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Ethical Self-cultivation as the
Politics of Engaged Theatre: How
Theatre Engages Refugee Politics*Jonas Tinius***Introduction**

Bojana Kunst¹ contextualises her lecture for the conference ‘Thinking on/of the stage’ (Müller-Schöll et al. 2013) by retelling the beginning of choreographer Hooman Sharifi’s performance *Who are the aliens?* In this performance, the audience is left seated without an official beginning. Nobody opens the curtain to the stage. No music begins. The play just doesn’t seem to commence. ‘After twenty minutes of uneasy restlessness’, she comments, ‘one of the audience members finally gathered enough courage to stand up and pry open the curtain on the side of the stage. ‘There is nothing there whatsoever!’ he yelled triumphantly’ (Müller-Schöll et al. 2013).

I enjoy this anecdote as a discussion of theatre and thought, because it offers a glimpse at the pre-reflexive moment of theatre reception: what is theatre? Who are we as audiences? And, fundamentally, where can we locate performance: on stage or in our heads? Inspired by such fundamental concerns, Part I of this chapter extends the theoretical narrative of this entire volume by discussing issues of aesthetics, ethics, and reflexivity in performance and artistic traditions. It does so with a focus on the ethnographic and social scientific study of such phenomena as they crystallised in the recent formation of a ‘new sociology of art’. Part II then zooms into my ethnographic fieldwork and offers various pathways into the ethico-aesthetic conundrums of an applied theatre project with a focus on internal discipline, reflexivity, and thought. I will be discussing a site-specific theatre and installation project called *Ruhrorter*. The project took place in an abandoned post-industrial multi-storey refugee asylum camp with and about the memories, dreams, and desires of relocated refugees in the West German post-industrial Ruhr

1 Valley. Under the aegis of the *Theater an der Ruhr*, the project's young
2 Turkish director Adem Köstereli has been 'socialised' into a particularly
3 self-disciplined and self-reflexive form of theatre practice based on his
4 directorial authority, gestural discipline, and a strict emphasis on theatre-
5 immanent thought-processes. I mobilise my ethnographic narratives to
6 reveal the intense imbrication, interweaving, and interdependence of
7 aesthetic, ethical, and political queries in this project.

8 The argument of this chapter is that disciplined forms of self-reflection
9 and aesthetic cultivation can be mobilised as themselves political
10 moments during the creative process of a theatre project. Such a process
11 of discipline and self-cultivation represents an ethico-aesthetic technol-
12 ogy, which is passed down via patronage and tradition. Furthermore, it
13 is my intention to highlight the reflexive moments during the process
14 as all the different dimensions of reflexivity on the ethico-aesthetic
15 aspects of theatre were in fact a central part of this project: reflection
16 and knowledge about *what* it is that one was doing on stage was equally
17 important as *why* one was doing it. My contribution to the project, in
18 writing, was itself another dimension of reflexivity, as this very text has
19 been discussed in and fed back into the project.

20 Extending this book's conceptual framework, this chapter therefore
21 also describes and analyses the immanent forms, methods, and theo-
22 risation of reflexivity in theatre. Key to the relation between relational
23 reflexivity and theatre is the distinction between performance and per-
24 formativity; and an elaboration of the ethical dimension of aesthetic
25 practice. In our introduction, Alex Flynn and I argue for a differentia-
26 tion between an analytical focus on the *effects* of performance (its per-
27 formativity) – how to *do* things with acts, so to speak – and the *reflection*
28 *on* performance – its metaperformative dimension, one might say. We
29 distinguished between these two foci because we felt that literature on
30 political performance and political art had not sufficiently and thor-
31 oughly done so. And if it has, as in the reception of Butler, Bourdieu,
32 Foucault, Reckwitz, and others, it has been done with the intention to
33 unmask previously 'invisible' acts of subjugation or resistance.²

34 In particular, literature on development (contexts), it seems to us, has
35 emphasised the former (formativity) at the expense of the latter (self-
36 reflected performance). We believe, however, that the ethical dimension
37 of *political* performances, i.e. those seeking to criticise or instigate discus-
38 sion about transformation, offers more complex pathways into under-
39 standing and studying political subjectivities, the relation between art
40 and activism, cultural politics, and the neoliberalism of the creative
41 industries and the creativity paradigm (cf. Boltanski and Chiapello

1 2005; Reckwitz 2012). By the ethical dimension, I refer to scholarship
 2 emerging as part of an 'ethical turn' (in particular Faubion 2011; Laidlaw
 3 2014; Lambek 2010) and an ethnographic turn in arts scholarship (Born
 4 1995, 2010; De Nora 2003; Matzke 2012; Rutten *et al.* 2013; Siegenthaler
 5 2013; Tinius 2015a) that foregrounds persons' and groups' concerns
 6 with their lives, their acts, their virtues, and moral systems – in short,
 7 their evaluative and self-reflected labour on their own subjective exist-
 8 ence and relational intersubjectivity. In this chapter, I am concerned
 9 with the heightened intensity of such ethical behaviour in the context
 10 of political theatre rehearsal processes; that centrally anthropological
 11 practice according to Helmuth Plessner, where 'one person embodies
 12 another' (1982). Three central questions arising from my propositions
 13 thus are: how can we conceptualise the reflexive and self-cultivating
 14 dimensions of performance, rather than reducing political theatre to its
 15 performative and iterative dimensions of the (re-)production of power?
 16 What are some of the *teloi* of self-consciously reflexive practices in politi-
 17 cal performances and theatre which do not have a 'visible' impact or act
 18 of resistance in mind, but self-cultivation, discipline, self-observation?
 19 In what kinds of precarious social spaces and under what conditions of
 20 relational reflexivity do such practices take place?

21 Part I: Aesthetics, ethics, and reflexivity in tradition

22 The following section discusses some of the key debates concerning
 23 ethnographic engagement with aesthetics, ethics, and reflexivity in
 24 the context of political art (see Pilz 2012; Tscholl 2010). I emphasise
 25 the importance of concepts of artistic 'labour' (or the *work* of art),
 26 as I believe that an analytical focus on creative *work* is a productive
 27 pathway into understanding the intense processes of introspection,
 28 self-reflection, and self-discipline that go into what is often idealised as
 29 a horizontal, harmonious, and unconscious process. Aesthetic practices
 30 and concerns (how is my work to be performed, evaluated, received,
 31 and experienced) always go hand in hand with ethical concerns (what
 32 kind of a person do I want to be), both of which are predicated upon
 33 reflexivity and artistic labour.
 34

35 The new sociology of arts

36 It appears common doxa in anthropological literature to relegate aes-
 37 thetic experience in Western institutionalised contexts into the realm
 38 of private and individualistic hermeneutics in order to denounce it as a
 39 class-based bourgeois concept (Bourdieu 1993; Coote and Shelton 1992,
 40
 41

1 Johnson 1996). In some cases, this is elaborated to make interesting
2 observations about the similarities of pre- and post-dramatic emphases
3 on audiences, collectivities, and the metaperformative experiential
4 dimensions of theatre events (see Foster, this chapter) or the sociali-
5 sation into ritual social behaviours (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994),
6 mythological *cosmoi* and exclusive political systems (Marsden 2005;
7 Sax 2002), or gendered performative spaces for alternative political
8 negotiations (Cowan 1990). Only more recently has the so-called new
9 sociology of arts begun to take up serious concerns for the subtly ethical
10 and powerful role of collective aesthetic practices in European institu-
11 tions. These concerns are ultimately tied to relational reflexivity; the
12 introspective and collective self-observation of individuals or groups
13 engaged in performances that seek to transform thought and practice.

