

Introduction

Scaling Traditions: An Anthropology of Theatre, Migration, and State

But how to get this going? How
To portray men's living together like this so
That it becomes possible to understand and master it? How
To show not only oneself, and others not only
As they conduct themselves once
The net has caught them? How
Now to show the knotting and casting of fate's net?
And that it has been knotted and cast by men? The first thing
You have to learn is the art of observation.

You, actor
Must master the art of observation
Before all other arts.

(...)
Therefore your training must begin among
The lives of other people. Make your first school
The place you work in, your home,
The district to which you belong,
The shop, the street, the train.
Observe each one you set eyes upon.
Observe strangers as if they were familiar
And those whom you know as if they were strangers.

(Bertolt Brecht, *An Address to Danish Worker Actors on the Art of
Observation*, 1987 [1976]: 235)

The Subject of This Book

'Theatre is not a cure for the ills of the world and not a replacement for therapy', Adem sighs into his cup of çai, as we sit in his go-to shisha bar near the centre of Mülheim an der Ruhr, *Casanova*. Like many mid-sized cities in the Ruhr valley, situated in the north of Germany's most populous state North Rhine-Westphalia, the bled-out urban social fabric of the city

exemplifies the fate of post-industrial regions. Dubbed ‘Germany’s Detroit’ by *The New York Times* (2013), post-war wasteland and high unemployment rates outweigh nostalgic rejuvenation campaigns that repaint the rusty structures of long-gone essential industries. Shopping malls that replaced the post-war middle classes and their independent stores have now themselves become bankrupt, leaving large and empty blots of white and grey in the inner cities; empty windows tell of the fluctuation on the former high streets, which lead up to desolate tower blocks accommodating the city’s poorest demographics. A bleak, yet condensed narrative starting point for the story told in this book; a book that tells of theatre, heritage, and migration in a region literally undermined. And yet only one narrative entry into this heterotopian valley along the Rhine and Ruhr, shot through with hundreds of kilometres of subterranean tunnels that give way to methane in porous exits, often far from the remnants of the old heavy industrial ruins that have become the projection screens of overly optimistic and flawed creative economies. There are other exits and entrances into this burrow, like the many creative observers – migrants or the children of migrants, amateur and professional actors, evoked by Brecht (1987 [1976]) in the epigraph to this introduction, who learnt the art of observation through the schools of the quotidian, the encounters among strangers – and the institutions they created in this region once connected only by the smoke of its past industries, to recall Joseph Roth’s phrasing from a reportage he wrote about the region: ‘Here, the smoke forms a sky. It connects all cities.’ (Roth 1926, see also Rossmann 2012).

I am ‘tolerated’ in the bar’s hidden and somewhat illicit backroom where shisha smoke clouds my notepad because Adem is a staple character respected among the mostly Lebanese and Turkish-speaking café-goers. Card games and slot machines add to the murmur of voices, interrupted by the sonic backdrop from recent rehearsals that Adem shows me on his phone. We have been meeting in the bar to discuss a theatre group he founded a few years ago under the patronage and aegis of the *Theater an der Ruhr* (hereafter also: the Theater) and its émigré-founder, philosopher, and self-taught director Roberto Ciulli. Its name, Ruhrorter, pays tribute to the street on which it staged its first self-composed play, and the derelict industrial building in which it took place. The complex on the ‘Ruhrorter Straße’ used to accommodate refugees from the Balkan wars and housed a ‘psycho-social centre for foreign refugees’ (*Psychosoziales Zentrum für ausländische Flüchtlinge*). It sits between different cities along the Ruhr – Oberhausen, Duisburg, Mülheim. All of these are ‘Ruhr Orte’, places along the Ruhr.

I don't want to say to the press that we are a 'refugee theatre collective', because it disturbs me that we are separating refugees and migrants from the others here in the city. Because: Who are these others? Bio-Germans [*Bio-Deutsche*], here since generations and with a different access to the rights of German citizenship and culture? No.

Adem's proposal for a new theatre collective touched a nerve with the founder and director of the Theater an der Ruhr, Roberto Ciulli. Not only had he himself migrated to Germany in the 1960s, working initially, as so many fellow migrants from the Mediterranean at the time, as a production line worker at industrial plants, before taking a slow route into the German theatre landscape. First as a lighting assistant, then slowly in smaller roles as an actor (see Wewerka and Tinius 2020). In Göttingen, later in the larger cities of Düsseldorf and Cologne, his wit, but also his previous experience – despite his young age, he had migrated to Germany following studies in philosophy, a failed tent theatre on the outskirts of Milan, and a heart attack – made him noteworthy among the predominantly German directors and acting colleagues at the time. And yet, even as Ciulli began directing in German, took over theatres, and founded his own institution, he was stereotyped.

'An Italian directing German plays'. 'The Migrant in Germany'. Titles of major newspaper reviews throughout the 1970s and 1980s that I gathered over the course of my research on Ciulli tell a story of the persistent cultural tropes of a united German identity and Southern European others, which are projected onto his theatrical work. Divisions that Ciulli was to challenge for the coming forty years with his post-dramatic, post-migrant work aesthetic and ensemble members when they declared themselves as a theatre of and for the *bastardo* (see Tinius and Wewerka 2020). A theatre that sought, against public opinion and critical reviews, to offer a perspective on cultural production beyond the national frame. 'Theatre as and for the bastardo', Ciulli told me frequently, 'means doing or being something or someone without a *Vaterland* or *Muttersprache*', using the two gendered kinship terminologies for father-land and mother-tongue. Exemplifying and performing this political aesthetic, his institution would later house, for ten years, the first professional Roma theatre *Pralipe*, whose ensemble had fled from discrimination in Macedonia. Many of their ensemble members, as the group dissolved, became active in Ciulli's ensemble and formed the migrant-situated core of the institution whose significance for understanding and troubling German theatre and culture I unravel in this book.

The Argument of This Book

This book takes the Theater an der Ruhr as a case study of an odd artistic tradition, as a school for the development of ethical and political sensibilities through art that both seems to fit into a very ‘German’ narrative of public theatre and politically detached criticism and yet appear at odds with it; by breaking with the idea of theatre as a cure or therapy. Instead, the narrative of this book is about the institutionalisation of a situated, migrant-led and -situated artistic critique of sociocultural homogeneity; about what happens when institutions are formed on the back of long-standing national traditions, and what forms of artistic and social critique are rendered possible through them.

This account also scales up as a comparative description of art (including theatre) as a form of ethical practice where engagement with the self is not an antipode to an engagement with others, or even society at large. Such a scaling up brings us in particular to the remarkable German network of public ensemble and repertoire theatres and the country’s tradition of *Bildung*, or self-cultivation, but it equally relates to other contexts of performance traditions that I elaborate in this book, especially those connected to refugee collectives that formed through forced migration into the Ruhr region.

Every anthropological inquiry, even comparative ones, begin from a concrete context and a partial locality. As an anthropological anchor point, this book situates the institutional form of the Theater an der Ruhr and its notion of art in the wider context of German cultural policies and state patronage. Indeed, the book shows how theatre can be a prism for making sense of and critically analysing the romantic notion of Germany as a ‘state of the arts and culture’, a *Kulturstaat*. It documents how an institution positions itself as an alternative to both, the flexible labour conditions of the ‘creative industries’ and the bureaucracy of state institutions. I therefore focus on how Ciulli and his ensemble conceive of and enact the Theater an der Ruhr as a site for self-formation and political deliberation in and through art. This enactment occurs through a range of means, including recourse to (critical) theory in the field itself and what I call ‘institution-building’ labour practices (Chapter 2), the creation of an internal training of conduct during rehearsals (Chapter 3), as well as transnational public engagement through theatre with international artists (Chapter 4) and migrants in the aftermath of the 2015 and 2016 ‘refugee crisis’ in Germany (Chapter 5).

This self-positioning of the Theater occurs in the context of the cultural institutions specific to Germany. The country boasts an exceptionally high density of publicly funded theatres with an ensemble and repertory system. These more than 150 institutions comprise municipal or city theatres

(*Stadttheater*), regional theatres of the federated states (*Landestheater*), and state theatres (*Nationaltheater*). This ‘theatre landscape’ has emerged through phases of republicanism, centralisation, and decentralisation that have shaped Germany over the last 200 years. In 2014, following years of lobbying by the powerful German theatre employer’s association (*Deutscher Bühnenverein*), the country’s unique public ensemble and repertoire theatre landscape was recognised by the German chapter of UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage. While it was thus officially acknowledged as integral to modern German cultural identity, critical commentators interpret this act as a conserving ‘musealisation’ of a decaying institution. Other critics from the consolidating freelance performing arts scene in the country further challenge the contemporaneity of public ensemble theatres on aesthetic grounds, portraying them as anachronistic guardians of classical Western canons and a long overdue historical avant-garde.

