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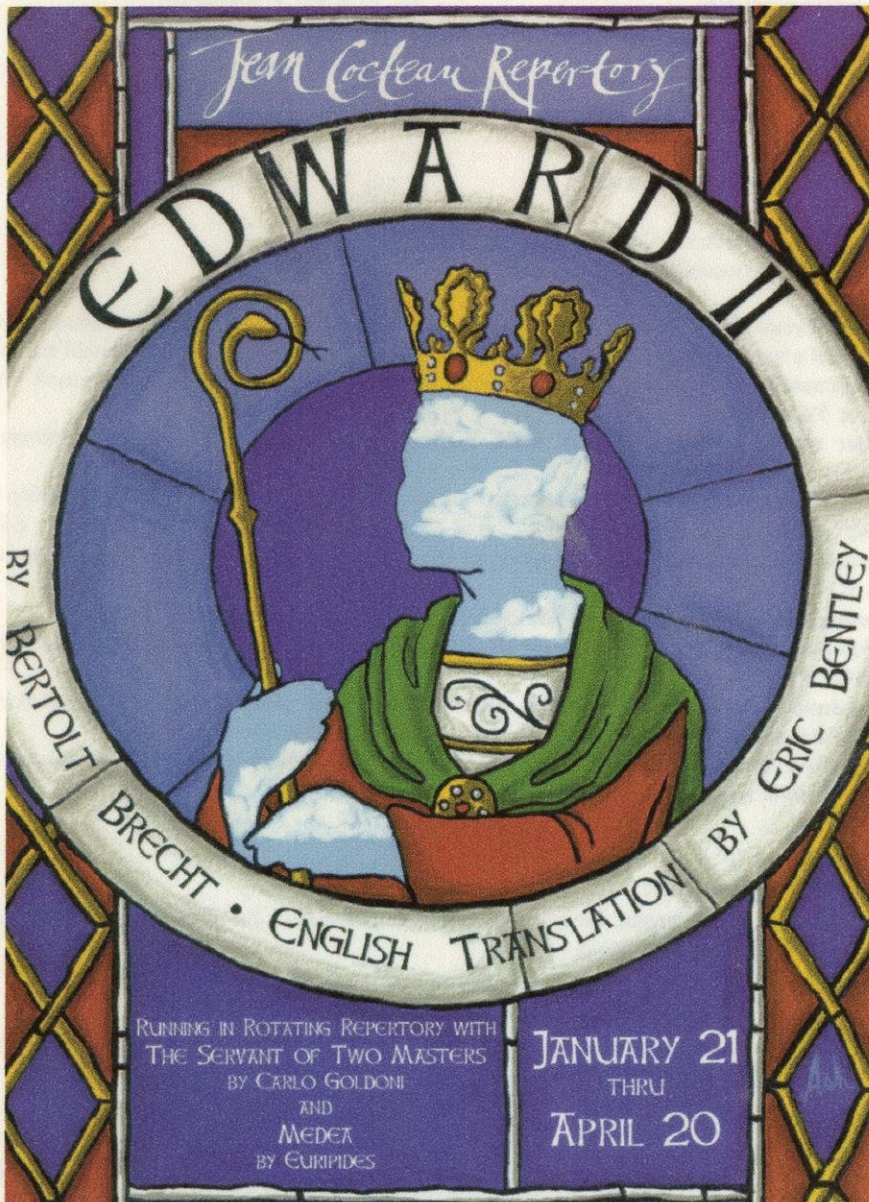
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# COMMUNICATIONS

from the International Brecht Society



Jean Cocteau Repertory's *Edward II* - Translation by Eric Bentley

Volume 29 Numbers 1 & 2

June 2000



# INTERNATIONAL BRECHT SOCIETY COMMUNICATIONS

Volume 29 Volumes 1 & 2

June 2000

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All Correspondence should be addressed to the Editor. *Communications* welcomes manuscripts relating to all facets of Brecht's work. Manuscripts should conform to the *MLA Style Manual* and should not exceed 7,500 words. You are encouraged to include with your manuscript the text in Word Perfect or Microsoft Word on IBM formatted 3½ or 5¼ diskettes.

The Editor wishes to thank Professor **Carl Weber**, Drama Department, Stanford University, for his continued support.

See the inside back cover for information on subscriptions and membership. Membership in the IBS includes subscriptions to both *Communications*, and *The Brecht Yearbook*. The Managing Editor of *The Brecht Yearbook* is Maarten van Dijk, University of Waterloo, 200 University Ave. West, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, N2L 3G1

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

A year has elapsed since the last issue of *Communications* appeared (Volume 28, no 1). The current Volume 29, 1 & 2 is a combined issue and focuses on Brecht related events, performances and scholarly research since June 1999. Contributions to the "Performance Reviews and Articles" section provide information about plays by Brecht that were performed in the 1999-2000 season, primarily in non-German speaking countries. Of the plays performed in the US *Good Person of Setzuan* (Szechwan, Sichuan) and *Threepenny Opera* were particularly popular. Others that could be viewed on American stages were *Mother Courage*, *Arturo Ui*, *Galileo*, *Edward II*, and *Baal*. Typically directors "americanized" the plays so that they would appeal to American audiences. Six of the articles (pages 48-74) were presented in the two IBS sessions at the 1999 MLA conference, in Chicago. Conference participants as well as other individual contributors pursue questions on how to adapt and update Brecht's ideas, his approach to acting, his desire to question existing views and representations of the world. Feminists — although critical of Brecht — acknowledge his dramatic techniques as being useful for interrogating existing structures and for articulating feminist messages. The challenge that lays ahead is how to use and adapt Brechtian ideas and strategies while at the same time going beyond them. I am pleased to be able to publish an article by Fernando Duque Mesa from Santa Fé de Bogotá and encourage others from Spanish-speaking communities to contribute in the future.

The picture on the front cover was designed by **Ashley Smith** for the Jean Cocteau Repertory's *Edward II*, translated by Eric Bentley. **Ilse Schreiber-Noll** made the ink drawings and woodcuts for *Mother Courage* (pages 79-80). As in the previous issue, **Helgrid Streidt** compiled the bibliography from the Brecht Archives as a service to the readers.

I would like to thank all those who have helped with this edition of *Communications*, most notably **Carl Weber**, **Vera Stegmann** and **Marc Silberman**, who has always been generous with advice and help. Contributors will need to send their submissions on hard copy and IBM-formatted diskettes.

*Gudrun Tabbert-Jones, Santa Clara University*

## President's Report

The Brecht centenary celebrations are behind us, but there is no dearth of similar events that remind us of the encompassing and central role that BB occupied in the cultural landscape for nearly four decades during the first half of our century. Obviously, Brecht's "turning" 102 this year has attracted far less attention than the hundredth anniversary of his birth that resulted in an

extraordinary number of celebratory events that took place two years ago. But other occasions continue to remind us of Brecht.

As I mentioned in my last report a year ago, this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of Kurt Weill's death as well as the centenary of his birth. While Weill has long been recognized as the coequal of Brecht, such recognition has not necessarily been accorded Helene Weigel — "die Weigel," as Brecht was wont to refer to her — his companion for approximately forty years. Weigel (1900-1971) is appropriately being honored this year not only as Brecht's companion and wife but as an actress — whose most memorable role was perhaps that of Anna Fierling in *Mother Courage and Her Children* — manager of the Berliner Ensemble, and administrator of the Brecht estate. Commemorative events such as the Berlin exhibit by the Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste and a Weigel evening by the Berliner Ensemble are bound to increase awareness of her contributions. Similarly, the authors of a slew of books and other publications on Weigel, among them those by Carola Stern, Sabine Kebir, Werner Hecht, and the contributors to this year's volume of the *Brecht-Jahrbuch/Brecht Yearbook* that is dedicated to Weigel, seek to appraise her achievements. As is well known, they have been overshadowed by those of Brecht; however, the problematic relationship between Weigel and Brecht invites, as Carola Stern put it, new reflection on the meaning of female emancipation.

In the post-centenary period, the IBS carries on its business primarily via providing a forum for discussion and a venue for the dissemination of research in *Communications* and the *Brecht-Jahrbuch/Brecht Yearbook*; in addition, there are the two IBS sessions at the annual MLA meetings (for details about this year's sessions, see the page 10 in this issue) that are usually well attended and frequently offer younger scholars the opportunity to present their findings. Inasmuch as the IBS is a democratically governed association, we welcome suggestions as to topics for future MLA sessions — in particular for those in New Orleans in 2001.

As an international society, we are of course keenly interested in Brecht-related activities in other countries and especially in Germany — without doubt, the center of these activities. In this respect, two items may be noteworthy. First, the *Große Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe* of Brecht's works, to which I have repeatedly drawn attention in previous issues of *Communications*, is finally complete; the all-important index volume appeared in May. Second, the new *Brecht-Handbuch* (see *Communications* 28.1 [1999]: 5-6) may be considered an interpretive supplement of the thirty-volume works edition. Together, these publications provide the material basis for new research. Inasmuch as the last IBS symposium took place in San Diego (1998), current — but still tentative — plans call for holding the 2002 symposium in Augsburg, site of two previous IBS symposia — in cooperation with the Arbeitsstelle Bertolt Brecht at the University of Karlsruhe and the editors of the Augsburg *Dreigroschenheft*, a most valuable resource for all matters pertaining to Brecht. In this way, North American colleagues as well as those from other parts of the world will be able to exchange ideas with their German colleagues about the two publications mentioned above. However, at the time of this writing, no topic for the planned symposium has been chosen — as always, suggestions are welcome.

Siegfried Mews, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



## TREASURER'S REPORT

Recent membership figures:

Paid Membership	Non-Institutional	Institutional
1997	112	96
1998	165	87
1999	101	77
2000	95	97

The IBS continues to do well financially. Our assets are growing modestly, building on the considerable nest-egg already accumulated. Interest on our dollar savings account totaled \$407.11 over the last twelve months. The executive committee discussed higher-yielding investment options at its December meeting in Chicago, deciding to wait for further proof that our finances were stable before committing large amounts of money. Given the current report, we will likely invest a portion of the savings money in term accounts in the coming months.

The credit-card-option brought in only \$480.00 last year, this year, at \$1,185.00, it outstrips the direct-deposit DM option by a wide margin.

*David Robinson*

### DOLLAR ACCOUNT SAVINGS

8 June 1999 — 15 May 2000

Receipts:	\$ 3,889.86
Disbursements:	\$ 5,500.00
Opening Balance:	\$ 19,268.63
Ending Balance	\$ 18,658.49

#### DOLLAR ACCOUNT (CHECKING)

8 June 1999 — 15 May 2000

Receipts	\$ 8,231.78
Disbursements:	\$ 7,552.59
Opening Balance:	\$ 2,105.58
Ending Balance:	\$ 2,784.77

#### CREDIT CARD HOLDING ACCOUNT

On 15 May 2000

Opening Balance	\$ 480.00
Receipts:	\$ 1,185.00
Disbursements:	\$ 90.00
Closing Balance:	\$ 1,575.00

#### DM ACCOUNT

8 June 1999 — 15 May 2000

Receipts:	DM 1,081.47
Disbursements:	DM 323.30
Opening Balance:	DM 1,751.10
Closing Balance:	DM 2,509.27

TOTAL ASSETS: \$ 23,018.26

## IN BRIEF

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

In her article/review about the Los Angeles production of Brecht's *Duchess of Malfi*, in vol. 28, no. 1, issue of *Communications*, Dorothea Kehler claims that Denise Gillman's staging of the text (as reconstructed by A.R. Braunmuller) with the Pilgrimage Theater was the "world premiere."

With all due respect to the achievement of the Pilgrimage Theater's company and director, I have to point out that there have been previous productions of the Brecht/Auden/Hays text in the United States as, for instance, a student theatre production in the University of San Diego, in 1976.

The first major production of the Brecht adaptation (since the flop of the dismembered version on Broadway, October 1946) was staged at Stanford University's Memorial Auditorium, in November 1992. The director, as well as the designer of set and costumes, was Judith Dolan, the Tony-winning costume designer, who was then a Ph. D. candidate of directing and critical theory at Stanford and is presently a professor at U.C. San Diego's Theater Department. Dolan made some changes in the text; she restored a few passages of Webster's original play and also used material from Brecht's *Edward The Second*. In this she followed Brecht's own practice of always re-working a text in rehearsal.

*Communications* published a review of the performance in Vol. 22, No. 1, in which the director's dramaturgical work is carefully traced and aspects of staging and imagery are well described.

Was the Stanford production, then, the "world premiere" of the Brecht/Auden/Hays text? In a way one might say: yes, but in strictly historical terms it certainly was not. If every staging of a text that presents dramaturgical changes or a newly reconstructed version would count as a "premiere," the contemporary theater with its proclivity for de- and re-constructing texts, and the re-discovery of earlier versions, might create a multitude of "world premieres."

In the same issue of *Communications*, Niko Lande made a laudable effort to direct our attention to the fact that in the realm of academic studies

"Helene Weigel appear [s] only as a character within the life of the male genius Bertolt Brecht." (Vol 28, No. 1, 55)

True enough, one might say, were it not for the fact that only a small minority of stage actresses has become the focus of extensive academic research and documentation within the halls of theater departments.

Lande compares Weigel's relative absence with the presence of research done on Marlene Dietrich, for example. Lande seems to ignore that Dietrich was an international film star (though a very negligible presence during her brief stage career in Germany, before she was discovered by the film industry). There has long been extensive work done on the life, work, and careers of film performers, female and male, yet much less on their counterparts who performed mainly, if not exclusively, on stage.

Weigel shares this fate with most of her female colleagues, and were it not for her "Brecht-connection," we might never have heard her name outside of the German theater and its criticism.

On the other hand, there has never been any doubt in the German theater and academic community that Weigel was one of the two or three greatest actors of her generation and, furthermore, the only woman leading a major German company in her time, as a managing director who also was the company's leading actor. Her sole predecessor in the history of German theater was Caroline Neuber, the unique actress/manager in the eighteenth century theater of the German speaking countries.

As much as Weigel may have been "absent" in the academic studies of Brecht's work as a playwright and director, she always has received the generally admiring acknowledgement of German theater critics and scholars. There were times, of course, during the "Cold War" decades, when some of the West German critics tended to ignore her work or tried to dismiss it on ideological grounds. But there has never been any real disagreement that Helene Weigel was not only a great actress but also the most astute leader of a world-famous company.

The forthcoming Volume 25 of the *Brecht Yearbook* will document in a comprehensive manner



the achievements of Helene Weigel, along with several books to be published in Germany on occasion of her centenary.

Carl Weber, Stanford University

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY HELENE WEIGEL!

On May 12, 2000, Helene Weigel would have been 100 years old. On the occasion of the centenary of her birth several new publications are forthcoming, and the Academy of Arts in Berlin is planning an exhibit and a "birthday party."

IBS members will be pleased to learn that volume 25 of the *Brecht Yearbook*, guest edited by Dr. Judith Wilke (Frankfurt am Main), is devoted exclusively to Weigel: to her person and to her career as actress and theater manager. Highlights include a chronology of her life, a complete list of Weigel's theater and film roles, interviews with Weigel's daughter Barbara Brecht-Schall, actress Katharina Thalbach, photographer Vera Tenschert, and directors Manfred Wekwert, Wolfgang Pintzka, and Manfred Karge. Various articles cover biographical aspects, Weigel's voice, her presence in Brecht's writings, and her work as an actress.

There have been virtually no publications on Weigel, except for one photo documentation published thirty years ago in the GDR. This year, however, readers will have several volumes to choose from, including a biography by Carola Stern of the couple Brecht and Weigel (Rowohlt Verlag); a biographical monograph on Weigel by Sabine Kebir (Aufbau Verlag); a biographically oriented volume of photos chosen by Werner Hecht and accompanied by a complete list of theater and film roles as well as a long interview he conducted with Weigel in 1969 (Suhrkamp Verlag); a volume of selected correspondence related to Weigel's theater career, edited by Stefan Mahlke (Verlag Theater der Zeit); a completely revised version of Vera Tenschert's volume of Weigel photos, including now a CD-ROM with voice and film excerpts (Henschel Verlag).

**The Akademie der Künste** in Berlin, which holds the Weigel archive (housed with the Brecht Archiv at Chausseestraße 125), is mounting an exhibition to commemorate Helene Weigel. Dr. Erdmut Wizisla, director of the Brecht and Weigel Archives, is designing the exhibit and a small exhibition catalogue, which will be shown in the foyer of the Dresdener Bank at the Pariser Platz (next to Brandenburger Tor and the new, still unfinished Akademie building). The exhibition will include a large selection of personal and stage photos from Weigel's bequest. In addition, videos will be projected, including a new 30-minute documentary being prepared by Heiderose Leopold for Deutsche Welle and the *Mother Courage* film adaptation from the Berliner Ensemble production (1960). The exhibition is open to the public from April 22 to May 19, 2000.

**The index volume (*Registerband*)** of the *Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Brecht Ausgabe* appeared, in May 2000, ca. 700 pages, DM 78. It includes:

- an index of titles of Brecht's works
- an index of institutions
- an index of journals
- an index of Biblical citations
- a section with texts by Brecht discovered after publication
- a section with errata and addenda (additional versions and commentaries)
- a report by the editors of the complete edition.

## ANGELIKA HURWICZ DIES

Brechtian actress and director Angelika Hurwicz died of cancer in November in Bergen (Netherlands). She was 77. Born as the daughter of a Jewish father, she was able to pursue her acting career in the Third Reich only under great hardship. After 1945 she was engaged at the Berliner Ensemble after a stint at the Deutsches Theater. At the BE she performed under Brecht's direction in the roles of Katrin in *Mother Courage* and, in 1954,

as Grusche in *Caucasian Chalk Circle*. After Brecht's death Hurwicz, who along with Helene Weigel was considered to be one of the most important GDR actresses, relocated to the West. She enjoyed immense success at the Theater in der Josefstadt in Vienna in Gerhart Hauptmann's *Fuhrmann Henschel*. She performed on stage for the last time in 1967. As a successful director, she worked in Hannover, Frankfurt am Main, Wuppertal, and Zürich. At the Burgtheater in Vienna Hurwicz directed works by Carl Sternheim, Jakob Lenz, Arthur Schnitzler, and Albert Camus. She served briefly in the early 1970s as a member of the three-person directorate at the Schauspielhaus in Cologne. (see the 1986 interview with Hurwicz by Bärbel Jaksch published in volume 22 / 1997 of the *Brecht-Yearbook*, 154-66)

## HEINER-MÜLLER-GESELLSCHAFT

Directors and actors at the Berliner Ensemble have founded the Heiner-Müller-Gesellschaft. The society is dedicated to the conservation of Müller's contribution to the contemporary theater and to projects in all of the arts, but particularly to independent theater projects. Director B.K. Tragelehn has been elected chair of the society. Board members include: Jean Jourdeuil (France), Wolfgang Storch (Italy), Norbert Kunz (Germany), and Brigitte Maria Mayer (Müller's widow). Robert Wilson, Matthias Langhoff, Corinna Harfouch and Martin Wuttke are among the founding members.

## KURT WEILL CENTENARY

The Kurt Weill Society celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the German-American composer in his native city of Dessau with a three-week festival in February/March and a series of events that continues to run throughout the summer. The festivities have been organized by the Kurt Weill Society, the city of Dessau, and the state of Saxony-Anhalt, Dr. Reinhard Hoepfner, and the ambassador of the United States, John C. Kornblum. The festival's

artistic director is Patrick Ringborg. For more information contact the Kurt-Weill-Gesellschaft e. V., Ebertallee 63, 06846 Dessau email Weillzentrum@t-online.de; internet <http://www.kurt-weill.de/>

**The Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM)** in New York presented in February and March the most comprehensive salute to Kurt Weill in the United States as part of the worldwide festivities for the Weill centenary. The programs included:

- Weill Style — a Centenary Gala Celebration,
- the production of Weill's long lost biblical epic *The Eternal Road* (*Der Weg der Verheißung*)
- a Kurt Weill and Israeli film series
- a Kurt Weill and Israeli Music program
- an educational series of BAM "dialogues" around *Eternal Road*.

**The Kurt Weill Foundation** for Music offers research and performance grants to scholars and artists working on Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya. Contact the Foundation for information and grant applications. The Weill Foundation also has complete information on publications, performances, and events in celebration of the Kurt Weill centenary (2000).

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NY 10003

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### IBS SESSIONS AT THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION

(Dec 27-30, 2000)

As in past years, the IBS will sponsor two sessions at the Modern Language Association conference, scheduled for December 27-30, 2000, in Washington, DC.

#### 1. BRECHT, POLITICS, AND THE AVANTGARDE

Presider: **Gudrun Tabbert-Jones**, Santa Clara U

1. "A Brechtian Critical Mass."

Speaker: **Theodore Rippey**, Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison.

2. "The Brecht Industry, Politics, and the Avantgarde in a Divided Germany."

Speaker: **Nels Rogers**, Univ. of Pennsylvania

3. "Brecht's Autonomous Art, or More Late Modernism."

Speaker: **Robert Kaufman**, Stanford Univ.

#### 2. BRECHT AND/ IN THE AVANTGARDE

Presider: **John Rouse**, U. C-San Diego

1. "*Im Dickicht der Städte*, Brecht's Surreal Concept of History."

Speaker: **Astrid Oesmann**, Univ. of Iowa

2. "On Brechtian Montage."

Speaker: **Brigid Doherty**, Johns Hopkins Univ.

3. "The Collective in Brecht's Media Theory."

Speaker: **Dorothee Ostmeier**, Univ. of Washington

### 24<sup>th</sup> IMISE Meeting – Naples / Italy

(August 7-12, 2000)

Venue: The Anglican Church in via S. Pasquale a Chiaia, a historical district of Naples. The venue should be considered a forum for free debate, therefore use of the church implies neither its approval nor disapproval of views expressed during the conference.

Themes for the conference can be found in *On Estrangement* (pages 5-6 of *Lo Straniero*). Themes of past IMISE events can also be found in *Lo Straniero*'s past issues. New ones too are welcome, keeping in mind that the study of human estrangement, either in its negative or positive aspects, can be applied to all fields of research.

A Theatre session is being coordinated by Prof. **Heinz-Uwe Haus**, Dept. of Theatre, University of Delaware/USA, whose activity has been recently linked to other researches on theatre, such as:

"Estranged Theatre," (Prof. Ing. **Ignazio Corsaro**, Editor of *Lo Straniero*, Naples/ Italy).

"Experimental Theatre," (Prof. **Charles H. Helmetag**, Villanova Univ. PA/USA).

"Irish Gaelic Theatre," (Prof. **James J. Blake**, State Univ. of New York/USA).

"Kyogen, Comedy of Medieval Japan," (Prof. **Andrew T. Tsubaki**, Univ. of Kansas/USA).

"Puppet & Masks Theatre," (Prof. **Frederick S. Lapisardi**, California Univ. of Pennsylvania/USA).

"Romanian Theatre," (Prof. **Mihaela Albu**, Univ. of Craiova/Romania).

"Theatre Research," (Prof. **Corina Shoef**, Univ. of Tel-Aviv/Israel).

# KURT WEILL CENTENARY CALENDAR 2000-2001

New York (February 7): **Weill and Lenya Centennial** starring Joy Bogen and Stephen Kimbrough (Paul Katz, conductor; Victor Symonette, director). Merkin Concert Hall.

New York (February 10): **Gala Concert, "Weill Style"** (Eric Stern, musical director; Jerry Orbach, Dick van Patten, Ann Magnuson, Billy Dee Williams, Jerry Hadley, Mark Linn-Baker, Nanette Fabray, Samuel E. Wright, Hudson Shad). Brooklyn Academy of Music Howard Gilman Opera House.

Cincinnati (February 11): **Symposium**. University of Cincinnati.

Los Angeles (February 11): **The Threepenny Opera**, ZDF German Television, 1972. Museum of Television and Radio.

Houston (February 12): **"A Valentine's Soiree — Love Songs by Weill, Gershwin, Porter, Piaf and others"** (Karen Hohler, singer; Lynda Oswalt, Pianist). Home of Mary McLeod.

New York (February 17): **Film, "September Songs: The Music of Kurt Weill,"** Rhombus, 1995. Kurt Weill Film Festival, Brooklyn Academy of Music Rose Cinemas.

Los Angeles (February 24): **"Lenya — A Girl Named Jenny,"** MT&R. Museum of Television and Radio.

Coeur d'Alene (February 24): **The Threepenny Opera**, North Idaho College.

Houston (February 25): **The Threepenny Opera**, University of Houston (Robert Nelson, conductor, Sidney Berger, director). Wortham Theatre.

New York (February 28): **Der Weg der Verheißung**, The Brooklyn Academy of Music in co-production with Oper Chemnitz, New Israeli Opera, and Opera

Krakow (John Mauceri, conductor, Michael Heinecke, director). Brooklyn Academy of Music Howard Gilman Opera House.

New York (March 1): **Symposium: "The Eternal Road,"** BAM Dialogues. BAM Harvey Theater.

Los Angeles (March 2): **Happy End, The Crusty Bread** (Joseph Berardi, conductor; Randee Trabitz, director). The Geffen Contemporary.

Dallas (March 2): **Street Scene**, Southern Methodist University, Meadows Opera Theatre.

Iowa City (March 3): **The Threepenny Opera**, Iowa City Community Theatre (Don Schneider, director).

Sanford (March 3): **The Threepenny Opera**, Seminole Community College (Doug Sinning, conductor, Boobie Bell, director).

Bronx (March 8): **The Threepenny Opera**, Lehman College (Douglas Kostner, conductor; B.D. Bill, director). Lovingier Theatre.

Providence (March 9): **Happy End**, Brown University Theatre (Matthew MacGarrell, conductor; William Beeman, director). Brown University Theatre.

New York (March 24): **"Kurt Weill at 100,"** New York Pops (Skitch Henderson, conductor; Ute Lemper, singer). Carnegie Hall.

Poughkeepsie (March 25): **Mahagonny Songspiel**, Philaletheis. Vassar College.

Riverside (March 31): **The Threepenny Opera**, Riverside Community College.

New York (April 3): **"Weill Influences,"** Opening Night Presentation, New York University, Weill Centennial Series.

New York (April 4): **Der Jasager** (with Japanese Noh play *Taniko*), Tessenkai troupe (Jonathan Eaton, director; Kanze Hideo, Umewaka Rokuro). Japan Society.

Portland (April 7): *Happy End*, Reed College Theatre.

Fort Wayne (April 7): *The Threepenny Opera*, Purdue University.

New York (April 11): *Der Kuhhandel* [American Premiere] (English translation by Jeremy Sams), Juillard Opera Theater (Randall Behr, conductor; Frank Corsaro, director).

New York (April 12): “**High Art? Low Art?**” **Panel Discussion**. New York University. Moderator: Foster Hirsch.

Aiken (April 13): *The Threepenny Opera*, University of South Carolina.

New York (April 17): “**Weill’s Broadway Years — An Evening of Music & Memories with Weill’s Leading Ladies and Men.**” Lucille Lortel Theatre.

Atlanta (April 26): *Die sieben Todsünden*, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (John Mauceri, conductor; Audra MacDonalds, soprano). Atlanta Symphony Hall.

Washington (May 4): “**Kurt Weill – 100 Years**” (Karen Kohler, singer). German Embassy.

Stamford (May 6): *The Threepenny Opera*, Connecticut Grand Opera and Orchestra (Laurence Gilgore, conductor; Paula Suozzi, director).

Palo Alto (May 26, 27): *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, West Bay Opera Association.

Colorado Springs (June 16): *Street Scene*, Colorado Opera Festival.

Sacramento (September 15): *The Seven Deadly Sins*, Sacramento Opera and Sacramento Ballet (Tim Rolek, conductor; Ronald Cunningham, director). Sacramento Community Center Theater.

Washington, D.C. *The Seven Deadly Sins*,

National Symphony Orchestra (Leonard Slatkin, conductor; Audra McDonald, soprano) John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Las Vegas (September 29): *The Threepenny Opera*, University of Nevada. Judy Bayley Theatre.

New Haven (October 20): **Symposium: “Kurt Weill and the Modern Music Theater,”** Yale University.

Los Angeles (December 2): *The Seven Deadly Sins*, Los Angeles Philharmonic (Zubin Mehta, conductor; Audra MacDonald, soprano). Dorothy Chandler Pavilion.

New York (January 2001): “**Musical Stages: Kurt Weill and his Century,**” New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.

Minneapolis (April): *Street Scene*, Minnesota Opera. Ordway Music Theatre.

(The above list is a selection from the Kurt Weill Centenary Calendar. For more comprehensive information, also about productions elsewhere in the world, visit the following site:  
[Http://WWW.KWF.ORG/PAGES/KWCENT\\_2001](http://WWW.KWF.ORG/PAGES/KWCENT_2001))



## CONFERENCE REPORTS

### BRECHT-TAGE 2000

6-11. Februar, Berlin

#### ROT = BRAUN? NATIONALSOZIALISMUS UND STALINISMUS BEI BRECHT UND ZEITGENOSSEN

Im Februar veranstaltete das Literaturforum im Brecht-Haus seine nun schon auf eine zwanzigjährige Tradition zurückblickenden Brecht-Tage unter großer nationaler und internationaler Beteiligung, begleitet von beträchtlicher medialer Aufmerksamkeit. Die Brecht-Tage 2000 hatten das Thema "Rot gleich Braun? Nationalsozialismus bei Brecht und Zeitgenossen." Bertolt Brecht stand, freiwillig oder nicht, wie viele andere Schriftsteller des 20. Jahrhunderts inmitten ideologischer Auseinandersetzungen. In Frankreich listet ein Schwarzbuch die Opfer von Bolschewismus und Stalinismus auf – und entfacht so neuen Streit um die alte Gleichung Rot = Braun. Historiker im vereinten Deutschland greifen auf Formeln der Totalitarismustheorie zurück, wenn sie Vergleiche zwischen der DDR und dem Dritten Reich ziehen. Kulturschaffende laden zu Auseinandersetzungen ein, wenn sie pauschal von Dichtern im Dienst sprechen oder in Ausstellungen die Staatskunst verschiedener Epochen und Systeme kommentarlos nebeneinander hängen. Die Diskussion um die Gleichsetzung von Rot und Braun und die mit ihr eng verbundene Totalitarismustheorie geht bis in die zwanziger Jahre zurück, als zuerst in den USA und dann unter deutschen Hitlerflüchtlingen im Exil Begriffe wie "Red Huns" bzw. "Brown Bolshevism" und "Communazi" geprägt wurden. Sie erreichte einen Höhepunkt während des kalten Krieges und erfährt, nach einer kurzen Unterbrechung nach 1968, eine zweite, internationale Renaissance in der Zeit seit dem Zusammenbruch des Kommunismus.

### DAS PROGRAMM:

#### Sonntag, den 6. Februar

**Jürgen Alberts** liest aus seinem Roman *Hitler in Hollywood*.

Anschließend wird der Film *Hangmen Also Die* gezeigt und diskutiert.

Moderation: **Kerstin Hensel**

#### Montag, den 7. Februar

##### ERÖFFNUNGSVORTRAG

**Konrad H. Jarausch:** Die Versuchung des Totalitären, Intellektuelle zwischen Diktatur und Demokratie

##### LESUNG

**Marianne Hoppe** und **Friedrich Wilhelm Junge** lesen Brecht.

#### Dienstag, den 8. Februar

##### 'COMMUNAZIS' ODER TOTALITARISMUS. WAS IST DAS?

**Gerhard Scheit:** "In finsternen Zeiten" – alles eins? Die Zwiespältigkeit des Totalitarismusbegriffs.

**Manfred Lauermann:** Horkheimer und der Totalitarismus: eine eigensinnige Distanz.

**Jürgen Schebera:** Lieder in Rot und Braun oder: "Entwendungen aus der Kommune" (Bloch).

Moderation: **Sebastian Kleinschmidt**

#### Mittwoch den 9. Februar

##### KONKRETISIERTE UTOPIE: VON DER AVANTGARDE ZUR STAATSKUNST

**Reiner Grübel:** Die Ästhetik des Opfers bei Brecht und in der russischen Literatur der 20er und 30er Jahre.

**David Pike:** Der Vorhang zu und alle Fragen offen. Brecht und die Stalinisten.

**Paolo Chiarini:** Brecht und d'Annunzio: Ästhetik und Politik.

**Gerd Rienäcker:** "Der verdiente Mörder des Volkes." Brecht und Stalin.

Moderation: **Alexander Stephan**

Donnerstag, den 10. Februar

LINKER ANTISEMITISMUS? ODER: WO IST AUSCHWITZ IN DEN WERKEN BRECHTS?

**Detlev Schöttker:** Brechts Auseinandersetzung mit den Faschismustheorien nach 1933 und 1945.

**Manfred Voigts:** Brecht, Marx und die jüdische Frage.

**Silvia Schlenstedt:** Ein Wunsch Brechts im Jahre 1945.

Moderation: **Wolfgang Benz**

Freitag, den 11. Februar

ANTIFASCHISMUS UND KOMMUNISMUS?

