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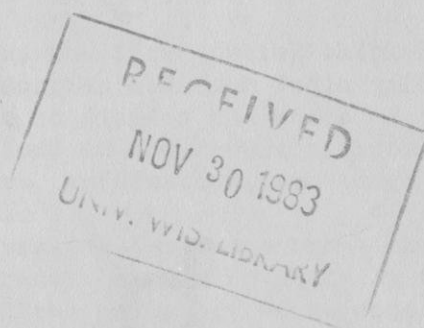
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communications

from the

international brecht society



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July 1981

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from the editor

This issue is late because we have been waiting for some important items, first of all Antony Tatlow's extensive report and reflections on the Hong Kong Brecht Seminar in March. It comes to you uncut, because it is too good to be mutilated. This major contribution may be seen as a first step toward what Ron Davis suggested as a desirable development for Communications, i.e., "into a reasonably respectable publication somewhere between a journal and a newsletter."

Secondly I received the programs of both IBS sessions at the MLA meeting just before going to press (see p. 16).

And finally, we had hoped to be able to announce the new Yearbook publisher and the new dues structure. Gisela Bahr and John Fuegi have been negotiating with an American commercial publisher. Unfortunately as of early July negotiations have not been completed. Now we'll have to wait till September.

In the meanwhile keep your editor posted. There have been gratifying responses to my call for input, but by fall I should be receiving many more slips telling of planned productions and activities for the next theater season and academic year.

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reports

BRECHT IN EAST ASIA: THEORY AND PRACTICE

REFLECTIONS ON A SEMINAR

When somebody has spent three and a half years in solitary confinement partly for staging Brecht, you will want to moderate criticism you may have of his productions. Some of those who spoke about the need for Brecht's work had been put away for ten years. Others whose work we discussed had been in prison for shorter or longer periods because they were specialists in literature or the theatre. One of the benefits of this unusual seminar was that many learnt for the first time and from those directly involved about the intentions and consequences of certain Brecht productions, about the compromises, the misunderstandings and, quite unforgettably, about the determination, the skill and the commitment of those for whom the practice of theatre and literature mean laying not just your promotion prospects or your job, but your whole existence and even your life on the line.

The occasion was, I believe, the first during which Brecht practitioners and scholars from East Asian countries and from India gathered together with their counterparts from the West to discuss the state of their activities, with a major focus on current conditions in the People's Republic of China. It had the quality of a first encounter: informative, sometimes exhilarating, occasionally frustrating, but never dull.

Behind the papers and discussions lay one assumption: that such an exchange involved more than getting the record straight, learning the facts, in many cases for the first time, pinning down the philology of response, noting the ebb and flow of influences - in other words, actuarial theatroglyphics. More striking than these necessities was the sense of challenge and, to use what was to become a dirty word, of hope offered by Brecht's work, the sense of the usefulness of looking to the years that lie ahead for East Asia. So this seminar differed in character from many recent meetings devoted to Brecht, as well as, by virtue of the substance of discussions, from the larger gatherings on the state of Brecht held in Berlin.

We would like to have assembled a more representative East Asian group-- though small ones are often more productive-- but, apart from financial constraints, current political alignments made this impossible. Koreans cannot now attend a conference on Brecht and representation from Vietnam was out of the question. The seminar would not have been possible without the assistance of the Goethe Institute and its Hong Kong Director, Klaus Vetter, and of the British Council. We were also grateful for financial assistance from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and from the Centre of Asian Studies, Hong Kong University, whose Director, Edward Chen, materially assisted the invitation of participants from the People's Republic of China.

Since I was directly involved in convening and conducting the whole affair, I can hardly give an objective account. Furthermore, I spent much time doing simultaneous and intercalative interpretation, which second activity was the most exhausting and frustrating I have ever undertaken. I found myself almost incapable of simply listening to what was said for five minutes and then accurately translating it. Opposite arguments kept popping into my mind and then I often

lost track of the speaker. So this must be a personal account. For those who want a more objective record, the proceedings will be published, though not the discussions, and other accounts have been written. They are detailed below.

Another problem that might have scuppered us and at times certainly obfuscated communication, whilst on some occasions drawing a tactful veil between positions and pre-suppositions that could not match, was the need for continuous translation. We communicated in English, German and Chinese, Mandarin or Cantonese, in about equal proportions. Because of the specialist vocabulary involved, we decided not to employ translators and to do everything ourselves. Professional translators often fall down just when the talk becomes really interesting because they have not got the historical knowledge of the subject and cannot handle the shades of meaning. Although our 'do-it-yourself' approach certainly slowed things down, going through three languages and then sometimes back again, at least we knew what we were talking about and that saved time. The language problem would have been there, however we handled it. The formal papers were translated from the speaker's table whilst we positioned simultaneous interpreters round the room to handle the discussions. This way we obviated interruptions. You sat near the language you understood.

The International Brecht Seminar took place in the Goethe Institute and in the University of Hong Kong, from 16th to 20th March 1981. It was attended by Chen Rong, Gong Boan, Xue Dianjie, Ding Yangzhong and Zhang Li from China, Tatsuji Iwabuchi and Hiroshi Yagi from Japan, Sekhar Chatterjee and Dharani Ghosh from India, Adrian Hsia from Canada, R.G. Davis from the USA, John Willett from England, Klaus Völker, Wolf Siebert and Wolfram Schlenker from Germany, Michael Morley from Australia and Hong Kong participants in varying proportions. Our main speaker, Huang Zuolin (Shanghai), was at the last minute prevented by sickness from attending. He recorded his speech which was illustrated by a film shot specially for the seminar—I heard it took him six weeks to make. The effect of this disembodied presentation was, for me at any rate, quite extraordinary, and depended in part on the sense of presence communicated by this remarkable man.