The cultural politics and political economy behind Germany’s public theatres thus reveals more than just funding statistics. As Brandon Woolf (2021) formulates it aptly for the West-German theatre context, its cultural policy ‘should be thought of as an artistic practice of institutional imagination’. German theatres are part of the country’s cultural and often difficult heritage, and as such, in Sharon Macdonald’s (2013: 1) words, ‘products of collective memory work’. The cultural historian Manfred Osten speaks of German theatre as an ‘administrator of cultural memory’ (Kaiser et al. 2010: 20). As arguably ‘the country that has struggled most and longest over its twentieth-century difficult heritage’ – even inventing a term to mean ‘coming to terms with its past’ (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) – Germany’s public theatres can reveal the country’s meaningful past, allow it to break through into the present, and constitute sites to negotiate its future (Macdonald 2009: 1).

Theatres are profoundly bound up with the German state through the pervasive notions of patronage and self-formation. The idea of the German ‘culture state’ or ‘state of the arts and culture’ (*Kulturstaat*) reflects Germany’s long tradition of state patronage for the arts and, moreover, of the arts as autonomous sites for self-formation and political commentary. This tradition is profoundly tied to the concept of *Bildung* and the dialectic formation of intellectual expertise among the educated intellectuals of modern German society (see Boyer 2005). A German cultural and intellectual history of art institutions inevitably has to take into account the divergent and conflicting traditions of fascism and socialism, division and reunification. I chose therefore to speak of connected tropes rather than a single ‘tradition’, as Walter Bruford intimates in his seminal *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation* (1975). For him, the ‘German tradition of

self-cultivation' (Bruford 1975.) originated among the Romantics as a liberal political notion that regarded the state as a *facilitator* of personal self-development of aesthetic sensibilities, rather than a *dictator* of artistic styles. As the following chapter elaborates, this political conception is linked to the idealist philosophy of Fichte and Kant and the attribution of moral value to art, elaborated by authors such as Goethe and Schiller for theatre (see Bruford (1950) for an extended discussion, and Goethe and Schiller 1986 [1799]). Self-formation through the arts gained a significant albeit far from unproblematic societal and political dimension through the statesmanship of Wilhelm von Humboldt and the German *Bildungsbürgertum* of the nineteenth century, the educated middle-class which embodied these ideals and significantly informed modern German culture and society (cf. Messling 2016). Although it is arguably also true that 'romantic nationalism in Germany was the product of a generation of underpaid and underemployed intellectuals who eventually turned to the task of inventing traditions' (Giesen 1998), my account underscores how theatre, as a network of public institutions, a professional field, and as an artform, relates to ideals of political self-cultivation today and how contemporary migrant theatre troubles these national heritage narratives by seeking concepts and practices that overcome the othering reification of the figure of the migrant.

This book thus contributes especially to two fields of study that pertain to anthropology, theatre and performance studies as well as scholarship on modern and contemporary Germany and its grappling with a post-migrant society. On the one hand, my analysis of German theatre in the cultural traditions of *Bildung* introduces the pertinence of art as an extra-ordinary ethical field; 'extra-ordinary' in the sense that it became institutionalised and is thus different from everyday performance. I am not following a 'descent into the ordinary' (Das 2012: 134), or the 'transcendent' (Robbins 2016), but rather work out ways in which moments become marked as other, theatrical, or set-aside (Barber 2007; Davis and Postlewait 2003). Brecht's speech to Danish working-class actors (1987 [1976]: 235), which opened this chapter, exemplifies this extra-ordinary theatricality I am here analysing. While Brecht may appear to tell the lay actors to stay in the everyday ('The place you work in, your home, / The district to which you belong, / The shop, the street, the train'), he breaks their perspective on the unreflected quotidian by asking them to take these – 'The lives of other people' – and their places, as 'your first school', where 'your training must begin'. The invitation to 'master the art of observation / Before all other arts' is a profoundly anthropological one, which resonates with my interest in theatre as a prism for anthropological understandings of society

and culture. It is as if Brecht talked of fieldwork when he tells the Danish worker-actors to 'observe strangers as if they were familiar / And those whom you know as if they were strangers' (Brecht 1987 [1976]: 235).

On the other hand, this study of theatre as an ethical field hopes to foreground a neglected aspect in the anthropological study of Western cultural institutions, especially in Germany: the articulation of traditions of political thought and self-formation through and in the arts. This also hints at how anthropological description, analysis, and theory interact in this book. The historical context of theatre as a key German cultural institution is important in situating the fieldsite and what I call its founders' 'instituting practices' (see Chapter 2 and Tinius 2015b). Primarily, these consist of rehearsals, international travel, and political engagement through theatre with marginalised communities, which I describe in this order in the following chapters. Since these practices constitute internal goods around which the identity of the institution and its members as well as the self-understanding of a cosmopolitan German nation has been negotiated for the last forty or so years, I use the analytic term 'tradition' to describe how the institution, its practices, and ideals hang together. In my account, then, the Theater an der Ruhr serves as a case study of an institution that has become a tradition with its own form of training, pedagogy, critique, and transformative *telos* and a prism for theorising, that is, explaining its own practice so as to understand it better.

The aim of this analytical vocabulary is to scale up and extrapolate from the example of theatre to the relation of (public) art institutions and ethical practices in contemporary societies more broadly. It is for these reasons that my study does not focus on the analysis or interpretation of individual performances or plays, but on the role of authority, the institutional processes that facilitate reflection and self-cultivation, and the way in which the virtues and ideals of German public theatre in general, and of the Theater an der Ruhr in particular, are negotiated through its engagement with transnationalism, alterity, and migration.

This study does therefore not address how theatre (as an art form) is consumed or circulated in a socio-economic 'field' (Bourdieu 1993), nor does it dismiss aesthetics altogether as a uniform bourgeois cult (Gell 1999). Rather, I wish to attend to how theatre contains both actual practices and 'a utopian promise of a different form of life' (Sansi 2015: 78; see also Blanes et al. 2016; Bourriaud 1999, 2002). This book thus does not explore how theatre (as an art form) is instrumentalised as a tool (Cohen-Cruz 2010; Crehan 2011) or an object of communication (Chua and Elliott 2013; Leach 1976; McAuley 1999). Rather, it studies how the

reflexive practice of theatre can be a form of political self-cultivation, and how this occurs in an institutionalised professional and public context that connects theatre as a 'relational entity' to other reflexive spheres of society (Bell 2012: 86; see also Flynn and Tinius 2015). My emphasis on the public role and responsibility attributed to German public theatres by the state and the significance I attribute to the moral narratives of key informants thus speaks to Weber's description of politics as a vocation (*Beruf*), that is, the deliberative reconciling of conviction and responsibility (Weber 1992 [1919]; 1995 [1919]).

Furthermore, if we understand by ethnography the information of analytic terms through emic, situated concepts in the poetic and political act of writing about experience, then this book does just that by asking how the terms used by my interlocutors and constitutive of the cultural history of Germany (*Bildung*, *Haltung*, and *Beruf*) can inform our anthropological understandings of ethical subjects and traditions in theatre and art. Since anthropology is both description *and* translation, this book treats these concepts as localised and therefore relative and partial, but also as informing an analytic vocabulary that is generalisable and comparative. The questions raised by this account are therefore at once about the specific account I offer, and about its effectiveness in informing the vocabulary, analysis, and theory of both anthropology and theatre and performance research. The core questions informing this book are: What can public art institutions, understood as 'prisms', tell us about the ethical relevance of art (including theatre) in German and European society today? How do artists in such institutions reflect on their practice, methods, and theories, and in doing so, what kinds of expertise do they develop to rethink social theory today? What methods and theoretical frameworks do we require to develop new approaches to professional public theatre today?

