorne for steering the direction of the play in translation. Thorne’s previous work on a version of *The Physicists* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt (2012), and adaptations of *Let the Right One In* (2013–14) by John Ajvide Lindqvist and *Stuart: A Life Backwards* (2013) by Alexander Masters, suggest he is a well-established theatrical collaborator and adaptor of German-language and non-German-language texts. His work on *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2016) significantly increased his popular symbolic capital prior to *Woyzeck* coming to the Old Vic. As of 2022, *The Cursed Child* is performed in London, New York, Melbourne, San Francisco, Tokyo, Toronto, and Hamburg, and the published play text was the bestselling book of 2016 in both the US and Britain.²⁹ It is therefore unsurprising that Thorne’s name dwarfs Büchner’s on an early poster for the show, a decision which suggests the comparatively low symbolic capital of Georg Büchner in a British context. Despite this, Thorne himself wrote disparagingly of his own talents in relation to Büchner and *Woyzeck*:

I felt as if this required one of the great poets of the stage — a Martin Crimp or a Sarah Kane, writers who seem to find the lyrical in the everyday. I am, sadly, a naturalist if I’m anything. Like probably every other writer of my generation, I’ve tried to write like Sarah Kane, but I don’t have the ability. *Woyzeck* felt like something I just wasn’t capable of.³⁰

Thorne here positions his own naturalistic writing as if it is both the wrong style and ‘not good enough’ for translating Büchner, signalling instead towards other playwrights whose work is often staged in Germany. This comes despite the view of many academic critics writing in English that Büchner was a forebear of, amongst other things, the naturalist movement.³¹ For Murphy however,

Woyzeck ‘can feel quite alienating to some people in its original form’ but he sees Thorne’s self-proclaimed naturalistic style as making the text ‘accessible’.³² These comments position Büchner’s original text, even in translation, as inaccessible, non-naturalistic, and distancing for a British audience, and in need of a mediator writing in a ‘naturalistic’ style to make it more palatable for a wider British audience. Murphy doesn’t state what makes Büchner’s text alienating, but this framing does nonetheless establish a binary between ‘accessible’ (naturalistic, British) and ‘alienating’ (non-naturalistic, German) theatre.³³

For Murphy, the casting of John Boyega in the main role of *Woyzeck* increases the ‘accessibility’ of the production even further. Having recently starred in J. J. Abram’s *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015), Boyega brings a certain amount of symbolic capital to the production, appealing to an international audience who would want to see the star of a film that grossed more than two billion US dollars worldwide ‘in the flesh’. *Woyzeck*’s desire to break from his milieu as a poor and struggling soldier is mirrored in Boyega’s character of Finn in *Star Wars*, who similarly breaks out from his dehumanizing work as a First Order stormtrooper to resist the domination and exploitation of the authoritarian government he works for. Through this intertextuality, Boyega begins to embody the idea of the Black working-class hero, both through his fictional characters and his position as prominent Black British actor.

Speaking to Esther Addley in the *Guardian*, Murphy talks about wanting to cast a ‘non-white, working-class actor as the titular *Woyzeck*’, with the aim of making class and race more prominent themes in discussions surrounding theatre.³⁴ Boyega, according to Murphy, will hopefully bring a ‘new audience to the theatre from Peckham, and from other places “far, far away”’.³⁵ Murphy here coyly references the well-known *Star Wars* phrase in what seems to be intended as a gesture towards inclusivity, but perhaps in fact rhetorically ‘others’ potential audience members from Peckham, an area just over three miles south of the theatre. Murphy thus uses Boyega’s background as a way of framing the Old Vic’s, and *Woyzeck*’s, potential audiences. They become divided into two ‘crowds’ by Murphy, who adds towards the end of Addley’s article that ‘we are really excited about the *Old Vic crowd* and *John’s crowd* coming together and watching a play’.³⁶ A regular Old Vic audience, by implication, is set in opposition to the social group established as being represented by Boyega.³⁷ The ‘Old Vic crowd’, following Murphy’s reasoning, is neither non-white, working-class, nor, it would seem, from Peckham (or made up of *Star Wars* fans). Boyega is thus framed as exceptional in relation to the usual casting at the Old Vic, bringing in Black, working-class, and Black working-class audiences who, Murphy suggests, might otherwise not attend performances there. This framing thus suggests the production will address not only the relationship between British and German national cultures, but also issues related to class and race within the British context too.

Murphy makes further assumptions about a regular Old Vic audience that are culturally literate enough to understand Büchner’s ‘alienating’ play. If Boyega is attracting audiences (‘John’s crowd’) who would not have ordinarily gone out of



FIG. 1.1. Poster for *Woyzeck*, Old Vic Theatre.
Image: Akse; concept: Pentagram, 2017.

their way to purchase tickets to a production of *Woyzeck*, then the implication is that the regular ‘Old Vic crowd’ would have. Murphy calls *Woyzeck* ‘quite avant-garde and hard to get to grips with’, descriptors that seem to further increase the cultural capital associated with the play by framing it as requiring high levels of cultural literacy to appreciate.³⁸ Thorne’s naturalistic writing style and Boyega’s symbolic capital are, for Murphy, the primary means of making the text more ‘accessible’. Intervention from these British practitioners is thus presented as a way of drawing in a more diverse audience than what is considered the standard at the Old Vic, whilst the original qualities of the German text (‘avant-garde’) are highlighted as features a typical Old Vic audience member would buy a ticket for. We can therefore see the danger of establishing new divides here, in that the framing equates German theatrical culture with notionally white, middle-class (or at least not working-class), culturally literate audiences.

The construction of these ‘crowds’ is further reinforced through the production poster and main promotional image, which shows an image of Boyega in a green army uniform spray-painted onto a blue, cracked concrete wall (see Figure 1.1). Commissioned as part of the theatre’s rebranding, the image was created by French-born, Manchester-based graffiti artist Akse P19. Chips and cracks in the paintwork reveal a concrete wall behind the mural that is reminiscent of Berlin’s

East Side Gallery, a long segment of the former Berlin Wall covered in artworks and reconstituted as an outdoor art gallery, or similarly graffitied sections of the Wall, pre-empting the Berlin setting of Thorne's adaptation. The urban aesthetic furthermore alters what audiences should expect from the adaptation. *Woyzeck* might be a nineteenth-century text, but this image sees it propelled into a contemporary, metropolitan world. We can also see Murphy's 'two crowds' reflected in this image. The image of Boyega, coupled with the urban aesthetic of a graffitied, dilapidated wall, perhaps leans towards relating to, and attracting, the notional 'John's crowd' of Black, working-class, metropolitan city dwellers. At the same time, a background that resembles the former Berlin Wall might be read differently by an audience familiar with the imagery and aesthetics of mid- to late-twentieth-century German history. Akse P19's image could therefore be seen as performing the work Murphy hopes his play will achieve, bringing together two divergent 'crowds' in a single shared moment.

My reading of the Old Vic's institutional framing of *Woyzeck* poses a variety of further questions for the text and production to answer. To what extent does it replicate what Murphy identifies as the alienating aspects of staging a German play in translation? Based on the interventions into the text identified by Murphy, I see his accessible/ alienating dichotomy as mirroring Venuti's domestication/ foreignization framework, but in ways that reveal unexpected cultural border-making in a production aimed at drawing seemingly different audience groups together. In the later sections of this chapter, I consider aspects of Thorne's adaptation and Murphy's production that alter Büchner's text to make it seem more naturalistic, accessible, and domesticated, or to distance, alienate, and foreignize it from its target audience(s).

Similarly to the Old Vic, which emphasizes its mission as being to produce 'accessible [...] art' in its diverse programme of productions, the National Theatre prioritizes reaching 'the widest possible audience' aiming to 'be open, inclusive and diverse, and as national as possible'.³⁹ National Theatre productions are 'for everyone', suggesting the theatre seeks, as Geraldine Brodie has noted, 'to live up to its name and provide a holistic service to the nation'.⁴⁰ The National Theatre's ideas of the national here thus seem rather expansive and border-defying. Being 'national' indeed appears to be bound to ideas of being international too. This is reflected in the theatre's work beyond Britain, where it prioritizes the export of 'the nation's leading artists on the world stage', rather than necessarily adopting a reciprocal programme of international exchange as historically championed by theatres such as the Young Vic.⁴¹ The inclusion of Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* in the programme for 2016 raises questions about how the theatre frames international work in translation within this 'national' framework. The National Theatre brings diversity and British national identity together: a national audience should also be a diverse audience — diversity within a British national context. Its drive to create theatre for 'everyone' is almost certainly guided by requirements for public funding.⁴² The Arts Council England, which in 2016–17 provided seventeen per cent of the theatre's funding (£17.2m), describes its mission as 'great art and

culture for everyone' in its ten-year strategic framework for 2010–20.⁴³ How, then, is 'British Brecht' configured for the National Theatre's desired contemporary, 'national', and 'diverse' audiences?

The National Theatre has programmed translations of Brecht's work previously, and indeed its framing of *The Threepenny Opera* suggests the production is a continuation of its international repertoire. Kenneth Tynan, literary manager of the National Theatre from 1963 to 1974, saw it as duty bound to present 'the best of foreign drama', a notion that continued to be reflected in the programme for 2016–17 through new adaptations of works by Ibsen, Chekhov, and Brecht.⁴⁴ Rather than seeking to stage new, contemporary foreign plays however, and thereby come into competition with the City of London's Barbican theatre (an institution discussed further in Chapter 3), the National Theatre instead prioritizes the presentation of canonical European playwrights given a contemporary edge through new textual or directorial adaptation. The 2016–17 programme was seen as '[striking] an exciting balance between the new and the familiar', a balancing act that might too be reflected on stage. The theatre summarized its programme thus:

We continued to present the classics freshly imagined by some of the best artists in the world today, including the landmark *Young Chekhov* trilogy [...] in new versions by David Hare, [...] and Ivo van Hove's staging of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, along with new productions of 20th-century masterpieces by Sean O'Casey, Terence Rattigan and Bertolt Brecht.⁴⁵

The Threepenny Opera is included in the list of 'new productions of 20th-century masterpieces', rooting the play in the context of when it was written and first produced. Simon Stephens's work as adaptor goes unreferenced in this description, despite Hare and Hove being name-checked as giving these canonical works a fresh, contemporary reworking. This moves the focus away from the text and towards the new scenographic or production elements of Norris's staging. Brecht is also listed alongside playwrights writing primarily in English (O'Casey and Rattigan), subtly suggesting the German playwright has entered the English-language canon to such an extent that his work is no longer seen as wholly foreign. This perhaps reflects Eddershaw's contention that productions of Brecht's works at the National Theatre in the late 1970s were 'made to appear like that of other playwrights'.⁴⁶ Of course, the theatre could also be revealing here how much it values the symbolic capital of David Hare as adaptor, Chekhov or Ibsen as international writers, and Ivo van Hove as international director, over the unmentioned Simon Stephens. This annual review thus reveals a continued uncertainty about how, and in which context, to frame and promote Brecht's plays.

This uncertainty runs through the National Theatre's framing of Norris's *The Threepenny Opera* as well. In the programme that accompanied the production, the show is placed in the context of previous performances of works by Brecht at the theatre, sixteen in total, and Kurt Weill, just one — *Lady in the Dark*.⁴⁷ Contextualizing the production in this way stresses that programming a Brecht play is 'business-as-usual' for the National Theatre, highlighting his work as a consistent part of the theatre's repertoire. The production programme takes on a



FIG. 1.2. '10 Cheers from Bertolt Brecht', production programme for *The Threepenny Opera*, National Theatre, 2017.

messy, scrapbook-style design, with titles and images seemingly stapled or taped in, put together in a manner that aestheticizes cheapness and carelessness (see Figure 1.2). The majority of articles included in the programme trend towards presenting historical context, with *The Threepenny Opera* historicized as being a part of the 'cultural renaissance' brought about by Germany's post-World War I 'economic devastation', Berlin being highlighted as the 'conduit' for the different artistic movements associated with the Weimar Republic, namely 'Bauhaus, Tanztheater and Neue Sachlichkeit'. The same article on 1920s Berlin features images of Otto Dix's *Der Salon I*, showing scantily clad prostitutes as they 'wait for business', and of Anita Berber, 'popular (and notorious) in Berlin for [her] taboo-challenging shows'.⁴⁸ The programme then, and, as we shall see, the poster and production design too, present a specific image of Brecht as a member of this Weimar-era revolution in art, 'Weimar Brecht'. Drawing on this aspect of Brecht's legacy sees him sharing some of the cultural capital associated with the seemingly gender-subversive and sexually provocative artistic products of the Weimar era.

Dan Rebellato draws this idea of Weimar art created in reaction to the world around it into the context of 2016, asking in his programme article: ‘what are the dramatic forms we need to understand Wikileaks and Anonymous, the Panama Papers and Occupy, the multiple forms of weightless, globalized, borderless market transactions that shape the course of our lives?’⁴⁹ For Rebellato with the EU referendum round the corner, ‘we might think that we could do with a bit of Brecht. Now more than ever’. By referencing the then upcoming referendum, Rebellato specifically points out Brecht’s relevance to the contemporary political climate, highlighting the ways in which the playwright could be useful in the debate surrounding the UK’s relationship with the rest of Europe. As he takes readers through the ten reasons why ‘we need Brecht’, Rebellato thus refers to the political use value of the German author to a British audience, which along with the timing of the production, might suggest that the play will engage with the question of Brexit and the UK’s contested relationship with the EU, amongst the other issues that Rebellato draws attention to. In the process, Brecht is presented as a radical Marxist theatre-maker: ‘he doesn’t want to reform the theatre; he wants to tear it up’. Rebellato goes on to describe ‘British people’ as being ‘nervous’ about Brecht’s theories, but ‘you and I know, don’t we, that there is no one more boring in the theatre than the person who affects to be bored by Brecht’. He implies there is a typical British view of Brecht that he, and his readers, can together undermine, dividing those who ‘get’ Brecht from those who don’t (or those who may be bored by his plays). In Rebellato’s ‘we’ resides an assumption of knowledge, namely that his audience are already familiar with Brecht’s work and theories. Secondly, it seems to offer a division between a general public, ‘British people’, and those, ‘we’, who can comprehend the value of Brecht’s theories. Similarly, Rebellato challenges his reader, asking how contemporary audiences can develop Brecht’s “‘watching-while-smoking” attitude”; however, he is ‘not sure Brecht would be too impressed by vaping’. Cigar-smoking, here seemingly considered an elite activity, is considered ideal, whereas vaping (a comparatively lower-class activity?) would be disparaged by Brecht. The playwright is thus positioned as a radical, divisive, foreign figure, representing something different from what the general British public finds comfortable. Despite the ironic or humorous intentions of the piece, Brecht is nonetheless imbued here with cultural and political value to British audiences in a manner that borders on cultural elitism, an image that seems at odds with the cheap, scrapbook-style design of the programme.

So far, then, Brecht has been framed as both radical subversive Weimar artist and culturally elitist author in the context of this production. This discrepancy is not, on its own, surprising. Laura Bradley and James K. Lyon have both, for example, discussed the complexity of Brecht’s status as a ‘socialist icon’, created in part through the impact of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) on his work and legacy, which ‘continues to influence international perceptions of his work in the twenty-first century’.⁵⁰ Lyon views Brecht’s time living in the GDR as creating a transition in the perceptions of Brecht from being a ‘radical outsider’ to ‘dissident conformist’.⁵¹ The framing for this production nevertheless takes us back to the days of Brecht as ‘radical outsider’. The National Theatre here presents ‘Weimar

Brecht', framing the German author as a politically radical 'fixed monolith' rather than tackling a legacy that acknowledges that there were 'almost as many Brechts as there were people who knew him'.⁵² This presentation avoids concerning itself with Brecht's post-war legacy in any detail, and in fact his biography in the programme skips from 'he returned to Europe in 1947' to his death in 1956, avoiding discussion of his work in the GDR or at the Berliner Ensemble.⁵³ By having this narrower focus, by framing Brecht as a 'fixed [Weimar] monolith', the National Theatre draws on the cultural capital of 'Weimar Brecht's' perceived radicalism to promote a reading of *The Threepenny Opera* through this relatively narrow lens, and thus in this way appealing to audiences more sympathetic to the idea of Weimar rebellion than to the more committed Marxist or socialist politics of GDR-era Brecht.⁵⁴ This choice positions the production as part of the all-too neat paradigm of German theatre — here represented by Brecht — as a means of presenting somehow more subversive and radical work than British theatre, a feature of German theatre noted by the British press in the past (see the Introduction).

The discrepancy between radical 'Weimar Brecht' and 'elitist Brecht' is further drawn out by Norris's decision to stage *The Threepenny Opera* at the 1150-seat Olivier Theatre, the largest of the National Theatre's three stages. The Balladeer, opening the show with a short monologue, welcomes the audience to 'our glorious dirty ditch of a theatre', describing the show as a 'cheap opera', lines that provoked laughter from the audience in the National Theatre live recording.⁵⁵ There is a sense of irony in these phrases that probably drew out the audience's laughter. In 2016, tickets for an Olivier production would have ranged from £15 to £89, suggesting that for some, seeing *The Threepenny Opera* was not a 'cheap' experience at all. This prelude introduces the world of the play as one that will play-act at being poor, cheap, and dirty, in a sense itself aware of a perceived incompatibility between the Olivier performance space (vast, expensive) and expectations of what a Weimar-era, Brechtian aesthetic might be (dirty, cheap). These expectations of the Brechtian aesthetic are clearly revealed by contemporary reviewers writing about Norris's production and Stephens's text. Alice Saville spots Brecht's 'grubby thumbprints' leaving their trace on Stephens's adaptation, whilst Miriam Gillinson in contrast wishes the actor playing Polly Peachum was 'grittier, uglier and more off beat' than actor Rosalie Craig, finding the production 'too clean and palatable'.⁵⁶ For Matt Trueman, the production is 'too classy', whilst for others, the revival is 'grubbily vivacious', and for Henry Hinchings Stephens's adaptation 'has conjured up a grubby new version of Bertolt Brecht's portrait of a callous society'.⁵⁷ These comments stress the value reviewers place on seeing a 'dirty aesthetic' that they consider to typify Brecht's work, connecting the author with cheapness, dirtiness, grubbiness, and ugliness. The Balladeer's irony has the effect of pre-empting these sentiments, mockingly acknowledging Brecht, or the Brechtian aesthetic, as a commodity now more fit for the scale and sizable audience of the Olivier than any other space in the National Theatre building. In fact, more productions of Brecht have been staged at the Olivier than anywhere else in the complex. This speaks to the writer's status as canonical playwright, sitting comfortably on a stage that harkens

back to two millennia of theatre history, and perhaps to his popularity (Norris's *Threepenny Opera* needed to fill over a thousand seats per night). Furthermore, the Olivier could be favoured for Brecht productions due to its larger stage revolve, a scenographic mechanism favoured by Brecht particular during his time at the Berliner Ensemble.⁵⁸ This opening monologue then, draws on the institutional setting to highlight the continued discrepancy between perceptions of Brecht's politics, a supposed Brechtian aesthetic, and the spaces in which his works are positioned in practice.

So far, I have argued that the accessibility of Brecht and *The Threepenny Opera* for the National Theatre's desired 'diverse, [...] national' audience has been put under pressure by the high levels of cultural capital associated with the writer. However, the production's advertisement draws attention to other aspects of the production than the cultural value associated with Brecht to entice audiences in. Rory Kinnear, the actor playing Macheath, is presented as a major audience draw. He is the only cast member named in the show description on the National Theatre website — 'Rory Kinnear (Hamlet, James Bond) plays Macheath' — and receives comment in a good number of reviews.⁵⁹

Kinnear is also the literal face of the show. Reminiscent of the work of Hannah Höch and the poster for G. W. Pabst's 1931 film version of the play, the show poster is a collage of images with a large photo of Kinnear's head plastered over with an oversized eye and large red lips and teeth, holding a giant switchblade with the small, suited body of a man (see Figure 1.3). A red hand, appearing stapled onto the image, points towards Kinnear's face. Both these elements foreshadow the production's Weimar-era aesthetic. Furthermore, the symbolic capital of Kinnear is on full display here, and the poster, read alongside these critics' responses, ignores Brecht's warning about theatre's 'bad habit of letting the dominant actor, the star, also "steal the show"'.⁶⁰

Beyond Brechtian principles however, these choices highlight the National Theatre's dependency, as mentioned above, on a funding model that is reliant on earning eighty-three per cent of its income through commercial means. What draws audiences to see this Brecht play? The cultural capital of the original author, the fact that it is a show in the Olivier Theatre, or the symbolic capital of the translator, director, or lead actor? *The Threepenny Opera* suggests Kinnear was the biggest draw for this production. In contrast to how the Old Vic utilizes the symbolic capital of John Boyega to draw in a new 'crowd', Kinnear is in familiar territory at the National Theatre, with *The Threepenny Opera* being his ninth production at the theatre since 2006. Whilst both actors have an international and popular appeal, Boyega is understood as having a more localized appeal as well, drawing in what the Old Vic called 'John's crowd'. Kinnear's coding as middle-class whiteness is, in comparison, not highlighted in marketing for *The Threepenny Opera*, thereby allowing the actor to pass as an unmarked subject here in a move that seems to suggest a perceived level of universality in his appeal.



FIG. 1.3. Poster for *The Threepenny Opera*, National Theatre, 2016. National Theatre Archive, London, RNT/PP/2/3/355.

Simon Stephens, named as creator of a ‘new adaptation’ of the original ‘by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill in collaboration with Elizabeth Hauptmann’ in the programme and on the National Theatre website, is also awarded prominence on the production poster through having his name ‘stapled on’ in the same font size as Brecht and Weill (although bigger than Hauptmann). However, features that signal towards the translational work involved in staging this production are not so prominent. It is only in the programme that Susan Hingley is named as a ‘literal translator’. This ‘expansion of the translation procedure’ is common practice when the named playwright has no knowledge of the source language.⁶¹ The literal translator, as described by Manuela Perteghella, would have produced a ‘line-by-line, word-by-word’ translation which is then ‘used by adaptors and playwrights for a specifically commissioned production’.⁶² As the penultimate name on the programme’s list of credits and unmentioned on the website, Hingley is made to seem (literally) a hidden collaborator in the production. Her credit is the sole reference to Stephens’s text being a translation from the German original rather than an adaptation. The ambiguity of this term implies ‘negotiations of numerous kinds’,⁶³ including, as Geraldine Brodie has argued, the transfer between media (i.e. novel to stage), and masks translational work.⁶⁴ This masking of translational procedure is also reminiscent of the institutional framing of *Woyzeck* and provokes similar questions regarding the extent to which both adaptors ‘domesticate’ or ‘foreignize’ the source text for their target audiences.

This question is also important in relation to Stephens’s enticing position in the Anglo-German theatrical context. Introducing a special issue on the writer, David Barnett notes that Stephens’s work is performed regularly in Britain, but that ‘he has been most successful in the German-speaking nations where his plays have been premiered and revived on multiple occasions’.⁶⁵ Anja Hartl similarly sees Stephens as a writer who crosses ‘aesthetic, dramaturgical, and cultural borders’, drawing on different cultures ‘as a source of inspiration for his own work’ and establishing fresh perspectives on the concept of ‘home’.⁶⁶ Collaboration too is a key component of Stephens’s work to such an extent that, as Hartl argues, ‘adaptation has played a defining and increasingly important role in Stephens’s theater practice’.⁶⁷ The writer has, for example, worked numerous times with British director Katie Mitchell who herself directs frequently in Germany, and has had a close collaborative relationship with German director Sebastian Nübling since 2003, when Nübling staged Stephens’s play *Herons* at the Staatstheater Stuttgart.⁶⁸ Adaptation and artistic collaboration thus become the means by which Stephens gains a similar transnational trajectory to these directors, establishing a distance from British theatrical culture that simultaneously creates space for critique of that very system.

This can be seen in Stephens’s keynote speech at the 2011 Stückemarkt at the Haus der Berliner Festspiele (an annual festival of new writers and new writing that takes place in Berlin) where he comments on the perceived differences between German and British theatre. ‘Too often in British theatre,’ writes Stephens, ‘sets are detailed and naturalistic and actors truthful and still. [...] I returned home to Britain

and started to become restless by [*sic*] the mimetic naturalism that defined our stages'. He took on board the value of 'a multi-authored process of collaboration, conflict, intervention and exploration', and even turned his attention to when British theatres programme work from abroad, commenting that 'we anglicise its presentation. We make actors act naturalistically and sets evoke the same naturalism. We choose the plays that most accord to our assumptions of what a play should be'.⁶⁹ These provocative statements, although fairly binary, can be tested in relation to Stephens's ability to 'translate' his observations into practice. Having worked collaboratively in the past, writing for international co-productions and working with international artists, are these experiences somehow reflected in this particular example of his translation work into English? Is there, in *The Threepenny Opera*, an attempt to replicate Brecht's epic techniques, or those of post-Brechtian directors from the German context? Or is the text 'anglicised' ('domesticated') in favour of using the text to reshape British audiences' understanding of German theatrical culture?

This final question in particular can be applied to both *Woyzeck* and *The Threepenny Opera*. I would argue that each host institution divides their audience into two distinct groups. There is an 'elite' audience being spoken to, referred to as having enough cultural knowledge to understand the references to an 'alienating', or 'difficult', German artistic and theatrical culture, an audience perhaps therefore drawn to the promise of a staging of radical politics. Then there is that audience attracted by the symbolic capital of celebrity creatives, which the theatre seems keen to court without changing its existing practice or repertoire too far. Rebellato's 'we' as opposed to the generic mass of British theatre-goers; his cigar-smokers versus his vapers; the 'Old Vic crowd' in contrast to 'John's crowd'. How these 'crowds' might relate to the context of Brexit will be considered in the concluding part of this chapter. The extent to which these rhetorical divisions seep into (or emerge from) the productions themselves will be considered further in the close readings below.

The Threepenny Opera: A Weimar 'Monolith'

Anthony Meech, who worked as translator on the National Theatre's earlier 2003 production of *The Threepenny Opera*, suggests that 'despite its setting in a sort of London, it remains essentially foreign, though not necessarily German'.⁷⁰ Norris's 2016 production challenges this perception. Brecht's original text presents a quirkily foreignized version of Britain and London. In scene 7 for instance, Mr Peachum informs his beggars that he has deployed 'eintausendvierhundertzweiunddreißig Herren [...] in unseren elf Filialen von Drury Lane bis Turnbridge' [one thousand four hundred and thirty-two gentlemen [...] in our eleven branches from Drury Lane to Turnbridge].⁷¹ Drury Lane is a prominent road in London's West End. The invented 'Turnbridge', however, is at best a wrongly transcribed version of Tunbridge Wells, in Kent, or at worst a reference to a canal bridge in east Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. Brecht's geographical references to areas of London and southern English towns become focused towards east London in Stephens's

adaptation, and indeed ‘corrected’ to correspond directly to existing London streets. In the opening scene, the beggar Filch is said to have been found on ‘Curtain Road’ in present day Shoreditch, rather than Brecht’s untraceable ‘Highland Street’. His assigned district moves from Baker Street to Butchers Road, Canning Town. Polly and Macheath are married at the ‘Church of the Grace of our Lady in Shadwell’ rather than in a ‘Pferdestall’ [stable] in Soho, and Polly lists some of Macheath’s reported crimes as taking place in Dalston and Leyton, whereas in the original Macheath [‘hat in Winchester] zwei minderjährige Schwestern verführt’ [seduced two underage sisters].⁷² Stephens also alters the temporal setting. The action in the original takes place alongside a queen’s coronation which would suggest Brecht’s version is set around 1838, the year of Queen Victoria’s coronation. Stephens’s adaptation uses a king’s coronation as the main background event, suggesting the action unfolds around 1937, the year of King George VI’s coronation.

This narrowing of the setting to the specifics of 1930s east London domesticates the play geographically, whilst distancing itself from the source text’s temporal setting. It thus asks the audience to consider how much the geographically ill-defined area, ‘covered [...] by the boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Newham’ according to historian John Marriott, has changed between the time of Stephens’s text and today.⁷³ As Stephens himself explains, this was purposeful: ‘I was trying to capture the East End of London in my version’, a place that is ‘a place which is charged with both mythology and modernity alike’.⁷⁴ This point is further reinforced by the way in which production materials frame the production. In ‘The Blade of Time’, an article presented in the production programme, Iain Sinclair sees the area as a ‘living museum’ where ‘time congeals’. It is a place that ‘does not change, but [the] cast and period are forever shifting [...] fictional entities [which] are grounded by the actors who impersonate them on real streets’.⁷⁵

Sinclair’s comments imply a sense of nostalgia for an ill-defined past in an area that has been significantly altered in recent years. As Marriott describes, in the 1930s east London was the so-called ‘headquarters’ of London’s criminal population and was devastated by the interwar depression. Compare this to the years spanning 1981 to 2006 when the population of the area grew from 40,000 to 107,000, coinciding with the building of Canary Wharf and the opening of the Docklands Light Railway connecting east London with the City. Paired with the redevelopments undertaken for London’s 2012 Olympic Games, these changes have, in Marriott’s words, ‘transform[ed] the environment and lives of east Londoners, although in ways few welcome’.⁷⁶ Curtain Road, for example, running parallel to Shoreditch High Street, is no longer the street filled with criminal beggars as presented in *The Threepenny Opera*, but is instead home to five-star hotels, trendy bars, and hip burger chain restaurants. For a London audience, seeing Stephens’s adaptation in 2016 mentally places the gentrified east London of the present side by side with the deprivation, poverty, and criminality of the interwar east London visible on stage.

On the one hand, Stephens’s return to an earlier east London in his adaptation might seem to engage what Marriott calls the ‘popular sense of east London’s history’ that establishes a ‘profound sense of loss amongst an indigenous population

which fondly recalls an age when [they] could walk the streets in perfect safety and leave doors unlocked'.⁷⁷ On the other hand, with its focus on criminality in that area, Stephens's text acts as a reminder that such nostalgia might also work towards romanticizing poverty. Given that the area is still affected by an 'endemic poverty' that puts Hackney, Tower Hamlets, and Newham as the second, third, and sixth most deprived areas of the country, Stephens is here utilizing the political potential of Brecht's text to draw attention to contemporary social concerns.⁷⁸ By narrowing the setting to east London however, Stephens addresses a local rather than a national audience. The subtleties of this political argument perhaps lose their impact for audience members unfamiliar with the streets of east London and lacking the frames of reference required to notice his critical, contemporary geographic parallels.