Since we intended the seminar to focus on theatre performance, we had asked participants to bring with them as much visual material as possible. Apart from scene design sketches, photographs and slides of productions, we had two live performances: Man is Man, directed by Rolf Stahl (Munich) and Vicki Ooi (Hong Kong) in the Hong Kong Arts Centre, performed by the Seals Theatre Company in Cantonese, and a drama workshop performance in Hong Kong University, directed by Bernadette Tsui, of Der Jasager and Der Neinsager which she had adapted from Brecht's three versions to enable a simultaneous performance by two groups, which split and merged according to the direction of the script. The discussion after this experimental performance focussed on the viability of the concept and on the muddled interrelationship of Brecht's three plays. One participant saw in the production a perfect example of 'the split image', a montage of simultaneity and divergence. Apart from the perennial but still instructive film Kuhle Wampe, a first viewing for many participants, we saw two other performances, each equally unique: Korea Senda's 1980 Tokyo production of the Caucasian Chalk Circle, a poetic and inventive performance representing one possible future approach to Brecht in East Asia, and the Peking Life of Galileo, directed by Huang Zuolin and Chen Rong, stage design by Xue Dianjie, translated by Ding Yangzhong, which represented another approach under utterly different specific conditions.

An interesting phenomenon observable throughout the seminar was a constant movement of problems and the search for solutions through the different groups, which did not settle into Easterners or Westerners, or inhabitants of socialist or market economies. The Indian experience was, for example, most apposite to the Chinese, for they share the problem of attracting and holding large peasant audiences, they also have access to powerful traditional forms and are anxious to work out how these may be used. Yet the social conditions of performance

are quite different. Japan, on the other hand, has an absolutely different economic structure from either (though sharing many cultural assumptions), whilst urban Hong Kong shares some of Japan's social and cultural problems yet unlike Japan and China has contact, as did India, with British colonialism. Brecht via English, and indeed the unique Brecht edition in English, served as a link for some. There was also considerable divergence in the standards of philology, understandable in view of degrees of isolation and the specific nature of educational background. This ranged from the wealth of solid knowledge of the experienced Iwabuchi, director, translator and academic, speaking German and English, quoting from French and Russian and communicating with his Chinese colleagues through the common characters, to those whose knowledge of Brecht comes entirely through English.

In addition, there were the questions of adaptability of Western cultural products to Eastern conditions, and the usefulness of Eastern presentational dramatic forms in a Western context, also the matter of points of contact, whether or not suggested by Brecht's work, between Eastern and Western forms of thought and social practice. I will first describe the conditions pertaining in the different areas, the history and state of Brecht reception, before isolating certain common problems and suggesting how paths might lead to their solution.

In 1960 Helene Weigel told Ding Yangzhong she was hoping to take the Berliner Ensemble to China. That remains one of the might-have-beens in the history of the theatre. Although it is hard to imagine that anything they could have conveyed would not have been swept away during the more xenophobic phases of the Cultural Revolution, some sense of an alternative acting method in dealing with Western plays might have been retained by some actors. Though the directors, translators and designers whom we met have had direct and in some cases considerable experience of Western theatre, actors in China have not. We need to remember that there is no significant tradition of spoken theatre in China. In recent years, there have been many experiences at overcoming this problem of the style in which to act Western plays. Asking Western directors to undertake productions is one such method. This has been done in the case of Shakespeare. But Brecht is perhaps a different matter. Furthermore, mere imitation of a Western style is not likely to lead to durable solutions for the considerable problems facing those anxious to develop in China a socially rewarding spoken theatre of wide appeal. This seminar certainly helped the attendant Westerners to appreciate the dimensions of the task. I return to this topic but now wish to describe schematically the history and state of Brecht reception in China.

In 1957 Weisenborn told Mao Zedong that Brecht's books, rather than his own, should be translated into Chinese. What was in fact known about Brecht at that time? The answer appears to be: practically nothing, beyond a small though dedicated circle. But this has always been characteristic of the state of western-influenced drama in China. Huang Zuolin was studying in England in the Thirties when he came across Eric Walter White's translation of that form of the essay Brecht later called "Alienation effects in Chinese acting," published in Life and Letters Today in 1936 as "The Fourth Wall of China: An essay on the effect of disillusion in the Chinese theatre." As we know, this was the first published result of Brecht's encounter in Moscow in 1935 with the celebrated Chinese actor Mei Lanfang. Huang was impressed by much of Brecht's analysis and since that time had been anxious to see to what extent the reverse might also be possible, how far the Chinese spoken theatre might be vivified by means of Brecht's methods, which were so conscious of an affinity with aspects of traditional Chinese acting. Beyond these considerations lie two others: how far might the Chinese Opera itself prove amenable to a Brechtian historicisation of its plots, and how might it be possible to modify a Brechtian acting style as a result of developing methods of acting employed in the traditional Chinese Opera? The chaotic conditions in China that preceded Liberation in 1949 were not exactly conducive to

the sort of sustained work necessary for enterprises of such breadth. By 1951, however, Huang was Deputy Head of the People's Art Theatre and he delivered a systematic introduction of Brecht's methods in a lecture which lasted six hours.

The Korean War, which had become in effect a war between China and the USA, was then in progress and a group of scriptwriters had attempted to construct a play of eight disconnected scenes chronicling American misdeeds over half a century of world history. The play lacked form. After Huang's talk it was rewritten, structured into four parts, held together by a narrator. This version seems to have been fairly monumental, with fifty scenes, thirty-three scene changes and one hundred and eighty actors. But it was the first attempt at developing an epic form for a modern Chinese play, though apparently more Piscator than Brecht.

The first translations of Brecht were not made until 1955, when Feng Ji translated seven poems. In 1959 a volume of selected poems, thirty-eight of them, appeared. Meanwhile three plays had also been translated: Mother Courage, The Days of the Commune and Senora Carrar's Rifles. Korea Senda of Japan had a hand, indirectly, in some of these activities, for he had criticised, while attending the First National Drama Festival in 1956, the fact that China only seemed to know about Stanislavsky. His friend, the dramatist Tien Han was "ashamed" and encouraged the introduction of Brecht. This interest culminated in the 1959 production of Mother Courage, the first of a Brecht play. We heard several descriptions of this production in Shanghai, also directed by Huang Zuolin. The stage designer, Gong Boan, showed us the inkwash drawings he had made for the sets. They were delicate, suggestive of scenery - roadside, sky touching the lake in distance, hazy - and realised through slide-projections on backdrop curtains, so as to leave the stage free for the actors' movements. I particularly remember a sketch of willow trees lining the endless road along which Mother Courage will have to travel, which anticipated the setting of the first scene in the later Berliner Ensemble film of the play.