14 Coined by Eduardo De La Fuente (2007, 2010), ‘the new sociology of
15 art’ articulates a shift away from what *ex negativo* emerges as ‘the old
16 sociology of art’, that is, most explicitly the work of Pierre Bourdieu
17 (1984, 1993) and Howard Becker (1982). ‘One of the characteristics of
18 the ‘new sociology of art’ is a desire to take the aesthetic and affective
19 properties of art-objects seriously’ (De La Fuente 2010: 6, my emphasis).
20 This contrasts the sociology of Bab, Becker, and Bourdieu, which insisted
21 on an ‘approach to the arts [that] is social organisational, not aesthetic’
22 (Bab 1931; Becker 1982: xi). This brings to mind Gell’s contribution to
23 the seminal collection *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics* (1992); therein
24 he describes his approach as a sociology, and not a theology, of art. The
25 editors, Coote and Shelton, bring this stance to the point: ‘[a]esthetics
26 as a universal moral discourse about art has no place in anthropology’
27 (*ibid.* p. 8). This strikes me as either ignorant or as the unsubtle set-up
28 of European art traditions as a straw man, as such a view of aesthetics
29 as a universal moral discourse has not seriously been held since Kant’s
30 ‘Critique of Judgment’ (2000 [1790]). The concept of aesthetics, both
31 in Baumgarten’s original sense of the perceptible, sensible experience
32 (2007 [1750]) and as a codified set of norms for evaluating and receiv-
33 ing art-forms (Bourdieu 2013; Geuss 1999), implies almost as varied a
34 reality as moral norms or ethical practices (Laidlaw 2014). Thus, a study
35 of aesthetics, similar to that of ethics, especially when studying art insti-
36 tutions, requires attention to the complex set of internal formations of
37 aesthetic traditions, which always also go beyond the ‘mere’ objects to
38 include practices, rituals, and assumptions.

39 One of the central motives for De La Fuente’s understanding of the
40 new sociology of art is a corrective to previous sociological accounts of
41 art, which have avoided questions of the artwork itself and its aesthetics

1 and reception (Zolberg 1990: 29) in their tribute to a neo-Durkheimian
 2 emphasis on the social. De La Fuente and other proponents of this new
 3 sociological approach react against social explanations that should really
 4 be opened up to questioning themselves. Jean Duvignaud's comment in
 5 his *Sociologie du Théâtre* (1965) is an indication of such an explanatory
 6 approach: 'Theatre has long been, in France at least, an object of predi-
 7 lection for aesthetics. ... Until now, sociology has not taken any inter-
 8 est in theatre – the art form which is most evidently a system of social
 9 relations' (Duvignaud in Isambert 1967: 572). Helmuth Plessner already
 10 stated in 1948 that it was surprising anthropology had not yet con-
 11 cerned itself with the actor, since he, after all, '*demonstrates* the human'
 12 (1982: 146, my emphasis) and his capacity and analogy to the human
 13 potential for exceeding and transcending his own 'positionality'.

14
 15 **'Aesthetics as the mother of ethics'**

16 The collective, self-cultivated, and teleological *labour* of groups is also
 17 a productive focal point for the study of the confluence of ethics and
 18 reflexivity (Boyer 1990; MacIntyre 1981, 2001[1988]; Muelder Eaton
 19 2001). Conceptualising the relevance of aesthetic traditions heightens
 20 this concern, as aesthetics (understood as the experience of as well as
 21 the rules for the creation and evaluation of art/performance) neces-
 22 sitates a phenomenological interrogation of one's own experience with
 23 art, its effects on one's subjective state, and one's relation in that experi-
 24 ence to others.

25 Philosopher Muelder Eaton (2001: v) proposes 'that the nature and
 26 value of art cannot be understood in isolation from a wide range of
 27 human endeavours and institutions'.³ For her, a corrective view of the
 28 nature of aesthetic experience implies a theory of aesthetic properties,
 29 which, she argues, requires 'the integration of aesthetics and ethics'
 30 (*ibid.*). Since the philosophically posited causality between 'being good'
 31 and 'looking good' had arguably escaped sustained and critical scrutiny
 32 until Adorno and others proposed that a study of moral and aesthetic
 33 principles also requires an analysis of their potential negation (cf. Geuss
 34 1999, 2005; Tinius 2012), moral judgement and aesthetic judgement
 35 have had a long (analytical) affair. Yet, much like the study of morality,
 36 the analysis of aesthetic judgement frequently and historically relied on
 37 the distinction between two opposing ideas: some believed that it was
 38 useful and possible to devise a set of universal standards for the judge-
 39 ment and study of morality (or aesthetic judgement for that matter),
 40 while others suggested that such a compilation would in itself form *just*
 41 *another form* of morality or aesthetic ideology and we should instead

1 be looking for an analysis of the particular features and qualities of
 2 the subject or object under study. Formalist theorists grounded their
 3 distinction between aesthetics and ethics on Kant and thus precluded a
 4 'full understanding of artworks, confusing the interests of the dominant
 5 group with universal interests' (*ibid.*, p. 82). Against formalist theorists
 6 of aesthetics who insist that genuine aesthetic experience depends on
 7 *what* is presented, not on *how* or *why*, Muelder Eaton proposes that aes-
 8 thetic experience usually is 'tied to the context in which they occur – to
 9 aspects of the history of an object or event, to its cultural setting, to the
 10 interests, beliefs, and attitudes of the persons who have them' (*ibid.*,
 11 p. 1). More importantly, she criticises formalists for ignoring the roles
 12 that artworks play in the existence of a community and 'conversely, [for
 13 ignoring] the ways in which communities determine the very nature of
 14 what counts as artistic or aesthetic experiences that exist within them'
 15 (*ibid.*; see also Bermúdez and Gardner 2003). For her, 'a work of art is an
 16 artefact that is treated in aesthetically relevant ways, at least when it is
 17 being considered a work of art, not as a doorstep or an alarm, ... [i.e.]
 18 considered worthy of attention (*perception and/or reflection*) within that
 19 culture' (*ibid.*, p. 3, my emphasis). As poet Joseph Brodsky proposed in
 20 his 1988 Nobel laureate address, 'On the whole, every new aesthetic
 21 reality makes man's ethical reality more precise. For aesthetics is the
 22 mother of ethics' (Brodsky in Muelder Eaton, p. 81).

23 But if we are going to study a particular institution, how do we go
 24 about studying those aspects? How are people expected to work on
 25 themselves to fit in and support an aesthetic tradition? What are the
 26 specific aesthetic references and standards by which especially aesthetic
 27 traditions generate a certain style? If we think of a contemporary intel-
 28 lectual theatre tradition as a 'particular conjunction of contemplative
 29 thought, reasoned action (*praxis*) and creative production (*poiesis*)'
 30 (Lambek 2000: 309), then we do need to understand the dynamics
 31 of the generative process by which theatre as art and as performance
 32 emerges. The conundrums surrounding the problems of 'applied thea-
 33 tre' hit the nerve of ethical and aesthetic discussions.