Meech's comments that *The Threepenny Opera* is 'foreign' but not completely 'German' also raise the question of where national identity is present in this production of Brecht's text. Stephens's adaptation locates the play in east London, yet the Germanness lacking in the text becomes present through the scenography of the stage. Vicky Mortimer's set and costume design drips with artistic and cultural references to Weimar-era Germany, visually foreignizing the domesticated text. Almost by default, due to its status as '*die kulturelle Kapitale der Zwischenkriegszeit*' [*the cultural capital city of the interwar years*],⁷⁹ Mortimer's work brings to mind Weimar-era Berlin, and indeed, in an interval interview on the National Theatre live recording, director Rufus Norris comments that 'German expressionism' was a 'massive influence' on the production.⁸⁰ In the second half of the show, for example, Mr Peachum is seen wearing a black bob wig reminiscent of Jeanne Mammen's *Langweilige Puppen* (1929). Mrs Peachum similarly resembles Otto Dix's *Portrait of the Dancer Anita Berber* from 1925, with black eye makeup around her eyes, red lipstick matching her hair and a high-necked, long-sleeved dress clinging to her slender body. These scenographic choices allow the east London of the text and the Weimar-era Berlin visible on stage to 'congeal' (to use Sinclair's term) and become a sort of 'Ber-London'.

These explicit nods to Weimar Germany were also spotted by reviewers of the production. Susannah Clapp, for example, called Mrs Peachum an 'Otto Dix creature', an image that conjures associations of overt sexuality and non-conformity.⁸¹ This imagery reflects Rainer Metzger's idea of the joining of 'dance and death', a combination used to describe how transgressive sexual and artistic practices masked the macabre or artificial foundations of a Weimar Republic teetering on the edge of destruction.⁸² As such, Mrs Peachum's character too comes to represent a figure of decadence and decay. Billington similarly saw the action taking place 'somewhere between Otto Dix's graphically decadent 1920s Berlin and our own world'.⁸³ This 'world' is really anything but: Ber-London, the 'between' space, is still a local, urban, metropolitan environment. As such, the references to Dix and Berber focus the attention on Berlin and London as city spaces and ask in what ways, where, and how these spaces might too reflect a decadence, an artificiality, or indeed a self-destructiveness associated with these Dixian images.

This links back to Stephens's use of real, now-gentrified east London spaces in his text. They too become symbolic of the 'overblown decadence' associated with Weimar-era Berlin, and this blurred temporal association becomes a way of being critical of the interplay between property development, consumerism, and capitalism in London's changed, and changing, cityscape.⁸⁴ Ber-London on stage projects the precarity often attributed to interwar Berlin, the idea of it 'dancing on top of a volcano' ('Der Tanz auf dem Vulkan', as the idiomatic phrase goes), onto east London. It is presented as a space for 'emancipation' and 'self-realization' whilst still being surrounded by a 'sense that things cannot carry on as they are'.⁸⁵ This is an image which has also been found beyond the theatre in recent years. Writing in May 2016, Jochen Bittner asks in the *New York Times* 'is this the West's Weimar moment?', seeing the 'economic depression, loss of trust in institutions, social humiliation and political blunder' he associates with Weimar-era Germany happening in countries in continental Europe and across the Atlantic Ocean.⁸⁶ Ber-London becomes a warning then. If the UK too, as it prepares for the Brexit vote, is 'dancing on top of a volcano', what will the political landscape look like once the eruption happens? Similarly, if the Weimar Republic is seen as 'a symbol of a society that loses confidence in itself', a 'failure' that created a pathway for 'extraordinary artistic innovation and brilliance', Norris's Ber-London seemingly carries the same potential.⁸⁷ In that sense, the geographical layering might evoke the role that international cultural exchange could play in an artistic resurgence responding to political crisis. Nevertheless, whilst these correlations are useful for considering critically contemporary political discourse and events, its effect on a potential theatre audience is predicated on a high level of German cultural and historical knowledge, not least the ability to recognize the references to Weimar-era art and east London urban geography.⁸⁸

Stephens makes additions to the original script that highlight a sense of self-aware theatricality and attempt to domesticate Brecht's text and indeed his theories. A key example would be the pink envelope added in that becomes the reason Macheath avoids execution at the end of the play. This prop has 'Pink Envelope' printed on it in large letters and contains 'information about a man who I am going to refer to as Our Important Friend from Windsor' that could 'bring this whole country to its knees'.⁸⁹ This envelope remains in Macheath's possession throughout as his safety net to get him out of trouble. Similar to the use of direct address and reading aloud of stage directions that occurs throughout the production, these moments seem to present an aestheticized version of *Verfremdung* [distancing]. The envelope acts as an amusing visual reminder of the meta-theatricality of the production but does not necessarily provoke a critical attitude to the object presented on stage. Indeed, in the wide context of this production, *Verfremdung* seems generally to have a negative association. Matt Trueman saw the additions noted above as 'staple Brechtian techniques' that become 'basically pastiche, one big epic spoof [...] Brecht for the bourgeoisie. Somebody's turning in his grave tonight'.⁹⁰ Trueman's analysis suggests that prior knowledge of Brecht's theories allows these moments to turn into amusing jokes that seem themselves to parody British expectations of

Brechtian theatrical techniques. Ironically then, those with the embodied cultural capital to recognize *Verfremdung* in its own right, are also the spectators most likely to recognize and dismiss the ‘spoof’ *Verfremdung* in *The Threepenny Opera*. For critics like Shuttleworth, these aestheticized features end up seeming ‘like a defect, however much you tell yourself [they were] Brecht’s intention’; Allfree, in contrast, is relieved that Norris ‘keeps the tedious Brechtian alienation devices to a minimum’.⁹¹ These reviewers identify vague traces of *Verfremdung* in the production, seeing them as something to be avoided rather than embraced. Either way, I would argue that the combination of a negative reputation in the press and an over-aestheticization of Brecht’s theatre techniques on stage ultimately devalues the radical potential of the original author’s work and ideology.

Stephens generally opts for coarse language and swearing, almost wilfully contrary to what Willett points out as one of the ‘snags and faults in our understanding’ of Brecht: the adding of “‘earthiness” and a “plebeian” touch by a liberal sprinkling of words like “fuck”. Brecht was the reverse of snobbish, but he was not very informal and he was sparing with his obscenities, which were never pointlessly used’.⁹² ‘Der Anstatt-Dass-Song’ [The Instead-Of-Song], for example, becomes ‘The What a Twat Song’. Brecht’s original song performs the work of dialectical theatre by comparing two ‘ways of behaving’, as sung by Peachum:

Anstatt daß
 Sie was täten, was ’nen Sinn hat und ’nen Zweck
 Machen sie Spaß
 Und verrecken dann natürlich glatt im Dreck.⁹³

[Instead of | Doing something that makes sense and has purpose | They have fun | And end up dead in a ditch.]

With Stephens, this becomes a shocking duet:

Stupid twats
 Stupid twats
 Spending every afternoon in reverie.

 They make me sick
 They make me sick
 All their sorry lives are just a fantasy.⁹⁴

Here, Stephens shifts Brecht’s text towards British theatrical traditions by invoking the tactics of ‘in-yer-face theatre’, a style of theatre that ‘shocks audiences by the extremism of its language and images’, in Aleks Sierz’s definition.⁹⁵ Whereas this style of theatre is thought to be ‘so powerful, so visceral, that it forces you to react’,⁹⁶ Brecht is more concerned about ‘hav[ing] us keep our distance and remain[ing] able to analyse and evaluate the arguments in his dramas’, according to Shuttleworth.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, considering Brecht’s position in post-1990s British drama, Hartl views ‘in-yer-face’ style ‘as participating in a reinvigoration of Brecht’s legacy, as provocation is employed as a dialectical tool to identify a crisis of dialectics as an epistemological and aesthetic device at the turn of the century’.⁹⁸ Shifting Brecht significantly towards his own style then, Stephens’s version underlines Hartl’s point,

associating Brecht with a contemporary and differently radical British theatrical language. Nevertheless, the shock of Stephens's language provokes an emotional response that feels distinct from the reasoned and critical responses that are (in part) the object of Brecht's *Verfremdung*.

This foul language also becomes the language of the underclasses here. Discussing other works by Stephens, Sierz connects the playwright with 'dirty realism' of plays tackling the issue of social division in Britain, a style that similarly involves 'coarse language, vulgar sentiments, and brutality'.⁹⁹ Rather than using coarse language to create a sense of real working-class life however, the language here seems once again so exaggerated that it cannot sit quite comfortably under the umbrella of Sierz's term. Martin Brady has pointed out the 'ubiquitous Brechtian style, a vernacular of aestheticized alienation effects' in (post-) Brechtian cinema, and this seems equally valid for this theatre production.¹⁰⁰ Stephens's adaptation eschews both *Verfremdung* and a sense of social realism, to fall somewhere between the two in such a way that, as with the discussion around 'aestheticized Brecht' above, ends up diminishing the potential political impact of either.

Rather than creating a show 'for everyone' then, *The Threepenny Opera's* socio-political impact seems predicated on audiences having high levels of cultural literacy (an awareness of Weimar-era art) combined with knowledge of the geography of east London. The production programme introduces spectators to images of Weimar-era art and the mythologization of east London, but the number of people engaging with this information is of course limited to those with the willingness or economic capital to buy a programme. The socio-political critique that does arise focuses on a metropolitan Ber-London space that prompts useful (if not vague) questions around the impact gentrification and urban redevelopment on poorer populations in both London and Berlin. Germanness therefore becomes ensnared in the geography of these capital cities. Furthermore, Stephens's domestication strategies in the text introduce a prevalent binary in discourse surrounding Anglo-German theatrical exchange in Britain. Scenographic elements and the aesthetics of the production borrow heavily from German culture, whilst the text shifts the Brechtian into something more recognizable to British audiences. Ber-London offers a space where the aesthetic Germanness of Weimar art and this domesticated text might fold into one another, but instead it continues to present a metropolitan, urban, and elite image of Brecht in Britain at precisely the point in British political history where, as Rebellato argues, the political potential of Brecht is most needed.

Woyzeck: Living with Borders

While the rhetoric of the marketing framing the production of Jack Thorne's *Woyzeck* was one of breaking down divisions — between 'John's crowd' and the 'Old Vic crowd', between Germany and Britain — many elements of the setting, the use of language, and the presentation of German characters serve conversely to uphold borders, this time between a British audience, and an imagined Germany. Tom Scutt's design plays a key role in this. The set consists of grey cuboid structures

that resemble wall insulation and slide, float, and fly in and out of scenes, acting as both physical and mental walls. Tall and grey, they are reminiscent of the concrete slabs that are still to be found on the streets of Berlin as remnants of the former Berlin Wall. At one point, Woyzeck hits one of these ‘walls’ causing it to bleed like a human body, transforming it into a vulnerable organic form. Thorne wanted the production to reveal ‘how geography can play into your mind’.¹⁰¹ These structures, imbued with the quality of suffering human bodies, also imply the reverse, namely that the mind forms and gives meaning to the geography around it — in this case, walls, and borders. Reviewers, too, were struck by this ‘dreamscape set design’ that ‘merges inner and outer worlds’ giving the audience ‘the full expressionist works’.¹⁰² Others, in stark contrast, saw Scutt’s ‘sculptural design’ as promoting ‘raw psychological drama over expressionism’.¹⁰³

The use of the term *expressionism* is significant. Writing in a monograph defining theatrical terms, Ruby Cohn broadly defines *expressionism* as ‘non-realism’. It is known from certain ‘Central European, especially German, productions between 1907 [...] and the mid-1920s’ and it was ‘mainly through the theatre that expressionism travelled from Germany’.¹⁰⁴ Although this links the term with the history of German theatrical culture, Michael Billington, writing in an article from 2010, believes that in its current use, the term has moved away from this national framing. Expressionism is no longer ‘the kind of thing they did in Berlin in the 1920s’ but is ‘widely applied to anything that is non-realistic’. It is moving ‘British theatre away from the grip of realism’ to become something ‘more experimental than we acknowledge’.¹⁰⁵ His definition both rebuffs and reaffirms the link between expressionism and German national theatrical culture. Although Scutt’s set clearly moves away from any concrete representation of observed reality, what is interesting is how certain reviews, by either directly or indirectly referencing expressionism, read this set as bearing traces of German theatrical culture. In the process, the design becomes distanced from what Billington and Cohn are implying is the norm in British theatrical culture: the ‘grip of realism’.¹⁰⁶

This distancing splits the design off from Thorne’s ‘naturalistic’ text, presenting these two parts of the production as stylistic opposites. However, this could just as well be Murphy’s attempt at reconciling the variety of conflicting artistic styles many academic critics have read in Büchner’s *Woyzeck*, allowing his set design to take on the non-naturalistic, German qualities he associated with the Büchner text, whilst the English-language text takes on the brunt of the work to make the production ‘accessible’.¹⁰⁷ This reinforces the view of critics like Billington, who see innovative theatre design as something ostensibly German.¹⁰⁸ In a way, the national border separating characters in Murphy’s *Woyzeck* thus becomes an aesthetic border in the production, one that presents the perceived style of the text and that of the set design as irreconcilable to one another.

Turning to the text, writer Jack Thorne shifts the action from Büchner’s unidentified German town to pre-unification Berlin in the year 1981. Frank Woyzeck is a Black British soldier stationed in West Berlin with his white Irish Catholic girlfriend Marie and illegitimate young child. Whereas academics such

as John Reddick suggest Büchner presented characters ‘as types’, inviting the audience to ‘see the story in archetypal terms’, Thorne alters this.¹⁰⁹ Almost all his characters are given names, nationalities, ages, and even religious orientations in the list of characters. All named characters, apart from Marie (‘Irish Catholic’) and Doctor Martens (‘German’), are indicated as ‘British’, and these markers demand the text be read with national identity at the forefront of the mind, and as a result of this foregrounding of the national, issues around Woyzeck’s racial identity become subsumed under other issues.¹¹⁰ Indeed, the list foreignizes the character of Woyzeck by adding a short pronunciation guide after his name ‘[Voy-tzeck]’ (*W*, p. 10), making him simultaneously British soldier and foreign outsider with a foreign-sounding name. Doctor Martens shares his name with the well-known British footwear and clothing brand. Like Woyzeck, his name complicates the nationality given to him in the text. Dr Martens boots have a history that sees innovative post-war German design meet with British manufacturing.¹¹¹ Since their initial inception in 1960, the boots have historically been associated with the British punk culture of the 1970s and the racist and violent behaviour of certain members of the Skinhead subculture.¹¹² This connection imbues the character with the status of a subcultural, violent, and politically radical outsider. With numerous unnamed characters, Thorne retains some of the ‘unnamed types devoid of psychology, [which foreshadow] the anonymous figures of Expressionism and, beyond it, Brecht’ which Michael Patterson finds in Büchner’s *Woyzeck*.¹¹³ Thorne’s German characters, his ‘GDR Citizen’ and ‘East German Soldier’, carry traces of non-naturalistic, but nationally defined, archetypes, whilst Woyzeck and Doctor Martens become semi-foreignized figures, distinct from the dominant ‘British’ characters of the play. There is therefore a noticeable divide between national identities — named British characters versus unnamed German archetypes — that places the division between naturalistic and expressionistic theatrical styles along national lines. Thorne here domesticates certain characters both literally, by making originally German characters British, and stylistically, shifting from the proto-expressionist and proto-epic archetypes present in the source text towards the named, detailed characters more associated with the psychological realism of naturalistic theatre. At the same time, Dr Martens and Woyzeck complicate this neat divide, with both characters, as we shall see, using different levels of bilingualism to probe the British/German (cultural) border that is present in the world of this production.

Despite the significant shift in setting and time period, Thorne retains the loose narrative thread drawn out by editors of Büchner’s source text. In Thorne’s adaptation, Woyzeck signs up to a medical trial to earn some extra money (*W*, p. 32). Thorne’s Marie attempts to earn the family money as well by working for a charity, and there is an additional sexual relationship between Andrews and Maggie, the captain’s wife. This pair use Marie and Woyzeck’s flat for their liaisons. The characters of Andres and ‘Der Tambourmajor’ [drum major] merge into the character of Andrews. The affair between Marie and ‘Der Tambourmajor’, as implied in the original ‘Wirtshaus’ [pub] scene when ‘Marie und der Tambourmajor tanzen vorbei, ohne [Woyzeck] zu bemerken’ [Marie and the drum major dance

past; they do not see him], is imagined by Thorne's Woyzeck after he catches Maria talking to an undressed Andrews (*W*, p. 69).¹¹⁴ In III. 6, Woyzeck sees Andrews and Maggie/Mother having sex, only 'suddenly it's MARIE that's riding ANDREWS instead' (*W*, p. 83), turning the actual betrayal that drives Woyzeck to violence into an imagined one.

This move also counters Reddick's assertion in relation to Büchner's Woyzeck that Marie is 'sexuality personified [...] potentially more predator than prey, more dominatrix than dominated', and David Richards's view of her suffering 'a similar inner conflict between the demands of her nature and the urging of her conscience [...] her desire to be faithful and her stronger need for sexual gratification'.¹¹⁵ Thorne almost completely de-sexualizes Marie. Woyzeck calls her a 'Zickwolfin' [she-wolf] in the original, whereas Thorne turns this animalistic imagery onto Andrews: he looks at Marie 'wolfishly' (*W*, p. 80).¹¹⁶ Andrews almost forces his sexuality onto Marie. He defines himself as a 'wife-snatcher' and presents her with some seemingly innocent Omo washing powder, previously defined by him in conversation with Woyzeck as the 'clue' for when wives are 'On My Own' (*W*, p. 43). As with Shakespeare's Desdemona, she becomes more a victim of the manipulations, sexual gaze, and jealous imaginings of men than a morally dubious character in her own right.

This connection with Shakespeare is significant. As Joseph Stodder has pointed out, there are 'close verbal echoes' and a 'resemblance of situations' between *Woyzeck* and *Othello*.¹¹⁷ In Thorne's *Woyzeck*, these echoes of *Othello* remain. Thorne writes in his stage directions that Woyzeck strangles Marie after learning she is 'going to go. I'm going to pack up and go and then when you're well again and out of this fucking army you're going to follow me' (*W*, p. 102), whereas in Büchner's text, the implication is that Marie is stabbed to death.¹¹⁸ This shift mirrors Othello's murder of Desdemona. Thorne thus turns the 'verbal echoes' of Shakespeare into textual and, through the casting of Black actor John Boyega as Woyzeck here, visual ones. This foregrounds the implied intertextuality by making it visible both on stage and in the text. Thorne thus connects the image of Büchner as author with that of Shakespeare as playwright. By following a plot certain culturally literate British audiences may be familiar with, Thorne transforms Büchner's fragmented narrative into something more recognizable, underscoring in the process a historical connection between British (Shakespeare) and Germanic theatrical culture, presenting a 'domesticated' Büchner influenced by and connected to British theatrical history.

Although many elements of Büchner's text are domesticated for the British audience, Thorne's adaptation is still nevertheless set in Germany. Thorne's shift of setting to 1980s Berlin in particular allows Anglo-German relations to be concretely represented. According to the 'Teaching Resources' pack produced to accompany the 2017 production, Thorne's Woyzeck 'is a soldier in the Armoured Division of the British Army of the Rhine (BOAR) [*sic*].'¹¹⁹ Peter Speiser's book-length study on the British Army of the Rhine explains that from 1949 the BAOR 'was [...] permanently stationed in Germany and constituted the British contribution to the

defence of Western Europe against communism'.¹²⁰ This border setting brings the question of the nation, and national difference, to the fore.¹²¹ Woyzeck's, and the BAOR's, 'enemy' in Thorne's adaptation is East Germany. It is 'where the Soviets are', and the sole representation of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) is the 'East German Soldier' whose only line — 'Fuck you, Englishman' — presents the people of the republic, and by extension the political culture of the GDR, as aggressively anti-English (*W*, pp. 38, 43).

Patrick Major highlights how in British popular culture, East Germany has become a 'shadowy never-neverland for the spies of John le Carré and Len Deighton', remarking on how it has been called 'the "other" German state'.¹²² Thorne's text affirms this representation. The GDR is referred to as the 'East' later in the play, a descriptor that presents its position in opposition to the values of 'the West'. Andrews travels to East Berlin and meets 'a dancing monkey. Dressed as a soldier. [...] All the things he could be and they dress him as a soldier. And then they made him dance'; Marie responds to this orientalist image by saying it 'sounds inhumane' (*W*, p. 82). Büchner uses similar imagery during the third scene of *Woyzeck* in which Woyzeck and Marie visit a fairground and see a monkey dressed as a soldier.¹²³ This moment foreshadows the larger themes of 'moral choice as against animal compulsion' present in the original text.¹²⁴ Thorne's version avoids this moral dilemma however by providing social and psychoanalytical reasoning for Woyzeck's actions. He is a victim of circumstance rather than an individual able to bear moral responsibility. Andrews's story creates the image of a cruel and morally ambivalent nation state, at odds with the (British) moral values of his character. Thorne's text in the first instance therefore does little to dispel Major's notion of the GDR as 'the "other" German state' and enemy to British political and social values.¹²⁵

The Berlin setting also facilitates moments when characters speak German, and British characters directly interact with, and comment on, German characters. The opening scene sees Woyzeck teaching Marie the phrase *ich liebe dich* [I love you], which she morphs into 'Ick leeb dich' [Ah luuv you] and finally 'I'll lick dick' (*W*, p. 13). This use of language facilitates what Matthew Smith calls 'the reorientation of the audience's attention' to sound. Smith views Büchner's *Woyzeck* as a text that attunes 'our ears [...] to a different kind of sound — sound not principally as language, but as noise and silence'.¹²⁶ In Thorne's adaptation, the German language shifts from word-with-meaning in German (*liebe*), to simultaneously Berlin-accented German and nonsense sound in English ('leeb'), and back to word-with-altered-meaning in English ('lick'). This homophonic distortion means Marie can find humour in how close German words can sound to rude words in English:

MARIE I'll lick dich means I love you?

WOYZECK It's the reason why I love this language. (*W*, p. 13)

The German language becomes more a joke for the British than a legitimate form of communication between the British occupying forces and German citizens. Woyzeck refutes the opportunity of cross-border communication in favour of linguistic mockery. This joke, and thus refusal, is shared by the British theatre

audience watching an originally German-language play too. The cultural capital of the German-language seems diminished by the more dominant force of British-English and is undermined through base humour. If ‘in language, people can feel and think of alienation between word and world’, Woyzeck and Marie here alienate themselves from their surroundings, twisting German into a humorous ‘other’ language.¹²⁷ Language thus becomes a barrier to communication rather than a bridge between different cultures.

Doctor Martens, the doctor facilitating Woyzeck’s medical experiment, represents one of the few German characters in Thorne’s version of the play who speaks both German and English to a high standard. Thorne transplants almost word for word an early scene from Büchner’s original in which the Professor and Doctor present Woyzeck to their students.¹²⁸ He retains a large slice of the original German-language text, but not all of it is correct. Büchner’s ‘Courage, Woyzeck, noch ein Paar Tage, und dann ist’s fertig, fühlen Sie meine Herrn fühlen Sie’ [Cheer up, Woyzeck. A few more days and it’ll all be over. Feel for yourselves, gentlemen], becomes ‘Courage, Woyzeck, noch ein Paar Tays und dunn ists fertis, fühlen sis, meine Herren, fullen sir’ [Cheer up, Woyzeck. A few more tays and thun its finigged. Full is for yourselves, gentlemen] (*W*, p. 86).¹²⁹ Are these innocent mistakes, telling inaccuracies, or purposeful distortions? Either way, they imply poor copy-editing at best, or at worst, a careless approach to presenting German-language elements in the text.

Further on in this scene, Thorne also adds some objections from Woyzeck in English, such as ‘I don’t understand what you’re saying’ and ‘why aren’t you worried about the cat?’ to demonstrate his lack of understanding and confusion about his circumstances being presented to an audience of ‘students’. By reverting to the original German language (or a close proximation of it) in this scene, Thorne shocks the audience into an awareness of *Woyzeck* as a foreign text, creating an effect similar to that described by Rose Elfman in her study on ‘expert spectatorship’ at the Globe to Globe 2012 theatre festival. In this study, Elfman sees performances of ‘Shakespeare-in-translation’ as ‘estrang[ing] the viewing process’ for those audience members who cannot speak the language being performed in on stage; for those who could understand the language, their ‘demonstrated informed responses to the production [...] conspicuously displaced English-speakers as “expert” spectators’.¹³⁰ Thorne’s use of the German language confers authority on any German speakers in the audience: they become the ‘expert’ spectators with increased cultural capital. This technique transforms, for a moment, a diverse London audience into groups of German speakers, non-German speakers, and those that sit somewhere between the two. Non-German speakers are, as Elfman suggests, ‘confronted with the gaps in their knowledge’.¹³¹

This confrontation can, as Venuti has argued, ‘be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism’.¹³² Thorne does not follow this route however, as English remains the dominant language in the scene and, indeed, the play as a whole. German, as an authoritarian language, becomes a tool to humiliate the main character Woyzeck in this scene, whilst

'resistance' comes in the form of Woyzeck's complaints in English. Towards the end of the scene, Doctor Martens is suddenly replaced by Marie who continues speaking in German as if she were the doctor herself (*W*, p. 87). Blurring the line between what is real and what is imagined in Woyzeck's head, Thorne turns the spoken German into the language of hallucinatory madness and betrayal. An initial reading of this scene then suggests that there is no reconciliation between the two national identities on stage: language remains a marker of difference, and English a signifier of authority and power. However, by bringing in the previously discussed institutional elements that framed this production, this moment reveals itself to be about divisions between two kinds of Englishness as well, intersecting in a curious way with Murphy's 'crowds' introduced above. The expectation was that the typical 'Old Vic crowd' would have the economic means and adequate cultural knowledge to 'get' the 'alienating' (non-naturalistic, German) *Woyzeck*, whilst 'John's crowd' represented a new type of audience that would not necessarily seek such a play out. Woyzeck's English-language 'resistance' could therefore reflect a way in which Boyega, as working-class hero figure, 'resists' the authority of the doctor, here representing an 'Old Vic crowd' framed as possessing high levels of cultural literacy.

Conclusion: Brecht, Büchner, Borders, Brexit?

My reading of Thorne's *Woyzeck* draws attention to the ways in which the Old Vic's institutional framing propagates themes visible in Thorne's text and Murphy's production: borders, walls, national and class difference. There is a stark cultural border established between the British soldiers stationed in Berlin and the German citizens on either side of the wall. Andrews's encounter with East Germans across the wall torturing a monkey is a prime example, creating a sense of a morally ambiguous, 'othered' East German state. None of the characters cross the cultural border in a constructive way. In fact, explicitly German characters are either archetypal enemy soldiers, as in the unnamed East German Soldier, or malevolent forces that intimidate and exploit, as in Doctor Martens. Furthermore, Dr Martens comes across, by the end, as a stereotypical representation of a 'mad German doctor', the likes of which have previously entered the British context through characters such as Dr Caligari and Dr Strangelove. There is a linguistic border set up early on in Thorne's script between the English and German languages; any spoken German is twisted into a sort of 'joke language' by Woyzeck and Marie. Language thus becomes a marker of difference, rather than a means of cross-border communication.

The critical reviews of *Woyzeck* along with the Old Vic Theatre's institutional framing present the text as being separate to and contrasting with the production design. Thorne's text is considered 'accessible' (meaning here naturalistic, British) whereas the production design is called 'expressionist' (non-naturalistic, German, 'alienating'), mirroring how Murphy himself framed Büchner's original text in contrast to Thorne's adaptation. This production therefore reaffirms an idea, common in the British arts media, that effective, non-naturalistic design is an

ostensibly German aspect of theatrical production. Despite the political and social value attributed to Büchner's texts by various academics and theatre critics in Britain (and Germany), and the claims made by the director around the potential for diversity work within Britain via this play, the production itself positions these socio-political elements in different ways. It highlights divisions between nations and class positionings within Britain, whilst in fact doing very little with intersecting questions of race. The latter indeed becomes hidden behind the former, despite the Old Vic's poster and institutional framing seemingly foregrounding the role of race in the production.

In the National Theatre's production of *The Threepenny Opera*, the disparate images of a politically radical 'Weimar Brecht' and a culturally exclusive 'elite Brecht' found in the production materials become joined together on stage. This production uncritically presents him as 'fixed [Weimar] monolith'.¹³³ By choosing this aesthetic, the production also invites comparisons between Weimar Germany and the contemporary political contexts in Britain and Germany. The political potential of this comparison is nevertheless undermined by the high levels of cultural literacy demanded by Norris's production. The geography of Stephens's text merges with the Weimar-inspired scenography to open up a Ber-London space on stage. Whilst this has the potential to become a site of cross-cultural exchange in which to find common socio-political concerns between the two cities, it nevertheless frames Brecht as part of a metropolitan elite (the cigar smokers versus the vapers, as Rebellato put it) and reinforces the representation of German theatrical culture as having an aesthetic value to British stages, whilst demanding its content, texts, and politics require mediation to become palatable to British tastes. These German authors' more radical, left-wing politics become masked, their 'foreign' elements become domesticated, and as a result, the German-language culture they represent comes across as increasingly distanced from British cultural tastes.