But this first production was not really well received and had indeed ominous consequences. Maybe the fact that only three months elapsed between beginning the translation and the first performance, with one month for the production itself, had something to do with the reception, but the real reasons seem to have lain elsewhere. There were only fourteen performances, three for invited guests and only about forty percent of the tickets were sold. Ba Chin the novelist stayed on to the end; many others did not. The audience seems to have been disconcerted by the style of the production. They saw poverty represented on the stage, not presented as it is in Chinese Opera. The audience expected entertainment and were not prepared for having to think through a situation. Furthermore, the attending intelligentsia were accustomed to the Stanislavskian model as more appropriate for Western theatre. The production seems to have been caught between these two expectations: too presentational for the intelligentsia; not presentational enough for the rest.

However, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution which started in Shanghai, other work of Huang Zuolin's was condemned as deriving from the suspect Brecht. The connection had been remembered. Yao Wenyuan apparently denounced Brecht as "petit-bourgeois, disgusting and foreign." The Mother Courage production was not forgotten either and Huang was accused of having tried to spread pacifist poison by performing an anti-war play during China's justified attempt to defeat US aggression in Korea. It had all been part of an imperialist intrigue to weaken China. Huang then spent three and a half years in solitary confinement and six and a half in a cadre school, reforming thought through labour. Among others who suffered for their connection with Brecht was the poet Bian Zhilin who had in the early Sixties published a pioneering study of his work. Galileo was singled out for particular opprobrium. To observe sunspots was to assert the sun had flaws, but that was to insult the sun. The sun was Chairman Mao Zedong. There is a tradition of concealed historical allusion in Chinese polemics and

Brecht apparently fell foul of it. Those polemics are politically worthy of study, but scarcely of theoretical interest. There is no indication that the polemicists understood anything of the theoretical implications of Brecht's views.

According to Chen Rong, the co-director of the play, the choice of Life of Galileo in 1979 had nothing to do with the apparent analogy: Inquisition - Gang of Four, let alone those famous sunspots, but arose from quite different considerations. This play naturally formed one main focus of our seminar. We heard a lot about it, saw the videotape of the television version, discussed this version at length and in particular the style of the performance, the problems of direction and the Chinese context in which this production must be understood, without which it is bound to be misjudged. What attracted them to Galileo was not the "cheaper" allusions and analogies but precisely the more productive problematic of political involvement, of the nature of the relationship between the intelligentsia and political action.

An understandable common reaction among the scientific community in China as a consequence of those ten years when much of education and research stood still--the effects may be felt for years, a generation of scientists is missing--was a horror, when it was all over, of ever again having to become involved in "politics." The task was to make up for lost time, to endeavour to catch up with the rest of the world. Never again did they want to be forced to waste precious time down on the farm. A primary purpose in staging this play was to remind scientists and the intelligentsia in general of the possible consequences of such an attitude, of the danger of so separating politics and science. The task was therefore to raise political consciousness, rather than to watch it drop further. An obvious implication of such an attitude is that the Cultural Revolution could never have degenerated into the xenophobic, anti-intellectual orgy it became, had there originally been a stronger bond between progressive intellectuals and the party.

The connotations of this production were, therefore, far-reaching and we may hope the arguments will play a part in determining the development of political structures in the coming years. The play had become a critique of the scientist and of the degenerate party whose feudal characteristics had come under criticism. But we would need to embark on a more detailed discussion than is possible within the confines of this description to do justice to the complexities of those relationships. Another radical gesture in the Chinese context of Brecht's play was to place a divided hero on the stage, split between allegiances, defeated and secure, victor and victim, critic and self-pilloried failure. Complexity of characterisation on this scale is not known in the Chinese theatre. This production's impact in Peking was undeniable. If Mother Courage mustered fourteen indifferently attended performances in 1959, twenty years later Life of Galileo ran for weeks, packed out every night, in a theatre that seats two thousand spectators.

In spite of all the discussions, nothing really prepared the participants, particularly those from the "West," for the film of this Peking production. Even those of us who had seen photographs and read critiques were surprised by the character of the performance: both agreeably but also disagreeably surprised. And here we have to learn, if not to see, then at least to judge with double vision. Striking in the positive sense was the competence of the acting, the sureness of design and of direction. They had deliberately wanted to move away from what was described as the "greyness" of the Berliner Ensemble productions. What we saw was indeed a colourful performance, which centred conceptually, perhaps, on the ballad scene as a celebration of the people's strength. This became an elaborate masque and dance against which were set the contradictions of Galileo's downward path. The two ballad-singers also introduced each scene and so underscored this juxtaposition and their role as witnesses of

Galileo's behaviour. The text of the play was shortened in many places, the duel of proverbs was an obvious passage for excision, though the role of the inquisitorial church was made very clear; at one stage a prelate waved a little black book and nobody missed the allusion. The eighth scene was cut. As Chen Rong disarmingly explained: the Chinese audience is used to more acting and there was too much talking in the eighth scene. It is not difficult to appreciate that the whole play must have appeared innovative to the point of astonishment for the Chinese audience, but the impression of the acting style, the control of movements and of stage business was, as one Western participant expressed it, of "Hollywood movie style." There was only one moment in the whole production, the way a prelate fell to the ground, where you could see how a Chinese acting style could be developed for performing Brecht; the rest was disappointingly reminiscent of the silver screen and you cannot help speculating that this may have been an influence on the actors. The music did not help either for it was a pot-pourri pastiche of European styles from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century, though for an average Peking audience it may have sounded adequately alienating. One problem with the version we saw was, of course, the television medium over which they did not have complete control. Distortions obviously resulted, juxtapositions were lost when the camera showed only one term of the contradiction. Another effect of the medium was probably to stress the emotional character of some of the acting, particularly that of the competent Du Peng as Galileo: tears in the last scene, for example. There were many tears among the audience as well; this play evoked painful memories.

