

Laurence Senelick

The Nazi Occupation of *Theaterwissenschaft*

Theaterwissenschaft was first developed as an academic field in Germany. In Berlin, Max Herrmann pursued a sociological and iconological approach; in Cologne and in Munich, Carl Niessen and Artur Kutscher followed an ethnographic and mythological direction, respectively. With the Nazi takeover in 1933, Herrmann was dismissed and replaced by a non-scholar, Hans Knudsen. Niessen's open-air *Thingspiel* was co-opted to support Nazi ideas of Volkstum. Kutscher renounced his liberal background and joined the Party. In Vienna, Josef Gregor got the local Gauleiter to found a Central Institute for Theatre Studies that disseminated anti-Semitic propaganda. The most egregious case is that of Heinz Kindermann, who rose to be the most influential aesthete of National Socialism, proposing a biological foundation to theatre studies and offering a racial-eugenic approach to theatre history. As this article demonstrates, in the post-war period, theatre studies sedulously avoided dealing with the Nazi interlude, where official denazification permitted these men and others to carry on teaching and publishing, winning honours and titles. It was not until the 1980s that attempts were made to confront this past. Laurence Senelick is Fletcher Professor Emeritus of Drama and Oratory at Tufts University, a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a member of the Advisory Board of the Conference on Transglobal Theatre. His most recent books include *Jacques Offenbach and the Making of Modern Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters* (Routledge, 2013); and (with Sergei Ostrovsky) *The Soviet Theatre: A Documentary History* (Yale University Press, 2014).

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Theatre history was interesting, but *Theaterwissenschaft* held no attraction for me, especially because its leading representatives, Heinz Kindermann in Vienna, Hans Knudsen in Berlin, were old Nazis.

Klaus Völker¹

WHAT HAPPENS to theatre studies in an academic climate saturated with political determinism? Theatre studies, as a relatively inchoate field, was still establishing its credentials in the first decades of the twentieth century. Consequently, the field was open to co-optation by other disciplines or ideological camps. The founders in Germany had barely staked their positions when a totalitarian system was imposed, foreclosing debate, argumentation, controversy and multiplicity. The various currents of scholarship were rechannelled into an undeviating mainstream intended to sustain the prevailing political system.

Theaterwissenschaft first evolved as an academic field in Germany,² and quickly split

into two distinct approaches.³ In Berlin, Max Herrmann (1865–1942) renounced the literary interpretation of drama to study performance on stage as an aesthetic phenomenon. In opposition to philology as it was then taught, he applied principles of spatial relationships, iconography, and sociology, a method resembling that of Aby Warburg in art history.⁴ Eager to establish such a study on a scientific basis, Herrmann urged the use of authenticated primary documents to reconstruct the conditions of original performance and establish the audience as a constitutive collaborator. His most important writing had been published by 1914.⁵

Carl Niessen (1890–1969) in Cologne and Artur Kutscher (1878–1960) in Munich also sought to free theatre studies from the philological frame, seeking the origins of performance in ethnographic and anthropological research. Religion and myth were seen to

foster and embody a *völkisch* ('of the folk', with overtones of 'national') psychology. Although Niessen believed that theatre originated in the dance and rituals of aborigines, whereas Kutscher sought it in *Mimus*, or the imitative instinct, they both insisted that students would benefit from hands-on activity, attending performances and staging their own shows.⁶ Of the two, Niessen was more interested in the material aspect of performance, omnivorously collecting objects and documents.

As Nora Probst has pointed out, Niessen is 'a problematic figure because of his rather "völkisch-nationalistic" views'.⁷ His ideas were more intuitive than scientific. Although his 1919 book on stage design seems to echo Herrmann, he had returned from the World War a conservative who voiced anti-modern sentiments; for him culture was the expression of a community's essence.⁸ To promote this view, he developed an open-air, amateur pageant, the *Thingspiel*, based on folkloric and Germanic themes.

Artur Kutscher's liberal credentials seemed impeccable: he was closely associated with Frank Wedekind and his lectures and seminars, created in 1908, were attended by such ground-breaking artists as Bertolt Brecht, Erwin Piscator, Peter Hacks, Ödon von Horvath, Klabund, and Ernst Toller. On tours, he immersed his students in the Berlin productions of Max Reinhardt and Leopold Jessner. Like Niessen, however, he showed a special interest in 'völkisch' and peasant drama, and its relationship to dance, masks, pantomime, and folklore. He was later to write: 'As early as 1923 I had taught that this theatre had evolved wholly and inextricably in line with the *Volkstum*, race, temperament, the driving force of mimicry, and the spiritual, religious, political, social life of a nation.'⁹ He believed that the *Volk's* soul could be found in old German folk plays, especially in Bavaria. They demonstrated an interdependence between 'völkisch' society, *völkisch* feeling, and the need to put this *völkisch* feeling into movement and sound, word and atmosphere. The stronger the one, the more profound, intrinsic, and crucial to existence is the other.'¹⁰ He began to believe that the professional theatre, especially when

catering to ethnic minorities, was conducive to a cultural crisis. Mass spectacles, similar to Niessen's *Thingspiele*, were recommended. These ideas were aired in Kutscher's magnum opus of 1931, *Grundriss der Theaterwissenschaft* [*Outline of Theatre Studies*], whose anthropological arguments are more psychological than empirical.

