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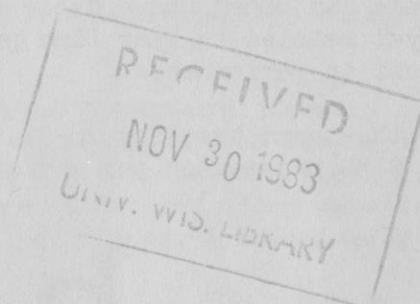
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communications

from the

international brecht society



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from the editor

This fall issue should have gone out by Thanksgiving. However, your editor is also doubling up as chief organizer of the next planned Brecht Symposium (see below), on top of a heavy teaching load. It is unfortunate that a day has only twenty-four hours.

Input from members has picked up, yet not a single production was reported for this fall. Please use the provided slip (p. 16). Also we tried hard to update the mailing list. Again, please check it over and stay in touch via the appropriate slip (p. 17).

~~Last~~ but not least, with the new Yearbook and new contacts with the Brecht people in the GDR (see the report of our president, p. 7) the IBS is in for better times. Please give your full support by making yourself available for office and by filling out the nomination slip (p. 9). It takes a cooperative effort to make the IBS work.

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symposium

Sadly, our first request for modest financial support from the Oregon Committee for the Humanities was turned down. Our proposal was deemed to be of interest only to "Brecht enthusiasts", lacking in popular appeal. We were urged to try again. So we did, but we'll only know whether or not we will receive the necessary funds for mailings and other unavoidable expenditures by late January. That is why I have not yet reacted to many fine proposals for prospective contributions, focusing on Brecht in performance.

Hang in there with us and keep May 28-31, 1982 free. Reed College offers full board and lodging for \$ 30 per person per day and Portland is glorious in late spring!

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COMMUNICATIONS -- THE BRECHT NEWSLETTER -- Vol. XI, No. 1 (December, 1981)
Published by the International Brecht Society

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theater reviews

THE MOSCOW THEATRE OF SATIRE

The Theatre of Satire was formed in 1924, during the NEP period and became quite a favorite of the Moscow theatre-going public due to its performances of rather incisive comedies of writers like Erdman, who later disappeared from the scene during Stalin. In the 1930's and 40's the theater turned to "safer" performances of folk-dramas of limited artistic quality. After the death of Stalin it did a complete about-face with the appointment of Valentin N. Pluchek as the director-producer of the theater. Pluchek was born in 1909 and had a successful career as an actor before he turned to directing. He was one of the last pupils of Meierhold in the latter's experimental studio in the late 1920's. In 1939 he formed an experimental stage together with the playwright Arbuzov, based on his experience with Meierhold. He produced a play which was a combination of improvisations and was entitled "A City at Dawn." In 1941 Pluchek was assigned as the director of the theatre of the fleet. After the war he worked as a free-lance director for various stages until he became the director of the Theatre of Satire, a position which he holds to this day.

Imagine my surprise when I arrived in Hamburg, Germany on June 22, 1981, and saw a large poster in front of the Deutsches Schauspielhaus, one of the major German stages, announcing the one-time guest appearance that same evening of the Moscow Theatre of Satire. They were to perform Bertolt Brecht's "Three-Penny Opera." Of course, I immediately purchased tickets.

The Soviet cast of 35 was headed by the top performers of the theatre, including A.A. Mironov (Macheath); S.W. Mishulin (Jonathan Peachum); Z.N. Zelinskaia (Celia Peachum); and M.M. Derzhavin (Chief of Police). In addition, Hamburg was host to an entire production crew of approximately twenty Soviets, including the musical director, lighting and prop technicians, choreographers and costumers. The entire group was headed by Pluchek himself who was on stage after the performance and literally basked in the thunderous applause the SRO house showered upon him.