**Jost Hermand:** Hitler-Bilder bei Bertolt Brecht und Charlie Chaplin.

**Klaus Völker:** "Und kein Führer führt aus dem Salat" – Brecht, der antistalinistische "Stalinist."

**Michael Rohrwasser:** Brecht und die Renegaten.

Moderation: **Simone Barck**

## WEITERE BRECHT-VERANSTALTUNGEN

Das Literaturforum bietet eine Skala von Veranstaltungen, die Konsens und Dissens mit dem Autor, dem sozialen und politischen Gehalt seines Werkes und dessen ästhetische Innovationen, sowie den individuellen Bedingungen seiner Produktivität Rechnung tragen. So präsentiert die "Stern"-Redakteurin **Birgit Lahann** im März ihr *Brecht-Buch*. **Regine Lutz**, eine der prominentesten lebenden Schauspielerinnen, die noch mit Brecht zusammengearbeitet haben, steuert Erinnerungen bei. **Werner Hecht**, **Sabine Kebir** und **Stefan Mahlke** stellen aus Anlaß des 100. Geburtstages neue Publikationen zu **Helene Weigel** vor. **Ernst Schuhmacher** liest im April aus seinem im Herbst erscheinenden Buch *Mein Brecht*. Im Mai spricht **Gottfried Wagner** in Sachen Kurt Weill im Literaturforum. Im Juli stellt **Kerstin Hensel** zusammen mit dem Komponisten **André Werner** und Studenten der Hochschule für Schauspielkunst "Ernst Busch" einen literarisch-musikalischen Dialog vor. Das Sommerprogramm ist im Juli und

der letzten Augustwoche Ernst Busch gewidmet.

**Werner Hecht** und **Peter Voigt** präsentieren Filme und halten veranstaltungsbegleitende Vorträge. Darüberhinaus wird im Literaturforum eine Ausstellung zu Helene Weigel gezeigt.

## Aus dem Programm:

Dienstag den 25. April

Buchpremiere: Stefan Mahlke. "*...in ruhiger Haltung, die nicht ohne Furcht ist.*" Briefe von und an Helene Weigel 1935-1971.

Es liest: **Annemone Haase** (Berliner Ensemble)

Montag, den 8. Mai

Multimedialer Vortrag: **Gottfried Wagner**. "Zur Aktualität von Kurt Weill am Beispiel des Songspiels *Mahagonny*."

Moderation: **Friedrich Dieckmann**

Donnerstag, den 11. Mai

Buchvorstellung: Sabine Kebir: *Abstieg in den Ruhm. Helene Weigel. Eine Biographie*.

Moderation: **Ursula Vogel**

Dienstag, den 16. Mai

Buchvorstellung: Nyota Thun: "Ich – so groß und überflüssig. Wladimir Majakowski." *Brecht und Majakowski*

**Nino Sadow** (Gesang); **Jens-Karsten Stoll** (Klavier)

(<http://www.lfbrecht.de>)



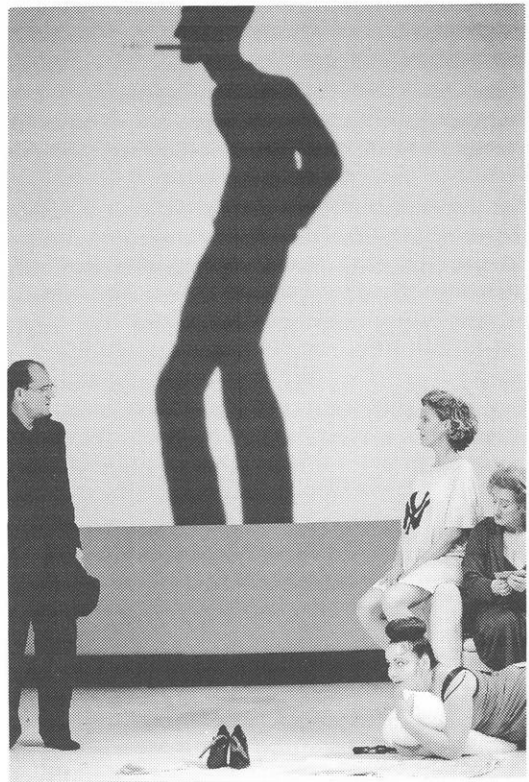
## PERFORMANCE REVIEWS AND ARTICLES

George Tabori's *The Brecht-File* opens the  
*Berliner Ensemble* under Claus Peymann

Peter Höyng

If Claus Peymann was not now heading the *Berliner Ensemble* there would have been not a performance of *Die Brecht-Akte* (*The Brecht-File*), written and directed by George Tabori. Who then is Claus Peymann? Without a doubt he has been one of the foremost theater directors of the German theater for the past 25 or so years. He gained his reputation as a forceful theater and stage director at the *Staatstheater* in Stuttgart (1974-1979), moved on to the *Stadttheater* in Bochum (1979-1986), and from there made a big leap to become the director of the *Burgtheater* in Vienna. He held that position for 13 years — in Vienna's theater history an eternity (1986-1999). Whenever he moved on to another theater, he left behind a legacy, the Peymann legacy. One of the factors contributing to a Peymann legacy is his ability to build an ensemble and another one is his talent in attracting some of the best contemporary authors to write plays for his theater. He likes to provoke not only by having a new look at the canonical plays but also by performing contemporary plays. Last but not least, he understands how to build a community of theatergoers. In other words, Peymann's theater is the incarnation of the eighteenth century ideal of the stage as a 'moral institution' (Schiller) where enlightened citizens gather who want their theater to be a part of public affairs. Peymann's theater is never in danger of becoming a dull place of adoration or mere entertainment, rather it is place where new and often provocative views on contested political topics are tested. Moreover, the name Peymann is to some extent synonymous with scandal. The biggest he

staged so far was when he asked Thomas Bernhard (1931-1989) to write a play for the centenary of the *Burgtheater* on the *Ringstrasse* in 1988. Bernhard wrote *Heldenplatz*, which addresses Austria's fascist past, its continuing anti-Semitic resentments, and its denial of Jewish emigrants. The public outcry for and against the piece was as much a drama as the play itself, even though it is not one of Bernhard's strongest. However, this scandal insured that everybody in Vienna and Austria knew Peymann, and his strong followers kept on teasing his (political) enemies.



Where would one go after the *Burgtheater*? After all, it still represents the pinnacle of the German theater world, if for no other reason than its venerable history dating back to 1776 and the sheer ostentatiousness of the building on the *Ringstrasse*. Even after some significant renovations, the 'new' BE cannot come close to the mighty *Burgtheater*.

But Peymann's latest career move — probably his last — is not short on triumphant symbolism. Whereas he remained a *Piefke* (Austria's derogatory term for a German) in Vienna, he is now returning to his homeland, and not just to any place there, but to



Berlin at the moment when it once again becomes the capital of Germany. And before the Berlin Republic becomes all too complacent or self-absorbed (for example with its first big scandal about the CDU's corruptibility), Peymann will make sure that the BE is as much a critical institution for the German parliament as it needs and deserves. Is it just a coincidence that the BE is near the *Reichstag*? It seems that Peymann thrives when his theater is so close to the seat of establishment power, for the closer he gets, the more critical he can be of it. In that regard, the BE and the *Burgtheater* share a proximity to their respective political

centers. Peymann wants his theater to be a location where literature is part of the political environment.

Undoubtedly, Peymann's choice for the opening of his first season at the BE has many of above mentioned 'Peymann factors.' It reflects a clear recognition of the BE's special *locus*. Peymann wanted to create some synergy when opening this new era at the BE — and it will be one — on January 8, 2000, by asking George Tabori to write and stage his latest play *The Brecht-File*. Where else would this choice have such a high density of connotations: Brecht's legacy is linked to the BE, Tabori is linked to BB, and his play is linked to BB and at the BE. How symbolic, how wonderful! What a perfect way to launch a new tradition without being blind to history. This constellation had to raise everybody's expectations, and the media in Berlin and elsewhere in Germany did its part to fuel the fire, thereby heightening the risk for failure. And unfortunately it is a failure. The play lives from its symbolic framework but this play is not convincing in itself, nor was the second performance that I attended. Certainly, it had all the marks of George Tabori, now age 85 and reenergized by his move from Vienna to Berlin. One encounters elements like Tabori's laconic humor and jokes, or profane language that expresses some sublime insights, or men's difficulties in dealing with sexuality, or his questioning of prescribed roles as perpetrator and victim. Likewise one encounters another pair of male friends, the two FBI agents Sol Shine and Roy Gallagher, vague shadows of the odd coupling of Shlomo and Hitler in *Mein Kampf* (1987) or Mr. Jay and Goldberg in *Goldberg-Variationen* (1991). But all of this came across like an encounter with old friends: "Nice to see you." However, the play does not spark new ways of looking at Brecht's years of US exile (1941-47), when his Marxist position raised the FBI's suspicion. Even worse, the performance did not provoke any new look at the tension between literature and politics, as if one could not learn something about this topic since the *Stasi* files of the GDR became available nine years ago.

If Tabori's very own characteristics did not shine, then how about his appropriation of Brechtian theater? After all, Tabori has been intimately familiar with Brecht's plays and poetry ever since

his own years in the US (1947-1971). In fact, Tabori helped popularize Brecht for an American audience in the sixties when he produced the quite successful collage *Brecht on Brecht*, which proved his superb translation skills (1961, published 1967). Moreover, he frequently utilizes *Verfremdungseffekte* in his own plays. Though Tabori is not (like Brecht) a dialectical or systemic thinker, he likes to see the stage as place to play out odd situations, and to experiment continuously. Above all, he likes to combine often presumably contradictory elements. Thus, it should be no surprise that he learned as much about theater from Brecht as from Stanislavski's method of acting. It was this mix one could witness once again in *The Brecht-File*.

The play's ten scenes are only loosely connected by the overall background of Brecht's years in the US. As a scholar, one is of course ready to acknowledge the loose structure of the play as reminiscent of Brecht's *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches* (*Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*), which Tabori already had used convincingly in *Jubiläum* (*Jubilee*, 1983). In an equally dutiful way, each scene was announced by one of the actors in front of a small white curtain, thereby contributing to the epic structure of the play and insuring that there was an element of disillusion. However, the biggest disillusionment and simultaneously the biggest surprise is that the two FBI agents and not Brecht are at the center of the play. It is the responsibility of Shine and Gallagher to spy on Brecht because of his assumed communistic activities and the threat they pose to American democracy. Whereas Shine becomes inspired by Brecht, Gallagher shoots himself at the end. Or at least he did in the second performance I saw; the text version as printed in the program does not include this ending. Thus, Tabori turns around reality by depicting the FBI agents, not Brecht as victim. Brecht is the one who leaves the country on his way to Zürich. Their lives change because of Brecht, the assumed perpetrator. This transformation of a victim into a perpetrator and vice versa, including the shot at the end, is something that Tabori narrates quite effectively in his novel *Beneath the Stone* (1945). One might read the play as wishful thinking that an author and her/his literature are beyond and above political threats.

Overall the play is a mix of documentary elements and fictional situations. The famous testimony of Brecht before the *House UnAmerican Activities Committee* (HUAC) constitutes the highlight simply because it is humorous in and of itself. Why this scene was moved to the beginning of the play, at least in the second performance, instead of next to the last, as in the program, was not at all clear. For the scene, Tabori simply had to copy the dialogue between the committee members



and Brecht. Brecht had prepared himself extensively in a hotel in Washington in October 1947, evoking his beloved Schweyk character. Why Tabori had the actors (Peter Fitz as Brecht) talk as if chit chatting, as if the interrogation took place in Brecht's living room, was one of the mysteries and disappointments of the evening. How ironic that the original testimony is more theatrical than its realization on stage.

In the opening scene, one saw big chairs which made the actors look small as they played Hollywood stars (Hollywood-Elegien, scene 9 in the



program) This scenery became an allegory for the opening of the BE under Peymann. Great goals ahead, but the highly charged first production did not measure up to the occasion. This perspective might change in the US-premiere at the University of Tennessee in March, 2001. Then we will know whether the different cultural context, the direction by Veronika Novak-Jones, and the dramaturgical assistance of Klaus van den Berg will make the play more inspiring so that it can live up to its promise.

*University of Tennessee*

## GAY BRECHT? JEAN COCTEAU REP STAGES *EDWARD II*

*Vera Stegmann*

From January 21 to April 20, 2000, the Jean Cocteau Repertory at the Bouwerie Lane Theatre, a historic structure in New York's East Village, is presenting Bertolt Brecht's *Edward II*, in rotating repertory with Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters* and Euripides' *Medea*. This is the first major staging of *Edward II* in New York: The only prior performance occurred off-off Broadway by *The Medicine Show* during the 1970s. Jean Cocteau Repertory uses the translation by Eric Bentley who has familiarized New York audiences with Brecht's work for over fifty years now. Bentley's renderings of other Brecht plays — *A Man's a Man* and *Mother Courage* — also served as textual bases in recent performances by Jean Cocteau Rep.

Written in collaboration with Lion Feuchtwanger in 1924, *Edward II* marks the beginning of Brecht's experiments with epic theater. It is an adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's 1592 tragedy, *The Troublesome Raigne and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second, King of England, with the Tragical Fall of Proud Mortimer*. When Brecht was contracted to stage Shakespeare in Munich in the twenties, he instead turned to another Elizabethan author, Marlowe. Brecht greatly changed Marlowe's original text: He streamlined

Marlowe's large array of characters, reduced them from 40 to 20 and concentrated on four main players. He changed and greatly expanded the roles of the queen and Mortimer, Edward's evil counterpart, into new and much more complex characters. He broke up Marlowe's two-part structure into individual scenes with titles announcing events to follow; and although he largely kept the Elizabethan iambic pentameter, he coarsened its smooth flow by adding irregular rhythms and a new language that mixes modern, occasionally even vulgar imagery with an archaic poetic style. Writing *Edward II* helped Brecht formulate his 1939 essay "On Rhymeless Poetry with Irregular Rhythms."

*Edward II* is founded on a historical figure, the Plantagenet king of England (1307-20), whose careless rule and whose provocative infatuation with his lover Gaveston led to an extended war, as well as his own downfall and death. Brecht's play begins with Danyell Gaveston's return to London after the death of Edward's father who had banned Gaveston from the city. British noblemen rebel against Gaveston's return and select Earl Roger Mortimer as their spokesman. Mortimer, an intellectual dedicated to reading the classics, is persuaded to



abandon his philosophical existence for a life of power politics in opposition to Edward. He soon becomes intimate with Queen Anne, Edward's lonely and estranged wife. Mortimer demands that Edward should force Gaveston to leave the country, and since Edward refuses, a thirteen-year war breaks out. In the jungle of war, intrigues, and misunderstandings, Gaveston is murdered. Edward's troops capture Mortimer, but set him free again. Years later, Edward falls into Mortimer's hands, with the help of Baldock, Edward's new lover who betrays the king in order to save his own life. Mortimer wants to force Edward to abdicate his crown, but Edward resists fiercely, in an act of courageous defiance in the face of death. This ability to say NO — a lifelong essential quality for Brecht — turns the originally frivolous and irresponsible king into a noble and tragic hero. Edward is cruelly strangled in London's Tower, and the new king, his child-age son Edward III, vows to take revenge and sentences Mortimer to death.

The war that raged in the fourteenth century symbolizes World War I, which still lingered in everyone's memory around 1924, when *Edward II* premiered in Munich. Edward's downfall could easily represent Germany's defeat. Unlike *Mother Courage*, a later play reflecting the experiences of World War I, the war in *Edward II* also has a private motivation: (homo)sexuality. Eric Bentley phrases the question succinctly when he thinks of Brecht as asking: "What if Helen of Troy had been a man? Would all those other men have fought a 10-year war over him and reduced Troy to smoldering ruins?" (*New York Times*, January 23, 2000).

Why does this early play by Brecht hold particular relevance to modern-day New York? It is probably less the epic war story than its homosexual theme. Marlowe, who may have been gay himself, still repressed the homoerotic content of the plot and described Edward's support of Gaveston as an act of political favoritism. Edward's crime here is less his love for Gaveston than his neglect of his governmental duties. 330 years later, Brecht changes Gaveston from a small aristocrat (as in Marlowe) to a plebeian, a butcher's son; and he foregrounds exclusively the erotic and intimate nature of Edward's relationship to Gaveston. Brecht, who had included gay themes in two earlier

plays — *Baal* and *In the Jungle of the Cities* — thus moved homosexuality center-stage as the main theme of the drama. Jonathan Slaff even argues in the play's press release that Brecht is the first major playwright to make homosexuality a central element of a drama's plot, a practice that did not enter mainstream theater until the second half of the twentieth century.

In open or hidden ways, homosexual entanglements define the interactions between several characters. Besides Edward's relationship to Gaveston, there are gay overtones in Edward's reactions to his rival Mortimer. It is never quite clear why he sets Mortimer free after his capture when he has the other prisoners decapitated. The two men are also tied to each other by the woman they share, Queen Anne. Finally, despite Edward's truthfulness to Gaveston, he does not give up his gay life after Gaveston's death and finds lovers among his soldiers, the last one being Baldock. Like Jenny, Macheath's favorite whore in *The Threepenny Opera* who betrays him in the brothel, Baldock becomes a Judas-figure as well: In need of helping his poor family, Edward's last lover takes money to betray the king and hands him over to Mortimer.

Karen Lordi directs the play in a very Brechtian fashion, distanced and gestic. More than Brecht himself even, she emphasizes the narrative structure of the play. A new prologue, written by Eric Bentley and delivered in the performance by a balladeer, poetically summarizes the events and introduces the characters, as they step on stage. The epic structure of Brecht's play is further emphasized by the expanded role of the balladeer. While the original play contains only hints of songs, Lordi includes a ballad peddler who is continuously present on-stage, singing songs accompanied by his guitar and often a drummer. In addition to Brechtian ballads, he also performs four new songs written by Eric Bentley and the composer Arnold Black.

The set designer of the performance, Robert Klingelhofer, invented an ingenious epic device to replace the titles that introduce each scene of the play. Rather than projecting the titles on a wall or having them appear on a curtain, these titles are printed on red boards lying on the floor, face down. There are sixteen boards in all, forming a rectangle. With each new scene, the narrator/balladeer picks up

a board, reads the title, and places the board to the side. At the end, after Edward's death, all boards are gone. During the final scene, Edward's funeral, the narrator places ten of the sixteen boards back on the floor, in the shape of a cross. Like a puzzle, first undone and then recomposed, we see Edward's life unfold. Opening as a square and closing as a cross, this structure suggests more unity than the anarchic world view of early Brecht might permit; yet it provides a beautiful structural device, a sense of closure and the possibility of hope, as Edward III could restore justice.

The stage design is simple, true to Brecht in that sense as well. Draped pictures of King Edward, hanging on the back and to each side of the stage, are soon taken off as his power wanes. In the front of the stage stands a small black water-filled tub, alternately described as gutter water or the carrion pit; to each side golden sinks are attached to the wall — the left one containing dust, the right one blood —; toward the back of the stage a moveable throne can be rolled in and out within seconds: These are the few noticeable stage props. Such sparse decoration on the stage helps the audience concentrate all the more on the acting.

The characters are fabulously acted by a superb cast. Harris Berlinsky portrays the tormented soul of King Edward II in great nuance. We see the king develop from a man preoccupied with his private life to a tragic figure in conflict with a corrupt world. Jason Crowl is very convincing as his young lover Gaveston; and he is also cast as Lightborn, the Lucifer figure chosen to strangle Edward in the Tower. Gaveston and Lightborn, Edward's lover and his executioner, are played by the same actor, which may symbolically underscore the close relation between love and death in Edward's life. Elise Stone plays Queen Anne with expression and passion. In many ways, in this play about gay love, she exudes the most eroticism. At least one openly erotic scene in the performance is a heterosexual one, between Mortimer and the queen, at the end of which she, in a drunken state of mind, "laughs at the world's emptiness." The complex role of Earl Roger Mortimer is marvelously acted by Craig Smith. He grasps the conflicted personalities of Edward's arch rival who is torn between books and power politics, between the king and the queen,

and to whom the king still feels attracted as Mortimer prepares the deceit for Edward's death. Edward's brother Kent is performed by a female actor, Angela Madden, adding interesting cross-gender touches; and Jennifer Lee Dudek portrays young Edward III, as well as the drummer boy and a soldier. Jolie Garrett plays the archbishop and Rice, Tim Deak is Lancaster and the elder gurney, Michael Surabian performs the abbot and James, Marc Diraison acts Baldock and Berkeley, and Neil Shah plays Spencer and the younger gurney. The narrator and ballad peddler is Ashley Smith, who also plays a soldier.

Jean Cocteau Repertory's staging of *Edward II* is a unique event for anybody who appreciates Brecht, or modern theater in general. In light of the fact that the play has been performed only twice in New York and three times in the US (counting one staging in San Francisco), this is a truly historic revival of a rarely performed play.

Lehigh University

## BRECHT IN A NEW KEY

Peter von Bawey

While his dogged defenders and adamant detractors argue over his place in a post-Marxian world, Bertolt Brecht continues to prove an attraction to theatergoers in Paris. From establishment theaters like the Comédie Française with last season's production of *Mother Courage* to small avantgarde or lesser known production companies, Brecht's plays appear regularly in the repertoire of the city's theaters. Recently, the Café de la Gare, located in the lively Marais district, staged Brecht's *Grand-Peur et Misère du III Reich* under the direction of Manon Rony; the Théâtre du Tambour Royal in boisterous Belleville performed François Bourgeat's *Belles de Brecht*; and the Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers in the suburbs opened the year with Jean-Pierre Vincent's grand production of *Homme pour Homme*.

Consisting of Brecht's collection of newspaper

articles and accounts of witnesses from 1933 to 1937, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* is a docu-drama of daily life in Nazi Germany. Printed in Prague in 1938, the arrival of Nazi troops prevented its publication. Interestingly, a selection of eight of the work's twenty-four scenes entitled by Brecht 99% was first performed in Paris in 1938. Manon Rony's version too is an abridged selection of scenes.



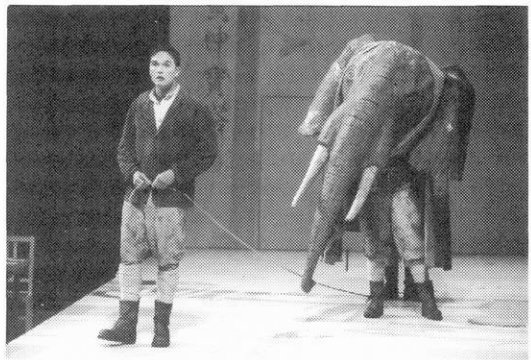
Only sixteen when she discovered Brecht, Ms. Rony, now a mere two years older, brings to the play a generational perspective that looks to history to understand the present. In six scenes — 4, 5, 9, 10, 16, 3 — the audience observes the corrosive effect of fascist ideology on mundane social situations. From the plaintive “Song of the Moor Soldiers” and scenes of political prisoners to the exclusion of the “Jewish Wife” and the parent’s fear of their child informer, the play reveals how fascism poisons everyday existence and deforms human interactions; whatever it touches is tainted and saturated with terror, perverting love partnerships, family, marriage and destroying possibilities for normal domestic or private relationships.

Each scene opens with a brief introduction via the recorded voice of Romain Bouteille (one of the Café de la Gare’s founders), relating the historical

events to their social context. The troupe ended the performance by engaging its youthful audience in a discussion of racism. In a country where 15% of the vote was cast for a crypto-fascist party, Ms. Rony’s production is a chilling reminder that fascism is neither an abstraction nor a political movement of the past, rather as distiller of discrimination and distributor of hatred and violence it may affect us today.

François Bourgeat’s production is a good example of the versatility of Brecht and of the innovative possibilities of staging his works. *Belles de Brecht* is a dynamic and enjoyable pastiche: humorous and sad, ironic and reflective, provocative and poetic. Bourgeat’s thematic selection of thirty-four ballads, poems, sonnets or songs extracted from Brecht’s works, ranging from his early “Legend of the Dead Soldier” (1918) to his late “Changing the Wheel” and “The Solution” (1953) of the Bukow Elegies are accompanied to the music of Kurt Weill and Hanns Eisler. The pastiche is about Brecht and in his own language — words of the dramatist, the theorist, the poet, the man. But there is more. *Belles de Brecht* is very much about women.

There are three women: one an actress, the other a singer, the third a pianist. Three beautiful women in enticing red dresses walk past the audience to the stage carrying large, awkward suitcases. One sits in front of a piano, the other places her foot on her luggage, the third straddles her legs over a suitcase. All alluring and engaging, beguiling and provoking the audience. As the pianist strikes the keyboard, the others take up the words of a man: cruel, derisive and tender words. A



man's words of struggle and hope, of love and sex, of human spirit and war. With his own words, three women confront Brecht "without concessions," according to posters announcing the play.

To Kurt Weill's music two women sing in tandem the "Bilboa Song" (from *Happy End*, 1929/30): "Ich weiss ja nicht, ob Ihnen so was grad gefällt." They discuss men and love, recite Brecht's poem of his Berlin period (1926) "Toujours quand je vois cet Homme" ("Immer wieder, wenn ich diesen Mann ansehe"), following with his much later "Le masque du Mechant" ("Die Maske des Bösen"), written in Los Angeles in 1942. A theme emerges: the women touch on love's problematic or its two categories — Brecht's dialectic without synthesis — of those who are loved and of those who love. "La différence et la feminine et le masculine." A man's words, but spoken by a woman with husky voice and a feminine sensibility full of humor and provocation. A woman confessing her entanglement with "Surabaya Johnny" (from *Happy End*) and her inevitably broken relationship, bringing with it all of Johnny's cruelty. While the audience senses the force of the male's vitality, it is affected by the woman's fragility, her anguish and abandonment. Through Johnny's unmitigated machismo the women direct the audience to the situation of the female with the poem "Every time I see this Man" (1926), exposing a woman's illusion of love. Brecht's words, but inflected with a feminine accent. Other examples: the woman acquiescing to man's war and her grief as Mother Courage in the "Cradle Song" (1939) or the woman understanding war and her triumph as Frau Kopecka in the "Song of the Moldau" (1943). Throughout Bourgeat's pastiche we hear a male's words, sense his force and vitality, yet it is the woman who holds our attention. If the male's force and power dominates social interactions, the actors counter with Brecht's own words that it is the woman who is stronger ultimately because she has a greater capacity for love. With Bourgeat's medley of Brecht's works, the audience experiences a feminine sensibility and confronts the conditions of the other's gender.

At the Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers Brecht's *Man is Man* (*Homme pour Homme*) ran for nearly one month from January to February this year. Directed by Jean-Pierre Vincent, who collaborated

with Bernard Chartreux, his dramaturge, and Eberhard Spreng in a new French translation of the play, *Homme pour Homme* was staged to an enthusiastic Nanterre audience, consisting mostly of the faculty and students of the University of Paris VIII, located near the theater in this western suburb of Paris.

Jean-Pierre Vincent, himself a professor of drama at the Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique, introduced Brecht's play of 1924-1926 in his brochure as a philosophical story or "un conte philosophique," placing it in the tradition of the great eighteenth century French classics of Voltaire's *Candide* and Diderot's *Jacques the Fatalist*. Just as those authors applied artistique innovation to an equally new subject matter so Brecht to document the birth of "the new man." The play is a veritable collage of exotic story, philosophical ballad, cabaret slapstick, musical comedy and Dadaist montage.

Brecht's "new man" is not related to the man of manners, character or integrity, those historical models from Renaissance to existentialist philosophy, rather the new man of the age is the "little man." The "little man" with his unlimited malleability has the stuff of rubber and is therefore liberated of any firm trait that might shape a singular personality. His freedom is the freedom of the formless: like rubber he is ready to be shaped into anything. The audience observes as Brecht's anti-hero Galy Gay, a timid porter, is gradually remade into Galy Gay the ferocious fighting machine and conqueror of the fortress Sir El Dchowr. Vincent argues that the little man takes central position in the twentieth century. From an historical perspective his point has merit: it was the little man who became dictator in Germany, chosen by a band of little men, all becoming the "hordes terribles" of the modern age. From this view, Brecht's play invites discussion on the ontology of "der neue Typus von Mensch" — the human being who participated in making our times.

By dividing the stage into three parts a bustle of human activity appears. On one side, Widow Begbick's Beer Salon and a band of female musicians in exotic dress, lounging at the bar or playing Paul Dessau's compositions; on the other side, luscious palm trees (all in rubber), telegraph poles, a shed, a rickshaw, a table to the rear. An



elevated space in the center serves as focal point of the action with railway tracks framing the back of the stage. Manipulating lighting from the rear, the on-stage light controller — Eric Frey as “régis seur du théâtre” — frequently participated as singer or vaudeville barker in dramatic events.

Trained at the Conservatoire National Supérieur d’Art Dramatique, Pascal Bongard as Galy Gay brings to the role a childlike manner that contrasts well with the brutish Jeraiah Jip, played by Rémy Carpentier, and the blustering Uria Shelley, performed by Frédéric Pellegeay. Scene nine with its six episodes demonstrating the remaking of Galy Gay was a high point of Vincent’s production. As the audience witnessed the demontage of Galy Gay, and the assembly of a new man, this “play in the play” exposed the illusionary techniques of theater. The disclosure of theater (ritual) distanced the execution scene of Galy Gay revealing it as a ritual (theater), thereby canceling its potential dramatic realism. This is just theater, cabaret or Dadaist demontage; certainly, yet a figurative execution elicited an ontological transformation, and a new man was born. Bongard’s acting superbly expressed



that the child in the man was executed to give birth to the beast in him. Galy Gay, the timid porte, expired to give life to Jeraiah Jip, the human fighting machine.

Galy Gay’s rite of passage stands in stark contrast to *Bildung*, the earlier pedagogical model of the educated middle class, with its appeal to the elevation of the individual person. Beginning as a “private person,” Galy Gay is initiated into the group to become a member of a militant collective, where

his actions reflect not the individual’s but the group’s thinking. In the transformation episodes the audience observed that his new identity was created by the collective; and in the last it found that his actions embody the collective’s purpose. If the audience followed how Galy Gay “relates to things,” it could assume that his conquest of the citadel was no more than the realization of the collective’s will. Brecht’s view that the age of the individual has given way to that of the masses was superbly demonstrated in this production.

Brecht’s works performed in various districts of or near Paris seem not only appropriate to the area but to the times as well. In the ancient Marais with its youthful population, Manon Rony’s attention given to fascism’s debasement of private relationships is a timely reminder to urban youth, particularly in a society where traditional perceptions of self and the other clash with current transformations of city life. From the Marais to Belleville are only four stops on the subway line, yet the urban landscape opens another world. Here in the most multicultural community of Paris — consisting of Africans and Asians, Arabs and Jews, Buddhists and Moslems — where you will find the cuisine of the world but not a store that sells French cheese, the old Théâtre du Tambour Royal, a small relic of nineteenth century Paris, draws its audience from the entire city. In the midst of this cultural diversity, Bourgeat’s pastiche at the Tambour captured well human sensuality and vitality with the feminine as center and source. In Nanterre’s suburban theater, associated with the leftist culture of the university, Jean-Pierre Vincent’s production appealed to the audience to question normative evaluations of human nature. In the theater brochure for the audience, Brecht’s social theory of “un nouveau type d’homme” was printed; and in a special folder for the press, Walter Benjamin’s essay on Brecht’s epic theater was reproduced. Thus, the theatergoer had sufficient material to cross the divide from mere entertainment to a socio-philosophical evaluation of the work of art.

*Paris, France*

## CHECHNYA AND BRECHT A THEME OF PEACE AND MODERN WAR

Sky Heussenstamm

"Rubble-strewn." "Crime soaked." "A dirty war." These are but a few of the phrases being used to describe the Russian conflict and warfare occurring in the province of Chechnya.<sup>1</sup> The region has been a hot spot for hostility since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Chechnya, located in the Caucasus Mountain region, is a melting pot of ethnic cultures and religious beliefs. The largely Muslim based population desires to establish a republic independent of Russian authorities. Acting with still unclear intentions, Russia has resorted to a brutal and totally destructive campaign of war and decimation to keep the rebelling province under Russian authority in the process killing, maiming, destroying the homes and lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. This theme, one of common humanity being displaced and devastated by the action of unsympathetic and indifferent governments or militaries, has been seen many times re-occurring throughout history and is the focal message in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Brecht's story takes us back fifty years to post WWII Russia and one thousand years to the Caucasus mountains and the land of Grusinia. In Grusinia the scheming and political revolts of its leaders have thrown the country into chaos, civil war, and anarchy. Intertwined into the story are the tales of a young woman's love and hardships, a Don Quichote-like judge who brings justice to the oppressed, and a young boy abandoned to the world. In a telling and thought provoking prolog a fourth tale is communicated; that of a group of villagers living in bombed out and destroyed Russia who are being uprooted and displaced by the government against their will. Brecht attacks Stalinism and the communist actions of that era which forced so many of its citizens to conform or perish.

Surely one of his most unusual plays (the only one with a "happy" ending), *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* takes us on a magical ride of wit and wisdom. Brecht's work as a propagandist and teacher are eclipsed by his strong story-telling ability and

mastery of dramatic effect. The play is not a tragedy but a comedy. Through all the darkness, a light does appear, and that is hope. The play ends on a note to remember this time of "almost justice," when common humanity was given a helping hand. It is a message that Brecht intended for the world, but in the very land in which he set his play, the cycle of domination and cruelty is ever spinning anew.