Problematising Performance

This book began as a personal and intellectual fascination with the skilful craft of acting, the reflexive climate of the milieu, and the complexity of theatres as sites of cultural production. Although my acquaintance with institutionalised theatre traditions precedes my anthropological training, I have long been attracted to what we might call the anthropological aspects of theatre, for example the cross-cultural differences in gestures and expression, its reflection on human relations and subjectivity, or its once ancient function as an *agora*, which recurs today in the guise of occupations, protests, and assemblies (Butler 2015). As institutions, professional theatres present a unique cross-section of artistic crafts and professions, ranging

from stagehand and designer to pedagogue, director, and dramaturg. It is not surprising that the Wagnerian notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art encompassing and transcending all art forms and genres, has so frequently recurred in reference to theatre to this day. As I got more familiar with the institution of 'theatre', I became interested in the hierarchies and discipline, the authority, and hard labour that went into rehearsing theatre on a daily basis, and its contemporary 'function' in agonising over the self-understanding of German heritage. And of course, by attending to the extra-ordinary and theatrical in the labour I accompanied, I came closer and closer to the profoundly anthropological 'art of observation' that Brecht again addresses in his speech to Danish working-class actors; their understanding of conduct, their training 'among / the lives of other people' (Brecht 1987 [1976]: 235).

Unfortunately, anthropological accounts that study professional and contemporary art practices and European theatre institutions in depth are scarce. Gell's (1999) description of the Western 'art cult', according to which 'art is a modern form of religion and aesthetics its theology, just as museums are its temples and artists its priests' (Sansi 2015: 67), characterises the tone of many anthropological accounts of professional art. A combination of this scepticism and the 'performative turn' has left the study of professional art and theatre as a credible field to sociologists (see Bourdieu 1979, 2013) and historians of theatre (e.g., Marx 2006); yet it has also produced an interesting turn away from studying actual theatre to seeing it as a set of metaphors for cultural analysis. Anthropologists extrapolated concepts such as 'performance', 'performativity', or 'theatricality' into cultural metaphors and analytics for understanding ritual and social action (Davis 2003; Davis and Postlewait 2003; Nield 2014; Turner 1974). This shift still influences fascinating analyses of political phenomena and political performativity today (see Alexander 2011; Balme 2008; Gaborik 2021; Mast 2012), yet it has always run the risk of being too all-encompassing: what is *not* performance, after all?

The anthropological engagement with theatre and performance has nonetheless generated a fascinating and fundamental discussion about the processual nature of cultural production that is hard to capture (see, however, Beeman 1993; Fabian 1999; Korom 2013). Its emphasis on subjective meaning and the constant negotiation and construction of relations and symbols in and through interaction may be indebted to Weber's principles of sociology (Weber 1904), but it also owes much to ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967) and its shift from thinking about performance as an *aspect* of culture to performance as a *symptom* of culture (Burke 1969). The definition of man as 'homo performans' (Turner 1986: 187), that is,

'a culture-inventing and self-making creature' (Conquergood 1989: 85) then came to define the so-called 'performative turn in anthropology' (Conquergood 1989: 85). As Goffman's (1959: 26) theses on the subject had already elaborated, in this approach all aspects of social life were seen as dramaturgic, and all public activities as enactments of roles. Clifford Geertz (1983: 22) has aptly described this kind of 'genre blurring' as a chance to find new explanatory analogies without giving up one's commitment to anthropology altogether: 'What the lever did for physics, the chess move promises to do for sociology'.

Complementing this conceptual widening of 'performance' and 'theatre', essential aspects of social life and personal identity such as class, ethnicity, gender, and nationality were not merely seen to be *performed*; they came to be regarded as *constituted* by their performance and, as such, *performative* (see Butler 1990, 1993; Cowan 1990; Gay y Blasco 1999; Lemon 2000; Sax 2002; Wacquant 2007). Inspired by sociolinguistics and the speech-act theory of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), performance theory reconceptualised the categories of anthropological inquiry (Davis 2008). Ritual, theatre, and performance became metaphors for cultural praxis more generally, responding to both Edith and Victor Turner's call for an empirically grounded 'anthropology of performance' (Turner 1986) and their colleague Richard Schechner's (1969, 1977, 1985) foundational writings on theatre performance studies. This blurring of boundaries between theatre as a subject *of* anthropology and anthropology *as* a ritual found a provocative echo in the 'writing culture' critique of the same decade (see Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988; Oswald and Tinius 2020), which turned this observation back onto anthropology and its own performance. In conjunction with the interpretative turn in the social sciences founded on Gadamer (2010 [1960]), Geertz (1973), and Ricoeur (1981), this shifted attention not only to the logic of the practising subjects of anthropological research (Bourdieu 1977 [1972], 1988 [1984]; Ortner 1984), but also to anthropological inquiry itself. This discussion is still influential, for example in the more cautious but equally provocative experiments *between* anthropology and artistic practice (Bakke and Peterson 2017; Martínez 2021; Sansi 2015; Schneider and Wright 2006, 2010, 2013) or in studies of practices through a lens of performance and performativity, such as the anthropology of authority and truth (Holbraad 2012; Mahmood 2001a), democracy and citizenship (Lazar 2008; Navaro-Yashin 2002), human rights and law (Barber 2007; Breed 2013; Englund 2011), or gender, race, coloniality, and class (Aly 2015; Sharifi and Skwirblies 2022).

This body of literature has informed this book's understanding of how professional artists perform and enact themselves, or constitute political

fictions they imagine or wish for, rather than just their roles and characters on stage. Yet, I wish to refocus these debates, moving away from using performance and theatre as *analogies* to looking at how artists *problematise* theatre and performance. This distinction moves the focus from analysing how *any* practice everywhere is performed or performative to particular spheres, institutions, and practices where theatre *itself* becomes a 'matter of concern' (Latour 2004a). I call these spheres, institutions, and practices extra-ordinary to distinguish them from ordinary acts and ethics (cf. Das 2012; Lambek 2010). What this shift brings into view, then, is how theatre itself is a sphere where artists negotiate issues of patronage, political engagement, labour, and hierarchy and grapple with the enactment of life through theatre and performance (see Gielen 2013; Peacock and Kao 2013). It is a theoretical, phronetic realm that comprises practice and reasoning.

Such a description and analysis of art institutions as a 'prism', that is, a reflexive and embedded institution with its own traditions, professional codes, and practices of critique has received less sustained attention in anthropology. Beyond the predominance of performance as a metaphor outlined above, this is due to two further reasons. The first is that the anthropology of performance and performance studies have been influenced by a more general anthropological tendency to highlight 'particularly non-Western' performance processes; the second is a pervasive tendency to focus on 'non-elite' practices beyond established traditions (Conquergood 1989: 82). With few exceptions (Faubion 2013; Rabinow 2018; Reed 2011), studies of Western artistic traditions are analysed by sociologists (Bab 1931; Becker et al. 2006; Sapiro 2014) or theatre scholars (Carlson 2001, 2003). Despite having been occasionally sketched as a possibility (see Plessner 1982 [1948]; Royce 2004), a sustained anthropology of the *professional* actor, the performing arts, or of theatre *institutions* has not come into being.

Nonetheless, several anthropologists have approached major cultural institutions similar to professional theatres, which serve as important points of comparison for this book. Georgina Born's ethnographies of the French modern music institute IRCAM (1995) and the BBC (2004) have outlined an anthropological framework for the study of major Western cultural institutions. Her accounts conjoin ethnography and cultural history, attending both to aesthetic traditions within the arts (here, music) and to the social hierarchies within such institutions. Born suggests that aesthetic traditions go hand in hand with how institutions 'pursue their historical effectivity in diffusing, consolidating or legitimizing certain literary or artistic genres or discourses, or, conversely, in their banalisation or demise' (2010: 180). This provides an alternative to Gell's unaccommodating

'anti-art' stance by taking seriously artistic traditions and theories themselves, while keeping a critical distance on how practitioners position themselves among these. Born's work constitutes an important pillar in the approach I outline in this book by combining ethnographic study in and of major Western artistic institutions with a close reading of the historicity and traditions within which these institutions frame themselves. My suggestion here is to regard cultural institutions as 'public theorists' themselves and therefore as explicitly capable of situating themselves with regard to existing theories and traditions of thought about art, society, and politics (see Macdonald 1997).