Until Stalin's death, the Soviets had an ambivalent attitude towards Brecht. Of course, his politics had a number of positive points, but his dramatic theory was definitely not what the Russians were used to, and his occasionally iconoclastic nature made him dangerous. Most of these objections were removed when Brecht was presented the Stalin Prize (it was not re-named until the following year) in 1954, with presentation speech by Boris Pasternak who despised Brecht but was forced to cooperate. After this event Brecht became "performable." Liubimov presented "The Good Person of Sezuana" in Moscow in the Meierhold tradition; Sturua in Tbilisi directed the "Caucasian Chalk Circle" in the tradition of the folk theatre.

The German audience was extremely impressed with Pluchek's version of an all-familiar Brecht musical-drama which they had seen all too often and of which they had gotten somewhat tired. Most of them had forgotten how marvellously theatrical the play is, and had gone to see it purely for the amusing "songs" of Kurt Weill. The staging by the Soviets was quite unexpectedly different. It premiered in Moscow in January, 1981, and was transported to Hamburg in exactly the same version. Primary emphasis was equally placed on the entertainment of the play and also on its socio-political message. A great deal of attention was paid to details which brought out the frictions between the characters, satirical elements, corruption, thirst for power and the down-trodden masses who must lower themselves to behave anti-socially. Nevertheless the play was extremely enjoyable and very well performed. Of course, only a handful of persons in the large audience understood Russian. In fact, many thought that it would be performed in German and were quite taken aback when they heard the first strains of Meki nozh. Nevertheless, they all knew the German text so well that the foreign language was not a deterrent to their enjoyment.

L. Hecht

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Ruth Portiz sent a wealth of materials concerning The Galileo Project in Pittsburgh, June 25 through August 3, 1981. The Pittsburgh Public Theater in collaboration with the adjacent Buhl Planetarium and Institute for Popular Science and supported by the University of Pittsburgh presented a series of Public Forums and Colloquia inspired by Brecht's The Life of Galileo. Guest speakers of national renown from the fields of science, technology, theater, ethics and theology explored contemporary problems raised by the play. Performances took place partly in the planetarium, partly in the theater. Press reviews of the whole project were extremely positive.

Director: J. Ranelli; Galileo: Michael Egan; Sagredo/Very Old Cardinal: Lazaro Perez; Cardinal Inquisitor: James Tolkán; Cardinal Barberini (later pope): Kevin O'Leary; Andrea Sarti (grown-up): Curtis Armstrong and an admirable supporting ensemble.

BRECHT AND CIRCUS FOR THE PEOPLE!!!

This Week in Germany of July 10, 1981 reports:

"This year's Ruhr Festival--an annual event sometimes called workers' festival-- . . . in Recklinghausen . . . was the biggest ever, attracting 150,000 visitors. Highlights of this year's event were the Roncalli Circus and performances by the festival's own theater company of Bertolt Brecht's Caucasian Chalk Circle The Ruhr Festival in Germany's industrial heartland is tailored mainly to working-class audience and reflects the cultural and political interests of the local people"

epic west

EPIC WEST INC. - A FEW ELEMENTS OF A LONGER STORY . . .

I was living in Berlin, a visitor in another society, an American trying to leap out of his skin. For a number of years I had been studying film, trying to leave theatre or find some answer to the annoying thought; "If one doesn't come up with a substantive purpose for theatre then film will continue to invade all areas of creativity and turn stage acting into an apprenticeship for a film job."

Sitting in a café on the Kurfürsten Damm with Gisela Bahr I said: "How about a Brecht center in the USA?" She said: "That's a good idea."

Back in San Francisco I purchased a new watch, got out my brown business suit and began organizing Epic West in Berkeley (1975). The college town seemed more appropriate than San Francisco because of the library, elite atmosphere and access to intellectuals and xerox machines.

The first step was an office over a coffee house, where a librarian was to catalog everything on Brecht. Research began towards discovering where films, books, materials were cached. The first objective was to re-examine Brecht from the Berliner Ensemble days, Brecht's work by Brecht and then decipher why Brecht, although everyone thought him a genius, had fared so poorly in the US.

We held a series of seminars with teachers who knew something about Brecht: literature, poetry, music, film, towards developing a general ambiance for further study.