As such, the 'route' for cross-cultural exchange seemingly created through theatre in translation becomes 'diverted' or even 'blocked' in both these case studies. In *The Threepenny Opera*, the potential of Brecht to be politicized anew and used as a way of contributing to the political discourse surrounding Brexit and the UK's EU Referendum in 2016 is made clear in the framing of the production. However, the production itself ultimately opts for a more generalized critique of Western European urban gentrification, aestheticizing Brecht and his political potential in the process. We will see this pattern repeated throughout the examples in this book: whilst I opt for case studies that seem well-placed to comment critically on the UK's Brexit processes, the actual engagement with Anglo-German or Anglo-European relations comes in different, and perhaps more subtle forms. Thorne's *Woyzeck* similarly attempts to utilize its position as a 'route' towards Anglo-German cultural exchange to address issues around English identities in a post-referendum context, establishing the notional division between 'John's crowd' and the 'Old Vic crowd' as one of the many 'rifts and fissures' between particular groups in England identified by Nadine Holdsworth and discussed in the Introduction.¹³⁴ In that sense, the production reflects how questions of cultural divisions within Britain

can become embroiled in Anglo–German theatrical exchange and points towards two types of interculturalism potentially at work; interculturalism between national contexts, and intraculturalism within a national context — an idea I take up again in Chapter 3.¹³⁵ Ultimately, by maintaining, through text and scenography, the division between Britain and Germany as two separate nation states, both productions reinforce the borders they seem to hope to dismantle.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Margherita Laera, *Theatre & Translation* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2020), pp. 13, 12.
2. See my discussion of this in the Introduction. See also: Willett, ‘Ups and Downs of British Brecht’, p. 79; Anderman, *Europe on Stage*; Taylor, ‘The Germans in Britain’; Esslin, ‘Brecht and the English Theatre’.
3. Taylor, ‘The Germans in Britain’, p. 189.
4. See for example Anja Hartl, *Brecht and Post-1990s British Drama* (Methuen Drama, 2021).
5. Anderman, *Europe on Stage*, p. 227.
6. MacNeill, *The Many Lives of Galileo*, p. 20.
7. See Anderman, *Europe on Stage*, p. 232; and Andre Lefevere, ‘Mother Courage’s Cucumbers: Text, System and Refraction in a Theory of Literature’, *Modern Language Studies*, 12.4 (1982), pp. 3–20 (p. 4).
8. Summers, ‘The Playwright as Epic Translator?’, p. 236.
9. Margaret Eddershaw, *Performing Brecht: Forty Years of British Performances* (Routledge, 1996), p. 3. Aleks Sierz, ‘John Osborne and the Myth of Anger’, In-Yer-Face Theatre, 1996 <<http://www.inyerfacetheatre.com/archive13.html>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
10. Summers, ‘The Playwright as Epic Translator’, p. 238.
11. Eddershaw, *Performing Brecht*, p. 153. See also David Barnett, ‘Introduction’, in *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory and Performance*, ed. by David Barnett (Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 1–8.
12. MacNeill, *The Many Lives of Galileo*, p. 24.
13. Victor Price, ‘Introduction’, in Georg Büchner, *Danton’s Death, Leonce and Lena, Woyzeck*, trans. by Victor Price, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. vii–xxii (p. viii).
14. David G. Richards, *Georg Büchner and the Birth of Modern Drama* (State University of New York Press, 1977), p. 202.
15. Michael Billington, ‘Woyzeck Review — John Boyega Shines as Traumatized Soldier in 80s Berlin’, *Guardian*, 24 May 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/may/24/woyzeck-review-john-boyega-jack-thorne-georg-buchner-old-vic-london>> [accessed 30 May 2024]. Matt Trueman, ‘London Theater Review: “Woyzeck” Starring John Boyega’, *Variety*, 24 May 2017 <<https://variety.com/2017/legit/reviews/woyzeck-review-john-boyega-1202442867>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
16. Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 172.
17. Marvin Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life* (Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 72.
18. Nick Clark, ‘Matilda Director Matthew Warchus to Take Over from Kevin Spacey at The Old Vic’, *Independent*, 22 May 2014 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/news/matilda-director-matthew-warchus-take-over-kevin-spacey-old-vic-9420287.html>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
19. Dominic Cavendish, ‘Matthew Warchus: Better than Kevin Spacey?’, *Daily Telegraph*, 21 April 2015 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/11550170/Matthew-Warchus-at-the-Old-Vic-better-than-Kevin-Spacey.html>> [accessed 30 May 2024]. In October and November 2017, a number of allegations of sexual assault and misconduct were brought against Kevin Spacey, including Old Vic employees who came forward to report incidents of misconduct after the theatre opened up a complaints process. This undoubtedly changes the coding of the Old Vic Theatre’s association with Spacey post-2017, but in the context of *Woyzeck*’s production run, from May–June 2017, does not have a direct relevance to this study.

20. Anita Singh, 'Matthew Warchus: "I don't want the Old Vic to be posh anymore"', *Daily Telegraph*, 20 April 2015 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-news/11550873/Matthew-Warchus-I-dont-want-the-Old-Vic-to-be-posh-anymore.html>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
21. Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre*, p. 172.
22. Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, p. 62.
23. 'The Old Vic: Brand Identity', Pentagram, <<https://www.pentagram.com/work/the-old-vic>> [accessed 2 April 2019]; Aimée McLaughlin, 'Pentagram's Harry Pearce Rebrands The Old Vic Theatre', 13 November 2016 <<https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/7-13-november-2016/pentagrams-harry-pearce-rebrands-old-vic>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
24. 'Mission', Old Vic Theatre, <<https://www.oldvictheatre.com/about-us/mission>> [accessed 16 March 2019].
25. Ibid.
26. Sarah Crompton, 'The Original Working-Class Tragedy', in *Woyzeck at the Old Vic*, production programme, 2017, [n.p.].
27. See Price, 'Introduction'; George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (Yale University Press, 1982); Maurice B. Benn, *The Drama of Revolt: A Critical Study of Georg Büchner* (Cambridge University Press, 1976).
28. As quoted in Crompton, 'The Original Working-Class Tragedy'.
29. 'J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter and the Cursed Child' <<https://www.harrypottertheplay.com>> [accessed 20 April 2022]; Hayley C. Cuccinello, 'How J. K. Rowling Earned \$95 Million in a Year', *Forbes*, 19 June 2017 <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/hayleycuccinello/2017/06/19/how-j-k-rowling-earned-95-million-in-a-year>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
30. Jack Thorne, 'Achtung! Jack Thorne on Braving the Strange, Monstrous World of Woyzeck', *Guardian*, 15 May 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/may/15/jack-thorne-woyzeck-old-vic-john-boyega-georg-buchner>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
31. For more on Büchner's relationship to naturalism, see Richards, *Georg Büchner and the Birth of Modern Drama*; Michael Patterson, 'General Introduction', in *Georg Büchner: The Complete Plays*, ed. by Michael Patterson (Methuen, 1987), pp. ix–xii; Michael Ewans, *Georg Büchners Woyzeck: Translation and Theatrical Commentary* (Peter Lang, 1989); Price, 'Introduction'; John Reddick, *Georg Büchner: The Shattered Whole* (Clarendon Press, 1994); Matthew Wilson Smith, *The Nervous Stage: Nineteenth-Century Neuroscience and the Birth of Modern Theater* (Oxford University Press, 2018).
32. As quoted in Crompton, 'The Original Working-Class Tragedy'.
33. This is a perceptual divide investigated across this book, as it also appears to shape responses to Katie Mitchell's work and discussions around German stage design in Britain.
34. Esther Addley, 'John Boyega: From Peckham to the Death Star, to the Old Vic', *Guardian*, 21 April 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/apr/21/john-boyega-from-peckham-to-the-death-star-to-the-old-vic>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
35. Joe Murphy, as quoted in Addley, 'John Boyega'.
36. Ibid. (my emphasis).
37. Since 2017, Boyega's coding has subsequently changed, with his interventions in the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 connecting the actor more directly to anti-racist activism.
38. Joe Murphy, as quoted in Crompton, 'The Original Working-Class Tragedy'.
39. 'Mission', Old Vic Theatre. 'About the National Theatre', National Theatre <<https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/about-the-national-theatre>> [accessed 14 January 2019].
40. 'About the National Theatre', National Theatre. Brodie, *The Translator on Stage*, p. 22.
41. 'About the National Theatre', National Theatre. How the Young Vic achieves this is addressed in Chapter 3.
42. Of course, these requirements are themselves most probably responding to a contemporary trend towards greater diversity and representation in theatre in general.
43. 'Annual Review 2016–17', National Theatre <<https://review.nationaltheatre.org.uk/#2017/overview/2>> [accessed 10 October 2019]. 'Great Art and Culture for Everyone: 10-Year Strategic Framework 2010–2020', Arts Council England <<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/>

- files/download-file/Great%20art%20and%20culture%20for%20everyone.pdf> [accessed 30 May 2024].
44. 'Kenneth Tynan (1927–1980)', National Theatre <<https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/sites/default/files/kenneth-tynan-profile.pdf>> [accessed 10 October 2019].
 45. 'Annual Review 2016–17', National Theatre.
 46. Eddershaw, *Performing Brecht*, p. 103.
 47. Emma Gosden, Sarah Corke, and Sorcha McDonagh, 'Brecht & Weill at the NT,' in National Theatre, *The Threepenny Opera*, production programme, 2016, London, National Theatre Archive, RNT/PP/1/3/335, [n.p.].
 48. Gosden, Corke, and McDonagh, '1920s Berlin', in *ibid.*, [n.p.].
 49. Dan Rebellato, '10 Cheers for Bertolt Brecht!', in *ibid.*, [n.p.].
 50. Laura Bradley, 'Introduction', in *Brecht and the GDR: Politics, Culture, Posterity*, ed. by Laura Bradley and Karen Leeder (Camden House, 2011), pp. 1–24 (p. 1). See also James K. Lyon, 'Brecht in Postwar Germany: Dissident Conformist, Cultural Icon, Literary Dictator', in *Brecht Unbound: Presented at the International Bertolt Brecht Symposium Held at the University of Delaware, February 1992*, ed. by James K. Lyon and Hans-Peter Breuer (Associated University Presses, 1995), pp. 76–88.
 51. Lyon, 'Brecht in Postwar Germany', p. 76.
 52. Meg Mumford, *Bertolt Brecht* (Routledge, 2018), p. 1; Lyon, 'Brecht in Postwar Germany', p. 77.
 53. Gosden, Corke, and McDonagh, 'Brecht, Hauptmann & Weill,' in National Theatre, *The Threepenny Opera*, production programme, 2016, London, National Theatre Archive, RNT/PP/1/3/335, [n.p.].
 54. Interestingly, the National Theatre here foreshadows more contemporary, post-referendum ideas about the Weimar Republic as reported in the British press. In May 2019, Sarah Hughes wrote in the *Guardian* about 'why the Weimar republic is in vogue' (Sarah Hughes, 'Hedonism, Sex and Fear — Why the Weimar Republic Is in Vogue', *The Guardian*, 25 May 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/may/25/weimar-republic-hedonism-sex-fear-art-culture-celebration>> [accessed 30 May 2024]), whilst Martin Kettle, in the same newspaper, considered how 'the political landscapes of Brexit Britain and Weimar Germany are scarily similar' (Martin Kettle, 'The Political Landscapes of Brexit Britain and Weimar Germany Are Scarily Similar', *Guardian*, 16 May 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/16/brexit-britain-weimar-germany-far-right-democracy-contempt-politicians>> [accessed 30 May 2024]).
 55. Simon Stephens, live camera script for *The Threepenny Opera*, National Theatre, 2016, National Theatre Archive, London, RNT/D/2/32, p. 6.
 56. Alice Saville, 'The Threepenny Opera, National Theatre, Review: A Snarling, Sexy Beast of a Show', *Independent*, 27 May 2016 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/the-threepenny-opera-national-theatre-review-a-snarling-sexy-beast-of-a-show-a7052206.html>> [accessed 30 May 2024]. Miriam Gillinson, 'Review: The Threepenny Opera at National Theatre', *Exeunt Magazine*, 27 May 2016 <<http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/review-threepenny-opera-national-theatre>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
 57. Matt Trueman, 'London Theater Review: "The Threepenny Opera" with Rory Kinnear', *Variety*, 29 May 2016 <<https://variety.com/2016/legit/reviews/the-threepenny-opera-review-rory-kinnear-1201785026>> [accessed 30 May 2024]. Michael Billington, 'The Threepenny Opera Review — Grubbily Vivacious Revival Plays up the Sexuality', *Guardian*, 27 May 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/may/27/the-threepenny-opera-review-olivier-london-rory-kinnear-rufus-norris>> [accessed 30 May 2024]. Henry Hitchings, 'The Threepenny Opera, Theatre Review: Kinnear's Really on Song in this Enticingly Sleazy Revival', *Evening Standard*, 27 May 2016 <<https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/theatre/the-threepenny-opera-theatre-review-kinnear-s-really-on-song-in-this-enticingly-sleazy-revival-a3258201.html>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
 58. See Andrew Dickson, 'Bertolt Brecht and Epic Theatre: V is for *Verfremdungseffekt*', *British Library*, 7 September 2017 <<https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/bertolt-brecht-and-epic-theatre-v-is-for-verfremdungseffekt>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
 59. See Claire Allfree, 'The Threepenny Opera, National Theatre, Review: "It chills more than

- it thrills”, *Daily Telegraph*, 27 May 2016 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/the-threepenny-opera-national-theatre-review-it-chills-more-than>> [accessed 30 May 2024]; Billington, ‘The Threepenny Opera Review’; Gillinson, ‘Review’; Hitchings, ‘The Threepenny Opera, Theatre Review’; Saville, ‘The Threepenny Opera, National Theatre, Review’; Ian Shuttleworth, ‘The Threepenny Opera, National Theatre (Olivier), London — “Still salient”’, *Financial Times*, 29 May 2016 <<https://www.ft.com/content/395183d0-23ed-11e6-a998-dbre01fabcoc>> [accessed 30 May 2024]; Trueman, ‘London Theater Review’ (2016).
60. Bertolt Brecht, ‘Short Organum’, in *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. by Marc Silberman, ed. by Marc Silberman, Steve Giles, and Tom Kuhn, 2nd edn (Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 229–62 (p. 247).
61. Brodie, *The Translator on Stage*, p. 1.
62. Manuela Perteghella, ‘A Descriptive Framework for Collaboration in Theatre Translation’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia, 2004), p. 20.
63. Margherita Laera, ‘Introduction. Return, Rewrite, Repeat: The Theatricality of Adaptation’, in *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat*, ed. by Margherita Laera (Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 1–18 (p. 5).
64. See Brodie, *The Translator on Stage*, p. 1.
65. David Barnett, ‘Simon Stephens: British Playwright in Dialogue with Europe’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 26.3 (2016), pp. 305–10 (p. 305), doi:10.1080/10486801.2016.1183666.
66. Anja Hartl, ‘Brecht, Brexit, and Beyond: An Interview with Simon Stephens’, in *The Brecht Yearbook/ Das Brecht-Jahrbuch 47*, ed. by Markus Wessendorf (Boydell & Brewer, 2022), pp. 6–21 (p. 8).
67. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
68. For my analysis of Mitchell’s work see Chapter 2.
69. Simon Stephens, ‘Skydiving Blindfolded: Five Things I Learned from Sebastian Nübling’, in *Plays: 4* (Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. xix–xxvii (pp. xxiii, xxiv, xxvi).
70. Anthony Meech, ‘Brecht’s Threepenny Opera for the National Theatre: A 3p Opera?’, in *Staging and Performing Translation: Text and Theatre Practice*, ed. by Cristina Marinetti, Manuela Perteghella, and Roger Baines (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 126–38 (p. 133).
71. Bertolt Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, in *Stücke I*, ed. by Wolfgang Jeske (Suhrkamp, 2005), pp. 191–284 (p. 248).
72. Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, p. 226.
73. John Marriott, *Beyond the Tower: A History of East London* (Yale University Press, 2011), p. 5.
74. Quoted in Hartl, ‘Brecht, Brexit, and Beyond’, p. 15.
75. Iain Sinclair, ‘The Blade of Time’, in National Theatre, *The Threepenny Opera*, production programme, [n.p.].
76. Marriott, *Beyond the Tower*, pp. 291, 269, 349, 353.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 350.
79. Peter Hoeres, *Die Kultur von Weimar: Durchbruch der Moderne* (Be.bra, 2008), p. 7.
80. National Theatre, live broadcast recording of *The Threepenny Opera*, 22 September 2016, National Theatre Archive, London, RNT/D/1/49.
81. Susannah Clapp, ‘The Threepenny Opera Review — Cartoon Counterfeit Runs Out of Juice’, *Observer*, 5 June 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/jun/05/the-threepenny-opera-rufus-norris-olivier-national-review>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
82. Rainer Metzger, ‘Metropolis in the Making’, in *Berlin in the 1920s*, ed. by Rainer Metzger (Taschen, 2017), pp. 6–31 (p. 25).
83. Billington, ‘The Threepenny Opera Review’.
84. Susan Laikin Funkenstein, ‘Anita Berber: Imaging a Weimar Performance Artist’, *Woman’s Art Journal*, 26.1 (Spring–Summer 2005), pp. 26–31 (p. 28), doi: 10.2307/3566531.
85. Metzger, ‘Metropolis in the Making’, pp. 7–8.
86. Jochen Bittner, ‘Is This the West’s Weimar Moment?’, *New York Times*, 31 May 2016 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/31/opinion/is-this-the-wests-weimar-moment.html>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
87. David Aaronovitch, ‘Willkommen! Weimar Comes to London’, *The Times*, 29 May 2019

- <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/willkommen-weimar-comes-to-london-92klbds79>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
88. There is however a generalized popular image of Weimar-era Berlin available to theatregoers in Britain established through the musical of *Cabaret*.
 89. Stephens, live camera script, p. 110.
 90. Trueman, 'London Theater Review' (2016).
 91. Shuttleworth, 'The Threepenny Opera, National Theatre (Olivier), London'. Allfree, 'The Threepenny Opera, National Theatre, Review'.
 92. Willett, 'Ups and Downs of British Brecht', pp. 87–88.
 93. Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, p. 201.
 94. Stephens, live camera script for *The Threepenny Opera*, p. 32. Further examples of this include Constable Smith, a hapless police officer, who also swears consistently along the lines of 'this is cocking priceless' and 'stand up straight you raggedy arsed cock' (ibid., pp. 153, 199).
 95. Aleks Sierz, 'What is In-Yer-Face Theatre?', In-Yer-Face Theatre, 2010 <<http://www.inyerfacetheatre.com/what.html>> [accessed 16 April 2019].
 96. Ibid.
 97. Shuttleworth, 'The Threepenny Opera, National Theatre (Olivier), London'.
 98. Hartl, *Brecht and Post-1990s British Drama*, p. 26.
 99. Aleks Sierz, 'Dark Times: British Theatre after Brexit', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 39.1 (January 2017), pp. 3–11 (p. 6), doi:10.1162/PAJJ_a_00346.
 100. Martin Brady, 'Brecht and Film', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bertolt Brecht*, ed. by Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 297–317 (p. 314).
 101. Quoted in Susie Ferguson, 'Teaching Resources: Woyzeck at the Old Vic', Old Vic Theatre, 2017 <<https://cdn.oldvictheatre.com/uploads/2017/09/Woyzeck-Teaching-Resources.pdf>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
 102. Rosemary Waugh, 'Review: Woyzeck at the Old Vic', *Exeunt Magazine*, 29 May 2017 <<http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/review-woyzeck-old-vic>> [accessed 30 May 2024]; Sarah Hemming, 'Woyzeck, Old Vic, London — A Powerful Play for Today', *Financial Times*, 24 May 2017 <<https://www.ft.com/content/4d5d4182-4072-11e7-82b6-896b95f3of58>> [accessed 30 May 2024]; Michael Billington, 'Woyzeck Review'.
 103. Trueman, 'London Theater Review' (2017); Tim Bano, 'Woyzeck Starring John Boyega' [review], *The Stage*, 24 May 2016 <<https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/woyzeck-starring-john-boyega-review-at-the-old-vic--boyega-shines>> [accessed 2 October 2024].
 104. Ruby Cohn, 'Expressionism', in *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre*, ed. by Martin Banham, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 332–33.
 105. Michael Billington, 'The Great Expressionist Experiment: Theatre Seizes the Essence of Life', *Guardian*, 25 November 2010 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2010/nov/25/expressionist-experiment-british-theatre-expressionism>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
 106. Ibid.
 107. Murphy, as quoted in Crompton, 'The Original Working-Class Tragedy'.
 108. See the Introduction for a detailed exploration of the views of Billington and others.
 109. Reddick, *Georg Büchner*, p. 337.
 110. Jack Thorne, *Woyzeck* (Nick Hern Books, 2017), p. 10 (hereafter *W*).
 111. 'Dr. Martens: A History of Rebellious Self-Expression', Dr Martens <https://www.drmartens.com/uk/en_gb/history> [accessed 13 August 2019].
 112. See Brenden Gallagher, 'An Abridged History of Dr. Martens', *Grailed*, March 2018, <<https://www.grailed.com/drycleanonly/dr-martens-history>> [accessed 30 May 2024]; Lani Irving, 'The History of Dr. Martens and My Lifelong Love Affair with the Subcultural Boot', *Bustle*, March 2015 <<https://www.bustle.com/articles/67815-the-history-of-dr-martens-and-my-lifelong-love-affair-with-the-subcultural-boot>> [accessed 30 May 2024].
 113. Michael Patterson, 'Introduction to *Woyzeck*', in *Georg Büchner: The Complete Plays*, ed. by Patterson, pp. 153–77 (p. 159).
 114. Georg Büchner, *Woyzeck: Text und Kommentar*, ed. by Henri Poschmann (Suhrkamp, 2008), p. 26.
 115. Reddick, *Georg Büchner*, p. 317. Richards, *Georg Büchner and the Birth of Modern Drama*, p. 178.

116. Büchner, *Woyzeck*, p. 28.
117. Joseph H. Stodder, 'Influences of "Othello" on Büchner's "Woyzeck"', *Modern Language Review*, 69.1 (1974), pp. 115–20 (p. 115), doi:10.2307/3725204.
118. See Büchner, *Woyzeck*, pp. 33–34.
119. Ferguson, 'Teaching Resources', p. 11.
120. Peter Speiser, 'Introduction', in *The British Army of the Rhine: Turning Nazi Enemies into Cold War Partners* (University of Illinois Press, 2016), pp. 1–12 (p. 1).
121. A similar argument is made in Robert Gillett, Ernest Schonfield, and Daniel Steuer, 'Introduction. Georg Büchner: In Our Time', in *Georg Büchner: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Robert Gillett, Ernest Schonfield, and Daniel Steuer (Brill Rodopi, 2017), pp. xvii–xxviii (p. xxvi).
122. Major, 'Britain and Germany', p. 468.
123. Büchner, *Woyzeck*, pp. 11–12.
124. Reddick, *Georg Büchner*, p. 308.
125. Major, 'Britain and Germany', p. 468.
126. Smith, *The Nervous Stage*, pp. 67, 68.
127. Jonathan Hart, *The Poetics of Otherness: War, Trauma, and Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 2.
128. See Büchner, *Woyzeck*, pp. 14–15, and Thorne, *Woyzeck*, pp. 86–87.
129. Büchner, *Woyzeck*, p. 15.
130. Rose Elfman, 'Expert Spectatorship and Intra-Audience Relationships at Globe to Globe 2012', in *Shakespeare on the Global Stage: Performance and Festivity in the Olympic Year*, ed. by Paul Prescott and Erin Sullivan (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), pp. 163–90 (pp. 163, 165–66).
131. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
132. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, p. 20.
133. Mumford, *Bertolt Brecht*, p. 1.
134. Holdsworth, *A Divided Nation*, p. 3.
135. For more on intraculturalism within a national context, see Stewart, "'The Future Market and the Current Reality'", p. 312.

CHAPTER 2



Travelling Productions: The Transnational Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier and Katie Mitchell

Katie Mitchell and Thomas Ostermeier are two of the most high-profile theatre directors whose work has been presented in the German language in Britain over the past twenty years. As such, an appraisal of their work is crucial in understanding how German-language theatre performed in Britain ‘co-constructs’ a British image of German theatrical culture.¹ This chapter places productions from both directors side by side to consider the differing ways in which international work can travel across borders. Mitchell’s *Ophelias Zimmer* [Ophelia’s Room] was an international co-production between London’s Royal Court and the Schaubühne in Berlin (2015), the first major collaboration of its kind between the two theatres. Ostermeier’s production of *Richard III* is a recent example of the director’s work with Shakespeare and toured to London for a short run in February 2017 as part of an international touring schedule that began in July 2015 at the Avignon Festival in France. For many years, Ostermeier has been considered the global ‘Gesicht des modernen deutschen Theaters’ [face of modern German theatre].² However, more recent scholarship has begun to query the extent to which he ought to be seen as the quintessential representative of German theatrical culture.³ British director Katie Mitchell’s career meanwhile has seen her work at some of Britain’s largest theatrical institutions, despite facing a consistently hostile press reception. Since the late 2000s, Mitchell has sought out a new theatrical ‘home’ in Germany, specifically at the Schaubühne in Berlin, where Ostermeier works as artistic director. A large amount of her work has since been presented in Britain in German, alongside semi-regular opera pieces or theatrical productions in English (usually at the National Theatre’s Dorfman Theatre). With their intertwined transitional trajectories, this chapter explores how these two artists engage with, and complicate ideas of, German theatrical culture and its traditions in Britain.

Ophelias Zimmer: The Anglo-German ‘Contact Zone’

Ophelias Zimmer was a co-production between the Royal Court in central London and the Schaubühne in west Berlin, directed by Katie Mitchell, with text by Alice

Birch and set design by Chloe Lamford. It premiered at the Schaubühne on 8 December 2015 and transferred to the Royal Court for a short run from 17 to 21 May 2016. The Royal Court is situated in Sloane Square, Chelsea, an area described by Geraldine Brodie as ‘an affluent residential and commercial inner suburb’, a phrase that could just as easily be applied to Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, the area in west Berlin in which the Schaubühne is located.⁴ According to Mitchell, this co-production marked ‘the first time ever that, since the two buildings [...] were set up, that they have ever directly collaborated from scratch’.⁵ Although this co-production had a variety of funding partners, *Ophelias Zimmer* appears to have been solely funded by the Royal Court and Schaubühne, with no credited additional support from EU arts funding programmes or the Goethe-Institut. As such, the theatres thereby took on the financial risk themselves.

The Royal Court describes itself as the writers’ theatre: ‘It is a leading force in world theatre for energetically cultivating writers — undiscovered, emerging and established’.⁶ As part of the opening paragraph in the theatre’s ‘About Us’ webpage, this statement clearly marks the theatre’s ‘attention on the voice of the playwright’, as well as its desire to extend its work beyond national boundaries and reach out to the ‘world’.⁷ The Royal Court is ‘at the forefront of creating restless, alert, provocative theatre about now. We open our doors to the unheard voices and free thinkers that, through their writing, change our way of seeing’. It sees ‘no more important theatre in the world than the Royal Court’.⁸ For the Royal Court then, importance thus reflects the ability to think globally, promote a diverse and unexpected range of artistic voices, and present work that speaks to the contemporary moment in a provocative way. The theatre’s focus on writers is not without risk, however. As noted by Brodie, the theatre recorded in its 2006 annual report that ‘the focus on the writer creates a degree of risk with regard to audience numbers’.⁹ By 2015–16, this risk had proved ‘diminishing’, replaced instead by ‘the unpredictable nature of development of fundraising income, particularly in uncertain political times [most likely referring to the 2015 General Election and upcoming 2016 EU Referendum], which impact on corporate behaviours’.¹⁰ Despite uncertain political times, in the period immediately surrounding the EU Referendum the theatre still considered international work a top priority, a standpoint reflected in the prominent positioning of *Ophelias Zimmer* in Chair Anthony Burton’s opening remarks for the same report: ‘from our grass roots work in Tottenham and Pimlico, to our co-productions with the Schaubühne in Berlin and the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, we have seen many of the charity’s strategic ambitions and hopes realised and exceeded this year’.¹¹ The value of the Royal Court’s international work is further exemplified by the dedicated International Department, established in 1996 by Elyse Dodgson under the artistic directorship of Stephen Daldry. This department has been the subject of a book-length study, *Royal Court: International* by Elaine Aston and Mark O’Thomas, indicating the level of the department’s success and prominence in the British academic context.

Aston and O’Thomas point specifically to the theatre’s ‘focus on Germany’ and reflect on the ‘comparative strength of the Court’s exchanges with Germany

around the turn of the millennium'. This was most likely a result of the then artistic director Stephen Daldry's passion for German theatre. The international exchanges facilitated by this department 'brought to the London stage [...] the opportunity to see work by a new generation of German dramatists who were as committed to dealing with contemporary realities as their British counterparts'. In the opposite direction of travel, the department and related programmes made space for 'German writers [who] were looking to challenge the tradition of a directors' theatre heavily invested in deconstructive approaches to canonical plays'.¹² *Ophelias Zimmer* somewhat flips this paradigm on its head to give, in the first instance, audiences in Berlin the opportunity to see work by contemporary British theatre creatives before the production transferred to the Royal Court for its London run. Rather than simply inviting German writers to challenge the tradition of directors' theatre, or exporting British creatives' work abroad, I argue that *Ophelias Zimmer* instead becomes a 'contact zone' between Anglo-German theatrical cultures. I use the term *contact zone* following Cristina Marinetti, who sees it as describing the 'interstices of cultures', and Ric Knowles, who sees the 'spaces *between* cultures [...] as sites of negotiation'.¹³ By bringing together British artists with German actors, space is created both on stage and off for theatrical traditions commonly associated with German culture to become interwoven with the work of British creatives in new and interesting ways.

On a practical level, the co-production model facilitated theatrical exchange between practitioners from Britain and Germany travelling between both countries. As described by Alice Birch, rehearsals took place in both London and Berlin, with three weeks in each location.¹⁴ The cast for the Royal Court run was made up predominately of members from the regular Schaubühne ensemble, with the exception of Welsh actor Glyn Pritchard taking the non-speaking role of Polonius. This mobility is in part made possible through a foundational 'fundamental principle' of the European Union: freedom of movement. Written into the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, freedom of movement, which ceased to apply to the UK once the transition period ended on 31 December 2020, entitles EU citizens to travel to other EU countries (and countries in the European Economic Area) for work purposes, reside there, and 'enjoy equal treatment with nationals in access to employment, working conditions and all other social and tax advantages'.¹⁵ The removal of this principle from the UK's immigration policies thus places work such as *Ophelias Zimmer* under threat from happening in the future, as costs of applying for visas, uncertainty, and the restriction of social and tax advantages could all have implications on a theatre's ability to support financially this type of work.¹⁶

Ophelias Zimmer also represents a surprising shift in the Royal Court's relationship with the playwright's role in a theatre production. Birch, credited as providing the text for the production, was the final main creative to join Mitchell's team. The set had already been designed by Choe Lamford, and the concept already decided upon when Birch came on board. Furthermore, Birch reports that *Ophelias Zimmer* was the first production in the theatre's history where the playwright's name was not displayed in lights on the theatre's façade.¹⁷ This choice reflects the collaborative



FIG. 2.1. Poster for *Ophelias Zimmer*, Royal Court Theatre, 2016.

nature of the production: there is no single author of the work but Mitchell, Lamford, and Birch all share credit for the work. The production poster used for the Royal Court run also highlights this collaborative approach by placing all three creatives directly beneath the title in an equal-sized font, suggesting (in contrast to the case studies seen in the previous chapter) that, whilst there is an order to the listing of the creatives that puts the director first, the symbolic capital of any one creative does not diminish the input of the others. In terms of design, the poster also suitably evokes both the Schaubühne's and the Royal Court's respective institutional aesthetics (see Figure 2.1).