34 **Part II: Adem Köstereli's refugee theatre project**

35 **The aesthetics of applied theatre**

36 One of the key problems with understanding socially engaged, applied,
 37 or other forms of supposedly *particularly* political theatre is the very
 38 notion that theatre can ever *not* be about social relations, alternative
 39 political opinions, and socio-political imaginations.⁴
 40
 41

1 Among practitioners and scholars, applied, social, or political theatre,
2 as it has, I find, misleadingly become known, refers to the use of
3 theatre or elements of theatrical practice with either outright political
4 intentions and ends ('to apply theatre to', as in 'to apply theory to') or
5 theatre with marginalised actors.⁵ The former understanding of theatre
6 (as an instrument for political ends) stands in the tradition of Theatre
7 for Development, which is rooted in the work of neomarxist grassroots
8 community engagement. Theories that underpin more progressive uses
9 of theatre performance began to evolve in the 1970s, based on Paulo
10 Freire and Augusto Boal's reconceptualisations. Penny Mlama has identified
11 what she terms as 'Popular Theatre', a mode of expression based
12 on people's genuine participation to 'assert the culture of the dominated
13 classes... making people not only aware of but also active participants
14 in the development process' (1991: 67). The use of theatre in this
15 new and radical context of empowerment has attracted much interest
16 from scholars, practitioners and activists, notably drawing on the work
17 of Richard Schechner (1977, 1985) and Jan Cohen-Cruz (2010). This
18 tradition relegates theatre (and art) into the realm of pure and interchangeable
19 instrumentality, where a performance on a stage could just as well be replaced
20 by a dance, music, or a ritual occupation – to name just a few popular therapeutic
21 and applied performance instruments.

22 The latter understanding of applied theatre – seeking engagement
23 with alternative representations through uncommon actors, also in traditional
24 theatre contexts, and with serious attention to the artistic quality of the work –
25 has provoked a more sophisticated and longer-lasting legacy than the former,
26 which evanesced with the coming-out-of-fashion of performance studies.
27 Political or applied theatre understood as theatre that engages with the
28 problem of representation creates both a different understanding of the
29 performative signifier (the actor) and the performed signified (the multiple
30 meanings of the performance) and thus of the theatrical world to its 'real'
31 context. It also urges a consideration of the dominance of conventional *corpi*
32 or means of theatre production, such as standard canons of classic literature
33 or particular dialects on stage. Engagement with disabled actors falls into
34 this category just as well as labour with lay actors, persons of the public
35 services (policemen, firemen, teachers), related family of the actors, or
36 theatre with refugees and migrants. This appearance and multiplying
37 of approaches emphasising the stage in its original sense of an *agora*, a
38 space of encounter between politically diverse groups, has been paralleled
39 by the rise of so-called 'artistic' or 'performative research'. This
40 approach describes collaborations between artists and (usually) social
41

1 scientists on topics such as urban regeneration, gentrification, and pre-
 2 cariousness, but also religion, power, and authority, to name but a few
 3 common topics.

4
 5 **Internalised politics of the *Theater an der Ruhr***

6 The refugee theatre project I will be discussing in the following sections
 7 of Part II took place under the aegis of the Western German *Theater an*
 8 *der Ruhr*. This institution, directed by charismatic authority Roberto
 9 Ciulli does not advocate or follow either of the above approaches. While
 10 also engaged and political in the sense Flynn and I outline in the intro-
 11 duction to this volume, it follows and perpetuates a philosophical and
 12 aesthetic ideology, which regards theatre as an ambivalent, mythical,
 13 unsettling, and also sacred work of art. The *Theater's* artistic philosophy
 14 also shows strong signs – which are internally coherent with a strong
 15 aesthetic tradition – of sophisticated high-cultural elitism, rejecting
 16 theatre which subjects or subordinates itself to an overarching political,
 17 social, or commercial cause (see introduction to Part I). I mention these
 18 aspects of institutional aesthetic ideology as they inform strongly Adem
 19 Köstereli's theatre practice with refugees.

20 The *Theater an der Ruhr* was founded in 1980 by the Italian émigré
 21 and Hegel scholar Roberto Ciulli, the philosopher Helmut Schäfer, and
 22 the stage designer Graf-Edzard Habben. It pioneered thinking in theatre
 23 institutional transformation and international theatre cooperation in the
 24 latter decades of the 20th century.⁶ The international work of the theatre is
 25 motivated and driven by a profound conviction and artistic philosophy,
 26 well summarised by its director, Ciulli, in an interview with me:

27
 28 We do not travel into other countries only to show our plays, but
 29 because we want to convey the idea of theatre as an artistic and cul-
 30 tural political institution to the base of every city, group, and society
 31 we visit.⁷

32
 33 In June 2014, I witnessed the *Theater's* so-called 'conceptual conversa-
 34 tions' (*Konzeptionsgespräche*) for a coproduction with the Istanbul-based
 35 theatre company *Kumbaraci 50*, a small theatre whose funding was
 36 withdrawn following their support of the Gezi protests from May to
 37 September 2013.⁸ Their ensemble had been working with the *Theater*
 38 *an der Ruhr* before, whose engagement with the Turkish fringe theatre
 39 scene had led to the establishment of a *Scene Istanbul*, a regular showcas-
 40 ing of free Turkish theatre outside state institutions. These conceptual
 41 conversations serve as fora for discussing the artistic direction of a new

1 work of art, conceptual decisions regarding dramaturgy and philosophi-
 2 cal or historical background, and the formulation of hypotheses for the
 3 interpretation of aspects of a play, should a dramatic text exist. Not
 4 just in this case, but in order to initiate each production process at the
 5 *Theater an der Ruhr*, such meetings are held usually over the course of
 6 three or four days, with intense discussions lasting several hours in the
 7 mornings and the evenings. The entire *ensemble* (directors, actors, seam-
 8 stresses, technicians, prop designers, stage designer, pedagogue, assis-
 9 tants, secretaries) is asked to attend. Although they also serve to enable
 10 conversations and criticism, these conversations are strongly focused on
 11 the establishment of a common *telos* of the production, a unified intel-
 12 lectual and philosophical background, and an agreed methodological
 13 approach to acting and directing.

14 I am not mentioning this, however, to talk through the creative process
 15 of a theatre production between two groups of artists; rather, I wanted
 16 to highlight a particular part of the conversation which took place at
 17 the end of the second day; first, because it introduces an important
 18 emic distinction between the political and the aesthetic in the thinking
 19 of the *Theater an der Ruhr* and, second, because it foreshadows Adem
 20 Köstereli's refugee theatre methodology: a methodology premised upon
 21 discipline and the cultivation of the self. Over the course of the day,
 22 the two groups had already discussed (in consecutive translation done
 23 by a former ensemble member of the *Theater*, Recai Hallaç) for about
 24 eight hours aspects of their adaptation of Sicilian Nobel prize laureate
 25 Luigi Pirandello's *I giganti della montagna* (Eng. *The Giants from the*
 26 *Mountains*, 1937), which they had rewritten by Yigit Sertdemir, a
 27 Turkish author also present at the table. At one point in the play, a
 28 group of actors appears to 'free' the people slaving away for the giants
 29 in containers – slaves whose former lives still resonate in traces in them,
 30 but crippled from forced labour. At one point in the conversation, Yigit
 31 Sertdemir, the author, talked through each character of his play.

32
 33 Sertdemir: "The "actors" in the piece are a family. "The
 34 director" [a specific character by that name] is
 35 the brain, the father of the group [*several actors*
 36 *and Ciulli laugh*]. When they realise that their
 37 acting is just not good enough to attract audi-
 38 ences, of which they are very aware as they are
 39 not doing "boulevard-theatre"! – they decide to
 40 withdraw from the world. It was the director's
 41 decision. That they only withdrew from the

1 world, but didn't kill themselves – after all, art
 2 was all they had – shows their *Haltung* towards
 3 their art. “The actress” [a particular character by
 4 that name] already wanted to kill herself, but
 5 “The director” stopped her. He said: we have two
 6 alternatives, either we withdraw and hope that
 7 things will improve, or we kill ourselves. They
 8 decided to withdraw. So the best phrase to char-
 9 acterise them might be: “They fell asleep in hope
 10 of better times.”

