

Jan Lazardzig

FROM ALLEGIANCE TO ACADEMIA  
THE 'KNUDSEN CASE' AND THE BEGINNINGS  
OF THEATRE STUDIES

*[Pubblichiamo qui, grazie alla gentile collaborazione dell'autore, la traduzione in inglese, di Kareen Seidler, dell'introduzione al volume di Jan Lazardzig Wissenschaft aus Gefolgschaft. Der »Fall Knudsen« und die Anfänge der Theaterwissenschaft (Dalla fedeltà all'Accademia. Il "Caso Knudsen" e gli inizi degli Studi teatrali, Berlin, Verbrecher Verlag, 2023). Hans Knudsen (1886-1971), allievo di Max Herrmann, noto come il fondatore degli studi teatrali in Germania, partecipò attivamente con lui alla creazione del primo istituto di studi teatrali berlinese, e proseguì con successo la sua carriera dopo che, nel 1933, il suo maestro ne venne estromesso dal nazismo al potere per le sue origini ebraiche (sarebbe morto nel 1942, nel campo di concentramento di Theresienstadt). Attivo collaboratore delle politiche naziste – come l'abolizione della critica, e il processo di Gleichschaltung (l'uniformazione in ogni settore alle idee di partito, in una totale subordinazione della cultura al pensiero dominante), Knudsen, che era stato tra i firmatari del manifesto degli scrittori nazisti, e che nel 1944 aveva ottenuto per la sua fedeltà una cattedra universitaria dallo stesso Hitler, fu anche, nel 1948, uno dei fondatori della Freie Universität a Berlino ovest. Allora, scrive l'autore, «Nella Germania occidentale non c'era praticamente redazione di teatro, giornale, radio o televisione che non avesse allievi di Knudsen». Per questo ci ha proposto di pubblicare con il suo testo l'immagine che si troverà più avanti, di Knudsen maestro con i suoi allievi, segno inquietante delle influenze e della continuità di un pensiero che solo apparentemente si chiudeva con la fine della seconda guerra mondiale. Muovendosi tra gli anni della dittatura e del dopoguerra, il volume esplora la permanenza nella cultura tedesca di idee «anti-moderne e antisemite», indagando «la funzione politica e sociale degli studi teatrali nella Repubblica di Weimar, nella dittatura nazista e nella*

*Repubblica Federale». Ma Lazardzig, studiando il passato, guarda anche al presente, ricordando come il caso di Knudsen, notevole ma non isolato, metta in questione anche certi meccanismi che guidano ancora oggi le carriere accademiche. Un promemoria sulle responsabilità, in ogni tempo, degli intellettuali, anche di quelli che dedicano la vita al teatro e al suo studio (Raffaella Di Tizio)]*

Professor by the grace of Mr. Hitler<sup>1</sup>

During the years of the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial (1963-1965), the most extensive and significant trial of Nazis conducted before a German Federal court after 1945, a five-volume collection of documents was published by the German-Polish historian and Auschwitz survivor Joseph Wulf. For the first time, the role which intellectuals and artists played in the Third Reich was revealed on a broader basis<sup>2</sup>. While the perpetrators and accomplices of the genocide were being tried in Frankfurt before the eyes of the world, Wulf brought countless testimonies of the cultural inner life of the Nazi dictatorship to public attention. Using a wide range of sources as well as long excerpts, he documented the opportunism and officiousness of mid-ranking intellectual workers. This shed light on forms of behaviour that, although not justiciable, were nevertheless indispensable for the social functioning of the criminal state. With his method of documentation – collecting, viewing, organising and publishing sources he considered important, characteristic or particularly meaningful – Wulf hoped to counteract the suppression of history and denial of guilt of the post-war period in the Federal Republic of Germany<sup>3</sup>. At the suggestion

<sup>1</sup> “Professor von Herrn Hitlers Gnaden” [Anonymous], *Geschlossene Gesellschaft. Die Provinzialisierung des Westberliner Theaterlebens und einige Ursachen*, in «Spandauer Volksblatt» (20 Dec. 1964), pp. 29-32: 29. The formulation “Professor by the grace of Hitler” (“Professor von Hitlers Gnaden”) was first used in Heinz Elsborg, *Mißglücktes Alibi*, in «Die Mahnung», n. 21, 1961, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Wulf, *Kunst und Kultur im Dritten Reich*, 5 vols., Gütersloh, Rowohlt Verlag, 1963-1966.

