Directing Across Borders: English *mise en scène* on the Continental stage

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Abstract: While there have been waves of English playwriting leaving their mark on European stages (the "angry young men" of the 1960s, the *In-Yer-Face* writers of the 1990s), the exchange between English and Continental European theatre practice has been much rarer. English theatre only seemed to arrive on the Continent, when directors – such as Peter Brook or Declan Donnellan - turned their back on British stages and left their home country. In recent years, Katie Mitchell has become a pioneer in directing her work both in the UK and in Continental Europe. Yet, nowadays more and more British directors and companies are brought over to work in Europe, such as Robert Icke at Toneelgroep Amsterdam, and Simon McBurney and the collective Dead Centre at Schaubühne Berlin. This essay will investigate how these directors bring a new sense of Anglophone theatre to Europe, which is both influenced by contemporary Continental practices while also influencing European theatre with its distinctly "English" stage language.

From Shakespeare to the "angry young men" of the 1960s, and more recently the "*In-Yer-Face*" generation of the 1990s as well as contemporary playwrights such as Simon Stephens, Lucy Prebble and Duncan Macmillan, there have been several waves of English playwriting leaving their mark on European stages. The exchange between English and Continental European theatre aesthetics, however, has been more selective. Anglophone stage practice only seemed to cross borders to the Continent as directors such as Peter Brook, Declan Donnellan and Simon McBurney (just like, some centuries before, the travelling companies of the 17th century), turned their back on British theatre and left their home country to work or study abroad. Over the past

decade, Katie Mitchell – herself greatly influenced by her training with the Polish Grotowski-adepts Gardzienice in the early 1990s – has become a rare pioneer in producing her work regularly both on UK and on Continental European stages; also, Sheffield-based Forced Entertainment have become regarded across Europe as the pinnacle of the quirky British performance theatre "off"-scene. None of these artists and companies, though, are considered representative of the current mainstream British theatre scene in their native country. Meanwhile, the past decade has seen Continental "directors' theatre" approaches of artists such as Thomas Ostermeier and Ivo van Hove finding wide resonance amongst UK theatre artists and the public alike, sparking great interest in Continental aesthetic notions such as *mise en scène* and dramaturgy (cf. Syme 2017; Trueman 2017). Gradually, more British directors have followed Mitchell's success in being commissioned to create work in the context of Continental ensemble structures, most notably Robert Icke at Toneelgroep Amsterdam *(Oedipus,* prem. April 2018), and Simon McBurney and Dublin-based company Dead Centre at Schaubühne Berlin (*Beware of Pity,* prem. December 2015, and *Shakespeare's Last Play,* prem. December 2018, respectively). This essay will investigate how this work of directors from the UK brings contemporary Anglophone theatre aesthetics to Continental Europe – approaches that are themselves influenced by Continental models (not least that of *Regietheater*), while still adhering to the distinctly realist and psychology-driven "English" stage idiom. We shall concentrate for our discussion on the German theatre context, specifically on works produced by artistic director Andreas Beck (b. 1965), himself a former international associate of the Royal Court, who has been instrumental in commissioning British theatre makers during his tenures at Volkstheater Vienna (2007-14), Theater Basel in Switzerland (2015-19), and, from Autumn 2019, at Residenztheater Munich. He was responsible for bringing Anglophone theatre directors such as Simon Stone, Ramin Grey, Joe Hill-Gibbins and Robert Icke to work, for the first time in their careers, with Continental actor ensembles, on non-English language productions in the context of the state funded public theatre system – hence, enabling them to work

within the theatres that had inspired their work as directors for some years. As with most border crossings, these directors thereby also experienced some form of "coming home" in the foreign environment, precisely as they left their familiar territory behind. We shall thus encounter multiple border-crossings – in the processes of appropriating, adapting, and then passing on (or, passing *back*) – in particular in the work of Icke and Hill-Gibbins, who now take back their own ways of implementing and integrating the impulses they had received from Continental aesthetics, as they begin to work themselves outside an Anglophone context.[1]

I am aware that this article will exclusively discuss the work of white, male directors. It thus symptomatically reflects an ongoing, but gradually challenged structural bias within both Anglophone and Continental theatre systems. I should stress, however, that among the British theatre-makers whose work has been inspired, over the past decade or even longer, by Continental theatre work, is an exceptionally high proportion of female directors, some of whom have in fact managed to break through to some hegemonic British theatre institutions, such as the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. Among them are, in particular, Carrie Cracknell, Nathalie Abrahami, Ellen MacDougall, Maria Aberg, and Jude Christian. At the time of writing, none of these female directors, though, had been commissioned to work in a major Continental theatre venue.