11 Roberto Ciulli
 12 (director, *Theater*
 13 *an der Ruhr*):

‘In this case, my reading is entirely different
 from yours. To start with, I think it is better to
 portray the actors as entirely dissolving (*aufge-*
hen) in art. They have become art themselves.
 We have to distinguish a psychologising gaze on
 their characters from an artistic-gaze (*Kunstblick*)
 on their inner posture (*Haltung*): as actors, they
 should not be concerned with the psychological
 categorising of each other and the world. The
 subject of their disputes should always be only
 one: the striving towards art, theatre, perfection.’

24 Helmut Schäfer
 25 (dramaturg, *Theater*
 26 *an der Ruhr*):

‘One also has to inquire whether the metaphor
 of the family is appropriate here, since it always
 already implies fixed roles. Theatre ensembles
 have nothing to do with bourgeois families, if
 we regard it sociologically. Theatre is a counter-
 proposal (*Gegenentwurf*) to an unreflected petty-
 bourgeois moral life striving only towards its
 immediate graspable surroundings (*Umfeld* and
Umwelt).’

35 An actress from the
 36 Turkish ensemble
 37 interjects, explicitly
 38 irritated:

‘Can I ask, have the actors been brought together
 by art or by their solidarity for each other as a
 quasi-family?’

41 Ciulli/Schäfer,
 simultaneously:

‘By art itself.’

- 1 Schäfer continues: 'The German playwright Friedrich Schiller
 2 describes this already in his *Aesthetic Education*
 3 *of Man*, 200 years ago: Only when man acts,
 4 only in the play (*Spiel*), is he entirely free. Today
 5 this means: in a rehearsed space. For us that
 6 means: during the rehearsals. As in real life, the
 7 actor can learn to become someone else, can
 8 take on roles, and thus cultivate himself.'
- 9 The same Turkish
 10 actress asks again: 'So their decision to withdraw from society is
 11 purely an artistic ritual and not a political one?'
- 12 Ciulli: 'Yes, actors don't always need to *intend to do*
 13 something political. They *are* political. What
 14 they do are political acts. It's a trap to think that
 15 as artists we would need to commit to a particular
 16 politics *a priori*: that's self-instrumentalisation.
 17 Of course their decision was political. When
 18 *Bartleby*, in Herman Melville's short story, says
 19 "I'd rather not", then that's political too.'
- 20 Another Turkish
 21 actor, after a short
 22 silence in the group,
 23 exclaims (rather
 24 than asks): 'So the actors don't have political opinions,
 25 then!'
- 26 Ciulli: 'That doesn't matter. Through and in their
 27 art, they have become works of art – they
 28 have become art-subjects, subjects to/of art
 29 (*Kunstsubjekte*). And as artworks, these actors can
 30 take any position. They don't choose a political
 31 *Haltung*, rather, the process of developing a
 32 *reflective Haltung* is political. We have to internal-
 33 ise that they are not psychological instruments
 34 for our own political message: they are artists,
 35 not of this world, they are beyond reason.'
- 36 A third Turkish
 37 actress raises her
 38 hand and says: 'I am a little confused. Can I ask a question? Do
 39 we at least find some parallels on the dimen-
 40 sion of the characters, if not as actors? So, is
 41 "The Director" more of a revolutionary, while
 "The Stagedesigner' is more of a proletarian?

1 Doesn't the human side of the characters get
 2 entirely lost if they become only art-subjects
 3 (*Kunstsubjekte*)?'
 4 Schäfer: 'No, of course not. Roberto and I sat down and
 5 we radicalised the second part of the play to
 6 speak more about and to make possible the
 7 autonomy of art. We have to remind ourselves
 8 of Adorno's dictum that "the personal is the
 9 political". Everything is political, so the only
 10 space where we can radically question politics
 11 is fiction, the fictitious, the imaginary.'
 12 Ciulli continues: "If we explain everything by reason and explain
 13 everything psychologically, what do we then still
 14 have in common with Picasso or Artaud? We
 15 and the audience need to endure theatre's own
 16 reasoning, perhaps we even need to force them
 17 to endure it.'
 18 The same Turkish
 19 actress responds: 'So how does art change the world, then?'
 20 Ciulli throws his
 21 arms up in the air,
 22 gathers his papers,
 23 and directs his view
 24 towards the ensemble
 25 before getting up: 'Well, with that question I'll send you home.
 26 See you all tomorrow.'
 27
 28 This discussion is representative of many others that were held dur-
 29 ing regular rehearsals of the German ensemble, or conversations with
 30 Ciulli. They also, I contend, mark the particular attitude towards and
 31 philosophy of acting and theatre put forward by Ciulli and his drama-
 32 turg Schäfer with the *Theater an der Ruhr*: an attitude and philosophy
 33 which foregrounds the inner thought processes of the actor and those
 34 intended to be stimulated in the receiving audience. Ciulli et al. pro-
 35 pose to view the political nature of their work of art not in the exter-
 36 nal gestures they sketch or the ideological slogans they proclaim, but
 37 in the self-cultivated reflexivity of the characters they create. This
 38 proposition is motivated by a scepticism regarding the ideological
 39 instrumentalisation of aesthetics and political populism in theatre
 40 and art.
 41

1 As the following sections elaborate, the *Theater an der Ruhr's* phi-
 2 losophy of theatre and attitude towards political aesthetics profoundly
 3 informs the work of Adem Köstereli and in particular his approach
 4 to theatre with refugees which created complex ethical and aesthetic
 5 dilemmas. Adem Köstereli's situation in the *Theater* is unusual and yet
 6 perhaps programmatic for the charismatic authority emanated by Ciulli
 7 and his institution. Born in Oberhausen in the Western German Ruhr
 8 valley to Turkish parents in the mid-1980s, he began acting in the young
 9 ensemble led by theatre pedagogue Bernhard Deutsch at the age of 17.
 10 Then, after starting to direct his own plays, first with fellow actors of
 11 the young ensemble, he has moved in the last five years to producing
 12 his own performances not based on literary antecedents, and with lay,
 13 marginalised persons. Adem regards Ciulli as an aesthetic and intellec-
 14 tual role model for his work and Ciulli, in turn, is interested in giving
 15 advice and supporting the aesthetic education of the young director.
 16 Thus, when Adem finished his schooling in the impoverished district
 17 of Oberhausen-Styrum, he sought Ciulli's advice on what to do: Ciulli,
 18 interestingly, convinced the then 20 year-old to become a businessman
 19 and to emancipate himself from the trend-driven and exhausting artistic
 20 milieu of German theatres – and to continue developing his aesthetics
 21 and skills with productions at the *Theater an der Ruhr*, thus creating a par-
 22 ticular form of dependency and patronage. Since 2007, Koesterli works
 23 without pay, i.e. voluntarily (*ehrenamtlich*).

24 **The Ruhrorter project**

25 When I first met Adem Köstereli in late 2013, while conducting field-
 26 work at the *Theater an der Ruhr*, he was about to develop ideas for the
 27 second part of his refugee trilogy. I was interested, then, in his strong
 28 interest not to follow a pedagogically driven methodology, but one that
 29 foregrounds the aesthetics of a reflexive theatre.
 30

31 'A theatre', Adem told me back then, 'which reduces its actors, its
 32 characters, and its imagery merely to documents, to singular fates
 33 (*Einzelschicksale*) based on the categories by which they are discrimi-
 34 nated against destroys more than it can construct'. Therefore it was not
 35 surprising that he reacted sceptically when Sven Schlötcke, one of the
 36 managing artistic directors of the *Theater an der Ruhr* approached him
 37 with the suggestion to apply for additional funding to expand and pro-
 38 fessionalise the second part of his trilogy.