Before we had solidified an organization and a direction we purchased a Julia Morgan designed Church, a historic monument that had more space than we could use and a \$1,600 a month mortgage.

Richard Lichtman began a pet project: The Institute for Social Cultural Studies, an advanced Marxist study center. We were to develop a place for study, research and production.

The first session was a success, Stanley Aronowitz drew the crowds, Lichtman taught the fundamentals, Cathy Gallagher & Patty Lee Parmalee rounded out the program. The following sessions were attended by fewer and fewer people as the course list grew. Forums were the best medium for thoughtful exchange, once a week presentations by such people as: O'Connor, Feenberg, Marcus, Sherow, Gitlin, Lerner, Cooper, Müller, Goldstein, Jacoby, et al. Epic West picked up the bills as the Institute continued to grind out the debts.

We defaulted on the mortgage about three times and had eight different business or general managers in three years. Only the last one was able to file income tax forms, keep the books straight, discuss problems with lawyers and sell the building.

We presented three Epic West productions, Tales from the Calendar, stories performed, Messingkauf Dialogues and Imaginary Invalid. Paid performers, and minimal costs of production were usually not covered by the gate. Carl Weber, co-director of Epic West, taught directing courses each summer for three summers, developed a workshop of Lindbergh's Flight and directed the first two weeks of Messingkauf.

There was a full musical production, indirectly connected to Epic West of Measure Taken; Roswitha Trexler gave a concert and the back little theatre was rented to a group performing Tennessee Williams!

The succès d'estime was Werner Hecht's visit for two weeks with films. Twelve films related to Brecht productions: Mother Courage, Mother, Kuhle Wampe, Figleaf for Kuhle Wampe, Katzgraben, Rifles of Senora Carrar, Helene Weigel, Hangman also Die, Two Sons, films on Eisler, Dessau and the Valentin short, Friseur Salon were introduced by Hecht at the Pacific Film Archives. He gave seminars at Epic West, and during a break I took him to Los Angeles to visit Brecht's three houses. He was filmed in front of the houses reading from Brecht's diaries, with the intention of making a longer film: Brecht in the USA.

As the Institute fell asunder, and the cost of productions mounted, we jobbed in other groups to pay the rent. We became a rental agency. Foundations and other sources yielded about \$50,000 over the three years. Our costs ran around \$25,000 a year. Left sympathizers who gave money to political activities said they usually didn't support cultural work, and cultural foundations tended to avoid Marxist groupings. Burdened by an overhead too large for the possible income, my left associates only capable of maintaining a forum once a week, my own time divided between managing/raising money or directing/producing plays - I decided to sell the building and get out of this desperate situation.

One friend said early; "Don't try to merchandise Brecht, it won't work." On the other hand, I didn't know anyone in academia who would or could discuss Brecht from a Marxist view openly. Many people helped and encouraged us but we needed much more expertise in managing and defining the role of a large non-profit educational left corporation and enough money to sustain a long range experimental program. We were an unformed institution outside the institutions.

We sold the Julia Morgan Church in 1979 and paid off about \$25,000 in debts, and still have yet to pay the rest. Perhaps after another 10 years all will be settled. Epic West is not a dead idea, it may yet arise in another less grandiose form. Some people, and I include myself, were encouraged during conservative times, to deepen their knowledge, explore new areas and continue working in a Marxist and progressive cultural fashion.

- Ron G. Davis, June 1981

Editor's note: As of last September, plans have been in the making to have Epic West arise again as an institute for dramaturgical research. Ron Davis writes that at this institute he wants to continue the type of work he has been doing with Dario Fo's We Won't Pay! We Won't Pay!, i.e., "obtain a script, work on it, then send out a team of director and assistant director or co-directors to work on selling the package to resident companies." These plans are to be developed in the next year or so. More power to Ron Davis!

reports

From the President of the IBS to the members:

After a year and a half of searching for a new publisher for our yearbook, carried out separately and/or jointly by John Fuegi and myself (with input from the other officers and additional advice from John Willett) we are now quite sure to have found the one that will best serve our needs. While some details still have to be worked out, we are very hopeful that this can be done and a contract be signed in the near future. Let me, therefore, share with you the major steps in the decision making process.