<sup>1</sup> I am a student at Mira Costa College in Oceanside, California, where we produced *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. I did extensive research comparing the play to the current conflict in Chechnya.

## THE RESISTIBLE RISE OF ARTURO UI BY BERTOLT BRECHT

The Berliner Ensemble at Freud Theatre,  
University of California, Los Angeles.

Arthur Horowitz

During his lifetime, Bertolt Brecht had a well-documented love/hate relationship with the United States, most especially Los Angeles, where he lived from 1941 to 1947. Two years after departing from America in 1949, Brecht helped found the Berliner Ensemble, one of the twentieth century's most important and influential theatre companies. Brecht, of course, never returned to the United States, and the Berliner Ensemble did not perform in the United States until early July of 1999, making its first (and apparently last) appearance with Brecht's epic, satiric, tragicomedy *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*. The production was originally conceived and directed in 1995 by the late Heiner Müller. Arturo Ui, the cartoonish parable of Hitler's rise to power set in Al Capone's Chicago, was an ideal choice for introducing the Berliner Ensemble's work to America.

After its six American performances, on the campuses of the University of California at Berkeley and Los Angeles, the Berliner Ensemble planned to disband. Actually, the company's plan was to reconstitute itself under Claus Peymann's

leadership, changing its artistic philosophy while keeping the name of the Berliner Ensemble, that is, promising to extricate itself from Brecht's epic dramas and political tradition. In a very different Germany, indeed a very different world from that which Brecht knew, the Berliner Ensemble plans to produce other playwrights and incorporate other dramatic styles. If this is so, and the Berliner Ensemble moves in different directions, then this production of *Arturo Ui* must be seen not merely as an individual performance but as a historically significant epitaph to the company's impact upon twentieth-century theatre. However, this farewell performance of *Arturo Ui* was no polemic Brechtian theatre fossil. The evening was indeed memorable, not because it was the final opportunity to see the work of a great company, but because the staging was so visually arresting and the ensemble work so vivid and cohesive. Mostly, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* was unforgettable, especially for Martin Wuttke's tour-de-force enactment of the title character.

The curtain rose, appropriately enough, to the music of Hitler's beloved Richard Wagner. A brief segment from the overture to *Tristan and Isolde* segued into the crashing music of Franz Schubert's setting for the *Erl-King*. At this point, Arturo Ui, the man who would be king, was first seen as a bare-chested, red-tongued, hyperventilating wolf, walking on all fours and circling one of the production's symbolic centerpieces — an entombed, decaying engine. The process which turned this panting animal into an occasionally laughable subhuman figure, one capable of inducing enormous villainy and terror, were among Wuttke's great technical achievements. His character transformations both dazzled and repelled.

The most Brechtian element of Wuttke's tragic performance was its being informed by film clowns. The production included performative references to Chaplin's *Great Dictator* (so admired by Brecht) and Jerry Lewis's stuttering, squeaky-voiced little big man. Interwoven were physical skills rivaling those of Jolm Cleese, particularly evident in a goose-step parody which culminated in Arturo Ui shaping himself into a horrifying human swastika. While there may never be anything funny about a swastika, its use by Wuttke struck the entirely appropriate

chords of shock, horror, terror, and very dark, very stark comic blackness.

Throughout the evening comic and tragic Shakespearean references abounded. Brecht had his mind on *Richard III* in creating the relationship between Roma (Thomas Anzenhofer) and Ui. Like Richard III's Buckingham, Roma is the brains, leading the inept Ui by the nose and, with a sexual subtext between these two bullies, by the trousers. Brecht also adapted the Richard III/Lady Anne wooing scene into a sexual parody between Ui and Mrs. Dullfeet. Traute Höß, the production's Mrs. Dullfeet, resembles Margaret Dumont and played the scene in a coy, comic style reminiscent of Dumont's great film work with Groucho Marx. Arturo Ui's seduction of Mrs. Dullfeet, literally over the dead body of Mr. Dullfeet, was to be Ui's ultimate conquest, but the encounter only exposes Ui as physically incapable of performing the sex act.

The extended scene with the old Shakespearean actor (Michael Gwisdek) was pivotal to establishing Ui as a political force, making it clear that Ui needed to master personal performance before being seriously considered. In contemporary Los Angeles (perhaps not so very different from the Los Angeles Brecht observed and reviled fifty years ago), where celebrities are re-imagined, re-shaped, re-packaged, and re-sold on a regular basis, this scene was the most memorable and the funniest, as Ui subtly shifted from perfect fool to perfectly frightening. Once the clown who was Arturo Ui mastered his lessons in body language and movement, vocal technique, projection, and image, he was no longer the fool. Now, he would move mountains.

The historic impact of these tragicomic proceedings was underlined by Ui's frequently voiced declaration that where allegiance to his cause was concerned "silence was not enough." Instead, this miniature Hitler demanded vociferous and immediate approval, all the while, the sound of distant trains rumbling behind the production. These sound effects, following on the heels of Ui's venomous threats and challenges, served as chilling reminders that everything dramatized would ultimately lead to Auschwitz.

*The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* was tremendously well received by the Los Angeles

audience, with the company of the Berliner Ensemble and Wuttke in particular called out for several curtain calls. In its fifty-year history, the Berliner Ensemble has left an extraordinary legacy. Its impact upon western theatre after visits to Paris and London in the 1950s has been well documented. This series of performances in California, coming at a turning point in the structure of the Ensemble, seemed more ephemeral, but for all that, the evening was no less impressive.

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**GOOD PERSON OF SETZUAN  
IN NEW YORK,  
ADAPTED BY TONY KUSHNER**

*James Fisher*

Although Tony Kushner's prominence among American playwrights is based on his remarkable two-play epic, *Angels in America*, he has also generated an impressive collection of adaptations, including Corneille's *The Comic Illusion*, shortened to *The Illusion* (1988); Goethe's *Stella* (1987); Solomon Ansky's *The Dybbuk*, renamed *A Dybbuk* (1995); and Heinrich von Kleist's *St. Cecilia* (1997), premiering soon as an opera with original music by Bobby McFerrin. It was perhaps inevitable that Kushner would adapt one of Bertolt Brecht's plays, whom he described in a *Theater Week* interview as "one of the great exemplars of what social commitment in the theater is about."

Kushner's adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Person of Setzuan* had its New York premiere at the tiny Wings Theatre, a typical off-Broadway operation on Christopher Street, in May and June 1999. This adaptation, which was first produced at San Diego's La Jolla Playhouse in the summer of 1994, is largely faithful to Brecht's original play. When staged at La Jolla, Kushner's adaptation was set in contemporary Southern California, where Latinos, Native Americans, and African Americans

struggle for survival. The marginality and economic inequities faced by American minorities allowed *Good Person* to function with this multicultural approach, and also specifically located the play. In contrast, Charles Geyer, director of the Wings production which included an ethnically diverse cast, did not emphasize the point, and thus the play more fully maintained its universality.

The reduced circumstances of the Wings company lent an odd poignancy to the harrowing poverty experienced by the characters in *Good Person*. While multimillion-dollar musicals, with ticket prices topping \$100, run for years (and even decades), little room exists for serious dramatic experimentation on Broadway, despite the recent production of a few star-driven revivals, of O'Neill and Miller. Kushner's fine adaptation was presented in a theatre with a limited budget, where the actors and production staff receive no pay. Perhaps a Broadway venue would be inappropriate for *Good Person*, a play with a strong political conscience. More distressingly, perhaps there is no longer an audience for such work within the decidedly conservative commercial theatre. The play's run in a modest Wings venue meant that only a small group of spectators saw this powerful collaboration between Brecht and Kushner.

In the Wings production, despite some flaws in staging and inexperience evident in a few performances, the strength of Brecht's themes came through. Without seeming to eliminate anything of significance from the original text, Kushner sharpens the play's issues, deepens its characters, and underscores aspects that make contemporary connections clear. He has said, "I've taken no liberties with Brecht at all, so I'm nervous about people thinking of it as adaptation – it's not me; it's Brecht," but Kushner's eye for the heart of a scene and his musical way with dialogue, have enhanced *Good Person*. Kushner's care and restraint means that the play seems not so much adapted as refreshed. He provides economical language and slightly accentuates the humor. He also brings the characters into bolder relief. Kushner's contributions are most telling in adjustments to Brecht's lyrics, set to music by director Geyer. Sound effects, as well as the music, are created live by actors. The play's lyrical passages are

evocatively rendered when the actors sing a cappella or are accompanied hauntingly by an accordion or zither. The sparseness of the music connects the spirit of Brecht's play and Kushner's precise wording. Kushner appropriately underscores the play's key thematic points: is it possible to be good of heart in a world of staggering need and suffering?

Under the simple lighting by Jim Salemi, Geyer's set design featured a stage full of junk that looked like a cross between a theatrical prop room and a downscale secondhand store. This design effectively showed the poverty in which Shen Te lived among the scavengers who tested her purity of spirit, allowing the actors to create brisk changes of scene as required. Geyer's strongest stagings were the second half of the production. One particularly evocative scene showed the workers at Shui Ta's factory silhouetted behind a sheer curtain, toiling under brutal conditions. Good use was also made of two round-headed hand puppets as two of the gods, with an actor as the third. An amusing effect was achieved with a toy airplane on a string, providing a delightful visual counterpoint to Yang Sun's dream of flying again. When a simple prop established a scene, as when an umbrella served as rain shelter for a homeless man, the work was at its best. This production's austerity was its greatest strength.

The Wings Theatre's energetic young cast of six, drawn from recent graduates at Yale and Rutgers, played all the roles. Cast standouts were Jason Quarles as Wang the water-seller, despite his ineffective transformation into other roles assigned him; Tal Goretkey, who was particularly delightful as The Gods despite a tendency to rush and garble his lines; and Michael Bell, who impressively made Yang Sun at once pitiable and menacing. Joanna Liao was attractively winsome Shen Te, full of heart, delicacy, and innate gentility. She also demonstrated a strong and unexpected vein of steel in her disguise as the avaricious Shui Ta. Liao succeeded more fully than her fellow players in merging Brecht's and Kushner's individual strengths. The empathy she exuded, which Kushner's adaptation emphasizes, allowed the audience to fully experience Shen Te's struggles while never losing the intellectual clarity of her complex dilemma. In Shen Te's world, surviving with one's morality intact is virtually impossible; it

is a world, as Kushner says, where "people are crushed and tortured into acts of desperation."

A quintessentially American adaptation, Kushner's work owes much to the style of Tennessee Williams and other lyrically inclined American symbolists as it does to Brecht. Kushner believes Brecht's characters "have a certain universality and fit very easily" into a change of cultural idiom. His version of *Good Person*, which will be published very shortly by Arcade Publishing, will compete for production opportunities with numerous other adaptations and translations. However, there is little doubt that to American actors, directors, and designers, this sharply focused, darkly amusing, and imaginatively theatrical adaptation will be an appealing choice. As a critic of the La Jolla production stated, this play provides an "opportunity for some long overdue soul-searching as we face the new century."

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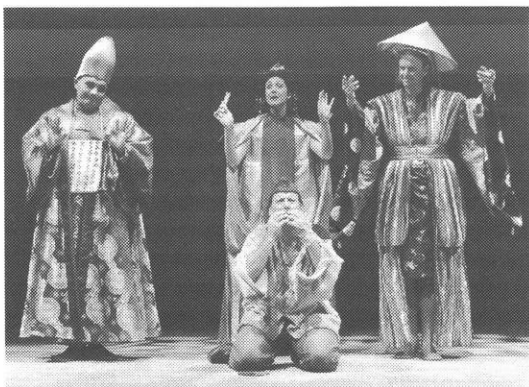
### GOOD PERSON OF SZECHWAN IN ASHLAND Gudrun Tabbert-Jones

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland (Oregon) presented the *Good Person of Szechwan* in its 1998/1999 season. Thanks to a new translation into American English by dramaturg Douglas Longworthy and the imaginative staging by Penny Metropulus, *Good Person* proved to be a great success. For Metropulus, who in the past had directed mostly American playwrights, it was the first time she produced Brecht. What was important to her and her team from the beginning was to make *Good Person* appealing to American audiences without changing Brecht. In his program notes Longworthy informs us about some of the preparatory work. First and foremost the team felt it was time to rethink Brechtian concepts such as *Epic Theatre* and *alienation*. Longworthy writes:



"Generations of theatre students have been taught about Brecht's didactic Epic theatre, in which the audience is alienated, kept at an emotional distance, to allow for rational observation. Many of the elements of traditional theatrical forms – such as suspense, empathy, illusion and pathos – had supposedly been banned from Brechtian theatre. But *Good Person* seems to be constructed out of melodramatic building blocks. Even the characters appear to come straight from central casting..." As Longworthy interprets it, *Alienation* does not mean that empathy, suspense, pathos are to be eliminated but that these things need to be "limited" by "placing them alongside their opposites: high-flung emotion next to coolness, fast-paced action next to contemplation, snappy dialogue next to lyrical expression" (Program Notes, 12).

The principle of "limiting" melodrama by placing it alongside its opposites (contemplative interludes, songs, asides, and direct addresses) was consistently applied in this production of *Good Person*. For example, each time a scene had "built up some steam," all action was put on hold. While the actors lingered in frozen dramatic poses, one of the characters changed into a commentator/narrator. These "reflective interludes" did not destroy suspense, on the contrary, while listening to comments on what had transpired or was going to transpire on stage, the audience waited for the "frozen" moments to come back to life. *Songs* were



sparingly used. Those that were delivered were sung to American tunes.

"Limiting" melodrama was also achieved by placing it next to comedy. The gods, played by

Robert Vincent Frank, Suzanne Rying and David Kelly, appeared as hilarious goofballs. They did not seem to take their mission of finding a truly good person seriously (Longworthy had translated the



German "Mensch" with "person"). Not only their appearance but their different accents — the female god (Suzanne Irving) spoke with a heavy German accent, slipping in an occasional "nein" and "Aufwiederschen" — produced a comical effect. When the gods reappeared after touring earth, in tattered cloths and bruised, they looked like comical figures.

By way of contrast, the "humans" were quite earnestly portrayed. B.W. Gonzales convincingly played the yearning and confounded Shen Te and the tough-minded Shui Ta with much energy and stage presence. American Shen Te wore a bright red shift with high side slits and seemed more dynamic and resolute than I have seen this character portrayed in

other productions. Disguising herself as Shui Ta when her very survival was at stake seemed right in character.

Other actors that stood out in this production were Michael Hume playing Wang, the humble yet slightly crooked waterseller; Michael Elich as opportunistic lover and would-be pilot, Yang Sun; Mark Murphey as Shu Fu, the fatuous barber; Robynn Rodriguez as the money-grabbing landlady Mrs. Mi Tzu; and J.P. Phillips as Lin To, the swindled carpenter. The energy and liveliness of the cast successfully transformed the old Chinese tale told by German playwright Bertolt Brecht into fast-moving, American-style entertainment. Although the play lasted for more than three hours, it earned standing ovations at the end of each show.

Reviews in local and regional newspapers were overwhelmingly enthusiastic. The *San Francisco Chronicle* found this production of *Good Person* to be the "the most provocative play of the season." For the *Eugene Register-Guard* it was "the hit" of the 1999 festival. The *San Francisco Examiner* called it "the season's most rewarding non-Shakespearean offering," and the *San Jose Mercury News* raved: "What a treat! Last year when everyone short of the Teletubbies celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Brecht's birthday, something was almost forgotten: The man was a great playwright."

What a tribute to Brecht, who has been found difficult and hard to relate to for American audiences, to Penny Metropolis, Douglas Longworthy, and the skillful actors!

*Santa Clara University*

## FOCUS ON THE BODY: TOWARDS A FEMINIST READING OF BRECHT IN PERFORMANCE

*Denise Varney*

In 1993, I directed Brecht's *The Good Person of Sichuan* at the Open Stage Theatre at the University of Melbourne.<sup>1</sup> Like most directors, I found the text's tightly-woven and theoretically inscribed composition resistant to meddling. Brecht's dramaturgy, structured on a Marxist-derived aesthetic and embodied in the techniques of *Verfremdung* and *Gestus*, weighs heavily on the creative development of the play in performance. I am in full sympathy with Leander Haussmann's claim that Brecht's plays are constructed linguistically and dramaturgically like a house of cards and therefore can only be reproduced by slaves to the text.<sup>2</sup> Not wanting to be a slave but also, unlike Haussmann, unwilling not to do Brecht, I prowled around for gaps into which our production could insert a differently-motivated, feminist mise-en-scene.

Notwithstanding the house-of-cards-like constraints, my production was interested in how far we could stray from the original text, to reposition the play within a feminist postmodern context. This involved historicizing Brecht, turning his own techniques of estrangement and distanciation against the assumptions that underpinned the theory and practice. To this end, we claimed *The Good Person* as a feminist subject, reworking the *Verfremdungseffekt* in the interests of estranging gender and sexual difference. The gods and Wang the Waterseller became female characters in a move that feminized the text, appropriating masculine dialogue for the feminine subject. Our fictional Sichuan was a postmodern space severed from its orientalist past and released from the onus of representing Brecht's critique of monopoly capitalism and Christianity. The ideological unity of Brecht's fable was ruptured by a visual text composed of objects from different historical periods, modes of production, and social control. The production attempted, therefore, to re-inscribe the text with the techniques of contemporary political theatre.

Theoretically, I wanted to approach the

question of Brecht and feminist theory from the point of view of the productive value of applying non-theatrical theories of the body to Brechtian theatre practice and criticism. I moved the frame of Brechtian performance criticism beyond the frame of his own theoretical writing to see how the performance, and therefore a Brechtian play, might address more contemporary concerns. I found that feminist poststructuralist and postmodernist readings of the body released the performance from the closure of a narrowly conceived analytical frame.

The following analysis of *The Good Person of Sichuan* traces theories of the body in the cultural sphere onto the body in performance. It focuses on the regulatory norms and imperatives that mark the female body as they are translated/transferred onto the body of the actor in performance. These marks are particularly visible on the bodies of the three female gods and the female Wang. The text is surprisingly open to this substitution. The dialogue, action, and fable continue unchanged, but the feminization of the parts offers a new means of deconstructing the gender polarities of the text. It is not a matter of females playing male parts for the purposes of estrangement as in the Shen Te/Shui Ta opposition. Changing the gender of the characters thinks through alternative representations of gender. The playing of the male parts as female parts within the text-as-written demonstrates that, even within the tightly woven Brechtian text, there is scope to insert an alternative discourse about gender ambiguity and fluidity. One of the effects of the feminization of the play in performance is that the framing scenes — the Prologue and the final scene as well as the interludes — become female rather than male spaces. I will therefore focus on these scenes in the analysis which follows, but before doing so, I will trace some recent developments in the theorization of the body that informed the development of the mise-en-scene.

The Body in Performance: Feminist interest in and theorization of the body have particular application to performance. Theatre is well-placed for such thinking to be enacted — it is the place where reality has always been performative rather than stable, and it is a place for experimentation and play. Where the body is variously theorized as a site for the interplay of the corporeal with the social, the

cultural, and the psychological, in performance the body is also a living, breathing materiality that occupies time and space. While theoretical interest in the body has grown, so has the centrality of the body in performance simultaneously as a signifier and a signified. This view of the centrality of the theatricalized body is usefully represented by phenomenologist Stanton Garner, Jr.: “Bodied spatiality is at the heart of dramatic presentation, for it is through the actor’s corporeal presence under the spectator’s gaze that the dramatic text actualizes itself in the performance.”<sup>3</sup>

Garner uses notions of ‘embodied subjectivity,’ also disseminated through feminist poststructuralist theory, to oppose the theatrical body to the essential, fixed, and timeless body of humanist discourse in ways that suggest the shared discourse through which the body is articulated across disciplines. In this case it is phenomenology, theatre, and feminism. Theories of the body offer analytical tools which undercut traditional text-based and semiotic modes of performance analysis and produce alternative readings of performance. Focus on the body displaces the logocentrism of textual analysis for both performer and spectator and provides opportunities for performing against the text. The performer can work from body-image and movement, from notions of rhythm and flow, energy and stillness, and the spectator can discern points of difference and even discordance between body and text.

The relation between the body and subjectivity, foreshadowed above, adds further substance to the analysis of the body in performance. The connection between the body in performance and the social or lived body of the performer suggests that something of the latter may be illuminated through the performance. The relation between the body and subjectivity, a crucial concern for feminism since Cixous and Irigaray, points to the constitution of identity through the corporeal. The notion of morphology connects the anatomical body to the lived, enculturated experience of that body, to the extent that the meanings attached to the male and female anatomy in culture are embodied as subjectivity. As Elizabeth Grosz explains: “No matter how much the individual may wish or will it, male and female genitals have a particular social

meaning in Western patriarchal cultures that the individual alone — or even in groups — is unable to transform insofar as these meanings have been so deeply etched into and lived as part of the body image.”<sup>4</sup>

Theorists like Grosz seek to use the body to deconstruct the binary opposition of mind and body that has historically worked against the feminine. The feminine is traditionally aligned with the body and assigned an inferior and unreliable position in relation to the masculine, which is aligned with the superior term, the mind. Grosz invites a reconfiguration of the body as a text on which subjectivity, history, and even psychology might be read. Rather than the binary opposite of the mind, Grosz asserts that the body produces cognitive meaning: “bodies have all the explanatory powers of minds.”<sup>5</sup>

Debates about the body as a medium of culture, or as a construction or even a location constitute a new turn in feminist theory in the 1990s. Grosz has circulated the notion of the body as an inscriptive surface on which “cultural and personal values, norms, and commitments” are written.<sup>6</sup> Thus voluntary practices such as diet, exercise regimes, and clothing, and coercive forms of correction and training such as shock therapy, straitjackets, and medication, mark the body, making it readable as a representation of the subject’s social, cultural, historical, and psychological make-up. In a similar way, Susan Bordo, after Foucault, proposes that the body is “a medium of culture” — a symbolic form or a text — that is readable as a measure of the extent to which the subject has incorporated the rules of cultural life. Bordo uses the notion of the docile body to describe the body that is “practiced at and habituated to the rules of cultural life.”<sup>7</sup>

Bordo’s contribution to the theorization of the body is her interest in the willful and highly visible disordering of the female body through conditions such as hysteria, anorexia nervosa, and agoraphobia. She reads the disordered and abnormal body as a form of feminine resistance. These conditions function as an exaggeration of the terms through which repressive and coercive regimes describe the feminine in a move that is not unlike Irigaray’s notion of playing the feminine to “convert a form of subordination into an affirmation.”<sup>8</sup> Even though I

would not want to endorse as practice such ultimately disabling modes of resistance, Bordo’s analysis produces an unintentionally theatricalized version of the disordered body that lends itself to theatrical performance. The image of the disordered body as a parodic caricature of gender norms, “exaggerated, extremely literal, at times virtually caricatured presentation of the ruling feminine mystique,” suggests that the body is willfully and artfully, that is theatrically, made into a heightened representation of the feminine.<sup>9</sup> Bordo’s hysteric, for example, can be played as a negative scenario in much the same way as Brecht intended with his characterizations of wrong states of affairs. Bordo’s theatricalized disorders found their way into the performance, as will be seen in the analysis which follows, in the representation of one of the gods as hysteric.

Reading the body as a text is appealing to performance analysis, and constructing the body as a text assists performance-making. The body in performance might be said to produce a corporeal or material text that runs parallel to or against the dramatic text. If the social or everyday body produces a meaning that refers to the culture in which it lives, then the performing body similarly engages in the production of a readable performance of culture.

Against the notion of the body as a text and as a medium of culture is a more deconstructive theory of the body as a discursive and corporeal practice. Judith Butler rejects the notion of the body as a text, claiming instead that the body is a construction. The notion of the body as text implies that it precedes the marks of culture. But there is no body, she argues, prior to inscription: “bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender.”<sup>10</sup>

For Butler, the body is inextricably tied to culture through gender and cannot be understood as a separate text. The body comes “into being in and through the mark(s) of gender,” and those marks carry cultural meanings. The body may be understood as a discursive construction: it becomes visible (readable, apprehensible) within the signifying system that gives all objects, even seemingly natural bodies, meaning. In place of the body as a medium is the body as a discursive space,



"a set of boundaries, individual and social, politically signified and maintained."<sup>11</sup> The body is not acted on by culture or inscribed, but enacts the attributes, gestures, and styles that produce its abiding gendered self.<sup>12</sup>

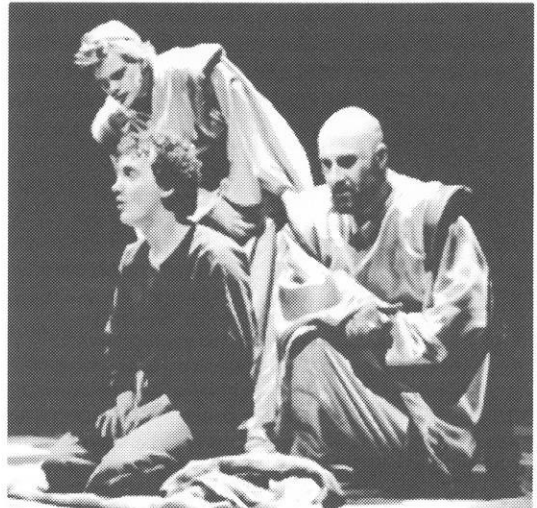
The notion of the body as a discursive space accords with Rosi Braidotti's formulations of the body as a "site." For Braidotti, the body is a spatial frame in which subjectivity, in all its multiplicity, complexity, and variability, is rooted. For Braidotti, the body is neither biological nor sociological, but the site for the interplay of a number of discursive formations. The body is "a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the material social conditions" that position the subject in culture.<sup>13</sup> Pragmatically for what Braidotti refers to as a — politics of location — the body is sexually differentiated, and also differentiated through class, race, age, and other social divisions. For Braidotti too, the body is connected to the rhizomatic network of interconnections in which subjectivity is multiple.

These varying and conflicting notions of the body set the scene for an invigorated reading of the body in performance. Whilst I favor the more active theorizations of the body as a construction and as a location, the notion of the body as text takes on a particular meaning in the analysis of performance. In so far as the body, in the *mise-en-scene* of performance, incorporates multiple layers of construction, including the textual, the notion of the body as a text does not suggest that the body of the performer is only a medium for the performance. The body in performance wears costume, moves in space and time, sweats and tires, performs actions and speaks — it activates signification at the level of visible corporeality and palpable energy. It is apparent that the female actor is not a passive medium, but one who brings her will and artistry to the self-inscription of her body. This self-inscription is undertaken for display purposes and to make social and political points. The body in performance is a complex network of signification that has the potential to operate at each of the levels outlined above.

The body in theatrical performance can be enlarged through the application of these non-Brechtian and non-performance-based discourses. While Brecht saw the body as *gestic* and accorded

the actions of the body an important status in the dramatic work, it was always driven by a proper consciousness. The Brechtian political mind is prior to and determines the attitude and mien of the body. What happens when the body is also shaped by discourses outside the text?

The conventional interpretation of the gods in



*The Good Person of Sichuan* is that they are pathetic representations of Christianity. They are traditionally dressed in long white robes and beards, like Biblical prophets and elderly patriarchs. They were a critique of the enduring power of the Christian Churches in the Weimar Republic, which, despite its social democratic origins, was still dominated by the conservative values and vested interests of the military-industrial alliances of which the church was its increasingly (in)human face. Volker Klotz saw them as a personification of bourgeois conscience. The bourgeois conscience, he explained, appeases itself with small gifts of charity while it accommodates itself to the status quo for fear that any change might lead to revolution.<sup>14</sup> In this reading the gods' gift to Shen Te is a paltry offering which appeases their conscience and turns the prostitute into the good person they seek in order to prove to themselves that it is possible to do good in the world they have created. The gods are comic figures whose ineptitude with earthly matters comments on the inappropriateness of Christianity in



the modern age. Rather than supporting humanity, they feed off it and have been doing so for some time.

Brecht's gods are a very good example of the difference history can make. The robed and long-bearded figures now appear as two dimensional clichés rather than parody. With the decline of Christianity as a state power since the time of the play's writing, the original critique has lost much of its sting, and its staging becomes problematic. The gods have lost the historical context through which they were estranged; numerous films including Wim Wender's *Wings of Desire* (Berlin 1988) have played with the fantasy of the meeting of the divine and the everyday. The spectator is not so easily surprised by unworldly beings who observe the world of people.

However, emphasis on the gods as corporeal rather than abstract or symbolic figurations is not entirely at odds with the Brechtian text in which there are several references to the gods' physicality. In the Prologue, Wang hopes to recognize the gods through their physical appearance. He imagines that their shoulders will not be bowed from carrying heavy loads, nor will their fingers be inky from working the presses. He picks three figures from the crowd who are well-nourished, bear no trace of any occupation, and have dust on their shoes and decides that these are the corporeal signs of godliness. The gods' physicality is *gestic*, linked to and indicative of their social position. Their progress through the dramatic fable is marked on their bodies — one has a black eye, another an injured foot, and signs of increasing exhaustion indicate the hopelessness of their earthly mission. For Brecht, the body is primarily an index sign of social status. A focus on the body is not necessarily at odds with the Brechtian text, rather it is the focus on the gods' gendered corporeality that is different.

Brecht's Wang is also a socially constructed dramatic figure. He represents the body of the marginal social type who ekes out a living on the edges of society. It is only towards the end of the play that he ventures into the space occupied by the people of Sichuan. Prior to that, the text stipulates that his space is at the edge of the city, along riverbanks and in sewer pipes, and he inhabits dream landscapes. He expects to suffer from the blows, both literal and symbolic, that life dishes out. As a

marginal figure, Wang eludes the strict binaries of sexual difference and represents a sexually indeterminate body. He has no sexual, emotional, or familial relations with any of the characters in the dramatic text. He is not an obviously male fabrication like Shui Ta, nor is he read as a sexualized male body by Shen Te. He does not play the male with other male characters such as Yang Sun, Shu Fu, the Carpenter, or the male members of the Family of Eight.

From the position of marginality, Wang serves a number of fictional and dramaturgical functions through which he/she derives power as a character. He is sufficiently detached or estranged from the dramatic world to take on narrative functions. He embodies a degree of objectivity about the social world. Hovering along the rails and borders of the city, he meets the gods, and the first speech is an exposition setting up the dramatic world of Sichuan and the situation, the arrival of the gods. He then acts as mediator, messenger, and servant to the gods. Later on, when Shui Ta appears to have taken over the Tobacco Shop and Shen Te has seemingly disappeared, Wang acts as the catalyst forcing the dramatic events to their (unresolved) ending.

In our performance, the female Wang emphasizes the gender indeterminacy of the original and acquires an additional level of gender ambiguity as an effect of the spectator's expectation of a male body for the character. The unexpected appearance

of an ambiguously gendered Wang, in addition to the equally unexpected female gods, draws attention to theatrical bodies in the space. Focus on the bodies undermines the conventional representation of the characters and sets in motion an alternative-bodied text, which tells a story about gender. In the text Wang appears at the beginning of the play and introduces himself to the audience.



He/she is given a choreographed entrance so that the spectator has time to read the character through the body before the introduction of the verbal text. The wordless sequence begins with Wang running up the stairs from the below-stage dressing rooms, through the space and across to the downstage right tap. The entrance establishes her bodily image and presence: the body is slightly built, she takes small steps, she is barefooted and moves quickly but with her back bent underneath the various water containers — buckets, watering cans, plastic bottles — hanging from the body. She is breathless from her run and stands a moment to catch her breath. She slowly and shyly lifts her gaze from the ground to the spectator. As she catches her breath by the tap, the spectator sees a young woman dressed in bright green trousers and a multi-colored striped, short-sleeved shirt. Traces of the male character linger in Wang's language and attach to the actor's female form, but this is also partly due to the actor who performs the part.<sup>15</sup> She has strung a worn laborer's pouch around her waist in which she carries personal belongings and professional tools. She has short, black, slightly wavy hair. When she speaks, she has a soft, nervous voice. She looks sideways as she speaks, in the manner of a person who is always on the look out for adversity. Her demeanor is that of someone who is always running from or towards superior beings. She is a bit simple, supplicating and eager to impress.