As late as 1949, Kutscher was claiming that in 1909–10 he and the Munich librarian Professor Leidinger, not Max Herrmann, had invented the term *Theaterwissenschaft* after considering a plural form. They knew that the university would not accept the term *Theater-Wissenschaft* (that is, the Science of Theatre) but might countenance *Theaterwissenschaft* (the Study of Theatre).¹¹ Their efforts faced resistance. University bureaucracies and the vested interests of departments of philology and *Germanistik* (German language and literature), which housed these professors, were reluctant to grant their specialities academic respectability.¹² Kutscher was sneered at as the 'Theaterprofessor', using the German meaning of *Theater* as 'making a fuss'. They had to establish their field of research as an independent discipline, with its own centres of learning. All three academics strove to develop institutes and collections devoted exclusively to *Theaterwissenschaft*. Niessen's Theatre Museum opened in 1919, followed by an Institut für Theaterkunde [Theatrical Ethnology], better known as the Theaterhistorisches Institut, in Munich in 1926.

In his memoirs, Kutscher is at pains to claim that he is a socialist by nature and had been, unofficially, a Social Democrat. In 1926, however, attracted by the National Socialist platform of the annexation of Austria, Germanic fellowship, rearmament, the right to work, and athletics, he met with Hitler. He was put off by the demagogue's personality, as well as by the uniformity, militancy, and centralization the Party demanded. The Nazi move to develop a politics of culture was under way by 1930. Although Kutscher, while claiming a position of neutrality, tried to make concessions in his lectures (for example, Hamlet is typically Nordic in his doubting), he was suspended from teaching until he formally

denounced the term 'liberalism' and replaced it with 'national community' or *Gemeinschaft*.¹³

Scholarship Branded with Swastikas

With the Nazi ascent to power in 1933, the educational establishment suffered the increasingly invasive attentions of a totalitarian regime. Non-Aryans were removed from their posts and doctrinal pressures were put on curricula. The pervasive 'total congruence' between *Volk*, *Führer*, state, and sciences broke with the German tradition of a *Kulturstaat* ['government-supervised culture'], which funded scholarship but did not have the right to employ sanctions against it. The required 'pledge of allegiance of professors' was meant to document 'the unity of German scholarship with the political leadership of the nation'.¹⁴ There was some resistance: bureaucratic chaos, infighting among quasi-governmental groups, and professorial idiosyncrasy provided a certain latitude in academic studies, despite efforts at rigid ideological conformity (or *Gleichschaltung*) and the *Führer* principle. In most fields, however, Party members or those who would enthusiastically serve the state were installed in positions of authority.¹⁵ Careerists found opportunities to advance, promoting the values of *Germanistik*, perverting language and ideas, so that the irrational strain in German thought and propaganda for a new mythos was exalted. Nazi fantasies of exclusion and exceptionalism fuelled a radically nationalistic mode of aggression. Resentment against bourgeois liberalism and a pronounced unity of spirit and politics prevailed.¹⁶

This held true for *Theaterwissenschaft* as well. As Erika Fischer-Lichte has pointed out, 'the future development of a young discipline's necessary and fertile scholarly discussion was brutally broken off by National Socialism'.¹⁷ Objective enquiry was supplanted by a mythologically oriented interpretation of the Germanic *Volk* or *Volkstum* as an ominous matrix for German theatre studies.

Berlin, capital of the Reich, led the way. Julius Petersen, President of the Goethe

Society until his death in 1941 and sole director of the Theaterwissenschaftlichen Institut of Friedrich-Wilhelm-Universität, enlisted Hitler Youth and Gauleiter for memorial services at the graves of the 'national' intellectuals.¹⁸ As a Jew, Max Herrmann was forced into early retirement and, ten years later, was deported to Theresienstadt where he perished. His replacement in the newly founded department of *Theaterwissenschaft* was Hans Knudsen (1886–1971), a theatre critic who had long served the Party and was commended by Goebbels; as chief columnist for *Die Bühne*, he recommended that the drama and theatre of the Weimar period be relegated to oblivion. In recompense for his politically impeccable convictions, he was appointed to Herrmann's chair of *Theaterwissenschaft* in 1938, even though the University had informed the Reich's Education Ministry that 'his scholarly achievements were insufficient for the maintenance of a professorship'.¹⁹

Knudsen's star pupil was Elisabeth Frenzel (1915–2014), whose 1940 dissertation on *The Figure of the Jew on the Modern German Stage* thanks him for his help, especially on the last chapter, 'The Jew as Political Intriguer'. She explains: 'The new *völkisch* concept creates a new racially ideological anti-Semitism'.²⁰ Knudsen praised it in the Party organ *Der Völkische Beobachter* as doing a great service in revealing how Jews use theatre to gain power over the German people. Such *obiter dicta* as 'Naturalism revealed the network of Jewry, and how its coils run through all the spheres of public life and to which the innocent, open, hard-working German falls victim' won Frenzel a place on the Council for Promotion of Art, charged with supervising the intellectual and world-view education with a speciality in Theatre, Literature, and the Jewish Question.²¹

National Socialist cultural politics also exploited the movement for alternative forms of performance that had been growing since the beginning of the century. In Cologne, Niessen, who had been head of the Institute for *Theaterwissenschaft* at the university from 1929 and a Truppführer of the SA from 1933, honed his concept of *Thingspiel* to support Nazi racial theories. That same year

Goebbels's Ministry for Education and Propaganda sponsored the Reichbund der deutschen Freilicht- und Volksschauspiel [Reich Association for German Open-air and Folk Performance] to facilitate and promote it. The head of the Theatre division in the Culture Ministry, Dr Rainer Schlösser, was a fan of the *Thingplatz* [Thing space] as a locus for Nordic folklore. However, the first Nazi *Thingspiel* bore the significant title *Deutsche Passion 1933*, suggesting an appropriation of Christian, rather than pagan, imagery. This chimed with National-Socialist themes of regeneration and rebirth prevalent in the early years of the Party.²² Huge amphitheatres were built to accommodate the form, but Goebbels eventually found it ineffective in promulgating policy and, when he codified language usage in 1935, forbade the word *Thingspiel*. By 1937 the phenomenon, along with its name, was extinct.²³