<sup>3</sup> Klaus Kempster, *Joseph Wulf. Ein Historikerschicksal in Deutschland* (Schriften des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts 18), 2nd edn, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014.

of his friend Walter Huder, director of the Archive of the Academy of Arts and pioneer of the research on exile in Germany (in 1956, he had completed his doctorate in literary studies on Georg Kaiser at Freie Universität Berlin), Wulf also reviewed the work of the Berlin critic and theatre scholar Hans Knudsen, dedicating over twenty pages to him, in his fourth volume on theatre and film. As a loyal collaborator of the Reich's dramaturge Rainer Schlösser during the Nazi era, Knudsen had earned a professorship for theatre studies at Berlin University awarded by the Führer in 1944<sup>4</sup>. Knudsen's rapid turn towards National Socialism confirmed Wulf's conviction that in 1933, «opportunism and "betrayal"» were the «prevailing political attitude» among intellectuals and artists<sup>5</sup>. When, soon after the publication of Wulf's theatre and film documentation, the «Spandauer Volksblatt» denounced the provincialism of West Berlin theatre with the headline *Geschlossene Gesellschaft* (private circle, literally, "closed society") and explained this by the continuation of Nazism in Berlin's theatre life, the case of the "Professor by the grace of Mr. Hitler" became clearer<sup>6</sup>. Knudsen's work was considered symptomatic of the activities of former cultural Nazi elites in the Cold War situation of the post-war period. Having been denied a reinstatement at Humboldt University in East Berlin after the end of the war, he was nevertheless able to continue his academic career since he was appointed as the first professor for theatre studies at the newly founded Freie Universität in the American sector in 1948. During the 1950s, for generations of students, the "theatre professor" became a formative figure accompanying their journey into the world of theatre, television and film, into the editorial offices of newspapers or into cultural institutions in the Federal Republic<sup>7</sup>. There was hardly a theatre or editorial office where Hans Knudsen's students could not be found. It was of no importance that their training in theatre criticism, dramaturgy and directing was dispensed by a former member of the censor's

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Wulf, *Kunst und Kultur im Dritten Reich*, cit., vol. 4: *Theater und Film im Dritten Reich. Eine Dokumentation*, 1966, especially pp. 206-214.

<sup>5</sup> "Opportunismus und 'Verrat'", "vorherrschende politische Haltung". Klaus Kempter, *Joseph Wulf. Ein Historikerschicksal*, cit., p. 230.

<sup>6</sup> "Professor von Herrn Hitlers Gnaden". [Anonymous], *Geschlossene Gesellschaft*, cit., pp. 29-32.

<sup>7</sup> [Heinz Ritter], *Theaterprofessor. Ein Leben für die Bühne – Hans Knudsen wird morgen 75 Jahre alt*, in «Der Abend», 1 December 1961.

office of the *Reichsdramaturg* – of all people – who, in his position of responsibility, had enforced Goebbels' ban on criticism in 1936.

This book traces the anatomy of a career that is closely interlocked with the beginnings of theatre studies as a university subject in Germany<sup>8</sup>. Hans August Heinrich Knudsen was born in Poznań in 1886, as the son of a tax officer. In 1906, during his studies of German philology at the University of Berlin, he attended the lectures of the literary historian and theatre scholar Max Herrmann, who was highly respected in theatre circles<sup>9</sup>. After completing his doctorate in Greifswald, Knudsen returned to Berlin in 1911 as a senior teacher of German and History and joined the circle of the Jewish scholar Herrmann. Under the umbrella of German studies, academic theatre research was being conducted as early as the 1910s in other cities, such as Kiel (Eugen Wolff), Leipzig (Albert Köster) and Cologne (Carl Niessen). Yet Herrmann provided the methodological groundwork for a new academic discipline: theatre studies. After the revolution and after the social democrats came into government, thanks to his initiative, an Institute for Theatre Studies was established at Berlin University, despite resistance from the university establishment that

<sup>8</sup> This book was preceded by an exhibition and publication project developed together with Peter Jammerthal and students of theatre studies in the winter semester 2018/19. See Peter Jammerthal - Jan Lazardzig (eds), *Front Stadt Institut. Theaterwissenschaft an der Freien Universität 1948–1968*, Berlin, Verbrecher Verlag, 2018. Mechthild Kirsch laid the groundwork for this in her Master's thesis (1991) on the history of theatre studies at Freie Universität, where she is impartial in her judgment. See Mechthild Kirsch, *Zur Geschichte des Instituts für Theaterwissenschaft an der Freien Universität Berlin*, Magister-Hausarbeit, Freie Universität Berlin 1991. Quentin Fondu recently analysed Berlin theatre studies after 1945 from a sociological-comparative perspective. See Quentin Fondu, *La Scène et l'Amphithéâtre – Sociologie et histoire de la discipline des études théâtrales en France et dans les deux Allemagnes (1945–2000)*, EHSS/Paris and University of Bielefeld 2021, pp. 69–83.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Hollender, *Der Berliner Germanist und Theaterwissenschaftler Max Herrmann (1865–1942)*, Leben und Werk, Berlin 2013. Hollender mentions Hans Knudsen only in passing. Testimonies taken from Knudsen are partly adopted uncritically. For a critical discussion of Hollender, see Götz Aly, *Im Osten geehrt, im Westen vergessen*, in Götz Aly, *Unser Nationalsozialismus. Reden in der deutschen Gegenwart*, Berlin, S. Fischer, 2023, pp. 65–81, and especially pp. 133 f. A reliable biographical sketch of Hans Knudsen can be found in Christoph König (ed.), *Internationales Germanistenlexikon 1800–1950*, Berlin et al., De Gruyter, 2003, pp. 960–962 (Nina Weller).