Elizabeth Grosz has said that body-image is an important component of subjectivity and is in a continuous process of production and transformation. For the actor who understands the body as a site for the complex interplay of actor and dramatic character, the creation of an alternative body image for the character assists in marking the points of difference (and similarity) between the two. The actor playing Wang creates a body-image for the character so that the spectator reads the character's body on her body. The body-image is invested with the character's attributes through the material objects chosen for the character and worn or carried on and by the body. In the space of performance, body-image and with it, subjectivity, both the character's and the actor's, become fluid, changeable, and capable of transformation. The fluidity of the body-image occurs as it comes into

contact with external objects. Grosz comments that anything that comes into contact with the surface of the body and remains there long enough will be incorporated into the body-image — clothing, jewelry, other bodies, objects. They mark the body, its gait, posture, position, etc. (temporarily or more or less permanently), by marking the body-image: subjects do not walk the same way or have the same posture when they are naked as when they wear clothing.<sup>16</sup>

The actor has built her character from old clothing and objects found around her own home, including her father's garage. Placed in contact with her body, her body is re-marked according to the additional signification, but also changed as it incorporates the objects, which alter the gait etc. Each object has a history which she embodies as a theatrical example of the way in which "every body is marked by the history and specificity of its existence."<sup>17</sup> For example, the worn laborer's pouch had been her father's and carries traces of the migrant story — the actor's father migrated from southern Italy in the 1950s and worked as a laborer. The actor draws on the family narrative of migration, available to her through objects such as the pouch to create a Wang whose marginalization in Sichuan, she imagines, is similar to the migrant's experience in a new country. The actor's own position as law student at a prestigious university gives her a distance from the situation of the character and the family history, and so the character embodies both the similarities and differences. Her distance from the character is marked by the realization that she will have to cut her manicured fingernails to fit the body-image of the fictional Wang. Her familiarity allows her to embody the attitude of marginality in the hesitant way she occupies the space.

The actor's performance in the Prologue is built around her constantly moving body. Throughout the performance, she appears and disappears in short interludes, crossing the space as a body intent on being invisible. A history of violence, beatings, correction, and training is inscribed on Wang's body and is particularly evident in the interactions with the gods. The performer bows, supplicates, and tries to placate the gods, creating a comic image of the "docile body," the "regulated body practiced at and habituated to the

rules of cultural life."<sup>18</sup>

The gods, on the other hand, represent three differently marked bodies. The conventional reading of the gods as a critique of Christianity is enlivened by the application of a more recent discourse concerning the symbolism of gods. Deleuze's notion of gods as having fixed attributes and codes and as marking boundaries offers another possibility within the context of *The Good Person of Sichuan*: gods have fixed attributes, properties and functions, territories and codes they have to do with rails, boundaries, and surveys.<sup>19</sup>

Recalling that the gods appear in the Prologue and the final scene, they mark the beginning and end of the play. They also appear in a number of interludes, in the spaces between the episodes which constitute the play's fable. They are positioned both inside the fable and outside it. They mark the boundaries of the fable by ranging around its borders, surveying its territories, and discoursing with other marginal social types, such as Wang and Shen Te the Prostitute. They provide the fable with its starting-point, its interludes, and its completion. The fable is enclosed within their borders. That the gods become increasingly disheveled as they make crossings over the border from the realm beyond into the territory of the everyday world, signals that their fixed attributes make them ill-suited to the fluid and changeable state of the world. The fixity of the gods' attributes and properties as metaphysical, literary, and cultural signifiers makes them resistant to the flow of the performance.

If the gods are understood as boundary markers, then as female, there is a change in their signification. As female boundary markers, they offer a gendered reading of the fixing of codes, attributes, properties, and functions. The relation between the gods as agents of control and regulation, and the feminine as the product of culturally regulated codes, styles, and practices is brought into relief in the space of the performance.

The first god plays on the elevated status of the divine in the earthly world, but is engaged nevertheless in a struggle with corporeality and its maintenance. The body of the performer becomes a locus for and an enactment of the body as a site for the interplay of competing and contradictory discourses. Draped in a diaphanous white

cheesecloth gown which is topped by an enormous headdress and carrying her own make-up bag, she is a parody of the great goddess. The headdress is adorned with signs of the pagan goddess — crystals, beads, and stylized deer antlers from which hangs more diaphanous cloth. It also evokes the cultural and religious use of the veil for female religious subjects. The deer antlers mimic primitive objects of worship, mythical notions of the horned god, and peasant women carrying twigs in baskets on their heads. She is transhistorical and transcultural, occupying multiple temporalities and referring to a range of composed images. The traces of the veil recall a history of covering the female head, claiming the body for religious, moral, and social institutions. The headdress also signifies primitivism and domesticity, the goddess and the essentialized peasant woman; it is comic, parodic, and grotesque. The headdress is also heavy, and the performer is acutely and uncomfortably aware of the weight on her head during the scenes in which she wears it. This adds to the performance a parodic representation of the performer's body as living and palpable, suffering, violated, and in extremity.

Images of female divinity, beauty, and domesticity and the discourses which support them gradually lose their grip on the body. The headdress is removed with great relief in the Prologue. In subsequent appearances the body has become increasingly enculturated to the new earthly situation. The god tries a cotton dress and running shoes and begins to shape the body for modern life. She begins to exercise and jog. She becomes the bush body in akubra and hat and finally leaves the space barefooted. The god learns that femininity is a matter of body-image and, as the custodian of fixed attributes, she is keen to adopt the appropriate body. The god enacts observed styles and gestures in order to make herself incarnate. The effort to compose and maintain the body points to the fabrication that demands ceaseless repetition. Beyond the boundaries of corporeality, there is no subject, and the god struggles to maintain visibility in order to inhabit the earthly world.

The second god is the most judgmental, morally high-minded, and uncompromising of the three. She is represented according to Susan Bordo's notion of the body as a medium of culture,

“a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced.”<sup>20</sup> Her long, black Victorian dress connotes a period of sexual repression masquerading as middle-class morality. The imposition of this code on the body is emphasized by the corset the actor wears and later reveals. The performer’s long hair is braided and wound around her head. For her first entrance, she has wound a length of calico cloth around the body, restricting leg, hip, and torso movement. The second god represents the incorporation, at the level of the body and at the level of subjectivity, of the regulatory codes of a morally repressive regime.

The cloth restricts the second god’s mobility. She moves with great difficulty, and the spectator sees a body that struggles against that which is inscribed on its surface and affects her movement, her attitude to the space and her difference from the other gods. Her other adornment is a key on a large metal keyring attached to her dress. She presents an image of a woman bound, of a body tied-up, contained, locked-up, and restrained. The key suggests that she has voluntarily submitted to the regime. The cloth wound tightly around the black Victorian dress encloses a body that must be restrained from its own biology: its excesses, its disposition towards hysteria, its inclination towards insanity, its capacity for moral weakness and, more dangerously, its suppressed anger. Sally Shuttleworth’s study of representations of menstruation in the mid-Victorian era shows the strong connection made between women’s reproductive biology and mental health. One example from a report by Dr. J. G. Millingen, a resident at the Middlesex Lunatic Asylum at Hanwell, England, entitled *The Passions; or Mind and Matter* (1848), states: “If the corporeal agency is thus powerful in man, its tyrannic influence will more frequently cause the misery of the gentler sex. Woman, with her exalted spiritualism, is more forcibly under the control of matter; her sensations are more vivid and acute, her sympathies more irresistible. She is less under the influence of the brain than the uterine system, the plexi of abdominal nerves, and irritation of the spinal cord; in her, a hysteric predisposition is incessantly predominating from the dawn of puberty.”<sup>21</sup>

Shuttleworth reads medical discourse on the body in terms of the twin notions of woman as angel and demon. As a figure of restraint she has civilizing power, but as a victim of the body’s excess she represents radical instability. The calico cloth is an exaggeration and caricature of the restraint both desired by and imposed on the female body that matches in hyperbole the language of the attitude it reflects. The second god embodies the duality of the feminine with its fixed and unfixed attributes.

Susan Bordo’s reading of the hysteric as an exaggeration of another related Victorian attitude toward woman is also relevant to the performance. Bordo reads “the dissociations of hysteria, the drifting and fogging of perception, the nervous tremors and faints, the anaesthesias, and the extreme mutability of symptomatology” as a subversive embodiment of the feminine mystique of the ethereal lady.<sup>22</sup> The second god developed a “You want restraint? I’ll give you restraint!”, the price of which filled her character with bitterness, irritability, and impatience. Her restraint is shown to be a response to corporeal inscription. The cloth is both stylus and text, the means and expression of her anger. Deleuze speaks of delirium — which is not all that different from hysteria — as going off the rails. It is related to the line of flight, creative leap that transgresses established codes and conventions and is a creative response to an impossible situation. Where gods stay on the rails (they have to do with rails, boundaries, and properties), going off the rails, as in delirium or hysteria, is demonic. This aspect of hysteria was not lost on Victorian doctors who branded its exponents as morally lax, but Deleuze is characteristically affirmative about abnormality. For Deleuze, the demonic jump across borders brings about change, while gods mark out the boundaries and maintain the status quo. One is revolutionary and the other conservative.<sup>23</sup>

Applied to the performance, the second god embodies restraint and repressed anger as the cost of staying on the rails. Deleuze’s opposition between gods and demons, between reason and madness, conformity and rebellion, loyalty and betrayal, suggests the dual constitution of the god. Played as female, the second god carries the dual signification of the boundary marker and the delirious hysteric. The character is destabilized through the added

signification of the female body. The second god as female is energized by the struggle to keep control over her and others' physical matter — the performer presents a body "whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, improvement."<sup>24</sup> Yet this conforming body has not completely suppressed the outburst. This is not to endorse representations of the female as hysteric, but to tap into the subversive possibilities of going off the rails. When her earthly experiences begin to take a toll on her nerves and she appears unbuttoned, unbraided, and corseted, her dress half torn off in her efforts to stay on the rails, she reveals not a demon or the hysteric but a body in transit, ranging across the space. The more she traverses the space over time, the further she departs from the normalized docile body. She is no longer a god marking out boundaries but a deterritorialized subject. The figuration of the feminine as a subjectivity in transit, looking for and finding points of exit from the phallogocentric text — whether Brechtian, Biblical, or Christian — is produced by the second god.

By way of contrast, the third god is covered by a large piece of calico drapery, so that she appears as a draped statue. She signifies the absence of a visible body. The space marked by the cloth is the space of her absence. As the body moves around the performance space, signs rearrange themselves on the body covered in calico. The body begins to appear as a location for signification. The calico, again, functions as a materialization of the body as a text, as a cultural surface across which signification moves. Each move creates a new image, with each one building on and enriching the other. When she stands with her back to the audience and spreads out her arms, she becomes a tent pitched on the desert-colored floor of the stage; as she squats on the floor, she becomes a surrealist shape in a sparse landscape. As she peeks out at the world, she is a face in a cloth. The transformations on the body of the third god point to the interplay of presence and absence on the performer and work to de-essentialize the body as an anatomical construct. The performance presents the body as neither biological nor representational, but fluid. The third god conceals corporeality but retains a presence in the space and does not stand in for an absent subject.

Rather, the body is a site for shifting images which are connected to the performer's body (she moves and the cloth moves) and disconnected (she has no idea how she looks).

When the moment comes for her to discard the drapery, a body appears in the space of its absence and it is suddenly a female body already dressed in a long white skirt and white cotton blouse. The text has been written on with costume. She becomes the historical, white European woman, the nineteenth-century traveler in strange and exotic territories that mark the borders of the civilized world. Just like a god on earth, she is out of place and ill-dressed for the place.

The covering of the third god in the drapery created a sensual, voluminous stage figure. At the same time, the image refers to the way patriarchal culture hides the female body under purdah or requires it to wear long sleeves, cover hair, and abide by codes of modesty in dress and behavior. The body of the third god is initially hidden from view. Only after she has entered the space does she shed her cover. Then it reveals another layer of cover, the long skirt and sleeves of the nineteenth century.

In the final scene, Wang is the only one who knows that the three new judges are the gods in disguise. Her body stands taller as it savors the information. This knowledge, which in the Brechtian text is between gods and men, becomes women's knowledge in our production. In this courtroom scene, concealment and disclosure are played out on the bodies of the gods masquerading as judges and Shen Te masquerading as Shui Ta. The female characters play with the borders of gender and identity. Disguise, concealment, and conspiracy are dispersed among the female characters as each tries to maneuver her way around the impossible situation set out for them by the play's narrative. This is not to reinforce the stereotype of the female as deceptive and duplicitous, the unreliable signifier, nor of her body as the site of deception. Rather, Wang, the gods, and Shen Te/Shui Ta appropriate the play of signification in the performance and embody a critique of the fixed identity. From such a position, their texts become transient, provisional, open, and subject to change.



This article has focused on the feminine body as a counter text to the Brechtian official or root-book. The bodies presented by the performers told a fragmented and transhistorical narrative of the construction of the female body. It is variously inscribed by medical discourse, constituted by weighty and symbolic visual images, and textualized as a medium of culture. However, it is also apparent that the notion of the body as a site for the interplay of cultural discourse takes on additional meaning in performance when the agency of the performer is considered. The performer's energy, artistry, and mobilization of theatrical convention means that the interplay of cultural discourse does not occur on the passive body. The second god shows the struggle to achieve the docile body, practiced and habituated to the rules of cultural life. The interplay between a repressive cultural inscription and a more enabling emancipatory text is played out on her body. The body is not only marked by the movement of these texts across its surface, but it produces points of resistance and incorporation. The actor winds the cloth around her body and then unwinds it. She inscribes and erases. The interplay of textual material at the site of the body is also shown to relate to a changing feminine subjectivity, from an ordered and passive inscriptive surface to one that has gone off the rails, her future unwritten.

Reading the performance through the bodies of the performers and through theories of the body connects Brecht's plays to more contemporary concerns with corporeality and subjectivity. Rejecting the political and social text and sidestepping the question of *Verfremdungseffekt* and *Gestus* allow for a re-invigoration of the performance through the politics and discourse of gender. This reading of the performance (while not entirely outside the frame of Brechtian theatre and to which the frequent references to the body in Brecht's writing bear witness) connects Brecht to discourses that are strange and foreign to his work. It positions Brecht within a more rhizomatic network of discourses, where no one discourse is placed at the top of the hierarchy. Focus on the body displaces the social construction of dramatic character and foregrounds the actor in the present as a producer of signification that is historically removed from Brecht and his times. It also displaces the centrality of the Brechtian fable, sending out lateral lines of

signification that do not return to the root-book by the end of the performance but continue through subsequent analysis and debate.

## Endnotes

1. This production used the National Theatre version (London, 1989). The National Theatre and its director, Deborah Warner, commissioned Michael Hofmann to translate the Santa Monica version (1943) of *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (1941). Bertolt Brecht, *The Good Person of Szechuan*, Trans. By Michael Hofmann (London: Methuen, 1989). All subsequent references to the play refer to this text.
2. Leander Haussmann, Leander cited in *Drive b:/ The Brecht Yearbook* 23 (1998), 11.
3. Stanton Garner, Jr., *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 1.
4. Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 82.
5. Grosz, VII.
6. Grosz, 141.
7. Susan Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault," in A. Jaggar and S. Bordo, *Gender/Body/Knowledge* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 13.
8. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. by C. Porter and C. Burke (Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 76.
9. Bordo, 16.
10. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 8.
11. Butler, 33.
12. Butler, 140.
13. Rosi Braidotti, "Toward a New Nomadism: Feminist Deleuzian Tracks; or, Metaphysics and Metabolism," in C. Boundas and D. Olkowski, eds. *Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 161.
14. Volker Klotz, *Bertolt Brecht: Versuch über das Werk* (Darmstadt: Hermann Gentner Verlag, 1957), 18.
15. Four years after this production a photograph depicting Wang and Shen Te in the Prologue hangs on the wall outside the drama studio. Present day students have spent considerable time speculating on the gender of the actor who played Wang. There are equally strong opinions for both genders. Some point to the cheekbones as evidence of femaleness and others counter that the arm is masculine. Gender attribution is indeed a fluid and context dependent business.
16. Grosz, 80.
17. Grosz, 142.
18. Bordo, 13.
19. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*. Trans. by

H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), 40.

20. Bordo, 13.

21. Sally Shuttleworth, "Medical Discourse and Popular Advertising in the Mid-Victorian Era," in Jacobus, Fox Keller, and Shuttleworth, eds. *Body Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 55.

22. Bordo, 17.

23. Deleuze and Parnet, 40.

24. Deleuze and Parnet, 14.

*University of Melbourne, Australia*

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## **GALILEO AT THE BERKELEY REP**

*Mark de la Viña*

No one will confuse a compass with a double helix or the Age of Reason with the age of genetics, but in the realm of theater, they're perfect bunk mates.

In the fiercely theatrical continuum of playwright Bertolt Brecht, the perpetual struggle against ignorance and closed-mindedness and the resistance to scientific research link the 20th century to the 17th. Brecht also nods to the class struggle and liberally sprinkles his work with the hope that humans can rise above their fear of change. Such thematic layering is part of what makes *The Life of Galileo*, the season opener at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre, such a richly engrossing, epic drama.

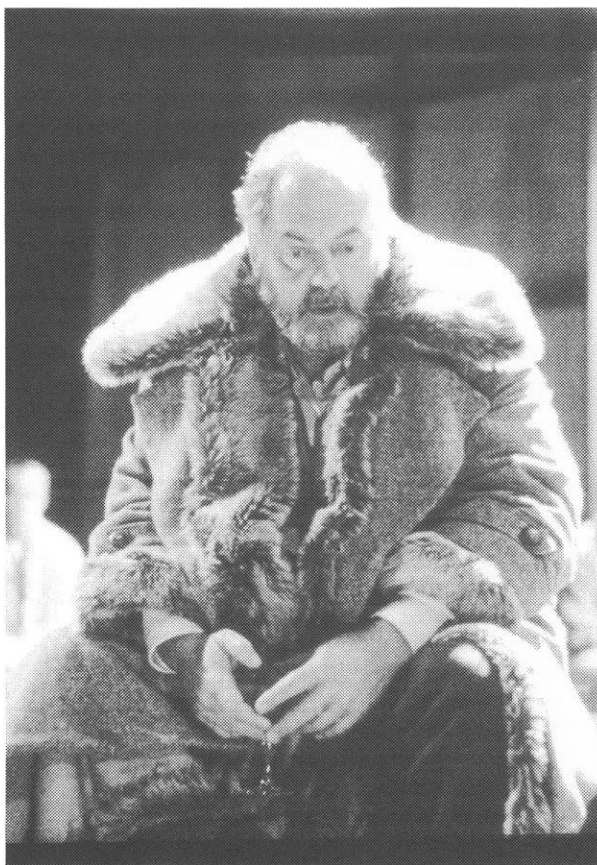
In a new translation by David Hare, *Galileo* is

updated in a way that makes recent genetic breakthroughs resonate with the Italian scientist's work. The pioneer physicist and astronomer — who proved that the sun, rather than Earth, was at the center of the solar system — faced extreme opposition from the Roman Catholic Church, whose assumptions his discovery challenged. Brecht uses Galileo's struggle on behalf of reason as mirror of 20th-century struggles — against European fascism, anti-communist witch hunts and Western culture's fascination with the trivial.

Though packed with heavy messages, *Galileo* is an exciting, pleasurable evening of theater, which makes intellectual connections we may not have made ourselves.

Directed with blazing inventiveness by Mark Wing-Davey, *Galileo* closes a circle for Berkeley Rep: This play was the first staged at the company's current home, now it opens the final season before the Rep moves to its new theater next door.

And it features many longtime Rep players, including Michael Winters (last seen here in *Man and Superman*, 1989) in the title role. Winters' performance is a textbook example of understatement. His driven, whimsical discoverer just wants to do his work and experience the thrill of finding truth. Winters plays Galileo less as an iconoclast than as a man driven by a hunger for logic. He is wonderfully frustrated when he can't persuade a group of closed-minded scholars to look at the moons of Jupiter through his telescope. And he is vexedly condescending toward his simple, religiously inclined daughter, Virginia. Winters' performance brings a sublime, though flawed, humanity to a mythic figure. The large ensemble cast features some of the best actors in the Bay Area. Ken Ruta (*Heartbreak House*, 1996) plays the Cardinal Inquisitor with a slow-burning patriarchal menace. Amy Mordecai's Virginia seems to slowly unravel as her father's conflict with the authorities deepens. Chanting the rosary in Latin while Galileo recants his discovery, she beautifully illustrates Virginia's submission to the status quo. Eli Marienthal, perhaps the best child actor in the area, plays Galileo's inquisitive assistant, Andrea. Campo Santo regular Sean San Jose is the earnest yet



wavering Little Monk. And L. Peter Callender (American Conservatory Theater's *Tartuffe*) brings the pragmatic Cardinal Barbarini to life.

Like the polymath Brecht, Wing-Davey has used every bit of inventive staging that designer Douglas Stein could devise: an elevator platform that rises to create a table or bench, or to lift a group of actors; video footage from an Italian TV game show; a disco ball; a border station with mechanical arms that raise and lower. Christopher Akerlind's versatile lighting design can highlight or obliterate a character, as needed. Meg Nelville's costumes conjure a timeless mood by mixing contemporary working-class duds with Vatican finery from the 1600s.

Rather than overwhelm the drama, the stagecraft and skillful acting make for thrilling theater. Brecht at times might be heavy-handed, but this production reminds us that he wrote timeless treasures, which will survive long after human genes have been completely mapped.

(*San Jose Mercury News*, Sept. 24, 1999)

## THREEPENNY OPERA IN SAN FRANCISCO

Robert Hurwitt

Bebe Neuwirth stands in a stark spotlight in front of the tawdry, frayed red curtain, her thin face framed in a thick black mane that cascades over her tail coat and slit red mini. She plants her stiletto-heeled feet and sheer-stockinged long legs well apart and simply, matter-of-factly launches into "Moritat," the justly famed "Ballad of Mack the Knife."

Her stunning voice — overmiked as it is — rings out clear, raw, insistent and penetrating with a feral vibrato that broadcasts the emotional resonance her formal stance and delivery belie. She sings Bertolt Brecht's sardonic catalogue of Macheath's career of rape, murder, robbery and mayhem investing every note of Kurt Weill's melody with perfect phrasing and rising, irresistible intensity.

By the time she's finished, you not only know Carey Perloff's ACT season opener is going to be a smash success, you understand all over again why *The Threepenny Opera* is the definitive musical



drama of the 20th century. And that's just the opening, before musical director Peter Maleitzke's hot onstage jazz sextet has swung into the overture. Two hours and 40 minutes later, as Neuwirth sings the bitterly downbeat coda, those feelings remain intact.

Not that *Threepenny* is foolproof. Brecht and Weill wrote their 1928 masterpiece specifically for singing actors rather than trained musical voices. But many a revival has foundered on inept musicianship, onstage or in the pit (the original featured the Lewis Ruth Band, one of Germany's top jazz groups) — if not on sloppy stagings, bad acting or misconceived direction.

Perloff's *Threepenny* which opened Wednesday, September 8, at the Geary Theatre, falls

into none of these traps. Michael Feingold's translation, revised from his 1989 Broadway version, is sharp, lucid and almost as biting as Brecht's German. The musicianship is brilliant on every hand. Perloff's staging is crisp, clear and brightly original.

And the cast she's assembled is quite simply the finest I've seen since the *Threepenny* that turned me into a lifelong theater devotee, the 1950s Off Broadway Theater de Lys production with which Lotte Lenya — Weill's widow and Brecht's original Jenny — helped revive Weill's reputation and re-establish the play as a contemporary classic.

It's a cast made up of equal parts Broadway veterans — Neuwirth, Philip Casnoff, Lisa

Vrohman, Nancy Dussault — ACT regulars (Steven Anthony Jones, Anika Noni Rose, Charles Lanyer, Dan Hiatt), other local actors and students from ACT's MFA and Young Conservatory programs.

Perloff weaves their talents into a seamless ensemble full of outstanding performances.

Not to mention a stunning blend of diverse, complementary performance styles: Neuwirth's confrontational Weimar cabaret stance; Dussault's deft vaudeville turns; Casnoff's disarming soft-shoe hooper grace; Vroman's operatic flourishes and silent-movie melodrama gestural eloquence; Rose's romantic ingenue underlaid with lusty burlesque. It's a range reflective of the eclectic sources for both the score and the script.

Weill matched Brecht's eclecticism with a score that blended American jazz and Lutheran hymns, German cabaret and English music hall, high and light opera and other influences, including one entire song from Gay — whose own score had been entirely composed of popular English tunes. It's a script and score that could make a post-modernist scholar dizzy analyzing layers of borrowing. But it takes no expertise whatsoever to revel in the play's still-astonishing freshness, bite and beauty.

Perloff, wisely, lets the play speak for itself, making only minor adjustments — far less radical than Brecht was wont to do with his own productions. True, she sticks Moritat out front, before the overture, and gives it to Jenny instead of the usual streetsinger. But Neuwirth, a memorable Velma in Broadway's recent *Chicago* (as well as *Cheers*), provides a blistering vivid rendition that fully justifies the change.

Feingold, theater critic for the *Village Voice*, has cut the text and songs some. But he's restored the songs to their original order and characters (though Perloff has Neuwirth's Jenny double gloriously with Rose's Polly Peachum on a resonant, searing "Pirate Jenny.")







Some of the translation undercut Brecht's humor, particularly in the rousing "Canon Song," but most capture the crisp clarity of Brecht's wit.

Perloff and choreographer Luis Perez infuse the show with a brisk, engaging energy that only flags a bit in the middle of the second act. Annie Smart's set — a two-story, distressed brick shell of an opera house, as if after an earthquake — and

turn-of-the-century costumes establish the vaguely San Francisco-ish milieu of Perloff's version.

The performers turn in one show-stopping rendition after another, giving the songs the intensified focus and self-conscious theatricality Brecht demanded. Dussault is outstanding as the tipsy, resourceful Mrs. Peachum, pairing brilliantly with Jones' gruff, booming, sanctimonious baritone on the Peachums' beggar shop duets. With resonant whiskey-tinged voice and deft sight gags, she turns the "Ballad of the Prisoner of Sex" into a hilarious solo turn of sardonic wit and delightful ribaldry. Vroman is outstanding as Lucy Brown both in a stunning vocal face-off "Jealousy Duet," with Rose's Polly and her superb, diabolically melodramatic "Lucy's Aria." Rose is sweetly touching and brightly lusty in her love duets with Casnoff and in her delightful "Barbara Song" about lost innocence. Above all, Neuwirth's Jenny and Casnoff's Machheath set the tone — she with her sharp, combative watchfulness, he with the murderous impulse not quite concealed beneath his song and dance grace. Neuwirth is as outstanding in her cynical "Solomon Song" as in the "Moritat" and "Pirate Jenny." Casnoff, too, sings beautifully, rendering Machheath's great paeans to corruption and soulful gallows hymns with dynamic intensity. And their tango duet ("Pimp's Ballad") is stunning in its erotic electricity and vicious execution. Its altogether a brilliant production.

As Neuwirth sings its acute final verses — about a society divided between those who walk in the light and "those in darkness lost to sight" — it's hard to leave the Geary without a deeper awareness of the social injustices so evident in the surrounding streets.

(*San Francisco Examiner*, September 9, 1999)

# BRECHT ON ACTING FOR THE 21st CENTURY: INTERROGATING AND RE-INScribing THE FIXED

Meg Mumford

As a spect/actor and teacher/learner facing the twenty-first century, I would argue that one aspect of Brecht's approach to acting that will leap with us into the new century is his *desire* to interrogate seemingly fixed ways of organizing, viewing and representing the world. By 'fixed,' I mean treated as 'given,' 'natural,' 'normal,' 'familiar,' 'assumed to be true' and thus 'unquestionably perpetuated.' Something fixed is closed, supposedly complete within itself and thus exclusive. The desire to 'unfix' permeates Brecht's attempt to demonstrate through theatre practice *how, why* and *for whom* certain behaviours, relations and representations are constructed AND the mutability of such constructs. Given our position within an age of information technology and world-wide bureaucratization, characterized by an expanding welter of images, sign systems and organizational patterns, I would predict that Brecht's interrogative endeavour will remain a source of inspiration for interrogative theatre of the immediate future.

Likewise, the shortcomings of Brecht's questioning, the moments when in *unfixing* one oppressive structure he asserts another, is also an important legacy. In our post-Brecht age marked by the 'global expansion of capitalism and its more dispersed social struggles,'<sup>1</sup> a dispersal manifest in the proliferation of marginalized groups not adequately represented within a Marxist class-oriented framework, Brecht's interrogations begin to appear problematically *fixated* around a limited number of so-called 'fundamental' oppositions - such as that between forces and relations of production, or between wage-labour and capital. The exclusive nature of Brecht's structural analyses have been challenged on many fronts from the post-structuralist to the materialist feminist. Here I want to explore some of the possibilities and limitations of Brecht's assault on fixatures by looking at two acting strategies central to his interruptive theatre. The strategies are, firstly, the 'fixing of the "not-but"' and secondly the dialectical

interplay of opposites.

## PART ONE:

**Fixing the 'Not-But':** In her article "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Genetic Feminist Criticism," Elin Diamond describes Brecht's theory of the 'not-but' as "keeping differences in view instead of conforming to stable representations of identity, and linking those differences to a practical politics."<sup>2</sup> One of Brecht's most lucid descriptions of the theory and its application in practice occurs in his 'Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Estrangement Effect':

When reading his part the actor's attitude should be one of a man who is astounded and contradicts. Not only the occurrence of the incidents, as he reads about them, but the conduct of the man he is playing, as he experiences it, must be weighed up by him and their peculiarities understood; none can be taken as given, ... When he appears on the stage, besides what he actually is doing he will at all essential points discover, specify, imply what he is not doing; that is to say he will act in such a way that the alternative emerges as clearly as possible, that his acting allows the other possibilities to be inferred and only represents one out of the possible variants. He will say for instance 'You'll pay for that', and not say 'I forgive you'.... Whatever he doesn't do must be contained and conserved in what he does. In this way every sentence and every gesture signifies a decision; the character remains under observation and is tested."<sup>3</sup>

Diamond argues that the application of the 'not-but' to characterization is a translation into practice of the Derridean deconstruction of identity. This is because the 'not-but' interrupts the assumed wholeness and *a priori* givenness of identity by supplying the trace of repressed choices and actions. The *fixed* monolithic unitary self or any hegemonic mode of being -- like gendered identity -- is transformed into a contradictory and multiple subject-in-process. The target of the estranging eye is not only fixed concepts but the discursive representations through which they are perpetuated. For example, 'not-but' acting 'unveils' the absences of the Stanislavskian system, the way it manufactures an image of coherent identity through a teleological

flow of actions, which erase discontinuous contradictions. The 'not-but's' celebration of difference is crucial to a politics of change and human agency, for as Brecht puts it in "A Short Organum for the Theatre," it encourages the spect/actor to learn to look with estranging eyes, to view the familiar as if it were a "rough sketching which indicates traces of other movements and features all around the fully-worked-out figure."<sup>4</sup> This act of complex seeing both transforms perceptions and shows the human subject and its world as capable of manipulation.

In practice at the Berliner Ensemble the 'not-but' was often achieved through the following three practices: (1) presentation of contradictory comportments through montage and tableaux; (2) the splitting of the socially critical actor from the character and (3) various forms of cross-casting (cross type, generation and gender). All of these methods disrupt the performance convention of iconicity, a 'fixture' which, by merging the character with the actor who lives in the present-time on the stage, suppresses the historical nature and multiplicity of actor and character alike in favour of a policy of eternal sameness. When I first began to observe these 'not-but' practices in the model books and the rehearsal notes held in the Brecht-Archiv, I thought I might find a realization of the palimpsestic sketching that Brecht describes. Instead I was struck by the congealment of traces into a carefully choreographed and legible grid of socially significant oppositions. There was something closed about the performed structure of opposition, as if the promise of offering up multiple options had been replaced by a presentation of 'the' alternative, the 'socially efficacious' way of behaving, the 'better' social solution. I'll try and explain what I mean by drawing on two examples of 'not-but' practices that occurred in the Berliner Ensemble productions of *Mother Courage and her Children*.

**Contradictory Comportments:** In the *Mother Courage* productions the 'not-but' often took the form of contradictory comportments. I am thinking of the disjuncture between Courage's damning of the war in scene 6 after her daughter has been attacked and disfigured while out collecting canteen supplies, abruptly followed by Courage's song of praise to war and celebratory march-like striding beside a richly stocked canteen wagon in scene 7; or

of the juxtaposition in the tableau of scene 5 which contrasts the figure of Courage diving into the wagon with her war booty — a stolen coat, and Katrin holding her war booty aloft — a child rescued from a war-torn farmhouse.<sup>5</sup>

**Actor/Character Split:** The not-but strategy was also realized through the split between critical actor and character that occurred during Weigel's presentation of the lullaby Courage sings over Katrin's dead body. In keeping with Brecht's warning that the lullaby was to be regarded *not* sentimentally *but* as based on a murderous outlook, Weigel used the song as a vehicle to criticize the narrow mindedness, the concern for one's own family regardless of the cost to society at large behind Courage's profit-seeking involvement in the war. One trick Weigel employed to bring out Courage's selfishness was the light emphasizing of the word 'you' in lines such as "Neighbour's babes walk in rags/And *you* wear silk cut from an angel's skirt," or "Neighbours don't have a crumb/ And *you* have a cake." Brecht argued that this repeated emphasis helped to defamiliarize Courage's 'treacherous hope' that she could bring 'her' child and perhaps only 'her' child, safely through the war. In the 1960 film version, Weigel further defamiliarized Courage by playing her as blindly obtuse, with her lower lip pushed out in a stubborn expression, bending over Katrin on several occasions to check whether she was breathing. Weigel's portrayal underlined what Brecht described in his model book notes as her shock that the person she was depicting did not have the ability to learn.<sup>6</sup>

The various 'not-but' techniques applied in *Mother Courage* that I have glossed all reinforce the conflict between Courage's activities as a business-woman trading off war, or big business by other means, and as a mother trying to defend her children and self from the very war she perpetuates. Brecht and Weigel's staging of the fable indicates how they limited the character's options by repeatedly pointing to an ideal behaviour — in this case the humanitarian nurturing displayed by Katrin, a socially productive attitude that better lends itself to the creation of a less antagonistically contradictory environment. Both character and spectator are encouraged to view capitalism with estranging eyes and see that Courage's petit-bourgeois perpetuation of capitalist warfare and individualist ethics is a self-

defeating activity. In Brecht's historical practice of theatre, the disrupted individualist attitudes are replaced by the fixed communitarian notions of a Marxian framework. Of course, as at any theatre performance, the spectator may not engage in complex seeing and read the 'not-but', inserting their own variants instead. Indeed in the case of the character Mother Courage, Brecht was often frustrated by the spectator's inability to read the social significance of the 'not-but' contradictions. But my point here is not so much whether Brecht succeeded in limiting spectatorial interpretations so much as the extent to which the practitioners left the palimpsestic sketchings behind in their attempt to define the choices available to actor, character and spectator alike.