The slogan in German above the title, 'sie protestiert zu viel', is a contemporary translation of Gertrude's 'quasi-proverbial' line in *Hamlet*, 'the lady doth protest too much, methinks' (III. 2). This line does not, of course, refer to Ophelia, but is a riposte from Gertrude, commenting on the Player Queen's performance in 'The Mousetrap'. Its usage here, however, directs audiences to see the line as addressed to Ophelia, and thus gains an ironic quality. As we shall see in the following, Ophelia barely speaks in this production, so a complaint of this kind is laughably out of place. The quotation also has a role in drawing attention to the meta-theatrical function of the production. Gertrude is referring to a performance that to her seems over the top, 'too much', referring to the female character/actor in 'The Mousetrap'. As shall be explored below, Mitchell reframes Gertrude's comments through her production, seeing them directed instead to a male character/actor and his erratic, over-the-top performance. This poster thus posits a series of questions the production might answer: which characters in Shakespeare really do 'protest too much'? What performance histories are associated with women and Shakespeare? Should this line not instead be directed towards a character such as Hamlet, who, with 1569 lines, speaks more than any other character in Shakespeare's canon?¹⁸

Stylistically, this piece of poster text also reflects the collaborative work of the Royal Court and the Schaubühne. Many of the Schaubühne's production posters, and often its outside façade too, take the form of a quotation from a production in the repertoire (see Figure 2.2). This quotation is then followed by an asterisk which guides the eye elsewhere on the poster to a footnote revealing the quotation's source. Mitchell's poster follows this pattern but rather than using the asterisk to reveal the source of the quotation, it instead guides the eye to a translation of the quotation into English. Rather than providing the original quotation from *Hamlet* ('the lady doth protest too much, methinks'), the poster provides a direct translation of the quotation as it is written in German: 'sie protestiert zu viel' becomes 'she doth protest too much'. Of course, both the title and this quotation alert audiences to the fact that the show is performed in German as well as drawing attention to the acts of translation that make such bi-lingual productions possible. The way the text is designed to look like neon lights directly references the Royal Court's façade, which displays the titles and usually the playwright's name on the front of the theatre as a red neon sign. Despite the power cables trailing down the side of the poster, this neon sign is however not switched on and almost disappears into the white background of the poster. As a line spoken by a woman, this can perhaps



FIG. 2.2. 'Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz', photograph. © Gianmarco Bresadola.

be read as symbolizing the ways in which female voices in theatre and performance are often left 'unlit', in danger of fading into the background.

The poster for *Ophelias Zimmer* thus openly addresses the Germanness of the production by displaying the German language and acknowledging acts of translation in a way that contrasts to the marketing strategies employed in the two case studies featured in Chapter 1, where translational activity was masked. Furthermore, it draws together the marketing aesthetics of both the Royal Court and the Schaubühne not only to reflect the collaborative work undergone by the institutions but also to hint at the potential of a shared Anglo-German theatre aesthetic. 'Sie protestiert zu viel', and all these examples, act as a primer for how audiences could view the production, bringing together Germanness and gender, and is indeed how I continue to read this performance. The action on stage can be viewed with a distanced sense of irony, casting an eye on the meta-theatrical meaning-making present as well. In addition, for audiences who already have some cultural knowledge of the Schaubühne and its work, the poster sets up an expectation of 'interweaving performance cultures' by itself 'interweaving' the aesthetics of German and British theatrical institutions. Finally, audiences are also primed for the feminist themes present in the production. In contrary to the disappearing female voice visualized on the poster, *Ophelias Zimmer* is an exercise in giving space to, perhaps 'lighting up', female creative voices in theatre, whilst at the same time criticizing the traditions that cause female voices to 'disappear' in the first place. Similarly, Mitchell and Lamford themselves prime their audience in

ways of viewing their production: in a promotional video made before the Royal Court run, Lamford suggests that the production is in ‘conversation with artistic representations of [Ophelia]’, thus asking audiences to take a historicized view of the character and her role in British, or indeed European, culture.¹⁹

Ophelias Zimmer saw Birch and Lamford collaborate with an internationally recognized artist enjoying consistent work in some of Britain’s and Germany’s most high-profile theatres and opera houses (Mitchell), making it the starting-point for a transnationally mobile partnership that has seen the pair produce work together for the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord (*La Maladie de la mort*, 2017), the Royal Court again (*Anatomy of a Suicide*, 2017), and the Schaubühne (*Schatten (Eurydike Sagt)*, 2016; *Orlando*, 2019). In this sense, Mitchell could be seen as a ‘network intellectual’, a term coined by Fred Turner and Christine Larson to describe someone with sufficient levels of symbolic capital to ‘build the social and intellectual communities that bring them fame. Within those communities, they help develop new social and institutional ties and, with them, new ideas’.²⁰ Rebecca Braun brings the concept to a literary context in order to uncover the ‘collaborative nature of authorship at both national and transnational levels’ and how this ‘can be uncovered and used to differentiate our understanding of how agency unfolds as literary celebrity travels’.²¹ This collaboration can thus be seen as a continuation (in the case of Lamford) and the beginning (in the base of Birch) of ‘social and institutional ties’ that have allowed all three collaborators to work transnationally.

For Matt Trueman, Mitchell is associated in Britain with a ‘specific kind of naturalism’; her work goes beyond a ‘British’ sense of theatrical naturalism to bear the ‘hallmark of her time in Eastern Europe’.²² Benjamin Fowler similarly draws attention to the influence of Russian theatrical techniques on Mitchell’s work, mentioning in particular how her time observing theatre director Lev Dodin’s ‘rigorous application of Stanislavsky’ were seen as ‘cut[ting] through theatrical approximations of “real life” in British stage realism’.²³ Whilst these influences complicate associations of Mitchell’s work with German theatrical traditions,²⁴ there is nevertheless a sense that Mitchell’s work is divided into the ‘more naturalistic proscenium shows’, which are usually shows produced in Britain, and her ‘Live Cinema work’.²⁵ For the former, as described by frequent collaborator Alex Eales, design is a key element in achieving a naturalistic theatre aesthetic: ‘we remove as many of those markers that remind you that you’re sitting in a theatre as possible. We put a ceiling on it, we try to light it with naturalistic and believable lights’, with the further aim to ‘seal the world so that the audience can’t leave the artifice of it’.²⁶ Eales’s description here suggests that for him, a naturalistic design aesthetic is one that resembles audiences’ real-life experiences over ‘artificiality’. Of course, although Eales’s work with Mitchell attempts to remove theatrical ‘markers’, these occur within the on-stage world and do not extend to the theatrical space beyond the stage. Lamford’s design for *Ophelias Zimmer*, rather than adhering to Eales’s model, offers frequent ‘markers’ of theatricality, including non-diegetic sound (a ‘ding’ to represent time passing), a visible Foley booth where actors work to make sound effects and often read from a script, and a single room set that only becomes

‘sealed’ at the very end of the performance by a clear, Perspex box descending from above the stage. Mitchell’s work with text and her Live Cinema work are both frequently read in relation to naturalism; Fowler, for example, sees Mitchell’s continued focus on ‘subjectivity and consciousness’ in these works as ‘an extension of Mitchell’s work on naturalism, rather than its radical deconstruction’.²⁷ Similarly, Dan Rebellato and Kim Solga suggest that the camera allows for an ‘even more detail-rich and attentive [kind] of naturalist performance’, whilst at the same time ‘it’s impossible not to notice the making of the detailed cinematic object alongside your observing of it’, resulting in a new, politicized way of viewing: ‘the option to look at the labour and the option to look at the product’.²⁸

This way of viewing is undoubtedly a feminist one, another crucial theme in writing about Mitchell’s work. Mitchell herself has spoken openly about her ‘feminist agenda’.²⁹ Academic discussions on Mitchell’s work view her naturalist (sometimes termed her ‘realist’) approach to theatre as complimenting her feminist work. Rosemary Malague considers Mitchell’s production of *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (2011) as a ‘feminist revelation’, layering a ‘physical “language” drawn from theatrical realism’ over the text and ‘thereby revealing dimensions of the female characters and their circumstances that the text itself would leave unseen or unspoken’.³⁰ Beyond the stage itself, Nicola Shaughnessy shifts the focus to the auditorium, seeing the ‘acute detail of Mitchell’s realism’ in her production of *Cleansed* in 2016 as causing an ‘embodied’, ‘visceral’ reaction in the individual watching the production. This in turn creates an ‘awareness and ownership’ of the spectator’s experience as spectator.³¹

Although Mitchell ‘rewrite[s] histories and narratives, placing female experience in the centre of the frame’, the limits, or ‘tensions of paradoxes’, of Mitchell’s feminism have been scrutinized in more recent scholarship, led in the most part by theatre academics Cornford and Svich.³² Writing in a 2019 article, Cornford argues in particular that Mitchell’s ‘casting has not been diverse’:

Racial prejudice may not be the subject of her work, but ethnicity is legible in it nonetheless, and may prompt us to questions whether the act of staging plays from white cultures with white casts in diverse European cities today may unintentionally participate in the white-washing of history that actively excludes people of colour from cultural narratives.³³

Cornford’s criticism here can easily apply to *Ophelias Zimmer* and, by extension, the Anglo-German context it is constructed within. Glancing at the creative team and cast, almost all artists and creatives involved are white. Cornford does go on to say, ‘by way of mitigation, that Mitchell often works with permanent ensembles in European theatres, whose performers are usually entirely or overwhelmingly white, and she does not, therefore, have the freedom to cast anyone she chooses’.³⁴ Here, Cornford associates ‘European [and within that German] theatres’ and their ensembles with a lack of ethnic diversity. Indeed, Priscilla Layne and Lizzie Stewart, drawing on the reflections of Black German artist Simone Dede Ayivi, argue in their chapter on racialization and contemporary German theatre that as of 2018, ‘while representation [has] improved, there [is] still a discrepancy between

the number of Black Germans in state theatre ensembles and those active in the independent scene'.³⁵

As a co-production between two international institutions, *Ophelias Zimmer* could therefore have been a chance to address somehow this issue by casting from the Royal Court's historically ethnically diverse profile of actors. In not doing so, it does little either to challenge an association of German theatrical culture with whiteness, or to broaden the possible diversity of audiences for theatre presented in German in Britain through the engagement of a diverse cast and creative team. This critique does important work to query the limits of Mitchell's (and indeed Ostermeier's) 'White Eurocentricity', and, as will be seen, becomes a point of departure for my analysis of the 'contact zones' created by these productions and how these spaces respond to issues of diversity within theatre.³⁶

Ophelias Zimmer also complicates the framework that aligns Mitchell's naturalist approach to theatre-making with her feminist ideology. Mitchell herself frames the production as sitting outside this framework. In an interview for the *Financial Times*, journalist Sarah Hemming responds to Mitchell's description of *Ophelias Zimmer* by saying it 'doesn't sound very dramatic'. Mitchell responds 'with a mischievous smile', suggesting that the creative team are "'not entirely doing it naturalistically'" this time round.³⁷ On the one hand, these comments see Mitchell leaning into her label as a 'radical' theatre maker by rejecting an aesthetic that is so commonly associated with her work in Britain.³⁸ By marking this difference, Mitchell challenges her perceived audiences' expectations of what her work 'should' look like and implies *Ophelias Zimmer* will present a 'new' viewing experience for her audiences. Aneta Mancewicz reads this as Mitchell wilfully 'frustrat[ing] the audience expectations' dramatically, dramaturgically, and theatrically.³⁹ Rather than viewing this as a negative however, Mitchell's comments in fact sell the show based on this expectation of both non-naturalistic theatre and feminist critique, implying that the director sees this type of work as having a high cultural value to her potential audience and functioning as a unique selling-point for this particular production.

My analysis here aims to follow Mitchell and Mancewicz as they attempt to frame this production beyond a naturalistic framework, arguing that as a co-production, *Ophelias Zimmer* establishes space for Anglo-German practitioners to collaborate whilst at the same time developing and combining Brechtian and postdramatic theatrical practices associated with a German theatrical tradition with her brand of 'naturalist' feminist theatre. Furthermore, I will argue that Mitchell can be read as using this opportunity of a transnational co-production to invite new critical analysis of Ostermeier's theatre. I will therefore consider Jenny König's performance as Ophelia in contrast to Renato Schuch's Hamlet in *Ophelias Zimmer*, viewing the latter's performance as a parody of Lars Eidinger's performances as Hamlet and Richard Plantagenet in productions of these plays by Ostermeier. To develop this comparison further, I will build on earlier work by Fowler and Mancewicz to read Ostermeier's *Richard III* alongside *Ophelias Zimmer* with particular focus on how both productions use and thematize space, and how the latter challenges the former's

approach to gender in performance, in ways that bring the gendered dimensions of Anglo-German theatre into new view.⁴⁰ This analysis of *Ophelias Zimmer* is based on a video recording of the play from 20 May 2016 at the Royal Court in London. Quotations from the text are based on my transcription of the German-language subtitles to this recording, translated from the English by Gerhild Steinbuch.

Ophelias Zimmer: Between Naturalism and Postdramatic Theatre

Mitchell describes the production as a ‘piece of performance that is doing the whole of *Hamlet* from the point of view of Ophelia’s bedroom’.⁴¹ Her telling use of the word *performance* indicates an experience that will attempt to move away from a sense of traditional Shakespearean or Aristotelean dramatic theatre. The piece is framed around ‘Five Stages of Drowning’. The Royal Court audience enter to see a black box covering the stage. As the performance begins, this lifts to reveal a simple bedroom, a foot or so below the rest of the built-up stage floor. Lamford’s set is a bare bedroom made up of muted shades of brown, black, and grey. A door set upstage centre is the sole point of entry, a single bed next to a bedside dressing table (with mirror removed) sits stage right, whereas a coat rack filled with dresses and a side table with cassette player and chair take up the area stage left. Beyond the realm of this room, a sound booth is visible upstage left, showing actors from the ensemble creating Foley sound effects using a gravel pit, door, and keys. Voices that Ophelia hears from outside her room are also created here through the use of microphones. The audience here are being shown Ophelia’s bedroom. The stage action focuses on her daily routine of getting dressed, receiving flowers from a maid (the only other human to enter her room on a daily basis), reading, receiving a ‘letter’ from Hamlet in the form of a cassette tape, listening to his voice, sewing, going downstairs for dinner, sleeping, and waking from a bad dream. This routine gets repeated and remains unbroken until the plot of *Hamlet* begins to play out beyond Ophelia’s four walls, and eventually infiltrates the room itself. Towards the end, water begins to fill her room, visible only to Ophelia, and the piece ends with Ophelia committing suicide — not by drowning, as perhaps expected by audience members familiar with the plot of *Hamlet*, or as is indeed foreshadowed by Birch’s ‘Five Stages of Drowning’ and the slow build-up of water on stage. In a surprise twist, Ophelia instead uses her sewing scissors to cut her own throat. With her body collapsed on the bed, a transparent glass case descends to enclose the room, followed by the familiar black box a few moments after.

Although the production is described on the Royal Court website as ‘a new work exploring Ophelia, freed from Hamlet’, Ophelia is anything but ‘freed’.⁴² Mitchell aptly described the performance as a ‘study in powerlessness’.⁴³ Ophelia’s actions are mainly restricted to what she or others refer to her as doing in the original *Hamlet*, meaning she can be seen sewing (‘my lord, I was sewing in my closet’, II. 1), reading (perhaps in reference to Polonius’s command to ‘read on this book’ in III. 1), and receiving flowers; gifts which later become what Gertrude describes as her ‘fantastic garlands’ (IV. 7), carried with her as she commits suicide.

She only leaves the room twice a day, to go for a walk in the morning, and after being summoned by a male voice, seemingly for some evening meal, from which she returns as her father is saying goodnight to Laertes. These actions are repeated multiple times throughout the performance. Exceptions to this include ‘the play’ at which Ophelia is ‘expected’, most likely *Hamlet’s* play-within-the-play, her father’s funeral, and towards the end of the performance when Ophelia is led out to ‘see Gertrude’.⁴⁴ Resisting what Mancewicz calls ‘the temptation to see her production as a simple act of restitution’, Mitchell’s Ophelia is here physically restricted by the limited information provided about her in original source text.⁴⁵ Rather than an act of ‘restitution’, this instead draws attention to Ophelia’s positioning, or lack of positioning, with the narrative world and performance history of *Hamlet*, with Mitchell and Birch focusing on the narrative gaps of what Ophelia does outside of the five scenes Shakespeare gives her character.

Mitchell thus allows Shakespeare’s text to restrain both Ophelia and the production. In addition to that, Ophelia is physically dominated and restricted by the male-dominated world in which she lives. Although the title implies that the room on stage belongs to Ophelia, this is not, to paraphrase Virginia Woolf, ‘a room of her own’.⁴⁶ Polonius, unseen until his dead body is dragged on stage by Hamlet towards the end of section 3 (‘Unconscious’), is a constant presence controlling Ophelia’s ability to move freely in society. His voice beckons her daily from an area off-stage (or the Foley sound booth), allowing him to control the moments when Ophelia exits the space on stage. Ophelia obeys her father’s commands here as she does in *Hamlet*: ‘I shall obey, my lord’ is her response to his request that she no longer ‘give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet’ in 1. 3. Polonius asserts his patriarchal authority in *Ophelias Zimmer* as well through restricting his daughter’s mobility. In section 2, ‘Involuntary Breath Holding’, Ophelia’s maid enters as usual with flowers:

OPHELIA I’m going for a walk.
 MAID Your father says you’re to stay indoors.
 OPHELIA I want to walk.
 MAID Your father forbids it.

Literally confined to her room, from this moment onwards Ophelia’s personal mobility comes under the control of a patriarch. Massey observed back in 1994 that ‘survey after survey has shown how women’s mobility [...] is restricted — in a thousand different ways, from physical violence to being ogled at or made to feel quite simply “out of place” — not by “capital”, but by men’.⁴⁷ Mitchell’s on-stage world is one in which this is certainly the case. In the final sections, Ophelia’s room becomes a prison. After her father’s death, a mysterious male figure (played by Ulrich Hoppe) enforces a medication regime that literally reduces Ophelia’s ability to move on her own, requiring physical support from him to climb the stairs. Only on his authority can Ophelia leave her room. The character’s lack of mobility thus appears in stark contrast to the mobility of Mitchell, Lamford, and Birch, who as creatives are able to move freely between Berlin and London.

The restrictions on Ophelia's actions, imposed by Mitchell's strict adherence to the original text, caused many reviewers to remark on the lack of action on stage, or what Mancewicz refers to as 'the oppositions between action and inaction'.⁴⁸ Lyn Gardner, Aleks Sierz, and Dominic Cavendish all comment on the length of the production, with the latter calling it a 'too protracted (almost two-hour!) affair'; Tim Bano goes so far as to call *Ophelias Zimmer* 'impressively boring. Gripping, in a way. But still boring'; Elaine Aston says there is a 'sense of the durational to the piece', despite it being a mere two hours long.⁴⁹ These critics' comments thus bring to mind Hans-Thies Lehmann's discussion of time in his well-known work exploring 'postdramatic' theatre.⁵⁰ The relationship between Mitchell's work and Lehmann's theory has been comprehensively explored only by Benjamin Fowler, in a conference paper in 2013. He sees Mitchell's multimedia, Live Cinema work as both corresponding to and destabilizing Lehmann's descriptions of postdramatic theatre, ultimately asking if Mitchell's Live Cinema work can challenge 'audiences to construct their own reading of the practice put before them', how does *Ophelias Zimmer*, which sits outside the Live Cinema bracket, interact with Lehmann's theory?⁵¹

For Lehmann, the 'new concept of *shared time*' is an important feature of post-dramatic theatre where 'the aesthetically shaped and the real experienced time [become] a single cake, so to speak, shared by visitors and performers alike'. Adding to this, he points out that 'hardly any other procedure is as typical for postdramatic theatre as repetition'. Through viewing Ophelia's simple daily actions repeated multiple times through the performance, the experience of time begins to lengthen and slow down. According to Lehmann, this '*aesthetic of repetition*' has two effects here.⁵² First, it connects with Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. For Butler, gender is the 'repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance'.⁵³ As Solga highlights with regard to conceptualizing space in theatre, this well-known concept sees gender as 'reproduced over and over again both on and within our bodies as we rehearse gender codes we and our fellow citizens recognized as "normal"'.⁵⁴ Solga's use of theatrical language ('rehearse') is telling, and in this sense, *Ophelias Zimmer* — and König's performance within it — becomes a theatrical performance of gender performance, suggesting the ways in which Ophelia's repeated actions are a product of the patriarchal system in which she lives, and thereby reinforce this oppressive form of society. The reviewers' acute awareness of time passing in the theatre space highlights the focus on the audience as 'co-actors' in this performance, co-experiencing the boredom imposed on Ophelia in her male-dominated onstage world themselves.⁵⁵ As German critic Esther Slevogt explains, 'man erlebt den langsamen Erstickungstod [...] dieser Frau quasi am eigenen Zuschauerleib' [one experiences this woman's long death by suffocation almost in one's own body as spectator].⁵⁶ Lehmann also suggests that 'only an experience of time that deviates from habit provokes its explicit perception, permitting it to move from something taken for granted as a mere accompaniment to the rank of a theme'. The effect of this is to move beyond Brecht's 'smoking

spectator', leaning backwards away from the action and distanced 'in "their own time"'. Spectators are instead invited to observe 'the significance of [their] repeated perception', to observe themselves as 'co-actors' to the meaning making of the performance.⁵⁷ If *Ophelias Zimmer* is boring, Shakespeare made it so. Through Mitchell's intervention, this boredom becomes a provocation. As such, it is Shakespeare's presentation of female subjectivity that thus comes under scrutiny. As Linda Bamber has convincingly argued, 'the Self is masculine [...] in Shakespearean tragedy and women are Other'.⁵⁸ *Ophelias Zimmer* invites audiences to view *Hamlet* in a similar way, challenging presentations of Shakespeare's texts that continue to allow male subjective experiences to represent universal human experiences.

Ophelias Zimmer thus in some ways lives up to the expectation set up by the director herself to move beyond a naturalistic framework by incorporating postdramatic elements into the production. Through 'interweaving' (to borrow from Fischer-Lichte) theatrical styles that, although by no means essentially 'German', carry with them a lingering sense of Germanness, this co-production sits outside a purely naturalistic framework synonymous with Mitchell's previous Britain-based work.⁵⁹ Instead, it becomes a 'contact zone' between elements that sit within and beyond the German theatrical tradition. In turn, these elements become crucial to understanding the production's feminist themes. *Ophelias Zimmer* proves an example of how Mitchell can make use of an international co-production model to expand her own aesthetic practice as seen in Britain, whilst at the same time creating space to critique practices in both British and German theatre.

Performing Back Ostermeier

Mitchell's critique of how gender and Germanness relate in the British theatrical context arise in part from her engagement with the work of Thomas Ostermeier. 'No other contemporary German theatre artist [...] is as present around the world today as Thomas Ostermeier [...] and yet, there could hardly be a director less typical of contemporary German theatre than [him]'.⁶⁰ This quotation from Peter Boenisch's book-length study of the theatre of Thomas Ostermeier, co-written with the director himself, summarizes the crucial tension in transnational appraisal of the German director's theatrical work. Through touring, international co-productions, and festivals, Ostermeier's theatre has an impressively global reach. *Richard III*, for example, premiered at the Schaubühne on 7 February 2015 and went on to tour in Avignon, Craiova, Harbin, Tianjin, Edinburgh, Stockholm, Hong Kong, London, Adelaide, Clermont-Ferrand, Milan, Paris, New York, Lausanne, Seoul, Zagreb, Prague, and finally Lisbon in December 2019–January 2020.⁶¹ As such, Boenisch is not wrong to assert that Ostermeier, more than any other German artist, 'has come to represent German theatre to the wider world'.⁶² Focusing more on Ostermeier's reception in Britain, Benedict Schofield sees a disparity between how Ostermeier is seen in the British press as representing a radical German theatre tradition and his actual aesthetics. Schofield takes issue with an international, Anglophone reception that often labels him a 'provocative German director',⁶³ or, as has been frequently

referenced in the British press, ‘the bad boy of German theatre’.⁶⁴ Schofield goes further to suggest that British attitudes have in fact ‘become attuned to, and thus less outraged by’ Ostermeier’s theatre over time since his first performances in Britain in the late 1990s, and persuasively concludes that ‘spatial and temporal shifts thus impact on the extent to which Ostermeier is perceived as radical’.⁶⁵

One further Ostermeier ‘myth’ centres around the relationship between his work and the city in which his theatre is based: Berlin. Framing the international value of his own work, Ostermeier has suggested that ‘international festivals purchase a Berlin identity from us’, drawing on the ‘hipster culture’ that is both visible and challenged in his production of, for example, *An Enemy of the People*.⁶⁶ His curiously transactional language here draws attention to the economics of transnational cultural exchange, with festivals and international venues becoming ‘buyers’ of the aesthetic identity Ostermeier chooses to ‘sell’. As has been made clear by Ostermeier himself, international touring plays a crucial role in the Schaubühne’s funding model. With a ‘fixed revenue target of two million euros from guest performances’, international performances make up to twelve and a half per cent of the theatre’s total income of sixteen million euros.⁶⁷ The production I focus on here, *Richard III*, appears to have been funded solely by the Schaubühne itself, without the support of the likes of Lotto Stiftung Berlin or the EU, both of which have funded Schaubühne productions (or co-productions) in the past. Similarly, Ostermeier’s production of *An Enemy of the People*, which toured to the Barbican in 2014, was awarded a grant by the Barbican Centre, something which was not reported as being offered for *Richard III*. The financial risk thus lies solely at the door of the Schaubühne. In 2015, the year *Richard III* premiered in Berlin, the Schaubühne actually received 14,274,000 euros from public funds (13,840,000 euros of which was provided by the Land Berlin’s ‘institutional funds’) and earned 3,002,000 euros from touring performances (‘Gastspiele’), sponsorship, refunds, and holdings; the theatre’s total income was 19,992,000 euros.⁶⁸ This is suggestive of the extent to which productions that do go on tour effectively strike a balance between attracting international, majority non-German speaking audiences, providing a recognizable ‘Ostermeier experience’, whilst still drawing domestic audiences in Berlin. Ostermeier’s framing also positions a local ‘Berlin identity’ as a globally valued, transportable cultural commodity owned by Ostermeier and his theatre, and one that is available to access for the cost of a theatre ticket in cities across the world. The institutional fabric of Ostermeier’s theatre thus seems to weave together the local (Berlin), the national (Germany), and the global.

Richard III was the director’s second Shakespeare production to tour to London’s Barbican and ran there from 17 to 19 February 2017. His first Shakespeare production to tour to Britain was *Hamlet* in 2011, a production that, as Schofield notes, ‘became a *cause célèbre* [in Britain] because of its supposed transgressions’.⁶⁹ Reviewers at the time saw it as ‘a wake-up call to British directors’,⁷⁰ challenging a supposed staid and British view of directing Shakespeare: ‘Are you ready for ‘Hamlet’ in German?’ was a question teasingly posed by Emma Hogan in the *Financial Times* before the run began, highlighting the production’s supposed provocative potential in a British

context.⁷¹ Hogan's suggestion of a double intellectual challenge similarly elevates the cultural value of German theatre and German-language versions of Shakespeare's texts, suggesting regular British theatregoers are in a sense intellectually or emotionally ill-equipped to 'appreciate' *Hamlet* in German. The production led to Ostermeier being offered the job of Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company (an offer he rejected), with critic Charlotte Higgins hoping he would give the company a 'violent, avant-garde shakeup'.⁷² Such offers and comments combine Ostermeier's on-stage artistic output with his perceived abilities as artistic director behind-the-scenes, a view that, as we shall see, Ostermeier playfully alludes to in his set for *Richard III*. The *Hamlet* production became a 'worldwide calling card' for the Schaubühne, and solidified the international reputation of Lars Eidinger, who played the titular role, as 'the face of the Schaubühne'.⁷³ Indeed, Eidinger's *Hamlet* has become an iconic image for the theatre: a production photo of the actor as Hamlet with an upturned crown on his head, kneeling in mud, adorns the cover of *50 Jahre Schaubühne: 1962–2012*.⁷⁴ With this production then, Ostermeier established on the one hand, an internationally celebrated artistic partnership with Eidinger as charismatic lead actor, and on the other, a reputation for a transgressive approach to Shakespearean texts. That said, as Schofield also argues, 'when provocation becomes an expectation, it can also become safe and unsurprising'.⁷⁵ Does *Richard III* then develop on or merely attempt to create a carbon copy of *Hamlet* for international audiences? How does the presence of Ostermeier's work in Britain interact with representations of Germanness? How do gender and Germanness come together here, in ways that help contextualize the other case study in this chapter, Mitchell's *Ophelias Zimmer*?

The choice of staging *Richard III* in the first place came out of 'numerous discussions with Lars Eidinger about how to continue our work, in particular after *Hamlet*, and he had been developing his own enthusiasm for playing Richard for some time'; Ostermeier wanted to 'fully exploit Eidinger's charm and his huge popularity, especially with a young audience'.⁷⁶ Ostermeier here sets up his target audience ('young'), an economically sound target group when considering the 1,168,132 twenty-five to forty-five year olds who were registered as residents in Berlin as of 2018, a higher number than any other age group.⁷⁷ At the same time, he uses language that is once again transactional, with Ostermeier 'exploiting' Eidinger's labour (or onstage charm) for commercial and financial success. That said, from early on, it seems Eidinger sat at the centre of this production, guiding the director's decision-making in ways reminiscent of the relationship between celebrity actors and theatre directors in Britain.⁷⁸ Despite the Schaubühne's ensemble model then, one that employs actors for long periods of time working in a repertory style and is typical of theatres across Germany, the symbolic capital of one actor is still a strong influence on programming choices.

This symbolic capital is clearly reflected in performance. Michael Billington saw British theatrical tradition reflected in Eidinger's performance in a play that has historically been 'a vehicle for bravura actors such as Garrick, Kean and Olivier'. Eidinger's Richard is 'uninhibited', and 'manages the audience as deftly as he

does his onstage dupes'.⁷⁹ Amongst a cast of nine ensemble actors, Eidinger is the sole performer given license to directly address and engage with the audience ('unleash[ed]', as Ostermeier would have it).⁸⁰ According to reviewer Charlotte Runcie, 'his commitment is not to destroying the fourth wall, but to making sure it's never built it in the first place'.⁸¹ He responds to what the audience offers him: as they laugh, Eidinger looks to the crowd and nods, enjoying their complicity. Ostermeier wanted a Richard that was 'very likeable and appealing'.⁸² Considering the audience laughter, audible in the recording as Richard coyly refuses the offer of the crown (despite the audience knowing full well the blood he has shed in order to get it), it seems Eidinger is capable of effectively winning the audience's sympathy. *Richard III* thus promises a theatrical experience similar to that of *Hamlet*: an unpredictable Eidinger engaging freely with the audience, entering the auditorium and incorporating spectators into the meaning making of the production.