The directing team were aware of the problems associated with the question of acting style. Spoken theatre acting style in China means combining a form of Stanislavskian realism and a more statuesque style influenced by indigenous tradition. What appeared to several Westerners as "Hollywood" seemed to me to derive also from the externalising poses of Chinese Opera, though these were formed, so to speak, beneath the skin and not as a conscious stylistic device. The overall effect was a mixed style, not real Stanislavsky and not really Hollywood either, though a type of cinematic realism may have been a conditioning factor. The task of developing an acting style is as difficult as it is important. The directors were not particularly happy about the final result but had to get the play out. The long dance in scene seven, for example, was done to placate the actors for having to work with so strange a play.

But our discussions absolutely convinced me that none of these concessions really mattered compared with the achievement of staging this play in China. Modern spoken drama operates with unequivocal plots. The reasons for this are not wholly due to a socialist-realism type of aesthetic reflection based on the sort of theoretical model that Brecht was at pains to undermine and destroy. The positive dialectics of the eight Model Revolutionary Operas of the Cultural Revolution, when Stanislavsky was xenophobically excoriated, represented an absolute antithesis to Brecht and derived in part from the unbending didacticism of the Confucian tradition, manifest in the traditional opera's villains and heroes. There exists a deadly, as it were subconscious, alliance between a deductive Confucian ethic which buttressed an authoritarian social structure and the rigidly deductive schemata of Stalinism. Such mutual reinforcement is deeply troubling. Other Chinese traditions challenged this orthodoxy and Brecht's work at certain points latched onto those challenges whilst also, through its open inductive methodology, rejecting closed Stalinist totalities. Galileo in China puts living contradiction on the stage and leaves the audience to think about the implications. That is a noticeable achievement.

Korea Senda's Caucasian Chalk Circle might have been specially devised to illustrate those qualities the Peking production lacked and to point to an entirely different style for an East Asian Brecht. Of course, the difference

in the plays themselves invites such a distinction. Unlike its Chinese counterpart, the Japanese theatre has had considerable experience with Brecht: much of it due to the perseverance of Kōzō Senda, but also to the skill of Tatsuji Iwabuchi who has translated at least eleven major plays and directed as many as well. Another advantage of Senda's Tokyo production, though only from the perspective of our seminar, over the Peking Galileo was the method of communication. We saw a film of the whole stage as the play was performed before an audience; hence no medium-generated interference interposed between us and the performance.

There has been a Brecht reception in Japan for fifty years. Drums in the Night was performed in 1930 and Kōzō Senda's version of the Threepenny Opera in 1932. Senda had seen the original Berlin production and legend has it that he adapted it from memory because they did not have a script. According to Iwabuchi, the 1932 production was based on the script of the film but the important point was that the play was transferred into a Japanese milieu. Senda played Macheath. Between 1932 and 1950 Brecht was off limits and Senda in jail for some of the time. After the war Senda founded his own ensemble, the Haiyuza theatre and it has remained the only large Japanese theatre to produce Brecht apart from one Threepenny Opera extravaganza. Iwabuchi mentioned the reception of Galileo in 1957 and the different conditions that had prevailed in Japan, where emigration was practically impossible and where the question of adjustment had hence become more pressing. There is no subvented theatre in Japan. There have, however, been numerous productions by workers and amateur theatre groups. It seems that practically all Brecht's plays have been performed in one way or another.

The Haiyuza theatre introduced Brecht to counteract the popular Stanislavskian methods of the orthodox left whose reaction to Brecht was: why does a political writer suspect feeling, isn't that just what we need to generate? Iwabuchi observed that the Japanese feel, they do not like having to think, especially not in the theatre, and that is why the Japanese theatre has tended to accept most readily those forms of Western theatre that stress the emotions. The early Sixties was a period of politicisation in Japan, due to the issue of the Security Pact with the USA, and it led to an upswing in left theatre. From 1962 the orthodox communist monolith began to break down and people started to question authority. Brecht's plays proved useful again. The 1966 Mother Courage, during the Vietnam war, seems to have constituted a high point of interest. Senda spent four months in rehearsal and for Iwabuchi, who with Senda translated the Model Book, this production constituted a breakthrough in the appreciation of the fulness of Brecht's method. Knowledge of his theory preceded and impeded practice with his plays --this was something we heard from India as well. The prejudice that formed as a result of conceiving Brecht's theatre in too exclusively cerebral forms blocked appreciation, though cerebralisation of the Japanese theatre of feeling is one important function that Brecht's theatre can exercise in Japan. This Mother Courage production had all told, in Tokyo and on tour, 113 performances, a record of some kind, if only for a Brecht play in Japan. I do not imagine the USA or England can come anywhere near such figures.

In the middle Sixties there developed the Angura, or underground, theatre: anti-authoritarian, yet more involved in emotional or even irrational theatre. Brecht was not relevant here, except for one group--the Black Tent--which was interested in the early plays. The Japanese equivalent of the 1968 movements led, not to any temporary Popular Front, but to a further de-politicisation and re-emotionalisation of the theatre. This process is still underway and has led to bizarre irrational forms. In Iwabuchi's view, Senda's Caucasian Chalk Circle, whose premiere was in September 1980, may have helped to reinforce this trend, since the concrete point of reference implied by the prologue has lost its force, if not updated to present conditions. In a Japan where the power of the state cannot be equated with the interests of the people, there is a danger, as there is elsewhere, that this play can revert to fairy-tale. Iwabuchi proposed this

prologue would have been more suitable, had it been adapted, for example, to the continuing Narita dispute between the farmers and the government. However, this production did seem to find a solution to the problem of adjusting Brecht's model to a Japanese style of acting: most noticeable in the quality of movement and gesture, much of which was splendidly handled, inventive, subtle, comic and accommodated to the Japanese aesthetic sense.