One of Niessen's pet projects had been the revival of a local form of *Everyman*, *Alten Kölner spels von Jedermann* [Old Cologne Play of *Everyman*], which, from 1922, had enjoyed several successful outdoor productions, often rewritten, staged, and even financed by the professor. After a staging at Weinkopp bei Bochum in 1933, which attracted an audience of 135,000, the SS banned further stagings as out of keeping with 'today's life feeling'.²⁴ Niessen remained in his post, however. As compensation for these rejections of his brainchildren, Niessen was promoted to Extraordinary Professor, and *Theaterwissenschaft* elevated to an independent department at the University of Cologne, in 1938. He served in positions of trust, as a corporate member of the Reichstheaterkammer and chief contributor to the paper *Theater der Welt*, publishing monographs on Shakespeare, Immermann, and modern opera.

In Munich, Kutscher maintained an unsteady balancing act between his fondness for liberal writers and his truckling to the authorities. Throughout the 1930s, his teaching came under increasing attack for discussing such authors as Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Thomas Mann and neglecting Party favourites. The performances and excursions by his students were cancelled and his own

lecture tours curtailed. In his autobiography, he describes his relationship with the Nazis as *locker* [relaxed, laid-back]; nevertheless, in 1938 he joined two National Socialist front organizations, the *Reichskriegerbund* [the League of War Veterans], and the *Volkswohlfahrt* [National People's Welfare], ostensibly a charitable institution but devoted to social engineering.²⁵ He travelled to Berlin to put his own ideas about folk drama before Minister Schlösser, who preferred more orthodox political manifestations. When the *Thingspiel* fell into disfavour, Schlösser informed Kutscher that a mention of it in his forthcoming *Outline of Theaterwissenschaft* was 'undesirable'.²⁶ In 1941, Kutscher was invited to open the German Theatre in occupied Oslo with a lecture on 'The Mutual Influence between the German and Norwegian Theatres'. Objections were raised to such propaganda being offered at the university, so he spoke to a hundred Germanophiles at high tea in the Grand Hotel and became a regular speaker in that city.

Finally, Kutscher, threatened with the loss of his appointment and his salary, joined the Nazi party in December 1942.²⁷ Throughout the war, faced with reduced class-size and a student body of cynical war veterans, he preferred to travel, lecturing and researching, to Italy and Poland, where he hobnobbed with Governor General Frank, later condemned and hanged at Nuremberg for war crimes.

In Vienna, Josef Gregor (1888–1960), a conservative Catholic and former student of Max Reinhardt, director and founder of the Austrian National Library Theatre Collection from 1922, had already established a reputation for the impressive *Monumenta scenica* [Monuments of the Stage, 1925–30] and a world history of theatre (1933).²⁸ He had no difficulty in adjusting to new conditions. Gregor persuaded the Gauleiters Alfred Frauenfeld and Baldur von Schirach, leader of the Hitler Youth, to support a Central Institute for Theatre Studies that disseminated anti-Semitic propaganda. In 1943 Gregor dedicated to von Schirach his book *Theater des Volkes* [People's Theatre], packed with such chapters as 'The Theatre of the Germanic Mythos' and 'The Theatre of the Christian Mythos'. It referred to Österreich [Austria]

by the Nazi-preferred term Ostmark, sidelined Jewish contributions to music and the performing arts, and bristled with the words *nationalistisch* [nationalistic] and *völkisch*. Because his research competed with that of Knudsen and Herbert Frenzel, Elisabeth's husband, they spread the rumour that Gregor had Jewish antecedents, a belief also entertained by Reich Education minister Bernhard Rust: 'His appearance is absolutely Jewish with a strong Negro additive. His works express this origin.'²⁹ Such *odium theologicum* was not uncommon within academe, but Gregor's position was never seriously threatened.

The Careerist: A Study in Brown

The most egregious case is that of Heinz Kindermann (1894–1985), who rose from an obscure post in Münster to be the most influential aesthete of National Socialism, enjoying the prestige of a scientist and a public intellectual. Technically a Germanist, he joined the party in 1933 and published prolifically racist and *völkisch* articles, with an increasingly fanatical adherence to Nazism.³⁰ Hitler's ascension laid the cornerstone for his career and in 1935 he was appointed to the *Theaterwissenschaft* chair at the University of Vienna. The faculty of philosophy protested, not because of his ideas, but in order to preserve independence from the government. In 1943, he founded the Zentralinstitut für Theaterwissenschaft there and was appointed its Director the same month as the defeat at Stalingrad in expectation that he would promote the cause. Director Kindermann's first move was to summon his student Margret Dietrich (1920–2004) from Münster to serve as his assistant; her dissertation the following year was on race psychology, with gesture as an identifying marker, and proposed a *Judenrein* ['purified of Jews'] Burgtheater.³¹

In a letter to Goebbels, Kindermann offered a plan for 'a methodical foundation' as the theatre-historical 'bridge', which would bolster the claims of German culture to be pre-eminent in world civilization. *Theaterwissenschaft als Lebenswissenschaft* was offered as a means of binding the nation, equating actors with soldiers and paying no attention to 'alien

cultural material'. Kindermann proposed a biological foundation to theatre studies and a racial-eugenic approach to theatre history:

Research of the repertoire . . . would have to be wholly systematic in the sphere of a more developed spiritual-historical interpretation, which conveys a full account of the internal laws of the artwork and hence raises from within the Theatre the whole play of forces of cultural and spiritual life of the *Volk*.³²

Consequently, the Institute became a major player at the cultural epicentre of the '*großdeutsche Reich*'.