Through what has been called an 'ethnographic turn in contemporary art' (Rutten et al. 2013, see also Siegenthaler 2013), anthropologically inspired scholarship on theatres and rehearsals has re-emerged in adjacent disciplines in the last decade (see, e.g., Buchmann et al. 2016; Colbert et al. 2020; Harvie and Lavender 2010; Holzhey and Wedemeyer 2019). This turn has its serious limitations, but it creates an interesting resource for the approach outlined in this book. The performance scholar Gay McAuley pioneered anthropological studies of and ethnographic thinking about rehearsals in Western opera and theatre institutions (McAuley 2006a, 2009, 2012). She builds on her observations to theorise theatre as a highly effective model of group creativity. While I question her instrumentalisation of rehearsals as models for other creative processes (because it glosses over the implicit hierarchies and tensions involved in the particular artistic context; see Kurzenberger 2009 for a more nuanced take on this), her recognition of rehearsals as long-term labour processes best approached through anthropological fieldwork is fundamental for this book (on creation and improvisation, see also Atkinson 2004; Hallam and Ingold 2008; Holbraad et al. 2009).

Published within the wide-ranging and interdisciplinary field of German applied theatre studies, Annemarie Matzke's study *Arbeit am Theater* (2012a) presents a rich discursive history of the rehearsal, in which she argues that labour, self-cultivation, and rehearsals are fundamentally related. Partly autoethnographic, since the author is both academic and founding member of feminist collective *She She Pop*, it firms the unstable scholarly ground for anthropological collaborations with theatre academics on professional theatre practice (see Harvie and Lavender 2010). Matzke's work is part of the turn to ethnography in German theatre studies and performance practice, which is also facilitated by the development of theoretical *and* applied schooling emerging at universities over the last two decades (see Matzke et al. 2012; Tinius 2015d). It is common now for performers to speak of their lay actors as 'experts of the everyday' (Dreyse

und Malzacher 2007) or to incorporate research on the conditions of labour into the very practice of theatre (Brogi et al. 2013). As a consequence, anthropologists are increasingly *invited* to regard fieldwork on art as a form of collaboration (see Tinius 2020a, Tinius and Totah 2020). This book responds to this turn to anthropology among performing artists by providing an anthropological account of professional theatre.

Imaginations of Germany

The comparative subject focus of this book on art (including theatre) goes hand in hand with its geographical location. Institutional art traditions, especially public ones, are contextualised and entangled in cultural policies, national cultural histories, and aesthetic schools (Haselbach et al. 2012; Mittag 2008). Although some international developments in contemporary art prompt the usage of terms like ‘global art’ (Fillitz 2015), my study locates the Theater an der Ruhr in Germany and German theatre more widely, not as an outcome or epitome of certain German traditions, but as engaged in aesthetic and political efforts of ‘positioning’ among these (Baert and Morgan 2015: 6). Public theatres are tasked to react to current affairs by their municipal and regional patrons, as well as through the responsibility assumed by directors in their roles as public intellectuals. Furthermore, public theatres (such as the Theater an der Ruhr) are embedded in a post-war tradition of political commentary with its own theoretical styles, such as Brechtian epic theatre and its dialectical approach (Barnett 2015a, b, 2021), for or against which such institutions ‘position’ themselves and ‘engage in contests over different definitions of cultural value, competence and authority’ (Verdery 1991: 18).

This book thus speaks both to anthropological approaches to art (including theatre) and to the study of German and European cultural traditions. The intention of this section is to illustrate the emergence of Germany as an anthropological subject, but moreover to convey the significance of theatre and artistic self-cultivation for understanding German culture, politics, and society.

Born out of romantic travel writing in the eighteenth century, the first German tradition of anthropology (*Volkskunde*) emerged through the collecting of poems, myths, and songs in the German ‘lands’. Herder’s writings on language and literature shaped the notions of *Zeitgeist* or *Volksgeist* as the spirit of a people and a time, expressed and shaped by their cultural output (1773, see also Nisbet 1985). He argued that the comparison of societies should build less on generalisable characteristics than on practices

such as kinship, friendships, or hospitality (1803). While twentieth-century *Volkskunde* reacted to industrialisation by turning towards rural folklore within Germany or German-speaking countries, *Völkerkunde* emerged in the Prussian capital as the (colonial) study of non-European civilisations. Zimmermann (2001) documents how the consolidation of German imperial anthropology during the *Kaiserreich* in the late nineteenth century presented a counterforce to the prevailing liberal humanism at the time. The emergence of ‘popular ethnographic shows’ (*Völkerschauen*), where non-European colonial subjects performed at commercial venues such as Castan’s Panopticon (opened 1883 in Berlin), threatened the superior notion of the European humanist self through colonial encounters *within Germany* (Zimmermann 2001, p. 3, see also Hofmann and Messling 2020). The Prussian ethnological collections of Berlin are still, to this day, the largest in Europe (König 2003; Penny 2021). The notion of the German *Volk* was both challenged and reified through German anthropology, not preventing its adoption under Nazism. As part of their pervasive appropriations of Western culture through propaganda media such as the *Völkische Beobachter*, the notion of the *Volk* epitomised the fascist national and cultural imagination of Germanness (Dennis 2012). Hahn (2010: 148) suggests that early twentieth-century German anthropology (Adolf Bastian, Leo Frobenius, Wilhelm Schmidt) failed to emancipate itself from the political influence of German imperial rule and the Nazis’ ‘dismal mark left on anything German’ (Norman 1991: 3, cf. Koepping 1983; Penny 2022).

Post-war attempts to reinvent the discipline as European ethnology, or *Europäische Ethnologie* (formerly *Volkskunde*) and ethnology, or *Ethnologie*, (formerly *Völkerkunde*) revisited its involvement in race ideologies (Hoppe et al. 1998). They also entailed a shift away from romanticised notions of *Volkskultur* towards studies of the everyday and urban, labour, and the technical world (Barth et al. 2005; Bausinger 1961). Besides these developments within German anthropology, the Cold War and Germany’s East–West divide provoked a plethora of studies conducted on Germany from without; on post-war society (Lowie 1954; Rodnick 1948), ethnicity and migration (Chin 2007; Mandel 2008; Weißköppel 2009), urban regeneration and heritage (Macdonald 2009; Weszkalnys 2010), post-industrialism and post-socialism (Borneman 1991, 1992; Ringel 2014), or cultural experience and the state (Boyer 2003a; Wiggershaus 2008 [1988]).

The liberal humanist ideals of *Bildung*, *Kultur*, and self-cultivation through the arts only recently ‘returned’ to anthropological attention. I say ‘returned’ because the intellectual traditions of Romanticism and Idealism that inspired these notions have been present throughout the

modern tradition of the human sciences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Duarte 2015; Eriksen and Nielsen 2001; Foucault 1970 [1966]; Wellmon 2010).

If the autonomy of the individual is regarded as one of the defining features of the admittedly problematic notion of 'Western modernity', then it is no surprise that Louis Dumont devoted his lesser-known analysis *German Ideology* (1994 [1991]) to France and Germany from 1770 to 1939. Dumont's study complements what he had proposed as the holistic and integrated vision of India's *Homo hierarchicus* (1970 [1966]), defined in relation to the structural whole. By contrast, the 'idiosyncratic formula of German ideology (community holism + self-cultivating individualism)' points to a relation of the individual to the community that is different both from the Indian and other European traditions, notably the French; *Bildung* presented for him a secularised form of inward-orientated humanism developed after the Reformation (Dumont 1994 [1991]: 20). As Andre Gingrich puts it in response to Dumont, 'Lutheran and Kantian moralism were ... transformed into a reflexive obligation' and 'normative ideal' (1998: 570). Although Dumont professes to 'know nothing about the German of the present day' (1994 [1991]: 3), his observation that *Bildung* relies on a larger structure that facilitates this process, captures the German fixation on autonomy and authority, self-realisation and submission that plays a role throughout this study.

Dominic Boyer's ethnography *Spirit and System: Media, Intellectuals, and the Dialectic in Modern German Culture* (2005) addresses Dumont and the 'idiosyncratic German ideology' by reading the relation between individual creativity ('spirit') and collective constraints ('system') as 'dialectic'. His account of journalists and intellectuals in the so-called 'new states' of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) in unified Germany situates their styles of thought as functions of their past social and professional experience, yet not as entirely determined by it. When dealing with reflexive professionals who theorise their own autonomy and constraints (see Boyer 2001, 2003b), concepts like structure and system cease to be mere analytic tools and become ethnographic matters of concern. Boyer suggests that while the dialectic between 'spirit' (*Geist*) and 'system' has been a recurrent (and indeed contested; see Simmel 1968) feature of German intellectual life for some 200 years now, it provides a useful lens to study intellectuals and knowledge in the present. His study underlines the relevance of bringing such intellectual traditions to bear on one's ethnographic description, especially when the relationship between anthropologist and interlocutor is that of one professional 'expert' studying

another (Boyer 2008). Such an approach highlights the distinctiveness of explicitly reflexive professional milieus and fields (Deeb and Marcus 2011, Wacquant 1989), which is arguably central to the construction of the modern German nation (Giesen 1998).