39 I told him that I was interested in his attitude and the proposed
 40 application Schlötcke had in mind, so Adem took me along to a meeting
 41

1 with him. Since Schlötcke knew me from previous introductions by
 2 Ciulli, I was allowed to take notes. In fact, I was encouraged to do so:
 3 Schlötcke was struck by the idea to document and communicate some
 4 of my observations of the entire project to a wider public. Schlötcke
 5 thought that my work could also become part of the process, as docu-
 6 ments about the intricate social and creative process of making such
 7 an engaged project would be beneficial and interesting for the artists as
 8 well as the theatre more generally. This involvement gave me access to
 9 discussions and procedures, meetings, and information that I would not
 10 otherwise have been able to access. 'Theatre with so-called problematic
 11 or marginal groups (*Problemgruppen*) yields many ethical and aesthetic
 12 dilemmas, both in documentary and participatory theatre and in tradi-
 13 tional, internally reflexive theatre', Schlötcke admitted. 'These issues
 14 are, at heart, about the subject of your work, Adem.' 'But', he continued:

15
 16 If you are working on and with refugees, what are you going to do
 17 about their situation if you don't want to refer back to the much
 18 hackneyed idea of Schiller's emancipatory aesthetic education? How
 19 can you do artistically challenging work and yet take part in the
 20 public discourse that decides their fates?

21
 22 Adem felt upset and pushed to politicise his work in a way he didn't
 23 appreciate. He later said to me:

24
 25 My work is political in different ways: my way of doing theatre
 26 is fundamentally based on the search for new forms of engaging
 27 with severed and relocated subjectivities, emotional and affective
 28 memories by bringing together previously unrelated people. I don't
 29 pretend to do therapeutic work and I don't assume a policy-relevant
 30 end-product: I offer the participants of my group space and time
 31 to *work*, with discipline and my guidance, on their own situations,
 32 exploring their own concerns, their worries, their nightmares, to
 33 distance themselves from them, creating new performative imageries
 34 and relations on stage. That's political, but not in the pseudo-activist
 35 and interventionist sense in which much documentary theatre uti-
 36 lises and instrumentalises marginalised fates to produce avant-garde
 37 productions which build the director's reputation in the scene.⁹

38
 39 Despite all these controversies taking place just days before their grant
 40 application was due, Adem and I sat down to see how he could reconcile
 41 his interest in a theatre piece with Schlötcke's propositions to enlarge

1 the scope, means, and ways by which this project would coordinate an
2 artistic process with a marginalised group of lay-acting refugees.
3 Additionally, Schlötcke and Adem had decided that the project would shift
4 from 'merely' theatre to a multimedia, site-specific project.¹⁰ They looked
5 into the possibilities of renting a space in an abandoned post-industrial
6 multi-storey nearby warehouse on the Ruhrorterstraße, just down the
7 road from the suburban and wealthy neighbourhood of the *Theater*. This
8 building used to house an asylum-seeking centre and a small society for
9 traumatised female victims of the Yugoslav wars – all of which had been
10 abandoned some nine years ago and left derelict since (see Figure 7.1–7.5).
11 Below is a shortened version of the *Ruhrorter* project's abstract submitted
12 to a federal grant from the state of North Rhine-Westphalia:

13
14 This project engages with the problems and the stigmatisation of
15 refugees. It seeks new ways to contrast the abstract categories by
16 which they are often categorised with their own experiences, stories,
17 and hopes and to make those visible to and experienceable for a city-
18 society: refugees as part of a city-society (*Stadtgesellschaft*). By means
19 of research, intervention, and documentation, as well as theatre, this
20 project traces and works with the stories, histories, memories and
21 dreams of young and adolescent refugees in Mülheim. One of the
22 core theses of this project is that the process of becoming an agent
23 of one's own right to human existence, as well as the act of situating
24 oneself in new places and spaces, can only or best take place through
25 the work of self-reflection, memory, and narrative self-(re)creation.
26 Therefore, the project collects and works with these processes in
27 order to produce a theatre piece, communicative interventions, and
28 a site-specific theatre installation. In addition, the process will be
29 documented and described, creating an interactive archive as well as
30 other forms of communications of and about the creative and social
31 process, which don't merely provide the participants a possibility for
32 reflection and remembering, but also the audience (*Publikum*), the
33 'public' (*Öffentlichkeit*), and the citizens of the city – thus making
34 them a part of the project's engagement.

35
36 At this point in late November, Adem had already contacted
37 several refugee camps in Mülheim Oberhausen, seeking out inte-
38 gration councils and notifying teachers in schools dedicated to
39 international migrants. From previous work, his network of contacts
40 extended well beyond those of the theatre and the political authori-
41 ties in the responsible municipal integration offices in Mülheim.



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16 *Figure 7.1* The Ruhrorter building in the industrial harbour



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Figure 7.2 During rehearsals on the Ruhrorter stage

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Figure 7.3 Adem instructing participants after rehearsals



Figure 7.4 During a dress rehearsal on the Ruhrorter stage

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Figure 7.5 During a dress rehearsal on the Ruhrorter stage

It didn't take very long for him to establish a group of 15 people, ranging in age from 13 to 39 and encompassing seven different nationalities, stories, and languages – all of whom he asked to come to the *Theater* for rehearsals on Monday and Thursday evenings from six to ten. Given that their 'hometowns', Mülheim and Oberhausen, have different municipal policies regarding refugee housing, the former adopting a single-apartment stance whereas the latter houses in camps, Adem would often pick up those from the camp and ask those from Mülheim to come by bus, necessitating frequent travel to the camps in Oberhausen. I would sometimes accompany him to pick up participants, thereby getting to know how he got people to participate, with whom he spoke, and how much it all depended on personal

1 ties to his approach to theatre – which didn't see language as a barrier
2 or seem associated with any pedagogic political or social agenda that
3 may have appeared suspicious to some potential participants.

4 Over the ensuing four months, I accompanied the entirety of the aes-
5 thetic and social process of this project, which opened to the public on
6 6 May 2014. Since my anthropological research became not merely an
7 additional aspect of the process, which I needed to negotiate in order
8 to gain access or trust, but an integral collaborative aspect of it (with its
9 own limitations). I was immediately entangled in a host of decisions,
10 disputes, and dealings that I doubt I would otherwise have witnessed
11 and not all of which were easy to negotiate. Soon, my fieldwork con-
12 sisted not merely of writing rehearsal diaries in which I documented the
13 assembling of and organisation of the *work* of art, but also in meeting
14 with Schlötcke to talk about the potential linkages of the project to
15 the local press and discussing Adem's relation to the aesthetic tradition
16 with the *Theater*. What is more, Adem soon began turning to me for
17 observations of his practice, advice for dealing with Schlötcke's urging
18 to make this project more public, and help with communications to
19 the press.

20 These kinds of entanglements invited me to ponder the kind of work
21 that theatre projects comprise, their openness to other kinds of enquir-
22 ies, and other aspects of collaborative fieldwork practice and ethics.
23 However, I found these to be interesting contextual strands of research,
24 which framed some of the other inquiries that I continually connected
25 back to the study of the *Theater* and its tradition.