In essence, Kindermann was applying to *Theaterwissenschaft* principles he had already enunciated for *Literaturwissenschaft* [Science of Literature] in his 1937 manifesto *Dichtung und Volkheit* [Poetry and Nationalness – another coinage], the title a crude linkage to Goethe's autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit* [Poetry and Truth]. Distancing himself from fact-finding positivism, Kindermann preferred 'spiritual' methods, which would unite philosophy and religion, an allegedly biological (but actually visionary) notion that literature is the expression of the body of the *Volksganze* or 'totality of the nation'. It should not only contribute to the community, but enhance the 'state of well-fortified and able-bodied beings' and the 'force of resistance.' Individuals are only spokesmen for the community.³³

New values entail not problems, only forces. The clotted prose describing them is typical:

By these forces, so must our new understanding of values, our new feeling and our precise knowledge of poetic authenticity, as well as the creative power of our new interpretation and localization of poetry be put into action amidst all the events of the *Volk*. . .³⁴

This, a moment when many people think *Wissenschaft* has abandoned the striving for absolute perfection, 'is precisely the time when the German *Volk* must rebuild the times':

When a tree nursery is planted, all the weeds must be removed, so that the growth of young trees be not impaired. And a great deal must be removed from developing young people, so that they be not

seriously impaired and destroyed by elders and grown-ups in this formative stage or else their whole future lives could be in jeopardy . . . The moral is . . . [that] in the present stage of renewal only the healthy and constructive writing of all the ages is to be chosen for positive evaluation through our research and teaching.³⁵

Quoting Nietzsche, Kindermann insists that human beings become confused and incapable of action when confronted with alien ideas and opinions, so they must escape history (a peculiar proposition for a practising historian). If we are to awake from our lethargy and become engaged, 'we obviously have to forget a great deal'.³⁶ Pick and choose, leaving aside what is diseased in literature 'as we do as a result of our race-hygienic views both in the realm of the corporeal so closely intertwined with spiritual life and naturally in the realm of religion, moral, social, political matters'.³⁷ For scientific progress cold reason must be jettisoned in favour of the heart, passion, scholarly intuition, enthusiastic assertion of one's own rightness. Academic research must be life service to the nation, and the scholar must stand behind his work as a complete person, not just as an intellect. Antiquarianism and theorizing are both danger zones unless annexed to *Volksgeschehen* [a neologism implying 'what happens to, by, and for the people']. A corollary of this was the classification, identification, and rejection of anything Jewish in favour of an integrated worldview.

After-Effects

If the Nazi occupation of *Theaterwissenschaft* had been a discrete episode that ended with the war, difficulties would still have been encountered in picking up and reconnecting the threads severed in 1933. What worsened the situation was that, for the most part, the same scholars who had occupied university chairs under Hitler were reappointed thereafter. Although there were throngs of émigré theatre practitioners ready and willing to resume positions in their former homelands, no such critical mass of theatre scholars existed. Unlike scientists, academics in the humanities could not easily find employment

abroad. Since *Theaterwissenschaft* was a relatively new and not always recognized field, its professors were especially unemployable.

The one outstanding exception was the Austrian Alois Nagler (1907–1993), a musicologist who happened to be on a lecture tour in the United States in the late 1930s and decided not to return to Europe. During the war he served on a naval intelligence project at Yale University and in 1949 joined its faculty as professor of theatre studies in its School of Drama. An entire generation of American theatre scholars were to attend his seminars and become members of the American Society for Theatre Research, which he co-founded. Nagler's approach was essentially that of Max Herrmann, namely, a reliance on collecting and authenticating original documents; a prime example was his *Sourcebook of Theatrical History* (1952), long a foundational text in the field. An arch-conservative who deplored modern methods of opera staging, Nagler also denigrated anything that could be counted as dilettantish in research.³⁸ His students later ran graduate programmes throughout North America, perpetuating for a generation the 'just the facts, ma'am' school of Theatre Studies.

In Europe, however, if departments and institutes of *Theaterwissenschaft* were to be staffed, the eligible candidates usually had suspect political backgrounds. Denazification, as practised by four separate Allied powers with different methods and agendas, often consisted of no more than 'a lick and a prayer'. Only a tenth of the German population had been card-carrying Party members, but even that was not considered incriminating in itself. Professors and administrators were frequently returned to their posts within a year's time. For instance, none of those responsible for making the arts and academe *Judenrein* was punished after the war. Otto zur Nedden (1902–1994), chief dramaturg of the German National Theatre in Weimar and director of Jena's *Theaterwissenschaft* Institute, and author of a history of drama in the twentieth century, which enjoyed its third edition in 1944, had joined the National Socialist party as early as 1931; he had adapted and staged a virulently anti-Semitic production of Marlowe's *The Jew*

of Malta, and been in charge of Germanizing Norwegian students in Buchenwald concentration camp. Yet he served from 1961 to 1969 as Professor of *Theaterwissenschaft* at the University of Cologne, and was much published, performed, and fêted.³⁹

Even in the Soviet sector of Berlin, where the East Germans established a rival Institute of *Theaterwissenschaft* on Marxist principles, with branches in Weimar and Leipzig, rehabilitation was not long in coming.⁴⁰ Hans Wahl (1885–1949), Director of the Goethe National Museum, co-founder of the Weimar Group of the Militant League for German Culture under Alfred Rosenberg, and a Party member from 1938, rapidly accommodated himself to the Soviet authorities, serving as Deputy Chair of the Cultural Alliance for the Democratic Renewal of Germany. On his death in 1949, he received a state funeral and had a street named after him.⁴¹