Tanja Bogusz's sociological account *Institution und Utopie* (2007) traces the legacy of Germany's East–West divide through a case study of Berlin's, and indeed Germany's, most iconic theatre, the *Volksbühne* (The People's Stage). While the GDR fell almost overnight, and Berlin initiated the transformative process of unification (*Wiedervereinigung*), this particular theatre maintained an East German intellectual profile and yet contributed to a post-socialist '*sensus communis*' (Bogusz 2007: 12). Theatre, Bogusz writes, is one of the most institutionalised forms of artistic practice in Germany, and as such presents at once contemporary social interaction and traces of past ideologies and cultural policies (Bogusz 2007: 13). She considers the *Volksbühne* as a prism for understanding the 'cultural and symbolic undercoat (*Grundierung*)' of both East and West Germany (Bogusz 2007: 12). Seen in such a light, public theatres can be understood as a lens through which the detailed relations between institution, state, and professional artists become visible.

This argument speaks to the nature of my contribution to the anthropology of nation-states, here in particular the anthropology of Germany, and how it interlaces art, ethics, and cultural history. The turbulent history of Germany in the twentieth century, and its difficult process of coming to terms with it, provides a fertile ground for the analysis of how national traditions intersect with and influence contemporary society, but also how they become subjects of reflection in art. The study of intellectual and professional self-formation through public institutions is one area to which this book contributes. More specifically, it seeks to trace the possibility of such a study of reflexive self-formation in the context of German traditions through theatre. German public theatres are regionally funded and maintained as institutions facilitating autonomous political commentary and detached self-cultivation through the arts; a reasoning that builds on a variety of traditions, from Romantic *Bildung* to post-war *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

This description is recursive in so far as the ethnographic term becomes itself a form of analytic. Initially serving as the defining feature among the educated German cultural bourgeoisie, *Bildung* became elevated to official Prussian cultural and educational policy through its principal proponent, Wilhelm von Humboldt (see Humboldt 1969 [1813]). Practices of political self-cultivation and the discourse of nation-building were no

longer confined to coffee houses and private societies but became central to national public institutions, especially universities and theatres (see Habermas 1989 [1962]).

While the first attempt at establishing a national theatre in this tradition, the *Hamburgische Entreprise* (1767–1769), was ultimately unsuccessful, it inspired contemporaries further south. Working in Mannheim, Friedrich Schiller emphasised that ‘if we experienced a national stage, we would also become a nation’ (1785 [1784]: 99). For Schiller, theatres were ideal sites for the aesthetic education of mankind. They could function as ‘moral academies’ with a *telos* of shaping man as an autonomous subject of his own judgement. For Schiller, theatre could achieve what Kant described as the *sensus communis*, an aesthetic self-cultivation that renders us aware of others (Kant 1951 [1790]). As Schiller put it in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1983 [1794]), aesthetic communication and play are forms of self-cultivation that unite society. Aesthetic self-cultivation therefore goes beyond detached private interests and denotes more than just *ex nihilo* creation or autodidacticism (Menger 2009), resistance or emancipation (Abu-Lughod 2002); it is a pathway into the multiple meanings of subjectivity – as subjection and expression (see Milchman and Rosenberg 2007) – and it speaks ‘of imagination, of concern and respect’ for oneself and others (Faubion 2001), and therefore of what we might call, with reference to Lambek (2000b: 11) and Al-Mohammad (2015: 449), an ethics that is at once self- and other-orientated.

This German tradition of inward-orientated self-cultivation is by no means an unproblematic one. Indeed, it is important to understand that the ‘unpolitical’ individualism associated with *Bildung* has led certain critical scholars, including Dumont and the sociologist Norbert Elias, to suggest that it even provided the basis for the National Socialist over-determination of German culture during the Third Reich. This discussion on the anti-Republicanism of imperial notions of self-cultivation has been critically elaborated, for example by Elias (1969 [1939]; 2002 [1989]), and I am not going to rehearse it here. It is important to remark on the rupture that Nazism signified for Germans and the way they related to art and culture after World War II, however, to understand the significance subsequently attributed to political critique and artistic autonomy. Reacting to the fascist centralisation of cultural practices, post-WWII West German cultural institutions, specifically theatres, stressed the detachment of art from state ideology. Funding became decentralised to federated regional states (*Länder*) and municipalities, which were to provide the conditions for autonomous artistic practices. Paired with the

democratising reforms of the 1970s that regarded institutions as sites for political critique, this created a unique combination: generously funded theatres tasked with a pedagogic *telos*, yet with little aesthetic coherence. Once again, self-education through the arts became a significant cultural policy, but with a political overtone.

German contemporary public theatre as I analyse it in this book thus encompasses a range of institutionalised traditions that are fundamentally tied up with the tumultuous formation of a German nation-state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Prussian in foundation, culturally bourgeois in its audiences and content, and critically liberal in its post-war philosophical orientation, today's public theatre system contains fragments of multiple traditions. Although I will be arguing that a central continuous narrative, from the emergence of public theatres and the notion of *Bildung* in the late eighteenth century to today's public institutions, can be read through the idea of the state as a facilitator of political self-cultivation through art and theatre – hence the title of this book – there are also other possible narratives that cannot be covered in the same depth in this study, but which inform it at different points. The appropriation of tropes of self-realisation through submission to the collective under the Nazis is one, the role of intellectual self-formation and socialist realism in the GDR and among post-war Marxists in the Federal Republic is another. As the German historian Reinhart Koselleck puts it, 'a productive tension, stabilized over and over again through self-critical use, obviously inheres within the concept *Bildung*' (2002: 170). German theatre is thus not the only one, but a productive institutional pathway, a prism that refracts analyses of national cultural politics and cultural traditions on the one hand, and the ethics of art on the other. Since this book is concerned with analysing the relation of public cultural institutions to these diverse German traditions, it is therefore also a study about how theatres question and negotiate their position in or against certain traditions of self-cultivation, cultural patronage, and political activism through art. From up close, the members of the Theater an der Ruhr, for example, will distinguish themselves from specific aspects of the public theatre tradition (its bureaucracy, for example, or its public–private partnership model) and it is in this respect an atypical case to extrapolate to a wider German phenomenon. Taking a step back, however, it is clear that, precisely by virtue of reacting so strongly against certain common institutional and aesthetic traditions among public theatres in Germany and by underlining the crucial role of migration in contesting national myths of cultural coherence, the Theater an der Ruhr is an illuminating case to understand the wider cultural context in which it

is situated. It throws into relief aspects of the German theatre system that would otherwise not be visible. And as such, my account also shows how certain key cultural terms are not extinct historical discourses, but extant notions used by artists and intellectuals today that prompt both them and me, as an anthropologist concerned with their practices, to reflect on the political and ethical role of the arts and an increasingly polarised cosmopolitan, post-migrant society in Germany in the present.

Art as Ethical Practice

Over the last decade, a particular dimension of human life has become the subject of sustained anthropological debate, encompassed by the category of 'ethics', 'the ethical field' (Faubion 2001, 2011), or 'ethical subjects' (Laidlaw 2002, 2014, 2023). This general subject of inquiry is not new. Questions about the moral systems of societies having been at the heart of anthropological accounts for the last century or so. What distinguishes this recent formation from previous engagements is first and foremost the very fact that it constitutes a sustained engagement. Secondly, those more recent anthropological accounts of ethics that I shall be considering shift towards practices and conceptions of the good or freedom (see Venkatesan 2015). Joel Robbins (2013) reviews how this is the current situation following disciplinary shifts in focus from the 'savage subject' to the 'suffering subject'. It has been argued (Scheper-Hughes 1995) that anthropological concern with ethics *should* address the disenfranchised, suffering, and subaltern communities whose marginalisation it allegedly facilitated (Rosaldo 1986). Scepticism of such evaluative claims about what constitutes the proper subject of study is an important aspect of the recent turn to ethics as I consider it. This scepticism rests in part on a reinterpretation of Nietzsche's dictum that 'there is no such thing as moral phenomena, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena' (2003 [1886]: 96, §108), suggesting that rather than making evaluative claims, the anthropology of ethics takes as its subject the very formation and practice of reflected evaluation and judgement.