26 **Problems with applied theatre**

27 What it means to conduct theatre with people who are not staging some-
28 one else, but instead *themselves*, Adem finds deeply problematic. New
29 forms of interactive, documentary theatre – by celebrated groups such
30 as the Berlin-based Rimini Protokoll or Signa from Copenhagen – have
31 reintroduced a concern for forms of realistic representation in the
32 aesthetic of performance art and theatre (see Tinius 2015a). Although
33 these practices touch upon issues at the heart of philosophy, they are
34 centrally anthropological issues important for Adem and Ciulli: how to
35 combine ways of seeing, ways of showing, and ways of representing?
36 In this regard, documentary theatre with marginalised people offers
37 particular problems yet not necessarily new ones: where does research
38 come in-between creation, the self with the fictional character, recrea-
39 tion with creation? However, the role of the normative artistic director,
40 as observer, as judge of what can become 'proper' representation, is more
41

1 than ever present in forms that seek to behold a particular relation to
2 reality (see Bertram 2010). Every single traditional practice – rehearsing,
3 improvising, representing/memorising – is problematised in theatrical
4 practices that claim more than mere fiction. How does one rehearse,
5 improvise, or represent/memorise oneself? The question of aesthetics,
6 then, becomes a problem of ethics: who am I? Who do I want to be?
7 Who can I be? Who allows me to develop my personality? The latter is
8 a question of emancipation that is central to so-called applied theatre,
9 and, for that matter, of the aesthetics of applied theatre. Can representa-
10 tion of the self be emancipating and should it strive to be?

11 These ethico-aesthetic issues with political theatre troubled Adem,
12 which is why he sought a different form of theatre work. For him, the
13 work with refugees can only rid itself of these ethical dilemmas if it
14 doesn't seek to expose or exhibit the participants. Therefore, he decided
15 to make use of extensive improvisations and rehearsal processes to
16 figure out what each person would like to talk about – often asking them
17 three central questions: what do you think about when you cannot
18 sleep? What was the first 'image' you saw in Germany? What are your
19 last memories from your 'home country'? Asking them to narrate
20 those stories, not through words or narration, but through different
21 performative scenes – weddings, funerals, music – he would then
22 slowly but steadily abstract from those very personal scenes in order
23 to work on each person's theme, asking them what they thought their
24 performance was about, what the core of their 'problem' or situation
25 was. He did so in order to crystallise a theme, which was personal
26 and yet abstract, explaining that this would help each performer
27 relate to the story in thought and emotion, but not as *their* story. This
28 process – personal narratives, performative narratives, abstraction, re-
29 appropriation – was the *modus operandi* of Adem's practice. For several
30 months, he worked on individual scenes, working closely with one
31 person first, then moving into relations between people, always paying
32 attention to what could be described as the 'transmutation' of feelings
33 and stories into performative images or situations. This process cul-
34 minates in a sketch of each scene's attitudes and development, which
35 I outline further below.

36 Actor and audience

37 Adding, from one rehearsal to the next, such fragmented 'situative' scenes
38 to each other, Adem created a pool of scenes, seeing what they could 'tell
39 each other', or 'letting people improvise' to find new ways to tell a story
40
41

1 in that particular scene. In contrast to the professional work at the *Theater*
2 done by Ciulli, Adem neither works with text nor with a preconfigured
3 conceptual framework for the theatre piece. It is notable, however, that
4 he approaches every scene with meticulous care about the kind of attitude
5 (*Haltung*) each performer has to and during the performance of the scene:
6

7 Each person has not merely to know what to say or where to go, but
8 precisely why and how he does these things. Our problem, or the
9 problem of every project that lasts a longer time, three, four, five or
10 seven months, is that things become a routine: you and things start
11 to function automatically. That is not good for theatre, because even
12 if you play it six times in a rehearsal, you have to play as if it were
13 the first time, you have to think and reflect. Otherwise, the audience
14 is going to notice and think: 'Aha, they know what they're doing and
15 they're doing it just for us'.
16

17 When we invited a friend of Adem's, also a theatre director, to see a
18 performance, he noted a few moments at which he couldn't figure out
19 what was meant on stage. He asked some of the performers themselves
20 what they thought they were saying with several particular scenes.
21 One scene had developed from conversations with Sara, a Moroccan
22 refugee, who left Casablanca as her family became a target for violence
23 from criminal members of her extended family. Having decided that
24 she wanted to speak about the sexual harassment she was subjected to,
25 she improvised a very calm and slow scene, which Adem subsequently
26 worked on. Sitting on a chair, another actor walks towards her from the
27 side and shines the light of a torch onto one side of her face, exposing
28 her in the previously dark room. Her hands and arms perform only two
29 alternating movements: in one position, one of her arms is held up to
30 block the light, while the other is placed, in the shade, between her
31 legs as if at rest or to protect herself. She then switches arms, exposing
32 her face and her protective hand. She does so for nearly two minutes,
33 showing, as she put it:
34

35 the brutality of being exposed and trying to protect me in plain light,
36 the difficulty of not being broken by this exposure while remaining
37 strong and still, confident and decided.
38

39 Our guest at the rehearsal questioned the length of this scene, saying
40 that he doesn't understand why she would put her hand between her
41

1 legs, saying it reminded him of a sexual act, of masturbation. Adem
2 listened patiently until he remarked:

3
4 I see that you may not understand it, but that is not an argument not
5 to perform this scene. This is the luxury on stage – the audience has
6 the time to think about what is happening. This slow silence may
7 become awkward, but it's only then that we get people to internalise
8 and to reflect upon their own fears and limits of understanding. If
9 you [speaking to his friend and our guest] don't get what they are
10 doing on stage, then that isn't necessarily the problem of the perfor-
11 mance, but yours. In fact, it should and must not matter to the actor
12 or actress to what degree the audience understands what they are
13 doing – as there isn't one way of understanding it. The performers
14 have their own reason to perform and that should remain theirs –
15 each member of the audience has to do their own work – we don't tell
16 them what to think. Such stories are poor and only used by directors
17 who have to produce endlessly and therefore rely on cheap theatric-
18 al and dramaturgical instruments such as an explanatory narrative.
19 We want to provide images that everyone can decipher for him- or
20 herself. If we explain our theatre to them, we don't need to do it.

21
22 **Discipline, authority, internality: ethico-aesthetic technologies**

23 Adem's response, uttered in the presence of the other performers and
24 partially directed towards them, exhibits several interesting aesthetic
25 attitudes: a levelling of interpretive authority with regard the audience
26 and the performer; perhaps even a disregard or disinterest towards
27 reception, reverting claims about the existentially constructive power
28 of reception in art theories, which propose that the artwork exists only
29 in the eyes of the beholder. Art historian Arthur C. Danto (*What Art Is*
30 2013) suggested that for us to see something as art requires an art world
31 that defines it as such: a set of ideas for which Ernst Gombrich's *Art*
32 *and Illusion* (2000[1960]) is a notable precursor. The argument applies
33 equally to the economic as to the moral and the art historical elements
34 of an art world. I would even suggest it nearly *always* applies to each
35 and all – and more aspects. Some contrasting suggestions, such as those
36 of the French curator and art historian Nicolas Bourriaud (*Relational*
37 *Aesthetics* 2002 [1998]), argue that the theoretical paradigm of the art
38 world since the 1990s has been 'the realm of human interactions and
39 its social context, rather than the assertion of a private symbolic space'.
40 The intersubjective encounters of relational art are thus negotiated
41

1 collectively and not consumed privately and individually. One of
 2 Bourriaud's reference artists Rikrit Tiravanija suggested, '[m]y work is
 3 like the light in the fridge. ... [i]t only works when there are people
 4 there to open the fridge door. Without people, it's not art – it's some-
 5 thing else – stuff in a room'.