**Master of Meaning:** What I am arguing here — and my point has been made by commentators such as Roland Barthes and Heiner Müller, is that I find the disruptive potential of the 'not-but' sketchings to be curtailed by Brecht's structuring of oppositions in a way that asserts an ideal meaning through clarifying pictures. Through these pictures, Brecht hierarchically elevates the actor, director and spectator over the character as 'masters of socialist meaning,' suppressing other pictures in the process. I am aware that this argument has been challenged by Elin Diamond who counters the notion of a 'master of meaning' by arguing that in the Brechtian actor-character-spectator triad, the actor is not endowed with superiority for s/he is also fragmented, split into performing subject and critical demonstrator. Diamond asserts that while the demonstrator is "presumed to have superior knowledge in relation to an ignorant character from the past," the subject "herself remains as divided and uncertain as the spectators to whom the play is addressed." Here Diamond is referring to the way the subject is divided into the roles of actor and character, both of which she states will remain 'historical, processual and incomplete,' rather than simply disappearing behind one or the other.<sup>7</sup> However, I would argue that in both theory and practice, Brecht's triad tended to assert the demonstrator as the figure of authority, observing and testing the character and 'fixing' the 'not-but.'

On the theoretical side, this positioning is manifest in the way Brecht emphasizes the impor-

tance of the actor's responsibility to society, insisting that s/he "master our period's knowledge of human social life by joining in the war of the classes."<sup>8</sup> The actor's social responsibility is embodied in the moment when the actor supplements the empathetic approach to the character with the *Haltung* of social criticism. It was Brecht's hope that the spectator would identify with the actor and apply her critical *Haltung* to life. In addition, Brecht has little to say about the subject's display of those aspects of self which contradict or are different from those of the socialist 'master of meaning.'

The discussion of empathy recorded by Brecht during the 1953 *Katzgraben* rehearsals exemplifies this point at the 'practical' level. During the discussion Helene Weigel explained that when playing Courage in the final scene, particularly on the line "I must get back into business," her empathetic relationship with the character would be disrupted in part by her shock at Courage's inability to learn. In this case Weigel's response as an historical subject neatly corresponds with that of a socialist commentator. At no other point in the discussion are subject positions incompatible with a socialist outlook raised.<sup>9</sup>

## PART TWO:

**Hierarchical Opposites:** Brecht's assertion of the opposition between the demonstrator and demonstrated character brings me to the second strategy of unfixing within Brecht's theatre that I wish briefly to discuss: dialectical interplay. Particularly towards the end of his career, Brecht became increasingly aware of his interest in working with inclusive oppositions. Even before this period he had established a theatre that engaged with oppositions: demonstrator/ demonstrated character; observing/ doing; teaching/learning; instructing/ entertaining; literal mimesis/non-literal mimesis; diachronic fable/synchronic tableau and so on. This interest in opposition can be related to his dialectical conception of change as dependent on friction and to his notion of the inter-dependence and inter-connection of all things.

During his time at the Berliner Ensemble Brecht increased his theoretical musings on dialectics as well as working in practice on the dialectic between demonstration and empathy. At a theoretic-



cal level this work on dialectical theatre is expressed in the following statement from the 1954

"Appendices to the 'Short Organum':"

"The contradiction between acting (demonstration) and experience (empathy) is interpreted by the ignorant as if only one or the other appeared in the actor's work (as if the 'Short Organum' concentrated entirely on acting and the old tradition entirely on experience). In reality it is naturally a matter of two mutually antagonistic processes which unite themselves in the actor's work; ... Out of the struggle and tension between the two opposites ... the actor draws his real strength. The style in which the 'Short Organum' is written is partly to blame for this. It is misleading often thanks to a possibly over-impatient and over-exclusive concern with the 'principal side of the contradiction.'"<sup>10</sup>

In a footnote, Brecht cites Mao Tse-tung's article "On Contradiction" as the source of his statement about the 'principal side of the contradiction.' Mao cautions that while the 'principal side' is the major determinant, as in the example of the opposition between economic foundation and superstructure, Mao cautions that the dominant position is not to be regarded as a fixed state, for the principal and subordinate aspects of a contradiction "transform themselves into each other," often leading to a reversal in status.<sup>11</sup>

The year before this appendix was written, Brecht had been busy during rehearsals of *Katzgraben* working on the dialectic of demonstration and empathy in practice. For example, he told his actor Erwin Geschonneck to empathize more with the character he was playing, the wealthy farmer Großmann whose attitude provides the major obstacle to agricultural reform within the Katzgraben community. Apparently the actor had been giving only the criticism of the character and not the character itself. By exposing Großmann to constant ridicule, Geschonneck actually undermined the farmer's credibility as a threatening opponent in the class struggle. Brecht suggested that Geschonneck work on subjectively justifying his character by regarding him as an intelligent man and crafty negotiator who is only overturned by the new situation.<sup>12</sup>

The usefulness of the dialectical interplay between opposites as an 'unfixing' strategy is that it avoids the problems of exclusive separate entities.

However, what I find problematical in Brecht's dialectics is his hierarchical approach to oppositions, an approach expressed through the elevation of a 'principal side.' Deconstructionists and French feminists alike have alerted attention to the way hierarchical opposites such as masculine/feminine, elevate one of the terms while conceiving the second in relation to it as a negation, manifestation or disruption of the first. How such oppositions can be disrupted remains a vexed issue. Derrida posits a reversal of the prioritization which brings about change in the nature of both terms, displacing or resituating the original opposition. Brecht often performs such reversals — the demonstration/empathy dialectic which reverses the Stanislavskian or dramatic theatre's focus on empathy is a case in point. As Elizabeth Grosz states in her examination of the mind/body opposition, the more fundamental issue is whether we can ever stand outside oppositions 'for even the idea of going beyond dichotomies creates and relies on a dichotomy,' that between dichotomous and non-dichotomous thought.<sup>13</sup> In the case of Brecht's prioritization's, maybe it is a matter of being aware of the oppositions with which he works and considering whether his binaries cause any marginalizations that are relevant to contemporary social existence.

As an example of how that awareness might operate I will briefly look at a further ramification of the 'master of meaning,' that being the demonstrator's analytical control over not simply the character but the character's objectified body. The act of control seems interconnected with another hierarchical binary of concern to feminist theorists today, that being the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy. This opposition has been associated with patriarchal traditions of thought which align males with the operation of mind and females with a body, conceived as a brute givenness in need of transcendence. On the one hand, Brecht's *gestus*-centred theatre reverses the two terms through the reassertion of the body and insistence on dialectical interplay. Brecht explicitly condemns the idealist Cartesian model in a c. 1945 *Messingkauf* dialogue about bourgeois theatre's emphasis on facial expression [*Mimik*] and psychologizing in which the face is treated as the mirror and the body simply as a container for the soul. He notes at the same time the bourgeois theatre's con-



comitant neglect of gesticulation [*Gestik*], which Brecht associates with social customs and habits. In his theatre, by contrast, *Gestik* prevails over *Mimik* for the face is written on by the *gestus* of the body.<sup>14</sup> In this reversal the terms are redefined. Facial expression is no longer the mirror of a disconnected soul but one of the body's many surfaces moulded by material relations, mental activities and social discourses. Through the portrayal of the mapping of ideology across the body, gestic acting also makes an important contribution to the politics of embodiment in its assertion that the body is 'not' essentially brute animality 'but' an ever changeable historical phenomenon.

On the other hand, the character's body is an object controlled by the rational demonstrator, bound to the Apollonian techniques of blocking arrangements, tableau and what Brecht called *auf-den-Punkt sprechen*. "Speaking to the point" involved isolating one sentence-gesture from the next by paying careful attention to the punctuation mark given at the end of each sentence, to accentuation, the clarity of consonants, and only speaking when at a standstill. Moreover, this body was often locked into the economically determined rituals and social functions of everyday mundanity. At the Ensemble rehearsals the actor was trained to defamiliarize historical comportments invariably marked by signs of political repression — rather than develop subversive and/or celebratory forms of corporeality such as nakedness, pleasurable or painful convulsion, abstract dance and acrobatic extension in space and time. In addition the performing subject's body was somewhat concealed under the body of the critical demonstrator. Brecht frequently described the demonstrator in macho terms as a cool engineer or chauffeur, puffing away at the ubiquitous cigar, and free from the oozing excesses of temperament — such as the trickle of sweat and hot surging of blood through over-worked arteries which he associated with dramatic theatre. In all these instances the mind/body binary reasserts itself with the bodies on stage remaining subordinate to reason and socially significant meaning.

By observing acting strategies such as the 'not-but' and dialectical interplay, I hope to have suggested Brecht's talent for unfixing fixity by displacing unitary identity and binary oppositions, as well

as his reinscribing of fixity through the Enlightenment 'master of meaning.' In my discussion of Brecht's assault on the fixed, I am in partial agreement with Marc Silberman who describes Brecht's interest in the way facts are not 'given' but produced by representation, as postmodern in its "antimetaphysical insistence that the truth cannot be uncovered, revealed or exposed behind the surface appearance but, rather, that the process of concealment itself is the structure of truth."<sup>15</sup> Yes, Brecht is fascinated by the idea of the construction of the subject and of representation. Yet his epistemological outlook seems to me more contradictory and full of metaphysical traces than Silberman would have it. For example, in Brecht's musings on dialectics he seems to posit a given truth — that being the historical and dialectical flux of social laws as apprehended through Marxist analysis. The metaphysical activities of the gestic actor who 'makes clear,' 'grasps,' 'demonstrates,' 'reveals' and 'shows' are often directed towards the revelation of that dialectical structure. In addition, Brecht often approached the truth from the point of view of a partisan pragmatist, using practical usefulness of the acceptance or rejection of a judgement as his measuring rod. The combination of Brecht's displacement of fixed structures with his partisan pragmatism, embodied I would argue in the 'master of meaning', remains a fragile but thought provoking model for political theatre of the future.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Marc Silberman, "A Postmodernized Brecht?," *Theatre Journal*, vol. 45, no. 1 (1993), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Elin Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism," *The Drama Review*, vol. 32, no. 1 (1988), 86.

<sup>3</sup> Brecht, "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect" in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett, 2nd ed. (London: Eyre Methuen, 1974), 137.

<sup>4</sup> Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre," in *Brecht on Theatre*, 191.

<sup>5</sup> Brecht, "Couragemodell 1949: Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder. Anmerkungen," *BFA*, vol. 25, 216-7, 211.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 238, 239 and Brecht, 'Einführung,' in "Katzgraben" — Notate 1953, *BFA*, vol. 25, 440.

<sup>7</sup> Diamond, *op.cit.*, 87-88.

<sup>8</sup> Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre," 196

<sup>9</sup> Brecht, "Einführung," 440

<sup>10</sup> Here the translation is my own. For the German original, see Brecht, "Nachträge zum Kleinen Organon," 1954, *BFA*, vol. 23, 291.

<sup>11</sup> Mao Tse-tung, *On Contradiction* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1953), 41.

<sup>12</sup> Brecht, "Einführung," p. 439; 'II, 3 "Preisgabe und Rechtfertigung," 14 April 1953, *BFA*, vol. 25, 435-6.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 183.

<sup>14</sup> Brecht, "B160," from "Der Messingkauf," c. 1945, *BFA*, ol. 22.2, 821 (see also Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, ed. and trans. John Willett [London: Methuen, 1965]), 28;

"Anmerkungen zur Dreigroschenoper", 1930, *BFA*, vol. 24, 65; "Anmerkungen zu Oper Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny," Autumn 1930, *BFA*, vol. 24, 77;

"Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst," 1936, *BFA*, vol. 22.1, 201.

<sup>15</sup> Silberman, 6, 11.

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## KLASSIKER AND DIALEKTIKER: PHILOSOPHY AND ANTIPHILOSOPHY IN BRECHT'S *DIE MAßNAHME*

Joseph O'Neil

Der Künstler ist und bleibt Zigeuner, gesetzt auch, es handelte sich um einen deutschen Künstler von bürgerlicher Kultur. Da es seine Sache ist, aus mancherlei Seelen zu reden, so ist er notwendig Dialektiker. Dialektik aber, spricht Goethe, 'ist die Ausbildung des Widerstandsgeistes, welcher dem Menschen gegeben, damit er den Unterschied der Dinge erkennen lerne.' Daß Dialektik im Sinne des

Glaubens und der Tugend die Sünde, das Böse ist, wissen wir wohl; eben darum ist jenes sittliche Befehlswort 'Widerstehe nicht dem Bösen!' ein Künstler- und Moralistenwort,— kein politisches Wort, wie sich versteht (Thomas Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, 403).

This citation comes not from Brecht but from Thomas Mann, and the sentiment expressed therein seems anti-Brechtian. It would seem from many commonly expressed views that Brecht, in *Die Maßnahme*, is on the other side of Mann's dichotomy — no *Dialektiker* but a dogmatic *Politiker*. Mann says of the *Politiker*: "Was die Dialektik betrifft, so hat er selbstverständlich eine Höllenangst vor ihr, und hastig nennt er jeden Einwand gegen die 'Lehre' ein Sophisma — ungeachtet man mit demselben Recht jeden seiner eigenen Heilsätze sophistisch nennen könnte" (403). This definition of politics serves well for an examination of the tension between *Dialektiker* and *Politiker*, or as Brecht calls them, *Klassiker*, in his notes on philosophy and in *Die Maßnahme*, the dramatic product of these reflections. In the course of this examination, I seek to clarify some of the points around which recent scholarship on *Die Maßnahme* gravitates. My theses are as follow: First, Brecht's own critique of ideology as philosophy accounts just as well for what happens in *Die Maßnahme* as frequently invoked outside models do, from Jesus Christ to Carl Schmitt. Second, whereas recent Brecht scholarship tends to emphasize the critical power of the internal framing structures of the play — the representation by four actors of scenes involving a fifth, absent person before a Party tribunal — and the play's theatrical setting, Brecht thematizes these critical issues in the text of the play as well as in these frames and in its relation to the ideally detached Brechtian spectator. Third, the question remaining is not so much whether the play's critical value comes from its form or its content, but whether its reception on the terms I shall outline is really an efficacious step toward the realization of a revolutionary agenda or only an innovative recasting of the tradition of philosophical critique.

**Klassiker and Dialektiker:** The value of "the political" is defined in this context as constitutive of an ideology or a dogma based on authority. Brecht

equates this value with the nature and activity of the *Klassiker*. Tellingly for our understanding of Brecht's play, the term *Klassiker* comes up repeatedly not only in *Die Maßnahme* but, in other of Brecht's *Lehrstücke*. In *Die Maßnahme* the *Klassiker* are those guiding spirits who define the ideology of the Party: Marx, Engels, Lenin and so forth. In a 1935 poem he sent to Ruth Berlau on his departure for the United States to oversee production of *Die Mutter*, Brecht adds his own name to those of the *Klassiker*; the poem's title says it all: "Als der Klassiker am Montag, dem siebenten Oktober 1935, es verließ, weinte Dänemark" (Brecht, *Gesammelte Gedichte*, 559). But Brecht also defines classicism in terms of class: "Der Versuch, bestimmte Vorschläge ethischer und ästhetischer Art dauerhaft zu gestalten und ihnen etwas Endgültiges, Abschließendes zu verleihen, also klassisch zu arbeiten, ist der Versuch einer Klasse, sich Dauer und ihren Vorschlägen den Anschein von Endgültigkeit zu geben" (SPG 160). This is also, therefore, the attempt of a class to create a traditional foundation for itself, yet, in the case of these *Klassiker*, as opposed to figures such as Goethe and, nowadays, Thomas Mann, "class" means working class.

For this reason, many readers of *Die Maßnahme* take Brecht at his word when he equates the *Klassiker* with what we commonly understand to be Brecht's own doctrinaire, even Stalinist, quality. Hannah Arendt, who notes Brecht's being "entzückt, daß man in diesem Chaos, in dem alle Traditionen untergegangen waren, sich doch noch an 'Klassiker' halten konnte" (96), asks how Brecht could contradict the partyline he presents in *Die Maßnahme* in the song "Lob der Partei" by saying, "Laß dir nichts einreden/ Sieh du selber nach! Was du nicht selber weißt/ weißt du nicht./ Prüfe die Rechnung/ Du mußt sie bezahlen" (qtd. in Arendt 97-98). She answers her own question by saying that this is an exception, a remnant of Brecht's love of contradictions that has no place in a play that praises the internal liquidations announced by Stalin in 1929 even more than the Party would like; she says, "Zweifelloos ist der Inhalt des Stückes nicht nur moralisch anfechtbar, sondern schlechthin abscheulich..." (99).

So, according to Thomas Mann, Hannah Arendt, and Brecht himself, Brecht is a *Klassiker*, one beholden to a fixed ideology put into the service

of a politics that seeks to violently eliminate opposition. The killing at the center of the play, the measure taken, is an example of this violence, which Brecht conjures here in the manner of an *agitprop* play as the solution for nagging bourgeois humanist doubts about the correctness and the determination of the Party. These assertions move from questions of judgment and interpretation to a political question, insofar as a "critique of violence" consolidates itself around an agreed-upon fact: that Brecht, in *Die Maßnahme*, presents the cold-blooded murder of an innocent individual by a Party apparatus as the necessary and just punishment of that individual's disagreement with the ideology of the Party. Is this actually what Brecht presents?

Several readers of *Die Maßnahme* (Winnacker, Müller-Schöll, and Jost) observe that the play's framing structure and the absence of the Young Comrade (who is only present in the "play within the play," played by a surviving agitator) makes *Die Maßnahme* a highly mediated representation. This is largely presented as a formal critique of the content of the play, following Adorno, who observes of Brecht (in *Engagement*) that "sofern seine Kunst das quid pro quo verschmäh, sie, die sich als Lehre vorträgt, sei gleichzeitig um ihrer ästhetischen Gestalt willen von der Verbindlichkeit dessen dispensiert, was sie lehrt" (Adorno, 416). This is essentially the same assertion that Adorno makes about Stefan George, whom he groups with Brecht, Wagner, and Hitler without explaining how Hitler is saved by *Gestalt*, *Material*, or *Sprache*. In a similar vein, Nikolaus Müller-Schöll calls the play "die Diktatur auf der Bühne," a staging of Carl Schmitt's political theory that allows a critique of fascism by virtue of the play's reception but not its content ("Der Eingriff ins Politische"). The only necessary disagreement between these two points of view is over whether Brecht's intention coincides with the formal structure of the play.

I contend that this programmatic opposition of aesthetic *Gestalt* and doctrine, *die Lehre*, does not obtain in the case of *Die Maßnahme*; rather, Brecht's presentation of the doctrine is limited by the terms of the theme of the play itself and its form. In showing that Brecht's specific critique of ideology and definition of *Dialektik* is performed in the play, and not merely referred to the higher instance of the audi-

ence for judgment, I hope to indicate the relevance of Brecht's *Lehrstück* for philosophical innovation in terms of an "anti-philosophy" of critique that also has echoes in Adorno as a "negative Dialektik," a critical reworking of Hegel that proposes a dialectic without *Aufhebung*. Dialectic here, since it remains negative, also responds to Mann's definition of the *Dialektiker* on Goethe's terms, as "die Ausbildung des Widerspruchsgeistes."

This reworking of dialectic is evident in Brecht's essays and notes on philosophy and Marxism. In the *Dreigroschenprozeß*, Brecht offers a critique of bourgeois humanism that anticipates the character of the Young Comrade in *Die Maßnahme*. The human being becomes, as in Walter Benjamin's description of Galy Gay from Brecht's *Lehrstück* *Mann ist Mann*, a "Schauplatz der Widersprüche" (Benjamin, 34). In this sense, when Brecht says in the *Dreigroschenprozeß* that the work of art is the product of a collective, he is referring first and foremost not to an authorial committee, but to the set of the social forces that shape a work and determine its final form and reception. His audience of detached *Denkenden* is thus constructed along this model, in a manner consistent with his explanation to Pierre Abraham in 1956 of the preface he meant to write to *Die Maßnahme* and *Jasager/Neinsager*:

So wird der Leser darauf hingewiesen werden, daß er darin nicht These oder Gegenthese zu suchen hat, Argumente für oder gegen solche Meinungen, Anklage- oder Verteidigungsreden, die seine besondere Weise, [die Dinge] zu sehen, ins rechte Licht rücken, sondern ausschließlich Geschmeidigkeitsübungen, die für jene Art Geistes-Athleten bestimmt sind, wie es gute Dialektiker sein müssen. Die richtige oder falsche Begründung eines Urteils ist eine ganz andere Sache, die auf Dinge zielt, die ich in jene Debatten nicht eingeführt habe (Steinweg 198).

Is this goal, as some critics think, a later revision of the ideology that informs *Die Maßnahme* or only secondary to the aim of a certain ideological indoctrination that wants an audience of believers, not of thinkers or *Dialektiker*? I don't think that it is. Even a cursory examination of Brecht's notes on philosophy and Marxism from the thirties shows that his constant and consistent aim was to provoke re-

flection and debate, not indoctrinate or even seek to present convincing rational grounds for, as he says, "die richtige oder falsche Begründung eines Urteils." The idea of *Urteil* will be opposed to that of *Maßnahme* in the play itself, and Brecht's more precise definition of the *Dialektiker* shows why that must be.

*Dialektik* for Brecht is first of all the deconstruction of existing thought-models. The good *Kopfarbeiter* (as Brecht described himself) is both a *Konstrukteur* and a *Demonteur*, one who identifies and criticizes idealisms in order to put alternatives into play. For Brecht, ideology and philosophical idealism are linked, insofar as that which is seen as a completed moment in the history of philosophy is in fact the form of something much more persistent and in fact inevitable. Brecht uses the verb *idealisieren* to describe the process of thinking by which ideologies are formed:

Das Idealisieren hat ganz bestimmte gesellschaftliche Funktionen, darunter sehr wertvolle. Es findet außerdem beständig statt und ist kein Gegenstand einer Morallehre. Es ist eine mentale Operation, ein bestimmtes intelligibles Verhalten, das in bestimmten Situationen erfolgreich sein kann, aber auch stattfindet, wo dies nicht der Fall ist (SPG 144).

This 'intelligibles Verhalten' is similar to the *Hal-tung* taught in the *Lehrstück*. If the constructive aspect is inevitable and responds to the criterion of intelligibility (as systematic coherence), the critical aspect of this *Verhalten* takes apart idealistic or ideological constructions through an anti-idealistic reading in terms of interest. When philosophers want to criticize their predecessors, writes Brecht:

Dann nämlich beschreiben sie dieselben als ziemlich skrupellose und voreilige Konstrukteure, nicht als Finder, sondern als Erfinder, und ein appetitmachender Slang von Werkzeug, terminus technicus, technischen Griffen macht sich breit: Man sieht Handwerker an der Arbeit.... (SPG 142).

It is important to note that this account of the history of philosophy has two stages: the criticism of one discourse of truth as an astute construction and the establishment of another discourse, at first critical, as the genuinely truth-telling replacement of the

first. The idealization of the rising philosophy is accompanied by the proletarianization of the preceding one as tool, technique, and *Handwerk*. This is exactly what happens in *Die Maßnahme*, but under conditions internal to the play and not merely hoped for in its reception that underscore the process of *idealisieren*, not just the ideologies that are its products.

The first of these conditions is the opposition between *Urteil* and *Maßnahme*. The later versions move away from the *Jasager/Neinsager* problems (the sacrifice of an individual for the group as a custom or tradition to be questioned) and toward a differentiation between terms of judgment and action. The first mode — of *Jasager/Neinsager* — requires more intervention from the audience; it is, after all, a *Schuloper* whose pedagogic effect lay in the responses of the schoolchildren. The second, evident in the fourth of five versions of *Die Maßnahme*, is more explicit in the internal confrontation of *Urteil* and *Maßnahme*. The idea of the agitators' measures as a judgment (*Urteil*) is rejected explicitly in this version:

DER VIERTE AGITATOR: ...Einzig mit dem unbeugsamen Willen, die Welt zu verändern, begründeten wir die Maßnahme.

DER KONTROLLCHOR: So war es kein Urteil?

DIE VIER AGITATOREN *sehr laut*: Nein! Eine Maßnahme! (100).

In the juridical context of the play, the question of *Urteil* is left to the *Kontrollchor*, the instance of Party justice that frames the whole performance of the events in China as a *Verteidigungsrede* for the remaining agitators, and is not appropriated by the agitators for their own measure taken in the action questioned by the tribunal. This shows clearly what is at stake even in the trial of the agitators; they are on trial not so much for murder as for appropriating the Reason of the Party. They must justify their action not as being consistent with Party ideology, but as being a contingent measure for their own survival and not a usurpation of the authority of the Party. In other words, first, the Party itself does not authorize killing (unlike Müller's *Mausier*), and, second, the agitators' ability to ground their act in a general ethical judgment of right would be tantamount to their guilt. It is a matter not of their *Urteilstkraft*, but of

their will to survive and carry out their mission. The importance of this distinction for Brecht's criticism of the Party lies in the *Kontrollchor*'s own withdrawal of its power of judgment, tellingly in the song, "Ändere die Welt, sie braucht es: Lange nicht mehr hören wir euch zu als/ Urteilende. Schon/ Als Lernende" (123).

Helmut Spinner, in his account of what he calls "der ganze Rationalismus der Doppelvernunft," opposes *Gelegenheitsvernunft* or *Okkasionalismus* to *Grundsatzvernunft*; one of the qualities of the former is lack of measure, in his definition, "Maßlosigkeit: die *Maßnahme* als negierter genereller rechtlicher oder ethischer Maßstab (Schmitts Auslegung der 'Maßnahmen' des Reichspräsidenten gemäß Art. 48, Abs. 2 der Weimarer Verfassung; Bert Brechts Lehrstück *Die Maßnahme*)" (730). In this context, *Urteil* would seem to belong to the language of *Grundsatzvernunft* and synthetic a priori judgments. The *Maßnahme* in Schmitt's exegesis of the powers of the *Reichspräsident* is an act that is not limited by each and every last article of the constitution but only by those that have to do with the constitutive power itself. While human rights may be trampled, the *Maßnahme* does not affect the integrity of the State itself (Schmitt 110-111).

Müller-Schöll reads *Die Maßnahme* in this vein, insofar as, he says, it portrays the Party's pure positing of its own authority, the pre-legal moment of constitution that determines all posterior legality, presumably in its power over human life. The play is thus a "Diktatur auf der Bühne" that enables an intervention in "the political" only from the audience ("Der Eingriff ins Politische" 113ff.). The irrational authority that Schmitt attributes to the State-making and — preserving power of the constitution would supposedly then be at work in the decision of the agitators, rather than the desire for self-preservation in the basic conflict, also present in *Jasager/Neinsager*, between the survival of any of the agitators versus the execution of all them at the hands of the State. In this sense, it is difficult to distinguish that point at which the agitators legitimize their action on any other than pragmatic terms. As Susanne Winnacker says of this section of *Die Maßnahme*, "Eine These ist überhaupt nicht mehr zu extrahieren und alles läuft auf eine Engführung hinaus, die kein Urteil mehr rechtfertigt und durch keines gerechtfertigt"



tigt ist, sondern eine Maßnahme ist und im Opfertod des jungen Genossen besteht" (150).

The implication of this for the political interpretation of *Die Maßnahme* is two-sided. First of all, it would seem that Brecht is indeed distancing himself from an older philosophical tradition in which ethical principles can be deduced through a transcendental Reason. Secondly, it would seem that Brecht is also trying to come up with a replacement theory. The agitators say in their own defense, "Einzig mit dem unbeugbaren Willen, die Welt zu ändern,/ begründeten wir die Maßnahme." But how does one ground or found a *Maßnahme*? Rather than approaching Brecht's play as a staging of the Schmittian *Maßnahme* (since, as Winnacker points out, it is not a thesis, therefore not an act of *Setzen* or a *Grundsatz*), I would read this instance not as the *Maßnahme* of the State that refers only to the authority of its self-foundation, but as a paradox inherent in Reason and its putative alternatives. This paradox lies not in the execution, but in the "betrayal," the self-unmasking of the Young Comrade, his substitution of one ideology, that of the Party, with another that does not conform to the exigencies of the situation and inevitably implies not just his own sacrifice, which he embraces in any case, but the failure of the revolution and the deaths of his comrades.

Brecht's description of *idealisieren* as an endless process implies a cycle of *Begründung*, in which reasons (plural and lower-case) always appeal to Reason (singular and majuscule). Therefore, while Brecht may be trying to take critical distance from the voice of Reason, he also underscores the impossibility of a kind of non-theoretical pragmatism. This version of ideological critique creates the *Haltung* that actors on the Brechtian stage represent:

Die Philosophie lehrt richtiges Verhalten. Zu diesem Zweck beschreibt sie erstens menschliches Verhalten und zweitens kritisiert sie es. Um es zu beschreiben (zu erkennen und kenntlich zu machen), ist ebenfalls eine bestimmte Haltung nötig, die gelernt werden muß. Diese Haltung wird gezeigt in der Lehre vom interessierten Widerspruch. Dieselbe behandelt die Probleme der alten Erkenntnistheorie" (SPG 127). This theory of *Haltung* redefines epistemology: "Erkenntnistheorie muß vor allem Sprachkritik sein" (Brecht,

SPG 140). The ideological consistency of *Haltung*, its systematicity, makes it possible, as Brecht says, "als Ganzes nach außen zu antworten (qtd. in Haug 25).

**Brecht and philosophical innovation:** This return to the classicizing mode takes place under conditions created by the dialectical interruption: the responsibility of the agent relates to a call from outside, what Althusser calls an ideological interpellation. This conception of dialectics is present in the work of contemporary theorists of politics and ideology and finds a striking echo in the work of Slavoj Žižek. Žižek freely alludes to Brecht as anticipating what Lacan would formalize theoretically, and he formulates ideology-critical propositions based on other Hegelians — Althusser and Lacan — that are similar to what can be read or inferred from Brecht's drama and his writings on philosophy. One of these, in the vein of the linguistic criticism with which Brecht replaces epistemology, is the proposition that "there is no metalanguage." As a self-consciously "metalinguistic" proposition that pretends to govern all statements but itself, it reflects Brecht's contention that there is no end to the cycle of idealization, the only solution being to stage our idealizations in a self-conscious way, one in which the spectator is distanced from their affective lure. Indeed, Žižek practically identifies the "postmodern critique of ideology" with the *Verfremdungseffekt* (Žižek 156).

Brecht's description of *Idealisieren* as an *intelligibles Verhalten* that is inevitable also shows the Hegelian influence that made its mark on Lacan. Lacan is anti-philosophical (and therefore dialectical in Brecht's sense) insofar as he defines philosophy in terms of the master-slave relationship; philosophy is an "entreprise fascinateur au bénéfice du maître" in which the Hegelian Master makes Knowledge (*savoir*) out of the Slave's *savoir-faire*, his technical ability (Lacan 23). This recalls Brecht's description of critique as the reverse: the proletarianization of another's mastery. This game of unveiling one kind of subjection to the ideal only in order to create another is what Brecht both thematizes and frames theatrically in *Die Maßnahme* and explains elsewhere as *idealisieren*. In this sense, Brecht's "Ändere die Welt, sie braucht es" is indeterminate,

just as in Sorel's account of revolutionary agency upon which Laclau and Mouffe base the radical democratic theory that Žižek adroitly connects with Lacan. The philosophically or ethically prescriptive question, "How ought I change the world," can't be answered on these terms. What remains after this critique is not a *Lehre*, much less a Marxist teleology that would retrospectively justify Stalin's purges, but merely the hope that critical ability can be taught and repeated, like the citable *Gestus* of Brecht's plays. Contrary to Thomas Mann's apolitical resignation, Brecht's *Dialektiker* knows, "Die Widersprüche sind die Hoffnungen!"

(Abbreviation: SPG : Brecht, *Schriften zur Politik und Gesellschaft, 1919-1956*.)