Offering a performance brand perhaps now familiar to the British press, *Richard III* came under some criticism for lacking political bite. Billington chastised Ostermeier for 'drain[ing] the play of political complexity', seeing it instead as a 'showcase for a star', and clearly located value in what he sees as political potency of Ostermeier's brand of theatre, and even referenced his 'deeply political' productions of *Blasted* and *An Enemy of the People* that both toured to the Barbican in the years prior to *Richard III* as contrasting examples. One year after the EU Referendum, 2017 represented a 'crucial time' for Billington, 'when the far right is on the move throughout western and central Europe', and for this German import not to address these issues, seemed to him 'evasive'.⁸³ Not only is the political potential of Ostermeier's theatre important to Billington, it is the potential for Ostermeier's productions to say something about a British and wider European political problem that has become the expectation.

If there is a political message in *Richard III* though, it lies in Eidinger's performance itself, and the majority of existing British critical commentary on the production is based on a moment when Eidinger seemingly went off-script. Both Benjamin Fowler and Alessandro Simari have commented on a moment in one performance at the Barbican when, after throwing quark in Buckingham's face and:

Admiring his handiwork, Richard said (in English, like all of his adlibs this evening), 'Man, Buckingham you look like shit. Did you eat pussy this morning?'. The audience laugh. Eidinger turns to us and walks to the front of the stage. He locks eyes with a young man in the front row and points to the young woman next to him. 'Did you grab —' he begins, then corrects himself. 'Did you eat her pussy this morning?'⁸⁴

Both the man and woman in the audience refuse to answer Eidinger's question despite him consistently asking and refusing to continue until one of them answers. In the end, the silent couple 'win' and Eidinger slinks off. For Simari, the refusal to engage with Eidinger and to become complicit with Richard's machinations is a 'a rebuke of the stage and its theatrical/political agenda'.⁸⁵ However, considering Eidinger and Ostermeier's history of Shakespeare performance in Britain, it is equally plausible that spectators would be buying a ticket specifically for this

post-*Hamlet* style of unpredictable, uncomfortable audience interaction. This (un)willingness to engage with Eidinger's improvisations is therefore in fact essential for Ostermeier's vision of the play:

I am deeply disturbed by this mushy generation of people my age with their mushy world-view. They seriously think that some well-meant, engaged play will be able to change the system we live in, which brings forth dead bodies on a daily basis, very much as Richard does.⁸⁶

Although Simari sees the non-response of these spectators as defeating Richard/Eidinger 'the Tyrant', the narrative and actor continue on stage nonetheless.⁸⁷ In fact, Eidinger seems to have settled into a repeated pattern in terms of his ad-libbing during performances of *Richard III*: in both the recorded version in Avignon and the performance in London that received the attention of Fowler and Simari in their appraisals, Eidinger 'improvises' at the same moment. In both the recording and Simari's and Fowler's descriptions of the performance they viewed, this moment becomes a springboard for asking the same question ('have you licked pussy today?') to the audience, with different results each time. Eidinger and Ostermeier thus invite carefully choreographed audience participation in *Richard III*, essentially 'acting' as if the possibility that what an audience member says or does can have some bearing on the action on stage. For me as an 'academic spectator', with the possibility to view the production multiple times through archival recordings and to relive performance moments through reviews and articles about the production, this in fact stresses the powerlessness and ineffectiveness of the spectator in this particular theatrical space to alter the action happening in front of them.

For Fowler, reflecting on this so-called 'improvised' moment, the production became a turning-point in his appreciation of Ostermeier's theatre. Eidinger's performance, Fowler asserts, specifically reflects a gendered 'systemic structure within the ensemble which privileges the male performer'.⁸⁸ Physically and spatially, Eidinger does stand out from the rest of the ensemble. In the opening scene, he moves around the stage space and auditorium freely, something that continues into the second scene where, wooing Lady Anne (Jenny König, also Mitchell's Ophelia), Eidinger moves confidently through the space whilst König remains fairly still. Wearing a black head brace that tucks under his chin, framing his face, a black fabric hump is strapped to his left shoulder and his right shoe is almost twice the size of his left, implying a club foot or limb length discrepancy, Eidinger also alters his body shape to play Richard, bending his knees inwards to reduce his height. In the same wooing scene with Lady Anne, Richard strips naked, offering his body to her as a sacrifice. Eidinger's naked body reveals the theatricality of his deformity: the shoulder straps becomes visible, his now bare feet are visibly unimpaired. In contrast to the other actors onstage, Eidinger is thus (literally) exposed as a performer, displaying, as Gemma Miller notes in her review, 'his deformity as a combination of meta-theatrical signifiers which seemed to indicate a physical disability while simultaneously revealing it to be nothing more than a rhetorical, theatrical and historical construct'. For Miller, this results in 'a Richard in whom his audience might see themselves reflected', denying any 'causal link between physical

deformity and moral depravity'.⁸⁹ Anyone, it would follow, has the potential for moral corruption. As we have seen, however, and as Fowler argues in his chapter on various examples of Mitchell's work at the Schaubühne, her *Ophelias Zimmer* forces us to question Miller's unspoken assumption that Shakespeare's male characters (and leading male actors) reflect and represent a universal experience.⁹⁰ In this sense, Mitchell's work, through challenging the masculine universal experience offered by Shakespeare, actually comes across as an approach to Shakespeare that is more 'transgressive' than Ostermeier's.

Although this prioritization of male characters and actors seems to be common in Ostermeier's touring Shakespeare productions (Fowler has also highlighted *Hamlet* and Ostermeier's version of *Measure for Measure* as productions in which male lead characters are seen regularly physically and verbally abusing female characters), the same brushstroke does not colour all his international work.⁹¹ Looking beyond *Richard III*, Ostermeier's touring *Hedda Gabler* and *A Doll's House* (both staged at the Barbican in 2008 and 2004 respectively), as well as his international co-production of *Returning to Reims* (2017) see prominent female members of his ensemble taking lead roles. In the last production in particular, Nina Hoss, whose symbolic capital has an international reach that arguably exceeds Eidinger's through her role in the American television show *Homeland* (2014–17), plays a female actor live recording the narration of Didier Eribon's memoir until the session breaks down and her own subjective experiences comes to be the central theatrical focus. Fowler indeed similarly views Hoss's employment as an indication of Ostermeier's alertness to the issues of his overly masculinist approach.⁹² As a key collaborator on this co-production, Hoss also further exemplifies Ostermeier's need to 'exploit' the popularity of internationally renowned celebrity actors in the creation of his work targeted at international audiences.⁹³

Fowler's comments on *Richard III* certainly draw attention to the role of women in Ostermeier's theatre. The director has, for example, made some startling comments about the 'eroticism of granting women, who are still disadvantaged in society, power on the stage', framing his work with women as an uncomfortable relationship between voyeur and sexual object, and he has also spoken openly about a romantic relationship with a female member of his ensemble, and his preference for working with women over men.⁹⁴ Fowler's comments are perhaps indicative of how 'temporal and spatial shifts' have affected a British academic reception of Ostermeier's theatre: from celebrating his 'transgressive' productions to being 'attuned' to his aesthetic, to finally criticizing how his work rubs against a British theatrical culture that increasingly prioritizes gender equality both onstage and at an institutional level.

Similarly, Ostermeier's presentation as the 'bad boy' of German theatre conflates his supposed theatrical and aesthetic transgressions with a masculine identity, putting a positive inflection on both. This unofficial title most likely stems from Ostermeier's attempts to 'distinguish himself "from the avant-gardists of international *Regietheater*"', and his supposed rejection of 'pseudo-avant-garde' postdramatic discourse that places his work outside of the German 'mainstream'.⁹⁵ Whilst Fowler has addressed Mitchell's reception and influence in the German

context, this discourse highlights a critical imbalance that becomes apparent when comparing it with her critical reception in Britain.⁹⁶ Her textual and aesthetic transgressions make her an 'auteur' in the eyes of some British critics,⁹⁷ who see an 'overweening arrogance' in her directorial approach.⁹⁸ Whereas a prominent British female director who is historically seen as working in the *Regietheater* tradition is 'arrogant', a male German director is celebrated.⁹⁹ The cultural capital of the German 'bad boy' suggests in one sense a misogynistic attitude towards women directors in the British press, a contentious point made by the then National Theatre artistic director Nicholas Hytner who noted how Mitchell 'gets misogynistic reviews where everything they say is predicated on her sex'.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the split in attitudes to Mitchell's as opposed to Ostermeier's work also expresses a critical preference for international work that challenges a perceived status quo in British theatrical culture (Ostermeier), rather than championing that challenge coming from within the British theatrical system itself (Mitchell).

In *Ophelias Zimmer*, Mitchell responds to this imbalance by critically engaging with both Ostermeier's approach to Shakespeare in performance, challenging and undermining the cultural value of Shakespeare in performance in a British context. Birch's 'sparse text', as Bano calls it, with short, sometimes one-word sentences, is perhaps written as an antithesis to Shakespeare's 30,557-word *Hamlet*.¹⁰¹ As the play was written in English but performed in German, it can only be accessed in its original form through theatrical surtitles (or subtitles if you are watching the recording). Birch's short sentences may have been written with the narrow space afforded by a surtitle display screen in mind, suggesting that practical arrangements necessary to make the bi-lingual co-production 'understandable' in both linguistic contexts impacted on the creative decision-making. Most of Hamlet's self-recorded tapes, handed to Ophelia daily by her maid as letters, are ruminations created by Birch. His recordings range from romantic ('You are keeping me warm now in winter') to the sexually vulgar ('I thought of you all day long. All day long. With my dick hard'). His self-involved musings seem to parody the original Hamlet's long soliloquies. Indeed, in one performance moment, as Ophelia is searching through one tape to find a particular section to listen to, she pauses at the wrong moment, catching Hamlet beginning his well-known 'to be, or not to be' speech. He is interrupted mid-line as Ophelia fast forwards through the tape. In the play recording, the audience can be heard clearly laughing at Ophelia's casual and comedic disregard for the Shakespearean text. The cassette tapes allow Ophelia a rare moment to control and manage the male voice. In this moment, Shakespeare and his text are thus denied access to world of the production, allowing the female creatives to 'take up space' instead, to paraphrase poet Vanessa Kisuule.¹⁰²

Each day begins with Ophelia putting on a new dress over the one she wore the previous day. As Jenny König, playing Ophelia, undertakes this action, a prerecorded voiceover can be heard, a voice that over time is understood to be that of Ophelia's mother, now dead. This voice issues commands such as 'breathe' and 'smile, Ophelia'. For Sara Ahmed, 'smiling becomes a feminine achievement [...] what you have to do to compensate when you are perceived as not feminine enough'.¹⁰³ These commands thus reflect the ways in which social expectations

can be handed down from parent to child, mother to daughter. Ophelia's 'smiling' comes to reflect another aspect of how gender is established through the repeated performance of actions, as well as her powerlessness, forced to 'make others happy by appearing happy' and enduring what Ahmed calls the 'emotional labor' of this pretence. Ophelia's mother also consistently refers to her daughter as 'O'. On the one hand, this 'O' could refer to what the Chorus in *Henry V* calls 'this wooden O', most likely indicating the Globe Theatre in which the play was to be performed. 'O' thus ironically implies a vast space, a G/globe that Ophelia is not given access to. On the other hand, this 'O' is reminiscent of Hamlet's many 'O's in the original. From 'O that this too too sallied flesh would melt' to his 'O God [...] O, most wicked speed' (1, 2), Hamlet makes use of this 'vocalization [...] used in emphatic emotion' repeatedly.¹⁰⁴ By making Ophelia another 'O', Hamlet's lines can, at times, be reread as addressed to Ophelia. It is however more likely that Birch is highlighting another lack in Shakespeare's text: abundant space for Hamlet's 'O's, but little space given for another 'O', namely Ophelia and her subjective experience.

This idea of space is further developed through performance. Jenny König (playing Ophelia) has been a member of the Schaubühne ensemble since 2011, whereas Hamlet actor Renato Schuch's tenure ended in 2019 after four years of working in the company. König's performance as Ophelia sharply contrasts with Schuch's Hamlet. Taking the voiceover commands of her mother literally, König's Ophelia tries to 'hide' herself, getting 'smaller' and 'quieter', and 'tuck[ing] into the wall'. For example, at the beginning of section 3 ('Unconscious'), Ophelia takes her bedding and lies underneath her bed, which, due to the floor of her bedroom being lower than the built-up stage, literally hides her from the audience. When other characters enter her room, mainly her maid and the mysterious male figure who governs her actions in the latter stages of the play, Ophelia is consistently seated, making her seem all the smaller in comparison to those with authority over here. A key moment occurs towards the end of section 2 ('Involuntary Breath Holding'). Ophelia having been once again denied access to the outside world, her maid leaves just as Hamlet comes rushing in, carrying a red briefcase, and wearing a long black coat. He grabs Ophelia's wrists and face and screams at her. He forces Ophelia to take a seat stage left and opens his briefcase revealing a portable record player. Joy Division's 'Love Will Tear Us Apart' begins to play in its entirety, and Hamlet 'dances' in front of Ophelia, waving his arms manically in an exaggerated version of Ian Curtis's well-documented dancing style. Ophelia meanwhile is sat almost completely still in her chair, her face covered with her hands so that her expression is not visible.

Here, König seems to be complying with what feminist scholars such as Iris Marion Young see as a learned way of behaving, as conforming to a patriarchal culture that has asserted dominance over her.¹⁰⁵ Hamlet, in contrast, forcibly invades her living space, her bodily, private space, and commands the audience's attention by taking centre stage. His rapid and large movements are in direct contrast to Ophelia's often small, slow actions. The music he plays is loud and long, whereas the only music the audience hears from Ophelia is her quiet humming to herself

at the start of the day. Describing Mitchell's approach to working with actors, Lisa Peck suggests Mitchell's 'intention is not that the actors experience the emotion, but that they learn to accurately show it'.¹⁰⁶ This 'post-Brechtian' approach, to use Peck's term, seems particularly visible in *Ophelias Zimmer* given König's almost consistently 'doll-like blankness', and symbolic use of action and gesture to express emotion (face in hands, seated position).¹⁰⁷ In this sense, following on from Elin Diamond's work combining feminist criticism and Brechtian theory, Mitchell perhaps invites her audiences to become 'feminist gestic [critics]', viewing these actions as reflecting the social circumstances, as well as the gendered and perhaps misogynistic conditions that produced them as well.¹⁰⁸ Each of Ophelia's actions thus 'contain[s] the trace of action it represses [...] the audience is invited to look beyond representation — beyond what is authoritatively put in view — to the possibilities of as yet unarticulated actions of judgements'.¹⁰⁹ Ophelia's inability to respond to Hamlet's physical force thus compels audiences to confront the physical domination of male bodies over female bodies in space as well as the historical domination of male literary figures over female subjectivities.

Reading these scenes whilst thinking about *Ophelias Zimmer* as a transnational co-production, I would argue that Schuch's performance comes to symbolize more than just an interpretation of the character of Hamlet. In his review, Bano saw a '90s post-punk adolescent' in Schuch's Hamlet, most probably in reference to his musical taste and dark clothing (although of course, Joy Division was formed in 1976 and the remaining band members became New Order after Ian Curtis's suicide in 1980).¹¹⁰ Schuch's erratic dance and aggressive, comparatively unpredictable and wild behaviour is also, however, reminiscent of Lars Eidinger's interpretation of both Richard III and the eponymous character in Thomas Ostermeier's 2008 Schaubühne production of *Hamlet*. By repeating the same erratic dance movements for the entire duration of the Joy Division song, Schuch's Hamlet becomes a parody of himself, and I read this moment as further parodying Eidinger's performance style, and by extension Ostermeier's direction. Mitchell places König's relatively timid and small portrayal of Ophelia in contrast to a dominating and attention-grabbing male performance. In a sense, Mitchell thus addresses an imbalance in Anglo-German stage presences. She invites future Anglo-German theatrical productions to move beyond a masculinist political pose, querying how often directors place female subjectivity at the centre of a Shakespeare production, what roles women play in Anglo-German ensembles, and whether they are, indeed, given the same fourth-wall-defying freedom as, for example, Eidinger.

A similar point has recently been made by both Fowler and Mancewicz. Fowler highlights the 'special political force' gathered by *Ophelias Zimmer* in its context as part of the Schaubühne repertoire alongside Ostermeier's Shakespeare productions 'showcasing Lars Eidinger as the anarchic clown given license to dominate ensemble and audience'. This placement makes 'visible a systemic problem in an ensemble that privileges the male performer'. He focuses on Mitchell's perceived realism, and views her 'feminist reworking of realist representation' as the means of addressing this gendered imbalance. Nevertheless, he concludes by letting

Ostermeier off the proverbial hook, arguing that his programming and casting choices at the Schaubühne have shown Ostermeier capable of ‘critical self-reflection’.¹¹¹ Mancewicz goes further to suggest a critique of *Hamlet*’s ‘patriarchal violence’ and ‘a long tradition of playing the character as a dominant and boisterous figure on stage’ in *Ophelias Zimmer*.¹¹² I would add to these arguments that it is the production’s status as an international co-production which invites audiences of *Ophelias Zimmer* to draw parallels between both British and German theatrical contexts, and in doing so critically question Anglo-German artistic practices from a feminist perspective. By doing so, Mitchell’s production reveals the gendered dimensions of what is popular with critics in terms of Anglo-German theatrical exchange. Through artists such as Ostermeier, a more masculinist mode of political theatre-making becomes associated with Germanness in the British context, with (as we have seen) negative reviews of Mitchell’s work often focusing more on gender rather than on national identity. Furthermore, my argument goes deeper to root this point in the production’s examination of the female and male body and their relation to space, and moves beyond Fowler’s description of *Ophelias Zimmer* as sitting within a realist framework, to draw out the key non-naturalistic aesthetic elements that highlight Mitchell’s critically feminist message. Fowler (and indeed Mancewicz) ultimately argue that Mitchell seeks to counter a tendency in theatre to ‘[drag] Shakespeare through time’, bringing the “‘toxic gender politics” of the sixteenth century’ along with him.¹¹³ I would also argue that Mitchell nevertheless attempts with her production to drag both Shakespeare and Ostermeier through space, provoking a critical re-engagement with both artists’ practice in British and German cultural contexts.

‘Totus mundus agit histrionem’: Performing in and across the G/globe

Space is thus a crucial theme across both *Richard III* and *Ophelias Zimmer*, in terms of the worlds created onstage, and the theatrical spaces themselves. Ostermeier’s *Richard III*, however, as a touring production with a broader international reach, establishes a different idea of who is allowed to occupy transnational theatrical space and how that space is conceptualized — two key considerations for this chapter. Whereas *Ophelias Zimmer* was a co-production enjoying a short run at both theatres within six months of each other, *Richard III* was performed at the Barbican in London as one leg of a year-long schedule of international performances. Although *Richard III* was certainly conceived with touring in mind, whether or not a particular production arrives at a particular theatre is at the discretion of the host theatres themselves. There are two Touring Managers and two Technical Touring Managers at the Schaubühne.¹¹⁴ The latter organize transport and are responsible for the handling of other technical issues. Host theatres would contact the Touring Manager in the first instance with a request for a certain number of performances, and this member of staff then calculates the total cost which includes travel, per diems, accommodation, wages, music and author’s rights, and transport. These costs are then taken on by the host theatre. *Richard III* has two sets so that the production

can still play in Berlin even whilst it is travelling. The number of performances abroad is curtailed by the need for the actors and other members of the crew to be present in Berlin for other performances. The Schaubühne performance schedule thus seems even more complex when these international performances are considered and suggests the ways in which the demands of touring can affect the casting of certain productions. Additionally, this could account for the use of a non-German actor for the non-speaking role of Polonius in *Ophelias Zimmer*, the cost of sending an actor over to London just to play dead for one scene perhaps steering the choice to cast outside of the usual Schaubühne ensemble.

The Barbican Theatre in the City of London has hosted all touring productions from the Schaubühne that have travelled to Britain outside a theatre festival context since 2000. The theatre is part of the large Barbican Centre, itself nestled in the Barbican Estate in the northern tip of the City of London ('the City'). Martin Kettle sees this location as isolating the Barbican from the rest of London, making it difficult for the cultural centre to be truly part of the 'rough and tumble of London life'.¹¹⁵ The Centre is owned, funded, and principally founded by the City of London Corporation, the 'governing body of the Square Mile' of the City.¹¹⁶ In financial terms, the City of London provides the majority of the Centre's public funding (£17,615,00 in 2016–17), further subsidized by Arts Council England, from which the Centre received £488,000 in 2016–17 as a National Portfolio Organisation; with an additional £22,398,000 coming from earned income in the same year, the Centre's total income came to £40,501,000, meaning Arts Council funding makes up just one per cent of the Centre's total income.¹¹⁷ As the main source of funding for the Centre, the aims and principles of the City of London thus become reflected in the theatre's programming choices. Jen Harvie identified the Barbican as a 'monumental theatre', following Marvin Carlson's idea of the 'theatre as public monument', a model that incorporates the 'complicit relationship between theatre and market ideologies'.¹¹⁸ These theatres become landmarks utilized by city authorities to 'incorporate and promote [theatre's cultural capital] in their city in order to associate that status with their city and their governance'.¹¹⁹ Harvie is thus critical of the Barbican building and its role as monumental theatre:

Built on an area devastated by Second World War bombing [...] instead of replacing the low-cost housing that had been there before, the Barbican's redevelopment, opened in 1982, brought in tower blocks of expensive private apartments and an arts complex where programming is arguably aimed less at comparatively poor immigrants still neighbouring the Barbican [...] and more at [...] comparatively wealthy City workers.¹²⁰

The Barbican as 'monumental theatre' can thus be read as reflecting the ideologies that govern the City of London, which can be divided into three main aims: to 'contribute to a flourishing society, shape outstanding environments, [and] support a thriving economy'.¹²¹ In fitting in with these aims, the Barbican theatre thus not only has a role maintaining and developing social cohesion and environmental standards, but serves the economic purposes of the City as well. The City of London Corporation's responsibilities have a particular remit: they provide

‘services for residents (and City businesses) in the Square Mile, but not those of other boroughs’.¹²² There is already a tension then between the local priorities of the City and its global outlook. A ‘thriving’ City benefits London, which in turn plays a vital role within Britain and, importantly, its inferred economic position in the world. The City, and the Barbican Centre as an integral cultural hub for the area, thus balances local, national, and global concerns. The Barbican theatre contributes to this vision with its own international agenda, introducing itself on the Barbican website by immediately referring to its global reach: ‘our two theatre spaces play host to the finest international theatre, dance and performance by artists and companies who are challenging the idea of what theatre can be’.¹²³ Despite the theatre’s international outlook, the Barbican’s global vision is somewhat limited when viewing the 2016–17 theatre season as a whole. Two productions from the Schaubühne by Ostermeier and British director Simon McBurney, *The Winter’s Tale* directed by Cheek by Jowl’s Declan Donnellan, Robert Lepage’s one-man show *887*, and three productions directed by Belgian Ivo van Hove: all together, this paints a very male, European-centred portrait of globalization (Canadian Lepage excluded). Thinking about the Ostermeier productions at the Barbican specifically, Brodie reports that the typical audiences for his touring productions are ‘noted for being made up of a significant number of theatre and academic professionals’.¹²⁴ Her observation points to an assumption that Ostermeier’s productions attract an elite, educated audience, professionally employed and with a pre-existing interest in (international) theatre.

Given the Schaubühne’s international agenda — artistic director Ostermeier claims he can ‘only think internationally’ — it comes as no surprise that the Berlin theatre has made the Barbican its London home.¹²⁵ This choice can also be read politically, however. By taking his theatre to the figurative heart of London’s financial sector — in 2018 the City ‘accounted for forty-nine per cent of all London’s financial services employment’ — Ostermeier allows his brand of internationalism to come into contact with that of the City.¹²⁶ ‘You can’t just leave globalisation to the economy and to economists’, Ostermeier has said in an interview, viewing the positive potential of globalized world that, according to Schofield, ‘reveals the mix of left-leaning and more mainstream political rhetoric, typical of what [Ostermeier] has called his aesthetic of Capitalist Realism’.¹²⁷ Carlson describes this aesthetic as presenting a theatre ‘whose characters are trapped in a crushing world unredeemable either by the humanistic vision of the post-war years or the socialist vision of positive political realignment’.¹²⁸ In one sense, the encounter with Ostermeier’s ‘crushing’ on stage worlds continues after the figurative curtain drops as audiences encounter a city space unavoidably associated with global capitalism and, following on from Harvie, an awareness of the people excluded from such spaces. For *Richard III* for example, the dull-suited aristocracy all scrambling for a semblance of power in the kingdom could easily be seen as reflecting the suited workers of the world’s financial districts. However, by bringing his productions consistently to the City of London, Ostermeier also becomes an elite, established part of the City’s vision of economically focused globalization.

The theatrical space and set of *Richard III*, designed by Ostermeier's long-time collaborator Jan Pappelbaum, conjures further interesting ways in which Anglo-German theatrical cultures interact in Ostermeier's work. Pappelbaum has been working at the Schaubühne since Ostermeier took over as artistic director in 2000 and designed all the touring productions that have travelled to the Barbican since then. As work began on *Richard III*, the two collaborated to create an entirely new theatrical performance space at the Schaubühne complex based on 'an Elizabethan theatre', for which *Richard III* would be the first production. Named the 'Berlin "Globe"', Pappelbaum and Ostermeier wanted to create a 'Shakespeare stage' that would 'direct[ly] impact on the actors' play [where] it becomes impossible to ignore the presence of the audience'.¹²⁹ Funded in part by the Friends of the Schaubühne, the construction of this space seems, from the outset, to have held audience experience at the forefront.

For the Schaubühne space (the already curve-shaped Saal C), this became a semi-circular, thrust stage with a tightly packed auditorium, giving the feeling that audience members are 'sitting above each other rather than behind each other'.¹³⁰ This spacing directly references Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, based on the south bank of the River Thames in London. As Kim Solga describes it, the Globe complex 'orients us toward the history of theatre-making in Britain [...] towards our fellow spectators — i.e., toward one another as collaborative cultural agents'. Ultimately, she sees this theatrical space as 'a lesson in shared human spacing, a way of orienting us toward space as collectively embodied: made, and re-made, together'.¹³¹ Solga's repeated and varied use of the verb *to orient* presents the Globe Theatre as an active space that demands an active mode of spectating. But it is also a creative space whose meaning is 're-made' by each audience for each performance. Stephen Purcell describes this as the 'game-like nature of playing at the Globe' that allows for 'audience response to alter acting choices and play a key role in determining meaning', or, as Alessandro Simari summarizes, 'the Globe model is routinely conceived of as a more "collaborative", "classless", "populist", "communal", and "democratic" counter-point to proscenium-arch spaces'.¹³²

In contrast to the open-air Globe Theatre in London, Ostermeier and Pappelbaum's Berlin Globe aimed to create something more sensorial, namely 'the atmosphere of a claustrophobic boiler-room', with the audience 'close enough to hear [the actors] breathe'.¹³³ Such language conjures up Lehmann's definitions of postdramatic space as one that:

Reduces the distance between performers and spectators to such an extent that the physical and physiological proximity (breath, sweat, panting, movement of the musculature, cramp, gaze) masks the mental signification, then a space of a tense *centripetal* dynamic develops, in which theatre becomes a moment of *shared energies* instead of transmitted signs.¹³⁴

Ophelias Zimmer also premiered in this Berlin Globe space, connecting and contrasting Mitchell's production even more concretely with Ostermeier's Shakespeare productions that are also performed there. Despite the German director's intentions, however, the conjoining of space and performance style

seems even in Berlin to have produced something much ‘cooler’ than the ‘boiler room’ Ostermeier was seeking to create. For *Richard III*, there is a vintage, fifties-style microphone hanging down in the middle of Jan Pappelbaum’s set. Richard’s opening soliloquy is whispered into this device, a tactic repeated throughout the performance for some moments of direct address to the audience. This has the effect of actually distancing Eidinger from the audience. He becomes an actor onstage, handling equipment that symbolizes the transfer of power to him as both actor and character. This highlights the performer/ spectator relationship as one of powerful observed versus powerless observer and ends up limiting the ability of Eidinger to engage with the audience and auditorium space as freely as perhaps expected. The Schaubühne Globe thus seems to have been built specifically to facilitate the Ostermeier/ Eidinger brand of performance that prioritizes easy exchange between spectator and performer whilst not pursuing this goal to its fullest extent. By merging this ‘centripetal’ performance space with one that specifically references Shakespeare, the Schaubühne Globe also functions to support Ostermeier’s thesis that Shakespeare ‘was probably the first postdramatic writer and theatre maker creating performance art’.¹³⁵ Rather than orienting audiences towards the ‘history of theatre-making in Britain’, Ostermeier’s Globe invites audiences to thus consider the ways in which German and British theatrical histories might overlap.¹³⁶ His stage layers the Schaubühne’s Shakespeare-as-postdramatic space with one that embodies Shakespeare as a part of British theatrical history.

By constructing this space within the Barbican for *Richard III*, Ostermeier adds another spatial layer to the fold. As a theatre designed both with and as the London home for the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Barbican’s main theatre space is thus ‘haunted’ (to borrow from Marvin Carlson) by the company and its performance history.¹³⁷ Through building his own Globe space in this particular auditorium, Ostermeier layers his own institutional and aesthetic agenda over that of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Ostermeier establishes his own contemporary, ‘global’ space for Shakespeare productions instead, one that challenges any British sense of institutional ‘ownership’ of Shakespeare as a global brand. The G/globe becomes what Fowler observed as a ‘playground’ for Ostermeier’s ensemble, and, through the continued success of his productions abroad, for Ostermeier himself.¹³⁸ The stage, in contrast to Ophelia’s bedroom, becomes a space where (male) bodies are given license to move freely around both the stage and auditorium.