The Allies refused the application of Hans Knudsen to resume his teaching for three years, but finally capitulated. Although Knudsen intended a thorough history of Berlin theatre in order to research and preserve what had been lost during the war, in the sixty post-war dissertations he directed there is no mention of the changes wrought in theatre life by the Third Reich. In his *German Theatre History*, written as a study aid in 1959, the Weimar Republic is depicted as communist-dominated, unwholesome, and propagandistic, while Brecht is drawn as perfidious and hate-filled. When asked about his praise of Frenzel's dissertation on the Jewish image, he continued to refer to it as 'a work of scholarship' and pointed out that Jews had also written on the subject; he contributed to her husband's theatre history of 1984, which breaks into two distinct parts after 1890. Frenzel herself was a frequent contributor to reference books, including the *Große Brockhaus* encyclopedia; in 2001 she was awarded a million euros by the Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen for her literary research.

Even more brazenly, Knudsen worked with Dr Kurt Raeck on a biography of his unfortunate predecessor Max Herrmann at the newly founded Theaterwissenschaftliche Institut der freien Universität and the

Gesellschaft für Theatergeschichte. Neither institution enquired into the Third Reich, for fear of self-incrimination, so Knudsen referred merely to Herrmann's 'being made emeritus and removed'.⁴² He continued to dominate theatre studies in Berlin in the face of intermittent protest; he wrote to a newspaper in 1961 complaining that the student protesters were under the sway of Jewish agents and leaders. Wicclair, an alumnus, testified five years later: 'From many conversations with students of *Theaterwissenschaft* I know that there are two groups: almost fanatic so-called Knudsen adherents, and on the other hand students who demonstrate against them.'⁴³

The University of Munich had re-opened in November 1944. After much red tape, Artur Kutscher received an academic contract in January 1946, but it was rescinded four days later. He hired a lawyer and argued for his victimhood: he had joined the Party under duress, he claimed, had had a student who was shot as a member of a resistance group, and had lost his house and four thousand books in Allied bombing raids. A petition signed by sixty-two German intellectuals of various factions finally managed to rehabilitate him, and by April Kutscher was teaching five hundred students.⁴⁴ He retired full of honours in 1951, and nine years later published a highly exculpatory autobiography.

The Survival of the Careerist

Vienna was no exception to these cases. Gregor continued to publish: a history of the Austrian theatre, a monograph on Wagner, a guide for playgoers. However, it is Kindermann who parlayed his National Socialist notoriety into post-war celebrity. After his dismissal from the Institute, the Institute itself was strongly defended by the Germanist Eduard Castle, who became its provisional head. In 1953 Kindermann was officially declared denazified and published his *Aufgaben und Grenzen der Theaterwissenschaft* [*Problems and Limits of the Study of Theatre*]. The next year he was reinstated at the Institute in the name of academic freedom, despite student demonstrations that were dismissed as minority opinions. Anti-communist policy

also played a part in this triumphal return. Kindermann's past became a taboo subject overnight, and he referred to books about Nazism as 'satyr plays between boards'. He embraced capitalism as a bulwark against socialism and Communism, going so far as to praise South Africa as a beacon of Western civilization on the 'dark Continent'. Needless to say, he was held in contempt and his works banned in the Soviet zone and its successor, the DDR.

Kindermann also reappointed Margret Dietrich as his assistant both at the Institute and as editor of the journal *Maske und Kothurn*, which he founded in 1955 and edited for thirty years. That Dietrich, formerly an active Party member, was unreconstructed is made clear by her reliance on National Socialist anthropology in her 1954 advanced professional dissertation on the imagery of humanity. She named as one of her research techniques 'appearance as an expression of race'. The Kindermann–Dietrich team maintained little distance from Nazi academic practices or self-critical reflection over the developed categories and interpretations, which they impressed wholesale on several generations of students.

Throughout his post-war publications, and regularly in *Maske und Kothurn*, Kindermann employed a more euphemistic vocabulary: he replaced the words *Rasse* [race] and *Wesen* [essence] with such tropes as 'landscape' and 'rhythm of the blood'. He insisted in 1961 that Austrians have a fervent interest in theatre because of their 'innate artistic feeling', and those who create theatre are 'always inspired by the will to let the Theatre become a people-forming force'. For him, 'irrationalism' was the essential component of true art (he had earlier praised Germans as unique in their ability to unearth irrational profundities) and insisted that theatre could not be a medium contingent on society. Consequently he disdained politically engaged theatre and preferred cathartic 'Affekt-Theater' (or 'emotionally charged' theatre). He urged an Austrian boycott of Brecht, whose theories could have nothing to do with art.

As to theatre scholarship, the scholar must be the preferred mediator between the artist

and the public. Since the theatre is a living organism, it has to be reconstructed by means of methodical research allied to a creative vision. Reason by itself is fatal to life. 'Forces', rather than 'problems', are to be investigated. As a discipline, *Theaterwissenschaft* is a law unto itself, since the theatrical work of art is unique. Interdisciplinary research is worthwhile only in auxiliary and ancillary fields of study. Sounding like a Viennese Polonius, Kindermann never ceased to proclaim how important 'cultural-historical, political-historical, philosophical, aesthetical, or social-historical parallel symptoms' are for *Theaterwissenschaft's* enquiry into pervasive similarities.⁴⁵