Last fall, you will remember, I conducted a preliminary poll regarding the type of book we would want, and regarding the dues structure. The 36 members who responded were evenly divided on the first question: type-set or photo off-set. My own experience as a contributor with the latter process convinced me that the advantages it seemed to offer were an illusion, particularly in view of the fact that the contributors to our yearbook live in different parts of the world. So we turned our attention to the "conventional" kind of production. Regarding the second question, 21 (out of 36) members agreed that our dues ought to be restructured according to income levels, rather than academic rank. More on this below.

The next alternative we considered was: university press vs. commercial press. After eliminating some smaller commercial publishers whose prices were too high, we negotiated quite seriously and extensively with one commercial firm that is also publishing one of John Willett's books. We dealt with a young woman there who was very enthusiastic about the project and made some very useful suggestions. However, one day she was no longer working there and it became soon clear that the publisher himself was not particularly interested in working with us. He also retracted from the initial understanding to have the yearbook in two, if not three languages. This, however, was our first priority because we do not think that switching from an all-German book to one entirely in English is what we really need for an international readership. Other considerations that led us to drop the negotiations included the firm's sales and distribution set-up which did not look impressive to us domestically and is non-existent outside the U.S.

Now we expect to conclude a contract with a well reputed university press. They are very interested in a partnership with us and have adjusted their cost calculation quite a bit in consideration of our limitations. They have been publishing another yearbook so they are experienced in this kind of undertaking. Above all, they understand that editorial responsibility and quality control must be with us and not with them (something the commercial publisher refused to accept, too). Included in the package is a sub-contract with a West German publisher for sales in Europe.

Once the publishing problem is resolved, our next step will be to organize an editorial board which, we believe, should be larger than before and include Brecht scholars from around the world. We are also considering inviting different experts to plan individual volumes of the yearbook. (Preliminary

talks with Werner Mittenzwei indicated that he likes this idea very much.) The contributions will be in either English or German most of the time, with occasionally some in French. In all cases, abstracts in a language different from that of the article will be included. Aside from these practical changes with which we hope to serve all IBS members better, the new yearbook will, of course, continue to accept only the best and most interesting work on Brecht and related subjects. It will strive for even greater diversity and, through its expanded editorial board, reach out to other areas as much as possible. So, you can look forward to a fine yearbook that truly reflects the scope of our interests.

The first publication, to come out next year, will be just below 200 pages, but as things get settled, the volume will increase. We even hope to add illustrations some time in the future. But we first have to adjust our finances to the new arrangement. There is no doubt that dues have to be raised (and I alerted you to this necessity earlier this year) but not by as much as I expected. We want to make the structure as simple as possible, so there will be just two categories for regular members: for those with incomes below \$20,000, the dues will be \$15, and for those with incomes of \$20,000 and above, the dues will be \$20. Dues for student members will be \$10 - for up to three years, while sustaining members and institutions will pay \$30, annually. These figures, we believe, are quite compatible with the dues for organizations like MLA, AATG, the Lessing Society, and the Büchner Gesellschaft. In the future, other avenues will have to be explored, too. Fundraising, for example, is a possibility as soon as the incorporation procedure is completed. This could be a project for the next president. I will be content if, by the time my term expires, the new yearbook is in production, and the financial base of the IBS is firming up so that our organization can again function properly. This can, of course, be accomplished only with the active support of all of you. I do hope that you share our concern for a revitalized Brecht Society, and that you will again consider your membership meaningful.

Let me also report to you on my activities last summer. During my stay in the German Democratic Republic, I talked to some people in Berlin on behalf of the IBS, and although I am still waiting for written confirmation of the talks I held, I want you to know what I am trying to accomplish.