was influenced by anti-democratic and anti-Semitic tendencies. Hans Knudsen – alongside the social democrat Bruno Th. Satori-Neumann – was appointed as Herrmann's assistant.

The academic and methodological innovations of the art-based discipline, which emerged around the categories of performance, staging and social play in the 1910s and 1920s, should not obscure its conservative educational goals<sup>10</sup>. Prospective directors, dramaturges, critics and theatre clerks were taught theatre history at the *Institut am Opernplatz* and trained theory and practice to a philologically text-faithful staging practice. For the German teacher Knudsen, the attractiveness of the subject lay in cultivating the tradition of national theatre culture and dramatic art. He largely rejected the aesthetic experiments and artistic innovations of the Weimar period – *Regietheater*, open stage forms, the use of audiovisual media – as being devoid of artistic interest. He had a strong aversion to the politicisation of theatre by the left (Agitprop). In the cultural heyday of the Weimar Republic, Knudsen made a name for himself as theatre and literary critic in the conservative and German nationalistic press. However, his high expectations of being chosen as Herrmann's successor and heir to the throne were not realised. Disillusioned, he left Berlin University in 1932.

When the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) came to power, the anti-modernist Knudsen suddenly saw himself in the right, given his long-standing opposition to the republic's approach to the theatrical repertoire. He condoned the fact that his Jewish mentor was exposed to anti-Semitic hostility and was gradually forced out of the academic system. Knudsen reacted with downright indignation when Herrmann refused to bow to the stipulations of Aryanisation of his own accord and continued to claim the chairmanship of the renowned Society for Theatre History, of which Knudsen was secretary. As editor of the magazine «Die Bühne» (The Stage), the central organ of the *Reichstheaterkammer* (the Reich's Chamber of Theatre), and of the «Deutsche Theaterzeitung» (The German Theatre Journal), Knudsen subsequently participated in the development of the Nazi theatre apparatus. His allegiance was first rewarded with a teaching position

<sup>10</sup> This was previously emphasized by: Corinna Kirschstein, *Theater, Wissenschaft, Historiographie. Studien zu den Anfängen theaterwissenschaftlicher Forschung in Leipzig*, Leipzig, Leipziger Uni-Vlg, 2009.

(1938) and, finally, in 1944, with the professorship for theatre studies at Berlin University, to which he had long aspired. Max Herrmann had already died in the concentration camp Theresienstadt on 17 November 1942, “from a severe cold”, as Hans Knudsen later meticulously noted<sup>11</sup>. (Fig. 1)



Fig. 1 - Hans Knudsen in a circle of students at the acting school at the Deutsches Theater (1943). Photo: Charlotte Willott. © Ullstein Bild.

After the war, having been a disciple of Herrmann proved to be a stroke of luck for his own career. With the active support of his former students, Knudsen claimed having maintained an inner distance from the Nazi state (even to the point of alleged complicity in the attempted assassination of Hitler in 1944)<sup>12</sup>. He was thus appointed as a professor

<sup>11</sup> “an einer schweren Erkältung”. Hans Knudsen, *Max Herrmann*, in «Maske und Kothurn», vol. 1, n. 1-2, 1955, pp. 167-170: 170.

<sup>12</sup> Rolf Seeliger (ed.), *Braune Universität. Deutsche Hochschullehrer gestern*



at the newly founded Freie Universität, alongside several other scholars who were burdened by a Nazi-past. This was – remarkably enough – the first ever tenured professorship for theatre studies<sup>13</sup>. Once again, Knudsen was able to devote himself – this time in a leading position – to the establishment of an institute of theatre studies. Being the only surviving assistant of the founder of the discipline, he took an offensive stance in the tradition of theatre studies in the 1920s, albeit without possessing the intellectual range, the level of academic excellence or the theoretical enthusiasm for experimentation of his former mentor. However, in the intellectual climate of the 1950s, and given Berlin's situation as a frontline city, this was not necessary in order to succeed in society<sup>14</sup>.