The Indian participants both came from Calcutta and spoke of their work in West Bengal; we did not discuss the rest of India. (The Brecht Centre's notate of February 1980 has an account by Bennewitz of Brecht reception in other parts of India. See also Brecht 80, Brecht in Afrika, Asien und Lateinamerika, Schrift-enreihe des Brecht-Zentrums der DDR, vol. 2, Berlin 1980, which contains interesting information.) If Calcutta has fifteen commercial theatres, West Bengal has around six thousand non-professional theatre groups and the theatre there is, as Sekhar Chatterjee reported, 100% political. The Left Theatre was established in the Forties as the Indian People's Theatre Association and it only began to disintegrate following the split in the Communist Party of India after the Moscow Twentieth Party Congress. At this juncture, interest in Brecht began to grow: through English and in Brecht the Marxist. Dharani Ghosh gave us a verbal account of this reception. I was simultaneously translating, could not take notes and will therefore move on to Chatterjee's experiences.

In 1972 Chatterjee produced Arturo Ui in Calcutta. The response was good and he brought it to the country. It flopped. The peasants might have heard of Hitler but he represented no particular reality for them, no more than did the Second World War. So he next chose Puntila with the rural peasant audience in mind from the start. Given the state of Indian land problems, it is easy to see why this play succeeded. His third production was The Breadshop which the middle class rejected, though it was relished by the lower middle class.

Apart from the wholly commercial theatre, which Chatterjee described as approaching porno art, and apart from the western-based theatre, there is another theatrical form: Jatra. It is traditional, popular and presentational. It is played in the countryside on a dais of twenty by twenty feet and two feet high, before audiences of between ten and fifteen thousand. In this form a piece of red cloth on the stage indicates a throne in the palace. There are songs and dances and attempts have been made to adapt it to modern themes: plays about Lenin and Mao Zedong, also a Threepenny Opera version, though tantalisingly we did not hear very much about this. Such theatre really does reach the masses and it does so, as always in Asia, with imaginative forms. If Brecht could be adapted to Jatra, his would become a popular theatre. If not, maybe his methods could help adapt Jatra for the plays that India needs.

"Flight to Hongkong" is the title of one of Brecht's early scenes in Man is Man (see Willett's edition). The Hong Kong production in the Arts Centre Theatre as part of the Hong Kong Arts Festival, was an ambitious, original but also flawed performance. The actors were semi-professional or amateurs. Fairchild was excellently directed as a martinet of the military-colonial machine and played by a European who had never set foot on the stage before. The play was underrehearsed and suffered from the weakness of two main characters: Begbick and Galy Gay. I am not sure whether this was due to the otherwise excellent idea of having a German and a Hong Kong director working together. They may have respected each other's opinions too much without really arguing out the basic purpose of the production and then directing it into its visual realisation. The sheer effort involved in getting anything done in the theatre, especially in a complicated production of this kind, often militates against finally getting it just right, even when you do agree about intentions. The actors never quite managed to master the problem of adapting the play into its Chinese setting without falling back on stereotypic behaviour. Begbick seemed more like a courtesan than the calculating mamasan she ought to have been.

The production's basic idea was sound: to show how Galy Gay, the naive and

gentle countryman, is gradually changed into an efficient, English-speaking fighting machine. The soldiers shouted all their commands in English and communicated with Fairchild in the English idiolect of their milieu. This was all sharply observed and funny. The change in Galy Gay could have mirrored the experience of thousands of Chinese peasants, who have taken their chances and adapted to the Hong Kong money machine. There can be few places in the world where the contrasts are so immediate and so severe. Galy Gay slips willy-nilly into the sociologically bizarre milieu of the "Hong Kong" forces for law and order, gradually warming to his opportunities. The storming of the fortress at the end was changed into an assault on a village, whose inhabitants, standing in a circle, were clothed in white like docile angels awaiting execution. I suppose this worked at a certain level of abstraction: Hong Kong destroys rural angelic values. But the relationship between Hong Kong and China is more equivocal than this, and money, the great transformer is colourblind. I would like to have seen money at the centre of the play, rather than language change, for to me that would have been more surely aligned with Hong Kong's problems, and it would have blocked the merely anti-colonial interpretation which is a popular but too cheap and easy a reading of what Hong Kong is really about. The production at least provided an impetus to think about these questions. There was also some excellently directed stage business, particularly the construction of the elephant.

The two main Western speakers, Klaus Völker and John Willett, both discussed a similar topic: what to do with Brecht today, the problem of adapting his plays, whether it is possible, after so much time has elapsed, to capture the critical thrust of the work, whether it can be geared to move anything forward. Both speakers addressed themselves to themes particularly topical for the (East) Asian context. Völker spoke about the Caucasian Chalk Circle, describing its genesis—though perhaps not differentiating sufficiently between the implications of Li Hsing-tao's and Solomon's test. The point is that the social context of the tests is different, and to miss this blurs an important issue. Völker discussed the interlude when Brecht had delusions of breaking into Broadway, and the allusions to the 1917-1921 period in Georgia (Grusia), pointing out that Lenin then advocated a more gradualist approach than Trotsky. All this without falling for Betty Weber's extremist position. Völker's main objection to the play centred on the prologue's "unbearable optimism over progress." He recommended basically two approaches to the problem: 1. find ways to stress the particular historical conditioning of the decision over the use of the valley and the maximum exploitation of nature; the old man of the goat-breeding Kolkhoz would be right today and any production must take account of this shift away from a Leninist technological progressivism; 2. something has to be done to stress the democratic nature of the soviet's decision; it cannot be allowed to become simple acceptance and the play of the chalk circle must not be merely a play within a play, but rather the actualisation of the whole conflict. Völker's question in the discussion: why use Brecht's version at all in China, why not perform the Chinese original? The Chinese delegates did not reply. My own response would be that whilst there are powerful analogies between Brecht's and the Yüan play, of which Klabund's version is a travesty, the Chinese drama's concept of justice is restorative, not revolutionary and hence could not be substituted for Brecht's. It might, however, be possible to historicise, or Brechtianise, the Chinese original, in the sense of bringing out the historical conditioning factors that made its own plot both pro- and retrogressive.