(1) I had the opportunity to see the Deputy Minister of Culture, Mr. Klaus Höpcke, and tell him about the IBS. My first point was our concern about our lack of success in having GDR scholars participate in our conferences. Finding the themes of our previous symposia "acceptable", Mr. Höpcke could not identify anything in particular that might prevent their scholars from attending an IBS conference. I also proposed the introduction of a formal IBS membership for GDR scholars, payable in GDR currency. To carry this out, we would need permission to open an account in Berlin, and to use the money from the account to buy books and other materials for the IBS. This could be handled through the "Brecht Bookstore". Mr. Höpcke promised to let me know in writing if and how we could proceed with this plan. The manager of the Brecht bookstore promised his full cooperation. The store is very well supplied with books of interest to us.

(2) At the Brecht-Zentrum I could not see Mr. Hecht, who was on vacation, but I talked to his next-in-command, Mr. Hahn, editor of Notate. I proposed a general and unrestricted exchange between Notate, the newsletter of the Brecht-Zentrum, and Communications so that the editor of the one publication

could reprint - in the original or in translation - anything from the other publication that he/she wants to make available to his/her readership. Proper reference to the source would, of course, be given but it would not be necessary to obtain individual permission for each item to be reprinted. Mr. Hahn's reaction was quite favorable but he could, of course, not say anything binding. I expect to hear from Werner Hecht, director of the Brecht-Zentrum, in due course.

(3) Finally, I saw Dr. Seidel, director of the Brecht Archive, for a long talk. As I was asked to do at last year's business meeting, I confirmed our willingness to exchange with the Brecht Archive published, as well as unpublished materials. The particulars remain to be worked out. I also invited Dr. Seidel to outline for us the various changes that have occurred in the holdings of the archive, as well as in its management in recent years. This information is to be published in the next yearbook. He agreed, in principle, to provide it. This kind of up-date, I think, is needed from time to time for the benefit of all those members who might consider doing research at the archive.

Considering that my short stay in Berlin coincided with the vacation period, I was lucky to be able to conduct these talks. Let's hope that they will have positive results.

-Gisela Bahr, October 1981

elections

The terms of all elected officers expire this coming spring. Nominations for President, Vice President, Secretary-Treasurer and editor of Communications will be accepted at the Business Meeting in New York; if you do not plan to attend, please send in your nominations by February 10. Kindly try to obtain the consent of the nominee beforehand! Officers serve for two years.

I want to nominate:

Name

Name

Address or Affiliation

Address or Affiliation

for: President/VicePresident/
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(circle one)

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recent publications

- Grimm, Reinhold, "A Pudding Without Proof: Notes on a Book on Modern Political Theater," a Review Essay on Massimo Castri, Per un teatro politico: Piscator, Brecht, Artaud (Torino: Einaudi, 1973), in New German Critique, 16 (Winter 1979), pp. 135-43.
- Davis, Ron G., "Benjamin, Storytelling and Brecht in the USA," a Report in New German Critique, 17 (Spring 1979), pp. 143-56.
- François, Jean-Claude, "Brecht, Horváth and Popular Theater," trans. Elizabeth A. Bowan, New German Critique, 18 (Fall 1979), pp. 136-50.
- Schmidt, Henry J., "Brecht's Turnadot: 'Tuis' and Cultural Politics," Theater Journal, 32,3 (October 1980), pp. 289-304.
- Suvin, Darko, "Brecht's Coriolan, or Stalinism Retracted: the City, the Hero, the City that does not Need a Hero," in Fiction and Drama in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, eds. H. Birnbaum & T. Eckman (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1980).
- Bhatti, A., "Brechtrezeption in der Hindi-Lyrik," German Studies in India, 5,2 (June 1981).
- Kamath, Rekha, "Brechts Lehrstück-Modell als Bruch mit dem Bürgerlichen Theater," Dissertation, Centre of German Studies, J. Nehru University, New Delhi-110067 (Prof. A. Bhatti, advisor).

forthcoming publications

- Herrn and, Jost, Bertolt Brecht und die bildende Kunst, to appear, January 1982, published by Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/Main.

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