In recent years, studies on the history of the society and mentality of the early Federal Republic have shown the key role that former Nazis, followers and beneficiaries of the Nazi system played in the development of post-war society in the Federal Republic<sup>15</sup>. Government and economy, culture and education – the old elites, often NSDAP members from the very beginning, were at the helm everywhere. Willi Winkler stated with good reason that the old networks «played a state-forming role in the construction of the Federal Republic», and what is more: without them, «paradoxically, many [people] would not have made it into democracy at all»<sup>16</sup>. This was also made possible by the communi-

*und heute. Dokumentation mit Stellungnahmen*, n. 4, Munich, Selbstverlag, 1966, p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> In early 1967, the magazine «Theater heute», in a series of articles entitled *How to study theatre and where* (“Wie studiert man Theater und wo?”), counts five chairs for theatre studies in the German-speaking region (West and East Berlin, Vienna, Cologne and Munich). See «Theater heute», n. 2, 1967, p. 37 f. (Munich), «Theater heute», n. 3, 1967, p. 36 (Humboldt University Berlin), «Theater heute», n. 4, 1967, p. 44 (Freie Universität Berlin), «Theater heute», n. 5, 1967, p. 38 (Cologne), «Theater heute», n. 8, 1967, p. 42 (Vienna).

<sup>14</sup> Henning Müller, *Theater der Restauration. Westberliner Bühnen, Kultur und Politik im Kalten Krieg*, Berlin, Henschelvlg, 1981, pp. 278-309.

<sup>15</sup> See Ulrich Herbert, *Wer waren die Nationalsozialisten?*, Munich, C.H. Beck, 2021, pp. 241-261.

<sup>16</sup> «am Aufbau der Bundesrepublik staatstragend mitwirkten», «es paradoxerweise viele gar nicht in die Demokratie geschafft». Willi Winkler, *Das braune Netz. Wie die Bundesrepublik von früheren Nazis zum Erfolg geführt wurde*, Berlin, Rowohlt, 2019, p. 19.

cative silencing of complicity and connivance in Nazi crimes<sup>17</sup>. As observers of post-war society, such as Hannah Arendt, pointed out early on, repression and the deflection of guilt were part of the basic social consensus of a people of perpetrators who saw themselves as victims<sup>18</sup>. They considered themselves as having been deceived and betrayed, hoodwinked by Hitler with false promises and unduly penalised by the consequences of war, destruction, fleeing and displacement. The fact that the protective claim of having known nothing of the Nazi crimes was in open contradiction to the claim of always having been against Hitler had to be reconciled. There was a widespread attitude among civil servants who had continued to work after the elimination of their Jewish colleagues: «Those who took part were those whose resistance was most effective»<sup>19</sup>.

A similar attitude can also be observed in the case of Hans Knudsen: after 1945, he denied all accusations of opportunistic behaviour or complicity with the greatest vehemence and with reference to exonerating statements by his students. This perspective was also possible because Knudsen – like many other academics and representatives of the educated elites – can be associated with an anti-modern, or at least modern-sceptical, mindset, for whom the revolution of 1918 represented a much more momentous cultural upheaval than National Socialism and the fall of the Hitler regime. The ideological excesses and the authoritarian despotism of the Nazi era were condemned – but the achievements in cultural and theatrical policy, the splendour and greatness of the theatre of the Third Reich were not called into question<sup>20</sup>. The Nazi regime's genocide is removed from this equation and is at best mentioned indirectly in Knudsen's writings and notes. There is no reflection about having brought guilt upon himself through nationalist narratives,

<sup>17</sup> Harald Jähner, *Wolfszeit. Deutschland und die Deutschen 1945–1955*, Berlin, Rowohlt, 2019, pp. 373-404.

<sup>18</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Aftermath of Nazi Rule: Report from Germany*, in «Commentary», n. 4, 1950, pp. 342-353.

<sup>19</sup> «Wer mitgemacht hat, der hat am wirkungsvollsten Widerstand geleistet». Willi Winkler, *Das braune Netz*, cit., p. 333.

<sup>20</sup> See Bertolt Brecht, *Rede auf dem gesamtdeutschen Kulturkongress in Leipzig*, May 1951, in Berliner Ensemble, Helene Weigel (ed.), *Theaterarbeit*, Dresden, Dresdner Verlag, 1952, p. 7.



subordinate behaviour or by seeking his own advantage<sup>21</sup>. Not only on a biographical level, but also on an institutional level, silence and denial prevailed. The development of theatre studies in the post-war period became an exculpatory project: Jewish emigrants were courted, exonerating narratives in film and theatre flourished and helped old networks and representatives of Nazi culture adapt to the democratic state.