Willett's paper proposed several answers to the question: how to keep Brecht alive, by adaptation, changing the text, or by novel ways of staging that text? He avowed that the further you move from Germany, the more acute this problem becomes. You have to overcome the lack of familiarity with the whole context in which Brecht worked. In another sense, of course, moving away from Germany solves problems rather than creating them. Willett displayed his

particular skill at suggesting contexts for Brecht's work, which has made the English language Brecht edition indispensable. (To its own detriment, German scholarship seldom consults it). He described two kinds of learning-process, ways of engaging with the plays, one practiced and the other envisaged. For him such learning-processes are more instructive than Brecht's concept of the Lehrstück as originally conceived. He recounted the steps taken during preparation for a performance with student actors in Philadelphia of Splendours and Miseries of the Third Reich, which he retitled Hitler before Auschwitz, how he acquainted them with a milieu and historical period with little relation to their own experience. One suggestion for giving a sense of the segmented structure was to juxtapose the play with Goya's Disasters of the War.

Turning to the East Asia and his paper's title "Production as learning experience: Taniko - Der Jasager - The Measure Taken," Willett envisaged a performance of these three plays, using Eisler's music which makes of The Measures Taken "a great work of art." Here the learning-process would entail opening up the background of The Measures Taken in several ways: showing how the lessons of Noh were wrenched out of their theatrical and ritual setting in Japanese tradition for use as a form of demystification, when in fact a remystification resulted--for Willett the Neinsager was a mistake--and then investigating and bringing into the production process the Chinese background, which Brecht learnt of through Hans Eisler's brother Gerhart. Their sister Ruth Fischer later denounced her brother Gerhart as "the hangman of rebellious Chinese communists." Gerhart was involved in the Canton Commune attempt of 1927 and was active for the Comintern, as Leon, in Shanghai in 1930.

The summation of Willett's paper was a call to investigate to what extent Brecht's interest in Asian models, rejected as formalist by official policy, and in plebian or pre-industrial characters independent of the urban bias of Marxism-Leninism, might be related to Eastern dialectics, to a form of Eastern communism, and to a degree of independence from the Stalinist line. There was a performance immediately after Willett's paper and we did not in fact get back to this topic; in addition our seminar was centred on theatre practice and many were perhaps unprepared for speculation in this direction. For me such topics promise to open up many possibilities. We now need to locate the Western analogies for such alternative modes of thinking, alternative also in East Asia since what is meant by dialectics stood outside the socially dominant authoritarian Confucianism. It may be that here also lies the way to free Brecht, in so far as this is possible, from the standard Western perspective of Brecht, advocating (or trapped in) the Leninist technological myth, and find a path towards a necessary and acceptable modern socialist philosophy of nature, which promises to offer the only solution for a philosophy of technology. There is here no question of Adorno's nostalgic primitivism; such thinking looks ahead and I consider that East Asian philosophy has a decisive role to play.

This leads us on, and back to, the primary question posed indirectly by our whole seminar, a question which evolved as we watched the different methods, standing more at the end than at the beginning of our discussions, and so I want to suggest ways in which they might be continued. This question was: how far might it be possible to adapt Brecht's theatre to East Asian aesthetic forms and what exactly is involved in such an attempt? One thing is certain: there is something more complicated at issue here than a mere matter of "style." To put it differently: style is strongly associated with attitudes as to what constitutes reality. What is crucial here is, firstly, whether styles could evolve which would incorporate attitudes different from those that moulded the various traditional aesthetic forms and, secondly, whether or to what extent we are now witnessing a process of attitudinal change within a Marxist framework. Because of Brecht's own interest in East Asian theatre this whole question is particularly tantalising, and it is particularly urgent because of the power of the traditional forms, though there are significant differences in the various countries, a fact

often forgotten outside Asia.

The dilemma faced by theatrical practitioners may be posed as follows: unlike the catalyst which it ought metaphorically to be, Brecht's work cannot remain unchanged if it is to reach the real masses and change their thinking, it must somehow fuse with traditional forms, but nobody has as yet succeeded in accomplishing this feat and some believe it cannot be done. This dilemma is sharpened by the fact that East Asian audiences have no tradition of representational realism and not really much affinity with or sympathy for such attempts as have been made to develop one. The Peking Galileo was a political and intellectual achievement but a stylistic embarrassment, and Peking is not the whole of China. Of course, China has first to discover Brecht by putting him on the stage, before taking the next step.

Contemplating this next step was surely the reason why Huang Zuolin chose not to even mention Galileo in his paper, but to describe techniques in the Chinese Opera which might be adaptable to a Brechtian dramaturgy. In his essay "Mei Lanfang, Stanislavsky and Brecht-- a study of contrasts" (in Peking Opera and Mei Lanfang by Wu Zuguang, Huang Zuolin and Mei Shaowu, New World Press, Peking 1981), Huang tells a story about the problems of taking modern spoken drama instead of traditional opera to the villages. After the play has started, the audience will still be sitting around outside. When told they are missing the beginning of the play, somebody will reply: "What's the hurry? The music hasn't started. Those fellows on the stage are just having a chat like ourselves. We will go in when they start to sing." If the spoken theatre is ever to attract a significant audience, there will surely have to be some form of accommodation to that audience's expectations. The participants from China at our seminar were more concerned with the practicalities of their own urban theatres. They were looking at different problems, and did not, that was my impression at least, see any immediate challenge or solution in Huang's proposals.