Schofield has argued how connecting Ostermeier with a radical German theatrical culture ought to be challenged. *Richard III* has many of the features Schofield identifies as ‘commonly associated with contemporary German Shakespeare’, namely ‘diegetic and non-diegetic sound’, ‘nudity’, and an ‘anti-illusionary’ scenography.¹³⁹ This production therefore offers those members of the British audience with prior knowledge of German Shakespeare in performance a ‘safe and unsurprising’ piece of German theatre. Similarly, as already noted, it presents the familiar Ostermeier/ Eidinger brand of unpredictable, fourth-wall-defying performance established by their successful partnership for *Hamlet* and which results in solidifying Eidinger’s ‘star’ status. Performing *Richard III* on a stage that

evokes both Shakespeare's Globe and the Royal Shakespeare Company alters the way Ostermeier's theatre can be read. Instead of positioning himself as representing 'Berlin identity', this shows Ostermeier's increasingly global focus. The connection between Ostermeier's Berlin Globe and London's Globe Theatre works to associate the German director's work with mainstream, institutionalized ideas of Shakespeare in performance. In a British context where funding bodies and key players in production contexts increasingly favour diversity in the arts, exemplified through the Arts Council England's focus on funding work that 'represents the diversity of England', this association reveals the limits of his success as an institutionalized brand in Britain.¹⁴⁰ His attitudes towards women and his ethnically homogenous ensemble sit at the other end of a spectrum to, for example, the work of the Globe Theatre's current artistic director Michelle Terry placing diverse bodies, ethnicities, nationalities, dis/abilities, and even audience members on the actual Globe stage. The comparison reveals London's Globe Theatre as more open, inclusive, diverse, and financially accessible (with tickets as cheap as £5) than the space carved out by Ostermeier.

As this chapter has shown, examining *Ophelias Zimmer* as an Anglo-German 'contact zone' draws attention to the ways in which Mitchell engages with, and indeed critiques, elements of both British and German theatrical cultures. Rereading Ostermeier and, in particular, his work adapting Shakespeare through Mitchell has uncovered new aspects of both directors' work, and suggests that the space created through Anglo-German theatrical exchange has both the potential to engage critically with work across borders, whilst at the same time being in danger of reinforcing the inequalities it might, on the surface, be intent on undermining.

Conclusion: British Hospitality and the 'Good Guest'

With space forming one thematic thread in this chapter, further questions arise concerning the politics of these spaces, and their social configuration: who is welcomed, and who is not. The picture thus far of Ostermeier's reception in Britain and Mitchell's corresponding relationship with Anglo-German theatrical cultures gains further clarity when viewed through Margherita Laera's 'ethics of reciprocal hospitality in theatre practice', here drawing on Jacques Derrida's work on hospitality and ethics.¹⁴¹ As we have seen, Ostermeier has been a regular 'guest' in Britain since the turn of the twenty-first century. The term *guest* is indeed implied by the German word used to describe his touring productions away from the Schaubühne's stages: *Gastspiele* (literally 'guest plays' or 'guest production'). Laera combines Derrida's concepts with her work in translation studies and transnational performance practices. For Kevin O'Gorman, if Ostermeier and his theatrical productions can be viewed as 'guests' being 'hosted' by a British theatrical system, then the expectation would be that the guest 'adopt the customs of its host [...] in order to have the best chance of being welcomed, and not rejected, by the owner of the house'. O'Gorman continues that for theatre practice, this would mean 'conforming to the hosts' stage conventions [...], acting styles, visual

aesthetics, conceptions of humour, genre, discourse and ideology'.¹⁴² Ostermeier's trajectory as 'guest' in Britain started with him being a 'bad boy' who rattled the mainstream status quo of Shakespeare in performance in Britain, making him, to a certain extent, a 'bad guest'. In a sense, Hamlet's storming into Ophelia's bedroom in *Ophelias Zimmer*, his unwillingness to be a 'good guest', and the license afforded to him as a male guest reflect Ostermeier's storming of the British theatre scene. As Schofield has argued, however, *Richard III* changed the perception of Ostermeier by his host. Ostermeier is now considered a 'good guest' by adhering more closely to the expectations of his host in all the ways described by Schofield above: his use of sound, male nudity, and a maverick, fourth-wall-defying central performance by Eidinger. If anything, with *Richard III*, Ostermeier's host expected more from its guest at a time when the host really needed its guest to offer something 'transgressive'.

Ophelias Zimmer offers a way of moving beyond Schofield's reading of Ostermeier's reception in Britain. Mitchell is a regular guest in Germany; when she returns 'home' to Britain, the souvenirs of her stay abroad are not necessarily welcomed. As Solga puts it, Mitchell seems 'pretty happy with the house she has built herself' outside a gendered and masculine mainstream of Shakespeare in performance in Britain.¹⁴³ *Ophelias Zimmer* sees Mitchell criticizing her German host and refusing the role of compliant guest through critically engaging with Ostermeier's work from a feminist perspective. At the same time, through her rejection of any one aesthetic label, her mixed reception from critics, and the ways in which this production critically engages with the theatrical status quo, Mitchell critiques both Shakespeare performance in Britain and a mainstream British acceptance of Ostermeier's brand of German Shakespeare.

Rather than importing German-language productions then, these case studies have suggested the transgressive potential of theatre as a 'contact zone' for the interweaving of different performance cultures and critical engagement with those cultures. Whilst each of the productions analysed above creates its own cross-cultural 'contact zone', seen together they introduce a critical dimension to the space(s) created through Anglo-German theatre. *Ophelias Zimmer* in particular shows how a production can, over or through time, affect readings of other productions in both the past and future. These productions come into conversation within a wider Anglo-German 'contact zone', feeding back and forwards to each other and thereby creating a potential future framework for understanding Anglo-German theatre. Brexit, as is perhaps obvious, puts this type of theatre under threat by adding additional restrictions to free movement between the UK and other EU nation states. It leaves, as Ostermeier feared, 'globalisation to the economy and economists'.¹⁴⁴ Perhaps most importantly, in contrast to Chapter 1 which defined Germanness through cultural difference, these case studies suggest how the term is in fact more porous than those examples of theatre in translation initially suggested.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. Wodak, 'Language, Power and Identity', p. 216. For full discussion of the term 'co-construct', see the Introduction.
2. Lebert, 'Der Radikale'.
3. See Boenisch and Ostermeier, *The Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier*; Schofield, 'Shakespeare beyond the Trenches'. These arguments will be explored in detail below.
4. Brodie, *The Translator on Stage*, p. 25.
5. Katie Mitchell and Chloe Lamford, 'Katie Mitchell and Chloe Lamford Discuss Ophelias Zimmer', Royal Court Theatre, 6 May 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGUTiCr3Snk&t=111s>> [accessed 1 June 2024].
6. 'About Us', Royal Court Theatre <<https://royalcourttheatre.com/about>> [accessed 2 April 2020].
7. Brodie, *The Translator on Stage*, p. 26.
8. 'About Us', Royal Court Theatre.
9. Brodie, *The Translator on Stage*, p. 26.
10. English Stage Company, *Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2016* (English Stage Company Limited, 2016), p. 4.
11. Ibid.
12. Elaine Aston and Mark O'Thomas, *Royal Court: International* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 132.
13. Cristina Marinetti, 'Transnational, Multilingual, and Post-Dramatic: Rethinking the Location of Translation in Contemporary Theatre', in *Theatre Translation in Performance*, ed. by Silvia Bigliuzzi, Peter Kofler, and Paola Ambrosi (Routledge, 2013), pp. 27–37 (p. 33). Knowles, *Theatre & Interculturalism*, p. 6.
14. Simon Stephens, 'Alice Birch Talks to Simon Stephens', Royal Court Theatre, August 2017 <<https://royalcourttheatre.com/podcast/s2-ep1-alice-birch-talks-simon-stephens>> [accessed 31 March 2020].
15. 'Free Movement — EU Nationals', European Commission <<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=457>> [accessed 2 April 2020].
16. Since officially leaving the EU in January 2020, freedom of movement has ended and theatre artists coming from the EU to work in the UK for twelve months or more must now apply for a Global Talent visa, a process that includes relatively high administrative costs (£716 per person plus an immigration healthcare surcharge of £624 per year). For shorter term work (twelve months or under), a Creative Worker visa is required which relies on sponsorship to work in the UK, an Equity minimum salary and having at least £1270 in the bank (in addition to paying a £298 application fee and the healthcare surcharge of £624). Whilst some of the artists referenced here who work at large institutions might fit the criteria listed above, these requirements would exclude emerging or early career artists from gaining initial international experience in the UK, as well as artists offered work on lower salaries (i.e. in fringe theatre) or who are on low incomes already. See 'Apply for the Global Talent Visa', HM Government <<https://www.gov.uk/global-talent>> [accessed 2 January 2024].
17. Stephens, 'Alice Birch Talks to Simon Stephens'.
18. Figure taken from Amanda Mabillard, 'Shakespeare: General Q & A', Shakespeare Online, 20 August 2000 <<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/faq/mostlinem.html>> [accessed 31 March 2020].
19. Mitchell and Lamford, 'Katie Mitchell and Chloe Lamford Discuss Ophelias Zimmer'.
20. Fred Turner and Christine Larson, 'Network Celebrity: Entrepreneurship and the New Public Intellectuals', *Public Culture* (2015), pp. 53–84 (p. 55), doi:10.1215/08992363-2798343.
21. Rebecca Braun, 'The World Author in Us All: Conceptualising Fame and Agency in the Global Literary Market', *Celebrity Studies*, 7.4 (2016), pp. 457–75 (p. 472).
22. Matt Trueman, 'Katie Mitchell: "I was uncomfortable coming back to work in the UK"', *The Stage*, 26 February 2016 <<https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/43477>> [1 June 2024].
23. Benjamin Fowler, 'Re-Scripting Realism: Katie Mitchell and Thomas Ostermeier at the Schaubühne', in *The Schaubühne Berlin under Thomas Ostermeier*, ed. by Boenisch, pp. 141–58 (p. 144).

24. Although of course the development of Brecht's theatrical aesthetics was influenced by, and responding to, innovations of Russian artists such as Vsevolod Meyerhold and Konstantin Stanislavsky.
25. Benjamin Fowler and Alex Eales, 'Immersive Worlds: Designing Katie Mitchell's Theatre', in *The Theatre of Katie Mitchell*, ed. by Benjamin Fowler (Routledge, 2019), pp. 12–38 (p. 15).
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.
27. Benjamin Fowler, '(Re)mediating the Modernist Novel: Katie Mitchell's Live Cinema Work', in *Contemporary Approaches to Adaptation in Theatre*, ed. by Kara Reilly (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 97–120 (p. 98).
28. Dan Rebellato and Kim Solga, 'Katie Mitchell and the Politics of Naturalist Theatre', in *The Theatre of Katie Mitchell*, ed. by Benjamin Fowler (Routledge, 2019), pp. 39–71 (p. 58).
29. Nicholas Potter, "'I make the work I want to make": Orlando's Katie Mitchell', *ExBerliner*, 17 October 2019 <https://www.exberliner.com/features/people/katie-mitchell-interview/?fbclid=IwARoPyoArBtFKmDIM8YDb6EM_QS7suOskiwiorIfNmTkK1uPQ7QR38wequUY> [accessed 1 June 2024].
30. Rosemary Malague, 'Theatrical Realism as Feminist Intervention: Katie Mitchell's 2011 Staging of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 31.4 (2013), pp. 623–45 (p. 623), doi:10.1353/shb.2013.0073.
31. Nicola Shaughnessy, 'Wreaking Havoc: The Feeling of What Happens in Katie Mitchell's *Cleansed*', *Performance Research*, 24.5 (2019), pp. 123–31 (pp. 123–30), doi:10.1080/13528165.2019.1671729.
32. Cornford and Svich, 'Katie Mitchell's Theatre', pp. 143, 147.
33. Cornford, 'Wilful Distraction', pp. 87, 88.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
35. Priscilla Layne and Lizzie Stewart, 'Racialisation and Contemporary German Theatre', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Theatre and Race*, ed. by Tiziana Morosetti and Osita Okagbue (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 39–60 (p. 54).
36. Cornford and Svich, 'Katie Mitchell's Theatre', p. 146.
37. Sarah Hemming, "'Ophelias Zimmer": A Spin-Off of "Hamlet"', *Financial Times*, 11 December 2015 <<https://www.ft.com/content/3258fdf4-9a9c-11e5-a5c1-ca5db4add713>> [accessed 22 January 2020].
38. This radicalism is noted in Fowler, 'Introduction', in *The Theatre of Katie Mitchell*, ed. by Fowler, p. 1.
39. Aneta Mancewicz, *Hamlet after Deconstruction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), [n.p.].
40. See Fowler, 'Re-Scripting Realism'; and Mancewicz, *Hamlet after Deconstruction*, where the work of both directors is addressed together.
41. Katie Mitchell, 'Ophelias Zimmer: Proben-Trailer der Schaubühne Berlin', December 2015 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-9CGCtyOu4&t=4s>> [accessed 1 June 2024].
42. 'Ophelias Zimmer', Royal Court Theatre <<https://royalcourttheatre.com/whats-on/ophelias-zimmer>> [accessed 6 February 2020].
43. Mitchell and Lamford, "'Katie Mitchell and Chloe Lamford Discuss Ophelias Zimmer'.
44. All quotations from *Ophelias Zimmer* are taken from Katie Mitchell, *Ophelias Zimmer*, recording, 20 May 2016, National Video Archive of Performance, Theatre and Performance Archive, London.
45. Mancewicz, *Hamlet after Deconstruction*, [n.p.].
46. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Penguin, 2000).
47. Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', p. 148.
48. Mancewicz, *Hamlet after Deconstruction*, [n.p.].
49. Dominic Cavendish, 'Ophelias Zimmer at the Royal Court is a Far-Flung Feminist Take on Hamlet — Review', *Daily Telegraph*, 18 May 2016 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/ophelias-zimmer-at-the-royal-court-is-a-far-flung-feminist-take>> [accessed 22 January 2020]. See also Lyn Gardner, 'Ophelias Zimmer Review — Katie Mitchell Brings Hamlet's Real Ghost into Focus', *Guardian*, 18 May 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/may/18/ophelias-zimmer-review-katie-mitchell-hamlet-royal-court>> [accessed January 22,

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50. Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. by Karen Jürs-Munby (Routledge, 2006).
51. Benjamin Fowler, 'Debating Postdramatic Theatre (Astr, Dallas, November 2013)', *Benjamindotfowler*, 17 November 2013 <<https://benjamindotfowler.wordpress.com/2013/11/17/debating-postdramatic-theatre-astr-dallas-november-2013/>> [accessed 2 April 2020].
52. Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, pp. 155, 156.
53. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (Routledge, 1990), p. 33.
54. Solga, *Theory for Theatre Studies*, p. 35.
55. Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 150.
56. Esther Slevogt, 'Du opfer!', *Nachtkritik*, 8 December 2015 <https://nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11880:ophelias-zimmer-an-der-schaubuehne-berlin-sperren-alice-birch-und-katie-mitchell-ophelia-ins-gefaengnis-der-unterdrueckten-frau&catid=34:schaubuehne-berlin&Itemid=100476> [accessed on 2 February 2020].
57. Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, pp. 156, 157.
58. Linda Bamber, *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford University Press, 1982), p. 9.
59. This choice may also be influenced in part by the need to appeal to audiences in Germany during the Berlin run as well. Lehmann's study was first published in German, although it did use a wide range of examples from different cultural contexts throughout.
60. Boenisch and Ostermeier, *The Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier*, p. 1.
61. 'Richard III', *Schaubühne* <<https://www.schaubuehne.de/en/produktionen/richardiii.html>> [accessed 2 March 2020].
62. Boenisch and Ostermeier, *The Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier*, p. 1.
63. Charles Isherwood, 'A Nora Who Goes beyond Closing her Prison's Door', *New York Times*, 11 November 2004 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/11/theater/reviews/a-nora-who-goes-beyond-closing-her-prisons-door.html>> [accessed 1 June 2024].
64. Andrew Dickson, 'Thomas Ostermeier: "Hamlet? The Play's a Mess"', *Guardian*, 13 November 2011 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/nov/13/thomas-ostermeier-hamlet-schaubuhne>> [accessed 1 June 2024].
65. Schofield, 'Shakespeare beyond the Trenches', p. 111.
66. Quoted in Gerhard Jörder, *Backstage Ostermeier*, trans. by James J. Conway (Theater der Zeit, 2016), p. 13.
67. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 12.
68. 'Jahresbericht Bühnen und Orchesterbetriebe 2016', *Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Europe*, February 2017 <<file:///C:/Users/Owner/Downloads/jahresbericht-2016-finanzielle-entwicklung-2.pdf>> [accessed 16 March 2020].
69. Schofield, 'Shakespeare beyond the Trenches', p. 107.
70. Jake Orr, 'Review: Hamlet', *A Younger Theatre*, 4 December 2011 <<https://www.ayoungertheatre.com/review-hamlet-thomas-ostermeier-schaubuehne-barbican-centre>> [accessed 1 June 2024].
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72. Charlotte Higgins, 'This Week's Art Diary', *Guardian*, 6 December 2011 <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/charlottehigginsblog/2011/dec/06/arts-diary-rsc-ostermeier-alasdair-gray-turner>> [accessed 1 June 2024].
73. Jörder, *Backstage Ostermeier*, p. 106.
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CHAPTER 3



Travelling Practices: Designers and Directors Working in Britain

In 2019, Matt Trueman, theatre critic for the British weekly magazine *The Stage*, invited readers to ‘meet the German artists revolutionizing UK stage design’, interviewing and referencing the international work of stage, costume, and lighting designers including Hildegard Bechtler, Anna Fleischle, and Miriam Buether. Trueman’s article asserts that if ‘German theatre’s influence is visible here, it has had most impact on stage design’.¹ This continues a trend in British critical and scholarly writing that points towards German theatre design specifically as bringing innovation, experimentation, and revolution to a comparatively ‘pictorial’ or ‘realistic’ design tradition in Britain, despite the number of well-known British practitioners from Edward Gordon Craig to Bunny Christie and Georgia Lowe, whose work troubles this claim.² Nevertheless, this trend finds traces in the moment the Berliner Ensemble toured to London in 1956, the impact of which ‘manifested itself [...] in stage design and lighting and in the use of music’, in the words of Martin Esslin, who, writing somewhat hyperbolically in 1966, went so far as to argue that ‘practically *all* British stage design, outside the area of the most old-fashioned drawing-room comedy, today derives from the work of the main Brechtian designers, Neher, Otto, and von Appen’.³

This chapter thus takes the binary construction between innovative, non-naturalistic German theatre design and a more placid, ‘realistic’ British tradition as a provocation to explore the work of German designers working in Britain, and to consider to what extent these designers can be seen as embodying, or complicating, an idea of a German theatre design aesthetic. It not only asks how theatrical institutions facilitate the movement of practitioners between Germany and Britain, but considers the wider question of whether Germanness itself can be manifested in stage design, taking German-based designers Johannes Schütz and Michaela Barth’s work with that of British director Joe Hill-Gibbins on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Young Vic, 2017) and German-born, Britain-based designer Hildegard Bechtler’s work with Robert Icke on *The Doctor* (Almeida Theatre, 2019) as case studies. The former production provides an example of German-based practitioners working across borders using particular design elements to engage with a British idea of

Germanness on stage, whilst the latter case study focuses on two artists based in Britain who actively engage with and expand upon ideas of German theatrical culture, and whose respective careers have a transnational trajectory.

While in previous chapters, analysis of stage design and scenography has always been present, here it moves to the centre of my focus. This attention on scenography allows for a specific engagement with how stage design and designers affect the production of theatrical and institutional space, and the relation of this to a conception of Germanness. Trueman, introduced above, has argued that ‘if British and German theatre really are closer together, it’s partly because the world is getting smaller’, thereby incorporating questions about transnational networks, ease of international travel, globalization, and their effects on intercultural theatre into his discussion of Anglo-German theatrical exchange.⁴ As such, I am also interested in exploring whether these designers can be seen as engaging in Anglo-German intercultural practice, and if so, asking how space for this intercultural practice is performed or established through the scenography of these productions. Although the term *interculturalism* has rightly come under criticism for the way it implies a ‘sharp division between “our” culture and “other” cultures’, I am interested here in drawing out how practitioners engage with cultural difference, seeing their work as a response to how certain signifiers themselves gain new meaning through performance.⁵

Following the structure of analysis from previous chapters in this book, I consider here the institutional framing of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Doctor*, before moving on to analysing the onstage scenographic elements of each production. Performance analysis of *The Doctor* is based on my own experience of seeing a preview performance on 10 August 2019, as well as on production photographs available on the Almeida’s website and the production text published by Oberon Books in 2019. My analysis of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is based on my own observations watching the performance on 25 February 2017, as well as production photographs kindly provided by the Young Vic marketing department. Email interviews with costume designer Michaela Barth, who also shared private rehearsal photographs with me, provide useful background information relating to the scenography of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, whilst a telephone interview with Hildegard Bechtler provided useful background information on her work with Robert Icke and the impulses behind their work together on *The Doctor*.

The Young Vic Theatre: Bringing the World to Lambeth and Southwark

A Midsummer Night’s Dream ran at the Young Vic in London from 16 February to 1 April 2017. Located on the border between the London boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark, the Young Vic sits just down the road from the Old Vic on The Cut, a fairly bustling street of pubs, restaurants, theatres, and rehearsal spaces just south-east of Waterloo Station on the south bank of the Thames. The theatre’s geographic location testifies to its history. Originally an ‘offshoot’ of the Old Vic, the Young Vic ‘made a break for freedom’ in 1974 under the directorship of Frank Dunlop.⁶

Under Dunlop, the company was conceived as ‘a “paperback” theatre, where high-quality work would be made available to all at low cost’, with the ‘adaptive re-use’ theatre building itself constructed from an old butcher’s shop and World War Two bombsite.⁷ Fast-forwarding to the twenty-first century, David Lan was artistic director from 2000 to 2018, overseeing an extensive regeneration project that saw the construction of a new two-storey social space, one large auditorium and two smaller performance spaces on the same site. Part of this refurbished aesthetic stripped the signage from the front of the theatre to reveal the original butcher shop front, adorned with the words ‘Young Vic Theatre’ lettered in neon, a choice later mirrored by the Old Vic’s 2016 rebranding which similarly sees a layering of a theatre’s past and present at the forefront of the building’s architecture, as discussed in Chapter 1.

A key feature of this redevelopment is the theatre’s Main House auditorium, a space described on the Young Vic’s website as ‘the most flexible auditorium in London’ giving ‘theatre artists the freedom to create without barriers’.⁸ Visiting the Main House is indeed a joyfully unpredictable event, with the performance space and audience seating arrangement often completely refigured for each different production, thereby creating a recurring sense of surprise and a need for spatial reorientation even for the most regular Young Vic theatregoers. For designers and scenographers, the open and adaptable auditorium becomes an opportunity to create what Lan has called a ‘one room’ space, where audience and performers come together in a shared environment, rather than experiencing an architecturally divided ‘two rooms’ theatre space.⁹ As such, the spatial placement of audiences at the Young Vic becomes by its very conception intertwined with the space created for performance.

This sense of giving artists creative freedom ‘without barriers’ extends to Lan’s programming and theatre-making philosophy. Framed in opposition to the Royal Court as a ‘writer’s theatre’, Lan has called the Young Vic ‘very much a director’s theatre’.¹⁰ Although this phrasing hints at the well-known German term *Regietheater*, Lan sought to move away from ‘the cliché of what the Germans call a “directors’ theatre”’, indicating both a debt to, but still an ambivalence towards, that particular element of German theatrical culture in the British context.¹¹ Whilst Lan was keen for young directors (such as Joe Hill-Gibbins) to travel to Germany and learn from theatre-makers there, his wariness of ‘cliché’ suggests this theatrical form still requires moderation or mediation before being introduced to audiences in Britain. His motto of theatre ‘without barriers’ is also reflected not just in programming choices but also through the educational schemes offered by the theatre, which include ‘a resident assistant’s scheme, awards and an online network offering access to workshops and collaborative opportunities’.¹² Similarly, the theatre’s Directors Programme has been running since 2000. This focus, combined with Lan’s ‘eclectic internationalism’, means talent from France, Norway, Iceland, Belarus, and Palestine have been invited to work and train at the theatre, and Lan has programmed plays from Germany, Syria, South Africa, and Yoruba-speaking territories.¹³ In this sense, the Young Vic can be seen as striving to overcome national barriers through the

employment and training of international practitioners. For *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the mix of German practitioners and artists based in Britain is suggestive of how the Young Vic operates to facilitate cross-cultural theatrical exchange, with a British director (Joe Hill-Gibbins) teaming up with German set and lighting designer Johannes Schütz and costume designer Michaela Barth. Johanna Meyer, the German-based assistant designer on the production, ran a workshop on the 'German design aesthetic' for the Young Vic during its 2016–17 season, an example of the theatre reaching across borders to educate and inspire artists in Britain, and thus indicating the high level of cultural capital embodied in this so-called (but 'real' for the practitioners involved) 'German design aesthetic'.¹⁴ At the same time, this description upholds a sense that there exists a specific, national design aesthetic that can be called 'German' — a contention I argue the production itself addresses.

Despite the theatre having a broad international outlook, Kim Solga has also stressed the theatre's commitment to its most immediate communities: it offers a privately-funded free ticketing scheme to local residents in Southwark and styles itself as a 'social hub'.¹⁵ Solga discusses the theatre's continued motto 'it's a big world in here', and points to the Young Vic's ticket schemes as a way in which it offers residents a 'home' at the theatre that is 'not driven by an underlying economic imperative', inviting local residents in without then making demands on their economic capital.¹⁶ For Solga, the Young Vic also offers a theatrical 'home' through its choice of programming that establishes a shared set of political values with its audience.¹⁷ This 'offer' extends to theatre practitioners, with Billington applauding the work of Lan for providing 'Peter Brook with a permanent London home that led to such marvellous productions as the folkloristic *The Suit*, *The Valley of Astonishment* [...] and *Battlefield*'.¹⁸ As an artist perhaps now synonymous with a particular brand of 'universalist' intercultural theatre, Brook's choice of 'home' adds another layer to the Young Vic's brand and invites broader questions about its engagement with theatre from different national cultures.¹⁹ 'Universalist', or hegemonic intercultural theatre (HIT), looks at global (usually Eastern) theatrical traditions and incorporates them into Western performances as a means of finding a universal theatrical language.²⁰ This form of intercultural theatre is frequently criticized for reinforcing an East-West binary that assumes a global cultural dominance of Western theatre-makers who then orchestrate their own Western 'universalist' vision of world theatre.²¹ In light of Brook's famous 1970 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I ask whether Hill-Gibbins's production uses scenography to engage with Brook's intercultural legacy, exploring how previous productions 'haunt' Hill-Gibbins's adaptation of Shakespeare's text.²² I am interested in seeing to what extent this links with how the production deals with a notion of inviting the 'world' — or in this case, German theatre practitioners — into a localized 'home' at the Young Vic. Do the intercultural aspects of this production imply an imbalanced power relation between British and German cultures or theatrical traditions?

A Midsummer Night's Dream was scheduled as part of a programme that included an international co-production between the Young Vic and Cape Town-based company Isango Ensemble and a new adaptation of Spanish writer Federico García

Lorca's *Yerma*. Hill-Gibbins's *Midsummer Night's Dream* was directly preceded by a revival of *Blue/Orange*, a play described by writer Joe Penhall as unpicking the 'cultural imperialism of being English', and *Once in a Lifetime*, a satirical comedy about the transition from the silent movie era to talkies.²³ As this programme was announced three months after the EU Referendum vote in the UK, it could easily be read as offering a rebuttal to some of the Vote Leave campaign's themes of British sovereignty and the sense that the UK could easily 'go it alone' without the direct political or financial support of its continental European neighbours — namely by addressing themes of cultural transition and imperialism whilst at the same time offering work based on international sources or with an international production background. Hill-Gibbins's production was directly followed by a restaging of Bertolt Brecht's *Das Leben des Galilei (Life of Galileo)* directed by Joe Wright. The interplay of (scientific) expertise and politics, the expert (Galilei) the state refuses to listen to, warns against the discourse in the lead-up to the EU referendum that challenged the British public's trust of experts.²⁴ Furthermore, this production indicates the value placed on German theatrical culture as a sign of continued engagement with European theatre for this season of work in the theatre's first wave of post-referendum productions. The theatre also erected an EU flag on the foyer bar balcony in 2016 which acted as a reminder to visitors and passers-by of its support of membership of the EU. The timing of this production therefore asks that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* be read with the politics of national cultural production, Brexit, and the transnational movement of artists in mind.

In a similar vein to Lan and the Young Vic theatre's institutional goals, director Hill-Gibbins argues for international theatrical exchange specifically as a way of developing theatre work in Britain. He finds 'the Little Englander "we do theatre best over here" attitude embarrassing. Why can't we all be in conversation with each other?'²⁵ *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and its Anglo-German creative team thus offers a crucial example of how this exchange, or 'conversation', can take place practically. Hill-Gibbins was thus able to construct a core creative team that worked together across two capital cities (the set model was built in Berlin, where Barth and Schütz were based) despite working on a show produced solely by the Young Vic, as opposed to being an international co-production established to facilitate international artistic exchange in the vein of *Ophelias Zimmer*, discussed in Chapter 2.

International exchange has certainly shaped the career of the director in charge of the project. Hill-Gibbins is often presented in the British press as a 'radical' director reimagining classic texts for contemporary audiences.²⁶ In 2018, he directed his first German language production (*Mary Page Marlowe*) at Theater Basel and has since continued working in Germany through opera, most recently working together with Schütz on *Greek* (Staatsoper Hannover, 2021). Comparing Hill-Gibbins to Emma Rice and Peter Brook, theatre critic Matt Trueman sees him as 'a different sort of director' who 'doesn't impose a signature style on plays, but nor is he the sort of director to disappear by serving the text first and foremost. He's more unpredictable than all that'.²⁷ His introduction of sex dolls into *Measure*

for *Measure* (2016), a food fight to *The Changeling* in 2012, and his ‘mud and blood-spattered versions of Shakespeare’ have worked towards giving the director the title of ‘provocateur’.²⁸ The reception of Hill-Gibbins thus values his work in effectively reinventing classic texts for contemporary audiences in a non-illusionist, non-naturalistic style.