Apologists cited Kindermann's later work as implicit acts of restitution and rehabilitation, although this interpretation may err on the side of generosity. His embarkation on what would become a ten-volume history of European theatre (1957–74) would seem to be a renunciation of former principles, since he had previously discredited and devalued any cultural phenomena outside the German-speaking world. Nevertheless, glimmers of his earlier tenets keep shining through. Kindermann insists that the only way to understand European or, for that matter, world theatre is to investigate national, chauvinistic histories. The project might even be seen as a hyperthyroid sequel to his 1944 manifesto in support of government policy, *The European Mission of the German Theatre*; in it, Kindermann insisted that German culture has a responsibility to instigate and infiltrate the pan-European art scene. Just as, in that essay, 'collaboration' and 'interaction' are weasel words, camouflaging a one-way traffic, one wonders if his exhaustive survey of continental theatre might be read as an imperial takeover of national and ethnic cultures.⁴⁶

When Kindermann stepped down as head of the Institute in 1966, Dietrich succeeded him in the post. Nothing prevented her from celebrating his eightieth birthday with a laudatory *Festschrift*. The first dissertation to broach the subject of the ex-Nazi presence in the academic field had come out of Münster in 1952; typewritten and unpublished, its generalities won little attention. The studies that

began to appear in the 1980s spoke of terror and manipulation, but overlooked the complexities of changes in the public and the media. It was only in 1981, four years before Kindermann's death at the age of ninety, that Peter Roessler, Monika Meier, and Gerhard Schiet published *Theaterwissenschaft und Faschismus*, illuminating the 'post-Nazi' situation and spelling out in detail Kindermann's complicity. By then he had become untouchable.⁴⁷

Of all the *Theaterwissenschaftler* who survived the Nazi period, Niessen is the only one to have made an *amende honorable*. The denazification boards classified him as politically 'minderbelastet' ('least tainted'). He continued in his chair at Munich until he was made emeritus in 1959, and his publications were prolific; among his contributions to the Theatre Collection was the acquisition of the *Nachlaß* [legacy] of the great Munich clown Karl Valentin. Like Kindermann, he embarked on a culminating magnum opus, a ten-volume *Handbuch der Theater-Wissenschaft* [*Handbook of the Science of Theatre*], of which only three volumes, comprising two thousand pages, appeared between 1948 and 1958. His collection of theatrical artefacts had juxtaposed and categorized all manner of fragmentary phenomena without imposing a comprehensive theory or argument upon them.⁴⁸ The *Handbook* is similar in avoiding a prescriptive superstructure; at the same time, his ideas, in Nora Probst's words, 'reflect an unusual liberal and open-minded concept of theatre'.⁴⁹

Carrying on his pre-war concerns, Niessen demonstrates a *volkskundlich* [national-ethnological] orientation with an emphasis on dance and ritual; he prefers this approach over literary theory in the formation of an all-encompassing *Theaterwissenschaft* that would be applicable worldwide:

Theatre studies is capable, as are few other disciplines, of awakening an understanding of other peoples. It should be capable of making clear how the core of all humanity is related, how it lives out of the same passions, follows the same artistic instincts, seeks beauty and humanity, rather than tormenting each other, shedding blood, and destroying irrevocably what ought to be the inviolable heritage of all things worthy of life, i.e., the true culture of human beings.⁵⁰

As Christopher Balme has pointed out, this is not only a clear repudiation of Nazi exceptionalism, its championing of theatrical diversity is also a kind of performance studies *avant la lettre*.⁵¹ Our current interest in global interculturalism and our fascination with crossing borders perpetuate Niessen's efforts to efface the chauvinistic, National-Socialist brand of *Theaterwissenschaft*. Its explicit and eloquent humanism clearly distinguishes it from Kindermann's cautiously non-judgemental appeal to pan-Europeanism.

The belated publication of the works of Niessen and Max Herrmann, whose pre-war *Origins of Professional Theatre* did not appear until 1962, limited their influence. 'My impression,' recalled the Polish dramaturg Andrzej Wirth, who worked in Germany in the 1950s, 'was that German *Theaterwissenschaft* had changed into an unmoored *Kulturwissenschaft* (cultural studies) without focus and method'.⁵² With so many academic chairs occupied by unreconstructed Nazis, the field had little appeal for seekers after intellectual rigour. It took the disruptions of the 1960s to provoke a theoretical questioning of the old paradigms; Germany was still divided politically and geographically, but at certain junctures the academic world had begun to coalesce. Alternative views were not only being aired, but adopted. In reference to historiography in general, one scholar has described it as the introduction of a 'sharpened theoretical understanding' in place of a 'naive empiricism of positivistic pragmatism'.⁵³

Intellectual systems do not spring up spontaneously. The so-called 'hard sciences' construct serious academic genealogies, tracing ideas and influences from teacher to student over generations. Theatre and performance studies would benefit from similar enquiries, not only to pin down when and where a concept may have originated, but what contingent circumstances have been brought to bear upon its gestation and genesis. For decades *Theaterwissenschaft* suffered from the baleful effects of an oppressive and intolerant ideology. Further enquiry into its lingering after-effects may be revealing about current disciplinary assumptions and practices.