Since he adhered to the National Socialist cultural nomenclature, given his self-fashioning as a victim of fascism after the war and not least because of the epigonism and intellectual paucity of his writings, the post-68 generation banished the “Nazi”<sup>22</sup> or “non-scholar”<sup>23</sup> from the history of the discipline in disgust. However, this also meant that the anti-modern impulses inherent in the beginnings of theatre studies disappeared from view. In a widely read study of the history of mentality and education from the 1960s, Fritz Ringer had already attempted to answer the question of why, in 1933, no recognisable resistance to the open anti-intellectualism and anti-Semitism of the National Socialist regime had come from the ranks of academics and especially university professors. Ringer explains this by referring to the anti-modern self-image of the elites – he calls them “German mandarins”, adopting a term introduced by Max Weber to emphasise their traditionally state-supporting role<sup>24</sup>. According to Ringer, in the hope of achieving

<sup>21</sup> For a basic overview, see Torben Fischer, Matthias N. Lorenz (eds), *Lexikon der “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” in Deutschland. Debatten- und Diskursgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus nach 1945*, 3, rev. and expand. edn, Berlin, transcript, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Theatre Journal Auto/Archive*, in «Theatre Journal», vol. 57, n. 3, 2005, pp. 557-567: 561.

<sup>23</sup> Laurence Seneleck, *The Nazi Occupation of Theaterwissenschaft*, in «New Theatre Quarterly», vol. 37, n. 4, 2021, pp. 365-375: 365.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Fritz K. Ringer, *Die Gelehrten. Der Niedergang der deutschen Mandarine 1890–1933*, Stuttgart, dtv, 1983 (engl. 1969). In his review of this book in 1971, Jürgen Habermas pointed out that Ringer, influenced by his own experience of exile, had postulated the end of mandarinism too early. According to Habermas, it was only then, at the beginning of the 1970s, in the context of the student revolt and the reform and democratisation of universities, that the end had, in fact, been reached. See Jürgen Habermas, *Die deutschen Mandarine*, first published in English in «Minerva», n. 9, 1971, pp. 422-428, in German in Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophisch-politische Profile*, 3rd expand. edn, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1981, pp. 458-468. For the current state of research regarding the involvement of academic elites, see: Ulrich Herbert, *Wer waren die Nationalsozialisten?*, cit., pp. 105-131.

the goals of a conservative revolution, the mandarins condoned or even supported the National Socialists seizing power<sup>25</sup>. Relevant studies by Georg Bollenbeck and Hermann Glaser on the relationship between the bourgeois cultural and educated elites and National Socialism emphasise the traditional semantics which led to the acceptance of National Socialism<sup>26</sup>. The cultural bourgeoisie were deeply disturbed by the mass media of film and corresponding experiments on stage (Piscator), theatre about contemporary topics (*Zeittheater*), jazz and abstract painting, which were considered an expression of a disrupted and polyvalent modernity. National Socialism offered identification opportunities to those who were repelled by the way the Nazi representatives behaved and acted, but who felt a great need to return to a cultural sovereignty of interpretation. Resistance to the nationalistic anti-Semitism of the National Socialists was also so low because, as Shulamit Volkov was able to show, anti-Semitism was already ubiquitous as a “cultural code” in discourses critical of modernity during the German Empire and the Weimar Republic<sup>27</sup>. Detached from political parties and their anti-Semitic programmes, anti-Semitic interpretative patterns functioned as a sign of the cultural identity of “Germanness” after the foundation of the Reich. Jews served as a cipher for modern life, which was imagined as being in opposition to “Germanness”<sup>28</sup>.

The beginnings of theatre studies are deeply linked to the continuity of anti-modern mentalities and to the attitudes prevalent at universities from the German Empire to the post-war period of the 1960s in the Federal Republic. Against the background of Hans Knudsen’s career, I will therefore analyse the function and transformation of anti-modern and modern-sceptical positions and discourses in the establishment of theatre studies. What hopes and expectations were associated with

<sup>25</sup> Fritz K. Ringer, *Die Gelehrten*, cit., pp. 385-394.

<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Georg Bollenbeck, *Tradition, Avantgarde, Reaktion. Deutsche Kontroversen um die kulturelle Moderne 1880–1945*, Frankfurt am Main, Westdeutscher Verlag, 1999; Hermann Glaser, *Wie Hitler den deutschen Geist zerstörte. Kulturpolitik im Dritten Reich*, Hamburg, Ellert & Richter, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Shulamit Volkov, *Antisemitismus als kultureller Code*, in Shulamit Volkov, *Antisemitismus als kultureller Code. Zehn Essays*, 2nd edn, Munich, C.H. Beck, 2000, pp. 13-36.