The British reception of Johannes Schütz similarly frames the work of the German-based lighting and set designer as radical. Schütz has worked extensively across Germany as well as internationally. His work has been invited to the Berliner Theatertreffen, Germany’s most prestigious theatre-award festival, on multiple occasions since 1993, most recently in 2020 for his work on Johans Simon’s production of *Hamlet* at the Schauspielhaus Bochum. The transnational nature of Schütz’s career means that he had worked with theatres in Britain prior to his work with Hill-Gibbins. He was first introduced to London theatre audiences through his work designing the set for the Royal Court and Schaubühne Berlin’s co-production of *Over There* (directed by Ramin Gray and Mark Ravenhill) in 2009, the first collaborative project between these two theatres. Schütz then worked with the Young Vic for the first time in 2013 on *Three Sisters* (directed by Benedict Andrews). Schütz’s frequent collaborations with director Polly Findlay have taken his designs to the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon (*The Merchant of Venice*, 2015) as well as to HOME Manchester (*Ghosts*, 2016). Reviewing the former production, both Michael Billington and Susannah Clapp criticized the role of Schütz’s designs in failing to create a specific sense of place.²⁹ Billington viewed *Big and Small*, a 2012 production at the Barbican for which Schütz worked as designer, as being a ‘strange mix of realism and expressionism’.³⁰ For *Three Sisters*, Schütz designed ‘a mound of mud instead of the forest of trees that customarily surrounds the sisters’ country mansion’ and the cast ‘were shocked when they first saw it’.³¹ These early reviews introduce a couple of key issues in the reception of Schütz’s work in the British arts media. Firstly, they suggest Schütz’s designs defy easy or binary categorizations (naturalistic, realistic) in ways that seem transgressive or, at least, ‘shocking’. Secondly, they take issue with how Schütz’s designs on the surface refuse to delineate a specific time or space in a recognizably naturalistic way. Rather than a problem, I see these choices as making demands on the audience to view the space of performance scenographically, or at least, in a way that extends beyond the onstage world of the play.

The invitation to Schütz to deliver the Edward Gordon Craig Lecture at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London in 2019 indicates an increasing academic interest in his work in Britain, and links Schütz’s design work directly to the innovative scenographic tradition of Craig. Organizer Peter Boenisch drew attention to the ‘radical clarity’ of Schütz’s work in his introduction to the event,³² a view echoed in the German arts media, where Schütz’s work is identified as ‘einfach, klar und radikal’ [simple, clear and radical] and ‘die Gegenwelt des Überfüllten’ [the opposite of overstuffed].³³ Once again, Schütz’s designs are noted for their supposedly transgressive elements, or radicalism, one of which is the recurrent device and/or theme of emptiness in his work that perhaps contributes to this supposed radicalism. For Schütz, ‘eine gewisse Leere ist wohltuend’ [a certain

emptiness is good for you].³⁴ He evokes Peter Brook's well-known description of theatre as an 'empty space': 'eine vernünftige Bühne ist a priori leer, weil sie erst mit dem gefüllt wird, was auf ihr stattfindet. Und je leerer sie ist, desto besser kann man sich auf das konzentrieren, was die Darsteller auf ihr machen' [a sensible stage is a priori empty, because it is first filled with what happens on it. And the emptier it is, the better one can concentrate on what the performers are doing on it].³⁵ Schütz appears to value stages that provide space for actors to perform in, whilst perhaps contradictorily still creating instantly recognizable spaces with sometimes imposing abstract shapes. As Sodja Lotker and Richard Gough have provocatively argued, in considering scenography 'there is no such thing as an empty space (as once proposed by Peter Brook [...]) — every space is an environment'.³⁶ This consideration creates a tension in Schütz's work between the perceived emptiness of his stage spaces and how this emptiness in turn can create meaning. For *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and this chapter, key questions will be around the cultural politics of this 'emptiness', asking how the scenography of the production relates to the mode of Anglo-German theatrical movement happening behind the scenes. After introducing *The Doctor's* creative team and institutional context, my analysis follows two strands: first, I consider how Schütz reshaped the Young Vic's auditorium and how the scenography affects the meaning-making in performance; second, I explore the ways in which this scenography is 'haunted', to use Carlson's phrase, by previous incarnations of Shakespeare performed in both English and German. Seen together, these two strands establish a theatrical space that playfully engages with expectations of Anglo-German theatre and how this intercultural practice is manifested in performance.

Hildegard Bechtler, Robert Icke, and the Almeida Theatre: Insiders' Outsiders

The creative team involved in my second case study has proved similarly provocative for the British arts media. *The Doctor* ran at the Almeida in north London from 10 August to 28 September 2019 before transferring to the Duke of York's Theatre in London's West End in September 2022. Opened in 1981, the Almeida was initially renowned for its International Festival of Music and hosting of international artists and companies. In their book detailing the history of London theatres, Michael Coveney and Peter Dazeley place the Almeida alongside the Young Vic in a chapter on 'informal delights', placing both theatres outside what could be described as the mainstream or 'popular' theatres in the capital.³⁷ Jonathan Kent and Ian McDiarmid took over as artistic directors in 1990, heralding 'a decade of galloping sponsorship, star power, glamour, and stage design, starting, ironically, to obscure the brickwork once again'.³⁸ Rupert Goold, artistic director from 2013 to 2025, continues this trend towards high profile, commercially successful productions, with a directorship most prominently defined as a time when 'the West End and Broadway transfers intensified'.³⁹

Continuing this history of star casting, the production poster for *The Doctor* certainly banks on the symbolic capital of its lead actor, Juliet Stevenson, to market Icke's new adaptation of German-language source material (see Figure 3.1).

The actor is well-known nationally and internationally for her BAFTA-winning performance in *Truly, Madly, Deeply* (1991) as well as various high-profile roles in theatre, film, and television. As was the case with John Boyega's presence on the *Woyzeck* poster discussed in Chapter 1, this poster focuses on the celebrity profile of its lead actor, with Stevenson alone against a pale blue/grey background, dressed in a medical white coat and a large collection of multi-coloured lanyards. Whilst the former was read as a means of attracting a new 'crowd' to the Old Vic, the use of Stevenson offers Almeida audiences a dose of what they have come to expect from an Icke production in that she had been cast in two of his other productions since 2016 (*Mary Stuart* and *Hamlet*). If a lanyard can be seen as symbolic of institutional authority and personal identity, this image also pre-emptively addresses the production's attention to identity politics as a key theme. Staring defiantly out towards the viewer, Stevenson is photographed with a motion blur, indicating an in-betweenness, or precariousness, of position, of authority, and of identity. Neither fully in one position nor in the other, the figure is in a constant state of motion, suggestive, perhaps, of the production's stance on identity as an evolving and changeable concept. Furthermore, the play was advertised on the Almeida's website as being 'very freely adapted from Arthur Schnitzler's Professor Bernhardt'.⁴⁰ Rather than using the more recognizable British phrase 'a new version by...', Icke playfully nods towards the German phrase *frei nach* (literally 'freely after') often used to describe a variety of forms of adaptation in a German theatrical context. On the one hand, Icke alerts a knowing audience familiar with the German language to his interest in German-language theatrical culture. On the other hand, the foregrounding of Stevenson as an artist familiar to Almeida audiences reassures those 'not in know' (i.e. unfamiliar with German-language theatrical cultures) that the production does not depart too much from the expected Almeida brand of theatre, and will not be, despite the German-language source text, 'too Austrian'.

As such, the poster cements the celebrity status of Stevenson as an established actor familiar to Almeida audiences, as well as suggesting that the theatre can be relied upon to produce commercially successful plays that give their creative teams an internationally renowned profile. That said, Brodie has argued that the Almeida's affiliate rather than full membership of the Society of London Theatres (SOLT), as well as its place outside London's central West End theatre district, indicates its desire to appear 'beyond the boundaries' and 'alternative'.⁴¹ This is further reflected in the theatre's desire to produce 'brave work' with artists willing to take artistic risks.⁴² Its risk-taking sensibility jars with the 'risk-averse' image of London's West End, giving the impression that the Almeida takes on the position as perhaps the 'insider's outsider' theatre.⁴³ This intersection between outsider/insider can be projected onto the two creatives in this case study by whom I am most interested: Hildegard Bechtler and Robert Icke. Their collaboration on *The Doctor* continues a working relationship that started with Icke's *Oresteia* at the Almeida in 2015.

Bechtler occupies an intriguing place in discussions around British and German theatre and theatre design. Since moving to London in 1970, she has worked extensively at some of Britain's largest theatres. She also works internationally at



FIG. 3.1. Poster for *The Doctor*, Almeida Theatre, 2019. Image: Nadav Kander.

the Toneelgroep Amsterdam with Icke, and she has designed sets for international opera productions at the Salzburg Festival and Berlin Staatsoper. Both her agent's website and interviews in the British press are keen to narrate Bechtler's journey from Germany to London: 'Hildegard Bechtler was born in Stuttgart, trained at Camberwell and Central St. Martin's Schools, lives in London'.⁴⁴ As such, she is simultaneously seen as bringing 'an outsider's eye to British theatre' — despite training in Britain and working regularly at some of the most well-established theatres in Britain — whilst at the same time being 'one of our busiest and most sought-after stage designers'.⁴⁵ Smurthwaite's 'our' invites Bechtler to be seen as a British artist, whereas Jays's descriptor draws attention to her country of birth as an important factor in how she reads and views theatre in Britain as a German 'outsider'. Despite the fact that Bechtler has worked mainly in Britain throughout her career, Trueman looks to her for insight into German theatre design in his article 'German Artists Revolutionising UK Stage Design', seeing her not only as an 'exponent' of German theatre but also, by implication, as a carrier of a German way of doing stage design. In this sense, Bechtler falls victim to what German-born, British-trained theatre director Caroline Steinbeis has called the 'misplaced intrigue' in her Germanness in the British context.⁴⁶ Rather than being seen as 'the origin of sovereign work', Bechtler becomes an 'actor' '(following Latour) on to which conceptions of Germanness are projected'.⁴⁷ This raises questions about the brand of theatre design that Bechtler creates, and how this might interact with other elements of stage design onto which a similar conception of Germanness is projected.

In a similar way to their framing of Bechtler, the British arts media frequently make references to Icke's geographical journey, his experience growing up in Stockton-on-Tees and discovering his love of theatre in Sheffield, as well as his university education at King's College, Cambridge, and his subsequent arrival on the London theatre scene.⁴⁸ Icke's time in Cambridge has allowed him to marry the 'habits of a scholar',⁴⁹ with an understanding of what makes audiences from the north east of England tick: his 'acid test' for his production of *1984* was 'would the kids I went to school with be excited?'.⁵⁰ For both Icke and Bechtler then, movement becomes a key trope in their respective narratives: from Germany to Britain, from industrial north to scholarly south. Despite their many years working in some of London's largest institutions, this trope also highlights a shared status as 'outsider' to the London theatre scene. This certainly mirrors the Almeida's status as the 'insiders'-outsider theatre and suggests there is a certain level of cultural capital given to creatives and theatres perceived as outsiders to the main London scene.

For Icke, this sense of being an outsider extends to his views on theatre-making and British theatre more generally. Early in his career (2010–13), he was associate director of Headlong, a British-based touring theatre company which, according to its website, 'interrogate[s] the contemporary world through a programme of fearless new writing, re-imagined classics and potent twentieth century plays', with a contemporary focus, valuing 'visionary artists' [...] work that is bold and original' and one that works to be 'a company for the digital age'.⁵¹ Icke is noted

for allowing his directorial vision to alter canonical texts and present them as if happening ‘now’, a technique that in a British theatrical context becomes labelled ‘radical’.⁵² Laura Barton goes further to say Icke ‘has the guts to reimagine the work of the world’s most revered playwright [William Shakespeare]’.⁵³ Coupled with his provocative (and perhaps performative) critique of British theatre as ‘boring’, this gives the director a type of rebel status comparable to Thomas Ostermeier’s status as ‘bad boy’, discussed in Chapter 2.⁵⁴ As I argued then, there is a high level of cultural capital attached to this stance as (male) rebel/outsider which Icke taps into. If British theatre is ‘boring’, Icke’s work is seemingly framed as providing something contrasting: there is an expectation of seeing work that is exciting, that addresses contemporary concerns for a young metropolitan audience, and that is ‘foreign’ — or at least, aesthetically so. Compare this to Katie Mitchell’s framing in the British media and the perceived misogyny of this representation, as argued in Chapter 2: Mitchell’s somewhat similar approach of radically adapting classic texts is, generally speaking, met with less enthusiasm than that of Icke. Whereas Mitchell was historically seen as an ‘exile’ triumphantly returning to work in Britain during the course of 2016, Icke is a welcome rebel, an ‘insider’s outsider’, again suggesting a gendered dimension to the reception of ‘rebellion’.

With this framing in mind, this chapter goes on to explore the connection between this ‘insider’s outsider’ status and the scenography of *The Doctor*. How do Icke and Bechtler extend or indeed challenge this status and positioning in the theatre environment? Are there further connections between Icke/Bechtler’s aesthetic and the work of Ostermeier or other German artists with a shared rebel stance? *The Doctor* is, of course, an adaptation of a German-language text by an Austrian writer, and I also explore the ways in which Icke and Bechtler engage with, translate, and adapt the original German-language material.

Cultural Politics in an ‘Empty’ Space

I will begin however with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as a production alongside which *The Doctor* can be productively read. The reviews for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* drew attention to two main features of the production: the dark, mud-filled set, and Hill-Gibbins’s cutting down of Shakespeare’s original text.⁵⁵ As with many productions at the Young Vic, the whole performance space and auditorium were reconfigured for it: built to resemble a dark amphitheatre, the stage was a semi-circular space surrounded by curved tiered seating. At the rear of the stage, the black brick walls of the theatre architecture were exposed, with solid black benches for actors to sit, stand or lie on. Three large floor-to-ceiling mirrors covered the back wall upstage centre. In terms of Schütz’s lighting design, the most striking features are the bright, strobe-like lights placed downstage, illuminating the playing space. The whole stage area is covered in what the programme describes as ‘scenic earth’.⁵⁶ For many critics, this resembled ‘a sea of mud’ through which actors attempt to wade, stumbling and crawling as they go.⁵⁷ All actors are constantly present on stage, either seated on or standing around the benches or leaning against the mirrored back wall.

The costumes were split into ‘drei Welten und drei Gruppen’ [three worlds and three groups], with three different costume aesthetics established for the fairies and their world, the mechanicals, and the Athenian high society represented by Theseus, Hippolyta, and the four lovers.⁵⁸ These were defined through various degrees of formality. In court, high society characters wore sombre black suits and dresses, and their children, the lovers, wore clean, white- and pastel-coloured shirts, dresses, and chinos that came across as decidedly middle- to upper-class. The fairies wore inverted versions of these formal costumes. In terms of temporal settings, costume designer Michaela Barth confirms ‘dass es heutig sein soll’ [that it should be present-day], and the present day is also suggested by the contemporary-style clothes on stage: Converse trainers, chinos, jogging trousers, and beanies.⁵⁹ The mechanicals all wore wellies (the only group allowed this concession to the mud), whilst some characters, such as Hippolyta, wore high heels, thus making her journey through the mud increasingly difficult. The combination of these costumes in the mud led many reviewers to view the stage as resembling ‘either a field in winter or Glastonbury on Day Three’.⁶⁰ The Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performance Arts has run at Worthy Farm in Somerset since 1970, and Sheila Whiteley sees the festival as ‘that most British of popular-music institutions’, connecting it with the wider mainstream national culture of Britain.⁶¹ Rather than providing a ‘universal’ and elemental staging of Shakespeare, the scenography of this *Midsummer Night’s Dream* produced a space many critics immediately recognized and associated with a British cultural product.

This visual connection to Glastonbury adds to the production’s themes of class, power dynamics, and morality. Since as early as 2005, Glastonbury has been known in the British press as ‘the world’s muddiest catwalk’, and there are numerous articles to be found expounding on the festival’s ‘best style moments’ and ‘what to wear at Glastonbury’ in various iterations of style guides.⁶² To be fashionable at Glastonbury is to ‘forget playing it waterproof and sensible’ according to *Guardian Fashion*.⁶³ This media coverage of the festival highlights the role of fashion as a means of social distinction which maps onto Barth’s costume designs for this production. The working-class mechanicals wear wellies, now the ‘the definitive British festival look’.⁶⁴ As these are paired with practical clothing, such as boiler suits, jogging trousers, and army trousers, and more casual outfits such as jeans and T-shirts, they nevertheless read as a footwear choice based on practicality rather than fashion. Compare this, for example, with Bottom’s skinny jeans and pointy-toed brown suede boots, a laughably impractical look for the deep mud on stage, which pairs neatly with the high-heeled, smartly dressed Hippolyta/Titania (both played by Anastasia Hille).⁶⁵ In different ways, both these characters seem removed from their respective social groups through their way of dressing. For Bottom, this is an attempt to break with his working-class background — ‘Bottom the weaver’ as Shakespeare has him (1, 2) — and differentiate himself through fashion.

For Hippolyta/Titania, the effect is slightly different. The sharp, dark suits and smart dresses of the courtly characters represent the upper or elite classes of a city or town, with the exception of Theseus, whose power in Athens is reflected in

his decidedly casual kimono-style long morning gown.⁶⁶ Whilst those around him feel the need to dress smartly, Theseus undermines this by dressing as if he has just woken up. Hippolyta's high heels seem, similarly to Bottom's footwear, laughably inappropriate for the muddy landscape onstage. As such, she is clearly delineated as an outsider, a newcomer to courtly society, forcibly given high heels in an attempt to integrate her into Athenian high society and thereby highlighting the failure of fashion as a means of achieving cultural integration. Although still part of Athenian society, the lovers have a slightly different look in order to reflect their age. Their pale-coloured summer dresses, shirts, chinos, and trainers were inspired by a mixture of the 'preppy' look — associated with labels Jack Wills and Polo Ralph Lauren and called 'the preserve of rich kids' by Lauren Cochrane — and the conservative dresses and cardigans of female characters in David Lynch's early-nineties television show *Twin Peaks*.⁶⁷ As such, their time in the forest mirrors a hedonistic journey away from the rules and regulations of society and the city, as represented by the black suits of Athenian courtly culture, and back again.

However, Hill-Gibbins's adaptation alters this seemingly neat journey. In the production's programme, dramaturg Zoe Svendsen explains how the creative team viewed this journey from city to forest: 'In a hyper-connected world, the countryside is no longer a void of inky-blackness out of which sounds emerge and into which people disappear [...] the dark was a place of imagination and terror'.⁶⁸ For Svendsen, the lovers essentially remove themselves from this 'hyper-connected' world when they enter the forest 'void'. Due to this disconnection from Athenian society and the rules associated with it, the forest becomes a liminal space that offers a moral reprieve for the characters to behave as they wish.⁶⁹ Hill-Gibbins explores the more menacing aspects of what this release provides space for, exemplified perhaps most potently in the scene between Lysander and Hermia. Lysander's original coy request in II. 2 that 'one turf shall serve as pillow' for both him and Hermia is of course denied: 'lie further off, yet. Do not lie so near'. In performance, rather than accepting Hermia's refusal, Lysander becomes violent, trying to force Hermia to sleep with him, with both wrestling uncomfortably in the mud. This moment of attempted sexual assault drew the attention of some reviewers, who saw it as exposing the 'febrile depravity lurking underneath the conventional froth' and added to their perception of the production as 'radical'.⁷⁰

The reframed ending has a similar effect, whereby Hermia, Helena, Lysander, and Demetrius, now back in Athens and attending the wedding of Hippolyta and Theseus, end the performance by holding hands, running in a circle and crying out parts of Demetrius's lines:

Are you sure
That we are awake? It seems to me
That yet we sleep, we dream. (IV. 1)

Rather than allowing the lovers to return to Athenian society as an act of resolution, as is perhaps expected, Hill-Gibbins forces 'the characters most insensitive to the woodland setting, namely the lovers, [to] have their lives most radically changed by it'.⁷¹ The stage set leaves its mark on the actors' bodies too, with mud clinging

to their costumes, leaving them dirty and stained. These stains bring the muddy world of the forest into the Athenian court, further highlighting that any moral misdemeanour cannot be forgotten, and so the divisions between forest/city, bad behaviour/ good behaviour, become more porous. By blurring the distinction between reality (Athens) and dream (the forest), Hill-Gibbins refuses to allow any concrete resolution for the lovers whose subsequent confusion acts as a form of punishment for their moral transgressions. In this sense, the production ultimately uses scenographic elements to both deny Theseus's attempts to assimilate Hippolyta into Athenian society culturally, and to criticize the ambivalence of a 'lover class' of preppy, wealthy city-dwellers who see festivals such as Glastonbury as a reprieve from moral responsibility.

Haunted *Dreams*

Moral ambivalence, Glastonbury, and cultural assimilation thus become connected through one key scenographic feature of this production: mud. But this mud also becomes an important object in the relationship between Anglo-German theatrical cultures. Lehmann describes postdramatic scenography as playing 'with a low density of signs [that] aims to provoke the spectator's own imagination to become active'.⁷² Viewing Schütz's set design here as acting within this framework, his use of 'absence, reduction and emptiness' effectively 'activates' audiences at the Young Vic.⁷³ Many reviewers were able to read other productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the scenography of this one, namely Peter Brook's 1970 and Robert Lepage's 1996 versions. As such, Hill-Gibbins's production becomes, to quote Carlson, a 'haunted' stage, a theatre-going experience 'ghosted by previous experiences'.⁷⁴ My own experience of being 'activated' develops on these experiences to include at least one other performance of Shakespeare in the German-language performed in Britain and that has already been discussed in this book: Thomas Ostermeier's *Hamlet*.

The first of these hauntings, Peter Brook's staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1970, is alluded to by many critics reviewing Hill-Gibbins's work. The production programme also includes a quotation from Brook about Shakespeare that inevitably draws the mind back to his production. Brook's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 'revolutionized the play's staging and indeed its interpretation' with an innovative 'white-walled space with ladders, trapezes and catwalks that reflected colour and freed actors' movements'.⁷⁵ Sarah Hemming lists Hill-Gibbins's production alongside Brook's in her article on the play, signifying a sort of chronology of radical, contemporary stagings.⁷⁶ Furthermore, and as referenced above, the Young Vic itself, described as providing a 'permanent London home' for Peter Brook, can be read as a space 'haunted' by the memory of previous Brook productions.⁷⁷ Rather than using an empty space to 'free' actors however, Schütz's muddy set appears to achieve the opposite effect. Movement across the stage seems difficult, requiring large steps as the mud rises above the actors' ankles. Despite creating a 'empty space' similar to Brook's, Schütz's set design actually impedes the actors' movements and ability to play 'freely'.

On the one hand then, Hill-Gibbins's production can be seen as literally muddying up the clean white box of Brook's 1970 version, dislodging what Barbara Hodgdon calls the latter's 'canonical status' in British theatrical culture and its understanding of Shakespeare in performance. According to Hodgdon, Brook's production became 'a national cultural property' that even in 2017 remained the yardstick for measuring other versions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.⁷⁸ Schütz was not the first designer to throw 'postmodern mud all over Brook's pristinely modernist white box' however.⁷⁹ That accolade belongs to another theatre experience 'ghosting' Hill-Gibbins's production: Canadian director Robert Lepage's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which toured to London's National Theatre in 1992. As described by Hodgdon, the stage for this production was formed of 'black upstage screens surrounding a stage covered with grey mud, a watery pool at its center, over which hangs a light bulb suspended on a long flex'. Through engaging with Brook's production 'through a process of negative quotation' (words that could equally describe Hill-Gibbins's work), Lepage's direction has been read by Hodgdon as forcing 'a confrontation between spectator and the materiality of actors' bodies [...] in favor of the self-validating presence of the performer'. She calls Lepage's work an 'intercultural *Dream*', referring in one part to the 'cross-cultural cast' of *Québécois* and white British, Black British, and Asian British actors speaking in a variety of different languages. His work 'takes *Dream* in a direction Brook had mapped out', namely the search for a transcultural, 'universal theatre language' through the use of non-European theatrical traditions and practices. For Hodgdon, these performances operate in a complex intercultural zone where non-Western theatrical cultures can 'revitalize impoverished Western theatrical traditions of realism and naturalism', expose outdated 'imperial' claims over Shakespeare in performance, but still be read simply as cultural 'borrowings' by directors who perhaps inadvertently position themselves as 'colonial [...] socio-theatrical' subjects.⁸⁰

By introducing elements of traditional Indian, Chinese, and Indonesian theatre performance practices into their respective productions, Brook and Lepage move against any notion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* being what Hodgdon describes as a 'nostalgic [...] folk-cultural activity — an organic, mystical ritual recapturable for present-day Britons, if at all, only in the near-annual productions in Regent's Park'.⁸¹ The latter is a performance tradition that dates back at least to Harley Granville-Barker's 1914 version of the play that introduced English folk songs (scored by Cecil Sharp) and dances into the production.⁸² Indeed, Sukanta Chaudhuri asserts that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 'may be the Shakespeare play most widely circulated across the globe [...]. Its varied, segmented and open-ended structure has made it richly meaningful for utterly different nations and their cultures'.⁸³ As such, through its performance history in Britain at least, the play comes to occupy a multivalent position as both British national product and a space for exploring themes of interculturalism. Both Brook and Lepage are placed in what Knowles has called the 'universalist' or 'idealist' stream of western theatrical interculturalism, this 'stream' seeing intercultural practice as a means of transcending 'social and cultural predeterminants, inequities, and power relationships that are constitutive of

culture and ideology'.⁸⁴ Hill-Gibbins's production utilizes an 'empty space' in a way that develops on the work of Brook and Lepage. Rather than seeking a universal theatre language through looking beyond the Western theatrical tradition, however, Schütz's set invites considerations of intercultural theatrical practices in an Anglo-German context, living with, and perhaps responding to, these 'ghosts'.

This is exemplified by the final 'ghost' of this production: Thomas Ostermeier's *Hamlet*, which was introduced in Chapter 2, and ran in 2011 at the Barbican in London. Similar to Schütz's set, designer Jan Pappelbaum's stage became an 'earthen pit', rained upon until the dirt turned to mud.⁸⁵ Schofield reads Germanness in this element of dirt/mud, seeing it as a scenographic feature 'commonly associated with contemporary German Shakespeare [...] mud, loud music, and nudity are so central to what [British] audiences have come to expect from Germany that they become largely "ornamental and predictably exotic"'.⁸⁶ Schofield here draws on Alexa Huang's work on 'Chinese Shakespeares' to suggest that mud as a scenographic element in performances of Shakespeare's plays from Germany loses symbolic meaning through its repeated, or expected and predictable use on stage.⁸⁷

Similarly, Hildegard Bechtler talks about Ostermeier's production of *Hamlet* as a watershed moment for Anglo-German theatrical cultures: "'Everybody I've ever met in theatre was there," the German-born designer remembers. Looking at Jan Pappelbaum's muddy field of a stage [...] she felt a flush of pride: "Nobody could do that here. Nobody could have that kind of vision"'.⁸⁸ Bechtler's comments, some eight years after the production toured to London, imply there were (or are still) practical issues and specific aesthetic values existing in British theatrical culture that would block artists working in Britain creating a similarly non-illusionist, 'elemental' scenography. There has nevertheless been at least one production of Shakespeare fully produced in Britain that utilized stage mud, namely Kenneth Branagh's 2013 production of *Macbeth*, which featured as part of the Manchester International Festival and had an all-British (and all-male) creative team. In contrast to both Pappelbaum's and Schütz's productions, however, the mud in Branagh's production seemed more atmospheric, or decorative. Through its effect on the actors' bodies, slowing down movement, the traces left on their costumes, and how this disrupts the usual happy ending of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Schütz's mud refuses to become merely 'ornamental', essentially becoming resignified as a key thematic element in performance.

The programme notes that the scenic earth was made out of 'Theatertorf' [theatre peat], provided by Griendtsveen, a German company based in Saterland in Lower Saxony.⁸⁹ On stage, a British cultural product (Glastonbury) is therefore seen as emerging, literally and symbolically, from the German mud. Schütz, Barth, and Hill-Gibbins thus destabilize a sense of cultural difference by creating a space where signifiers of British and German culture merge, establishing a dynamic that is almost the opposite of *Woyzeck* at the Old Vic, which seemed to erect rather than take down the borders between Anglo-German culture. And yet, the use of a German company to provide peat from Germany seems to refute a reading that would ignore the Germanness of seeing mud on stage. The set design upholds, almost to

parody, Schofield's assertion that mud is a central feature in British expectations of contemporary German Shakespeare performance and a scenographic element that needs to be (literally) imported into Britain. Nevertheless, the collaboration between Hill-Gibbins, Schütz, and Barth suggests it is no longer a feature British audiences can only expect from German-language productions. This could, in fact, be read as a moment of 'successful' interweaving of Anglo-German performance cultures, with the thread of German theatrical culture remaining visibly distinct in the fabric of performance, highlighting that the continued introduction of intercultural theatrical practice and exchange can be a useful means of reinterpreting canonical texts, and raising questions about interculturalism and theatre itself.

The Doctor: 'Translocal' Diversity?

Whilst *A Midsummer Night's Dream* appears to engage actively with signifiers of German theatrical culture, *The Doctor* attempts to use scenography to smooth over cultural difference. Austrian author Arthur Schnitzler's *Professor Bernhardi*, on which this adaptation is based, was completed in 1912 and first performed in Berlin in November 1912. The 'Komödie in fünf Akten' [comedy in five acts] takes place in Vienna around 1900.⁹⁰ Professor Bernhardi, leader of the 'Elisabethinum' clinical institute, causes a scandal by refusing a priest entry to perform the last rites on a young Catholic girl who subsequently dies from sepsis as a result of an abortion attempt gone wrong. The scandal quickly goes public, and many members of the institute use the opportunity of the public turn against Bernhardi to try and oust him and the new Jewish member of staff he chooses to employ. Although Bernhardi's actions are then exploited by doctors and the media to continue an anti-Semitic agenda, his refusal comes from a desire to avoid causing additional emotional or physical distress to the patient. The case eventually goes to trial, where Bernhardi is found guilty of 'Religionsstörung' [religious disturbance] and sentenced to two months in prison.⁹¹ He is only released once the testimony of a witness is proved false, and eventually returns to the medical profession maintaining the belief that he did the right thing. The mixing of historical specificity with contemporary themes of 'the individual fighting against the interests of a collective' gives Schnitzler's play an enduring modernity.⁹² For Icke, known for taking on contemporary issues through canonical texts, *Professor Bernhardi* is thus an ideal choice for adaptation.