This disinclination to take the Stanislavskian model, to use this shorthand expression, too seriously--because he was criticised during the Cultural Revolution, Stanislavsky has now inevitably gained a certain credence, also when set against the stereotypic style of the eight Model Revolutionary Operas--is apparent when Huang juxtaposes in the same essay Stanislavsky's and Mei Lanfang's method of crossing a river. In The Fisherman's Revenge, which Brecht saw in Moscow, the river crossing is demonstrated with the help of one wooden oar. I have seen such a crossing. It is not symbolized by conventional gestures but actually shown. But how is it shown, for that is what matters? Two figures stand erect on the bare stage, one of them holding an oar, each at one end of the imaginary boat. They bob and sway as it crosses different currents in the river, staggering slightly when it grounds on the opposite bank. It is so humorously and imaginatively done. Though there was nothing to be seen, everything has been shown, the imagination is unforgettably engaged, there is no better way. Contrast this with Stanislavsky's gondola, described by Huang: "Wheels thickly encased in rubber were fitted under the gondola to enable it to move smoothly . . . Following the example of the two ships in the Flying Dutchman, the gondola was pushed by twelve men and sacking blown by fans was used to make waves . . . Stanislavsky gave detailed instructions regarding the oars, which were made of tin hollowed out inside and half filled with water, to reproduce the sound of splashing so typical of Venice."

In Brecht's analysis of Chinese acting Huang admired his observation of the gap that always exists between actor and role, between emotion and its gestural expression. In his film of Chinese Opera techniques Huang showed many examples of subtle and controlled externalisations of feelings. As another participant put it: the Chinese actor must be able to show the drunk Li Po on a sober horse. Unlike Huang, Iwabuchi saw no way of adapting his country's traditional theatre to accommodate Brecht. For him the lyrical Noh Theatre is too exclusively concerned with the emotions and a religious context, and although the Kabuki has

an epic character, it lacks any sense of the dialectical. Here one might observe that there is a fundamental difference between the secular Chinese and the ritual Japanese theatre, which Brecht also noticed on the level of plot. A member of the Kanze Noh theatre family was in fact banished from the Noh stage for experimenting with Brecht, so at least he thought it worth trying. Yet I would see the main connection in the Noh theatre's externalisation of contradiction. The chief characters are always split, caught in the tensions between their different states, possessed by spirits, whilst the Buddhist context naturally provides access to a dialectical mode of thought: whether on the philosophical level—reality as process—or on a metaphysical one—tension in the simultaneous presentation of different states of being. Here there ought to be a point of contact with Brecht's philosophical theatre of contradictory process, though developing it may seem easier to someone outside Japan. It is obvious that you cannot turn Brecht into Noh theatre, in the way you can stage Yeats's At the Hawk's Well. But cannot technique be secularized?

Behind all these attempts and speculations lies the main theatrical problem to which Huang Zuolin's work in particular drew our attention: is it possible to accommodate an essentialist (Huang's term in his essay) East Asian aesthetic with political theatre? At first glance it looks insoluble, especially from a Western perspective where political theatre has always connoted some kind of realism. Probably because those forms are so powerful and self-contained, the Easterners have not yet found a satisfactory solution. But even though "social being determines thought," Marx's value-oriented philosophy holds an essentialist view of the self, though it is an essentialism in potentialis that awaits realisation. There are also, I am convinced, powerful analogies between what we might call the meta-materialist and dialectical philosophies of East Asia and Marxist thought, which offer the prospect of freeing it from its inhibiting, nineteenth century Western positivist encumbrances. Neither is there surely any final reason why political theatre should be affixed to any particular style, though the practical difficulties of change and style development are obvious and the process will be slow. If "realism" can be representationally naive, why cannot "essentialism" be politically apposite?

What must at all costs be avoided is any descent into celebratory fairy-tale or into the sort of reflectionism we see in the dreadful revolutionary romanticism, whose dramaturgy instructs the form of intervention and depends upon deductive certainties within a predefined totality. There is no reason why a challengingly critical or Brechtian theatre must be confined to a certain style. A socially-grounded psychological essentialism does not preclude the inductive process which Brecht envisaged, indeed it is a precondition for its proper functioning.

Antony Tatlow

Further accounts of the Hong Kong International Brecht Seminar:

- R.G. Davis: "Brecht in China" in Artbeat, San Francisco, May/June 1981, p. 7-8.
- M. Morely: forthcoming in Theatre Australia
- J. Willett: forthcoming in Times Literary Supplement
- W. Siegert: forthcoming in notate, Brecht-Zentrum der DDR,
- T. Iwabuchi: in Japanese in Tokyo Shimbun, Tokyo, 14.4, 1981, p. 3
- H. Yagi: in Japanese in Asahi Shimbun, Kobe, 3.4, 1981 & Yomiuri Shimbun 3.4, 1981.

Further reports are planned in other places. I will record them when they reach me.

A.T.

announcements

From R. G. Davis

During a meeting of theatre people from 17 countries in Havana, Cuba, June 19-24th I spoke with José Prego from Nicaragua.

They are considering a production of The Mother or Mother Courage within the year. I asked whether I could be of any help and he said he needed all kinds of books on Brecht.

There must be many members of the IBS who have extra volumes of plays or other materials by and on Brecht in English (or Spanish or German) that could be sent to Nicaragua to aid their work.

If we all, 225 of us, sent but one volume each, they would be immensely grateful and we would have contributed to their cultural development. And, if all goes well, we can do the same, in a year, for El Salvador. Please mail your book(s) to:

José Daniel Prego
 Depto. de Teatro
 Ministerio de Cultura
 Aptdo. 3514 Managua
Nicaragua

From DeVina Barajas

CHANGE THE WORLD: IT NEEDS IT is a Song Program that presents a cross-section of Bertolt Brecht's work. It includes well-known compositions written in collaboration with Kurt Weill from Mahagonny and the Threepenny Opera and many of the more powerful compositions written in collaboration with Hanns Eisler. The program is performed by German actress/singer INA WITTICH. "This could be Brecht's beautiful daughter singing as simply and clearly as she knew he liked," writes Dan Sullivan in the LA TIMES. Ms. Wittich has performed throughout California in theatres, universities and high schools, and accompanies each concert with a thrilling workshop. She will be TOURING THE WESTERN HALF OF THE U.S. THIS COMING FALL QUARTER. Scheduling has been under way for some months but there are still convenient dates open.