In line with a second, Foucauldian scepticism, recent anthropological engagements with ethics problematise another significant difference: the ways in which ethics differs from 'morality', or 'moral codes', which are understood as 'a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies' (Foucault 1990a [1984]: 25). Ethical practices are distinct from techniques of domination (see Laidlaw 2002: 322). Rather, as techniques of the self, they

permit individuals to effect, by their own means [or with the help of others], a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power. (Foucault 2000a [1981]: 177; see also Foucault 1988: 18)

These techniques do not imply a ‘law conception of ethics’ (Anscombe 1958: 13), but an ‘exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain a certain mode of being’ and as such constitute ‘conscious (*réfléchie*) practices of freedom’ (Foucault 2000b [1994]: 282, 284). For Foucault, thought and reflection here denote ‘a form of action’; they *are* ‘what establishes the relation with oneself and with others, and constitutes the human being as ethical subject’ (pp. 200, 201).

This reflection positions my approach within the multi-focal anthropological debate on the ‘location’ of ethics; whether ethical behaviour is to be found in *particular* forms of practice or in everyday life (Das 2007, 2014), the subject or the forces that shape it (Bodenhorn, Holbraad, and Laidlaw 2018), the ordinary (Lambek 2010), even exceptional events (Zigon 2007, 2014), or a narrative combination of both (Mattingly 2012, 2013). Or as Michael Lambek (2015: 5) put it: ‘The various epistemological and methodological issues may be condensed as simply *how to recognize the ethical?*’ This is not a ‘mere’ reflection on method, but an analytic and to some extent a political one that delimits whose and what kinds of action fall within the remit of ethical practices, who is seen as capable of acting ethically, and who is not (McKearney 2022). Two of the most significant questions for an anthropological engagement with ethics as I wish to discuss it therefore seem to be: ‘who or what constitutes ethical subjects?’ and ‘where’ or ‘when’ to locate ethical practices? This second question could be rephrased as ‘who or what constitutes an ethical field?’

This study proposes two related answers to these questions, which I see as an extension, not a reorientation, of this emerging field of inquiry. First, that we can think of institutions and traditions as ethical fields and, second, of art as ethical action and the artist as an ethical subject. In a nod to Gell, I am not proposing that art is per se a ‘Good Thing’ (1998: 159), but that art condenses reflection on ethical practices in ways that are distinctly different from but often embedded in other spheres such as religion or care. It is unsurprising that – despite Gell’s polemic association of art and theological ideology – art, religion, and ethics often intertwine (Bermúdez and Gardner 2003; Bertram 2010; George 2010; Hirschkind 2006; Marsden 2005, 2007). I do not intend to explore the relation of art to religion as ethical practice, although the vocabulary of sacredness, virtue, and spirituality

is often invoked in relation to artistic practices (Combs-Schilling 1989). My concern draws on the way in which art is regarded not as a hobby, but as a public profession with moral tasks and requirements (in Weber's sense of *Beruf*), where artistic practices both inform and result from ethical questions such as 'how ought I to act – in relation to myself and to others?', 'what kind of a person am I?', 'what constitutes a life worth living?' My own contribution on theatre is therefore a descriptive one aimed at a comparative analysis of artistic practices as ethical and of art as an ethical field.

The relationship between art and ethics has long been entertained and studied, predominantly through the lens of aesthetics. As Edmund Leach put it: 'If we are to understand the ethical rules of a society, it is aesthetics that we must study' (2000 [1954]: 154). Reduced to the rational cultivation of our senses and our judgement of the beautiful (an essentially Kantian understanding of aesthetics that differs from the subjectivist and immersive one of, say, Baumgarten 1954 [1735]), however, it has become a controversial anthropological subject. In 1993, the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory met in Manchester to debate whether 'aesthetics is a cross-cultural category' (Weiner 1994). While Howard Morphy and Jeremy Coote argued that all cultures have such standards according to which they create art, Joanna Overing and Peter Gow opposed this view, arguing that aesthetics is a 'bourgeois and elitist concept in the most literal historical sense, hatched and nurtured in the rationalist Enlightenment' (Weiner 1994: 260). This position must be understood within a post-colonial framework that reacts against the hegemony of Western cultural categories and institutions, but it is unhelpful, to say the least, if it is those institutions and categories that one wishes to inquire and study. This scholarly urge to go *Beyond Esthetics* (Pinney and Thomas 2001) has been articulated in numerous ways by anthropologists (see Leach 1954), philosophers (Adorno 2003 [1970]; Nowak 2012), and – ironically often overlooked – also by artists and art historians (see Sansi 2015; Osborne 2004), but it provoked its broadest reception in anthropology following Alfred Gell's provocative writings on the subject of art and aesthetics (1992, 1999).

In so far as such modern souls possess a religion, that religion is the religion of art, the religion whose shrines consist of theatres, libraries and art galleries, whose priests and bishops are painters and poets, whose theologians are critics, and whose dogma is the dogma of universal aestheticism. (1998: 159)

Accordingly, he proposed that anthropology should 'swallow' the 'bitter pill' of 'methodological philistinism' to put an end to the Eurocentric 'art cult' (1998: p. 161). This understanding of aesthetics as 'privileged detached contemplation' has informed an impoverished anthropological view on

Western art as ‘the very tool of the process of social distinction’ and as a form of ascetic ‘withdrawal from the senses and bodily experience’, as Roger Sansi rightly observes (2015: 68). Such a view describes only a limited range of specific bourgeois traditions, and to adopt this position as the last word on the subject forecloses the possibility of developing a sustained comparative anthropological inquiry into professional Western art practices (see Rabinow 2018; Sansi 2007, 2008; Svašek 2007). To bracket all Western art experience as bourgeois presumes that we already know what it is and can safely ignore it. This study seeks to go beyond such an unhelpful approach by contributing to a different kind of anthropology of art, one that looks back at canonical Western traditions, in this case theatre, and to treat it as reflexive and complex field whose ethical dimension and traditions we do not in fact already know well enough to ignore them.

As the philosopher Marcia Muelder Eaton put it, ‘aesthetic concerns can be as serious and important as ethical concerns ... and may even require the integration of aesthetics and ethics’ (2001: v; cf. Levinson 1998). For her, the value of art ‘cannot be understood in isolation from a wide range of human endeavours and institutions’ (Muelder Eaton 2001: v). It follows that an understanding of the ethical import of art ‘goes well beyond immediately manifest formal properties residing in what are taken to be aesthetic objects and events’ (p. 1). She therefore suggests that ‘artistic activity can be understood and appreciated only when we recognise and acknowledge what and why people have engaged in it’ (p. 3). ‘In every culture and subculture’, she continues, ‘traditions develop that lead to a sharing of attitudes about worthwhile activities’ (p. 4) – and which those are ‘depends on the traditions of a community’ (p. 5). If we take art and aesthetics to be two closely related such activities, ‘it is essential that one understand a great deal generally about that community’ (p. 4).

Since the aim of this book is to understand the ethical significance attributed to public theatres in Germany, my ethnography of professional institutions stands in dialogue with the German tradition of self-cultivation encapsulated in the notion of *Bildung*. In doing so, it performs a syncretic act, which has not yet been made in this field, namely to bring the anthropological lens of ethics to bear on an artistic organisation and a cultural tradition within the framework of a strong nation-state narrative. In turn, it brings artistic practices into the realm and scope of anthropological engagement with ethics.

By using the terms ‘ethical’ and ‘tradition’, I speak to two levels of anthropological analysis: the specific artistic practices within the Theater an der Ruhr and the Theater an der Ruhr as a case study for a wider German institutional tradition of public political theatres with moral responsibilities,

moral mandates, and ethical incentives. Since the daily practice of artists in the Theater involve intellectual self-positioning in this wider tradition, some of the ethnographic terms I use (*Bildung*, Haltung, tradition, self-cultivation, conduct) are also analytic terms for my interlocutors. My analysis is therefore not reduced to the artistic present I describe, but speaks to a wider understanding of traditions (see, e.g., Flood 2004). The Theater an der Ruhr is not portrayed as the *epitome* of a tradition of self-cultivation through theatre, but as a relatively young institution whose reflections on and self-positioning within this broader tradition yield rich insights onto this broader German tradition of self-cultivation and public theatre.