6 It appears to me – and this applies in a similar way, perhaps even
 7 more than for Adem, to Roberto Ciulli – that the art historical and thea-
 8 tre historical trend to criticise the creation of private symbolic places
 9 does not properly represent the extreme attention to private symbolism
 10 in the making of theatre for such slow-producing theatre institutions as
 11 the *Theater*, in whose tradition Adem and the significance of his claims
 12 with regard to such constructivist relational theories are to be situated.
 13 After a more recent rehearsal, one in which we performed the entire
 14 script as it stands, Adem asked the actors to sit down to talk about the
 15 trial run. Sara, the French-speaking Moroccan actress, remarked that
 16 the different scenes felt a little bit like individual, abstract images, 'tab-
 17 leaus', meaning literally 'painting'. Adem responded by noting that this
 18 description was entirely apt:

19
 20 The scenes are indeed snapshots and memories, abstract excerpts
 21 from your stories, which have turned into our own artworks. That's
 22 why it is so important for all of you to be absolutely perfect and
 23 focused, as these images are not *you*, they are situations you know
 24 intimately. You are no longer a private person on stage, but you
 25 become part of an artwork, part of a fragment, which you know how
 26 to decipher. That's when we begin to create those sacred moments
 27 that I strive to create. Nobody can interfere with you or your situa-
 28 tion on stage, you are dedicated to a purpose that only you under-
 29 stand for yourself. That's why you need to know exactly what you
 30 are doing and why you are doing it. Never do things technically, or
 31 merely repeat – always do it just for this moment.

32
 33 Paradoxical about Adem's stance and practice is that while he wishes
 34 and indeed requires and checks whether each performer knows why
 35 and what s/he is doing – not with regard to technical details, but to
 36 meaning – he is the normative judge about when reflection or improvi-
 37 sation is performed well or when it fails. Put differently, he demands
 38 constant conscious self-reflection from the actors, yet he sees himself
 39 as a prerequisite judge of the right kind of reflection. I am citing from
 40 early notebook entries, also displayed in an installation archive room
 41

1 accompanying the theatre piece, to illustrate such moments from the
2 early stages of the creative process:

3
4 *Monday, 20 January 2014. Rehearsal, 6pm, Theater an der Ruhr.*
5 Marvin's right to stay has been extended to March 27, 2014. Our pre-
6 miere is planned for beginning of May. Adem says: 'Everyone on their
7 own. You are alone – and remember: you are on stage. This means
8 that you have to know precisely what you want to communicate; but
9 you are not telling anyone *what* you are communicating. Therefore,
10 please think; think about what you are thinking, what you are com-
11 municating, and how. I want to hear you speak to yourselves.'

12 *Tuesday, 21 January 2014. Rehearsal space at the Theater an der Ruhr,*
13 *6pm.* Adem asks everyone to sit down. 'Recep has been deported,
14 early this morning. He didn't want us to know.' The other partici-
15 pants are outraged. Adem calls everyone together: 'Listen everyone.
16 I want to tell you something absolutely key to what we are doing.
17 We are on stage and we improvise. Improvising is the most beautiful
18 thing on earth. To improvise means to be free. You can do just about
19 anything you want – as long as you think! Think! What that means
20 is you have to reflect upon *what* and *why* you are doing something.
21 Never, really never, just *do* because you think "Adem has told me to
22 walk around". Talk to yourselves, in your own language. Don't tell us
23 your stories, they are your secrets. But promise me to think.'

24
25 Both of these excerpts exemplify how much Adem foregrounds the
26 analysis of thought on stage, the discrepancy between the stage and
27 privacy, but in particular Adem's emphasis on constant immanent self-
28 reflection of the participants. These entries are merely excerpts from
29 many months of similar rehearsals, in which Adem consistently refers
30 to particular dialectical processes, which he often describes to me after
31 rehearsals.

32
33 My theatre piece is about dreaming, memory, and relating to each other.
34 'What do you think about when you cannot sleep?' The participants of
35 this project have to negotiate these things all the time, but with them-
36 selves: they have to analyse their own relations to this question and
37 decide how to react to it; then they have to distance themselves from
38 their own experience by abstracting from memory to speech, gesture,
39 and movement. Then, in a final step, they are re-appropriating these
40 abstract movements as an external experience (*Fremderfahrung*) of more
41 general signification and connecting it to their own stories.

1 This procedure, he explains to me, is meant to play with abstraction and
2 personalisation in a way that creates archetypal images on stage that
3 the actors can relate to as originators of these abstractions yet without
4 feeling that they are telling *their* own stories.

5 In a conversation we had with an actress of the *Theater an der Ruhr*,
6 who came to witness one of the project's dress rehearsals, one partici-
7 pant, Marvin, a Serbian Roma and autodidact musician who toured the
8 world in a 'Roma Orchestra', said to her:
9

10 When I am sad, I play the trumpet. My problems are transmuted
11 into tones, especially when words are failing me. I don't need a par-
12 ticular song, I just play. But what motivates my play is the question:
13 'What kind of a person am I and what kind of a person do I want
14 to be?' I don't mean the country I am from or the language I speak.
15 I was never merely Roma, Serb, or German – and yet I cannot be all
16 of these at the same time. When I play theatre, I can be a thousand
17 people at once. Theatre, for me, is liberation. Even when the stage
18 may be small, other worlds exist in it for me. Even when I am impro-
19 vising, everything is a part of my memory. The question driving my
20 improvisation, however, is not how painful my memories are, but
21 how I can develop a conversation from them. These conversations
22 I am leading first with me, then with an audience, via my play.

23
24 These very intimate multilingual negotiations that Marvin refers to
25 were central to many conversations we had about rehearsals with the
26 group. Most of the time, I didn't even need to ask questions about
27 these internal thought processes, because Adem would require them to
28 explain to him what they thought about an aspect of a rehearsal. Often,
29 he would then problematise himself what he saw as a central problem:
30 how do I deal, as director, with the issue of wanting to approach a
31 political topic and such sensitive issues as painful memories of escape
32 and deportation without submitting oneself to political activism? In
33 one post-rehearsals conversation, Adem told the group that he had
34 been to see Roberto Ciulli to discuss this issue with him. And this con-
35 versation had helped him understand that what constituted intensely
36 ethical acts of political emancipation during this project were his con-
37 stant provocations to self-reflect – for him on his own practice and for
38 his actors on their practice. 'To observe oneself, and thus to distance
39 oneself from one's own expectations, emotions, worldviews and to be
40 open to the ambivalences and fragments revealed in improvisation –
41 that's the process I want to instigate in all of you'. Marvin responded

1 to this comment by describing his own experience of rehearsing and
 2 standing on stage:

3
 4 Language is not central when I play. When someone regards me with
 5 care, they will notice and understand what and why I am doing what
 6 I do on stage: they will not understand it in a linear way, however, it
 7 will be revealed to them, in fragments, like a dream. That's why I am
 8 not escaping or ignoring my memories when I am abstracting from
 9 my own story in improvisations led by you [Adem] – I am playing
 10 with them.¹¹

11
 12 Over the next month, Adem moved into the final stages of the produc-
 13 tion process. He has, with my help and notes, established detailed drafts
 14 of every single moment and movement on stage, including technical
 15 and property instructions. These facilitate trial runs (*Durchlauf*) of the
 16 play as it stands. At that moment, the play appeared complete, running
 17 at just over an hour and with a seeming conclusion. Yet Adem com-
 18 mented on this observation of mine by saying that 'this is the point
 19 where we must work hard to battle laziness and repetition. If we stop
 20 here, at a recognisable conclusion, we deliver an easy evening. Just at
 21 the moment when the audience least expects it, we need to pick up
 22 pace'. Over the course of the next four weeks (the project premiered
 23 on 6 May 2014), Adem planned to do as many trial runs as he could so
 24 that he still had some time remaining for free improvisations to find a
 25 suitable ending. 'We need to make sure we don't overdo it. We cannot
 26 exhaust things. Last year, I switched major things around after each
 27 public performance, of which we usually do only six. And things got
 28 better. We mustn't get lazy.'