Notes and References

1. Klaus Völker, 'Kein richtiger Beruf', *Theater Heute* (May 2017), p. 78.
2. Because this paper specifically concerns Germany and Austria, I use *Theaterwissenschaft*, rather than 'Theatre Studies', throughout, as a disputed term within the Germanophone context. Similarly, I use *Volk* and *völkisch* for their significance within the National Socialist way of thinking, especially since it conflates concepts of 'folk', 'people's', and 'national'.
3. For an English-language overview of the early history of theatre studies, see James Arnott, 'An Introduction to Theatrical Scholarship', *Theatre Quarterly*, X, No. 39 (1981), p. 29–42. Despite occasional errors, Michael L. Quinn's 'Theaterwissenschaft in the History of Theatre Study', *Theatre Survey*, XXXII, No. 2 (1991), p. 123–36, is a thought-provoking analysis of the German situation.
4. See M. A. Katritzky, 'Aby Warburg's "Costumi teatrali" (1895) and the Art-Historical Foundations of Theatre History', *Theatre Research International*, XXIV, No. 2 (Summer 1999), p. 160–7.
5. The standard sources are Gesellschaft für Theatergeschichte, ed., *Max Herrmann und die Anfänge der deutschsprachigen Theaterwissenschaft* (Berlin: Universitätsbibliothek der FU Berlin, 1992); Stefan Corssen, *Max Herrmann und die Anfänge der Theaterwissenschaft* (Reinbeck: Rowohlt, 1998); and Martin Hollender, *Der Berliner Germanist und Theaterwissenschaftler Max Herrmann (1865–1942): Leben und Werk* (Berlin: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, 2014).
6. Christopher Balme, "'Verwandt der Kern aller Menschen": Zur Annäherung von Theaterwissenschaft und Kulturanthropologie', in Bettina Schmidt and Mark Münzel, eds., *Ethnologie und Inszenierung Ansätze zur Theaterethnologie* (Marburg: Curupira, 1998), p. 19–44.
7. Nora Probst, 'Traces of Performance: The Ethnographical Roots of Theatre Studies in Carl Niessen's Theatre Museum (founded in 1919)' (unpublished paper, Working Group for Theatre History and Historiography of the International Federation for Theatre Research, July 2014), p. 7. Quoted with the permission of Frau Probst.
8. Peter W. Marx, 'Interpretations: The Interpretation of Theatre', in Peter W. Marx, ed., *A Cultural History of Theatre in the Age of Empire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 135–8.
9. Artur Kutscher, *Der Theaterprofessor. Ein Leben für die Wissenschaft vom Theater* (Munich: Franz Ehrenwirth, 1960), p. 145. Kutscher's statements in his autobiography have to be weighed carefully, for it is meant as a self-serving apologia. (All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.)
10. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 77, 152. Kutscher also claimed to have founded the first Munich Institute for Theatre History, but the begetter was actually Hans Heinrich Borchardt.
12. Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Theatergeschichte und Wissenschaftsgeschichte: Eine bedenkenswerte Konstellation', in Fischer-Lichte, Wolfgang Greisenegger, and Hans-Thies Lehmann, eds., *Arbeitsfelder der Theaterwissenschaft* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1994), p. 17.
13. Kutscher, *Der Theaterprofessor*, p. 206–8.
14. *Bekennnis der Professoren . . . zu Adolf Hitler und dem national sozialistischen Staat* (Dresden, 1933), quoted in Georg Bollenbeck, 'The Humanities in Germany after 1933: Semantic Transformations and the Nazification of the Disciplines', in Wolfgang Bialas and Anson Rabinbach, eds., *Nazi Germany and the Humanities, How German Academics Embraced Nazism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), p. 10.
15. Florian Odenwald, *Der nazistische Kampf gegen das 'Undeutsche' in Theater und Film, 1920–1945* (Munich: Herbert Utz, 2006), p. 166–7.
16. Sander L. Gilman, ed., *NS-Literaturtheorie: Eine Dokumentation* (Wiesbaden: Athenaeum, 1971), p. ix–xviii.
17. Fischer-Lichte, 'Theatergeschichte und Wissenschaftsgeschichte', p. 19.
18. Walter Wicclair, 'Das fatale Loch in der Berliner Theatergeschichte', in Marta Mierendorff and Walter Wicclair, eds., *Im Rampenlicht der 'dunklen Jahre': Aufsätze zum Theater im 'Dritten Reich', Exil und Nachkrieg* (Berlin: Sigma, 1989), p. 22–3; W. Daniel Wilson, 'Goethe and the Nazis', *Times Literary Supplement* (14 March 2014), p. 14–15.
19. Wicclair, 'Das fatale Loch', p. 27–9; Fischer-Lichte, 'Theatergeschichte', p. 18.
20. Quoted in Florian Radvan, "' . . . Mit der Verjudung des deutschen Theaters ist es nicht so schlimm!": Ein kritischer Rückblick auf die Karriere der Literaturwissenschaftlerin Elisabeth Frenzel', *German Life and Letters*, LIV, No. 1 (2001), p. 25–44; and Peter Goßens, 'Judengestalten auf der deutschen Bühne (Buch von Elisabeth Frenzel, 1940)', in Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Handbuch des Antisemitismus: Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Band 7: Literatur, Film, Theater und Kunst* (Berlin, Munich, Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), p. 221–3.
21. Ernst Klee, *Das Kulturlexikon zum Dritten Reich: Wer War Was vor und nach 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2000), p. 163–4; Wicclair, 'Das fatale Loch', p. 33. Frenzel's 1943 pamphlet on Jews in the theatre has been characterized as one of the worst anti-Semitic screeds produced by a German writer: Jochen Hörisch, 'An ihren Werken sollt ihr sie erkennen – Das "Internationale Germanistenlexikon 1800–1950"', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (31 December 2003).
22. See Günther Berghaus, 'The Ritual Core of Fascist Theatre: An Anthropological Perspective', in Günther Berghaus, ed., *Fascism and Theatre: Comparative Studies on the Aesthetics and Politics of Performance in Europe, 1925–1945* (Providence, Rhode Island: Berghahn Books, 1996), p. 39–71.
23. The literature on the Nazi *Thingspiel* is voluminous. One might begin with Henning Eichberg et al., *Massenspiele: NS-Thingspiele, Arbeiterweihespiel und olympisches Zeremoniell, Problemata*, LVIII (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977); or, in English, Henning Eichberg, 'The Nazi *Thingspiel*: Theatre for the Masses in Fascism and Proletarian Culture', trans. Robert A. Jones, *New German Critique*, XI (Spring 1977), p. 133–50.
24. Wicclair, 'Das fatale Loch', p. 134–7, 147; Gerd Simons Dokumentation, <<http://homepages.uni-tuebingen.de/gerd.simon/ChrNiessen.pdf>>.
25. Klee, *Das Kulturlexikon*, p. 347.
26. Kutscher, *Der Theaterprofessor*, p. 212.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 227.
28. For Gregor as a librarian who plundered the holdings of proscribed writers, see Peter Malina, 'Von Büchern und Menschen: Neue Veröffentlichungen zur NS-Geschichte des Bibliothekswesens', *Mitteilungen der VÖB*, LX, No. 1 (2007), p. 56; Christiane Hoffrath, 'Widmungsexemplare aus der Bibliothek von Elise und Helene Richter', in Stefan Alker, Christina Köstner, and Markus Stumpf, eds., *Bibliotheken in der NS-Zeit*.