<sup>28</sup> Volkov’s conclusion is key here: anti-Semitism was «not a direct reaction to actual circumstances» (“keine direkte Reaktion auf reale Umstände”), *ivi*, p. 25.

the academic discipline of theatre? Which social and cultural-political function was assigned to theatre studies? Which anti-modernist positions existed and how did they change? What role did anti-Semitic semantics play and how did they continue to have an effect?

When regarding the discipline from a historical perspective, Hans Knudsen does not immediately come to mind. He did not leave behind any writings that could be considered relevant to theatre studies, nor did he found a school of scholarship. However, he was – and this is the subject matter of this book – continuously involved in the emergence and establishment of theatre studies as a university subject in four different political social systems, from the German Empire, the Weimar Republic and the Nazi regime to the Federal Republic of Germany. His achievement, one might say, was that he was always *there*. Virtues such as diligence, loyalty and allegiance were decisive for this achievement. The political turning points, along which this book is structured, are of particular interest here because these virtues had to be proven anew each time. From a methodological point of view, this insight encourages us to analyse the respective functions of theatre studies in the specific socio-cultural and political environments.

Since the 1980s, scholars in the history of theatre studies and the history of science have – with different approaches – highlighted the innovative aspects of Max Herrmann's school of theatre studies<sup>29</sup>. This

<sup>29</sup> See especially Helmar Klier (ed.), *Theaterwissenschaft im deutschsprachigen Raum. Texte zum Selbstverständnis*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981; Stefan Corssen, *Die Anfänge der Theaterwissenschaft in Deutschland*, Magisterarbeit Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg 1992; Stefan Corssen, *Max Herrmann und die Anfänge der Theaterwissenschaft. Mit teilweise unveröffentlichten Materialien*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1998; Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theatergeschichte und Wissenschaftsgeschichte. Eine bedenkenswerte Konstellation*, in Erika Fischer-Lichte, Wolfgang Greisenegger, Hans-Thies Lehmann (eds), *Arbeitsfelder der Theaterwissenschaft. Eine Bestandsaufnahme* (Schriftenreihe Forum Modernes Theater), Tübingen, Gunter Narr Verlag, 1994, pp. 13-24; Erika Fischer-Lichte, *From Text to Performance: The Rise of Theatre Studies as an Academic Discipline in Germany*, in «Theatre Research International», vol. 24, n. 2, 1999, pp. 168-178; Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Wie Max Herrmann (1865–1942) die Theaterwissenschaft erfand*, in Claudia Olk, Susanne Zepp (eds), *Jüdische Wissenskulturen und Allgemeine Literaturwissenschaft*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2022, pp. 169-180; Hans-Christian von Herrmann, *Das Archiv der Bühne. Eine Archäologie des Theaters und seiner Wissenschaft*, Munich, Wilhelm Fink, 2005, pp. 227-283; Stefan Hulfeld, *Theatergeschichtsschrei-*

was necessary because of the mere fact that, in West German theatre studies unlike in the German Democratic Republic, any knowledge of Herrmann's academic and scholarly organisational achievements had all but disappeared from the discipline's collective memory<sup>30</sup>. With this focus on Herrmann, however, the conservative and restorative aspects of his reconstruction of past theatrical events faded into the background, to the benefit of the theatre's emancipation as the art-based discipline for which he had called. Since the 1980s at the latest, the exponents of theatrical modernism, Otto Brahm, Max Reinhardt, Leopold Jessner and even Erwin Piscator had been advocating for a new kind of theatre scholarship, despite the fact that Max Herrmann and his entourage were mostly opposed to director's theatre, the use of technological media and scenographical innovations (which does not mean that there were not many points of contact, including personal ones, with some of the theatre practitioners mentioned above)<sup>31</sup>. What was also forgotten: the art-based discipline refined and invigorated the

*bung als kulturelle Praxis. Wie Wissen über Theater entsteht*, Zurich, Chronos, 2007, especially pp. 237-246; Stefan Dörschel, Matthias Warstat (eds), *Perspektiven auf Max Herrmann. 100 Jahre Forschungen zur deutschen Theatergeschichte*, Berlin, Gesellschaft für Theatergeschichte, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> In 1955, a new (and slightly abridged) edition of Herrmann's works was published (Max Herrmann, *Forschungen zur deutschen Theatergeschichte des Mittelalters und der Renaissance*, parts I and II, preface, abridgment and commentary by Helmut Schieman, Dresden, Verlag der Kunst, 1955), in 1962, Ruth Mövius edited Max Herrmann's last study (Max Herrmann, *Die Entstehung der berufsmäßigen Schauspielkunst im Altertum und in der Neuzeit*, ed. by and including an obituary by Dr. Ruth Mövius, Berlin, Henschel, 1962); in 1974, Rudolf Münz analysed Max Herrmann's achievements in theory and scientific policy and published sources on the foundation of the institute that had not previously been considered: Rudolf Münz, *Zur Begründung der Berliner theaterwissenschaftlichen Schule Max Herrmanns*, in «Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin». Gesellschafts- und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe, vol. 23, n. 3/4, 1974, pp. 333-353; in 1978, an exhibition on Herrmann's work was organised in the foyer of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (see the documentation in the manuscript department of the Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Collection Max Herrmann).