Opening doors across aesthetic borders: The influence of the artistic directors David Lan and Andreas Beck

The recent commissions of British theatre directors at prestigious theatre ensembles of the Dutch- and German-language theatre system highlight a frontier between British and Continental European theatre practice – a border policed far more rigorously than that between the undoubtedly rather heterogenic forms of "European" theatre itself, in its German, French, Italian, or Polish manifestations, which, nevertheless, one dares to confidently subsume under the label of "European theatre". Given the almost everyday presence of Anglophone

playwriting on Continental stages, from Beckett, Bond and Pinter to Kane, Ravenhill and Stephens, let alone Shakespeare, one is tempted to forget that these playwrights also had to cross this aesthetic border. Some of them managed to become well received household names in Continental theatre, while their work remained far more controversially received, if not largely invisible at home in the UK. Sarah Kane, and in the context of performance theatre, Forced Entertainment, but equally Ravenhill and Stephens are notable examples of British playwrights whose wide success abroad, notably in the non-Anglophone, Continental European theatre world, led to their acknowledgement in the UK – a recognition which, at times, only reluctantly corresponded with actual programming and stage presence of their work at home.

Writing at the turn of the century, Lynette Hunter and Peter Lichtenfels identified the incompatibility of the material production processes as the main reason for this border that continues to separate the two theatre cultures and that appears at times rather insurmountable, long before even considering the future effect of Brexit. They stressed that far more than an often anecdotally foregrounded language barrier, the major differences in funding systems (subsidy vs mixed-mode), the company structures (ensemble vs ad-hoc casting), and the varying traditions of performing (repertoire vs ensuite) act as major barriers guarding this frontier (Lichtenfels and Hunter 2002, 39-43). It appears significant in this respect that the work of a number of the established border-crossing directors of an earlier generation – such as Mitchell and McBurney, as well as Declan Donellan, whose company Cheek by Jowl is comprised of multiple, English and Russian ensembles, no less than Peter Brook, who escaped the "deadly theatre" system of the UK to set up his base at the Paris Bouffes du Nord – to the present day have remained outsiders to the inner circle of the British theatre business, being regularly programmed alongside "foreign work" at places like the London Barbican and the Manchester, Brighton and Edinburgh International Festivals. Yet, today, an entire group or even generation of emerging directors, some of whom have by now arrived at the country's major theatres, such as the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, and whose work has been ex-

ported *within* the Anglophone theatre world, to Broadway and Australia, see themselves as at home on both sides of this border.

In contrast to the somewhat "lone adventurers" of the earlier generation who had made individual efforts to cross the borders of these two theatre cultures, a network of crucial facilitators has worked largely behind the scenes to foster and cultivate this emerging generation and their work, contributing to an intensifying dialogue and wider mutual exchange between British and Continental European theatre directing. The singular most important "door-opener" on the British side, who more than once faced adverse reactions from purist gatekeepers of the British theatre tradition, had been David Lan, Artistic Director of London's Young Vic theatre from 2000 to 2018. Perhaps typically, Lan, who had trained and started his career in theatre in South Africa, by trade was also a playwright and translator. During his tenure, the "Young Directors Network" was established at the Young Vic, with which virtually all of the above named contemporary British theatre directors have been associated. This informal network established a productive platform for exchange between young theatre directors in the UK – a theatre profession that in the UK theatre economy is still largely (and, in terms of employment contracts, officially) considered as technical rather than artistic. The Directors' Network was open for anyone who was able to demonstrate two public, professional productions. It offered a context for virtual (online) as well as actual meetings and debates, facilitating events and launching working groups, one of them specifically dedicated to Continental European directors' theatre. Corresponding to his programming of the Young Vic, Lan fostered interaction with artists from abroad. The directors he brought to his theatre, such as Peter Brook himself as well as Katie Mitchell, the late Patrice Chereau and Luc Bondy, Australian Benedict Andrews, South African Yael Farber, and Ivo van Hove from Amsterdam, would engage with this next generation of British directors, giving workshops and masterclasses to network members. In addition, Lan regularly organised visits to foreign theatres and theatre festivals for these young artists, to Germany, Poland, Greece, or to the Avignon theatre festival. Interestingly, a good number of foreign the-