In the British context, Schnitzler is related to a very specific socio-political and cultural setting. Writing in the production programme that accompanied *The Doctor*, Judith Beniston describes Schnitzler as a Viennese writer 'in every sense', relating the author to a specific brand of Austrianness that connects him to the cultural capital of Freud and Freudian psychoanalysis — as Beniston points out, Freud considered Schnitzler his 'Doppelgänger'.⁹³ Indeed, Schnitzler makes a number of memorable appearances in the 2020 Netflix series *Freud* as the titular character's cocaine-sniffing friend, popularizing an image of Schnitzler as a partying, hedonistic socialite in Viennese society. Beniston also tantalizingly quotes Schnitzler calling himself 'a Jew, an Austrian, a German' in the programme,

expanding his sense of self to foreground his Jewish identity as a key biographical detail, and similarly drawing Schnitzler into a wider German-language cultural field, rather than seeing him fixed to a single national (i.e. Austrian) cultural identity.⁹⁴ Despite his Austrianness then, Schnitzler is nevertheless subsumed here within Germanness on the British stage. Indeed, in an interview given for this book, Bechtler noted how the themes of the play text are ‘bigger than Austria’, indicating her willingness to move the scenography away from a local setting (1900s Vienna) to something more global and/or universal.⁹⁵ Bechtler’s comments echo Marie Kolkenbrock’s assertions that Schnitzler was a ‘key critical observer of Viennese bourgeois society’, presenting him as a Modernist, critical outsider.⁹⁶ This section therefore considers how the scenography in *The Doctor* continues this expansion, reconfiguring elements of Schnitzler’s investigation of Austro-Jewish identity and turn-of-the-century anti-Semitism to address new concerns about race, gender, and a wider band of religious groups.

Icke shifts the play text to create what he terms an ‘abstract nowness’, turning Schnitzler’s five acts into five days, with the scandal unfolding and spreading online at increasing speed.⁹⁷ Although the temporal and geographical location of the production is left ambiguous in the text, critic Paul Taylor saw it as taking place ‘now, in Britain’.⁹⁸ Anglo-sounding names such as Ruth, Brian, Michael, Paul, and Rebecca replace the likes of Löwenstein, Tugendvetter, and Ebenwald found in Schnitzler’s original, indeed suggesting a location within the Anglophone world rather than German-speaking Austria. The initial course of events is nevertheless the same as in the original, with the female Professor Ruth Wolff replacing the originally male Bernhardi as the titular doctor, played by Juliet Stevenson. Barring entry to Black Catholic priest Father Jacob Rice (played by white actor Paul Higgins) brings race to bear onto the scandal as well as religion — this will be explored in detail below. Whereas Bernhardi’s Judaism remained a key feature of his identity (and a constant point of attack) in Schnitzler’s original, Wolff describes herself as ‘born to Jewish parents’ but not subscribing to any religion.⁹⁹ Her Jewishness is thereby presented as secondary to other positionalities she occupies: her female identity, her homosexuality, and her whiteness. As Wolff’s colleagues take sides against her, the appointment of a new head of pharmacology becomes a key battleground between Wolff and her colleague and deputy Roger Hardiman: Wolff prefers white, female candidate Feinman over Hardiman’s preferred candidate, the Black, male, and Christian Munro. As a result of political pressure from both within and without the Elizabeth Institute, Wolff resigns her post and, rather than facing legal trial (as in the original), takes part in the Question Time-style debate show ‘Take the Debate’, with a panel of five different ‘experts in their respective fields [...] put[ting] her through her paces’ (*D*, p. 79). Fictional health minister Jemima Flint subsequently calls for a public inquiry into the scandal, with Wolff being ‘struck off’ for ten years for ‘discrediting [her] profession’ (*D*, p. 97). The play ends as it began with Wolff calling an ambulance to report a death. Icke leaves it ambiguous as to whether this is moving forward in real time or not, referring either to the suicide of Wolff’s partner Charlie, recounted in detail towards the end of the play, or that of Wolff herself.

Bechtler described her set and costume design as aiming towards ‘abstraction’, suggesting a scenography that attempts to move away from a recognizable or concrete recreation of a known environment.¹⁰⁰ A curve of neutral coloured wood forms the back wall with a large double door in the centre. A long wooden table with metal legs sits centre stage, with backless benches rather than chairs surrounding it. This is set up on a revolving stage that moves slowly and consistently throughout the performance, sometimes pausing for entire scenes of dialogue. Costumes are contemporary and functional, with the doctors wearing dark trousers and light shirts and long white lab coats. Colour tones are relatively bland: pale colours, greys, whites, browns, blacks, and dark blues. With these colours and materials, Bechtler’s intention was to create an institutional and expensive-looking space.¹⁰¹

Reviewers of the production similarly saw her design as having a ‘clinical simplicity’, being ‘slick, simple, clinical’, and creating a ‘calculatedly anonymous conference room’.¹⁰² As already noted in my earlier discussion of scenography, there is ‘no such thing as an empty [or anonymous] space’. Despite seeking ‘abstraction’, the set is still recognizably a clinical or institutional setting, defined by its slickness, smooth lines, and wooden surfaces. In fact, Bechtler’s wooden curve and table bring to mind the ‘smooth surfaces and fluid forms’ that Douglas Spencer sees as typical of postmodern and contemporary ‘architecture of neoliberalism’.¹⁰³ This type of architecture is seen as masking the ‘struggles, antagonisms or contradictions’,¹⁰⁴ as well as the ‘political and economic relations behind [the building’s] construction’.¹⁰⁵ Liam Dee, looking at twenty-first-century design, draws similar comparisons between rounded, smooth surfaces that ‘efface the joints and marks of production [and render] the complex power relations of transnational commodification practically invisible in the face of the Smooth World of globalisation’.¹⁰⁶ As such, the Elizabeth Institute, and the world created through the production, must be critically examined as an environment that (on the surface) reflects a neoliberal agenda, an agenda that combines the operation of power through the ‘autonomous self-management of individuals [...] increasing globalisation and the systematic removal of any perceived impediment to the accumulation of capital’.¹⁰⁷ This connection is further reflected in the onstage action. Despite effectively washing their hands of the Elizabeth Institute, the forced resignation of Wolff gives governmental and non-governmental investors renewed reason to continue their financial support, thereby trading off personal loyalty and friendship for economic gain.

Bechtler has thus created a fictional space in which individuals can work together as controllers of capital to continue their own neoliberal agenda. Additionally, the scenography thematizes access and privilege through the onstage representation of authority, namely with the long white lab coats and green lanyards worn by each character working at the Elizabeth Institute indicating through costume who has, and guards, access to certain spaces, and who is excluded from those spaces. The large door positioned centre stage is a constant reminder of the boundaries between spaces: this is a space where a government health minister can come and go freely, without the need of a security escort, and who on entry can joke and reminisce with the doctors working in the space to indicate a close relationship and/or shared personal history. Clinical and laboratorial settings figure in Doreen

Massey's comparative analysis of domestic and institutional spaces, in which she sees the 'closure' of the domestic, local, and female home space sitting in contrast with the 'openness' and masculinity of the globalized scientific laboratory. The laboratories Massey visited as part of this research were defined by a 'sparse and spare' style held within 'stylish modern buildings', words that, despite a more clinical than laboratorial setting, could certainly describe Bechtler's set and map onto the space created on stage. Massey calls this a globalized workplace, a space that allows for global mobility whilst still being exclusive and 'tightly sealed against "non-conforming" invasions from other worlds'.¹⁰⁸

Bechtler and Icke can be seen as subverting these expectations of a scientific space as associated with masculinity, male mobility, and exclusivity in the first instance by casting a female actor in the main role. This point is perhaps emphatically made through the production's use of video technology, whereby a camera close-up of Stevenson's face is projected onto the back wall in real time during the 'Take the Debate' scene. Literally projecting Stevenson's face onto the smooth, curved back wall of the institute layers her celebrity status, her womanhood, on this global and masculine space, and thereby refutes what that space might typically be seen as representing. Furthermore, it thematizes the intense scrutiny celebrities, and arguably more so female celebrities, are put under by the media more generally: the audience is invited to examine and scrutinize her slightest facial reactions to questions. Icke was conscious to employ a diverse cast of both able-bodied and dis/abled actors, Black actors, British-Asian actors, actors of colour, and transgender actors for the initial run at the Almeida. Whilst the deeper implications of Icke's casting choices will be examined below, on the surface, by populating the Elizabeth Institute with bodies perhaps not typically associated with that setting, or indeed regularly excluded from such spaces ('non-conforming', as Massey puts it), Icke attempts to redress on stage an imbalance of representation that is now common in Western, elite, neoliberal institutions.

Additionally, with the brick back wall of the Almeida theatre visible just above the walls of the set, the performance space asks that we consider not just how power and identity intersect in the elite, fictional Elizabeth Institute, but also how they figure in (elite) theatrical institutions in both a national and international context. Rather than smoothing over this institutional wall, Bechtler allows what Spencer terms the 'struggles, antagonisms or contradictions [as well as the] political and economic relations' of neoliberalism to peer over the surface.¹⁰⁹ This incorporation of the Almeida space was intentional.¹¹⁰ On the one hand, it connects Icke's supposed final Almeida production to the building's historical roots as a scientific lecture hall, thereby drawing a direct line between the theatre's past and its present (or future). On the other hand, to a critical viewer, this might provoke wider questions about how the themes of the production are reflected in the real theatrical institutions (literally) behind the production: about which identity groups figure most prominently not only in national productions but also in international networks, and what institutions in Britain can do as gatekeepers to diversify both national and international networks of theatre artists more generally.

Although, as argued above, signifiers of turn-of-the-century Vienna are effectively removed in *The Doctor*, the scenography of this production references a different aspect of recent German-language (theatrical) culture, namely the scenographic work of Ostermeier and his frequent collaborator Pappelbaum: their own production of *Professor Bernhardt* premiered at the Schaubühne in December 2016. In a similar aesthetic shift to Icke and Bechtler, Pappelbaum and Ostermeier locate the action in one large, white, geographically or temporally undistinctive space, with a long table that dominates much of the space for portions of the production, and a cluster of clinicians all wearing white lab coats making up the staff of the institute. In her interview with me, Bechtler mentioned the Schaubühne production as a reference point for her work. Although she had only seen production photographs, she was keen to move away from the visual whiteness of the set and costumes of that production.¹¹¹ According to one reviewer, Ostermeier's production was able 'das Stück für die Gegenwart aufzuschließen' [to unlock the play for the present day], finding, as Icke and Bechtler have done, a removal of specific cultural signifiers as a means of achieving contemporary and perhaps transnational resonance.¹¹² With this aesthetic link, Icke and Bechtler replace the localized cultural setting of *Professor Bernhardt* (1900s Vienna) and its Austrianness with a scenography that taps into Ostermeier's 'Berlin identity', a theatre aesthetic associated in Britain with the whole of German theatrical culture, to create something more 'German'.¹¹³

Rather than suggesting these elements are merely borrowed or copied, however, I see Icke and Bechtler's 'abstract nowness' and use of familiar Ostermeier scenographic choices as placing their aesthetic within Benjamin Fowler's framework of 'translocal flows between Britain and Europe'.¹¹⁴ Fowler draws on Clemens Greiner and Patrick Sakdapolrak's use of translocality 'to describe socio-spatial dynamics and processes of simultaneity and identity formations that transcend boundaries — including, but also extending beyond, those of nation states'.¹¹⁵ Translocality 'seeks to overcome [transnationalism's] limited focus on the nation state', moving beyond a focus on the 'movement of people' to also consider 'flows and circulations of ideas, symbols, knowledge, etc.'.¹¹⁶ This translocal perspective points Fowler towards practitioners working in and across Britain, Germany, and the Netherlands and their shared aesthetic: Ivo van Hove, Thomas Ostermeier, Katie Mitchell, Simon McBurney, and, crucially for this chapter, Robert Icke.¹¹⁷ In a provocation, given at the 2019 conference on 'Contemporary European Drama in Translation on the British Stage', Fowler contends that these practitioners 'rely on and entrench a recognisable Euro-aesthetic that easily transcends linguistic barriers'.¹¹⁸ He identifies three relatively broad characteristics of this 'Euro-aesthetic': the reinforcement of a repertoire of 'familiar dramatic texts from a Euro-centric Western canon [...] reimagining the classics as if they are new'; a loosely non-illusionist design world; and the use of technology and new media in performance.¹¹⁹ Whereas Ostermeier, Mitchell, van Hove, and McBurney regularly work with international production teams, bringing creatives from different European countries together for shows that tour beyond the international festival circuit, Icke and Bechtler's partnership, and their creative team for *The Doctor* at least, is seemingly quite localized: London-based

creatives making a show for London audiences. However, their aesthetic choices here, along with their respective biographies and previous work experience, brings in this translocal element and, I would argue, actively comments on and attempts to alter this network.

The scenography of *The Doctor* is both loosely non-illusionist, in the sense that it designates a vague, contemporary, clinical space that eschews the use of naturalistic props or other scenographic elements, and makes use of video-streaming technology. Furthermore, Icke's choice of text is certainly part of a Euro-centric Western canon, despite Schnitzler's texts not being regularly performed in Britain. In the series of talks held by Icke over Zoom between June and July 2020, the director was often keen to refer to the work of van Hove, Mitchell, and Ostermeier as examples of directorial work he admires, reinforcing an already visible network of influence and admiration.¹²⁰ Whereas Chapter 2 argued that Mitchell could be seen as unsettling this framework through her feminist critique of Ostermeier and Shakespeare in performance, Icke and Bechtler's work here certainly seems to fit Fowler's description very neatly. Indeed, I want to suggest that the production can be read as connecting to some of Fowler's key concerns about the translocal network he identifies. Rightly, Fowler remarks that 'the translocal celebrities of European directorial practice tend to be cis, white, male and middle class'. He goes on to consider how their work reinforces particular euro-centric theatre canons as well as 'consolidat[ing] certain approaches to casting and representation, rehearsal methodologies and attendant power hierarchies shaped by a dominant perspective that is nevertheless presented as the norm, if not the universal'.¹²¹

While much about *The Doctor* seems to repeat the issues Fowler identifies above, Icke's diverse cast can also be read as introducing casting practices that disrupt Fowler's description of this translocal network. Scenographically, Icke and Bechtler sought to move away from the 'whiteness' of Ostermeier and Pappelbaum's set but could also be seen as trying to move away from the 'whiteness' of Ostermeier's ensemble as well. Furthermore, the cast were seemingly actively involved in the creation of the adapted play text: it was written during rehearsals, and the actors had a direct, collaborative input in the process.¹²² Icke's casting choices also function to relate the audience's perception of the action on stage and experience of the play to the actors' bodies. In a key moment from the performance I attended on 10 August 2019, an audience member gasped after the following exchange:

RUTH I didn't push the priest

MURPHY I think part of the sensitivity, and nobody is saying it, is because he's a black man. (*D*, p. 56)

The gasp presented this moment of realization that the priest, played by white actor Paul Higgins, was in fact a Black character, as shocking. This choice of casting is directly referred to in the published play text, where Icke suggests 'each actor's identity should be directly dissonant with their character's in at least one way'. The intention of this is to make audiences 're-consider characters (and events) as they learn more about who the characters are' (*D*, p. [x]). Bechtler's fairly monochromatic costumes and white coats similarly draw attention to the actors'

bodies as defining characteristics, and the actors worked with Bechtler to craft each individual costume. This ‘creative dissonance’ was comfortably jarring for most reviewers.¹²³ Icke’s choices were seen as ‘cross-casting’ by Sarah Hemming, who felt the ‘rug [pulled] from under us, prompting us to re-evaluate events and question our assumptions. Perspectives shift; certainties dissolve’.¹²⁴ Nick Curtis’s assertion that ‘it pushes colour and gender-blind casting to a new limit’ mistakes what seems to be clearly conscious casting choices for a practice that ‘ignores the appearance of an actor [...] in the belief that talented actors can play any role and, more specifically, can quickly convince spectators to overlook whatever gaps exist between themselves and the characters whom they play’, as Harvey Young defines the term *colour-blind casting*.¹²⁵ The effect nevertheless ‘intriguingly wrong-foots the viewer’, causing these reviewers’ ‘debating mind[s]’ to be ‘tugged in countless and unexpected directions’.¹²⁶

In the reviews cited above, the overall impact of this tugging and debating is never quite delved into, perhaps remaining characteristically vague in order to maintain a level of mystery about the production (and effectively not to ‘give the game away’), reflecting the role of the review as marketing tool. These reviewers fail to explore in detail what this ‘casting-dissonance’ achieves. Ravi Ghosh, writing for the online theatre magazine *Exeunt*, offers a more critical exploration of Icke’s ‘dive into minority identity’. For him, *The Doctor* becomes a conservative way of watching theatre: ‘diversity as an exotic diversion’ rather than giving minority identities space to confront audiences ideologically. Furthermore, he suggests that the play ‘assumes the audience’s white gaze alongside Icke’s’, which is plausible given that eleven per cent of the Almeida’s audience in 2018–19 identified as Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic.¹²⁷ What Ghosh terms the production’s ‘lens of whiteness’ allows an assault on identity politics — ‘collective activism based on embodied experiences of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity or nationality’ as Elin Diamond succinctly defines it — to flourish.¹²⁸ Ghosh describes this ‘lens’ as ‘a symptom of British theatre’s unwillingness to animate and empower [identity politics] silenced proponents’ and views Wolff’s character as becoming ‘a mouthpiece for “common sense”, recklessly positioned against the self-indulgent modern trend of “taking identity politics too far”’.¹²⁹ Haberich, writing about Schnitzler’s original text, essentially points out the same central conflict: the original ‘is not, as often assumed, that of science against religion, but rather that between the critically minded individual and those who submit to a political or religious programme’.¹³⁰ As such, Icke’s ‘casting-dissonance’ seeks to destabilize an assumption that one person (or actor) can represent any community or identity group, whilst at the same time making casting choices seemingly based on this assumption.

At the same time, the production programme includes a passage from Kwame Anthony Appiah’s 2018 book *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity* that seems to address this issue: ‘Identities work only because, once they get their grip on us they command us [...]. If you do not care for the shapes your identities have taken, you cannot simply refuse them; they are not yours alone’.¹³¹ The audience is thus being asked to see individuals as both shapers of, and shaped by, their varying identities. I therefore read *The Doctor* as expanding this conflict between what Ghosh critically

referred to as ‘common sense’ and identity politics to incorporate and question the role of institutional power structures. As Young usefully highlights in his writing on theatre and race:

To conjure a racial label and project it across another person in an effort to categorize that person is an exercise of power. It is a demonstration of the capacity to control and manipulate others: to divide them, to sort them, to mark them, and, even, to name them.¹³²

As such, Icke’s ‘casting–dissonance’ asks the audience to consider how their understanding of the identities of characters on stage is informed by, and therefore reflective of, the dynamics of power and the role of cultural gatekeepers. At the same time, Icke himself acts as one of these gatekeepers, failing to give space to the original’s criticism of anti-Semitism as well as the Jewish identity of its main character and the text’s Austrianness. Icke’s criticism, I argue, is not of identity politics and its usefulness per se, but rather he takes issue here with the ways in which figures of authority might utilize or exploit those identities for their own political or personal gain, seemingly without consequence.

This brings us back to the larger questions around how German-language theatrical culture is utilized in the British context. *The Doctor* works in a similar way to Jack Thorne and Joe Murphy’s production of *Woyzeck*, in the sense that both creative teams turn to German-language sources to address cultural divisions between classes and ethnicities living within Britain, in place of using theatre in translation solely to address Anglo–German, Anglo–Austrian, or even Anglo–European cultural difference. Icke and Bechtler create a scenography that subsumes the original text’s Austrianness into the Germanness of Ostermeier and Pappelbaum’s work, allowing the production to sit within Fowler’s translocal framework. Bechtler has spoken about how the production was an ‘extreme risk’ for the Almeida, and Icke was careful to keep what Bechtler terms the ‘older group’ engaged with the themes of the production.¹³³ Perhaps latent in Bechtler’s suggestion is that Icke, for all his rebellious bravado, is actually keenly concerned with maintaining relations with his local (Almeida) audience. In 2018–19, nineteen per cent of the Almeida’s audience was from the local Islington area, whose local Member of Parliament, Jeremy Corbyn, was also at the time leader of the Labour Party.¹³⁴ Corbyn’s tenure as leader was heavily overshadowed by claims of anti-Semitism within the Labour Party, and so it seems surprising that Icke did not use the opportunity provided by Schnitzler’s *Professor Bernhardt* to investigate institutional anti-Semitism at a time when the topic was so prevalent in the British media, especially considering the Almeida’s stated aim to ‘interrogate the present’.¹³⁵ Rejecting the opportunity to engage with localized themes or politics, Icke and Bechtler instead placed a diverse cast within a recognizably translocal aesthetic to consider themes of cultural gatekeeping and institutional authority. On the one hand, this might be seen as allowing both artists to continue utilizing their ‘insider’s outsider’ status to engage critically with the homogeneity of the framework Fowler has identified, in a similar way to Mitchell ‘performing back’ Ostermeier through a feminist lens as discussed in Chapter 2. However, by continuing to bank on the cultural capital of

this aesthetic as a means of accessing international audiences as well as larger local audiences, the production could also be seen as making a tokenistic use of diversity to engage with themes of race, gender, and identity politics on stage, whilst not necessarily altering the larger structures that make the network itself open to criticism of being a predominantly white ‘boys’ club’.

Conclusion: (Inter)cultural Capital and ‘Top-Down’ Diversity

A 2019 Tweet posted by Matthew Anderson (see Figure 3.2), European Culture Editor for the *New York Times*, visualizes the binary construction between British and German stage design that provoked the analysis in this chapter:



FIG. 3.2. Matthew Anderson, ‘When you go to theatre in Britain vs. When you go to the theatre in Germany’, Twitter, 13 September 2019 [accessed 30 April 2020].

What is intriguing about this post is Anderson’s interest in locating performances in a particular place: each image is related to the process of physically visiting a theatre in two different national cultural contexts (Britain and Germany). Going to the theatre in Britain is, Anderson implies, a confrontation with a naturalistic scenography, with a location and costume recognizable as existing, or possibly existing, in the real world outside the theatrical space. It denotes a specific temporal and physical setting. The actors are fairly static, with movement and gestural expression coming from the arms. If you find yourself in Germany, this image suggests a visit to the theatre will be typified by non-naturalistic stage design and a scenography that prioritizes the physical and sensorial experience of the spectator: a giant fan gusting wind towards the audience and a veil of smoke covering and, in some cases, hiding the action on stage. The actor is in motion, their whole body activated.

Both productions in the present case study challenge Anderson's assumption that these scenographies can only be experienced in a specific national cultural context. For *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Anglo-German collaboration is achieved through practitioners based in Germany coming to work with artists in Britain. Schütz and Barth's movement from Berlin to London is accompanied by the movement of a scenographic element that is typically associated in Britain with Germanness: mud. Literally imported from Germany for this production, their theatre mud plays with this cultural association and refuses to become ornamental, affecting the actors' bodies on stage, their movements, and leaving its mark on their costumes, contributing to the themes of the production: moral ambivalence, cultural integration, and class. Hill-Gibbins's production therefore represents an Anglo-German intercultural response to Brook's production. Rather than seeking a 'universalist' interculturalism that exoticizes a conceptualized 'other' culture, Hill-Gibbins uses scenography to disrupt ideas that British and German theatrical cultures stand on opposing sides of a binary divide.¹³⁶ Instead, he creates a scenographic space at the Young Vic in which Anglo-German cultural exchange occurs without one culture being subsumed into the other, but also without the otherness of German culture becoming a culturally divisive element, as was the case in Thorne's *Woyzeck* (discussed in Chapter 1). On an institutional level however, the movement of artists here seems to reinforce an imbalanced Anglo-German cultural relationship, a sense of British cultural dominance that utilizes cultural forms and practices from its German neighbours whilst remaining a one-way system of exchange.

This movement of practitioners to facilitate Anglo-German theatrical exchange is also not without its issues. In an interview with me, costume designer Barth was keen to point out some of the issues with working within the British theatre system as a costume designer. These range from salary ('die Gage ist in London DEUTLICH niedriger' [the pay in London is NOTICEABLY less]) to rehearsal culture: the opportunity to develop costumes during rehearsal, or to have actors rehearse in costume, was denied for this production.¹³⁷ Related to this, Barth noted a lack of engagement with actors as co-creatives: 'alle haben sich den Wünschen des Regisseurs unterzuordnen, auch wenn auf den ersten Blick Teamarbeit behauptet wird[,] ist es keine. Man redete eher über die SchauspielerInnen als mit ihnen' [everyone had to subordinate themselves to the director's wishes, even when collaborative work was claimed from the start, there was none. One spoke about the actors rather than with them].¹³⁸ Whilst this experience would vary from director to director and from theatre to theatre, Barth's comments highlight financial as well as creative or organizational concerns that might hinder both the desire to engage in international theatrical exchange, and the full unfolding of practices from one context in the other. There is a high level of (inter)cultural capital attached to the transnational German artist who we might say gains rather than loses cultural capital through movement between cultures, but, as Barth notes above, this (inter)cultural capital often fails to convert into economic capital (namely the salary and working conditions for these artists), especially in comparison to institutions in their

‘home’ country. The end of freedom of movement to the UK from the EU has put this form of intercultural exchange under increased financial pressure.¹³⁹

In *The Doctor*, Icke attempted to create a collaborative space in rehearsal by inviting contributions from each actor for the creation of his performance text. Bechtler was able to work with individual actors to tailor a costume to suit their own interpretation of their character, a process she described as unusual in a British theatrical context.¹⁴⁰ Although *The Doctor* is a comparatively local production compared to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, in the sense that a London-based creative team worked on a production aimed towards a London audience, it still engages with a binary view of Anglo-German stage design. The translocal aesthetic visible in this production moves easily across borders — *The Doctor* has already toured to the international theatre festival in Adelaide — and has been criticized, in the context of European or Anglophone theatre festivals for creating a ‘generic Western European sensibility’ that could be seen as ‘obscuring cultural difference for the sake of cultural hegemony’.¹⁴¹ The scenography of *The Doctor* certainly does underscore this hegemony by creating a performance space noted for its relation to an elite, exclusive, Western European, and neoliberal aesthetic. Populating this space with a diverse cast seemed, in the first instance, to offer a critique of the whiteness of the translocal network Icke and Bechtler are a part of. On further reflection, the production could be seen instead as commodifying diversity as a means of justifying the continuation of the globalized, popular neoliberal ideology represented by this translocal aesthetic. It would be in this sense that Ghosh’s criticism of the ‘tokenism’ of Icke’s casting rings true.¹⁴²

The Doctor proves to be an example of how ‘local’ artists (i.e. London-based artists) working in a ‘local’ theatre can produce a translocal scenography within a British context, thereby representing a form of British ‘intra-intercultural theatre [...], intercultural-theatre-within-a-culture’ as Yun-Cheol Kim defines the term.¹⁴³ A focus on Bechtler’s Germanness in the British arts media, the aesthetic move away from the play’s Austrianness, combined with a renewed focus on the place and value of EU migrants within the British theatrical scene and the discourse surrounding Brexit, draws attention to the designer’s position as German migrant living and working in Britain. Whilst Kim uses the term ‘intra-intercultural’ to describe the performance work of minority and marginalized groups within a particular culture, its use here suggests the ways in which *The Doctor*, and Bechtler as German migrant, complicate a sense of the German artist as ‘other’ by eliding Anglo-German cultural difference. The production’s West End transfer indicates the way in which the translocal aesthetic can become mainstream and commercially viable. This again highlights the commercial and cultural value attached to the work of the German migrant artist, despite a political environment that makes that movement to Britain increasingly difficult. Nevertheless, the production alerts a critical viewer to the ways in which certain minority voices might be excluded from male-dominated, predominantly white European transnational theatre networks. Through thematizing ethnic, gender, and ability diversity however, and by banking on the cultural capital of the charismatic white male director (to paraphrase

Knowles), it reinforces a director-led, ‘top-down’ approach to both Anglo-German intercultural theatre and artistic or cultural diversity within Britain.¹⁴⁴

Notes to Chapter 3

1. Trueman, ‘Meet the German Artists Revolutionising UK Stage Design’.
2. For a more detailed discussion of this trend, see the Introduction.
3. Esslin, ‘Brecht and the English Theatre’, p. 65.
4. Trueman, ‘Meet the German Artists Revolutionising UK Stage Design’.
5. Erika Fischer-Lichte, ‘Interweaving Performance Cultures’, in *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, ed. by Minou Arjomand and Ramona Mosse (Routledge, 2014), pp. 113–40 (p. 131).
6. Andrew Dickson, ‘The Director’s Cut: David Lan of the Young Vic’, *Guardian*, 11 April 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/apr/11/director-david-lan-young-vic-olivier-awards>> [accessed 1 June 2024].
7. ‘History of the Young Vic’, Young Vic Theatre <<https://www.youngvic.org/about-us/history-of-the-young-vic>> [accessed 5 August 2020]. The term ‘adaptive re-use’ is used in Gay McAuley, ‘What is Sydney about Sydney Theatre? Performance Space and the Creation of a “Matrix of Sensibility”’, in *Performance and the Politics of Space: Theatre and Topology*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte and Benjamin Wihstutz (Routledge, 2013), pp. 102–18 (p. 102).
8. ‘What to Expect’, Young Vic Theatre <<https://www.youngvic.org/visit-us/what-to-expect>> [accessed 28 July 2020].
9. David Lan, *As if by Chance: Journeys, Theatres, Lives* (Faber & Faber, 2020), [n.p.].
10. As quoted in Michael Billington, ‘How the Young Vic’s David Lan Dared to Put the World Centre-Stage’, *Guardian*, 6 February 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/feb/06/david-lan-young-vic-theatre-london>> [accessed 1 June 2024].
11. Lan, *As if by Chance*, [n.p.].
12. Dickson, ‘The Director’s Cut’.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Young Vic Theatre Company, *Report of the Trustees and Consolidated Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2017*, (Young Vic Theatre Company, 2017), p. 4.
15. Solga, *Theory for Theatre Studies*, pp. 7–8.
16. Kim Solga and Joanne Tompkins, ‘Environments of Theatre in the Modern Age’, in *A Cultural History of Theatre in the Modern Age*, ed. by Kim Solga (Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 75–94 (pp. 77, 85). As well as inviting audiences in, the Young Vic also sends artists out to its local community, as seen most recently in INNOVATE, the theatre’s collaborative arts-in-education project that saw practitioners placed within local secondary schools across two years.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
18. Billington, ‘How the Young Vic’s David Lan Dared to Put the World Centre-Stage’.
19. Knowles, *Theatre & Interculturalism*, p. 20.
20. Daphne P. Lei, ‘Interruption, Intervention, Interculturalism: Robert Wilson’s HIT Productions in Taiwan’, *Theatre Journal*, 63.4 (2011), pp. 571–86.
21. Knowles, *Theatre & Interculturalism*, p. 20.
22. I use the word *haunt* here following Marvin Carlson in *The Haunted Stage*.
23. Joe Penhall, ‘Blue/Orange’, Young Vic Theatre, 12 May 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQET19MBkEY&t=109s>> [accessed 1 June 2024].
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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].

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