<sup>31</sup> See Andreas Enghart, *Theaterwissenschaft*, in Jürgen Elvert, Jürgen Nielsen-Sikora (eds), *Kulturwissenschaften und Nationalsozialismus*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008, pp. 863-898: 897; Matthias Warstat, "Vielspältigkeit der ganzen Theaterkunst." *Max Herrmann als Kritiker des Gegenwartstheaters*, in Stefan Dörschel, Matthias Warstat (eds), *Perspektiven auf Max Herrmann*, cit., pp. 180-192.

ephemeral and transitory nature of the theatrical work of art, yet this not only signified a turn towards modernity – in the Baudelairean sense of the fleeting – but could also be understood as an attempt to tame and overcome, a reaction to the impertinent demands of a (theatrical) modernity perceived as oblivious to tradition, as non-committal and as volatile<sup>32</sup>. Those who reject modernity strive to regain what has been lost, to restore what has been devalued and to re-establish the integrity of the «communal “we” that constitutes the social space» and that had been relinquished to the world of machines<sup>33</sup>. The paradox of anti-modern knowledge – as Ulrike Haß aptly formulated – consists in always striving, in one’s imagination, for the place with which one is already familiar<sup>34</sup>. From an anti-modern perspective, theatre studies promised to keep classical theatre traditions alive for the purpose of the academic training and aesthetic orientation of future directors, playwrights and critics. However, it is hardly possible to simply set modern and anti-modern positions against each other. There is much to be said for a complex and, from today’s perspective, often seemingly contradictory situation, where the two positions lay closely side by side, with multifaceted contact points.

In the following, my heuristic method for identifying anti-modern lines of discourse in the beginnings of theatre studies (before and af-

<sup>32</sup> Regarding the ambivalence of the ephemeral in the modernity discourse, see Michael Bies, Sean Franzel, Dirk Oschmann (eds), *Flüchtigkeit der Moderne. Eigenzeiten des Ephemeren im langen 19. Jahrhundert*, Hannover, Wehrhahn Verlag, 2017. A number of studies on the history of the discipline and the history of science focusing on the founders and the founding phase of theatre studies in the German-speaking regions now provide a differentiated picture that is not based solely on Max Herrmann. Regarding Albert Köster, see Corinna Kirschstein, *Theater, Wissenschaft, Historiographie*, cit.; regarding Artur Kutscher, see Chiara Maria Buglioni, “Das strittige Gebiet zwischen Wissenschaft und Kunst”. *Artur Kutscher und die Praxisdimension der Münchner Theaterwissenschaft*, Tübingen, Narr Francke Attempto, 2016; regarding Carl Niessen, see Nora Probst, *Objekte, die die Welt bedeuten. Carl Niessen und der Denkraum der Theaterwissenschaft*, Stuttgart, J.B. Metzler, 2022. A praxeological approach to early theatre studies, including the current state of research on the history of the discipline, is offered by Lotte Schüßler, *Theaterausstellungen. Spielräume der Geisteswissenschaften um 1900*, Göttingen, Wallstein, 2022.

<sup>33</sup> «Wir-Verfaßtheit des sozialen Raumes». Ulrike Haß, *Militante Pastorale. Zur Literatur der antimodernen Bewegungen im frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, München, Fink, 1993, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ivi*, p. 217.

ter 1945) will be based on the motifs of loyalty and allegiance. These motifs, as Nikolaus Buschmann has shown, are characteristic of the anti-modern identity discourse of educated elites in scholarship and culture during the time of the Reich's foundation. The concept of loyalty is used to defend the class-based order, to justify the monarchy, in the fight against the Weimar Republic and, finally, to legitimise the *Führer* principle<sup>35</sup>. Accordingly, relationships of allegiance serve as a medium of political, social, academic and epistemic cohesion. Relationships of allegiance and pledges of loyalty run like a red thread through Hans Knudsen's career<sup>36</sup>. At first, for his academic teacher Max Herrmann, he becomes a zealous advocate of his theatre studies. Then for the *Führer* state, which Knudsen welcomes in October 1933 as one of 88 authors of a nation-wide published "pledge of most loyal allegiance" to Adolf Hitler<sup>37</sup>. After the war, loyalty and allegiance prove to be important virtues in the ideological static battle of the frontline city Berlin and for the foundation of the anti-communist Freie Universität, a *free* university.