atre directors living in the UK, many of them from Eastern Europe, became members of this network and thus further contributed to the international exchange of ideas and practices, while remaining virtually absent and invisible on British stages.

Numerous Young Vic associate directors emerged through this network of aspiring artists, among them Carrie Cracknell, Natalie Abrahami, Walter Meierjohann, and also Joe Hill-Gibbins. Without public fanfare, Lan thus created a platform that facilitated the internationalisation of British stage aesthetics in the early 21st century. His network promoted a new outward-facing awareness that had previously rarely existed beyond the international programme at the Royal Court theatre, there of course with its main focus on playwriting. Hill-Gibbins himself had started out in the Royal Court's script department before beginning to assist under the Court's former artistic director Ian Rickson. Other British directors who began at roughly the same time planting seeds for an engagement with the new European postdramatic aesthetics, such as in particular Ramin Grey, had also been associated with both the Royal Court and Lan's Young Vic.

The crucial impulses of Lan's initiative in transforming the outlook of an entire generation of British theatre makers (as opposed, for instance, to more conservative directors such as Rufus Norris, current artistic director of the National Theatre, who according to his own admission had never even been to Berlin), facilitated a new flow of inspiration into British theatre which did not see its direct correspondence in Continental theatre. Certainly, for instance, Thomas Ostermeier's Berlin Schaubühne had consistently engaged with Anglophone theatre, in the early years mostly with the new writing of his close friend Sarah Kane, with Mark Ravenhill and others, and since around 2005 also with Anglophone directors such as Benedict Andrews, Katie Mitchell, Simon McBurney, and more recently with New York's Public Theatre and the Anglo-Irish theatre group Dead Centre. The Berlin theatre has thus become a prominent catalyst for stimulating an engagement with contemporary Anglophone stage aesthetics. Elsewhere, German-English director Karin Beier, as artistic director

first in Cologne, later at Schauspielhaus Hamburg, particularly championed the work not only of British playwrights, but also of directors, such as again Katie Mitchell, whom Beier had introduced to the German stage, inviting her to restage her 2006 National Theatre production of *The Waves* at Cologne in 2011.

Meanwhile, the afore-mentioned Andreas Beck facilitated a number of more recent "border-crossings". Before he took up his first appointment as artistic director, at Volkstheater Vienna in 2007, Beck had originally studied theatre studies and worked, from the 1990s, as a dramaturg as well as a translator, for instance for Mark Ravenhill's plays in the 1990s. At Vienna, he became one of the masterminds behind the much-noted international coproduction with Lan's Young Vic and the Norwegian Brageteatret, Ramin Grey's production of David Greig's *The Events,* which premiered at the Edinburgh Festival in August 2013. Grey, whom Beck had known from his time at the Royal Court during Ian Rickson's time as artistic director, had already previously directed at Volkstheater. Moving, from 2015, to Basel, Beck brought Joe Hill-Gibbins and Robert Icke to work in a German theatre context, while also being instrumental in introducing another vital facilitator of the current budding encounters between Anglophone and European theatre aesthetics to German theatre: Australian director Simon Stone, who was actually born in Basel in 1984 before moving to Australia aged 12. From 2015 to 2017, Stone was associate director at Beck's Basel enterprise, having previously worked as an actor and director in Australian theatre, most notably as staff director at the Sydney Belvoir theatre. His Belvoir production of Ibsen's *Wild Duck*, created in 2011, was invited to the 2012 Ibsen Festival in Oslo, and also shown at the Holland Festival in Amsterdam the same year. This visit launched Stone's by now huge career in European, and in particular in German-speaking theatre, where he has since worked, far beyond Basel, at major theatres from Vienna to Munich, Hamburg and Berlin, and received several invitations to the Berlin Theatertreffen, the festival of the season's most outstanding German-language productions as chosen by a jury of theatre critics. Meanwhile, he was also associated with Lan's Young Vic, where he directed Garcia Lorca's