29 Just a week later, he invited Roberto Ciulli to watch a trial run – 'to see
 30 if we've made any mistakes. Maybe it's all flawed because we didn't look
 31 at it critically enough. Ciulli's gaze is extremely important for me'. After
 32 the initial trial run, Adem also prepared a four-page text, which he titled
 33 'Sketch of Attitudes (*Haltungen*) and Thoughts'. Therein, as he explained
 34 to each participant, he outlines the motivations, history, personal con-
 35 nections, development, origins, and attitudes of each scene with respect
 36 to the persons involved in it. We discussed these for well over an hour
 37 after the trial run, with frequent remarks from participants adjusting
 38 and complementing what Adem had written. 'Everybody needs to
 39 know', he said, 'why and what they are doing on stage. We developed
 40 these thoughts together over the last six months. In some places you
 41 may not recognise your own stories in them immediately – and that's

1 not per se a bad thing, since we deliberately abstracted from your per-
2 sonal stories. We don't want to expose you, we want to play with the
3 expectations and clichéd stereotypes circulating about refugees. That's
4 why you, Marvin, don't play your trumpet.' 'At first', Adem said to
5 Marvin, 'you appear as the Roma boy whom they expect to perform and
6 entertain, but when they see that their own entertainment perpetuates
7 your exhausting effort, they will rethink their own interpretation of the
8 scene. That's precisely when we move on.'
9

10 Concluding remarks

11
12 Engaging with the ethico-aesthetic traditions of artistic institutions
13 offers particularly challenging pathways into what Flynn and I refer
14 to as the relational reflexivity of political performance. Among ques-
15 tions of political and interpersonal patronage, artistic labour and self-
16 cultivation, and the management of creative processes, this chapter has
17 specifically sought to throw light upon the role of discipline, authority,
18 and thought in so-called political or applied theatre. I have situated
19 the ethnographic description of various processes, decisions, and nego-
20 tiations that were central to the refugee theatre project *Ruhrorter* in an
21 account of political aesthetics and the tradition of the *Theater an der*
22 *Ruhr*. This embedding of one person's artistic work in the context of an
23 established high-cultural institution serves to highlight the importance
24 of relational aspects of aesthetic communities and the role of patronage
25 in artistic traditions.

26 As I outlined in the first part of this chapter, concerns for reflexivity
27 and ethico-aesthetic traditions are a recent and vivid concern for social
28 scientific engagement with the arts, yet it speaks to practitioners and
29 scholars beyond the sociology or anthropology of arts. In particular,
30 I sought to engage, if indirectly, debates on the anthropology of ethics,
31 demonstrating the extent to which aesthetic and artistic queries are
32 deeply and philosophically linked to questions of self-cultivation and
33 transformation. This concern for self-reflection and discipline, voiced
34 by the key informants involved in the artistic processes I discuss in this
35 chapter, does not stand in contrast to an aspiration to act politically or
36 to reduce the role of antagonism and collectivity in the performance
37 arts. In dialogue with Clare Foster's chapter on pre- and post-dramatic
38 theatre, I have hoped to show instead the significant and intense
39 elaboration of the immanently political nature of aesthetic decisions, of
40 discipline and authority in closely knit groups of theatre practitioners.
41 Their focus on meaning-making and self-reflected action does indeed

1 exhibit aspects of an introvert, *avant garde*, and elitist dismissal of the
 2 role of audiences, mainstream theatre productions, and the state; yet in
 3 doing so, they themselves engage subtle and nuanced negotiations of
 4 political subjectivity, reflected sociality, and ethico-aesthetic sensibility.
 5 Congratulating the refugee actors in the project on the evening of the
 6 premiere, an actress of the *Theater* advised:

8 Don't try to be a good actor while forgetting about being a good
 9 human being. You cannot be a bad person and a good actor. When
 10 you act, you should strive to become a perfect human being.
 11 Perfection in theatre, though utopian, is ultimately nothing other
 12 than empathy for others and reflection upon your own acts.

14 **Notes**

- 16 1. Professor of Choreography and Performance at the Institute for Applied
 17 Theatre Studies at the University of Gießen and dramaturg.
 18 2. See also Baert (1998), Korom (2013), Laidlaw (2013), and Rabinow and Rose
 19 (2003) for further in-depth discussion of this matter.
 20 3. See also Danto (2013) and this obituary: '[The term art] would be bestowed
 21 not according to any putatively intrinsic, aesthetic qualities shared by all
 22 artworks but by general agreement in the "artworld," a community that
 23 included artists, art historians, critics, curators, dealers and collectors who
 24 shared an understanding about the history and theory of modern art.'
 (Johnson 2013).
 25 4. This problem pertains particularly to the German theatre scene, as it has
 26 earned a reputation for being non-commercial, highly (self-)critical, and
 27 almost unbearably politicised. One detailed historical reading (Gilcher-
 28 Holtey 2009) attributes this tendency to the legacy and traces of the so-called
 29 *Regietheater* (literally directing or director's theatre): a term describing the
 30 emergence and edification of the social and aesthetic authority of the direc-
 31 tor in and after the 1960s. A more sophisticated reading (Daniel 1999; Eikhof
 32 2009; Ther 2012) understands the very possibility of such a *Regietheater* (and
 33 its reverberations in the present) as the outcome of a complex array and devel-
 34 opment of political and economic perspectives and reactions to the role of
 35 aesthetic education or *Bildung* (Adorno 1955; Geuss 1999), 'culture' (Lepenies
 36 2006), and the liberalisation of theatre arts in German society (Ismayr 1977;
 37 Jeschonnek 2010; Mittelstädt and Pinto 2013; Stegemann 2013).
 38 5. Similar conceptual issues apply to 'applied theatre' (or art for that mat-
 39 ter) as they do for the attempt to 'apply theory' (Latour 2005, 'A Socratic
 40 Dialogue').
 41 6. For an in-depth discussion of the international theatre philosophy and the-
 atrical imagery, see Tinius 2015b.
 7. Ciulli's citations are drawn from two interviews, which I conducted with
 him in November 2013 and April 2014. An extended interview on rehearsals,

- 1 visual imagery, and international theatre collaboration will soon appear in
 2 an edited volume accompanying a longer piece on the *Theaterlandscapes* of
 3 the *Theater an der Ruhr* (Tinius 2015b).
 4 8. <http://kumbaraci50.com>.
 5 9. I elaborate these and further aspects in an interview that appeared on the
 6 website of the ERC-funded project *The Aesthetics of Applied Theatre* convened
 7 by Professor Mathias Warstat at the FU-Berlin (Tinius 2014b). Dominic
 8 Boyer has elaborated these issues in his brilliant article 'Thinking through
 9 the anthropology of experts' (2008). I also elaborate the discussion about
 10 ethnography in the arts and performance based anthropological research
 11 elsewhere (Tinius 2015a).
 12 10. Site-specificity, here, refers to a trend and practice in contemporary theatre
 13 to move the performance outside a prepared and institutionalised 'black
 14 box' theatre space. The specificity of a particular site would be dependent
 15 on the project's focus, so plays have taken place in refugee centres, shop-
 16 ping malls, prisons, etc. (see Thompson 2009 and Matzke 2007 on Rimini
 17 Protokoll).
 18 11. These remarks were reworked into newspaper articles on the project (see
 19 Tinius 2014a).

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