For more information contact:

DeVina Barajas
 3232 Buchanan Apt. 3
 San Francisco, CA 94123
 or call (415) 346-2472

From John Fuegi

According to a newspaper clipping from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (n.d.), the house in which Brecht was born, Auf dem Rain 7, was recently purchased by the city of Augsburg for DM 85,000. After renovation (DM 100,000), plans call for a permanent Brecht display, an art gallery for congenial exhibits, a café and a tea-room. Twenty-five years after his death the city of Augsburg honors its great son.

upcoming events

From Sara Lennox and Jost Hermand

The programs of the two IBS-sponsored sessions on Brecht at the next national meeting of the Modern Languages Association (New York City, Dec. 27-30, 1981) have been established:

Brecht and Psychoanalysis

Chairperson: Sara Lennox, University of Massachusetts

Arnold Heidsieck, U. of Southern California,

"A Psychoanalytical Reading of Brecht's Later Works"

Philip Bishop, U. of Wisconsin, Madison,

"Brecht and the Social Unconscious"

Helen Fehervary, Ohio State University,

"Brecht's Heirs and Männerphantasien"

Brecht and Music

Chairpersons: Jost Hermand, U. of Wisconsin, Madison

Ronald Shull, Lexington, Kentucky

Nancy Vedder-Shults, U. of Wisconsin, Madison,

"Brecht's and Eisler's 'Solidaritätslied'"

Thomas Nadar, University of Oregon,

"From Schuloper to Lehrstück: The Metamorphosis of
Jasager into Massnahme"

Wolfgang Mueller, Dickinson College, Penna.,

"Brecht, Eisler and Popular Culture"

symposium

Plans for a performance-oriented IBS Symposium in Portland, OR are taking shape. All going well we will be able to use the beautiful campus of Reed College during Memorial Day weekend (May 28-31, 1982). At this moment we are negotiating with Reed for an acceptable package deal via Ottomar Rudolf (head of the German Department of that school), who agreed to serve as the secretary for the Symposium. We also hope to get financial support from the Oregon Committee for the Humanities.

James Lyon (U. of California, San Diego) has already received several proposals for the Symposium both from within and from outside the U.S. He will co-chair the event with your editor. Also Gisela Bahr found Klaus Völker interested in Participating, pending financial support. Keep the dates free and watch for a definitive announcement in the Fall issue of Communications.

recent productions

Gisela Bahr writes:

"While in San Francisco (early June) I went to see the Ui production there. It was quite interesting. Ui himself was marvellous, and in their slide projections they mixed Hitler and other Nazis with Reagan, Haig, and other "dictators" of today, much to the delight of the audience." From the program:

The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui

Actor's Ark Theatre, Fort Mason Center, San Francisco

Director: Ugo Baldassari; Set: Dennis Howes; Lighting: Linda Preminger;

Costumes: Gail Russel

Cast: Arturo Ui: Luis Oropeza; Ernesto Roma: John Coleman; Giusseppe Givola: Lutrell Jolly; Old Dogsborough: Bert Brauer; Betty Dullfeet: Patricia Butler; Ignatius Dullfeet: Richard Elliot; Emanuele Giri: H.R. Rosen.

Who says Brecht is dead in Europe?

While on a brief visit to the Netherlands in June your editor witnessed the Holland Festival Opening night of Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe by the ensemble of the Bochumer Schauspielhaus. Most fittingly, the four sold-out performances (in German!) were done in the Amsterdam Exchange Building, an architectural landmark, built in Jugendstil by the socialist architect Hendrik P. Berlage the year Brecht was born. The last performance was broadcast by Dutch and West German TV in prime time.

When H.K. Filbinger, then still prime minister of Baden-Württemberg, refused to renew Claus Peymann's contract, Peymann and his famous, provocative Stuttgart ensemble moved to Bochum, an industrial town in the Ruhrpott. They opened in December 1979 with Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe and the piece is still on their repertoire. No wonder; it is a most dynamic production, in which the audience has to move along with the actors from scene to scene, presented on stages in every corner of the large hall. In the mass scenes the actors mingle with the audience in order to create a sense of immediacy, somewhat at odds with Brecht's call for detachment and reflection. I missed some of the Hölderlin, Schiller and Faust II parodies, but for most of the audience the updating of the piece seemed to work, including the policemen carrying in the stockyard tycoons on sedan office chairs (the same policemen, who later on forcibly dispel the striking workers) and including the hired sniper who shoots Joan so she can be canonized. I did not like the love scene on Mauler's sofa, which violated the subtlety Brecht evinced in the relationship between Joan and Mauler. The music (for six instrumentalists), sets, lighting and sound effects all greatly enhanced the production. The Dutch reviews were very positive. From the program:

Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe

June 20, 21, 22, 24, Amsterdam Exchange

Director: Alfred Kirchner; Sets and Costumes: Karl Kneidl; Music: Hansgeorg Koch;

Dramaturges: Uwe Jensen, Wolfgang Trevisany

Cast: Johanna Dark: Therese Affolter; Pierpont Mauler: Gerd Kumath; Cridle: Volker

Spahr; Lennox: Niels Hansen; Slift: H.-C. Beckmann; Paulus Snyder: Johann Oest;

Frau Luckerniddle: Lore Stefanek

The Bochumer Schauspielhaus also has Mutter Courage on their repertoire and next year they will add Die Mutter.

recent publications

Thomas, Linda. Ordnung und Wert der Unordnung bei Bertolt Brecht. Series German Studies in America. Bern: Peter Lang, 1979.

forthcoming publications

Lyon, James K. Bertolt Brecht in Amerika. (translation of U.S. edition) Suhrkamp.

Nussbaum, Laureen. "Brecht's 'The Ship,' Pregnant Woman or Self Criticism of Poetry?" Selecta 2 (1981).

dues notice

Our secretary/treasurer ^awants all IBS members to know that for those who paid their dues for 1980 the 1980 YEARBOOK should be on its way. He apologizes for undue notices of fees due. In order to qualify for bulk mail privileges, his secretary sends notices to ALL IBS members regardless of whether they already paid or not.

-- Please Xerox copy if you need more than one of the following slips:

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