Yerma (2016) in an Olivier-award winning production starring Billie Piper. Amongst Stone's other noted European productions were *Ibsenhuis,* staged with Toneelgroep Amsterdam in coproduction with the Avignon Festival in 2017, and *Hotel Strindberg* in 2018, a coproduction of Beck's Theater Basel with renowned Vienna Burgtheater. Both of these works merged several of the authors' plays into one evening, offering a portrayal of the particular thematic obsessions of these playwrights.

Stone has become known for his trademark directorial rewriting of canonical plays, whose plot and stage worlds he vigorously transposes into the present moment of the twenty-first century, merging the playwrights' motifs and intentions with his generation's contemporary sensibilities and issues. He also brought a distinct "Anglophone" approach to *mise en scène* on the European stage: his character work as well as the specific form of theatrical realism notably departs from the dominant postdramatic and deconstructivist signatures of European *Regietheater.* His dramaturgic approach of merging an entire body of works into one production resembles the multi-layered storytelling of HBO- and Netflix-series that have become popular in recent years.

Navigating theatre-work across the borders: Robert Icke and Joe Hill-Gibbins

Similar comparisons have been attributed to the directing work of Robert Icke, and it may therefore not have been too surprising that Beck invited Icke to direct at Basel, too, where his version of Arthur Miller's *Crucible* premiered in January 2019, some months after he staged a German version of his signature piece, the *Oresteia,* at Stuttgart. The original version, a four-hour non-stop performance, was created at London's Almeida Theatre in 2015, with which Icke has been affiliated since 2013 as Associate Director. It won him the Olivier Award as youngest ever "best director". Icke comes from a working-class background in Northeast England, yet read English at Cambridge, like many influential British theatre directors before him. In 2010, he joined Rupert Goold's Headlong company, with which he

created his first major success, a stage adaptation of George Orwell's *1984* that he devised together with playwright Duncan Macmillan; their textual adaptation of the novel was in fact also staged in Germany, yet only using their script, staged anew by a different director. Icke then succeeded with his staging of Schiller's *Mary Stuart* in 2016*,* starring Juliet Stevenson and Lia Williams, in which a coin tossed at the beginning of the evening decided who of the two actresses would play Mary, who Elizabeth. In 2017, he directed *Hamlet,* starring Andrew Scott, before creating, as his first non-English production, Sophocles' *Oedipus* for van Hove's Toneelgroep Amsterdam; this production was selected for the Dutch Theatre Festival, the annual selection of the seasons' best productions in the Dutch-speaking countries, their equivalent to the Berlin Theatertreffen.

Not unlike Stone, Icke works from his own textual adaptations, even when directing English-language plays.[2] For his four-hour *Hamlet,* he compiled a new version based on various Quarto-editions, reintroducing several of their more "apocryphical" scenes not included in the 1623 Shakespeare Folio, most notably around the character of Ophelia. Such a detailed, dramaturgic and in large parts academic study of the playtexts has become characteristic for Icke. He thus develops his key directorial approach by closely studying the text before going into the rehearsal room, deciding on ideas such as the setting of a court hearing that addresses the audience in his *Oresteia,* or the tossing of the coin in *Mary Stuart* to underline the exchangeability of fate. Icke considers himself an author, however not in competition with the playwright, but extending their play visually and atmospherically through his *mise en scène*. At the heart of a play is for him the experimental and experiential dramaturgic arrangement that the playwright has conceived, and which underpins the words and details of the scenes as written down. As Andreas Beck commented in a personal conversation, Icke's entirely un-postdramatic directorial approach of studying a playtext in close detail to create his own "edition", is reminiscent of the (pre-postmodern) German *Regietheater* tradition*,* paradigmatically exemplified by Peter Stein's Schaubühne of the 1970's. Directors such as Stein himself, Klaus-Michael Grüber, Andrea Breth,

Claus Peymann, and others, would also work from their own translations, adaptations and versions of canonical plays that strongly resonated with contemporary sensibilities. According to Beck, it was this peculiar amalgamation of a Continental approach of directors' theatre and distinct traits of the British theatre idiom that sparked his interest in Icke (and previously, Stone) and made him commission their work at his theatres.[3]