I establish this argument about the significance of an ethico-aesthetic tradition in Chapters 2 and 3 by outlining how the Theater negotiates several aspects of Alasdair MacIntyre's account of moral virtue (1981). In his 'framework for socio-historically grounded knowledge of moral life', he proposes three related concepts: 'excellences internal to a complex social practice, the narrative character of human life, and tradition' (Laidlaw 2014: 75). These three are linked in an example MacIntyre uses to describe institutions as traditions:

So when an institution – a university, say, or a farm, or a hospital – is the bearer of a tradition of practice or practices, its common life will be partly, but in a centrally important way, constituted by a continuous argument as to what a university is and ought to be or what good farming is or what good medicine is. (1981: 121)

When I describe the institutional practices of the Theater as internally coherent but crafted against the cultural history of the German tradition of *Bildung*, then this makes them comparable to the 'complex social practices' discussed by MacIntyre. Practices of the sort outlined in the citation above are 'socio-historical products' (Laidlaw 2014: 77), and I observed during my fieldwork that learning them 'requires the acceptance and adoption of established standards and criteria, and therefore obedience to authority' (p. 77). This observation about ethical practices in a tradition resonates with my analysis of rehearsal practices aimed at cultivating conduct (*Haltung*), which I put forward in Chapter 3. It also speaks to the notion of the repertoire, the stock of plays that the Theater has been performing for over forty years, thus establishing an archive of canonical plays with a complex set of accompanying practices of reflection, which I investigate in Chapter 4. Such a conversation between art, ethics, and anthropology therefore not just elucidates concepts pertinent to the field of art, but to anthropological theory, as I elaborate with regard to migration and detachment in the final chapter of this book and elsewhere (Tinius 2016a).

The political dimension of theatre, that is, as reflected upon by my interlocutors, constitutes another knot that ties ethics and art together. As a result of its collective nature and core communicative function, theatre has long been mobilised as a form of community engagement (Cohen-Cruz 2010; Czertok 2016), therapy (Plastow and Boon 1998; Thompson 2011), or activism (Juris 2015). Yet, for my interlocutors as well as theatre practitioners studied elsewhere (Ingram 2011: 168; see also Deck and Sieburg 2011), the political in theatre is not always associated with ‘direct action’ (Graeber 2009) or ‘artivism’ (Lichtenfels and Rouse 2013; Love and Mattern 2013; Raposo 2015). The Theater an der Ruhr and the migrant collectives I study in this book do not oppose *political action*, but through their institutionalised theatre practices have developed an alternative way of *acting politically*. The members value the sustained analysis of and reflection on political matters in a smaller-scale art institution over spontaneous agitation; one of many parallels to the intellectual tradition of critical theory that operates in the field I describe. They regard the cultivation of a community of artists who work on the inward-orientated craft of art as more sustainable politically than the propagation of a specific political ideology. They see ideological critique, voiced and practised through theatre, as a form of political ‘performance with all its moral entailments, not as a flight from lived responsibilities’ (Conquergood 1985: 1). As the final chapter of this book brings to view, my interlocutors recognise the political capacity of theatre to engage, for example with the so-called refugee crisis of the mid-2010s in Germany, but not only by putting on a single demonstration or organising a forum on the matter. Rather, they would try and facilitate long-term processes of deliberation on the subject with focused groups through, for example, three-year trilogies or a decade of sustained labour rather than two-week projects (see Tinius 2015e).

Rehearsals in theatre invited refugee participants to reflect on personal stories but through the fictitious realm of characters and roles, thus creating what I describe as engaged detachment and ‘dialectical fiction’. Their insistence on art as the learning of skills and self-observation is thus not anti- or apolitical, but it recognises that theatre cannot bring things about in the way that a new law may. It should therefore not aim to replace activism or government, but to provide alternative means of deliberation on political issues (see Candea 2011; Mouffe 1993, 2008, 2013a). We might think here of Bartleby the Scrivener’s famous utterance ‘I would prefer not to’ (Melville 1986 [1853]) or my interlocutor Roberto Ciulli and Adem Köstereli’s insistence on ‘deceleration’ as instances of detached resistance that are political in their propositions of alternative political deliberation.

Scholarship on political art (including theatre) predominantly emphasises the *effects* of performance (its performativity) – how to *do* things with

acts – at the expense of performance as a way of *reflecting* on action, as Flynn and I theorise elsewhere (2015). If my interlocutors understand their artistic practices as forms of political engagement and self-cultivation, and if they see theatre as a tradition that encourages such critical deliberation on what constitutes the right engagement with the self and ‘others’, then this study of art can provide a productive addition to the anthropology of political post-migrant self-cultivation. Moreover, it can provide a ground for a comparative anthropology of artistic practices (including theatre) and their professional traditions as ethical fields and of artists as ethical subjects.

The How: Conducting Ethnographies of German Theatre

This ethnography documents my experience of participating in and observing the daily life and professional practices of the Theater an der Ruhr and migrant collectives formed under its aegis. Since it pays close attention to the use of emic concepts (*Kultur, Bildung, Haltung*), the focus will inevitably be on German and therefore European phenomena. This may appear problematic for a discipline whose formation rests on the critique of such inflections (see Latour 2013; Rabinow 1996; Waldenfels 1980). In my view, however, anthropological writing on art has too frequently and too comfortably taken for granted that it is writing against something ‘we’ already know and that can therefore bracket from our analyses (the West, aesthetics, contemporary art) – something Matei Candea (2016: 95) described as the ‘hinterland’ of anthropological comparison. Since this book advances the anthropological study of powerful Western institutions and the artistic traditions that give rise to them, this work’s inflection and my focus on Western art traditions is therefore not only inevitable, but necessary and deliberate.

An additional preliminary remark on description is that I conducted anthropological fieldwork in Germany as a German. The fieldsite, the context, and the language are therefore familiar to me. This provoked interesting issues of ‘translating’ the familiar, of rendering rough the fine grain of a familiar view, and complications about how to inquire into assumptions that I shared with my interlocutors about, for example, German politics or the role of public institutions. The German post-war intellectual and artistic milieu I describe in this book has continuously and profoundly problematised notions of ‘Germanness’. As a German socialised into such a critical environment – and critical theory – through education, family, and fieldwork, I appreciate Bourdieu’s reflection that ‘the harshest and most cruel analyses are written with the knowledge and an acute awareness of the fact that they apply to he who is writing them’ (1989: 3). The notions of the familiar or ‘home’ are inevitably complicated,

albeit in many ways more productive than the binary of the West and 'the rest' (see Okely 1996; Peirano 1998: 105; Said 1978). The places that seemed so familiar to me incorporated many interlocutors of mine whose passports, if they had any, were not German – but Iranian, Macedonian, Serbian, or Turkish – and who also saw the region as a 'familiar home'. Additionally, while the milieu of cultural production was familiar to me, I was still an outsider to the institution I studied, leaving me thus as a 'multiple native', and as only one among many who experienced the dialectic of inhabitant–stranger, insider–outsider, observer–observed (Mascarenhas-Keyes 1987: 180; Kumar 1992).

I was introduced to the Theater an der Ruhr through my late father, and probably first taken there by him when I was young. With Lila Abu-Lughod (1985: 11), 'I suspect that few, if any, fathers of anthropologists accompany them to the field to make their initial contacts'. Although their reasons for doing so were worlds apart in our respective cases, the significance of my father's introducing me to my field is also noteworthy (see Tinius 2020b). As a high school philosophy and German literature and language teacher from the late sixties to the late nineties, my father followed the emergence of the Theater as an important cultural site in Mülheim, and Germany more widely. For him, philosophical teaching had to go beyond the classroom and, not unusual for someone socialised into the spirit of the German student movements that crystallised around May '68, he saw theatre and schools as spheres for the enactment of a radical political education. He frequently took his students, and his son, to the Theater and organised workshops on right-wing extremism, anti-fascism, and refugees in Mülheim with its founders and actors – so much so that at some point, former students of his noted in their graduation yearbook that 'the curriculum of Mr Tinius seems to orient itself more along the programme of the Theater an der Ruhr than the curriculum provided by the regional state [Land]' (Tinius 2020b: 186). The dramaturg Helmut Schäfer, Roberto Ciulli, the pedagogue Bernhard Deutsch, and actors at the Theater were frequent interlocutors. This is important to note, because it explains the nature of my entry into this milieu: through theatre as a form of schooling and a political forum. It also helps to situate the mode of my encounters: I was sometimes cast, more or less helpfully, as 'the son of Kurt Tinius', the teacher who had supported the Theater throughout its early years. Yet my position was also ambivalent since I was less interested in my father's pedagogic collaboration, but in critical scholarship. As this initial acquaintance with my field was primarily intellectual, I decided that my first study of the Theater should be practical and work from the 'ground up'. Accompanying stagehands and the craft workshops integrated into the

theatre (woodworking, stage-building, painting), I gained a practical, situated knowledge of the institution through initial fieldwork that grounded my later research for this book. I could build on this when I accompanied the rehearsals and travel, since it rooted me in the hands-on infrastructure of the institution that is so important for understanding its tradition.

