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<i>Preface</i>	

A long-standing involvement with theatre has to a great extent shaped my sense of Europe and its fascinating cultural diversity. As a theatre professional and academic, I have been observing the surge in commercial theatre and its advanced professionalism with growing concern for the implications for the non-commercial stage. In view of the competition, proximity and even enmeshment of these two realms – one profit-chasing and the other sustained by public subsidies – I want to plead in this book for their firm demarcation. My analysis of the performing arts as an artistic domain sketches a system of interconnected public institutions, created across Europe for public service and for the delivery of the public good. The question I am posing is how these companies, venues, festivals, studios and the supporting and intermediary facilities on which they rely can be sustained against the competition of commercial entertainment and the weakened support of public authorities. Globalisation, migration, European integration and the digital revolution are altering the lifestyles of city and country dwellers and putting pressure on public theatre to adjust and modify its role, or risk marginalisation and irrelevance.

An early impulse to write this book came from an invitation from the young interns of the Dutch government to speak at their annual seminar on the public finances, some time around the start of the new millennium. I recall my surprise at how ignorant these prospective civil servants were about Dutch cultural policy and the cultural infrastructure, maintained as it is by public subsidy. Moreover, they failed to see why the national government was subsidising theatre companies and festivals while Joop van den Ende, the famous commercial producer, was putting on hit musicals and other popular productions without subsidy, and even making a profit on them. A long and complicated argument was involved in explaining on the occasion that there are different sorts of stage products and that only some of them can earn enough to cover their expenses and hopefully generate a profit, and why others cannot. It was especially difficult since I was flanked on the panel by a cultural economist, who after his years in the United States had become a staunch opponent of any government subsidies to culture, and argued that those who have cultural needs and passions should support cultural organisations of their choice with donations, just as religious people support churches. He advocated this without regard to the fact that in the Netherlands, as in most European countries, the government supports religious organisations in many ways and maintains their buildings if they are listed historic monuments. As the economist pitched