The specific fusion of characteristic Continental and British approaches that is even more evident in Icke's work than in Stone's, becomes particular evident in his commitment to the primacy of the dramatic text in a way that is characteristic for English stage direction. At the same time, Icke approaches the playtext with a very different attitude that considers the playwright's work not as solidified in the words printed on a page. Instead, he concentrates on interrogating the underlying ideas set in motion through these very words and the play's dramaturgic and scenic composition. Like Continental directors, Icke feels free to intervene in the printed dramatic texts, especially if compared to the prevalent "literalness" of British stage realism. And yet, he remains notably British in unlocking his often radical readings of the playwright's ideas through the lens of character psychology, in contrast to the Stein-*Regie* tradition of the politicised 1970s that attempted a larger scale, fundamental critique of contemporary society. In Icke's approach, socio-political configurations translate themselves through the behaviour of individuals instead of being seen as conditioning them as an outside force as from a materialist and Marxist perspective that underpinned a lot of the Continental work from the 1970s and 1980s. Icke's close attention to character psychology entirely lacks the European "performativity" of a character as a staged construct (rather than a psychologically conceived fiction), even though his overall *mise en scène* never disavows its theatricality. In this respect, Icke's work further discloses his almost obsessive attention for minute stage details and a carefully thought out semiotics of props, stage objects and more generally the scenographic space. He is thus clearly aligned with the "semiotic" compositions of directors such as Mitchell and playwrights such as Pinter, as opposed to the characteristic postmodern playful-

ness of free-wheeling associations and added intertextual material that characterised recent decades of Continental *mise en scène*. A further aspect that links Icke's work to other British directors who have crossed the borders beyond the Anglophone theatre sphere, is his preference to work with a surrogate ensemble company, as he draws consistently on a group of actors (at least in his British work), and employs his preferred designers, composers, and other close associates.

When Joe Hill-Gibbins made his debut at London's National Theatre in 2013, directing Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II,* the set by Lizzie Clachan – which kept the back and side walls of the venue's Olivier theatre open to the bare firewalls, so one could see for much of the time the off-stage action as well – alongside the video work by Wooster Group and Stefan Pucher-video designer Chris Kondek, showing as projections on screens next to the stage what was going inside a closed-off space on stage that remained otherwise invisible to the audience's eyes, was very reminiscent of signature contemporary European *Regietheater* in the vein of Frank Castorf, Thomas Ostermeier and Ivo van Hove. Over the following years, working as associate artist at Lan's Young Vic, where he staged a cycle of Shakespeare plays, including *Measure for Measure* (2015) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2017), Hill-Gibbins developed his directorial style beyond eclectic appropriations of Continental templates, also eventually arriving at a rather original blend of these tools and strategies with paradigmatic traits of British theatre aesthetics. Critic Andrew Haydon had already identified in his discussion of Hill-Gibbins's *Edward II* some key differences to European work, above all in the way that the British director "uses the play to argue a point, rather than arguing with/against the play itself", the latter identified as characteristic of Continental directors' theatre (Haydon 2013).

With his Continental debut at Basel in spring 2018, Hill-Gibbins seemed to be pushed even further into a new territory located precisely at the border of Continental and British stage aesthetics. In contrast to Robert Icke's work – essentially, Icke-shows as to be expected, just in another language – Hill-Gibbins' work revealed an almost