The *Knudsen case* offers a challenge to the history of academia: to reflect on the role of triviality and mediocrity, of obedience and diligence within a university. Accordingly, no innovative research is to be expected in the following pages. Knudsen's publishing and academic achievements manifest themselves mainly in terms of quantity. This is directly related to the material basis of this book. Hans Knudsen was a tremendously industrious writer, he re-used and recycled. His style is one that reports, evaluates and instructs; analysis or deductive thinking and writing were not his forte. He writes as a critic and senior teacher with clear ideas of what is right and what is wrong. In addition to a modest number of small books, mostly based on his lectures, he pub-

<sup>35</sup> Nikolaus Buschmann, *Die Erfindung der Deutschen Treue. Von der semantischen Innovation zur Gefolgschaftsideologie*, in Nikolaus Buschmann, Karl Borromäus Murr (eds), *Treue. Politische Loyalität und militärische Gefolgschaft in der Moderne*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008, pp. 75-105.

<sup>36</sup> In the obituary for his late doctoral supervisor, Eckhard Schulz notes that Knudsen was «guided by a manifestly idealised concept of loyalty» ("von einem offenbar idealisierten Treubegriff geleitet"). Eckhard Schulz, *In memoriam Hans Knudsen. 2. Dezember 1886 bis 4. Februar 1971*, in «Maske und Kothurn», vol. 17. n. 2, 1971, pp. 129-131: 131.

<sup>37</sup> «Gelöbnis treuester Gefolgschaft».



lished a never-ending stream of reviews, miscellanies and articles in programme booklets, newspapers and magazines. It was impossible to even compile a near-exhaustive list of his publications. This is also related to the fact that it was not possible to recover an estate in the proper sense<sup>38</sup>. Like most people incriminated by a Nazi past – in theatre studies, among others, Rolf Badenhausen, Hans Heinrich Borchardt, Willi Flemming, Elisabeth Frenzel, Herbert Alfred Frenzel, Heinz Kindermann, Artur Kutscher, Otto C. A. zur Nedden, Hanns Niedeken-Gebhard, Carl Niessen and, most spectacularly, Hans E. Schneider (alias Hans Schwerte)<sup>39</sup> – after 1945, Hans Knudsen went to great lengths to minimize his role in the National Socialist era and, whenever an opportunity presented itself, to reinterpret it. With the assistance of students and colleagues, his CV and bibliography were silently adapted to the new circumstances. This pronounced culture of whitewashing was facilitated by the chaotic archival situation after the war and by the death of those who might have been able to report matters from a different perspective. In addition, Knudsen exercised an interpretational sovereignty over his own past through his accounts of the history of theatre studies in Berlin<sup>40</sup>. This makes the numerous documentary

<sup>38</sup> In addition to consulting relevant archives (see bibliography), numerous sources for this book were purchased online – and many more can still be found online. At times, it was necessary to gauge whether an acquisition was worthwhile in terms of content. The university library of Freie Universität Berlin holds Hans Knudsen's (extant) private library. See Ulrich Goerdten, *Theaterwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Hans Knudsen: Katalog* (Veröffentlichungen der Universitätsbibliothek 1), Berlin 1981.

<sup>39</sup> Regarding Schneider/Schwerte, see: Bettina Brandl-Risi, *Wissenschaft im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus – Der Fall Schneider/Schwerte und die Anfänge der Erlanger Theaterwissenschaft*, in Hans-Friedrich Bormann, Hans Dickel, Eckart Liebau, Clemens Risi (eds), *Theater in Erlangen. Orte – Geschichte(n) – Perspektiven*, Bielefeld, transcript Verlag, 2020, pp. 205-243.

<sup>40</sup> See especially: Hans Knudsen, *Theaterwissenschaft. Werden und Wertung einer Universitätsdisziplin*, Berlin et al. 1950; Hans Knudsen, *Probleme und Leistungen der Theaterwissenschaft*, in «Universitas», n. 10, 1955, pp. 955-964; Hans Knudsen., *Max Herrmann*, in «Maske und Kothurn», vol. 1, n. 1/2, 1955, pp.167-170; Hans Knudsen, *Begründung und Entwicklung der Theaterwissenschaft an der Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität*, in Hans Leussink, Eduard Neumann, Georg Kotowski (eds), *Studium Berolinense. Aufsätze und Beiträge zu Problemen der Wissenschaft und zur Geschichte der Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Berlin*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1960, pp. 739-754.

sources and references that Heinz Elsberg, Joseph Wulf, Ruth Mövius, Marta Mierendorff, Walter Wicclair and Rolf Seeliger compiled and analysed in the 1960s – in some cases against considerable resistance – all the more valuable. Without their documentary, archival and enlightening works, which I will discuss in more detail at the end of this monograph, this book would hardly have been conceivable.