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The following article is a response to the two papers presented in the first session: "Brecht's Social Philosophy and his Fragment 'Aus Nichts wird Nichts,'" by Astrid Oesmann, and: "Klassiker and Dialektiker" by Josef O'Neil. Only O'Neil's paper was made available for publication in this issue of *Communications*.

### CAUGHT LOOKING: RESPONSE TO OESMANN & O'NEIL

William Rasch

As the two excellent papers by Astrid Oesmann and Joe O'Neil admirably show, Bertolt Brecht, contrary to what one might assume, remains at his most complex, multi-faceted, and revealing in his most overtly political and covertly philosophical of plays, the so-called teaching or learning plays, the *Lehrstücke*. The political and biographical particularities that inform the struggles of the early 1930s in Germany do not force us to view these plays as mere historical documents, as debris left over from the fight against fascism; nor does the apparent de-

mise of Marxism as a credible political ideology render them obsolete. If a certain "spirit of the times" persistently clings to them, it is nevertheless a "spirit" that we can still recognize as our own. Thus, what I wish to do in this brief response is to stake out some issues that might serve as a useful focus for further discussion.

The notes struck in these two papers echo familiar and perhaps not so familiar philosophical themes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As one could reasonably assume, Hegel lurks in the background of both talks, yet it is not the customary Hegel that one might expect — that is, it is not so much the Hegel who is filtered through Marx, as the Hegel who is filtered through Kojève. Oesmann remarks that for Brecht, "thought should take place publicly and visibly," a statement she uses to establish the important distinction between text and performance, or, more significantly, between drama and acting. Of interest here is the notion that identity, rather than preceding or serving as the basis of character, results from a character's actions, or rather, from the observations of a character's actions. Character, in other words, arises from one's realization that one is being observed and acted upon. Oesmann cites Brecht as saying: "Nur aus dem Verhalten der andern erkennt er, wer er ist." Although there are numerous contemporary models of recognition, misrecognition, double contingency, and the like, that would be serviceable here (I refer to the work of Jacques Lacan and Niklas Luhmann, among others), I cannot help but recall Jean-Paul Sartre's famous chapter in *Being and Nothingness* (to cite a reference that must surely count today as 'unzeitgemäß') on "The Look." Here Sartre depicts for us the primal scene of the eruption of self-consciousness -- and it is a very theatrical scene indeed. A figure kneels in front of a door, peering through a keyhole, only to become aware that he is being seen by another. It is precisely at this moment of shame that the figure becomes a subject. It is at this moment that the figure can see himself because he is seen by another. "It is shame or pride," Sartre remarks, "which reveals to me the Other's look and myself at the end of that look." "To apprehend myself as seen is, in fact, to apprehend myself as seen in the world and from the standpoint of the world" (*Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, Trans.

Hazel E. Barnes, New York: Washington Square, 1966, 353). To repeat: "Nur aus dem Verhalten der andern erkennt er, wer er ist."

Sartre's example — clandestinely peeking through a keyhole — is remarkable, for it links self-consciousness with the awareness of danger, of being caught. It places, in other words, the origin of subjectivity in the domain of the slave, whether that slave is defined as Adam being hailed by God, or as the eternally supervised proletariat. This, then, brings us to what Oesmann identifies as the center of Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, namely, "Aushalten," or "the endurance of the difference between theory and life," the endurance of the difference between knowledge and history. "The teaching plays," she states, "demonstrate the pain that theories can cause in human life while still affirming their necessity." That "pain" extends into the audience, for not only do the characters come into being by being seen by the other characters and by us, but we too emerge as a historically situated audience every time we become aware that we have been caught looking through the keyhole of the invisible fourth wall, every time we are addressed by the action on the stage and we realize that we have been spied as we spy, seen from the standpoint of the world that Brecht creates. This world allows only shame. When the characters on stage address their eavesdropping audience, either indirectly or as a direct verbal challenge, we keyhole-peepers are asked to judge not only the actions on the stage, but are also asked to judge the validity of our own judgments. We stand, as it were, naked with our judgments, no longer clothed by our invisible passivity. We are asked to bridge the divide between observation (theory) and action (practice), yet despite our efforts, this divide proves impassable. More often than not, we fill that space with nervous or embarrassed silence. Thus, the disjuncture of theory and practice that Oesmann identifies is a kind of original sin that can never be reconciled, precisely because there is no third term other than theory or practice that can serve as the common ground of both. As politically and morally active human beings, we are trapped, to be fittingly and existentially melodramatic about it, in the space that is defined by this disjuncture.

What we find implied in Oesmann as a dynamic relation between seer and seen in the theater

of theory and history, we have explicitly articulated in Joe O'Neil's paper as the internal structure of a Brechtian text. O'Neil offers us a Brecht who is a critic of ideologies, yet the object of Brecht's critique is the critique of ideology itself. Thus the *Lehrstücke* are emancipated, so to speak, from the burden of providing non-ideological truth. They have no *Lehre* in the conventional sense because their lesson is the lesson we have already learned from Oesmann, namely, that all theories that conceal the disjuncture between theory and practice are to be critiqued — both theoretically and practically. O'Neil nicely shows how Brecht identifies the philosophical critique of rival philosophies as a form of "proletarianization," reducing the opponent's science to a craft, a mere *Handwerk*. Our task as critics, then, is to resist this temptation, in part by acknowledging our own political and philosophical handiwork.

O'Neil's analysis of the difference between *Urteil* and *Maßnahme* is of particular interest in this regard. At one point he defines this difference as the "differentiation between terms of judgment and action." The consequences of such a differentiation are startling, for the shift away from judgment and toward the supposedly non-rationally motivated actions of emergency measures moves, according to O'Neil, Brecht's *Die Maßnahme* beyond the borders of the *Lehrstück* altogether — at least as traditionally defined by Steinweg. The confrontation between *Urteil* and *Maßnahme* is internal to the play itself and precludes the audience's participation. The decision concerning the measures to be taken in the exceptional or extraordinary case -- a decision that cannot be based on criteria dictated by reason or the party — must be left to the agitators in the field, who now base their judgment, O'Neil reports, on "their will to survive and carry out their mission." Since these measures are not immediately presented in the play, but rather "mediately" re-enacted, the audience, like the *Kontrollchor*, can only intervene after the fact, after the sacrifice of the Young Comrade and the subsequent success of the revolution in Mukden. We are thereby returned, it seems, to Oesmann's *Aushalten*. Trapped between the devil of theory, as represented by the *Kontrollchor*'s demand for rational justification, and the deep blue sea of history, marked by the vicissitudes of the conditions

"on the ground," the agitators, and the revolution, are called upon simply to survive.

Oesmann's *Aushalten* and O'Neil's analysis of a *Maßnahme* as the linkage of political judgment and survival provoke the question of whether some form of philosophical pragmatism emerges, or should emerge, as the *deus ex machina* that resolves the tension created by critiquing the proud critique of ideology and disciplining the hubris of theory. By pragmatism I simply mean here a non-grounded move to judge "truth" by its efficacy — or rather, a move that uses efficacy to ground its quasi-indeterminate judgments. O'Neil seems to brush the question aside, but nevertheless implicitly raises the issue when he states that Brecht attempts to "come up with a replacement theory" for the "older philosophical tradition in which ethical principles can be deduced by transcendental Reason." Not only Brecht is on the look-out for such a substitute. This search for a self-limiting theory that modestly refrains from logically or historically deducing and thereby dictating practice is, in fact, one of the ways by which one can define the modern condition — at least in its so-called "postmodern" self-description. The question to be asked, therefore, involves the status of a theory that, in Oesmann's words, sets out to criticize all theoretical models that conceal the difference between theory and its other? Are the stakes of such a search philosophical or political? Or is this distinction, like Mann's between the dialectical and the political, meaningless?

I raise this general question not in the hopes that it can be directly answered, but rather that it should accompany us, hunched over our collective shoulder, and look at us as we discuss these two extremely intelligent and provocative papers.

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## BRECHT IN LITERATURE

Guy Stern

If we were to project a collage of Bertolt Brecht on the strength of the various portraits drawn by poets, fiction writers, and dramatists, we would emerge with a multiplicity of perspectives that would outdo Picasso. In the fragmented mirror of their creative writings, his image or psychogram ranges from saint to scamp to devil — often attenuated by a judicious or capricious admixture of light and shadow. No phase of his relatively short-lived existence nor of his dying was ignored. His creative interpreters came from East and West, included feminists and macho epigones of him and, conversely, writers seeking escape from his influence. As a chronicle of his early Augsburg year, one encounters a text entitled *In Baals Welt. Kindheit und Jugend des Bertolt Brecht*.<sup>1</sup> It hovers, by self-definition, "between fiction and documentary." The latter predominates in the chapters entitled "Bericht [oder Mitteilung] zur Lage," all of them accurate historical background sketches,<sup>2</sup> the former in a psychogram of the young Brecht intuited by the narrator.

The novel's author, Hans-Christian Kirsch, brings two highly relevant qualifications to his task. One of Germany's most eminent *Jugendbuchautoren*, praised for his character portrayals of young people, he also was in his youth, according to his friend and fellow student in Munich, Walter Hinderer, an early aficionado of Brecht. He would, à la Brecht, lead student devotees in Brechtian songs, accompanying them on his guitar.<sup>3</sup> Quite clearly such scenes are plausibly projected on Brecht and his friends in the novel: "Spelunke ist Mandelay, hang-out der Soldaten der Indienkompanie. Was er ihre Mythologie nennt, sind die Augenblicke der Freundschaft mit den anderen Jungen der Clique, das Singen, bei dem er vorsingt und sie beim Kehrreim einfallen" ... (98f). Kirsch builds his psychogram on his protagonist's overtly rebellious nature. The young Brecht despises not only the materialism, reactionary attitudes and hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie, e.g. of Caspar Neher's father, the "Oberlehrer," he also rebels, during a sort of counter epiphany, against its moral code, including chastity and monogamy (25).

These rebellious principles, Kirsch extrapolates, also permeate Brecht's understanding of art. Brecht rejects early on the existing laws and moral codes that govern literature and champions a credo that art must, as its primary mission, change the world and divest it of its inhibiting conventions.

Brecht needs his creation, *Baal*, who is a constant intrusive visitor of his mind, if for no other purpose than to prevent his own relapse into bourgeois values. But he also is Brecht's temporary muse, "his shadow or golem," whom Brecht would like to unleash as a brutal, destructive force on existing society. Brecht, according to Kirsch, is ultimately able to dispense with his Dr. Hyde or Mephistopheles. The book ends with the sentence "Baal steht nicht hinter ihm" (144). In lieu of Baal's destructiveness his creator has found his own alienation effect, distancing himself from the world around him. Like Kragler in Brecht's *Trommeln in der Nacht* he stands deliberately aside as his causes are being fought for by others.

Where Kirsch's narrative leaves off, a British and an American novel take over, both focusing on Brecht's years in Berlin. One represents a decidedly feminist point of view; the other revives, reminiscent of a history of ideas, the Romantic image of the artist as a genius and a holy scoundrel. Elaine Feinstein, in her novel *Loving Brecht*, conjures up a near life-long lover of Brecht as her narrator, similar in background but not identical to Lotte Lenya, who is an additional character in the novel.<sup>4</sup> Feinstein, who acknowledges her debt to John Fuegi's controversial study in a note to the paperback edition of her novel, buttresses her feminist approach by many of the charges against Brecht leveled by Fuegi,<sup>5</sup> i.e. his appropriation of their creative work. The feminist tenets espoused by Feinstein's protagonist are valid; she sees hypocrisy in the dual standard of fidelity, a virtue demanded but not practiced by Brecht (34). She counters an anti-Semitic remark of Brecht's by comparing his prejudices to the discrimination against women (37). She upholds her feminine sexuality, including a Lesbian experiment (69). She protests against Brecht's wish for domination and control (62). And when she, in America, breaks with her erstwhile lover, Brecht, she equates it with an act of liberation: "I wanted my freedom. And if loneliness was to be the necessary price of



that freedom, I was prepared to pay the price" (138).

Frieda, the protagonist, as all the used women in the novel, is complicit in her own exploitation. That appears to be Feinstein's final cautionary message to her readers. Yet in a complete volte-face at the novel's close, Frieda, the long-suffering heroine, accords Brecht a measure of forgiveness — for the sake of his positive accomplishments.

Brecht's Berlin is part — certainly a minor part this time — of yet another novel, *Benjamin's Crossing* by Jay Parini.<sup>6</sup> Its author is a professor of English at Middlebury College and the author of five novels and four books of poetry.<sup>7</sup> The book's main focus is both the real and intellectual odyssey of Walter Benjamin, as told by shifting narrators. Jay Parini, in an "Author's Note," speaks of shaping "a vision of Walter Benjamin and his world" (308). Obviously Brecht was part of that world. Parini, in the last chapter, as in many previous ones, assumes the role of omniscient narrator. He imagines that Benjamin, just before dying, renders his ultimate judgment of Brecht: "And Brecht, like Gershom Scholem equally selfish, equally loving. Everyone convinced that his or her path was the only way" (277).<sup>8</sup> A few days before his suicide he recalls overhearing Brecht's conversation with Asja Lacis, a Latvian writer, at one time Brecht's assistant director in Munich and later Benjamin's lover.<sup>9</sup> According to the novel Brecht had turned to Asja during one rehearsal of the interminably long battle scene of *Edward II* and asked her a question:

What is wrong with these soldiers? What is their dilemma? With care, she replied, "They are pale and afraid of dying." "Yes, and they are thoroughly exhausted," he said. "We must make them look ghostly." Each soldier's face was, at his bidding, covered with a thick layer of chalk. As Asja later said to Benjamin, "the epic theater was suddenly born that day — Athena sprung fully grown from the head of Zeus (258-259).

It is an ingenious way of explaining the birth of the epic theater. *Si non es vero, es ben trovato*. Benjamin, in an encounter in Denmark, steers the conversation to literature once more. Brecht, as Parini hypothesizes, muses of Soviet censorship: "They [the Reds] hate to see genuine artistic production. It is unstable, unpredictable" (257).

Given the multitude of voices heard throughout the novel, it is not surprising that the estimation and esteem of Brecht varies accordingly. Gershom Scholem, for example, concludes: I will never [despite Benjamin] see the attraction of that man, an obvious charlatan" (299). But through the very structure of the novel the weightiest assessment is given to Benjamin via the voice of the omniscient narrator. Benjamin is well aware of Brecht's exploitative nature, as is Asja Lacis. But he also recalls Brecht's acts of kindness and concern, his warning against remaining in Paris, his advice to Benjamin to eschew convoluted metaphysics, "*plumpes Denken*" (131), and to adopt straightforward writing, his ability "to transmogrify all influence," all contributions of his collaborators into his own language (131). Aphoristically he says of his friend in a conversation with his sister: "He is a scoundrel, but a holy scoundrel in his way" (59). Within the *gestalt* of the novel, it is a fair judgment.<sup>10</sup>

Parini's time frame, expanding over the early exile years of Brecht, overlaps with that of the time frame of another novelist, Peter Weiss. But *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* is primarily a grandiose political text and a view of art through the eyes of a "denkender Arbeiter."<sup>11</sup> Robert Cohen has termed the relationship of the younger writer to Brecht a "lifelong disputation [lebenslängliche Auseinandersetzung]." Weiss' narrator, in many respects his alter ego, succinctly summarizes the relationship as it ends: "Abschiednahme von einem Freund, der mein Freund nicht, doch mein Lehrer gewesen war" (II, 319).

Brecht emerges in various conversations with his circle of Scandinavian friends as the dialectical thinker, deeply interested in the Leninist years of Communism (II, 273f.) and as a writer attempting to compose a historical epic about the Swedish peasant leader Engelbrekt. According to the narrator Brecht abandons the project not only because of his illness, bronchitis, but also because of squeamishness, "eine plötzliche Abschirmung vor dem unerträglichen Ende des Engelbrekt" (II, 255). Various literary developments and opinions of Brecht are interwoven into these passages, for example his approval of Kafka and the genesis of his novel *Die Geschäfte des Herrn Julius Caesar*, which, according to Weiss,

was intended by Brecht as an analogue to the fascist-bourgeois age of his own times (II, 272).

But Weiss' most elaborate account of Brecht's exile in Sweden centers on the preparation of his flight from Sweden to Finland after the German conquest of Denmark and the appearance of German vessels in Swedish waters. The narrator, charged with assisting the packing of Brecht's copious library, ranging from classical antiquity to contemporary authors and straddling many fields of the arts, humanities and beyond, finds a certain thematic consistency in an apparently random shelving.

The library serves as a symbol of Brecht's contradictory behavior. True to his conviction that a country needing heroes is a woeful one, he does not cast a heroic figure. But the narrator, betraying his and likely Weiss's ambivalence, consistently couples accusation with exculpation. All circumspection has left Brecht in view of the threat of a German invasion. His teeth are chattering from fear; when embarking, he nearly collapses (II, 310, 318, 326). Yet the narrator also recalls Brecht's sang-froid during earlier stages of his flight, observes his ability to read while racked by fear, and describes his defiance of the Swedish policemen who ransack his library (II, 310, 314, 318). He even finds extenuations for Brecht's indifference to the danger to his fellow refugees:

Es war, als sei nur er von der Katastrophe betroffen worden, als habe er, als einziger, die Last der Verfolgung zu tragen. Doch es ging um sein Werk. Hier lag alles, was er während der sieben Jahre des Exils geschrieben hatte, das meiste davon nicht publiziert. Hier lag der Wert, der dazu bestimmt war, sein Dasein in der Literatur zu bestätigen.

Brecht's Finnish exile entered the literary canon only obliquely. His drama *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti* and his famous poem "Radwechsel" are instrumentalized, boomerang-fashion, to wreak some social criticism on their author. A poem by Yaak Karsunke, one of Germany's prominent post-war lyrists, is entitled "Matti wechselt das Rad," which ends: "Wenn die panne ihn zu viel zeit kostet: er kann mir ja helfen."<sup>13</sup> By implication the driver becomes Puntila's servant Matti; Brecht is consigned to the role of his tyrannical master.

Brief references to Brecht's stay in Finland

and his traversing the Soviet Union surface in a drama about Brecht's American exile. In Christopher Hampton's *Tales From Hollywood*<sup>14</sup> Brecht finds Hollywood more "remote from the world" than the backwaters of Finland (26) and, one of the last emigrés to slip through the mesh of ever more restrictive U.S. immigration laws, he keeps alive in Russia by collecting royalties owed to Feuchtwanger (24-25). But in human terms Hampton charges him with shared culpability for the death of Margarete Steffin in Russia and the imprisonment and execution of Carola Neher (25,32). As Hampton has it, the fate of Neher shows Brecht at his most callous. When Ödön von Horváth finds Neher's fate appalling, Brecht quips: "The innocent, you know... I think they deserve everything they get" (32).

In the main, however, the drama focuses on the fate of Hollywood's prominent exiles, as Siegfried Mews and others have previously pointed out, and on Brecht's contempt for America's capitalistic culture, including Hollywood's commercialism and frivolities (26, 31, 38), on his acerbic exchanges with Thomas Mann (33, 39, 51), especially in the drafting of a common position paper on Germany's future, on his own creative compromises, even in the making of the Fritz Lang film, *Hangmen also die* (54), and on his image as a tyrannical theater director (55). All these traits are thematised in Hampton's evocation of a period in Hollywood, which has recently been evoked again in a book about Billy Wilder.<sup>15</sup>

But Hampton's prize-winning play attempts something that none of the other recreations of Brecht, mentioned in this article, assayed: it comes to grips with Brecht's various theories of the theater. One exploration concerns his opinions about the functions of the stage. In an exchange with Horváth — the fiction is that an anonymous bystander, not Horváth, was killed in that oft-discussed freak accident in Paris — Brecht defends his view "that in the theater it's not enough just to interpret the world any more, you have to change it" (55). Horváth's rebuttal maintains that "an intelligent audience does not want blueprints, they don't want instructions." He also accuses Brecht of loving humanity and despising the individual (56). The argument is not resolved within the play.

Hampton alternately embraces and rejects

Brecht's innovations in the theater. The drama itself is in every respect epic theater: Horváth is the epic narrator who stitches together the various scenes, bantering with the audience, exiting through the auditorium, displaying large newspaper headlines providing background (54). Hampton handles the technique with near-Brechtian skill. He also uses and simultaneously lampoons Brecht's alienation technique. Brecht has no answer when Horváth argues that people, even without Brecht's reminder, are constantly aware that they are in a theater. And in several comedic turns Horváth pokes fun at Brecht's use of illusion-shattering lighting effects (37) and his extensive use of signs and projections. Horváth — and Hampton — are having their Brechtian cake and eating it too.

An even more recent text, a novel by Jürgen Alberts, *Hitler in Hollywood* of 1994, also tries to depict Brecht's years in California.<sup>16</sup> It is currently being analyzed by Professor Glenn Cuomo, who kindly shared the following insights with me: The novel has a contemporary frame about a researcher returning to the USA on her 50th birthday to search for Brecht's "*Idealscript*" for *Hangmen Also Die*. The chapters alternate between the contemporary search in the archives of the studios and the adventures of a Georg Kupfer, a writer who knew Erich Mühsam and Oskar Maria Graf, was a participant in the revolution leading to the Bavarian *Räterepublik* and was sentenced to 15 years *Festungshaft* in Landsberg. After 1933, Kupfer goes into exile, stopping first in Prague and France and then continuing to the USA. The Georg Kupfer character engages Brecht in an FBI-sponsored project to train five actors as prospective assassins of Hitler. They are supposed to impersonate SS officers and get close enough to kill Hitler. Kupfer's task is to recruit German exile authors, including a willing Brecht, to teach the actors about Nazi mentality and behavior.

Both the novel by Alberts and the drama by Hampton, as chance would have it, also provide a transition to the last phase in Brecht's life, his return to Europe. Towards the end of *Tales from Hollywood* Brecht cleverly parries the thrusts of Robert E. Stripling, the chief council of the House Un-American Activities Committee, a confrontation that decides Brecht on flying back to Europe the next day. (60)

Brecht's life and works in the GDR provoked both great adulation and equally pronounced disparagement. A poem by Günter Kunert extols Brecht: "Fortdauer / nur der Veränderung gestattet dieser letzte / Heilige des Zweifels, der asketische Sybarit und / Verkünder der Wissenschaft und der Kunst / und der Kunst des Wissens...."<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Torberg, on the other hand, who prevented for years major Brecht performances in postwar Austria, penned a pasquil "Lukullus hat sich verhöhrt; Moritat des Ausrufers," which culminates in the following verse:

Immer dichter rückt der Dichter an den Busen  
der Partei,  
er bedichtet Pieck und Frieden, Komsomol  
und Hirsebrei.<sup>18</sup>

Of course the most extensive and vitriolic reckoning with Brecht's temporizing with the GDR leadership is Günter Grass's *Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand. Ein deutsches Trauerspiel*.<sup>19</sup> Grass is quite successful in imitating Brecht's compact dialogues. He even has Brecht explain the style of his later dramas: "Wortarm, weniger Substantive gewiss" (106). But reading Grass's text post-1989, one cannot entirely fault Brecht's refusal, as does Grass, to be swept up in an unarmed resurrection and one can even applaud his courageous rejection to become a spokesperson for a self-serving Communist leadership. Given the fact that it took a diminution of Soviet power, Gorbachow's *glasnost* and an unprecedented mass uprising to topple a dictatorship, Brecht's sly ruses and evasions, derogated by Grass, resemble now a rather realistic response to the uprising. That his decision is not free of opportunism — the government has promised him a new theater — and the suppression of the insurgents makes for a good, topical updating of *Coriolanus* — represents a fairer judgment on Grass's part (32). Grass's indictment of Brecht culminates in his evocation of Brecht's youthful play: *Trommeln in der Nacht*: He too, as did Kirsch, likens Brecht to Kragler, the protagonist who deserts the revolution.

Finally, literature accompanies Brecht to his dying moments. Gerhard Zwerenz ascribes his death to a broken heart: "gestorben am gebrochenen Herzen/ das er/ vergeblich/ zu leugnen versucht hatte."<sup>20</sup> Angelika Hurwitz describes his grave: "Das ist des Lehrers Grab/ kein Hügel ist aufgehäuft."<sup>21</sup> But one obituary, this one by Wolf Bier-

mann, may be directed at us, the scholars of Brecht. A resurrected Brecht observes the toilers in the Brecht archive in Berlin:

Was, dachte er,  
seid ihr immer noch nicht fertig  
mit dem Ramsch?  
Und er lächelte  
unverschämt-bescheiden und  
war zufrieden.<sup>22</sup>

The texts cited above represent a sampler rather than a full catalogue of Brecht in literature. He makes several cameo appearances, for example, in poems, novels, and dramas of his fellow exiles, for example in Feuchtwanger's pre-exilic novel *Erfolg*.<sup>23</sup> None of these additional works refute the concluding observations that may be extracted from this panoply of literary portraits:

1. At a time when it is occasionally argued that the popularity of Brecht is on the wane, these depictions of him, reaching into the nineties of the last century, attest to the fact that his life and times continue to fascinate his fellow writers, even when they find their model flawed as a personality.

2. Every phase of his life attracted the attention of his fictionalizers.

3. His appeal as a riveting character transcends national boundaries. The samples above stem from the pens of American, Austrian, British, and German writers, many prominent ones among them. It would be easy to add others, such as the poem by the Italian lyricist, Franco Fortini "Traducendo Brecht."<sup>24</sup>

4. Despite the wide diversity of authors and their divergent styles there are some motifs which occur throughout. One of them is the perfunctory farewell which Brecht offers even to close friends and collaborators. These callous scenes occur in virtually all works. Feinstein compares him to the notorious Surabaya Johnny of the Brecht-Weill song; Peter Weiss' narrator tersely reports: "Unverbindlich wie meine Tätigkeit bei Brecht begonnen hatte, hörte sie auch auf." Brecht's cool goodbyes have by now become somewhat of a topos.

5. Many of the texts, while portraying Brecht, also try to follow in his footsteps. The poems, not always successfully, imitate Brecht's penchant for "rhymeless lyrics with irregular rhythms;" the dramas profit from alienation effect and epic theater;

the novels draw on his style of dialogue and his multi-level vocabulary.

6. No paper about Brecht ought to end without a didactic observation. It should give Brecht scholars some satisfaction that most creative writers draw on their scholarly findings for the various fictionalizations.<sup>25</sup> In consequence, our scholarship, since it may acquire greater permanence through the texts of creative writers, gains even more in importance. But for the same reason it also exacts a still greater degree of responsibility from its practitioners.

### Endnotes

1. See Hans-Christian Kirsch, *In Baals Welt. Kindheit und Jugend des Bert Brecht* (Augsburg: SoSo Verlag, 1993).
2. See Kirsch, chs. 2, 4, and 13.
3. See Guy Stern, "Walter Hinderer und die Kurt Weill Stiftung" in Dieter Borchmeyer, ed., *Signaturen der Gegenwartsliteratur. Festschrift für Walter Hinderer* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1999), 49-51.
4. See Elaine Feinstein, *Loving Brecht* (London, Sydney, Auckland, Johannesburg: Hutchinson, 1992). Lotte Lenya is first introduced as a character on p. 45.
5. See Feinstein, *Loving Brecht*, and John Fuegi, *Brecht and Company: Sex, Politics and the Making of the Modern Drama* (New York: Grove Press, 1994).
6. Jay Parini, *Benjamin's Crossing, A Novel* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1997).
7. For biographical details on Parini see "Parini, Jay (Lee)" in James G. Lesniak, ed., *Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1991-), XXXII, 324f.
8. Of course Benjamin's separate articles on Brecht were published already during his lifetime, i.e., from 1930-1939, as "Kommentare zu Werken von Brecht" and have been collected in *Versuche über Brecht*, 2nd Rev. and exp. ed. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978).
9. Cf. Asja Laciš, *Revolutionär im Beruf: Bericht über proletarisches Theater, über Meyerhold, Brecht, Benjamin, und Piscator*, ed. Hildegard Brenner, 2. durchgesehene und erweiterte Ausgabe (München: Rogner & Bernhardt, 1976).
10. For a very favorable review of the novel, see Robert Grudin, "Benjamin's Crossing," *New York Times Book Review*, June 29, 1997, 12.
11. See Peter Weiss, *Die Ästhetik des Widerstandes III*, part II, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997).
12. See Robert Cohen, *Peter Weiss in seiner Zeit. Leben und Werk* (Stuttgart and Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 1992), 9. Also Cohen, "Versuche über den Brecht-Komplex" in his *Versuche über Weiss's Ästhetik des Widerstandes*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 155-222, here 155: "Ein 'Scheusal' sei die Brecht-Figur in der Ästhetik des Wider-

standes, wurde zu Recht festgestellt. Das ist allerdings, auch das hat man gesehen, erst die 'halbe Wahrheit' über die Brecht-Figur." Weiss describes *Brecht's* merits, as Cohen notes, as his greatness as a writer and as an untiring fighter against fascism.

13. See Brecht "Der Radwechsel," *Gesammelte Werke 10* (*Gedichte 3*), 1009, and Yaak Karsunke "Matti wechselt das Rad," in Jürgen F. Wallmann, ed. *Von den Nachgeborenen, Dichtungen auf Bertolt Brecht* (Zürich: Verlag der Arche, 1970), 52. Cited subsequently as Wallmann.
14. Christopher Hampton, *Tales from Hollywood* (London: Samuel French, 1983).
15. See Cameron Crowe, *Conversations with Wilder* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999).
16. See Jürgen Alberts *Hitler in Hollywood* (Göttingen: Steidel Verlag, 1997).
17. Günter Kunert, "Erinnerung an Bertolt Brecht," in Wallmann, 11.
18. Friedrich Torberg "Lukullus hat sich verhört," in Wallmann, 38.
19. See Günter Grass, *Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand, Ein deutsches Trauerspiel* (Neuwied und Berlin: Luchterhand, 1966).
20. Gerhard Zwerenz, "Gesang von den Grabsprüchen," in Wallmann, 23.
21. Angelika Hurwitz, "Brechts Grab," in Wallmann, 22.
22. Wolf Biermann, "Herr Brecht," in Wallmann, 29.
23. See, for example, Lion Feuchtwanger, *Erfolg. Drei Jahre Geschichte einer Provinz* (Berlin: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1930).
24. Franco Fortini "Traducendo Brecht/ Beim Übersetzen von Brechts Gedichten," in Wallmann, 74.
25. Kirsch draws on Stephan Bock (149); Elaine Feinstein, as she acknowledges in the paperback edition, on John Fuegi; Jay Parini, among others, on Robert Alter and Bernd Witte.

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## IN BRECHT'S FOOTSTEPS OR WAY BEYOND BRECHT?

Brechtian Techniques in Feminist Plays by  
Elfriede Jelinek and Marlene Streeruwitz

Britta Kallin

Already in the late 1970s, Sara Lennox pointed out that the "case of Brecht is a difficult one" for feminists. According to Lennox, Brecht claims that "[a]t every point human subjectivity can intervene into and transform history. This is a conception of history, hence a dramatic structure, which feminism can use." In an article on Brecht's influence on German women filmmakers in 1990, Renate Möhrmann describes the connection between feminists and Brecht still as "an uneasy relationship." Many other scholars have pointed out the problematic affinity between Bertolt Brecht and feminist dramatists in particular. As Sue-Ellen Case convincingly argues in 1995, playwrights who portray gender and sexual oppression have often at the same time "assimilated and contradicted" Brecht's sense of the political. Case refers to Fleisser, Lasker-Schüler, and Gerlind Reinshagen, and she deplores the fact that Anglo-American feminist scholarship has not dealt with the influence of Brecht's heritage on contemporary German-language feminist theater. While British and American feminist scholars have investigated and acknowledged Brecht's influence on feminist drama in their respective countries (Karen Laughlin, Janelle Reinelt, Elin Diamond, Laureen Nussbaum etc.), there seems to be a lack of scholarship on Brecht's influence on postwar German-language feminist drama. Scholars who work on contemporary theater by women, as for example Helga Kraft and Katrin Sieg, have commented on the ambivalent relationship between feminist drama and Brechtian techniques, but a re-assessment of Brecht's influence on the plays of the 1980s and 1990s has not taken place. An investigation of plays and theoretical texts is necessary to determine to what extent the assertion is correct that Brecht's heritage has left a mark on contemporary German feminist theater. The question is then: How has the Brechtian Epic theater affected the work of contemporary women playwrights in Germany and Austria in terms of political goals, aesthetic features, and



dramaturgical techniques?

In the following analysis I investigate how Brecht's legacy has influenced Elfriede Jelinek and Marlene Streeruwitz, two prominent contemporary Austrian dramatists. This analysis will shed light on the question of how these women shape an understanding and evaluation of Brechtian parameters within current feminist discourses. I will show that the playwrights, on the one hand, continue within Brecht's tradition and, on the other, go beyond it. Therefore, I analyze both the theoretical writings and the plays *Ein Sportstück* (1998) by Elfriede Jelinek and *Waikiki-Beach* (1992) by Marlene Streeruwitz.