textbook instantiation of British character work and stage psychology – mostly, it seemed, since here he was not given another Shakespeare or other canonical classic to direct, but Tracy Letts's contemporary American play.[4] *Mary Page Marlowe* carefully expands conventional Anglo-American playwriting norms by distributing the narrative on eleven scenes that are not presented in chronological order, while also suggesting that the eponymous main character should be played by several actresses, as the play juxtaposes moments from the character's life aged 40, 19, and so forth. Very typically for the psychological tradition of Anglo-American writing, there was a rich subtext behind the fragmented scenes, while crucial plot-points (such as Mary being jailed for years) were not shown, but only indirectly alluded to. Comparing Hill-Gibbins's approach to the play's German premiere at the Berliner Ensemble, directed by David Bösch (2017), showed an unexpected difference. The BE production staged the play with the help of the revolve in separated rooms, thus reinforcing a conventional realism, and an isolated focus on the individual scenes. Hill-Gibbins, meanwhile, continued his collaboration with German scenographer Johannes Schütz, setting his version in an open space, with minimal props, and all performers present on stage throughout. They thus watched and witnessed the past, present and future of Mary Page Marlowe's life. Even though Hill-Gibbins clearly used with the actors, as he also noted in a personal conversation, an almost textbook-British drama school approach to rehearsal – dividing scenes into units, identifying intentions and objectives, and deciding on "actions" in accordance with the widespread Stanislavsky-based technique invented by Max Stafford-Clark – his *mise en scène* still transcended any surface realism in a way one would have expected more from a German director. The remarkable dynamics that emerged from the contrast of the entirely abstract scenographic frame and the realistic psychological portrayal of the characters (which formally also matched Letts's play) revealed the implicit potential of the recent directorial border crossings that are at the heart of our discussion. Having been influenced and having followed developments of Continental European theatre closely, Hill-Gibbins may thus contribute to the avantgarde-aesthetics

of contemporary German-language *Regie* precisely by introducing a British textbook-approach that he himself had long abandoned when working in British theatre itself.

Beyond bourgeois institutions: Moving theatre into the globalised, digital media world of the 21st Century

The emergence of a new generation of Anglophone directors such as Ramin Grey, Simon Stone, Robert Icke and Joe Hill-Gibbins on the Continental (and specifically, on the German) stage, may appear accidental. However, we here suggest that as a symptom their concurrent manifestation points towards wider issues affecting the medium and social institution of theatre today – both the subsidised, previously predominantly bourgeois state and city theatres of the Continent, and at least the more discerning and ambitious end of British theatre. Both systems now face the reality of globalisation, which is also a post-bourgeois reality, with changing audiences who bring in very different life patterns, experiences, and not least medial habits and viewing conventions to the theatre, thus also different expectations of the place and role of theatre in their lives, as compared to the traditional middle-class, highly educated theatre patrons for whom the theatre counted as their "cultural capital" famously analysed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Serious theatre makers and artistic directors, such as Lan and Beck, have thus long started to question the role of a city theatre, as they do not understand its institutional role as being a commodity proffering spectacles feeding the entertainment industry, nor as functioning as museum of the formerly dominant bourgeois culture. They instead have embarked on a thorough scrutiny of forms, formats and aesthetics, of which the invitation to foreign theatre-makers to cross borders and thus work in another and different theatre system has been an integral part.

In their considerations about the role and function of theatre for contemporary audiences in a digital, globalised media economy, issues of reality, of representation and the representability of reality, and an engagement with different realities, have become of central impor-

tance; these explorations also extend to revisiting the potential of theatrical realism as a form and medium for such engagement. In fact, these cross-border experiments can be productively linked to the border-crossing success with both UK and Continental audiences of, for instance, Netflix series, video games, and similar new medial dramaturgies. They disclose distinct approaches to narrative, to visual and affective modes of storytelling that reimagine parameters of orality, and appropriate other epic forms no longer predicated on linear and condensed telling or realism, but instead on a multiplicity of plotlines, and an engagement with complex metaphoric and metonymic relations. This expanded digital poetics of form reflects the disjunctive temporality, the messy experience of presence, and of our present.

As a result, artistic approaches and aesthetic forms that have dominated the stage over the past decades are newly negotiated. The theatre in the German-speaking countries, in particular, had been preoccupied for a long time with an approach to staging the canonical repertoire driven by deconstructivist questioning and challenging the plays, by confronting, doubting and dismantling them, and not least by staging this very process of confrontation, interrogation and doubt *as* performance. This resulted in the characteristic merger of the dramatic role with the performative persona of the actor, where the actors no longer performed their roles, but rather the performing of the role, or their doubtful refusal or perceived inability to make sense of a play such as, say, *Othello* or *The Merchant of Venice,* from their perspective as self-conscious performance specialists.