- Provenienzforschung und Bibliotheksgeschichte (Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2008), p. 118; and Evelyn Adunka, *Der Raub der Bücher: Über Verschwinder und Vernichten von Bibliotheken in der NS-Zeit und ihre Restitution nach 1945* (Vienna: Czernin, 2000), p. 196–211.
29. Quoted in Klee, *Das Kulturlexikon*, p. 197.
30. Kindermann's publications during the Third Reich include *Kampf um das Ordnungsgefüge* (1939); *Kampf um die deutsche Lebensform: Reden und Aufsätze über die Dichtung im Aufbau der Nation* (1941); *Theater und Nation* (1943); *Die europäische Sendung des deutschen Theaters* (1944); as well as monographs on Raimund (1940), Max Halbe (1941), and Hölderlin (1943).
31. Peter Roessler, Monika Meier, and Gerhard Schiet, *Theaterwissenschaft und Faschismus* (Vienna: Antifaschistische Arbeitsgruppe, P. Roessler, 1981), p. 57, 66–71; Konrad Dussel, 'Theatergeschichte der NS-Zeit unter sozial geschichtlichem Aspekt: Ergebnisse und Perspektiven der Forschung', *Neue Politische Literatur*, XXXII, No. 2 (1987), p. 233–45.
32. Quoted in Roessler, Meier and Schiet, *Theaterwissenschaft und Faschismus*, p. 66–71.
33. Sandra Richter, *A History of Poetics: German Scholarly Aesthetics and Poetics in International Context, 1770–1960* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2010), p. 255–60.
34. Hans Kindermann, *Dichtung und Volkheit: Grundzüge einer neuen Literaturwissenschaft* (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1939), quoted in Gilman, ed., *NS-Literaturtheorie*, p. 56–71.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. Werner Röder and Herbert A. Strauss, eds., *International Biographical Dictionary of Central European Emigrés 1933–1945*, Vol. 2, Part 2 (Munich: Saur, 1983), p. 842.
39. Klee, *Das Kulturlexikon*, p. 429; Albrecht Dümmling, 'Wider die Negerkulture, für deutsches Volkstum', in Kevin Clarke, ed., *Glitter and Be Gay: Die authentische Operette und ihre schwulen Verehrer* (Hamburg: Männerschwarm, 2007), p. 217.
40. Rolf Röhmer and Joachim May, eds. *Beiträge zur Theaterwissenschaft: Theater gestern und heute* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1968).
41. Wilson, 'Goethe and the Nazis', p. 14–16.
42. Wicclair, 'Das fatale Loch', p. 28–37 (p. 28). Knudsen also published a guide to the academic study of theatre: *Theaterwissenschaft: Werden und Wertung einer Universitätsdisziplin* (Berlin: Christian-Verlag, 1950).
43. *Ibid.*, p. 40–1.
44. Kutscher, *Der Theaterprofessor*, p. 234–9.
45. Roessler, Meier, and Schiet, *Theaterwissenschaft und Faschismus*, p. 73–87.
46. See Anselm Heinrich, *Theatre in Europe Under German Occupation* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
47. In 2008, Margret-Dietrich-Straße in Vienna was renamed Helene-Richter-Straße after a *Theaterwissenschaftlerin* who had perished in Theresienstadt.
48. Marx, 'Interpretations', p. 136–7. See also Lutz Ellrich, 'Carl Niessens Handbuch der Theater-Wissenschaft: Versuch einer ethnologischen Relektüre', *Maske und Kothurn*, LV, Nos. 1–2 (2009), p. 175–92, reprinted in Ellrich, *Verführen und Verführen: Von antike Theater zum Internetportal* (Bielefeld; Transcript, 2011).
49. Probst, 'Traces of Performance', p. 7.
50. Carl Niessen, *Handbuch der Theaterwissenschaft* (Emsdetten: Lechte, 1949), I, p. xxiii.
51. Christopher Balme, 'Relektüre: Carl Niessen: *Handbuch der Theater-Wissenschaft*', *Forum Modernes Theater*, XXIV, No. 2 (December 2009), p. 183–9; Balme, "'Verwandt der Kern aller Menschen'".
52. Andrzej Wirth, *Flucht nach vorn: Gesprochene Autobiografie und Materialien*, ed. Thomas Irmer (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2013), p. 25. In 1982, he founded his own Institute for Applied *Theaterwissenschaft* in Giessen.
53. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Historiography in Germany Today', in Jürgen Habermas, ed., *Observations on 'The Spiritual Situation of the Age'*, trans. A. Buchwalter (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1984), p. 240–1. The principle had been applied to theatre studies in Dietrich Steinbeck, *Einleitung in die Theorie und Systematik der Theaterwissenschaft* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1970).