First I would like to explore Jelinek's description of Brecht in essays and newspaper articles. In the early 1980s, Jelinek acknowledges that she has adapted some of Brecht's devices. She regards her play *Was geschah, nachdem Nora ihren Mann verlassen hatte oder Stützen der Gesellschaften* (1979) as aesthetically in line with the Epic theater:

Ich sehe . . . mein *Nora*-Stück als eine Weiterentwicklung des Brechtschen Theaters mit modernen Mitteln der Literatur, den Mitteln der Popkultur der fünfziger und sechziger Jahre, die auch darin bestehen, vorgefundenes Material — pur oder gemischt mit eigenem, aus dem ursprünglichen Zusammenhang gerissenen — nebeneinanderzusetzen, um eine Bewußtmachung von Zuständen und Sachverhalten zu erreichen.

At that time Jelinek asserts that her own dramaturgy is closely related to that of Brecht. Yet, she claims that it is not an assimilation of Brechtian ideas but a further development of his methods. In the seventies and eighties, Jelinek had declared herself a Marxist feminist and thus positioned herself not far from Brecht's Marxist philosophy.

In three recent essays Jelinek reflects on Brecht's influence on contemporary art in Germany. In the first one, entitled "Alles oder Nichts," she asserts that Brecht's plays are not topical anymore but that he still influences our thinking in the 1990s. In two other essays, entitled "Brecht aus der Mode" and "Das Maß der Maßlosigkeit," Jelinek highlights Brecht's exploitation of women and the denial of their contributions to his work. Nevertheless, she does not pass harsh judgment on the author. Elfriede Jelinek is critical of Brecht but also recognizes

his contributions to theater in general as well as to her own conceptualization of what theater could possibly achieve.

In *Ein Sportstück* (1998), I argue, Jelinek appropriates Brechtian techniques for her own artistic expression. *Ein Sportstück* is a play that deals with the role of sports in contemporary society in which Jelinek mixes all kinds of associations with her topic. The play is a potpourri discussing many aspects of life in the framework of sports and war. Characters wearing sport outfits discuss WW II, the Gulf war, the war in Yugoslavia and Croatia as well as gender constructions, the role of the nuclear family, sexuality, the media, and politics. An obsession with corporeal aesthetics is expressed and the performances of bodies in all kinds of sports are at stake. The director Einar Schleef, who is himself deeply influenced by Brecht, staged the premiere in the Burgtheater in Vienna last year. But for my analysis here I will focus on Jelinek's written version rather than the stage production.

Jelinek employs Brechtian techniques in this play in order to emphasize the problems of our societies and particularly to send a feminist message through this play. Similar to Brecht, Jelinek's choice of characters reflects the insignificance of individuality in relation to the masses. The names in *Ein Sportstück* are "Frau," "Täter," "Opfer," "Taucher," as well as some mythological names such as "Elfi" Elektra, Achilles, and Hector.

Like Brecht, Jelinek uses alienation effects in discussions between characters. Achilles directly addresses the character called "Autor" who appears on stage: "Sie, Frau Autor, warum sind Sie denn so aggressiv? Wir haben Ihnen doch nichts getan. Was plustern Sie sich denn so auf? Am liebsten gehn ja doch wir ins Theater. Und uns interessiert nicht, was Sie sagen" (130). Not only is the author of *Ein Sportstück* as "Autorin" or "Frau Autor" frequently mentioned in the play, but towards the end of the play the author's last name is mentioned by Hector: "Jaja, wir sehen schon: Ihr Geweih verrät Sie als eine Jelinek..." (132). While Brecht would have probably tried to distance the audience from the content and characters of the play, Jelinek goes even further and presents herself in the play as a subjective being, an artist, and a woman. Jelinek explicitly mentions autobiographical references and de-

picts the author, i.e., herself, not as an omniscient narrator or abstract creator but as a woman, a person with a name. In doing so, Jelinek succeeds in contextualizing and reclaiming the female playwright whose erasure has been nearly complete in literary history. Thus Jelinek goes beyond Brecht on a meta-level of the play by refusing to offer an allegedly objective representation of history, which Brecht might have claimed his plays achieve through a poetics of distance.

Another Brechtian distancing effect is employed when visual projections of images are used in *Ein Sportstück*. In the stage directions, Jelinek suggests the use of television and slides in the play. At the beginning of the action, Elfi Elektra is supposed to turn on a TV which shows people participating in a sporting event. Another instance takes place in a scene in the second part of the play when an old woman is staged as a pieta figure with her son called Jesus (or Andi). In the text, Jelinek recommends that a brightly lit photo of Arnold Schwarzenegger or film sequences with Schwarzenegger should be displayed behind the woman. The image of the celebrated Austrian/Hollywood muscular body behind the older woman invites the spectator to experience the contrast between these figures and calls on the audience to contemplate the situation of (older) women's bodies. The old woman declares:

Als Frau müßte ich mich allerdings mehr nach fremden Bildern richten, ja, ich müßte mich ununterbrochen beschreiben lassen und dabei stillhalten. Das liegt mir nicht!... Meine Krankheit Frau bricht gar nicht erst aus... Ich bin eine Frau und gleichzeitig ihr Gegenteil, weil ich nur meinen eigenen Blick, und auch den nur auf mich selbst zulasse (78).

The old woman's description of womanhood as a disease mocks the scriptures of gender. She appropriates the traditionally male gaze and transgresses her role as object by turning it at herself and describing herself. Jenny Lanyon convincingly suggests: "Jelinek's dystopian view of female subjectivity can offer no reassuring blueprint for an alternative society and yet, in the very bleakness of her vision, she recalls Brecht's imperative 'Ändere die Welt! Sie braucht es!'"

Another Brechtian technique used by Jelinek is the *Gestus*, which Brecht developed as a tool to ex-

hibit inner conflicts through (verbal or gestured) expressions to point out social problems internalized by the characters as well as to disrupt the flow of the action. Marc Silberman suggests that the concept of *Gestus* has been used in investigations of plays and movies as a critique of representation. In *Ein Sportstück* an example of *Gestus* occurs when a young woman, who wears breasts stitched on to a shirt on her back, takes the breasts from her back, looks at them, and attacks them with a dagger (123). The destruction of a woman's breasts on a piece of cloth signifies Jelinek's struggle for women's coming to terms with their bodies and their sexuality in a society that denies women's bodies many rights.

Similar to Jelinek, Marlene Streeruwitz notes Brecht's influence on her conceptualization of theater and her dramatic work in lectures on poetics held at the universities of Tübingen (1997) and Frankfurt (1998). Similar to Brecht's assertion about the theater's goal to question the status quo and the changeability of humankind, Streeruwitz comments:

Personen und Gruppen müßte die Bühne überlassen werden, um das Ihre [sic] darauf auszudrücken. Projekte für Stadtviertel, Schulen, Gruppen aller Art, Frauen, Männer, Arbeitsslose, Trinkerinnen und Trinker, Süchtige etc. Sie alle sollten nach dem Ausdruck ihrer Situation suchen können, der durch den Einsatz theatraler Mittel diese Situation den Betroffenen so entfernt, daß sie dabei Einsicht gewinnen können und den Anderen [den Zuschauern] ein Verstehen ermöglichen. Das Theater bekäme so eine soziale Funktion, die ihm fehlt.

Streeruwitz maintains that the theater as an institution has changed and played different roles in history: "Das bürgerliche Publikum errang ... die Macht. Die Episierung des Theaters geht damit einher. Der politische Akt ... unterliegt im Bürgerlichen der Entfremdung und der Psychologisierung." Streeruwitz's goal is to produce a kind of theater in which dominant and imperial forms of oppression are exposed. This can only be achieved through alienation and not identification. Her intention is the following: "Ziel muß also sein, ein Theaterpublikum zu vereinzeln und jeden und jede auf sich selbst zurückzuweisen." Drama should go against the expectations of the audience. Unlike many tra-

ditional plays in which playwrights try to offer the essence and truth about humankind to their audiences, contemporary plays should not even attempt to present a complete picture of life. Streeruwitz calls this strategy a "disintegration of realistic theater." The techniques she employs in her plays should produce effects comparable to those Brecht advocated: "Die Aufführung wird so noch mehr zur Aufführung in ihrem besonderen Ablauf. Jeder Anschein von Realismus wird im Keim erstickt. Die Theaterhaftigkeit bloßgelegt." In her lectures held in Frankfurt, Streeruwitz mentions the importance of Brecht's work:

Das Abenteuer am Theater fortsetzen hieße, sich einer entfremdeten Professionalität in den Mitteln der Umsetzung zu besinnen. Also doch noch ins 20. Jahrhundert zu gelangen, bevor es zu Ende ist. Brecht war da schon einmal weiter ... [Aber] eine Gruppe von Männern dominiert das Theater, die die großen Diskurse unserer Zeit, den kulturkritischen und den feministischen, als Quatsch bezeichnen.

Streeruwitz's conceptualization of theater resembles that of Brecht in its role as a platform for social and political activism. Nonetheless, Streeruwitz emphasizes the need for a critical theater that opposes not only the hierarchy of classes within society but also one that calls for a change of hierarchy between the sexes. In *Waikiki-Beach* (1992), Streeruwitz uses a number of Brechtian techniques to uncover the mendacity of our society. The plot of the story involves two successful men who deny the truth to save their careers as mayor and editor of a town's most important newspaper. The cast of characters includes Helene, the mayor's wife, Michael, the editor of the paper, Rudolf, the mayor, three so-called "fat women," a homeless woman, and a group of skinheads. The mayor's wife and the editor of a newspaper have an affair. When they secretly meet, the skinheads attack them. The editor flees, and the woman is killed. The lover informs the husband about the woman's death, and the two men agree that they should not inform the police about the murder because the mayor would lose his job, since his wife had an affair and the editor would be seen as a coward because he left the woman to die.

Streeruwitz uses techniques of Brecht's Epic

theater when some of the characters comment on other characters' roles and the message of the play as a whole. In one scene, three "fat women," who have nothing to do with the rest of the play, walk across the stage, observe the two stiffened bodies of the lovers on a couch, and critique the naturalistic depiction of the scene as if they were walking through an art exhibition:

2. DICKE: Soll hier Sozialkritik transportiert werden?

3. DICKE: Was soll Sozialkritik in der Kunst? Auch nur eine Männersucht. Zu predigen. (22)

The fat women's remarks about the other characters of the play and the playwright's intention for the play function as disruptive devices and make an identification with the characters impossible.

With two inserted scenes Streeruwitz employs an alienation effect when the lovers play the roles of Anthony and Cleopatra and use the words of Shakespeare's play in Shakespearean English. Later in the play, suddenly a scene from Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* is acted out in which three old men act as traitors of the truth, foreshadowing the end of *Waikiki Beach*. Throughout the play Streeruwitz also employs film sequences and lighting as alienation tools. But the playwright also makes use of surreal and grotesque elements from the Absurd theater which differ from Brecht's techniques.

My analysis of Jelinek's and Streeruwitz's plays and theoretical essays vis-à-vis Brecht's political goals, aesthetics, and dramaturgical techniques demonstrates how these two feminist playwrights identify themselves in a way as heirs to Brecht's legacy. At the same time, however, they do not uncritically adopt and assimilate his strategies but modify the techniques they employ in their plays and thus conceptualize a new theater which Brecht could not have foreseen. Even though these two Austrian dramatists appropriate some of Brecht's dramaturgical methods, they only partially support his sense of aesthetics and politics. Their theatrical concepts are influenced by his ideas, which they transform and modify according to their feminist goals and sense of aesthetics. They make use of techniques such as alienation; *Gestus*; historicization; stage design; use of props; screens, slides, or filmed sequences; music; commentaries; stepping out of the character's

role and addressing the audience. Like Brecht, who tried to heighten the awareness of his audiences about different social problems, these two feminist playwrights expose the often unequal power relationships between men and women and point out changes that have to be implemented before women can gain equal status with men in our societies. While Jelinek and Streeruwitz make use of Brechtian techniques, they simultaneously go beyond those techniques in a new kind of political theater.

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### BEYOND BUCKOW: BRECHTIAN INFLUENCE ON THE GDR LYRIKWELLE

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"Influence" is a problematic term, invoking a broad selection of possible methodologies ranging from Harold Bloom's psychoanalytic criticism across Barthes's intertextuality to a pragmatism such as Reinhold Grimm's, who recently waved off the whole business of intertextuality off as a trendy buzzword for the obvious, ancient reality that writ-

ers do read, and that they use what they read in their writing.<sup>1</sup> Let, therefore, the terms GDR and *Lyrikwelle* stake the position taken here. A historically specific and culturally embedded reading of texts cannot avoid treating influence other than as a historically specific and culturally embedded practice of writing. The term *Lyrikwelle* names a particular historical situation: a year-long craze for mass poetry readings among GDR youth that began in late 1962, one year after the building of the Berlin Wall. Situated thus, the term “literary influence” serves as the term for a particular type of mental horizon shared among GDR writers, readers, and listeners at that time.<sup>2</sup> Influence, for our purposes, shall describe the role a particular, commonly known literary source plays at the time of a text’s writing and reception.

The literary source in question here is the works of Bertolt Brecht. However, the extent and nature of the influence of Brechtian thought and art in the GDR during the early 1960s — i.e., what “Brechtian” meant at that time and in that place — has yet to be established by scholarship. The difficulty with any such analysis has been largely due to the ideological fronts within which Brecht researchers have worked until 1989, and which remain as our critical tradition.

For a historical case study of literary influence, an appropriate definition of “Brechtian” could be formed by turning to contemporary evidence for the received meaning of “Brechtian” among the poets, critics, and censorship authorities of the GDR. Several procedures offer themselves for this project: we could extrapolate a Brechtian “formula” from comments in literary criticism and in poetologies, and then determine the extent of the formula’s influence by identifying poems from that period which seem to apply that formula. Alternately — to avoid the dangers of trimming literature to fit our literary theory — we could reverse the procedure and characterize “Brechtian influence” based on those poems which were identified as Brechtian by contemporary critics and poets. But a third solution arises from a problem which hinders both of these approaches.

Even within the GDR, an unspoken but fundamental difference in the term “Brechtian” becomes apparent according to the cultural-political opinions of the writer or speaker. The contemporary reception of the *Lyrikwelle* poems demonstrated how in-

terpretations depended on the “ideological” — as it was called then — position of the poet, critic, or censor in question. The main differences of opinion revolved around the “Wirkung” — the putative political effect — of the poems. Whereas the poets understood their poems either as politically constructive and helpful to the state or as merely general philosophical statements, the state interpreted many of those same poems as destructive attacks and attempts to incite popular dissatisfaction in the GDR. For example, in March of 1963, at the peak of the *Lyrikwelle*, a secret report circulated at the highest levels of government in the form of an anthology of 69 poems by 23 of the *Lyrikwelle* poets. Its ominous title was “Information über negative Tendenzen in der Entwicklung der zeitgenössischen Lyrik in der DDR.”<sup>3</sup> The confidential status of the anthology reveals one of the most significant reasons why fundamental differences in cultural-political positions were not recognized by those who held them; the Party’s (un)communicative practices prevented differences from becoming recognized. Whereas the Party’s attitude was one of condescending annoyance with the “unclear” ideas of the poets, the poets shared a naïve faith that their well-intentioned expressions of social dissatisfaction would be taken seriously. Both sides assumed that the other shared the same fundamental values, rather than that the ongoing misinterpretations were symptoms of difference. Even the sharply critical *Lyrikwelle* poet Wolf Biermann, in his recent Düsseldorf lectures, admits to his own blindness back in 1962 with respect to the inability of the Party to respond to public dialogue, even — or perhaps especially? — when it occurred within the space of literature.<sup>4</sup>

Because of the widespread blindness towards differences in interpretive positions, the task of determining the status of Brecht and his work in the GDR is complicated. Even within the Party Brecht’s status was ambiguous. On the one hand, the state was heavily invested in holding onto Brecht as a classic literary figure who belonged to the GDR, and not to the competition in West Germany. For the Party’s purposes, “Brechtian” poetry was exemplified by poems such as “Lob der Partei,” “Fragen eines lesenden Arbeiters,” or “Kinderhymne,” just to name representative exam-



ples of Brecht's poems that were published in GDR newspapers or read at official events in 1962 and 1963. On the other hand, Brecht had been politically rehabilitated just a few years earlier, finally ending his association with formalism (still a very negative term in the GDR in 1963), which dated back to the *Expressionismus-Debatte* of 1938 and 1939 in Moscow. The censorship files (*Druckgenehmigungsakten*) on new GDR poetry in the years 1959–64, available at the Bundesarchiv in Berlin, reveal the still-remaining insecurity about Brecht. Although one finds many references to the triumvirate of “Becher, Brecht and Fühnberg” as the greatest figures of GDR poetry, the identification of Brechtian influence is alternately used to praise and to disparage. Some censors are wary of Brecht’s “Problemgedichte,” such as the one on the June 1953 uprising, or they criticize excessive use of Brechtian didacticism and dialectical form.<sup>5</sup>

The archives reveal a dynamic, complicated network of contemporary associations with the figure and works of Brecht that varies across the whole range of critics, poets, and poems in question. “Brechtian influence” was not a pattern against which we could measure the *Lyrikwelle* poetry. What remains as a starting point is the long critical tradition of Brechtian and GDR scholarship with all of its post-1989 problems. The trend of those working on GDR poetry in the last ten years is to try to rewrite the literary history of the GDR in order to present cultural phenomena such as the *Lyrikwelle* by including the ideological forces which shaped them. But in our well-intentioned flight from ideology, we seem to have now retreated to yet another, unnamed ideology, a position descended from the allegedly neutral Western academic perspective that tried before 1989 to distance itself from the Cold-War binary of Communism and anti-Communism.<sup>6</sup> In particular, our work has shifted from defenses of the literary qualities of GDR and GDR-exile poetry to culturally broader descriptions of antitotalitarian GDR activism, especially focusing on the Prenzlauer Berg scene and environmentalist, church, or Sorbian minority poetry. In other words, we have taken up the flag of a “subversive socialism,” sketching out a historical movement whose outlines we may be inventing. The perhaps unwanted effect is that we are contributing to a self-confirming and ideologically

useful historiography that heroizes “movements” within the GDR that were directed towards the end of the GDR.

Gerrit-Jan Berendse provides a convenient example of newer GDR scholarship. His seminal work on the “Sächsische Dichterschule,” published in 1990, describes the later careers of nineteen of the *Lyrikwelle* poets.<sup>7</sup> He defines the *Lyrikwelle* as an officially promoted euphoria which allowed the state to consolidate its control in the domain of poetry, just as it was doing in all areas of cultural and economic production after the Berlin Wall was built. Berendse establishes the “dialogicity” of this poetry, especially the intertextual references among these poets to each other, and shows how it functioned as an artistic counter to the state’s “monosemy,” its aggressive monopolization of linguistic meanings. The same thesis was echoed in 1995 by David Bathrick in his monograph on GDR culture, *The Powers of Speech*, which even from its title can be understood as a prime example of our recent focus on establishing the politically subversive powers of literature in the GDR.<sup>8</sup> Bathrick positions Brechtian aesthetics in general as a challenge to the “monosemic, binding models of communication” (70) sought after by the Party ideologues, and he characterizes the *Lyrikwelle* poets as “a collective group that experienced itself as such — a group ready to assert publicly its sense of shared ‘provocation’ and critical impatience with the status quo.” (71) Both Bathrick’s and Berendse’s approaches stress disruptive social activism as the defining function of *Lyrikwelle* poetry.

The critical tradition on the larger question of Brechtian influence on GDR poetry thus seems to be weighted with ideological baggage. On both sides of the Berlin Wall, at least back to the 1960s, there has always been a consensus in secondary literature that Brecht’s poetry is one of the primary models, if not the most fundamental one for post-1960 GDR poetry. I suggest that this claim is based more on a particular ideological perspective rather than on close readings of poems, and indeed no one has attempted to base directly the claim of Brechtian influence on readings of particular poems.

The historical “selection” of the *Lyrikwelle* poems also reveals a long tradition of a primarily ideologically motivated reception. If we begin with

the 63 poems Stephan Hermlin chose to present at the remarkable reading which initiated the *Lyrikwelle* on December 11, 1962, and identify those which then enjoyed multiple publication on both sides of the Wall, about fifteen poems by five poets emerge as the most "successful" poems. Their "success," we can safely say, was defined by the poets themselves, their publishers, and their audiences. It is no coincidence that every one of these fifteen "successful" poems are more or less open criticisms of contemporary GDR society. Of all the countries caught in the Cold War, the culture of the GDR was perhaps the most politicized of all, and the publication and reception of its literature both within the GDR and worldwide has always been determined nearly exclusively by the tension between text and ideology. Therefore, to investigate Brechtian influence is to explore the relationship between Brecht's poetic legacy and the particular political situation in which these poems participated.

Let us examine, then, these fifteen poems for agreed-upon Brechtian literary traits. The details of this procedure have already been described by the Brecht scholars Ute Seidel and Edmund Licher. Seidel's investigation of intertextuality enumerates an unsurprising collection of literary techniques such as direct reference to the poet's name, quotation, and borrowing of "Denkstrukturen."<sup>9</sup> Licher provides useful and well-founded summaries of Brechtian literary characteristics such as "Dialektik," "Historisierung," and "Kommunikativität" — relevant examples of Seidel's "thought structures."<sup>10</sup>

In the "successful" *Lyrikwelle* poems we can positively identify only rudimentary species of literary allusion and borrowing as Brechtian influences. Rainer Kirsch's sonnet "2005"<sup>11</sup> is the only one that approaches direct quotation in its fairly obvious response to Brecht's "An die Nachgeborenen."<sup>12</sup> Besides the basic question of the relationship of the socially committed artist to his legacy, Kirsch retains from Brecht's original only three motifs: the necessity of the element of "hate" in art, the confidence that future generations will be able to afford the virtue of "friendliness", and the awareness that those future readers may or may not accord "Nachsicht" as they judge our works. Whereas Brecht's poem uses the past tense to place the unquestionably evil, present reality of World War II at a distance, Kirsch sets

a much more ambiguous present of the GDR (although not specified as the GDR) as the foreground for his hope for a bright future. The challenge of the GDR poet, writes Kirsch as a 28-year-old "Nachgeborener" responding especially to the third section of Brecht's poem, is no longer to stay alive and battle fascism but to be "exact" in one's allegiances, to hate "well enough," and face close examination of one's self and one's poems. It is exactly this much more subtle situation which sent Brecht himself, in the face of the "Mühen der Ebene," into retreat in Buckow.

Of the fifteen poems, Rainer Kirsch's other sonnet, "Meinen Freunden, den alten Genossen," is the most representative for the post-Brechtian attitude of the *Lyrikwelle*, and also one of the most "successful" of the poems.<sup>13</sup> Here the identity of the *Lyrikwelle* generation, born between 1930 and 1945, is defined as a "wir" whose addressee is an "ihr" consisting of the founders of the GDR, who are out of touch with the new challenges facing socialist progress. While the dialectical structure of the first three strophes could be Brechtian, it may equally derive from the similar structure of Johannes R. Becher's sonnets, or even from the traditional Italian sonnet rules which dictated an antithetical argument divided among the strophes. As many have claimed, and Berendse has proven, the *Lyrikwelle* poetry represented a peak of intertextual borrowing from all ages and literatures of the world.<sup>14</sup> In any case, whatever literary sources may have fed this poem, its "success" was entirely determined by its expression of generational conflict.

Two months after the December 11, 1962 *Lyrikabend*, this poem and a letter from Rainer Kirsch were published in *Sonntag*, the national cultural weekly of the GDR.<sup>15</sup> Kirsch was responding to a criticism which had accused many of the *Lyrikabend* poems, including this poem by Kirsch, of being "Gedichte voller Dürsterkeit und mühsam enträtselbarer Bilder."<sup>16</sup> Both Kirsch's letter and the critic's rebuttal, published on the same page, as well as the ten other essays and letters to the editor published in response in the following weeks, focused exclusively on the generational conflict. A sentence from Kirsch's letter is enough to hint at the ideological dynamite hidden in this poem: "Nicht nur, daß schöpferische Unzufriedenheit, die vom Boden des

Sozialismus ausgeht, kurzerhand zu 'Mißbehagen an der Umwelt' umgemünzt wird (dies tun doch sonst nur die westlichen Journalisten, die auf der Suche nach 'zornigen jungen Männern' im sozialistischen Lager sind), nein, Sie schreiben, wir werden gegen die Partei sticheln."<sup>17</sup>

Brecht's poetry offered no precedent on how to write critical poetry within a society without offending the authorities of that society. If anything, one could blame Brechtian influence for the didactic, wiser-than-thou tone, which was the only possibly Brechtian poetic feature ever mentioned in the immediate reception of this poetry. Official judgement of the *Lyrikwelle* poetry was published in September, 1963, entitled "Entwicklungsprobleme der Lyrik seit dem V. Deutschen Schriftstellerkongreß," in *Neue Deutsche Literatur* (NDL), and included the following condemnation of this poetic voice: "Diese jungen Lyriker nehmen vielfach gegenüber den Erscheinungen der Wirklichkeit eine unbedingte — oft moralisierende — Haltung des richtenden Betrachters ein, Sie wollen subjektiv meist auf Veränderung zielen, begreifen sich aber noch nicht als Teil des verändernden sozialistischen Kollektivs."<sup>18</sup> In the *Druckgenehmigungsakten* of the GDR censors this sort of "Haltung" is often credited to Brechtian influence — sometimes positively, sometimes negatively, depending on the subject matter of the poem, of course. The writers of the NDL article went on to conclude that a certain "upper" level of GDR society was being targeted in the *Lyrikwelle* poetry: "Daraus ergibt sich die für zahlreiche Gedichte charakteristische Gegenüberstellung von ICH und IHR bzw. von WIR und IHR" (70).

Such antagonistic references to Party authority were one of the first features to disappear as the *Lyrikwelle* poetry later evolved into the much more "düster" and "mühsam enträtselbar" poetry of the late 1960s, when these same poets shifted even further away from Brecht into complicated, hidden encodings and allegories of intra-societal split in the typical Soviet-Bloc Cold War fashion. Of the remaining thirteen poems I have not mentioned here, the Brechtian features are merely antithetical argument structure and parabolic form, neither of which are exclusively Brechtian. The claims by Berendse, Wüst, and — in the 1970s and 80s — by various GDR critics, that their favorite GDR poets, the ones

who began their careers in the *Lyrikwelle*, owed their beginnings mostly to the literary model provided by Brecht, fail to hold up upon closer examination.<sup>19</sup> Instead, we need to reexamine the ideological baggage attached to the figure of Brecht and to untangle our admiration for his poetic achievements from our analyses of the poetry by his successors, his "Nachgeborene." I close with confirmation from Volker Braun's poem "Kommt uns nicht mit Fertigem!": "Alles Alte ist verdächtig: her, Kontrollposten Jugend!"<sup>20</sup>

## Endnotes

1. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1973). Barthes dismisses "influence" as an insufficient category in his Kristevan definition of "intertextuality" on p. 39 of Roland Barthes, "Theory of the text," trans. Ian McLeod, *Untying the Text. A Post-structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge, 1981), 31–47. Grimm dismisses "intertextuality" on p. 208 in Reinhold Grimm, "Intertextualität als Schranke. Übersetzungsprobleme bei Zitaten und dergleichen am Beispiel Günter Kunerts," *Monatshefte* 89.2 (1997), 208–220.
2. For a treatment of the *Lyrikwelle* see portions of Anthony Visser, *Blumen ins Eis. Lyrische und literaturkritische Innovationen in der DDR. Zum kommunikativen Spannungsfeld ab Mitte der 60er Jahre* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994). A more extensive investigation of the *Lyrikwelle* focusing especially on Stephan Hermlin's *Lyrikabend* is in progress as a dissertation by this writer at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
3. "Information über negative Tendenzen in der Entwicklung der zeitgenössischen Lyrik in der DDR," Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Alexander-Abusch-Archiv, Nr. 104.
4. In reference to the time period of Stephan Hermlin's *Lyrikabend* Biermann confesses, "Ich brauchte noch zwei, drei Jährchen. Ich suchte immer noch Verständigung, ich liebäugelte immer wieder mit der Chance, den Drachen mit der sanften Gewalt der Vernunft zu überzeugen, ohne daß er die List der Aufklärung merkt und ohne daß er mich packt." Wolf Biermann, *Wie man Verse macht und Lieder. Eine Poetik in acht Gängen* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1997), 37. NB, this admission could be disqualified if one chose to construe it as a self-defense of past complicity with the Party.
5. Brecht's poem "Die Lösung" was in 1964 still one of the problems holding up publication of *Lyrik Band V-VII*: see letter from Klaus Gysi (Aufbau-Verlag) to Haid (Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel), 6 Apr. 1964, Bundesarchiv, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR, DR1, 5106/179-180. An unusually

explicit example of a negative reference to the influence of Brechtian characteristics of 'Verfremdung, Didaktik' can be found in the *Gutachten* by Dieter Schiller (probably written in 1962) regarding Karl Mickel's manuscript for the poetry volume *Lobverse und Beschimpfungen*, Bundesarchiv, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR.

6. See, e.g., Bill Maltarich, Alan Ng, Nancy Thuleen, "Literature as Contested Ground: A Retrospective of GDR Studies in the United States," *Contentious Memories. Looking Back at the GDR*, eds. Jost Hermand and Marc Silberman (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 107-139.

7. Gerrit-Jan Berendse, *Die "Sächsische Dichterschule." Lyrik in der DDR der sechziger und siebziger Jahre* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1990).

8. David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech. The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1995).

9. Ute Seidel, "'Gewebe der Literatur': Intertextualität — ein Ansatz für interdisziplinäre Arbeit am literarischen Text," *Interdisziplinäre Aspekte des Textes* (Potsdam: Brandenburgische Landeshochschule, 1990), 123-34.

10. Edmund Licher, *Zur Lyrik Brechts. Aspekte ihrer Dialektik und Kommunikativität* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1984).

11. Public premiere on December 11, 1962, at Hermlin's *Lyrikabend*. First published as: Rainer Kirsch, "2005," *Neue Deutsche Literatur* 11.1 (Jan. 1963), 98-99.

12. "An die Nachgeborenen" was given the closing position in the standard GDR Brecht poetry volume *Hundert Gedichte* (1950). The source used here was Bertolt Brecht, "An die Nachgeborenen," *Gedichte 2. Sammlungen 1938-1956*, Vol. 12 of *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, ed. Werner Hecht et al. (Berlin and Frankfurt/Main: Aufbau and Suhrkamp, 1988), 85-87.

13. Public premiere on December 11, 1962, at Hermlin's *Lyrikabend*. First published as: Rainer Kirsch, "Meinen Freunden, den alten Genossen," *Sonntag*, 17 (Feb. 1963), 5.

14. Berendse summarizes boldly on p. xiii, regarding the poetry by the *Lyrikwelle* poets: "In keiner anderen deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur ist der Umgang mit den Klassikern und zeitgenössischer Literatur so umfangreich und produktiv wie in jener Poesie."

15. See note 13. Kirsch's lengthy letter appeared under the title "Vom scheinbar nebensächlichen Streit zur prinzipiellen Frage" on the same page.

16. Bernt von Kugelgen [author's name printed incorrectly as "Kugelgen"], "Nach einem Abend," *Sonntag* 6 (Jan. 1963), 2.

17. Kirsch, "Vom scheinbar nebensächlichen Streit zur prinzipiellen Frage," 5.

18. "Entwicklungsprobleme der Lyrik seit dem V. Deutschen Schriftstellerkongress," *Neue deutsche Literatur* 11.9 (Sept. 1963), 70. This apparently anonymous text is credited only in a note at the back of the issue to Silvia Schlenstedt, Dieter Schiller, Christian Löser, et al. This text has been cited in other secondary literature as one of anonymous authorship.

19. E.g., Berendse 68 and 113, and Karl-Heinz Wüst,

*Sklavensprache: subversive Schreibweisen in der Lyrik der DDR 1961-1976* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1989), 173.

20. Public premiere on December 11, 1962 at Hermlin's *Lyrikabend*. First published as: Volker Braun, "Kommt uns nicht mit Fertigem," *Forum* 63.24 (December 1963), 23.

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## THE BRECHT EFFECT IN CINEMA: 1960-90

Ingeborg Hoesterey

It is only after Brecht's death that the author's most famous device for a revolutionized theatre, the *Verfremdungseffekt*, was adopted by avant-garde directors for cinematic practice in significant and influential ways. Brecht appropriated the device of making strange (*priem ostranenie*), as we now know, from the Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky who, in his famous essay of 1917, "Art as Technique" (German: "Die Kunst als Verfahren") had called for defamiliarization devices to set off poetic discourse more clearly from ordinary language.

The V-effect, translated more recently as "defamiliarization effect" (replacing Bentley's "alienation effect") would prove highly engaging for auteurs like Jean-Luc Godard and the politicized filmmakers of the New German Cinema. These in turn influenced numerous artfilm practitioners including the post-modern iconoclasts of the New New Hollywood (Lynch, Tarantino et al.). The deployment of the V-effect, i.e., all those strategies that would make transparent the dream-factory tools of the traditional narrative film, was to prevent a conventional illusionism gained first and foremost through continuity editing. Defamiliarization devices were to reveal the constructedness of a film's representations so that the viewer could develop an intellectual distance to what was viewed. There are of course earlier instances of cinematic self-reflexivity in Hollywood-style films that did not essentially challenge the dominant code. The genre of comedy permitted versions of distancing effects such

as Bob Hope's direct audience address at the end of *Road to Utopia* (1945): "As far as I am concerned, this picture is over right now." (Incidentally, the 1931 film *Die Drei von der Tankstelle* had already used the same structure.)