At the same time, and equally emphasising the very process of making theatre, the dramatic stage has absorbed the new aesthetics and dramaturgies of visuality, corporeality and temporality introduced by performance art since the 1960s, and influentially outlined by Hans-Thies Lehmann's notion of "postdramatic theatre". Yet, such predominantly reflexive modes of theatre- and performance making no longer seemed adequate in a time of financial crisis, neo-colonialist exploitation, global migration and a rising new right-wing populism. Old concepts of "realism" and of "mimetic" representation of the reality

beyond theatre seemed to warrant fresh investigations, not so much as a conservative gesture of returning to an old theatre style, but with the impetus to move forward by reinvigorating the critical forces that once drove realist and naturalist theatre-making. This is exemplified, above all, by Simon Stone's work, which opened up a new entry-point to conventions of realism and mimetic acting. His, and likewise the works of the other directors discussed in this contribution have become instrumental in re-appropriating the ability of theatre to still tell stories, to evoke fictional worlds and dramatic conflicts, while of course doing so from a twenty-first century, and hence, also a postdramatic and postmodern perspective, in ways that resonate with present audiences who are as familiar with these postdramatic forms of theatre, as they are with the new narrations and diverse and complex character portrayals explored in the many online TV series. Therefore, none of the directors discussed here goes back beyond a self-conscious, exposed "playing" that does not seek to dissimulate the fact that it is theatre.

This global cultural background applies equally to British and to Continental theatre contexts. For the same reasons as the postdramatic performativity of Continental *Regietheater* had been unable to provide answers to contemporary problems, the very literal British stage realism also had to be put to the test, extended and updated. Britain and the Continent thus meet in these directorial border-crossings in the middle: British theatre seeking a way out of the stalemate of all too literal realism, Continental theatre looking to go beyond its self-reflexive bubble of *l'art pour l'art*-deconstruction whose pretence of radical political gesturing exhausted itself in the performance of empty, "deadly" gestures, to evoke Brook once more. Neither the pure self-reflexivity of Continental theatre nor the obsessive realism of the British stage, neither postmodern deconstruction, nor truthful, mimetic stage realism, were up for this task on their own. They seemed to fail when confronted with the monstrosity of a massacre, as portrayed in David Greig's *Events,* but perhaps even in the telling of the apparently simple story of a woman's life, as in Letts's *Mary Page Marlowe*. They needed their respective other, they needed to turn from a straightfor-

ward and simplistic idea of representation to a dialectic understanding of theatral *mise en scène,*[5] which neither disavowed the fabrication of the stage business, nor frowned upon the idea of character and subjectivity, of dramatic conflict and fictional representation. Only such a dialectic, richly textured, and complex approach to *mise en scène,* which returns to and reinvigorates the power of theatral play, may be able to offer the ability to confront on stage the monstrous depths of globalised modernity in all their ambiguity, force, and complexity. While it is certainly all too premature to float, on the basis of only a handful of productions that have been recently created, the idea of a "wave" of Anglophone directors inspiring European theatre in the second decade of the 21st century, we are at least witnessing a potentially very productive encounter, and maybe the infusion of some new impulses that may eventually work both ways, on both sides of the aesthetic border.

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[1] Icke's *Oedipus* premiered at Toneelgroep Amsterdam in April 2018, a month after Hill-Gibbins had premiered his *mise en scène* of Tracy Letts's 2016 play *Mary Page Marlowe* at Theater Basel, in March. At the time of writing this article, during the 2018/19 theatre season, both of them were lined up to direct more productions in German theatre, in Stuttgart, Wuppertal, again Basel, and Munich.

[2] This section draws on a personal conversation between Robert Icke and the author which took place at the Almedia Theatre offices in London on 23/7/2018.

[3] I am here drawing on a very generous and insightful conversation with Andreas Beck that took place on 27/9/2018.

[4] I am indebted to Joe Hill-Gibbins for discussing his production with me in a personal conversation that took place via Skype on 22/10/2018, on which I am drawing in this section.

[5] I maintain the terminological distinction between fake and deceptive "theatricality", and the "theatrality" generated by the dynamics of movement, meaning, and spectatorial affective perception, as introduced by German theatrality studies (*Theatralitätsforschung*) and its pioneers Rudolf Münz and Helmar Schramm (see Boenisch 2015, Ch. 2).