This initial tension between practical/technical and intellectual/pedagogic aspects of the Theater continued to play a significant role in my research. 'Writing a book' was not an unknown practice, since several people at the Theater had done so themselves, for example to complete their own PhDs, or were affiliated with universities. Many members of the institution were also familiar with anthropology or philosophy as scholarly disciplines through their familiarity with the Frankfurt School. Yet, the practice of long-term, immersive fieldwork was not. Despite the persistent awkwardness associated with observing professional 'peers', fieldwork among experts proved productive. Gradually, my observation was no longer considered a more persistent form of the journalist-critic (often regarded as a necessary evil in theatre), but as an appreciated form of external reflection. In one instance, it even became a desired form of contribution to the artistic process (Tinius 2015d).

During my fieldwork, I thus played multiple roles, some of which I hoped to play, others I was cast into. While I continued to rehearse my main part as the participant observer and anthropologist, this was not always the most helpful role. Convincing my interlocutors that I was a 'different' and more 'committed' observer than, say, critics was also far from straightforward. I experienced many situations during which my presence as a critical observer appeared, involuntarily, to challenge other internal and external critical observers including dramaturgs or critics, respectively. Being 'one observer among others' (Baecker 2013a), it was ultimately a matter of 'deep hanging out' behind the scenes, to borrow Geertz's apt description of fieldwork (1998: 69), and the 'ethnographic commitment' to the intersubjective and personal over the official and written (Macdonald 2001; Miller 1997) that distinguished me in the eyes of my interlocutors. I drove buses, managed bookstands, and translated from and into French and English on tours to Switzerland and Algeria. I edited interviews with the dramaturg, wrote a column based on interviews with actors for the local newspaper, commuted with refugee actors from Oberhausen to Mülheim and back, recorded, and took notes of rehearsals. In 2016, after I had defended my doctoral thesis, I was furthermore invited by Roberto Ciulli to publish a book of our interviews, which eventually turned into a four-year long research process with the founded of the publishing house Alexander Verlag, with whom I completed a two-volume sociocultural

biography of his life and a reference and archival resource on his work with the Theater (Tinius and Wewerka 2020). Many of these tasks had their flip sides: a recognised job in the theatre gave me greater access to certain tasks and reduced the awkwardness of being an outsider, yet it also positioned me in ways that foreclosed mobility and detached reflection – considered foundational, or so I thought, to anthropological fieldwork.

Layout of This Book

This introduction situates the main theoretical framework and contextualises the book amid the institutional landscape of modern-day Germany. It analyses the productive albeit difficult relationship between anthropology and theatre, as well as the crucial intersections and failures to connect fieldwork as method and contemporary performance studies. The introduction outlines the role of theatre as a modern form of self-cultivation in Germany and introduces the book's key concept of theatre as a scalar ethico-aesthetic tradition. It discusses the unique scope of anthropology to study both micro-level practices of institutionalised traditions, as well as to grasp wider cultural and historic patterns that have shaped the national traditions of German public theatre. The introduction also unfolds how such an anthropological study of contemporary German theatre renders intelligible the tensions and troubles of a self-proclaimed 'state of the arts'.

Chapter 1 works through the historical context of two central overarching notions in this book's narrative: the German *Kulturstaat* and the country's *Bildungsbürgertum*. Combining historical analysis with fieldwork in Berlin during the fiftieth anniversary edition of Germany's largest theatre festival and observations at the city's iconic Volksbühne, this chapter explores the moral significance attributed to institutionalised public theatres, as well as activist contestations of its state patronage and institutional structures. It also traces the role of cultural politics in facilitating the emergence of public theatres as sites for aesthetic self-cultivation (*Bildung*) and nation-building in the face of an increasingly diverse contemporary Germany. Expanding on the notion of institutions as traditions in Western contexts, it expands on the necessity for anthropology to take into account cultural history and art history as part of fieldwork.

Chapter 2 introduces the case study at the heart of this book, the Theater an der Ruhr, and traces its institutional formation in the post-industrial Ruhr valley. This chapter builds on archival material and fieldwork in the archives of the Theater an der Ruhr in the theatre studies collection on Schloss Wahn in Cologne, suggesting new ways for combining anthropological and

historiographic methods for studying the institutionalisation of theatres. Documenting how its founders negotiated regional patrons and municipal funding, this chapter explores the political economy of public theatres and how they articulate their own forms of 'artistic critique' against the economisation of cultural production (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007 [1999]). It also describes on the basis of a series of interviews and founding contracts and critical reception at the time how and why the founders of the Theater an der Ruhr created an institutional structure that facilitates long phases of rehearsals, analysing its underpinning by an avant-garde understanding of 'autonomous artistic creation' irreducible to profit.

Chapter 3 examines the core creative practice at the heart of institution and tradition of the Theater an der Ruhr and most public theatres in Germany: the rehearsal. Rehearsals are not merely the most significant spaces for the training of the body and elaboration of a play. They are also practices for the cultivation of a particular form of comportment described by actors and directors as *Haltung*. The rehearsing of *Haltung*, which is discussed as an example of an ethnographic concept, that is, one stemming from the theorising of my interlocutors, constitutes the fundamental ethical practice and internal good facilitated by the institutional tradition of the Theater an der Ruhr. This chapter examines the broader significance of studying the learning of conduct during rehearsals and makes a case for their study as foundational to an understanding of creativity and self-formation in theatre. It also investigates issues of authority and discipline, thinking about rehearsals as a form of social practice rather than an artistic means to create a staging.

Chapter 4 gives an account of the role of 'repertoire and travel' in German public theatre and how their conjunction works against national understandings of canonised theatrical repertoires. It examines why German repertoire theatres do not 'discard' plays after a season, but reperform them for years, even decades, and what consequences this has for actors and their self-cultivation, as well as for the building of an ethico-aesthetic tradition in an institution. This system goes hand in hand with the closely knit notion of the ensemble in German theatre. This chapter explores these notions through a case study of the transnational repertoire of the Theater an der Ruhr and their long-term collaborations with international theatre-makers from precarious parts of the world, known as the 'international theaterlandscapes project'. I accompanied the Theater's journey to Algeria and witnessed first-hand their cooperations with Maghrebine artists after the Arab spring, focusing on the way in which theatre develops forms of transnational diplomacy and troubles national narratives of cultural heritage.

Chapter 5 troubles the narrative on German culture further by situating the traditions of education and *Bildung* in the context of the migration of refugees into Germany from 2014 onwards. It analyses how this migration has prompted a profound recalibration of the role of artistic institutions, especially theatres. This chapter focuses on public theatres and the ways in which they have responded to and forged new civil society alliances addressing refugees and the concept of migration in urban environments. I argue that public city theatres in Germany are uniquely situated in the interstices of civil society, urban populations, and public authorities, allowing them to reflect and reposition concepts, policies, and practices engaging with migration and difference on multiple scales. Analysing the practices of the Theater an der Ruhr, I show how they complicate and reframe local public policies while creating prefigurative political spaces and developing inclusive and critical visions of citizenship in Germany today. Furthermore, this chapter focuses on the emergence of a refugee theatre collective, documenting the ethical struggles of doing applied theatre with marginalised groups, but retaining an aesthetic approach to theatre, focusing on the rehearsal as a space and practice for ethico-aesthetic negotiation. This concluding chapter is thus also a case study in applied theatre work and its ethical dilemmas within and without public theatre institutions in the height of the German refugee crisis.

The Conclusion summarises my responses to the core questions raised by this book with view to an outlook at a wider theoretical trajectory for studying theatre anthropologically. What can public art institutions, especially theatres, tell us about the ethical relevance of art in German and European society today? How do artists in such institutions reflect on their practice, methods, and theories, and in doing so, what kinds of expertise do they develop? What methods and theoretical frameworks do we require to develop new approaches to professional public theatre today? The conclusion constitutes an outlook at the wider import and significance of this interdisciplinary study for anthropology, theatre, and performance theory.