Before I turn to the political aesthetics of the Brechtian effects in cinema, mention should be made of an important adaptation of Brecht's concept of epic theatre, the film *La Ronde* of 1950 by Max Ophüls, based on Schnitzler's *Der Reigen*. "In *La Ronde*," Anna Kuhn writes, "Ophüls actively and consistently mitigates against viewer identification. His chief vehicle of alienation in the film is the *me-neur de jeu* who, by directly addressing the audience, by interrupting and commenting on the action, by self-consciously pointing to himself, breaks the aesthetic appearance (*ästhetischer Schein*) of the work of art" (Kuhn 1983, 94).

The director associated most with a Brechtian mode in the 1960s is Jean-Luc Godard, the daring and maverick filmmaker of the French *nouvelle vague*. Godard became acquainted with Brecht first through *Kuhle Wampe*, which he mentions in an article on "The Political Cinema" for *Gazette du Cinéma* in 1950 (Godard 1972: 245). Brecht's theory and practice of a theatre that would create a politically aware spectator rather than a passive consumer of events presented on the stage naturally appealed to the leftist intellectual Godard. As Peter Wollen stated in 1972, the Frenchman was about to develop a "counter-cinema whose values are counterposed to those of orthodox cinema" (Wollen 1999: 499). Influenced, however indeterminately, by Brecht's opposition to the 'culinary' mode in theatre, Godard sought with intensity a cinematic style that could break the mystification and subliminal ideological illusionism characteristic of the 'classic' Hollywood-style movie.

The Brechtian effects in the many films that the prolific Godard created in the sixties and beyond, are numerous. Only a few can be sampled here, for one Brecht's demand for a style of acting that would exhibit all gestural and verbal performance as exactly that, a performance, rather than the coherent portrayal of a character. Actors were to speak their lines as if quoting material, thereby breaking the illusion of the psychological unity of the character. The first scene of *Deux ou trois choses que je sais*

*d'elle* (1966) pays double homage to Brecht, as it were, by having Marina Vlady, not yet the character Juliette Janson, face the camera and proclaim: "Yes, to speak as if one were quoting the truth. It's Father Brecht who said that."

Godard's films are essays that comment on life and the state of intellectual discourse, fusing both. In *Breathless* (1959) the Jean Seberg figure asks her friend, the thief and bohemian played by Jean-Paul Belmondo: "Do you know Adorno?" "No," he replies, "who is it, did you sleep with him?" Although the naughty flourish by which Godard's wit here undoes the master discourse quality of philosophical theory is typical of his cinematic metafiction, more prominent are quotations from works by famous minds that are wrapped up as aphoristic digressions and snippets of dialogue; they ceaselessly decenter Godard's narratives. Whether presented in an explicit or implicit mode, these insertions prohibit any type of conventional identification with plot or the psychology of a character. The causal linearity of plot development, characteristic of the continuity style of classical Hollywood cinema, is mocked throughout. Instead Godard's movies are composites of multiple, shifting, discontinuous strands of filmic textuality, sometimes randomly connected as chapters (e.g., in *Pierrot le fou*, 1965).

In his essay on "Godard and Counter Cinema" Peter Wollen aligned the filmmaker's project closely with that of Brecht when he devised a binary scheme to describe Godard's "revolutionary" counter-cinema as opposed to Hollywood cinema (Wollen 1999: 499). The analogy to Brecht's "dramatische Form" versus the "epische Form des Theaters" is obvious although Wollen does not name Brecht nor another potential inspiration, Roman Jakobson's two-axis theory of language. (At the time of writing, in the early seventies, Wollen is a structuralist semi-otician.)

#### The Hollywood Mode Godard's Style

Narrative transivity	vs. Narrative intransivity
Identification	Estrangement
Transparency	Foregrounding
Single diegesis	Multiple diegesis
Closure	Aperture
Pleasure	Unpleasure.

Some instances in the table of binary oppositions in particular alert our Brechtian antennas; we read



"pleasure" as culinary and "aperture" as the "open form" that Volker Klotz attributed to Brecht's theater. Wollen sees the open form in Godard's cinema as disturbing narrative transivity in various ways: "It is impossible to maintain 'motivational' coherence, when characters themselves are incoherent, fissured [ ... ], multiple and self-critical" (Wollen 1999: 501). It should be remembered that as Brechtian as Godard gets, there is always a sensibility of the absurd at work in his distancing and decentering operations, nowhere more visible and "unpleasurable" than in *Pierrot le fou*.

In recent years Godard's oeuvre has been seen in the context of "deconstruction," as the philosophical-literary concept has moved more and more into artistic practices and their interpretive environment (e.g., deconstructionist architecture).

Without Godard's embrace of Brecht, Volker Schlöndorff's most Brechtian work, *The Sudden Riches of the Poor People of Korbach* (1972), is hard to imagine. The harsh critique of poverty and tyranny in Hesse in the 1830s is an early example of the New German Cinema and its anti-Hollywood stance, here first and foremost through the use of a variety of viewer-distancing effects the most conspicuous of which ostentatiously provokes Hollywood's continuity style. The poor people of Korbach try to rob the tax wagon of the Duke of Hesse that always uses the same passage through the woods. Schlöndorff has the men attempt the robbery five times in vain; the sixth time it finally works (and marks the beginning of their gruesome end).

A robbery such as this is a topos of the American Western and therefore prompts certain expectations in viewers. The linear narrative film of the tradition would never dare use such excessive retardation. It is, however, precisely through the documentation of the recurring scenes of utmost frustration on the part of the peasants that the historical need for a change of the social situation becomes vividly manifest for the spectator. Other defamiliarization devices include the scene in which a young girl mechanically recites a song by Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, "Bauernschweiß verschönt, der König wird gekrönt," that satirically exposes the class system. In addition, the visible imperfections of lay acting are here employed to further disturb cinematic illusionism. Schlöndorff's film most con-

genially continues Brecht's project with cinematic means, a point more difficult to make with regard to the avant-garde cinema of Straub/Huillet as attempted by Martin Walsh in the 1970s in articles posthumously edited under the title *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema*.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder actually started out as a maker of a Brechtian "anti-theater," then moved on to develop his brilliantly idiosyncratic screen style. Throughout his (tragically short) career Fassbinder echoed Brechtian priorities in his signature slogan, "Filme befreien den Kopf." Close-textual analyses of Brechtian strategies in Fassbinder's movies are still outstanding, although such intertextuality is usually perceived and sometimes theorized (Corrigan 1994: 196, n.10). Thus Timothy Corrigan importantly observes in his discussion of *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*: "Fassbinder's film is an extremely disconcerting attempt to move the viewer to a point where he or she can not only respond on that level [love, suffering] but can also examine the murky middle ground where cinema and social life confuse the clarity of each other's communications" (Corrigan 1994: 35). The scholar of New German Film goes on to point to Fassbinder's unabashed regard for the melodramatic mode, and that the director's "semi-Brechtian perspective" on melodramatic formulas (borrowed from Douglas Sirk) did generate his "critical camp, his mixture of surface art and real emotions."

There are other remarkable footsteps, less wellknown to the Brecht community. The English director Peter Greenaway makes cultural appropriation his artistic hallmark. In *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* of 1989 his rewriting of Brecht/Weill's *The Threepenny Opera* constitutes, apart from the many visual pastiches, the most conspicuous borrowing. The English filmmaker and opera producer radicalizes Brecht's play by staging it as high grotesque that ends the film in a notorious, albeit misunderstood ceremony of cannibalism. The practice of conflation and stylization in *The Cook, the Thief* turns narrative into abstract paradigm, into a tale of oppressor and oppressed, of abuser and abused. Given the director's penchant for Jacobean drama, Shakespeare's villainous *Timon of Athens* and his men are models for Spica and his gang. Yet Greenaway's thief can also be seen as a monumen-

tally inflated Mackie Messer, a Brecht-and-John-Gay composite figure.

The Brechtian intertext is visible in a number of ways. There are the cronies surrounding their boss, shady characters all of them. They bring their chief stolen silver as do their colleagues in *The Threepenny Opera*. Both MacHeath and Spica share a predilection for bourgeois pretention. Spica is a gourmet, a sexual pervert, and knowledgeable about the opposition of literal vs. metaphorical meaning, that is, he is a dialecticized Brechtian character. Like Brecht and Godard, Greenaway is not interested in conventional character development; he goes so far as to use abstract color-coding derived from avant-garde photography to undermine realistic characterization.

The neon sign "Luna" (moon) that appears in a hybrid space, the film studio only partially propped as a service area adjoining Spica's gourmet restaurant "Luna," has been interpreted as an allusion to Bertolucci's film with the same title (van Wert 1990: 45). Knowing Greenaway knowing Brecht, one tends to read the sign as a reference to "Moon over Soho," the cynical, albeit nostalgic dismissal of romantic love in the *Threepenny Opera*. (It is into the dark void of this off-space that the lovers in Greenaway's visual tale are dismissed.) The "Luna" sign mimicks the typical Brechtian anti-illusionistic prop, which in turn prompts this viewer's reading of a second sign that lights up for a moment in the darkness outside the neo-neo-Baroque of the restaurant: "Aspic." On a first, rhetorical level, the verbal image is an anagram of the thief's name, Spica. On the level of artistic auto-reflexivity, the displayed sign "Aspic" comments by way of *mise en abyme* upon the filmmaker's pastiche style. Aspic is one of the variants of pasticcio, the hodgepodge paté of various ingredients that gave rise to the metaphorical use in artistic discourses in sixteenth-century Italy and later developed into "pastiche."

Greenaway's Brechtian pastiche, a most sophisticated conflation of historical and contemporary material, both in terms of ideas and styles, can be appreciated only if seen allegorically rather than mimetically, as straightforward realist narrative. *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* is gaudy at best, if seen conventionally. The stylization of cannibalism as baroque pageant that ends the film

can only be viewed as allegory, namely as a most powerful allegory of late-capitalism that dramatically updates Brecht.

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## LA HERENCIA DE LA DRAMATURGIA DE BRECHT

Fernando Duque Mesa

Eugen Berthold Brecht (1898-1956). Actor, teórico, dramaturgo, poeta, novelista, narrador, pensador, guionista y director teatral alemán, fue un creador que durante su vida jamás llegó a ocuparse de América, y en particular de América Latina, sin embargo no es difícil hallar una más decisiva y profunda influencia sobre el teatro contemporáneo de nuestro continente americano que la ejercida por toda su obra, ya dese las Piezas Didácticas (*Lehrstücke*), sus obras de transición, como aquellas donde se apreciaba una alta maduración y depuración de todas sus teorías del teatro épico o dialéctico, donde es frecuente el empleo de las metáforas, parábolas, elipsis y alegorías para con el momento presente que le tocó vivir, en medio de tormentosos y convulsionados tiempos como fue padecer y vivir en carne propia las dos grandes Guerras Mundiales, participando como enfermero en la primera, y dando cuenta de los no menos dolorosos años veinte, que tienen su expresión más cruda y alta con la crisis capitalista mundial, con un masivo desempleo y ruina, que vino a ser captado y aprovechado a sus anchas por Adolfo Hitler y su pandilla de *gangsters* en su endiablado camino de ascenso y expansionismo que representó el inicio de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, que le significó a Brecht como a los más selecto de su generación, tanto artística como científica el obligado exilio, esquivando el fascismo que se iba extendiendo como una gigantesca e incontenible mancha de aceite sin fronteras de ninguna índole, hasta culminar en un inmenso holocausto de vidas humanas y pérdidas materiales hasta la llegada de su derrota y rendición final incondicional, en 1945.

Ahora bien, hoy en día ya es un pensamiento común y obligado entre los creadores de teatro como entre quienes nos dedicamos a la investigación teatral, decir que muy buena parte del meridiano del teatro experimental en el siglo xx atraviesa de manera inevitable por la obra teórica y dramática de Bertolt Brecht, más allá de cualquier momento contextual especial como por ejemplo la época que abarca los años sesenta y setenta, donde Brecht fue el plato favorito en las garras de los principales y más diversos movimientos de izquierda, en momen-

tos en que el discurso político, coyuntural, enarboló en muchas ocasiones sus obras y muy poco en serio sus propuestas estéticas, al tomarlas en forma ligera e irresponsable en muchos casos a lo largo y ancho de América, desvirtuándolas en general al asimilarlas de un modo erróneo, precipitada y en el mejor de los casos parcial, llevando a no pocos equívocos, como la mejor antipropaganda contra su autor, que aún se mantiene en la memoria hasta el momento presente, por falta de un estudio riguroso y concienzudo no sólo en América sino en otros continentes, pero donde por fortuna los más importantes, sólidos y serios grupos, directores, dramaturgos, actores e investigadores, han asimilado las grandes riquezas de su obra, generando sustanciales aportes y reelaboraciones desde el discurso de la puesta en escena, la dramaturgia y la misma reflexión teórica, a partir de la búsqueda de nexos orgánicos con sus mismas raíces culturales, su idiosincrasia, es decir, teniendo en cuenta una actitud muy brechtiana como es la de crear a partir de nuestros particulares temas o problemas concretos ese lenguaje propio.

Por otra parte, valga destacar como en el campo del quehacer teatral en el mundo, ningún teórico, dramaturgo y director ha sido tan polémico, rico y brillante en su producción, y a la vez tan amplia y fabulosamente tergiversado, mal interpretado con torpeza a más no poder, sobreviviendo no obstante a mares de aciertos y falacias de todo orden que aún siguen retumbando y reiterándose con sordina en los mares de la ignorancia, porque “de la calumnia algo queda,” dice un adagio popular, y sí que ha quedado bastante escoria en el camino..., en este sentido el continente americano no ha sido la excepción a la regla en mención de esta incultura que se ha venido imponiendo desde 1956, cuando fallece, y de manera contemporánea “comienza” a constituirse en uno de los momentos en que empieza a diseminarse y expandir su pensamiento poético con relativa rapidez, siendo “estudiado” y llevado a la práctica, y a través de sus propias obras que poco a poco se traducen en distintos países al igual que sus ensayos, agrupados en *Schriften zum Theater* (*Escritos sobre Teatro*), que van influyendo e impulsando con su pensamiento, la generación de una pluralidad de dramaturgias particulares en América y en todo el orbe que se han venido gestando, quierase o no reconocer por parte de algunos, en muy buena medida

a la sombra de su paradigmática figura.

La dramaturgia y la teoría de Bertolt Brecht desembarcó con su ironía en nuestro continente americana, desacreditando de entrada en puerto con lujo de razones inteligentes, en forma elegante, tosca y “grosera,” llamando las cosas por su nombre exácto, quitándole el piso a viejas concepciones del arte escénico que imperaban con su carácter provinciano, cuasi feudal, situadas en apariencia para ciertos “creadores” como “inamovibles” y “eternas”..., representadas por distintas asunciones del teatro dramático, producto y reflejo de un gusto siempre avalada por el estamento gubernamental, oficial, heredado de la cultura europea, que se alternaba con interesantes formas escénicas como el teatro costumbrista en Colombia y México, el teatro criollo en Argentina y Uruguay, el mismo teatro bufo en Cuba, rituales negros y formas también criollas muy ricas en Brasil, Haití y otros países del caribe, para sólo citar algunos casos ejemplares en América de este sincretismo escénico que se dió en general en todo el continente desde sus particularidades nacionales, que por fortuna se siguen dando, porque los procesos culturales son indetenibles en el campo de los ricos intercambios, las distintas dinámicas de una sociedad y cúmulo de sociedades, y en el caso específico de Brecht se comenzaron a producir con muy ricos hallazgos, aunque en menor cantidad, pero así mismo sus aspectos cualitativos son lo suficientemente gratificantes a la hora de los inventarios.

Y es así también como una de sus primeras “víctimas” a su arribo comienza a ser el teatro heredado de los españoles desde los tiempos de la conquista, en lo que se refiere a la América Latina, caracterizado en su larga evolución estético-formal entre otras concepciones por el melodrama, forma que se encontraba trepada en el podio de la palabra como reina, como si ésta fuera la esencia última del drama, tipo de teatro cuyo eje principal en muy buena medida era el verbo, también denominado en el lenguaje macondiano de nuestro medio colombiano como Teatro Visita, porque se asemeja bastante a este tipo de reuniones sociales de tipo familiar, teatro éste al cual Brecht le contraponen a cambio la búsqueda de la teatralidad, el privilegio del código gestual, el gesto, que denominará más adelante como el “Gestus,” para darle un sentido más profundo, que se constituye en una de las herramientas indiscuti-

bles con la que se habrá de narrar las causas reales que llevan o conducen a producir un determinado estado de cosas en la sociedad, al tiempo que procede a mostrar las posibles alternativas a optar por los hombres para su transformación, al presentar los acontecimientos desde una óptica o dialéctica negativa, es decir, desde el lado *No* para que el espectador encuentre el lado *Sí*.

En este sentido conviene señalar la forma en que la estética brechtiana vino a revolucionar la escena mundial, desde todas las aristas posibles que tienen lugar en la gestación y concepción dramaturgica del hecho teatral. En primer lugar Brecht entiende aquí ya por Dramaturgia, la relación dialéctica siempre compleja tanto entre el texto escrito, como el mismo discurso del espectáculo que se cristaliza a través del arte del director, los actores, los técnicos y los otros lenguajes en manos de especialistas que se entretajan en la especificidad de la puesta en escena, ámbito en el que no hay discursos más importantes portadores de sentido en el espectáculo: donde la escenografía no es más trascendente que la actuación, ni la música es más importante que la iluminación, ni el texto escrito es más valioso que el trabajo del director, ni el maquillaje es más preponderante que las búsquedas de las soluciones gestuales y espaciales, etc., no hay pues partes más importantes portadoras de sentido, ya que por su carácter de convergencia multidisciplinaria de lenguajes, si en él llegara a faltar uno sólo de los códigos escénicos citados, todo el sentido y superobjetivo profundo ideado por el grupo de actores se arruinaría o vendría abajo por completo..., ya que en forma inexorable todas las artes que allí se dan cita noche tras noche en ese efímero instante que es el teatro entre escena y público, tienen su autonomía o estatuto dramático particular, de la misma manera que poseen su interdependencia. que se manifiesta en el justo momento en que todos esos discursos se articulan, entrando en tensión con sus fluidos peculiares en el espacio escénico, funcionando en forma coherente como una unidad con organicidad integral que despliega múltiples lecturas y por lo tanto dando lugar a una pluralidad de sentidos y significaciones en la *mise en scène*, función específica del gran arte como es la de indagar la polisemia, la multiplicidad de lecturas que emanan de sus voces para con el aquí y ahora. Esta serie de claridades sobre las in-

terrelaciones entre los lenguajes del espectáculo nos lo enseñó a todos Brecht, conciencia que se hizo pronto extensiva por profundizar en la elaboración y búsqueda de múltiples y ricos sentidos del signo teatral, siendo uno de los que se vino a anticipar al desarrollo posterior del discurso semiológico en el arte escénico..., por eso el actor del teatro épico tiene que tener una gran conciencia de ser al tiempo un gran administrador y regulador de sus particulares gestos a mostrar a los espectadores, gestos portadores de unas intensiones y unos sentidos específicos predispuestos, buscados en el laboratorio de creación con sus compañeros de escena y el mismo director, para que logren tener allí su respectiva efectividad y claridad lúcida.

Por otra parte, Brecht destruye de modo radical las viejas concepciones del naturalismo que hasta entonces se tenían sobre estos diversos lenguajes del hecho teatral ya referidos, donde se requiere del dominio de ellos para lograr el más alto grado de cualificación en la puesta en escena, es decir, de un verdadero especialista en éstos que maneje además una nueva concepción de cada uno de estos códigos:

Es así como se urge de un nuevo tipo de texto dramático, en el cual se empiece por contar con una estructura dramática "abierta," siguiendo la sabiduría del mejor teatro popular, que se opone a la forma "cerrada" dramática aristotélica, para dar tránsito a un discurso que narre una historia de manera "descuadrada" en su poética holgada, no ya lineal rumbo a la intriga y al clímax para que la vivan y sufran en su dramatismo sus nuevos espectadores, sino contribuyendo a no explotar los sentimientos del público, a fin de que no sea depositario de la catástris y la ilusión, y donde las escenas de por sí son autónomas operando en forma de shock, a saltos para narrar de manera dialéctica los sucesos de la fábula, que han sufrido una operación artística de antemano, al ser presentados en algunos casos, como ya sucedidos, acontecidos, o sea, "historizados," por eso Brecht con bastante frecuencia vino a acudir a la historia como materia prima ejemplar de primer orden que puede procurar este efectivo funcionamiento, echando mano de referentes culturales muy conocidos por los espectadores que se van a encargar de contribuir a romper las otras atmósferas, el factor sorpresa) que por lo general tiende a conducir a promover tensiones y vivencias, especies de

invisibles y tramposas telarañas para atrapar todo el arsenal y capacidad de pensamiento manifiesto en la crítica del espectador hacia lo mostrado, por ello para salvar este obstáculo Brecht procedió con precaución, con mucha conciencia y claridad a "dinamitarlo" o a dejarlo inservible, inútil, para así desarticular este factor intriga y otros aspectos afines citados, produciéndose de todas maneras una identificación, que él sabía muy bien que se tiene que dar en el arte teatral no obstante ya en cierto menor grado con sus personajes, acciones y situaciones y no de manera absorbente, apabullante, total, como en las manifestaciones de la concepción dramática aristotélica.

Así mismo Brecht sabía también que necesitaba de un nuevo tipo de personajes, personajes negativos o "antihéroes," aquellos que ya no desean ser héroes como lo encontramos en el modelo del prudente Ulises en *La Odisea* de Homero, que Brecht tendrá siempre en cuenta para aplicar en muchas piezas, como en los casos de protagonistas como: Baal, Galy Gay, Coriolano, Mackie Navaja, Skweyk, Langman, Gruche, Madre Coraje, Herr Puntilla, Matti, Shen-Te/Shui-Ta, etc., que se equivocan por ser de carne y hueso y no están supeditados a los designios de seres superiores o Dioses que no les permiten pensar, salirse de la trampa y rejas infranqueables del "destino," como si suele acontecer en la tragedia griega donde el héroe de antemano está por completo determinado, y además no puede violentar las tres unidades de tiempo, espacio y acción en las que está enmarcada e inscrita su historia, como: Edipo, Clitemnestra, Electra, Agamenón, Orestes, Antígona, Medea, Prometeo, entre otros, quienes de manera inexorable tienen que cumplir con las líneas que han sido trazadas por los dioses, soñadas por sus creadores Esquilo, Sófocles y en menor grado de rigidez dramática por Eurípides. El error es humano y el hombre es un mar de equivocaciones, este aspecto es uno de los motores naturales que fue impulsando toda la dramaturgia de Bertolt Brecht, como ya lo habían hecho también un William Shakespeare, Félix Lope de Vega, Pedro Calderón de la Barca, Molière, Carlo Goldoni, entre otros.

Por eso estos antihéroes o antipersonajes en general en forma necia, carnalesca, optan por el camino que aparece como errado para el público,



audiencia con la cual establecen también una nueva y vigorosa relación más directa, cálida, lúcida y lúcida, empenzando porque hacen a un lado la cuarta pared y a cambio de ella deciden entablar una actitud crítica, distanciada, dialógica cargada siempre de vital humor e ironía, por ello se necesita de un nuevo tipo de actor y de un nuevo concepto de arte de la actuación misma, en que el actor tras haber encarnado (vivenciado) en un principio en la asunción de su personaje (Stanislavski), luego vendrá a entrenarse en el procedimiento permanente para estar entrando y saliendo de él con una gran destreza artística en una relación de juego poético, para así lograr efectividad justamente en la aplicación de los célebres *Verfremdungseffekt* o Efectos de Distanciamiento sobre la escena, para lo cual se requiere de actores bastante hábiles como los que tuvo en su tiempo Brecht, que eran herederos del viejo teatro, y de los cuales decía con ironía lamentándose: “Lástima que sean tan buenos,” refiriéndose a la forma como aún ellos se defendían en la escena durante los ensayos de la nueva pieza con la vieja estética actoral..., porque pensaban que con esa nueva concepción estética del Teatro Epico de Brecht no iban a agradar al público... Y un crítico en este mismo sentido le pregunta al dramaturgo alemán: “Y en verdad no lo agradecerían?”. Y Brecht le contesta: “Me temo que no.” Es decir, Brecht sabía que había que correr el riesgo de no agradar al público, para romper la “calidad” hasta ese momento establecida por los cánones estéticos reinantes, parasitaria del naturalismo, y esa fue todo el tiempo su tarea y el piso de su revolución escénica: proponer una nueva dramaturgia y una nueva estética, ya fè que lo logró con creces plasmado en su monumental obra, herencia de toda la humanidad.

Pero así mismo dentro de todos su aportes y lecciones regados para “las generaciones futuras,” tal vez uno de los más apreciados por todos los hombres de teatro del mundo, será sin lugar a dudas su demostración dramaturgica paradigmática que lo convirtió en un gran artista-investigador-destructor por excelencia en nuestro siglo xx en el campo teatral: nadie como él construyó y destruyó (desbarató) cuantas veces fueran necesarias sus piezas, y ni se diga de los graves tropiezos y enfrentamientos que tuvo con sus editores por las incesantes versiones, pero era un autor sui generis que podía permitírselo, lo que para otro creador sería un lujo.

Pero Brecht como sabemos no sólo destruía de modo permanente su obra, sino también la de los demás autores “...que a mí me servían...” -- como lo dice en forma autobiográfica en la “Canción de un Autor Dramático” -- , y fue así como entre los clásicos se apropió de *Antígona* de Sófocles, *Don Juan* de Molière, *Coriolano* de William Shakespeare y *Vida de Eduardo II de Inglaterra* de Christopher Marlowe, y aún no satisfecho con ésto destruyó las novelas de Máximo Gorki para configurar *La Madre* y la del creador checo, Jaroslav Hasek, *Schweyk en la Segunda Guerra Mundial*, las cuales convirtió en sendas obras para el haber de su dramaturgia y el de la misma humanidad, y así mismo hizo otro tanto con dramaturgos como John Gay para elaborar a partir de *La Opera de los Mendigos*, *La Opera de los Tres Centavos*, y del pretexto homónimo de Jacob Lenz, generar *El Preceptor*, entre otras.

Y para llevar a cabo estos procesos de apropiación con lujo de virtuosismo destructor o deconstrucción, de manera previa indagó con bastante rigor las más diversas estéticas, como nos lo testimonia aquí en este fragmento de “Canción de un Autor Dramático” en *Poemas y Canciones*.

Para poder mostrar lo que veo,  
estudié las representaciones de otros pueblos y otras épocas.

He adaptado un par de obras, examinando minuciosamente su técnica y asimilando de ellas lo que a mí me servía.

Estudié las representaciones de los grandes señores feudales

entre los ingleses, con sus ricas figuras  
a las que el mundo sirve para desplegar su grandeza.

Estudié a los españoles moralizantes,

a los indios, maestros en las bellas sensaciones,  
y a los chinos que representan a las familias

y los más variados destinos de las ciudades.

(Bertolt Brecht. “Poemas y Canciones,”

*Alianza Editorial*. Madrid. 1980, 53-54)

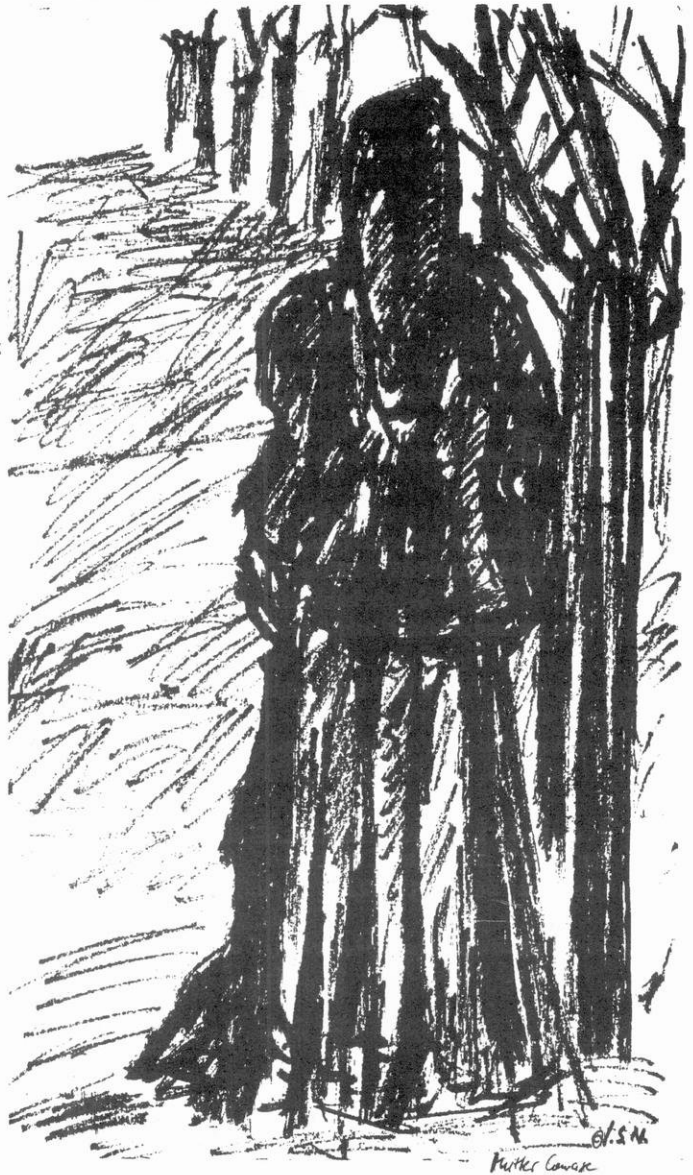
Desde la producción dramaturgica de Bertolt Brecht como bien podemos ver ya se impone en un sentido contemporáneo, la importantísima lección de la asunción de un procedimiento estético como es la decostrucción, que a su vez ya habían puesto en marcha los grandes clásicos del teatro como Félix Lope

de Vega, William Shakespeare, Molière, Pedro Calderón de la Barca, tomando prestadas textualidades de todo orden y convirtiéndolas en obras suyas, y como acabamos de ver Brecht también empleó estas valiosas herramientas, de las que se han servido hoy en día los más heterodoxos y grandes dramaturgos y directores contemporáneos, entre ellos su ejemplar alumno, el alemán Heiner Müller, el francés Bernard-Marie Koltés, Tadeusz Kantor, (fallecidos); así como Peter Brook, Bob Wilson, Ariane Mnouchkine, Tadashi Suzuki, Eugenio Barba, Theodoros Terzopoulos, Anatoli Vassiliev, José Sanchis Sinisterra, y en América Latina creadores como: Enrique Buenaventura, Santiago García, Virgilio Piñiera, Griselda Gambaro, Jorge Díaz, Juan Radrigán, Marco Antonio de la Parra, entre otros, atados sólo por muy heterodoxas búsquedas e intereses, porque como dice Lautréamont en "Poesías y Ensayos."

"El plagio es necesario. El progreso lo implica.

Ciñe la frase de un autor, se sirve de sus expresiones, borra una idea falsa, la reemplaza por la idea justa." (*Poesías y Canciones*, 48. Ediciones Myramar. Buenos Aires. 1977).

*Santa Fé de Bogotá*



"Mutter Courage," Ink drawing 7 1/2 x 10 1/2  
©Ilse Schreiber-Noll



"Mutter Courage" Inkdrawing 7 1/2 x 10 1/2  
© Ilse Schreiber-Noll



"Yvette Poitier" (*Mutter Courage*)  
Woodcut 11 1/2 x 15 1/2  
© Ilse Schreiber-Noll



"Kattrin" (*Mother Courage*)  
Woodcut 11 1/2 x 15 1/2  
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Zusammenstellung für *Communications*

Helgrid Streidt

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Eisler<sup>158</sup>  
Bentley

# Hammer & Sickle 59. Hammer und Sichel: Stalin Speaks, 1934 (Bertolt Brecht)

> And to build our selves a life we  
Mäßige (nicht schleppen, aber auch nicht eilen)

leicht (1936)

Uns ein Le - ben auf - zu - bau - en ha - ben wir die Herrn ver - trie - ben

And on our red flag we painted proudly the hammer & the sickle:  
und auf uns - re ro - ten Fah - nen Ham - mer und Si - chel stolz ge - schrie - ben.

For out - riffs are the hammer & sickle U S S R what we build will stand!  
Ham - mer und Si - chel sind un - ser Werk - zeug U S S R was wir bau'n, das hält.

A mighty fortress in the world for the oppressed of every land!  
Für die Un - ter - drück - ten al - ler Län - der ei - ne Fe - stung in der Welt!

\*) Aus der Rede Joseph Stalins auf dem 17. Parteitag der kommunistischen Partei der Sowjet-Union am 26. Juni 1934. (Page 1 of 4 pages.) Eric Bentley.

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